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BELLERUE

OR

THE STORY OF ROLF

BY

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AUTHOR OF "SHILOH; OR, WITHOUT AND WITHIN," ETC.

Long ago was Gracchus slain,
  Brutus perished long ago;
But the living roots remain,
  Whence the shoots of greatness grow.
—BRYANT.

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TO

C. T. W.

"All things through thee take nobler form,
And look beyond the earth."

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BELLERUE.

I.

WHITHER?

"In the Wilderness,
"*May 5th*, 188–.

"And now," said I, as the steamer slid from her moorings, and the shining waves rose and fell beneath her prow, "we turn our faces toward the Promised Land!"

"I hope so," answered Paul, with his grave, sweet smile. "But the Wilderness comes first, you know."

Accepting the warning, I date my journal accordingly. Yet not with any sinking of heart; for the Israelites must have found many pleasant spots in those years of wandering through the desert,—green plains of ease, cool shadows of sheltering rocks, Elims where tall palms bent their plumy heads to the breeze's whisper and silvery fountains sang of peace and hope. No doubt friendships were faithful and loves sweet; infancy smiled up into the face of happy motherhood; youth was merry and old age wise; Time softened the sharp outlines of grief even as he levelled the graves left behind; and Life ran its round of toil and rest, success and failure, growth and decay, much as it does in

our modern days. No doubt, too, God was ever ready to shed sweet dews of forgiveness and consolation into uplifted hearts; and in the light of His gracious countenance the rough places were made plain, and the desert oft seemed to blossom as the rose.

So, if it be in truth a Wilderness through which we are to journey,—Paul and I,—we will go hand in hand, with good heart and hope; and, please God, the way shall not seem long, nor the days evil, though the time wax late.

II.

WELCOME.

As if to point and emphasize Paul's warning, we were little more than well under-way when our steamer crashed into an irresolute barge; and there was a delay of some hours, so that we did not reach Bellerue until after midnight. It made a striking picture as seen from the river,—black silhouettes of unknown buildings crowning the steep bluff, and, on a lower level at the right, a large foundry sending up red flames and dusky columns of smoke into the star-lit sky.

One of Paul's vestrymen had asked the "privilege" of entertaining us until the rectory could be made habitable, but when our carriage stopped before his fine, old, colonial mansion, it was dark and silent. Expectation, too long-drawn-out, had attenuated into hopelessness, and gone to bed and to sleep. But its slumbers were light, for, just as we were deciding to go quietly to an hotel, a window was raised, a hearty welcome spoken, and very shortly Mr. Clavrick, frank of face and cordial of manner, opened the door and ran down the steps.

"Pray come in," said he; "everything is ready for you, and Mrs. Clavrick will appear in a moment. Excuse our going to bed; we had a misleading report that the steamer would not be in before daylight."

"You did quite right," said Paul; "and please do not allow Mrs. Clavrick to rise again. If you will be so good as to show us to our room, we will gladly defer any further demands upon your kindness or hers till to-morrow."

"Just as you please," returned Mr. Clavrick. "No doubt a bed is the fine essence of hospitality at this time of night —or of morning; I think it is after one o'clock."

So I made the acquaintance of my hostess next morning, in the breakfast-room. She was tall, fair, graceful, vivacious, and winning. We "took to" each other at once; it was a case of friendship at first sight,—perhaps a rarer thing than love, so-called.

The table-talk ran its course in a very bright, informal way; yet I soon became conscious—and so, I knew, did Paul—of some reticence, some constraint, whenever parish matters were touched upon. Twice I noticed that Mr. Clavrick avoided giving a direct answer to a question; and once I suspected that he was skillfully guiding the conversation out of an undesirable channel. Whatever the underlying cause of it all might be, it was often on the brink of revelation from the frank lips of Mrs. Clavrick, who is of a more impulsive nature than her husband; but his warning glance sufficed to check it.

Breakfast and prayers over, our host invited Paul to the library, "for a plain business talk," and his wife led the way to her cosy boudoir, where a very small girl was busy with a very large doll. She was fair-haired and blue-eyed, and seemed to be four or five years old.

"This is Babiecita," said the mother, putting her hand under the child's chin and lifting the blushing face. "She has been as anxious as anyone for your coming; she has talked of nothing else for days; yet now that you are here,

shyness enfolds her like a veil, and she has not a word to say for herself. But one of these days, or hours, she will suddenly open her mouth and make up for lost time; the repressed stream will have become a torrent. Is not that a true statement of the case, Babiecita?"

The child only smiled, and gazed at me shyly from under her long, curly lashes.

"I notice that you make use of the pretty Spanish suffix of endearment," said I. "May I ask if you have Spanish relations or experiences?"

"Mr. Clavrick is part owner of a sugar plantation in Cuba," she answered, "and we have been accustomed to spend some portion of our winters there. So to our pet name of 'Babie' for this little one, the Cuban servants added the 'cita,' and we liked the combination well enough to adopt it."

"It is a graceful custom, I think; the habit of it clings to me still. I often find myself involuntarily adding an *ito* or *ita* to the names of those whom I love well."

A brisk interchange of Cuban reminiscences followed; but I soon saw that Mrs. Clavrick's attention was wandering, and a troubled expression crossed her face, as the low murmur of the gentlemen's earnest voices came to us in every slight pause. It was plain that she knew and regretted the subject-matter of their conversation.

Finally she turned to me with a look which prepared me for a change of subject.

"I hope your husband will not take it so hard as some of us do," she began, with an unmirthful laugh. "But I really cannot wish him joy of the news that mine is breaking to him: namely, that he is in the hands of an entirely new set of vestrymen. Mr. Clavrick insisted that your breakfast

should not be spoiled—or spiced—with the tidings; but there is no reason why it should not 'out' now."

"I beg your pardon; I do not quite understand," said I, doubtfully.

"In good truth, neither do I! One knows a good many things that one does not understand. The simple fact is that at the parish meeting, last Monday, the late vestrymen were turned out, almost *en masse*, and a new set voted in. And such a set! Positively, I dare not trust myself to speak of them, lest I seem to be most unchristianly slanderous and spiteful; it is better to let them speak for themselves when you come to know them. Happily, it will not matter very much to you personally, but I really am sorry for Mr. Vennor. Of the eight gentlemen who invited him to become our rector, and whom he saw on his visit of inspection, only two are left—Mr. Darcy and Mr. Asher. The latter was not in sympathy with our old vestry, but as they were an unit against him he could do no harm; he will cooperate most heartily with his present colleagues. As for Mr. Darcy, who has been our senior warden for years, he is the best of men, but in a certain limp way,—he has no more back-bone than a jelly-fish. The incomers did not turn him out, because they had the sense to see that not one of them could pose in his place without provoking the average beholder to unseemly mirth; moreover, they knew he would never do them any harm. He is not going to fight anyone's battles—not even his own; he is simply a soft cushion for people in general to sit on as hard as they please—and welcome!".

She paused, somewhat breathless with strong feeling and rapid utterance; I sat in dismayed silence. I could not but remember how delighted Paul had been with the gen-

tlemen of the former vestry; it was much to be sure of such a strong, harmonious, agreeable corps of co-workers in his new field. And this was the end of it! I turned to Mrs. Clavrick.

"But why—" I began, hesitatingly.

"Why, indeed!" she echoed, indignantly, not waiting for the uncertain sentence to decide on its course. "I blush to tell you. Because they were afraid that too much money would be spent on the new rectory; because they thought the pews rented too high; because they doubted if the old vestry would sufficiently impress the new rector with the necessity for economy; because—but I have neither the patience nor the face to go on!—it is too humiliating. To think that such men as General Fairfax, and Judge Ellenwood, and Mr. Holroyd (not to speak of my husband!) should be supplanted by Pollard, and Jackman, and Lasker, is enough to make the parish hide its collective head in shame and disgust!"

"But, if I rightly understand you, it was by the vote of the parish that the change was made," I ventured to remark.

"My dear Mrs. Vennor, I beg you will not think it is quite so bad as that! The truth is, things had gone on so harmoniously in the parish for some time that the members had grown slack in their attendance at the meetings, and a few sore and jealous heads saw their opportunity and seized it. They scoured the city for all the good-for-naughts that had been made 'members of the society,' some of whom had not been inside of the church for a decade; by one means or another,—it would not profit us to inquire too curiously exactly what means!—they induced these people to vote at their bidding; they packed the meeting with them; and

this cataclysm is the result. You may call it a vote of the parish, if you please, but the real working members had as little to do with it as with the last earthquake."

"Then it is not so bad, after all," said I, determined to look on the bright side. "The new *régime* cannot do much mischief in a year; at the end of that time we may trust that the old order of things will be restored."

She shook her head discouragingly. "For Mr. Vennor's sake, I hope it may be so. But my husband is no alarmist, yet he says that we shall not soon see the end of the disastrous effects of this overturn. In the first place, we lose two of our most valuable members:—Mr. Holroyd, of the steamboat company, was debating whether to keep his permanent residence here, or go to New York,—he could manage the business equally well at either end of the line,—this affair decides him;—he goes. And Judge Ellenwood, who was our strong man in some ways, is so angry that he vows he will never set foot inside of the church again. He left the meeting in a rage, and went straightway to apply for a pew in the Dutch Reformed Church."

I looked at her in a distressful surprise that really had no words. Although I knew nothing of the gentleman in question, his failure in loyalty to the Church of my love was like a personal wound.

Mrs. Clavrick answered my look as if it had been speech.

"I am not defending him; Heaven forbid! I see the woful wrong of it as clearly as you do. But I also see the other side of it,—his side, that is,—which you can not see; and though it does not justify, it explains. The man who takes the Judge's place has been his foe for years, socially politically, parochially, and this is his first triumph. There is a fair proportion of human nature in the Judge, and all of

it is up in arms and rampant. My husband labored with him for more than two hours yesterday, urging him by everything good and bad to reconsider his action before Mr. Vennor's arrival; and he would not give in a hair's-breadth."

"I am glad to be able to infer that Mr. Clavrick is stanch."

My hostess put out her hand impulsively, and gave mine a warm clasp. "My husband will stand by his church and his rector to the last drop of his blood and the last gasp of his breath. But he will have no share in the controlling power, now. Indeed, it will be best for him to keep in the background as much as possible, to avoid arousing the jealousy of the new vestry, upon whose good-will Mr. Vennor's comfort must largely depend. It is such a shame that, after having been urged to take charge of this parish, on the ground that it was in an excellent condition for work and growth, he should come to us in three weeks, to find everything at sixes and sevens,—an angry faction, a sullen faction, a scared faction, and the remainder about evenly divided between indifference and hopelessness. It is so different from what he was led to expect, that no one could blame him if he just turned his back on us and left us to our fate. But I sincerely hope that he will not! Oh! I cannot begin to tell you—and you would hardly believe me if I did—what a strong hold he has already taken on our hearts, and with what hope and confidence we turn to him as the one bright spot in all this fog. If any one can steer us safely through it to some fair haven of peace, I am sure that it is he."

I was spared the necessity of a reply by the entrance of the gentlemen. Naturally, I looked first at Paul's face; it still bore traces of the gravity due to a recent discussion of serious matters, but not a shadow of doubt, discourage-

ment, or dismay. My spirits rose as by some infusion of a subtle elixir, and I turned to listen to Mr. Clavrick with a much lighter heart.

"I see that my wife has been taking you behind the scenes," said he, with a keen glance at my face. "I did not tell her she must not; when a cold bath is inevitable, I believe in taking one swift plunge, and having the chill over with. For then the reaction sets in."

"I don't think we had got so far as that," said Mrs. Clavrick, lightly shrugging her shoulders.

"No? Well, we will hope that it is close by. To hasten it let me say to you most emphatically, Mrs. Vennor, that in all this folly and friction, this rancor and recrimination, I have yet to hear the first word of dissatisfaction with our new rector. His election is the one action of the old vestry that the new one does not criticise or disown. We may be at loggerheads about every other subject under the sun, but we are an unit in our affectionate and loyal regard for him."

"Which will last," said I, somewhat ruefully, "until you have decided of which faction he is to be accounted the head."

"That decision will be long in the making, I trust. I shall do what I can to delay it, even if I have to cut my rector dead in public, to prevent people from thinking that I am too deep in his confidence. We understand each other."

The eyes of the two gentlemen met in a way that spoke volumes for their mutual trust and liking. Plainly, their talk had borne good fruit.

"As for you, Mrs. Vennor, our host went on, in a tone half of jest and half of earnest, "please do not go and get things hopelessly mixed by falling in love with my wife!"

"How can I help it?" I asked, in the same tone.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he responded, looking at her with a frank admiration very pleasant to witness. "You will have to find your own solution to that problem; I never did! But now, let her show you to your dressing-room, to get your things on. We are going for a drive. We need to get our minds cleared of the smoke and dust of this parish muddle before Sunday is upon us. Nothing will do it so effectually as the gracious ministrations of nature. If you are a lover of fine scenery, we can show you things to exalt you to the seventh heaven of delight. Our views may not be so grand as those of the Alps or the Yo Semite; but or sheer, simple beauty, and the quiet grandeur of mountains not so high as to be austere, we think them unsurpassed."

Paul came up to our room as I was putting on my bonnet. My mind was still running on the morning's revelation, and doubtless the mirror reflected a sufficiently dubious and anxious face. He lightly laid his hands on my shoulders, and turning me gently around so that he could look deep down into my eyes, he said:

"The Lord is King, be the people never so impatient; He sitteth between the cherubim, be the earth never so unquiet."

It was enough; I needed not to hear, nor say, another word.

III.

SHOWER AND SHELTER.

BELLERUE is the quaintest old town! Memorials of its Dutch founders, traces of their characters, taste, and customs, meet one at every turn,—albeit often ruthlessly elbowed by the march of modern improvement, and sometimes far advanced on the road to decay. Yet their homely, massive, old-world charm is worth far more than the flimsy elegance of a later period.

"But how did it come by its French name?" I asked.

"For years the town consisted of a single, straight, mile-long street, beginning at the river and ending on top of the hill that we shall soon ascend, where lived a sporadic Frenchman who is supposed to have given the name. 'Beautiful-Street' was no misnomer then! with its fine old mansions and shade trees on either side, and at either end lovely views from the river-bluff and the hill. In our day, there are parallel streets galore, many of the old houses have been turned over to business, and the old name becomes only a name, to which one rarely gives a thought. Yet to some of us this is a beautiful street still; it is thronged with memories of childhood or shadows of earlier times; we see it as it was rather than as it is; besides, the lovely views are still its *termini*, as you will see."

The day was a delightful one, fair and fresh enough to have strayed down from Paradise ; and, when the city was left behind, the road wound through scenery so various and so beautiful that one might well doubt if this is a "fallen world ":—unless the term be limited to those who people it, clouding its sky and dimming its sunshine with the murky miasma of their own follies and sins. We traversed peaceful vales with clear-shining streams lovingly and lingeringly gliding through them; we wound past fertile fields, sunny meadows and shadowy woods; we saw quaint old farm-houses—one built of bricks brought from Holland; and ever and anon we caught glimpses of the Catskills lifting their blue summits into the bright sky, and seeming a type of the Delectable Mountains.

Guides and visitors were alike enthusiastic lovers of nature, and neither cried " Hold, enough ! " as we went from view to view; so it happened that we were still some miles from home when swift clouds began to gather in the sky, lit from within by flashes of lightning, and vocal with the low rumble of thunder.

We were skirting the grounds of a fine old country place when the first raindrops fell; and, without an instant's hesitation, Mr. Clavrick reined his horses in at the open gateway, and put them at their best pace up the avenue toward the large mansion dimly visible through the trees.

" Must we really stop here? " asked Mrs. Clavrick, with something like a shiver, it seemed to me. " I have not been here since—" she left the sentence unfinished.

" Why not? " asked Mr. Clavrick, with a reassuring smile. " This place will shelter us as well as any other; indeed, there is no other near enough to be of any avail."

elk's horns fixed over it; all around were tall cabinets filled with minerals, coins, and other *curios*, and settees of carved oak occupied the interspaces. The place was in perfect order, but it had the chill, cheerless, desolate aspect that tells of long disuse.

Opposite the entrance was a carved and pillared doorway, leading into the main hall. Daniel now flung this door open, and waited deferentially for us to enter.

Mrs. Clavrick glanced that way, and again I seemed to see her shiver.

"Surely, we do not want Mr. and Mrs. Vennor to inspect the house by this gray and ghastly light," said she, looking deprecatingly at her husband. "Let us reserve it for a sunshiny day. I fancy Mrs. Vennor is weary enough to be glad to do so, if you ask her."

"I am not tired," I hastened to say, willing to spare her what seemed likely to be no pleasant task; "but it is never well to drink any cup of pleasure to the very bottom, and I can come to the Manor-house with a fresher zest some other day."

Mrs. Clavrick gave me a grateful look, and the next moment proposed that we should go out on the wide porch to wait for the cessation of the shower.

"It feels like a tomb here," she said, apologetically, "and I cannot but remember when it was so different!" and she sighed as she led the way out.

The shower ceased as suddenly as it came; and the jewel-like drops, clinging to every leaf and twig, were sparkling in the first sunbeams when the young man that we had passed in the park came into view, strolling leisurely through the trees, and occasionally turning to look about him;—more, it struck me, with the air of one who remembers than

of one who discovers. Nearing the porch, he took his hat off to us, but he addressed the old servant, as if well aware that he was the one in charge.

"Will you kindly allow me to look through the house?" he asked, in a clear and pleasantly modulated voice. "I am told that it is to be let, and I think of taking it, if it suits."

Daniel's answer not being forthcoming, I turned to look for the cause of the delay. He stood staring at the stranger in a way that did not indicate his fitness for his position, I thought. Finally, he faltered :

"I—I—yes, cert'nly. But—the shower—you are not wet."

"No, thanks to the old oak yonder," replied the stranger, a smile lighting up his grave face like a gleam of sunshine in a shady spot ; "I reached it just in time."

The words sounded simple enough, but their effect was quite otherwise. Daniel looked more dazed than before. Mr. Clavrick took one swift step forward, as if in glad recognition of a friend, then, becoming instantly aware that the impulse was not mutual, he as swiftly retreated. But his wife, more impulsive and less observant, had already rushed to the young man, holding out both hands, and joyously exclaiming :

"Oh, Rolf! welcome, welcome home! I am so glad to see you back! I know it can mean but one thing."

The stranger bowed till his lips almost touched the outstretched hands, but he did not take them.

"I am grieved to have no right to so kind a welcome," he said, with an accent that seemed unmistakably sincere. "But my name is not Rolf ; I am Hugh Ennadeen, at your service."

And he handed a card to Mr. Clavrick, again bowing low.

Mrs. Clavrick's hands dropped ; her face fell ; she looked not only surprised, but hurt, and even a little indignant.

The stranger glanced at her and went on :

"I am here by General Fairfax's authorization ; indeed, he brought me as far as the farm below, where he stopped on business. I preferred to come on alone ; I thought I could find the way ;" and with the last words, the eyes smiled, though the lips remained grave.

"I hope you have not missed it," returned Mr. Clavrick with a slight compression of the lips, as he saw the tears starting to his wife's eyes.

Opportunely enough, the carriage now came up, and her husband was plainly glad to end the scene by putting us into it. But, stopping for a moment with his foot on the step, he turned again to the stranger.

"If you should decide to take the house, Mr.——Ennadeen, I shall be glad to be of service to you in any way, for the sake of one whom you strongly resemble, and whom we knew and loved well ;" adding, after a slight pause, in a curiously significant tone,—" and believed in."

The young man's dark-blue eyes shone. "I thank you from my heart," said he, in a full, rich tone, " not only for myself, but—if I may—for him. He is happy in your esteem and confidence. If I take the Manor,—and it is almost a foregone conclusion that I shall,—I hope to prove not unworthy of my resemblance to him."

And the two gentlemen shook hands with a grave heartiness that gave the little ceremony the air of an alliance, offensive and defensive, against a common enemy.

IV.

THE MANOR.

The conversation was far from brisk on the first part of the homeward route. Mrs. Clavrick spoke little and with effort; her husband, though he failed not to give a certain automatic attention to the business in hand, was almost as evidently pre-occupied with serious and perplexing reflections. But at last he shook himself free of whatever doubts or anxieties had beset him, and turned to us with his frank, genial smile.

"There is really no good reason," said he, "why you should not have an explanation of the scene that you have witnessed, only that I would gladly have deferred telling you just yet of the more modern tragedy that casts its gloom over the Manor-house, if circumstances had not thrown it so directly in our way. There are plenty of legends of earlier woes clustering round those time-mellowed walls, which would but lend them a richer, subtler charm like that which a plentiful growth of parasitical vegetation gives to a massive tree-trunk; and it does seem a pity that, on the very threshold of your life in Bellerue you should be met, first, by our miserable parish upset, and then by this sad story of mysterious crime. But we will take it as an indication that you are to get the worst of us first, and the best afterwards; on

the whole, a much better order of things than the *vice versa*, —if only it does not fill you with discouragement at the outset."

"I assure you," said Paul, quietly, "that, whatever reason I may discover for regret, I see none, as yet, for actual discouragement."

"I rejoice to hear that," returned Mr. Clavrick, heartily. "Half the battle is to keep up good courage."

Yet he ended with a faint sigh, as if oppressed with some heavier disquietude than he cared to admit. Or was it due to the sombre tale that he now began to tell us?

"Thirty years ago, Kenworth Manor was inherited by Rollin, of that ilk;—a bachelor about fifty years old, gentle and courteous of bearing, yet with a certain underlying reserve and austerity of temper. Nevertheless, he was not without a good deal of kind-heartedness at some still deeper depth, as was shown by the fact that, when his only sister (who had made a hasty, ill-assorted match) was, in the natural course of things, deserted by her scapegrace husband, he invited her and her boy to make the Manor-house their home; and, although he showed no very demonstrative affection for either, he treated them kindly and generously, causing the mother to be recognized as lady of the Manor, and sparing no pains nor expense to give her son the education and training of a gentleman. It was almost unavoidable, therefore, that as the years went on, and the boy became a tall, handsome stripling, with the air of being perfectly at home and 'to the manner born,' outside observers should begin to look upon him as his uncle's heir; nor is it to be wondered at if he and his mother indulged in similar anticipations. To whom would Rollin Kenworth be so likely to devise his estate as to the nephew who had

grown up under his roof, and for whom he had always manifested the care and solicitude, if not the warm affection, of a father? If he had ever asked himself the question,—and he must have done so more than once,—he could scarcely have given it other than an affirmative answer.

"Yet there were reasons—excellent ones—why Kenworth Rixon could take no real hold on his uncle's heart. He was no true Kenworth, except in the name by which his mother, with her strong family pride, had managed to have him christened in spite of her husband's opposition. And he never was a boy, in the usual sense of the word. He must have been cold, calculating, cautious and secretive from his cradle, to judge from his character when I first had the pleasure of knowing him, fifteen years ago, when he was about thirteen years old. At that epoch, certain business matters brought me into frequent association with Mr. Kenworth, and more than once, when his nephew had rendered him some little service, or instantly given up at his bidding some wished-for pleasure, I have seen him look after him with a sigh, and I could not help thinking that one spontaneous caress of unmistakable affection would have been a surer road to his heart. Reserved as he was outwardly, I suspected that there was a deep reservoir of love within, longing for the right hand to unlock its gates and let it forth. And yet, to do Ken justice (he soon came to be called 'Ken,' to distinguish him from his uncle, who naturally went by his surname among his intimates), that reserve was the very thing that he was least fitted by nature to deal with. A more genial and visible affection from his uncle might have awakened a corresponding feeling in himself, since there is no touchstone like love to detect and foster love.

"This was the situation when Destiny, or Providence, chose to introduce into it a new element. Mr. Kenworth had one brother still living at the West, who had embarked the most of his property in a Mexican mining scheme, and lost it. He was ill when the news came, and it killed him. He had long been a widower; he left one child, a boy a year or two younger than Ken; and in due time, he, too, became an inmate of the Manor-house.

"I have said that Ken Rixon never was a boy; Rolf Kenworth had the spirits, the mischief, and the hardihood, of a dozen boys rolled into one. As soon as he got out from under the shadow of his father's death,—and at his age, with his temperament, that does not take long,—he made the old Manor fairly alive with fun and frolic, pranks and feats, to which it had been a stranger for half a century. He climbed trees, descended into wells, got astride of wild horses and furious bulls, went fishing in leaky boats, fought half the boys in the neighborhood, had no end of falls, duckings, and bruises, yet came through them all as if he led a charmed life.

"But in the very worst of his escapades, he never did a cruel nor a disgraceful thing. He was the soul of honor; his word and his promise could be implicitly relied on. Ken, in the few times when he had been suspected of doing anything wrong, had always lied like a Jesuit; the tearing of wild horses could not have made Rolf act or utter an untruth. His worst fault was that he was subject to attacks of swift, speechless rage, which made him, for the time being, look and behave like a young demon. Aside from these infrequent outbreaks, never was there a sweeter, sunnier temper. Taking him altogether, I thought him the most winning and lovable youth of my acquaintance.

"And Mr. Kenworth loved him well; no doubt of that. From the moment when, turning away from his father's grave, he had thrown his arms around his uncle's neck, and sobbed out his boyish grief on his breast, Rolf possessed the "Open, sesame,' to his affections. He strove conscientiously to treat the boys with strict impartiality; nevertheless, his eyes and his voice softened to Rolf as they had done to none other since the dispelling of the early romance, in remembrance of which he had lived a bachelor all his days. How could he help it? Rolf brought with him the clinging, caressing ways of a petted darling, and saw no reason for changing them. He put his arm round his uncle's neck and laid his fresh young cheek against the bronzed elderly one; he dropped his head on his uncle's knee and went to sleep with the confiding ease and grace of a kitten; he held up his red lips for a good-night or good-morning kiss as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Ken, if he had loved his uncle with all his heart, could never have done these things; they were not in his way; they would have come from him with an ill and alien grace.

"At Rolf's advent, Mrs. Rixon had received him with great kindness; but as soon as she saw what swift progress he was making in his uncle's favor, her mother-love took the alarm. Thenceforth, she was not absolutely unkind to him —she was too wise a woman for that—but she ceased to treat him with tenderness. As an inevitable consequence, Rolf clung all the more closely to his uncle, and was alienated in a proportionate degree from his aunt and cousin.

"Not that the boys were exactly at enmity. Rolf was of too genial and generous a temper to be habitually on bad terms with anyone, and Ken was too reticent and self-con-

trolled to give outward expression to the jealousy and anger that must often have gnawed within. In the few serious quarrels that they had, Mrs. Rixon generally contrived to make it appear that Rolf was in the wrong : and, to say truth, his temper often put him there in the end, whatever might have been the fact in the beginning. Indeed, more than once it struck me that both mother and son were deliberately fanning the flame into fury, which a single drop of kindness or forbearance would have speedily quenched.

"So things went until it was time for them to go to college, and both were duly packed off to Columbia, the family *alma mater*—Ken first, Rolf a year later. Both ranked high as students, so far as their class-work went ; and Ken's deportment was eminently proper, at least on the surface ; but Rolf's high spirits, impulsive generosity, and occasional outbreaks of temper got him into more than one scrape. Not that he had the least tendency to vice or dissipation. He was full of fun and frolic ; he was free-handed as the summer sun ; he had a quick sympathy for every tale of real want ; he was the natural prey of the whole plausible race of beggars, borrowers, and swindlers ; but he never did a thing that was vicious or dishonorable.

"In Bellerue, he was the universal favorite. When he came home for the long vacations, the whole town seemed brighter for his presence. His first appearance on Main street was a real ovation : nearly everybody smiled at him ; most people stopped to greet him, to shake hands, to delight their eyes and ears with his handsome face and cordial voice. Children took to him instinctively ; animals were like wax in his strong, gentle, skillful hands. And the old Manor-house seemed to laugh with every gable when he was within ; there was something in the very

air of the place that told a sensitive observer: Rolf is here!

"It was during one of those vacations that he put me under an obligation which I can never forget. Babiecita's life was in danger from a runaway horse; for a few terrible moments I expected to find her mangled, dying, or dead by the roadside. Instead, I found her laughing and crowing in Rolf's arms,—she was too young to understand from what his daring, strength, and skill had saved her.

"But I was not. I put my hand on Rolf's shoulder, and told him that he had made a friend for life. I meant it, and I mean it still. Always, everywhere, I stand ready to serve and befriend Rolf Kenworth to the extent of my ability."

"And I, too!" cried Mrs. Clavrick, wiping away the tears that had gathered in her eyes. "And not merely for my child's sake, either, but for his own as well. This husband of mine is so careful not to overrate Rolf, so anxious not to hurt his cause by a too evident partisanship, that he does not half do him justice. I tell you that he was the dearest fellow that was ever made, the most genuine, the most unselfish, the kindest-hearted. Even his faults were but excesses of virtue;—those very rages which Mark mentions always began either in his intense sympathy with some case of cruelty or oppression, or in his being falsely accused of something which he held to be dishonorable;—no one ever took merited reproof more humbly. And when his fit of temper was over, he was always so ashamed and penitent that he took twice as much blame upon himself as he deserved, and exonerated everybody else. Ken Rixon often found his account in that—the sly, scheming,

cold-blooded, smooth-spoken young rascal! Rolf was—and is—worth a whole township of him!"

Mr. Clavrick listened to his wife's outburst with an indulgent smile.

"You see," said he, turning to us, "that Rolf will not lack for one out-spoken, thorough-going partisan while my wife lives. But, allowing that her sketch of him is drawn with the most accurate pencil, that of his cousin is shaded a little too blackly, I think. For he was by no means an ill-conditioned or unprepossessing youth. He was a good son to his mother; she doted on him, and he seemed to give her all the tenderness of which his nature was capable. And we must allow that it *was* hard lines to be so continually outshone by Rolf,—to have to go through life just on the edge of that young Apollo's halo of glory, when he might so easily, in his absence, have made a sufficiently brilliant illumination of his own. There were times when I felt something like pity for Ken, little as I cared for him personally. And just because I did not care for him, it is more than likely that I do not do full justice to the good that was in him."

"His wife gave him an amused, albeit a very proud and admiring glance; then she said to us:—

"Don't believe him, either of you! He would do justice to a wolf that had just dined off his favorite horse! there never was such another determined-to-look-on-both-sides character in the world. But go on, Mark," she added, turning to him; "your story is but half told, and I do hope you will end it before we get home; it is not the sort of thing to enliven the dinner table!"

V.

WHAT A MORNING BROUGHT FORTH.

"THUS far," resumed Mr. Clavrick, "my talk has been merely prefatory. Without some knowledge of previous events, and of the actors in them, you could not well understand what is to follow.

"During one of their vacations, Ken and Rolf could think of nothing better to do than to fall in love with the same young lady—Dana Heathcote. It must be granted that she was pretty enough to furnish them with valid excuse."

"Dana!" I repeated, "what an odd name for a girl!"

"And she came somewhat oddly by it," remarked Mr. Clavrick. "When her father was a young man, a certain Mr. Dana helped him out of some trouble, and, in his gratitude, he vowed that his first child should be named for his benefactor. It appears never to have entered his masculine mind that his first child might not be a boy. When that turned out to be the fact, he kept his word all the same. He silenced remonstrance by averring that he could not see why Dana was not as good as Lina or Dina; for his part, he liked it much better. So Dana she was called, and Dana she remains; and we are so used to the name as never to think of it as strange. In truth, she is

the kind of girl to make one feel, not that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but that the name is sweet for the sake of the rose. Proceed, Mark; this is merely a footnote."

Mr. Clavrick smiled, and obeyed.

"Up to this time, though Ken may not have felt any real love for his cousin, and was undoubtedly jealous of his growing favor with his uncle, yet I verily believe that he had never felt any bitter animosity towards him. But now, when he saw him lifting his hand to take the prize that he, too, had striven for with all the repressed strength and passion of his reticent nature, I suspect that a flood of jealous resentment rose and surged within—all the more powerfully because it was denied any free outlet, and constrained to seek such dark, tortuous, underground channels as it could find or make.

"It next happened that Mr. Kenworth was seized with a long and painful illness which left him the shadow of his former self both in body and mind. Thenceforward, he was a nervous, morbid, irritable invalid, never in the same mind for two consecutive days, and always certain that everything not under his own eye—and much of that!—was going to ruin. What I endured from him in those days as his partner, was bad enough; what his sister and nephews underwent must have been a heavy burden. But Mrs. Rixon and Ken soon saw their opportunity in his condition, and deliberately set themselves to make the most of it.

"As is usual in such cases, the subject which chiefly engrossed and perplexed him was the disposition of his property. It appeared that, some years before, he had made a will in Ken's favor; after Rolf's coming, he had destroyed it,

and prepared one with blanks left for the insertion of the legatee's name, whenever he should decide which it was to be. The short way out of the difficulty would have been to divide the estate between them, as I told him more than once; but that was opposed to all the instincts and traditions of the race. Kenworth Manor had always belonged to one of the name; it had never been divided; it had passed from father to son with the regularity of an entail; its present possessor had no mind to break with the time-honored custom. So he began to hold the succession over the heads of his nephews like a veritable sword of Damocles; if either displeased him, a threat of disinheritance was instantly on his lips. And it was generally Rolf to whom it was uttered, for Ken walked as warily, in those days, as if he had been treading among African man-traps, while both he and his mother did their underhanded best to lead or to goad Rolf into mischief. If any thing went wrong, they contrived to make it appear that he was somehow to blame; if he was gay, he was heartless; if he was grave, he was considering the probability of soon stepping into his uncle's shoes;—worst of all, if he was caressing, sympathetic, and attentive, as it was his nature to be, they hinted that it was simply to prejudice his uncle in his favor. And Mr. Kenworth was just weak and morbid enough to yield easily to any influence that was specious and persistent; and Rolf was of too unsuspicious a nature to see what was going on, or too proud to defend himself.

"Indeed, if I have given you any true conception of his character, you will understand that to be accused of mean, politic wheedling and toadying in order to make himself his uncle's heir, was a thing that he was not likely to endure with any patience. There must have been more than

one unpleasant scene before the last one, when Rolf—after telling his uncle that he hoped he would sign his will in Ken's favor at once, for he would never enter the house again till he knew it was done, and he was no longer liable to the insult of having his heart's purest affections mistaken for mercenary meanness—walked out of the house with his eyes aflame and his head in the air, leaving his foes to rejoice over their victory, if they felt like it.

"And a victory it appeared to be, at first. Mr. Kenworth was quite as angry as Rolf; and, loudly declaring that the will should be filled out immediately, and Rolf never should come back, he went to his library and shut himself up there for the rest of the day. When he came out, towards twilight, he seemed to have aged by ten years; he was bowed and broken as if a tempest had swept over him. As the evening wore on, he began to look worried and anxious; by-and-by he surprised Mrs. Rixon by asking if Rolf had returned or been heard from.

"'Of course,' he added, 'he did not mean what he said, and neither did I. It was a senseless quarrel, which we shall do well to make haste to forget. If he does not appear to-morrow morning, he must be sent for.'

"Certainly, none of them could have had any idea of what the morning was to bring forth. The housemaid, going into the library early, gave a shriek that brought everybody running to see what it meant. Mr. Kenworth was lying on the floor, dead, with a wound in his breast, and a pool of blood by his side. His desk was open: papers were strewed round the floor; the money-drawer was empty. It was supposed that he had heard some noise made by the thief, that he had risen to look for the cause, and possibly grappled with the man; who, fearing that he would call for

help, had silenced his voice, and freed himself, by one swift thrust of the weapon that he carried. Whether by skill or accident, the blow had been well-aimed and needed not to be repeated.

"This was woful enough, but it was not the end. When Mrs. Rixon saw her brother lying there, when her mind grasped the fact that he was dead, she stood for one moment staring straight before her as at something unseen by anyone else; then she sank slowly to her knees, and, the next instant, fell heavily forward. They lifted her up and carried her to her own bed; in a few moments she had ceased to breathe. It turned out that she had an obscure heart affection, and the shock had killed her.

"I have probably made it plain enough that I had no particular liking for Ken Rixon, but I was never more sincerely sorry for anybody in my life than for him. When I reached the house, he was sitting by his mother's side, and but for an occasional spasmodic movement, one could not have told which was the corpse. He did not moan nor weep; but his face was like ashen-gray marble; I never saw such dazed, stone-like grief. All that day, all that night, he sat there; indeed I do not think he left his mother for an hour till she was laid in the family tomb.

"Meanwhile, the doctors had been busy with an autopsy, and I cannot tell you what a thrill of horror ran through the community when it was stated that the wound in Mr. Kenworth's breast had been made by a poniard, or stiletto, of a certain peculiar kind and size. To make you understand why, I must go back a little.

"Mr. Kenworth's predecessor had a decided taste for curios, and during a long residence abroad, had made a considerable collection of the odds and ends that the stream

of time strews along its banks for those who care to pick them up. Among other things, at a sale in Italy, he had secured two stilettos, said to have been made for twin scions of a certain noble house ;—very curious and valuable things in their way, with handles of embossed gold, set with jewels, and slender blades of polished and damascened steel. Moreover there was a tradition that some secret had been wrought into their make, which no recent possessor had been able to discover.

But Rollin Kenworth cared little for curios; he looked upon his ancestor's collection as a particularly inconvenient sort of rubbish, since, little as he cared for it, he could not well throw it away; so he relegated it to the large entrance-hall (you probably noticed it there), in order to make room for more book-cases in the library, where it was originally bestowed. And when Rolf was one day seized with a desire to try his hand at the secret of the stilettos, and Ken became infected with it, he good-naturedly gave one to each, and bade them work at it to their heart's content. It did not transpire that they ever discovered it,—if there really were any;—but the dainty weapons, with their romantic history, were greatly to the taste of two college youths; and from that time forth they counted them among their most cherished possessions. Consequently, it had not been without a good deal of reluctance and regret that Ken, some months before, had given his up for lost. He had been fishing in the pond that day; he had bent over to free his boat from some floating rubbish; he had heard something go splashing into the water; no doubt it was his stiletto, which he happened to be carrying in place of a knife that he had mislaid.

"I do not need to show you the bearing of all this. It

being decided that Mr. Kenworth's wound was precisely such as these stilettos would make, and that Rolf's was the only one left, it was inevitable that some people should draw the inference that it was in Rolf's hand when it made the wound.

"But not many—at least, at first. It is as much to the popular credit as it is to Rolf's that, at the first broaching of the idea, there was an almost universal cry of indignant disbelief. Rolf a midnight murderer! Rolf a dastardly thief! It was simply inconceivable.

"And Ken, I am glad to say, was as sternly intolerant of such a theory as Rolf's best friend could wish. In truth, the accusation was the first thing that roused him from his apathy of sorrow into something like life and interest. At the inquest, he gave his testimony in the most emphatic way. Rolf, he said, had gone off in pride and anger,—as alas! he had too much occasion for!—but he had gone quite as much in sorrow, for Daniel, to whom he had said a kind parting word, had seen tears in his eyes. And that Rolf should come back at night, in cold blood, to rob his uncle, or assassinate him in any mood, was simply unthinkable for anyone who knew him. He was quite as likely to do such a thing himself. Any hypothesis was to be received except that. No train of circumstantial evidence, however dove-tailed and damaging, should ever make him believe that his cousin had committed that mean, dastardly crime. He spoke with a force and earnestness that were not without their effect; I never liked him so well before or since as on that occasion.

"But where was Rolf all this time? Heaven knows. From the Manor, that morning, he went straight to Dana Heathcote, told her the whole story, and made known his

determination to go away for a time; the scene through which he had just passed, the humiliating accusation that he had heard repeated by his uncle's lips, made it impossible for him to remain at the Manor any longer. Henceforth, he meant to earn his own living. As soon as he found himself in an independent position, he would open communication with his uncle, whom he should always dearly love; until such time, he should remain silent. What more was said between the two, it is not necessary to inquire. Doubtless they exchanged sighs and protestations, as parting lovers will, the world over; doubtless Rolf promised to be true, and Dana to wait for him; and then he took her in his arms, gave her a last kiss, and sorrowfully went his way.

"But *what* way? That was the question which racked the brains of friends and strangers, police and detectives,—in short, of the whole population of Bellerue,—for months; and not one of them has answered it as yet. If he had taken the wings of the morning, and flown to the farthest coast of Africa, he could not have vanished more swiftly and silently.

"It is more than three years, now, since it all happened, and to this day Rolf has never been heard from. After a time, this circumstance began to tell against him more strongly than any other:—If he is innocent, people asked, why does he not come forward and prove it? It is a question impossible to answer; nevertheless, there are still some of us who believe that it will be answered satisfactorily some day, and Rolf's innocence be made shiningly manifest. Ken was right. No circumstantial evidence, however dovetailed and damaging, could make one who knew Rolf well believe that he committed that crime. I have always thought better of Ken Rixon for those words.

"But they did not prevent the Grand Jury from bringing in a verdict to the effect that Mr. Kenworth died of a wound made by a stiletto, in the hands of Rolf Kenworth. It was not unanimous; one or more of the jurors recommended the substitution of 'in the hands of a person unknown,' but the majority went the other way;—in truth, they could not well help it, as the circumstantial evidence was so strong. It follows that Rolf is under indictment for murder, and if he ever comes forward, or is found alive, he must stand his trial.

"You see why Honor and I gave that Mr. Ennadeen such an unnecessarily warm reception—because he looks enough like Rolf to be his twin brother. The resemblance quite took me in, till I bethought me how impossible it was that Rolf should present himself at the Manor in any such fashion, if at all."

Mrs. Clavrick shook her head.

"The very impossibility makes the probability, to my mind," said she. "Strong in the belief that no one will suspect him of so boldly putting his head into the lion's mouth, he has come to look into the matter for himself."

"If that be your opinion," said Mr. Clavrick, gravely, "I recommend you to be careful about making it known. It's general adoption might make a good deal of trouble for an innocent man. I observed Mr. Ennadeen very narrowly after my first surprise; he is broader shouldered than Rolf; his hair is darker and so is his complexion; he has a thick beard, while Rolf had only a moustache; and he has also a slight intonation or accent that is almost foreign."

Again his wife shook her head.

"Just the changes that three years spent in a strange

land would be sure to make in a youth of twenty-one; don't you see? Besides, he sought shelter from the rain in the old oak! How should a stranger know anything about that?"

The question was plainly a poser, and the answer came only after some reflection:—

"My dear Honor, the circumstantial evidence may point to Rolf as strongly in this case as it did in the former one, but there is an inherent improbability in both, which, to my mind, is not to be overcome by any amount of such evidence. If you admit it in one case, why not in the other?"

This was a poser for the wife, in her turn, and reduced her to silence for awhile.

"And the old oak in question," said I, with some curiosity, "is there anything wonderful about it except that it is hollow?"

Mr. Clavrick hesitated for a moment.

"I scarcely know how to answer you. The oak is a grand, stalwart specimen of its kind, and no one knows how old it is. The wonderful thing about it *is* the hollow. That is, to some extent, a secret, which Mrs. Clavrick has unguardedly betrayed. Accident discovered it to us; but I do not think it is known to anyone else outside of the Kenworth family; Daniel is the only one of the servants acquainted with it. Rolf chanced to hit upon it one day, and made use of it thereafter, as a sort of out-doors study."

"And boudoir," said Mrs. Clavrick, laughing;—"that is to say, he did his pouting in it. When things went awry in the house, he betook himself thither to sweeten his temper. At least, that is what he told me, one day; he said that the airiness, the lovely outlook, the thick oaken walls around him, the great, swaying boughs above, with the

birds nesting in them, the sense of grandeur and serenity and antiquity,—all soothed and rested him as nothing else did. And it would have dispelled the charm if the place had been generally known. That was why he begged us to keep the secret. I am sorry that I have so foolishly let it out."

"Pray do not give it another thought," I hastened to say. "We will straightway forget that we ever heard of any old oak except those which are the world's common heritage;—rooted far back, yet reaching their boughs, heavily fruited with legendary lore, down into the newest present. But, Mr. Clavrick, is it an indiscretion to ask what has become of Kenworth Rixon?"

"Certainly not. When it appeared that Rolf was not soon to be forthcoming, Ken declared that it was impossible for him to stay on at the Manor, and decided to go abroad. He left strict injunctions that any news of Rolf should be immediately cabled to him; and some people are persuaded that he really went in search of the fugitive. Be that as it may, he seems to spend his time in travelling; he has been seen by our citizens in divers old-world places, wearing the same sad, pale, listless countenance that he wore here after those tragical events.

"By the way, the will was found incomplete, and therefore inoperative. Thus the very thing that Mr. Kenworth so strongly deprecated is to come to pass; the law will divide the estate equally between the two nephews. But nothing can be done until Rolf's fate is determined; meanwhile, General Fairfax and I are the trustees. Some time ago, we decided that it was better to let the Manor to a good tenant than to leave it to the slow, sure deterioration of disuse. But its gloomy reputation is not in its favor;—

to the old-time ghosts that were always said to haunt the long gallery, superstition now adds the more modern shades of Rollin Kenworth and his sister, with their fresher and consequently more appalling frightfulness. The ancient phantoms are dim and gray of texture ; their wrongs and woes have faded to a soft neutral tint not without its charm ; the later comers are vivid and corpse-like, their ' excuse for being ' borrows no beauty from time's enriching touch, they are sharp, gaunt, and hideous in their staring newness of to-day. So far, no eligible tenant has presented himself ; if Mr. Ennadeen turns out to be such an one, he will be most welcome."

" What can he want with the Manor, if he isn't Rolf ?" asked Mrs. Clavrick, coming out of a reverie.

" Really, my dear, I think the question would be more pertinent if he were Rolf !"

" He was not the least bit surprised when I took him for Rolf," persisted Mrs. Clavrick.

Her husband stared, then laughed. " May I ask if it is a harp of a thousand strings that you are touching for our benefit ?" he asked, banteringly.

" I suppose it does look like monomania," she replied, good-humoredly,—" but, really, I can't get it out of my head that it is Rolf, altered enough by time to feel that he can safely come to investigate that grewsome business of the assassination for himself."

Mr. Clavrick lightly shrugged his shoulders. " Keep your idea as long as you like, if only you keep it—to yourself," said he in a jesting tone, yet one that did not invite further discussion of the subject.

Almost immediately, we stopped at his door, and I went up to my room wondering whether wife or husband were

more likely to be in the right about the question of identity, and feeling that there was a good deal to be said for both of them.

Referring the point to Paul, he opined somewhat quizzically that, our interest in the problem not being of that warm, personal nature which insists on an immediate solution of some sort, we might safely leave it for the process of time ; which does its work all the more surely because it does it slowly, gradually eliminating mere preferences and prejudices, and giving the bare facts and latent probabilities a chance to show themselves unveiled and unadorned.

VI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

SUNDAY morning dawned as smilingly fair and peaceful as if human woes and crimes had never been nor could be. The sky was clear—height above height of stainless, transparent blue, except for a few white, slow-drifting clouds, casting shadows that lent a softer, graver grace for a moment, and left no trace behind.

The Bellerue churches are all gathered round or near a central square, not large enough to be termed a park, a little aside from the main street, securing to them a due measure of seclusion and quietude. A walk of a half-mile, or more,—none too long for the bright spring day,—brought us in sight of St. Clement's, of which Paul had wisely said little, not to blunt the keen edge of enjoyment by anticipation. Some years before the more ancient structure was replaced by a modern Gothic edifice of stone, with a spire of fair proportions rising above the tall elms that stood near, flinging their pleasant gloom over the entrance. Within were upsoaring pillars and arches, and a rich glory of stained glass and decorated walls.

It needs not that I should here speak of the service. It is a delight always, everywhere, in all its variations of simplicity and richness; satisfying both my spiritual and æs-

thetic needs as nothing else does—or can, I think, until I come to worship in the eternal temple of the New Jerusalem. And it is an added delight to be ministered unto by one's husband, giving a new sweetness to what is sacred, and a new sacredness to what is sweet. "I am determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified," was his significant text to-day; and, as he spoke, all parish quarrels and jealousies, all petty ambitions, divisions, and animosities, all wrongs and sorrows, seemed to sink out of sight in the great, deep sea of Christ's infinite love, with its infinite adaptation to every form of human need.

The service over, several persons waited to greet their new rector; some few had the courtesy or curiosity to wish to make the acquaintance of his wife, and so came up to the pew where, with Mr. and Mrs. Clavrick, I awaited Paul's leisure. A rather short, stout man, with iron-gray hair, and dark-gray eyes which seemed to look more keenly into mine through their half-shut lids than many—indeed, most—wide-open ones, was presented to me as, "Mr. Pollard, our junior warden."

With him was his wife, a sprightly little woman, much younger than himself, all smiles and gestures, and airy little meaningless motions, reminding one of a bird mounted on a very elastic perch. There was also a tall, thin, elderly spinster,—Miss Deane,—with a shrewd, yet kindly face, and much quaintness and energy of manner.

By way of safe and pleasant meeting ground, I said something about my gladness in seeing so beautiful a church, addressing Mr. Pollard, who happened to be nearest me. He turned to me with eyes so nearly shut that only a dark line remained visible. It was like being examined

through the crack of a door; one can see that some shadowy figure is there, but cannot tell what or whom, nor whether its gaze is kindly or malevolent.

"Yes, it's very fine," said Mr. Pollard slowly, and as if he grudged the admission. "The truth is, it's a great deal too fine for us. It gives rise to false notions about our people. 'If you can build such a fine church as that, you can afford to give handsomely to charities,' is the premise and inference that we have to meet all the time. But it's all wrong. In the first place, we did not build the church. Our old rector, after scraping and squeezing every possible cent out of the parish, begged of his friends and acquaintances all over the land, and robbed himself, to make up the needed amount. Secondly, we are not able to give much to outside objects, because it's as much as we can do to row our own boat."

"It is as much as any one can do to row his own boat, if he declines to put forth his strength, or fetters his arms at the elbows," remarked Mr. Clavrick, with a certain good-humored dryness of intonation.

Mr. Pollard leisurely scanned the carven capital of a tall pillar through his half-closed eyes ere he answered:—

"You are just as bad as the rest of them, Clavrick; you greatly over-rate the parish's financial ability. If you had your way, we should be up to our eyes in debt in a year."

"You have taken good care that I shall not have my way," replied Mr. Clavrick, cheerfully.

"I!" exclaimed Mr. Pollard, opening his eyes for an instant, and then shutting them as if he were about to drop off to sleep. "Allow me to remark that, by the vote of the parish meeting—"

"Which I have no intention of criticising," interrupted

Mr. Clavrick. "Nor are we going to reconsider it for Mrs. Vennor's benefit—"

"It would be more to the purpose to do it for our own," interposed Miss Deane, grimly.

There was a gleam of mirth in Mr. Clavrick's eyes, but he went on, with outward gravity:—

"The vote stands, and we are to stand the consequences. I trust they will be its best justification. A prosperous parish is the main thing; that is what we all want and work for."

Paul here came up with another of the new vestrymen—Mr. Jackman. He was in strong contrast with the other,—slender, quick, bustling, brisk of manner and crisp of speech, evidently with a vivid consciousness of the value of time, and especially of his own portion of it.

Mr. Pollard turned to him as to a sure ally:—"I have been warning Mrs. Vennor not to let our fine church give her too high ideas of our parish."

"It's a white elephant that would eat its head off, if we did not look out for it," returned Mr. Jackman, much as if he were speaking of an unprofitable inmate of his cattle-yard.

I was too much surprised to answer at once. Paul saved me the trouble.

"The comparison is not an inapt one," said he, in the studiously quiet tone wherewith he conceals deep feeling which it is wise not to express. "In the East, the white elephant is a sacred animal, to be tenderly and reverently cared for. As for the cost of its maintenance, they do not expect it to be a source of profit, in the ordinary sense of the word."

Mr. Pollard turned his eyes meditatively upon Paul, as

if dimly cognizant of a latent rebuke. Mr. Jackman answered with business-like disregard of everything but the main point—*his* main point:—

"Probably not. I fancy we could teach the Orientals a thing or two about making things pay as you go. I don't suppose you, as a clergyman, are likely to think as I do about these matters; my idea is that every church should be run on strict business principles, and made to pay a profit."

"I agree with you," said Paul, quietly.

Mr. Jackman looked surprised. "Oh, well, if that is the case, no need to waste any more words about it."

"Allow me to explain," said Paul. "I agree with you that a church should be so managed as to pay a profit; but the profit of which I was thinking would not make much show in your ledger, Mr. Jackman."

"Oh, you mean the increase in the value of the property, the security due to the maintenance of law and order, and all that sort of thing," said Mr. Jackman, graciously. "Of course, those things are to be considered, and their value is real enough, though we can't always set it down in dollars and cents."

"And the increase in the value of men and women, the maintenance of the law of love and the order of righteousness, the ennobling and enriching of the individual and corporate life of the parish,—are not these things also to be taken into the account? Are they not of such real and paramount value that all which we can do, or be, or give, to secure them, is not too much, while anything short of that is far too little?"

There was a silence. Paul's voice had lost its studied quietude; it was deeply thrilled with earnestness—the rich

earnestness that touches the surface of even a cold, careless heart with a momentary glow, though it cannot penetrate its depths nor alter the direction of its current.

Recovering himself, Mr. Jackman gave a short laugh. "That is the sort of thing to preach, Mr. Vennor, and I like to hear it as well as anyone. But when it comes to practical questions of every-day life—"and he ended with an outward sweep of his hands more expressive than further speech.

"If I have not misread my Bible," remarked Miss Deane, drily, "it was not the brethren who said of Joseph, 'Behold, the dreamer cometh,' but the very dreamer himself who stored up the corn that saved them from death by famine. There seems to have been a practical side to his visions."

"And the practical question of every day," said Paul, "is not so much how large a heap of corn we can raise or store, as how we can best feed and foster the life that is more than meat. It is not a question to be answered offhand, nor in any stereotyped or perfunctory fashion, clerical or commercial. There is room enough in the working out of the problem for every sort of energy, material or spiritual, if only it be rightly applied."

As if by a general intuition that, for this time, there was no more to be said, the party now began to move slowly down the aisle of the emptied church.

Mr. Clavrick had quitted us some minutes earlier; we found him in the vestibule talking earnestly with three gentlemen. One, of medium size, white hair, an amiable face, and gentle manners, was introduced to me as, "Our senior warden, Mr. Darcy." Another—tall, slender, still young, with very dark eyes and complexion—was "one of

our vestry, Mr. Brune." The erect, broad-shouldered figure, tightly buttoned coat, and military bearing of the third prepared me for his name—"General Fairfax."

All greeted me with courtesy and cordiality; but I noticed that the General bowed very stiffly to my companion,—so much so as to suggest the possibility that, had he not been my companion, the bow might have been omitted. Nevertheless, it struck me that, after saying some polite sentences to me, the General's next words were meant for the ears of the whole party, so clearly and deliberately were they spoken.

"By the way, Clavrick, I hear that you were at the Manor yesterday, and saw my young friend, Mr. Ennadeen."

"I am glad to know that he is your friend," returned Mr. Clavrick, quietly; "he seems a fine young fellow."

"And bears a striking resemblance to Rolf Kenworth, at first sight," continued the General. "Upon my word, I could almost have sworn that it was he, until he handed me his letters of introduction from my friends in Cairo. I am going to bring him to see you to-morrow; he wants to lease the Manor."

Was it my fancy that this explanation was given less for Mr. Clavrick's benefit than for that of the bystanders, and was meant to forestall any unpleasantness to Mr. Ennadeen arising from his likeness to Rolf?

Mr. Pollard listened to it with his eyes gradually closing until they became nearly obliterated; then he said, in the slow, even tones which have a curiously emphatic quality:—

"My wife came up on the train yesterday with a young man, who, she said, was exactly like Rolf."

"Yes; exactly," said Mrs. Pollard, bristling with interest and animation at every point. "And if it were not for your

assertion to the contrary, General, I shouldn't hesitate to say that he *was* Rolf. To be sure, he did his best to act as if he had never seen me before, didn't see me very well now, and wasn't particularly anxious to see me again, which was not in the least like Rolf, who was always so cordial and friendly with everyone. But circumstances alter manners as well as cases, you know."

Treating his wife's speech as a mere parenthesis, Mr. Pollard proceeded:—

"And it is well that you can answer for him, General, or he might find himself in quarters neither so spacious nor so pleasant as the Manor-house."

"And such mistakes sometimes have still more disagreeable consequences," observed Mr. Burne, closing his firm mouth with an expression that verged on vindictiveness. "It is as well to avoid putting one's self in a position where they are likely to occur."

Apparently, I was the only one of the party who had noticed the entrance of a new-comer upon the scene. Just as General Fairfax began, a young lady, with a roll of music in her hand, had descended the gallery-stairs; but, finding his large figure effectually blocking her way, she had courteously stopped on the lower step to allow him to finish his statement, inasmuch as the number of his auditors forbade the supposition that it was meant to be private. I happened to be so placed that she came almost inevitably within the range of my observation:—perhaps, too, in my quality of comparative stranger, I was less interested in the conversation than the rest, and more at liberty to notice other things.

But any lack of interest on my part was quite made up by hers, as soon as she became aware what topic was under

discussion. I saw her start, change color, and catch her breath, as if she had sustained something of a shock; then she stood listening with as strained and breathless an attention as if her very life depended on her clear understanding of every word.

"As Mr. Brune finished his coolly cynical speech, he lifted his eyes, and saw her. A curious change came over his face, quite as swift and radical as that I had watched in hers, but by no means so simple in its nature, nor so easy to analyze. Something of pity, of regret, of kindness, I seemed to discover, yet something of hardness and bitterness, too :—but how could such a contradictory mixture be! More likely my imagination and the dim light of the vestibule had played me a trick.

Nevertheless, his change of countenance was real enough to attract General Fairfax's notice; and looking round for the cause, he saw the young lady waiting on the foot of the stair-case,—pale, but quite collected, even smiling as she met his startled gaze, yet not without a touch of hauteur in the way she faced the battery of eyes now directed upon her.

"Bless my soul! my dear Miss Heathcote!" cried the General, with surprise and mortification. "I had not the least idea I was turning my back on you. I humbly beg your pardon."

And he bowed with a depth of penitential courtesy that seemed a little disproportioned to the occasion.

Perhaps it was the consciousness of this that made Miss Heathcote's cheek flush; though she bent her head graciously enough, and disclaimed the necessity of any apology in tones that would surely have been tremulous if she had not held herself together with so firm a hand. It occurred

to me that such self-control in one so young argued a sorrowful necessity and a deal of practice.

Eager to create a diversion, I think,—though she would probably have done much the same thing in any case,—Mrs. Clavrick now seized upon her, and brought her over to my standing-place.

"Mrs. Vennor, I want you to know my friend Dana—Miss Heathcote. Mr. Vennor will find her a willing helper, always ready to fill any gap. Just now, she is our acting organist,—kindly keeping the place for Miss Keene, who has gone off on a health trip."

"So it was you who played that exquisite voluntary!" said Paul. "What was it? At first, I thought it was familiar, but I soon found that it was not."

"It was partly an improvisation," she answered, simply.

"Her playing is all well enough," said Mrs. Clavrick, with a proud, loving look; "but if you want your very heart wiled out of you before you know it, just wait till you hear her sing!"

"Until then," said Paul, smiling, "we may be permitted to say how much we enjoyed her playing this morning. It had the rare merit of fitting in so well with the whole spirit of the day's services as to make one forget that it was not an integral part of them."

She thanked him duly for his praise; she gave no opportunity for anyone to think her *distraite*, pre-occupied; yet I saw her look at Mrs. Clavrick with the wistful gaze of one who longs to ask questions of much moment to herself, if only the way would open.

So I made a motion to go, which was responded to by *adieux* from all the gentlemen not of our party, except Mr. Darcy, whose homeward route was the same as ours.

for a considerable distance. He and Paul led the way; I followed with Mr. Clavrick; last of all came his wife and Miss Heathcote. The sound of their voices in animated conversation reached our ears, and now and then a word or two, indicating that Mrs. Clavrick was relating the history of our yesterday's invasion of the Manor.

"I hope," said Mr. Clavrick, with the frankness that these twain had shown us from the beginning, making us feel more like near kinsfolk than new acquaintances,—"I hope that my wife is not infecting Dana with her belief that Mr. Ennadeen is Rolf in disguise."

"Then you are quiet confident of the contrary?" said I.

"Quite," he replied, with emphasis. "Rolf may be capable of a good deal of Don Quixotism, but he is not so foolish as that. If he knew of anything strongly in his favor, he would come forward in his own person; if not, he would not show up at all."

"You seem very much in earnest," said I, looking at him somewhat curiously.

"Don't you see that I am doing my best to manufacture correct public opinion," replied he, laughingly, yet not without a certain undertone of gravity. "How can you be so unkind as to refuse to be convinced?"

"But why should you be engaged in that manufacture, if you don't believe in Mrs. Clavrick's hypothesis?" persisted I, using the same freedom with which I was being treated.

Mr. Clavrick looked down musingly for a moment before he said:—

"That is just what I should like to know. I seem to be foolishly yielding to an intuitive feeling, which is strong

enough to influence my action, though it makes no appeal to my reason."

"More likely, you are wisely yielding to it," said I, warmly. "The intuitions which are not the reflex action of selfish passion and prejudice are likely to be heavenly influences, I think."

"We may hope so," he answered, gravely. "For, though Heaven seems a good deal farther off than it did when I was younger, electricity travels so much faster than the old-fashioned stage-coach that we may still believe it is near enough to make its influence felt at need. Indeed, it seems very plain to me that subtler forces than electricity, even, are at work among us,—harder to control and analyze, but none the less real and powerful. In truth, the more I see of this life of ours, the more strongly am I impressed with the reality of the unseen element in it,—the immaterial, as we say;—which is probably only a more delicate material than our senses take cognizance of."

"Except that spiritual sense which would be so much keener and more trustworthy if we gave it more careful training and practice," said I.

There was no time for farther talk, for we had now arrived at the home steps, where Babiecita was on the watch for us; and she precipitated herself from the top one into her father's arms with sufficient force, I thought, to give him quite enough to do with the material, at the moment.

VII.

TEA-TABLE TALK.

EARLY on the next morning, we began the task of setting the rectory in order for occupation. It is a quaint old mansion, stands on a corner of the main street, and was originally built and owned by a retired sea-captain, whose notions of domestic architecture must have taken a curious twist from his nautical life. There is a wide hall running the whole length of the main building, on one side; on the other, is a row of four large rooms, with wide openings into one another, presenting an almost palatial vista from the front one. Back of them is the kitchen, in a wing. The upstairs arrangement corresponds, except that the rear end of the hall is cut up into a nest of closets,—enough to offer a swift solution to any problems of stowage that might have beset the captain's mind, or ours.

Taking it all in all, the rectory has many qualifications for a pleasant home; not the least of which, to our minds, is its oddity, lifting it far out of the dull region of the commonplace. But it is too remote from the church to be convenient, and the building of a new one on ground directly adjacent thereto, is one of the tasks definitely before Paul and the vestry. One, too, wherein my "prophetic soul" discerns the possibility of a good deal of friction. For how

is it to be supposed that a robin and a mole would be able to reconcile their differences of opinion in regard to the fitness and functions of a dwelling. Things that burrow and things that soar are apt to take very dissimilar views of life and its needs.

But for a year, at least, and perhaps more, this quaint old structure is to be our home; a period quite long enough to furnish a motive for making of the place as fair and fitting a nest as circumstances permit. And there is something very fascinating to me in the ordering of a new home,—in the careful study of possibilities, the overcoming of difficulties, the seizing on points of vantage, the gradual evolution of order from chaos and latent correspondence from seeming incongruity. And if there be no hallowing touch of old associations, no spot sweet with the withered-rose fragrance of vanished loves and joys, so there are no mournful, bitter, blighting associations to deepen the shadows, and take the brightness out of the very sunshine. The new home may be as full of hope as it is empty of memory. Instead of being haunted by pale ghosts of the past, bright visions of the future may dance through the rooms, or smile out from the duskier passages like the glint of a chance sunbeam.

Mrs. Clavrick's "high tea" was a very bright and timely thing after our hard day's work. It was pleasant to see how thoughtfully she had catered for us, and how she enjoyed our manifest appreciation of her efforts. A very cheerful time we had over it, exchanging reports of the day's events and comments upon them, in the frankest and friendliest fashion.

"By the way," said Mr. Clavrick, at a fitting moment, "I had a visit from Mr. Ennadeen to-day, in company with the

General; and we had the mutual pleasure of signing a lease of the Manor for the space of a year from this date."

"I hope that he has a family," said I, "or he will be lost in that great house."

"Who does he profess to be, anyhow?" inquired Mrs. Clavrick.

"He comes to General Fairfax with a letter from an old class-mate of his, now consul at Cairo, Egypt. He is certainly a bachelor, of a good English, or Scotch, family, and belonged to the army that was sent to end the insurrection in the Soudan—and failed. It may be inferred that, having had enough of war and the East, he comes to peace and the West for a change. At all events, here he is, and welcome, since he takes the Manor off our hands."

"What can any young bachelor, except Rolf Kenworth, want of that great place?" asked Mrs. Clavrick, with incredulous emphasis. "He will be about as comfortable there as a single soldier in a barrack."

"Perhaps he will be lucky enough to find a wife here, as so many of his countrymen have done," laughingly suggested her husband.

"Doubtless. He will find her in—Dana Heathcote."

Mr. Clavrick looked at her with an amused face. "Wait till you know him better before you decide about that. In our interview to-day, I noticed one thing very unlike Rolf. He is grave even to sadness; he has none of Rolf's breezy buoyancy of temperament."

"Do you think, then, that to be accused of robbing and assassinating a beloved uncle is likely to put a man in high spirits?" retorted his wife, with a curl of her pretty lip.

"There is something in that," admitted Mr. Clavrick

frankly. "Nevertheless, I protest against your adoption of any theory till you have talked with Mr. Ennadeen face to face for just one half-hour. I greatly mistake if, at the end of that time, you do not confess yourself as hopelessly muddled as I am."

I could not help giving him a quick glance of surprise. Yesterday he was "confident," to-day he confessed himself to be "hopelessly muddled." Had he seen some reason for doubt, then?

He caught my glance, and understood it.

"I am not manufacturing public opinion to-day, Mrs. Vennor," he said, laughing. "I have given up the business. That commodity is manufacturing itself at a rate that defies my humble competition. Directly after the General and Mr. Ennadeen left me to-day, I had occasion to go to the bank. They were just a few paces in advance of me, and for five blocks I had an opportunity to watch their progress,—an occupation not without interest. Most people contented themselves with staring their eyes out of their heads, but a few heroic souls stopped and cordially extended their hands; then I could see that the General was affably explaining that this gentleman really was not Rolf Kenworth, but some one who looked remarkably like him. Then all bowed with the utmost courtesy, and parted; and the deceived person, looking a good deal dazed, went on his way, occasionally turning to gaze wonderingly after the pair. Finding me directly in his path, he was only too glad to disburden himself of his surprise and bewilderment; and I had a chance to see how the same thing affects different minds."

"Who were they all?" asked his wife, with a feminine desire to exchange the general for the particular.

"Oh, well, there was Judge Ellenwood for one. He is a doubter,—as becomes the legal mind, he will wait till the evidence is all in and ready to be summed up, before he gives an opinion. Another was our new vestryman, Ira Lasker; he is on your side, my dear. He *knows* it's Rolf, and hopes he'll get his desert for his 'brazen audacity;'—it's his phrase, not mine, please, ma'am," he added, with a humorous assumption of the necessity of exculpating himself.

Mrs. Clavrick laughed, yet she looked a little annoyed, too. To have the despised Lasker on her side was almost reason enough for going over to the opposition. Tapping her slender foot impatiently on the floor, she said:—

"Never mind his expression; it becomes him. Go on."

"Next, there was the artist Calyo,—he who painted Rolf's portrait, you know. I regarded his opinion as well worth having; a man who has studied a face in that careful way ought to know more about it than an ordinary observer. Without really deciding the question, he was inclined to the negative; did not regard chance likenesses as wonderful; on the contrary, thought it wonderful that there were no more of them, as there are only seven types of faces, and the resemblances must always be more numerous and noticeable than the differences. Indeed, he laughingly asserted that many people were not known so much by their individual faces and figures as by the fact that they were not somebody else! After him came Jessie Lawrence;—she did not stop me; I stopped her. 'What do you think of that young gentleman you were just speaking with, and who looks so much like Rolf?' I asked. She looked at me with surprise. 'Do you think so?' said she. 'I did, just at first; one naturally allows for some changes to be made in

three years, and more. But, in another moment, I knew better; he is not half so handsome as Rolf.'"

"Of course *she* would take a superficial view," commented Mrs. Clavrick, with somewhat contemptuous emphasis. "Is that all?"

"It is a sample of all,—except, perhaps, Ben Harding," and he added, parenthetically, to us,—"a young imp that Rolf once fished out of the river, nearly dead, and who showed a dog-like devotion to him ever after." (Resuming his narrative). "Ben did not speak to Mr. Ennadeen; he simply stared while he passed as if turned to stone, except as to eyes; and he remained so staring for some time. Then, putting his head on the ground, he elevated his feet in the air, in which attitude I left him. Whether he meant to express thereby the general topsy-turvity of his ideas, or thought his brains would work more clearly in that position, is more than I can tell."

"Do you suppose that the world looks upside down from that point of view?" asked Paul, with a mirthful gleam in his eyes.

"Probably; what is seen of it. The view can't be extensive," said Mr. Clavrick, with an answering gleam.

"I have heard of a soldier on the march, who complained, 'Everybody is out of step but me!'" said Mrs. Clavrick, laughing.

The business of eating had long been over, but we still lingered at the table, and might have done so much longer if the maid had not appeared, with the announcement:—

"Judge Ellenwood, ma'am. He told me to say that you were not to hurry; he could wait."

"I don't think we can be accused of overmuch hurry," laughed Mrs. Clavrick, rising; "it is nearly nine o'clock."

Judge Ellenwood's title was not needed to show his quality. He seemed to carry the abstract bench around with him, and delivered therefrom, not opinions only, but rulings, charges, and sentences. Not that his words were so many, but that they were uttered with so much precision and formality, such an evident consciousness that they carried with them the weight of much learning, a wide experience, a competent authority, and were to be received with proportionate deference. For the rest, he was of medium height, with keen eyes, a firm mouth, and an abundance of dark hair, lightly touched with gray over the high forehead.

He shook hands with me very cordially, welcomed me to Bellerue with well-turned phrases, regretted that a slight illness had prevented Mrs. Ellenwood from accompanying him, and then turned to Paul with the air of one who has an important explanation to make:—

"I have called thus early, Mr. Vennor, in order to show you that, although I have unfortunately been forced to sever my connection with St. Clement's Parish, my esteem and regard for you personally are not at all affected thereby, but remain in full force. I count it a great loss that I am not to enjoy your ministrations, as I so confidently expected when I had the honor of waiting upon you with the call to become the rector of the parish of which I was then one of the officers. If I had known what changes a few weeks would bring about, I should never have accepted that mission. I cannot but deplore my agency in bringing you in contact with such a set of men as the present vestry,—men with whom I, myself, could not consent to associate or cooperate in any capacity. Whatever I can do, as your warm personal friend—though no longer a member of your parish

—to atone for that most involuntary injury, I shall do with all my heart."

No wonder that Paul looked very grave; the Judge's action had been such as he, both as man and clergyman, must find it hard to excuse.

"I thank you for your kind words for myself," he replied, quietly; "and I hope that the future has better things in store for us than we now foresee."

"I sincerely hope that it has," replied the Judge, quickly. "But if you mean to imply that I shall ever be induced to reconnect myself with St. Clement's Parish, you are foredoomed to disappointment. I am not the sort of man to take the back track.

"I hope you don't call this sort of thing going forward," interposed Mr. Clavrick, with the easy familiarity of long acquaintance;—"I don't. I call it taking the back track with a vengeance; and how you ever came to do it passes my comprehension. My impulse is to stand up to the fight till it's over; and if I am beaten, make ready for the next set-to. When another parish meeting comes, Pollard, Jackman and Company will find me on hand, with my lance poised, not over in Dr. Bartlett's camp, leaving them to do their worst unhindered. I am sorry not to have your valuable aid in the tourney, but General Fairfax and I hope to be too many for them all the same."

Almost unconsciously, I fell to analyzing the characters of the two gentlemen, so far as was possible with the material in hand. They were not less unlike in appearance than in act. There was a certain breadth and largeness about my host, in physique, dress, speech, manners, very different from the neat, precise, studied aspects of the Judge. It was plain that the former thought little about

himself, and perhaps still less about the impression that he was likely to make upon others; whereas, it may be doubted if the latter ever really forgot himself, or failed to note whether he was getting his due amount of respect and attention. He must be a very proud man, at bottom; or it might be truer to say, a very vain one, since vanity only is so deeply wounded, and so hasty to seek revenge. Doubtless, a deep and thorough analysis would find pride enough underlying Mr. Clavrick's careless ease and independence, but it would be of a totally different quality. He takes his title to respect for granted, without ever giving it a deliberate thought or troubling himself with the inquiry whether it is as patent to others as to himself; and if, by any chance it should be made known to him that it was not, the knowledge would have little effect upon his spirits, and none whatever upon his action:—unless, indeed, it should involve some deep heart-wound, piercing to the joints and marrow of his affections. To blows dealt by indifferent hands he would be invulnerable. He would go smilingly on his way, never giving them the honor of a second thought, much less of turning aside to visit them with some petty punishment. If he had felt as much indignation as the Judge at losing his place on the vestry, he would never have given his adversaries the satisfaction of seeing him wince under the blow.

In such indignation as he does feel there is the smallest possible flavor of the personal element. So far as he alone is concerned, it is safe to say that the new vestrymen might keep their position until the crack of doom, and he would lift no finger to oust them from it. He has plenty to occupy him, and he regards honors as roses, the sweetness of which is subject to a large discount for thorns. His hostility to

the present *régime* is partly due to the treachery and duplicity to which it owes its existence, but far more to his belief that the best interests of the parish are likely to suffer at its hands. He counts it, therefore, his duty to do his best to overthrow it at the first chance; and to a duty he brings a cheerful spirit, a steady patience, a strong will, and an energetic hand,—things as formidable in a foe as they are helpful in a friend.

In selfish pride and rage, Judge Ellenwood threw down his weapons and abandoned the field; in loyal love and truth, Mr. Clavrick intrenches himself on the ground which is indisputably his own—his membership of the Church—and waits to renew the contest about temporal matters under better auspices. The one is true to his faith, his friends, his principles; the other, to a tinsel-bedizened idol that he calls his "honor,"—the essential thing being to find some well-cushioned niche for its bestowal, where no profane finger shall point at it, and no skeptical mind deny its right to homage. So long as that idol is not touched, he is a courtly and cultured gentleman, whom it is a pleasure to meet; touch it, and he becomes anger incarnate.

Already he was knitting his brows at the mild censure implied by Mr. Clavrick's remarks; seeing which, that gentleman hastened to give a new turn to the conversation.

"I hope you understand, Mr. Vennor, that my words are more belligerent than my doings are likely to be! It is the deft hand in the silken glove of diplomacy that I largely rely upon for the work to be done. And, by the way, it would be interesting to know what is the proportion of the important results achieved by open, direct means to those due to more occult causes."

"Not one in ten," said the Judge, with prompt decision.

"The most powerful forces in nature are the least visible," said Paul; "we see their effects, not themselves."

"Is that a justification, then, for the preference of silent, secret means to an end?" asked Mr. Clavrick.

"It would be, perhaps, if silent, secret *human* means were not so apt to involve falsehood and treachery," returned Paul.

"You hold then that a lie is inadmissible under any circumstances?"

Paul looked surprised. "Is there any question of it in your mind?"

"There never has been. But I seem to foresee a situation wherein I could be somewhat puzzled. It might be a question how far telling the truth was an offering to one's own fetich of honor, self-respect, and the like, rather than unselfish love for the thing itself. One may sacrifice one's self to it, even unto death, with a clear conscience; but has one the right to sacrifice a friend with the same single-mindedness?"

"It is a question that I trust none of us will be called upon to answer," said Paul, with a grave shake of the head; "nor are we likely to be in these days."

"I beg your pardon," said Judge Ellenwood; "it is by no means an impossible nor infrequent question in our courts. If wives and children and friends thought it their duty to tell the truth about the whereabouts and doings of persons wanted by the police, no criminal would go unhung,—not to mention some innocent people, victims of suborned witnesses or circumstantial evidence."

"It may well be that human nature fails under such a trial as that," said Paul, very seriously. "Yet we must not suffer the weakness of the flesh to lower the standard

of the spirit. Truth, entire truth, so far as we know it, is the only possible rule for the Christian; if we fall short of it, as we do of other things,—perfect love, for instance,—we must simply cry, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' That is better than to assume that we have not sinned. I must believe that—"

The sentence was arrested by the entrance of another visitor,—Miss Heathcote,—"anxious," as she prettily told us, "to be one of the first of Mr. Vennor's flock to make him and his heartily welcome to their new home."

Taking a seat by me she entered easily into conversation. In a moment or two Mrs. Clavrick also drew near; the result of which was that we three made one group about the sofa, while the gentlemen formed another by the table and renewed the interrupted conversation, at first in subdued tones, but soon rising to the ordinary pitch. So it fell out that, after awhile, Miss Heathcote's attention began to wander, in spite of her efforts to restrain it.

"They are talking of Mr. Ennadeen," said Mrs. Clavrick, noticing her distraction and sympathizing with it; "and that being a subject in which I am interested, I take leave to listen. You can follow my example if you like."

"Can a man be tried on a criminal charge before his identity is proved?" asked Paul.

"The identity that he cannot disprove is assumed to be proven?" replied the Judge.

"I thought the law assumed every man to be innocent until he is proved to be guilty," said Mr. Clavrick.

"Before trial, it does. Afterward, the question of guilt has been settled by the trial—unless the jury happen to disagree."

"What an arrogant assumption!" exclaimed Mrs. Clav-

rick. "But, Judge Ellenwood—we are all friends here —I want to know if it is so utterly preposterous as my husband thinks to suppose that Mr. Ennadeen may be—well, someone that we know,—bent on making investigations and looking up clues that he would not be allowed to do in his own person."

"My dear madam," replied the Judge, with much deliberation, "my experience is such as to lead me to believe that almost no supposition is absolutely preposterous. Reality outdoes fiction in the genuinely illogical. Further than that I decline to speak, as I do not wish to disqualify myself for trying Mr. Ennadeen, if ever he should be brought before me. He might find a less—" the Judge hesitated for a moment, and finished with—"less impartial Judge."

"I am glad that you so narrowly missed saying, 'friendly,'" said Mrs. Clavrick, laughing; "it makes me feel easier about him."

"There is no reason why you should feel uneasy about him," answered the Judge, kindly, as he rose to go. "He looks like a man who knows what he is about. I suspect that no event will find him unprepared."

"You think, then—" began Mrs. Clavrick.

"I beg your pardon, madam," interrupted the Judge politely but firmly; "I don't think anything but that it is time for me to take my leave. Mrs. Vennor, as soon as you get through with the labor and fatigue of setting the rectory to rights, Mrs. Ellenwood is coming to ask you and your husband to dine with us. We mean to be among the best of your friends and neighbors, if you will permit."

And the Judge bowed himself out.

For some moments, no word was spoken. Miss Heathcote had listened to the foregoing conversation with many

changes of color, hands tightly clasped, and eyes bent searchingly on each speaker's face, as if seeking to discover every possible shade of meaning that might lurk under the surface of a discussion about matters so deeply involving her happiness, yet in which she could take no part. We all felt the pain and pity of it too keenly to assail her at once with commonplace talk, yet too long a silence would also have its uncomfortable side; so I turned to her at last with some remarks about music, purposely long-drawn out, in order to give her time to free herself from anxious thoughts. She did it more quickly than I expected; when the time came for her answer, it was ready, and to the point.

By-and-by, taking the privilege of intimate friendship, Mrs. Clavrick asked her to sing for us.

I expected that she would decline, but she went straightway to the piano. In truth, she did it as if she were turning gladly and gratefully to a refuge, rather than yielding reluctantly to a necessity.

She began by running her fingers absently over the keys, bringing forth perplexed harmonies and shuddering chords, unutterably sad to hear, yet very soothing, I felt intuitively, to the heart thus pouring itself out in the expression most natural to it, and unconscious, or very nearly so, that it had any auditors. By-and-by, a silver thread of melody began to show itself twisted among the tangled harmonies, gradually it worked itself free; then came a low, rippling accompaniment, and a song:

"Is anything on earth
So sad as love?
It hath its dewy birth
In shining realms above;

But fallen here below,
All in the dusky night,
It findeth frost and snow,
It findeth dearth and blight—
Ah, sad, sad Love!

"Is anything on earth
So sweet as love?
It hath its dewy birth
In shining realms above.
The darkest night it stars,
Makes bitter waters sweet,
And laughs at prison-bars
With lightsome, wingéd feet—
Ah, sweet, sweet Love!"

I have heard a good deal of singing, but never anything like this! For it has not happened to me before to hear a tried and sorrowing yet strong and patient heart pour itself out in song as simply and naturally as a bird on a bough;—distilling perplexity into harmony and pain into sweetness; weaving its own crown out of its own heart-thorns, and making each one of them to bud and burst into beauty by the might of its own innate genius.

The first stanza was given in sombre recitative, wailing gloom, and shivering despair, till I longed to beg the singer to be still. But, in the second stole softly forth a honey-sweet melody and a crystalline brightness that were like the shimmer of sunlit raindrops after a shower. When she ended, with a lovely *diminuendo*, so perfectly graduated that it was impossible to tell just when dulcet sound became memory-sweetened silence, no one could speak. Only a long-drawn sigh, half of pleasure, half of relief, testified to the powerful spell that she had flung over us.

She did not wait for us to recover composure or speech. Before we were quite sure that the song had ceased, she had risen, drawn on her gloves, and was saying "Good-bye" composedly, although somewhat hastily. Mrs. Clavrick went out of the room with her; and for some little time, we heard the murmur of their voices in the hall.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Mr. Clavrick, turning to me with a smile.

"She is wonderful!" I exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "Where did she get such a gift?"

"Where, indeed!" echoed he. "I'm sure I don't know —unless it came straight from above. Her father scarcely knows one tune from another. As for her mother—well, she may have sung when she was a girl, but she doesn't look like it now. However, you will be sure to see her soon, and can judge for yourself."

Mrs. Clavrick came back with a pitying expression in her kindly gray eyes. "Just think," said she, "Dana has not had even a glimpse of him yet! Of course, he cannot call upon her—"

"I should think not!" interpolated her husband, humorously arching his eyebrows.

"And who can tell when chance will bring them together," she continued, without heeding the interruption.

"Have you a notion of lending chance your valuable assistance. Better not. Anyway, you will have to wait a little. Mr. Ennadeen left town this evening; he will not be back under a fortnight."

"Are you sure that he will ever be back?"

"As sure as his check for three months rent in advance can make me. I assure you, Honor, it is a ground of confidence not to be despised!"

VIII.

A VISITOR AND A HINT.

As soon as it was known that we were "at home," there was a long succession of visitors, making me acquainted with the faces of most of Paul's parishioners, and such slight traits of character as may peep out in a first formal meeting. One of the earliest comers was Mrs. Heathcote,—a lady of large frame and coarse features, clad in a most careless—not to say, outlandish—costume, and with a corresponding ease and informality of manner. The one theme of her conversation was "my Dana;" she rang the changes on her daughter's beauty, sweet temper, and musical talent, until sympathetic assent grew into wonder, and finally into weariness. One other topic she did touch upon, just as she rose to go.

"You've managed to make the rectory look very cheerful and pleasant, I must say," she remarked, glancing around with a certain restricted commendation. "I've always thought it the most dismal of all dismal places. It certainly was in Mr. Armour's time. Haven't you noticed—a—a—anything queer about it?"

Now, inasmuch as the same question, in substance, had already been put to me more than once, it flashed upon me that something more was implied than met the ear. So, to

my usual answer, "Nothing but its odd arrangement of rooms," I added, "Is it otherwise remarkable?"

"Well—really—I don't know—very likely not."

And she turned towards the exit. Yet there was something in her manner which suggested that she could not only say more if she would, but that her disinclination to speak was of no inveterately tough fibre.

"If the house has any uncomfortable peculiarity, I think I should prefer to know of it beforehand, not to be taken unawares," I ventured to remark, suggestively.

Mrs. Heathcote hesitated for a moment, then answered :—

"Well, that's my way of thinking, too. I like to know what's more than likely to happen ; it saves trouble. The truth is, Mrs. Armour—our last rector's wife, you know—believed that the house was haunted. She declared that she would not live in it another year for any inducement whatever."

"And by what or whom is it haunted?" inquired I, with incredulous surprise.

"Oh! she never saw anything, but she heard mysterious rappings and other unaccountable sounds; and more than once tunes were whistled as perfectly as if played on a flute.'

I fear I was discourteous enough, first, to stare, and then to laugh. A whistling ghost is something new under the sun, and so incongruous with the received idea of supernatural visitations as to border on the comic.

"I trust that he has a choice collection of airs," I responded, gravely :—"for of course it is a 'he'; no respectable feminine phantom would whistle!—I do not think I could stand much repetition of 'Roll on, shining Moon,'

and the like. Any musical shape but that, and my firm nerves will never tremble!"

Mrs. Heathcote was not insensible to the latent mockery of my speech; but she only smiled in good-natured indulgence of the blissful ignorance that is sure to end in sorrowful wisdom.

"Tell me what you think about it in a month or two," she replied, oracularly. And then she took her leave.

When I told Paul about it, he, too, laughed at first; yet he ended by looking thoughtful.

"So that is what it all means!" said he. "I have for some time been aware that there was supposed to be something 'eerie,' as the Scotch say, about this house; I am so often asked if we have not been anywise disturbed or annoyed, as to understand that something of the sort is expected. But when I ask for the reason of this friendly solicitude, my interlocutor becomes utterly ignorant or prudently non-committal. What part of the premises is the favored locality of the said visitations?"

"Really, I never thought to ask! The mention of the whistling nipped my curiosity in the bud; it is so little suggestive of a ghostly origin!"

"It is certainly a cheerful occupation for a wandering spirit, and shows a praiseworthy disposition to strike out in a new line," said Paul. "As long as he contents himself with whistling, and does it tolerably well, eschewing unlicensed flats and sharps, I think we can afford to give him house room."

"It is probably the shade of a small boy, with nothing worse on his conscience than cheating at marbles, or tying tuneful tin-kettles to tempting dog-tails," said I. "But if he takes to anything so painfully hackneyed as groans

and rappings, we shall have to hunt him up and find out what is the matter with him."

"And he will affirm that it is a legitimate pain, caused by too keen a recollection of stolen green apples," laughed Paul. "In any case, it is agreed that we are not going to be afraid of him, whatever he may do, is it not?" he added, lightly enough, yet with a glance in which I detected some latent anxiety.

"Never fear that you will have me swooning on your hands, just when you need them both to seize the phantom," said I, reassuringly.

He looked much relieved. "That being the case, we will put him out of our minds,—at least until he forces himself upon our attention."

"With all my heart. Nevertheless, this shade of a small boy reminds me of a more substantial one—Ben Harding. Do you know him?"

Paul shook his head. "I have been introduced to a bewildering number of persons during the past week, but I doubt if that young gentleman were among them. May I inquire who he is?"

"Don't you remember Mr. Clavrick's mention of the 'imp' that Rolf Kenworth fished out of the river, and who showed a dog-like devotion to him ever after? You know what a fascination the street-arab has for me, in general; that 'dog-like devotion' made this one irresistible. Then and there, I made a mental note that Ben Harding was to be looked up, and made a friend of. I am curious to know if Rolf Kenworth enjoys a monopoly of his devotion, or if some small remnant is to be had for the seeking."

"Which is, being interpreted, that you want to see if it is possible for him to be coaxed, taught, elevated, redeemed,"

said Paul, with a deep and tender thrill in his voice. "Go on, Sweetheart; and the Lord be with you!"

But I was more than once reminded of Mrs. Glasse's famous: "First, catch your hare," before I succeeded in getting sight of Ben. Nobody had any idea where he harbored; everybody stared when I asked for the information, and a few gently intimated a doubt if I should be any the happier for it. Plainly, Ben and his mode of life were not counted as suitable subjects of lady-like investigation.

Chance favored me at last. Coming through Church Street, one sunny morning, I saw a boy trying to walk on his hands,—and actually achieving a few steps (if that be not a misnomer) before the combined forces of habit and gravitation brought his feet unwillingly to the ground; yet their owner persevered, showing a deal of resolution and skill which was not without value as an indication of character.

Jumping to the conclusion that the 'imp' was before me, I stopped beside him just as the brown feet went up for the half-dozenth time, and, when they came down, volunteered the comment:—

"That was very well done. Have you been practising long?"

The boy was a good deal surprised; his sharp, steel-gray eyes rested on my face searchingly; but his training had not been of the sort that fosters over-much diffidence.

"'Bout a week," he answered, with reasonable promptness. And, after eyeing me for another moment, he vouchsafed the information: "You're the new minister's wife."

"And you are Benjamin Harding," returned I, not quite so confidently.

He nodded.

"It appears that we have heard of one another," I went on. "I hope that you were as much pleased with the report as I was!"

"I didn't s'pose anybody was likely to say anything good 'bout me," he replied, with more bitterness than humility.

"There you mistake. Somebody did say something very good. I have been wishing to make your acquaintance ever since."

Ben stared in silence. The statement was probably without precedent in his experience, and he knew not what to do with it.

"The truth is, I am ambitious to be placed on your list of friends, after we get to know each other a little better," I proceeded. "I promise you that I'll do my best to deserve the honor."

His face did not relax; his lips parted just enough to drop the laconic statement:—

"I ain't agoin' to Sunday School; ye needn't ask me."

"My dear Ben, it is better to decline after you are asked! Certainly, I had no thought of giving the invitation:—I don't go to Sunday School myself yet. And, between you and me, I can defer it for some time longer without being unhappy about it. I have the bad taste to prefer to be a sort of free lance, and do my work in my own way. But pray don't betray my confidence, Ben!"

His eyes twinkled responsively. "There ain't any danger; I don't see much of that sort o' folks; and it won't pay to look 'em up, jest to tell of ye."

"I am glad to hear it. Do you know where I live?"

"I know where most folks live in Bellerue," he answered, with a doubtful, suspicious look.

"The more shame to you for not having been to see me! Newcomers expect old residents to make the first visit. When shall I have the pleasure of seeing you?"

He looked up to the sky, down to the ground, sent a furtive glance round the vicinity, and shuffled his feet in a way to suggest that he might be thinking of taking to his heels. Lest the thought should become action, I hastened to say:—

"Never mind about a dress-suit; come just as you are; you shall be very welcome."

"What do you want me for?"

"As I told you, first, I want to know you; I believe that you will be an acquaintance worth having. Then, I have something to show you which I think will interest you. Besides, I want to talk with you about Mr. Rolf Kenworth."

This last was a sudden inspiration; but its effect was magical; his face lighted up; his doubtful, suspicious air vanished almost on the instant.

"Do you know Mr. Rolf?" he asked, coming quite close to me in suddenly roused interest.

"I think I can put you in the way of doing something that will please him much when he comes home again," I answered, evading a direct answer. "So don't forget to come very soon; I shall expect you. To-morrow morning will do very well, if you are at liberty."

And with a cordial smile and bow, just such as I should have given to any gentleman of my acquaintance, I went my way, knowing well that Ben was looking after me in a very uncertain mood. So, after a moment, I dropped my handkerchief,—an embroidered one that I valued; but I chose to take the risk.

I was half-way down the next block before I heard swift

foot-steps pursuing me,—Ben had taken his time! Very shortly, now, he was beside me, holding out his find.

"You've lost your handkerchief, ma'am."

"Have I?" I asked, keeping both hands close to my side. "All right; bring it when you come to see me."

And I hurried on, leaving Ben motionless with amazement.

IX.

HAROLD BRUNE.

THAT evening is memorable for Paul's first experience of his vestry, in their official capacity. They met in his study; their business being the consideration of certain plans for a new rectory, bespoken by their predecessors, but not finished in time to be acted on. To say truth, their sudden ejection from office was partly due to a fear lest their well-known liberality should topple over into what their more economically minded successors must needs term "wholesale extravagance." They had given great offence by employing an architect to submit plans—as if there were need of anything more than the rough draft and estimates of an ordinary builder! So many rooms, so many doors and windows, *plus* walls and a roof, what did anyone want of an architect for that? was the quite unanswerable argument of these gentlemen.

Nevertheless, the plans being on hand, as well as the sad necessity of paying for them, it was proper to see if they could be of use.

As the study adjoins the library, where I happened to be busy, and as some one by-and-by opened the door between the rooms for better ventilation, I found myself unexpectedly assisting at the end of the conference.

My attention was first challenged by a thin, querulous voice that was unknown to me.

"I suppose we may as well make up our minds to lose Judge Ellenwood's subscription, now that he has gone off in such a tantrum."

"On the contrary," said Mr. Darcy, "he has sent me his check for the amount."

"And it is just as good as if he had not been waspish enough to say that he sent it for Mr. Vennor's sake—otherwise we might whistle for it," added Mr. Jackman, with a laugh.

"A quite gratuitous bit of spleen," remarked Mr. Brune. "The Judge knows well that a man's signature to a subscription paper is as good as his note, and not cancelled by any subsequent change of—religious convictions."

He let the last words drop with an icy contempt that I was wicked enough to wish that the Judge could have heard. It would not have been music to his ears!

"Undoubtedly, the parish could bring suit, and recover, if there were need of it," said Mr. Jackman.

"If any parish could so far forget itself," observed Paul, quietly.

Apparently, this remark fell on unprepared ground, for no one proffered reply or comment.

Mr. Brune broke the brief silence with a reminder that, though all this chat might be very interesting, it was "not business," and moved that a builder be requested to estimate the probable amount to be saved by the reduction in the size of the rectory that had been proposed; which motion was seconded, and carried.

Some discussion about minor details followed; but I ceased to listen and buried myself in my books. The tone

of the whole was not pleasant to my ears, and I sighed for Paul's sake.

After adjournment, the vestry passed directly from the study into the hall, and departed ; except Mr. Darcy, who lingered for a few words with Paul, and Mr. Brune, who, catching a glimpse of me, begged permission to come into the library.

Mr. Brune is much the youngest of the vestrymen,—not more than thirty years old, at the most, I should judge. He is comparatively a new-comer in Bellerue, and it is not quite clear how he came to be chosen for his position, though it is probable that he owes it to the influence of Mr. Asher, of whom he is a far-away cousin. In personal appearance, he is both handsome and striking,—tall, dark, with very black hair and eyes, a well-knit, well-shaped figure, and small hands and feet. His bow and greeting, as he came toward me, were unexpectedly cordial and winning.

"You are so stoutly barricaded with big books," he went on, smiling, "as to suggest that you are preparing to repel an attack. Or it may be that you are going to make one.

"*Cela dépend.* I am trying to find out how much of modern skepticism is modern. What use I shall make of my find remains to be seen."

He looked interested. "And so far as your work has gone, how much does prove to be modern?"

"Very little. It seems to be usually the old forces in a new uniform, and under new leaders."

"Is not that an indication that the main lines of skepticism are inherent in the human mind, and not to be thoroughly nor permanently dislodged?"

"Perhaps so ; just as sin is. But a brighter indication is that as Christianity has over and over again repulsed

these forces all along the line, she will do it now, and always."

He bent his dark eyes thoughtfully on me. "Are you sure that you give due weight to the modern critical doubts of the genuineness of the records of Christianity? I confess that to me they seem very formidable."

"As external evidence, no doubt they may so seem. But the internal evidence in favor of genuineness is so much stronger as to seem practically impregnable, to one who gives *that* its due weight."

"Pardon me,—are not most of those objections based on internal evidence?"

"I refer to a deeper internal evidence than a certain style of Greek,—which may or may not be due to a careless transcriber or a too zealous one:—I refer to the spirit, not the body, the matter, not the manner. You are a lawyer, Mr. Brune; you have rare opportunities for the study of human nature; you see much of monomaniacs, visionaries, fanatics, enthusiasts, not to mention deliberate forgers and swindlers;—tell me frankly, please, is your experience of these people such as to warrant you in believing that one or more of them would be likely to produce a system of ethical teaching universally conceded to be not only superior to anything the world had seen before, but so perfect as to preclude any substitute; or to give a thoroughly simple, deep, wise, moderate exposition of it, never lapsing into weakness, extravagance, sensationalism, for the use of future generations?"

He shook his head. "You have certainly hit upon a strong *argumentum ad hominem* there. My experience of such people does not tend to bolster up any such theory. As we say in logic, the premises do not contain the conclu-

sion. Comparing the gospels and epistles with the ethical and philosophical teaching of Greek, Jew and Gentile, ancient and modern, not directly influenced by Christianity, one is compelled to admit their superiority, and to conclude that they came from some more than ordinary depth somewhere, and one not easily reconcilable with either involuntary or deliberate deception and collusion. Such work from such a source does look highly improbable."

I had an odd sensation of surprise and bewilderment. Disregarding for the moment my invitation to be seated, he was standing at the back of my desk, resting his hand on an open book, and looking down into my face with a singularly intent and piercing gaze, as if he were looking into my mind as well, while he thus ended by tracing the outlines of my own thought, and announcing my own conclusions. Was it insight, sympathy, or mere coincidence?

"And is there anything more convincing on the other side?" said I. "Direct evidence is impossible; we cannot summon the witnesses of those days to give us their *viva voce* testimony; we must be content with their writings. And not only my own study and experience, but the fact that the majority of learned minds and noble lives is in favor of their being genuine—in all that is essential to genuineness—inclines me to believe them so. What are a few skeptics here, a *coterie* there, to such a mass of consenting believers?"

"I hope your argument does not prove too much. The old Greeks and Romans may have said the same thing in reference to the handful of early Christians."

"Did they have the same sound basis of moral perfection to rest upon? What does the handful of modern skeptics—agnostics, positivists, humanitarians—offer us that is inher-

ently better than Christianity,—likely to make life easier, work worthier, sorrow lighter? Christianity only pulled down in order to build better. Show me what skepticism has built up.".

Mr. Brune smiled and shook his head. "I shall have to find it first. I confess I don't know where to look. I was very much struck by a certain paragraph in a missionary address that was sent to me not long ago;—quoting from memory, I cannot pretend to give the exact words, but it was something like this: '*Infidelity and skepticism taunt Christianity with neglecting the poor. I come to-day from the prisons, asylums and hospitals of this great city, and I declare unto you that I never see in them that skeptic or agnostic, ministering to and solacing the unfortunate. He is at home, in his comfortable arm chair, writing an article on the selfishness of Christianity or the doubtfulness of its title to belief. But in those corridors of pain, I do see Christian men and women going from cell to cell, from couch to couch, caring for the sick, the sorrowful, the fallen, and the dying. Waiting for the solution of the difficult problems of life which only children and demagogues find it easy to answer, they meanwhile put their hand to every good work.*'"

It would be hard to give any idea of the beauty, the richness, the flexibility of tone with which Mr. Brune gave the little recitation, vividly bringing out the contrasting pictures of the messengers of pity in the "corridors of pain" and the sneering skeptic in his comfortable home;—it was like a sudden strain of melody across a winter landscape.

But, with an immediate return to his usual, cool, crisp tones, he continued:—'Those sentences were worth a great deal to me, in answer to doubts and queries that do now and then get a grip on my mind. If Christianity alone

does such deeds of mercy, it is a heavy weight on her side."

"And it is not the only heavy weight," said I.

"No; you have added one to it that I must think over. Perhaps I may come to you some day with the product of my thought, if you will permit."

"Certainly. But you would do better to talk to Mr. Vennor; he is stronger than I in knowledge, if not in faith. In truth, I get most of my ideas from him; if he does not give them to me ready shaped and polished, he shows me where to find material out of which to shape them myself."

"It will be a pleasure to talk with you both. These topics interest me much; they are a little in my line, you see; the weighing of evidence is a part of my profession. I wish its duties left me more time for this study. But here comes Mr. Darcy, and it is getting late. I must bid you good evening, and may I say, *au revoir?*"

He bowed low, and was quickly gone.

I turned impulsively to Paul. "What a trying set of men you have to deal with, to be sure! Not a really large-hearted, liberal soul among them, so far as I can see! I am so sorry for you!"

He smiled gravely. "Keep some of your sorrow for them, love. I think they need it quite as much, on a different ground. And possibly on the same ground, too;—can you not fancy one of them saying to another: What a trying rector we have! No conception of practical life and business ways. Thinks of nothing but church and services and Sunday-schools. Believes that money falls from the skies when it is wanted. If he had his way, the parish would be bankrupt in a month."

The words were so exactly in the Jackman tone and manner that it was impossible not to laugh. He went on :—

"Moreover, it is sheer waste of time to find fault with one's sphere of work, or with one's tools, and fancy what one might have achieved with different ones ; our business is to do good work with such as we have, the best of which we and they are capable."

" And I suppose there is such a thing as improving one's tools—sharpening, straightening, and polishing them to the highest possible degree of utility," said I. " It does seem as if something might be made of Mr. Brune."

" I suspect that he is a tool of more edges and greater powers than the rest,—not all visible at the first glance, either. But, if awkwardly handled, I think he may be trusted to cut the hand that is trying to wield him, and severely. Yet I think he has a conscience, correct enough up to a certain point ;—*he* would doubtless say that he is a man of honor. Socially, there is much which is agreeable about him, when his coldly satirical vein is not too prominent. But it is always his intellect that I feel in touch with mine ; his heart, never. The former, whether by nature or education, is probably the better part of him."

" The larger one, you mean."

" I might, if I had ever had any experience of a minuter part, of a higher and sweeter quality. But I have not, you see."

" I think I have—a very little," said I, hesitatingly. And I tried to tell Paul in what way his vestryman had seemed to show a softer, finer nature, for just a moment.

Paul mused a moment before he answered :

" It might be a sufficient explanation that he is simply a master of elocution, and knows how to use it to advantage

when he chooses to take the trouble. But it may be admitted that the keeping of such a thing in his memory is a not quite meaningless sign. The really surprising thing, to me, is that, however it may seem at the first glance, that argument is addressed more to the heart than the head ; if it found Brune's, it may be taken to prove that he has one. It goes to show that such arguments are the really effectual ones ; no man was ever made a Christian by reasons ; religion will always be a matter of experience rather than of intellectual conviction. Do not fancy that you are going to confound or convince Mr. Brune by argument ; it is the evidence in his own heart that he needs. The appeal to reason may serve to bolster up a failing faith ; it cannot create a sound one. If it were not for the weak ones among us who may be overcome by skeptical arguments, I would set my face steadily against both the writing and the reading of any more Christian apologetics. The Christian life has no need of them. And if Christianity be not a life, it is nothing.

"But do you see how late it is?"

X.

A STREET-ARAB.

In the course of the following morning, Annie came to me with the announcement :—

"If you please, ma'am, the boy is here. He wanted to give the handkerchief to me, but I did just as you told me ; I pretended not to see it, and said yon would be down directly."

I hurried to the door, where stood Ben in an uneasy attitude, with an equally uneasy expression on his sun-burned face, suggestive of a strong inclination to run away. I was very glad to see him, and said so with a sincerity of tone that immediately transformed his dubious look into one of surprise and pleasure.

Taking the handkerchief and the outstretched hand that held it, I drew him into the parlor, saying :—"It is very obliging of you, Ben, to come so soon ; it encourages me to hope that we are going to be friends one of these days. And what good care you have taken of my property,—it is so nicely folded and pressed!"

"I put it into a book—a clean un," explained he, with some pride in his ingenuity.

"So you have books! And do you read them?"

"Some, when the words ain't too hard."

"The more you read, the easier they will grow. Perhaps we can read something together, by-and-by, and help each other to understand."

His grave face relaxed into a smile. "I don't 'spect I'll help you much, ma'am."

It being my object merely to win his confidence in this first visit, I did not pursue the subject; but seeing his eyes fixed on the piano, I asked if he liked music, and being promptly assured that he "guessed" he did, I played two or three popular airs, such as I thought likely to suit his boyish taste. He listened gravely, marking the time with hands and feet, and finally confided to me that he often stood under Miss Heathcote's windows when she was playing, and that her performance "beat most everything out o' sight."

Taking this as an indication that his musical taste was less uncultivated than I had supposed, and having no hope of rivalling Miss Heathcote in her special field, I thought it well to vary my entertainment by an appeal to the universal love of youth for pictures. So I took Ben up to the little room which, for want of a better name, is dubbed my "studio," and exhibited the few, hasty sketches of Bellerue that I have been able to make. Herein I had catered for my guest better than I hoped; his eyes kindled with the deepest interest at sight of things so familiar seen through a medium so new; the last vestige of constraint slid unconsciously from his manner, and he poured forth question and comment in a steady stream, that seemed likely to "go on forever." For no sooner were the local sketches exhausted than he transferred his attention to the more foreign subjects with which the walls were lined; and, moreover,

showed so much curiosity about materials and methods that I was moved to take up palette and brush and give the finishing touches to a waiting sketch, while he hung over me in great delight.

"How quick and easy you do it!" he commented, finally, with a sigh. "I'd give all I had to do so—if I had anything."

"Oh, that comes with practice," replied I, encouragingly. "If we work diligently at anything, we are sure to be rewarded by a steady increase of facility and skill. You have learned that in trying to walk on your hands."

"Yes'm. It's pooty hard work, that, an' no mistake. But I'm a-gainin' on't; I can take four or five steps now, —good long ones too. But my feet come down mighty hard sometimes, and it hurts, I c'n tell ye!"

"Very likely. But we do not mind the hurt as long as we see that we are improving, do we?"

"Oh, no, ma'am. It makes us like the work all the better."

Then I turned round from my easel, and told Ben a story. It was founded on fact—all the facts that I could work into it. Dick Whittington, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Mark Twain lent various shreds of their lives and talents to a poor *gamin*, whose early experience of life was a sad series of rags, cuffs, and short commons; but who, nevertheless, by dint of energy and perseverance, cheerfulness and honesty, grew up into a highly concentrated essence of all the virtues, and ended by becoming President,—the only orthodox *finale* for a juvenile American appetite. Ben's eyes grew larger and larger as the narrative ran its abundantly sensational course; at the end, he sat silent for some time, and then heaved a deep sigh.

"I guess that's a story," he commented.

"Just as I have told it, it is. But the spirit of it is true enough. Many a poor, neglected boy has risen to be a good and great man, by first resolving that he will be, and then working with all his might to carry out his resolve; not minding a few falls and hurts, but always keeping the wished-for end in view, and striving to advance a little way toward it every day, though it be no more than a hair's-breadth."

For a brief space, Ben's face lighted up with a cheerful ray of hope or inspiration; then it settled back into the old, grave, doubtful expression.

"It wouldn't be of any use for some folks," said he, impersonally.

"It is of use for everyone to have some object in life, and to work for it," I insisted. "You, for instance, Ben; if you should seriously resolve to make something worth while of yourself, I am sure you would succeed."

"Indeed, I couldn't, m'm. I'm just nothin' and nobody. I don't know anything much. I'm as poor as twitch-grass."

"Have you no father nor mother?"

"They're both dead."

"Do you remember them?"

"Oh, yes'm. But I remember mother best. She was good to me; she was. Nothing's been the same since she died."

Of the paternal goodness Ben said naught. The omission was not without a certain suggestiveness.

"Have you no relatives?"

"I've got an aunt. She lives in Milburn, and I walk over there 'bout twice a year, and stay two or three weeks, and she fixes up my clothes for me. She'd like to keep me

all the time, but uncle says he's got enough to look after without me;—you see they're poor folks too. And I like to live in Bellerue best; I'm used to it. And mother lived here."

"But how and where do you get your food?"

"Oh, all sorts o' ways. Sometimes I make a dime by holdin' horses or shovelin' snow, or runnin' errands; then I buy somethin' good, you bet! And I sell the evening papers; that don't amount to much, but it's steady. Things have been kind o' rough sometimes, but I've always managed to get through somehow. And I've been doing tol'rable well along back."

"And where do you live?"

Whereupon, Ben's face changed as suddenly and completely as if he had drawn a mask over it; the open, candid look vanished; the doubtful, cautious one returned.

"I guess it's about time to go," said he, starting for the door.

"But, Ben!" I remonstrated, "don't go without saying good-bye, and telling me when I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again. Besides, we were going to talk about Mr. Rolf Kenworth, you know."

At that name, Ben halted and turned slowly round. "Do ye know anythin' 'bout him?"

"Not much. I wanted to ask you about him. Is he as nice as people say?"

Ben's face lighted up, and his words poured out with a kind of breathless eagerness, in strong contrast with the somewhat laconic and leisurely style of his previous talk.

"He's the best man t'ever was! He's the handsomest fellow ye ever see! His eyes are just like stars, and his hair's like the river when the sunset strikes it. He saved

my life, ye see. I was a little shaver then, and mother was alive. I went in to swim with a bad boy, bigger'n me; he told me anybody could swim, if they tried, and I was fool enough to b'lieve him. First thing I knew, I was a chokin' and coughin'; then I was lookin' up through the water and seeing the sky kinder green and far off; and then I didn't know anything more till I woke up, and Mr. Rolf was a-laughin' in my face, and a-asking me how I felt. And I felt pooty queer, and he carried me in his arms to my mother, and told me not to go into the water again till I knew how to swim. And allers after that, when I met him, he used to laugh at me ever so pleasant, and toss me a dime to catch, and once he said I was born to rise in the world, and that was why I wasn't drowned."

Ben finished in happy unconsciousness of the ulterior meaning of Rolf's euphemistic rendering of the old proverb. I seized upon the suggestion.

"To be sure, you are going to rise in the world, Ben. It is your duty to do it, in order to show Mr. Rolf that you deserve his good opinion."

Ben looked at me with the dumb, pathetic wistfulness of a dog.

"When he comes back, how pleased he will be to find you in the way to make a good, useful man!"

"Do you think so, ma'am?" cried Ben, eagerly. "I'd do anything to please Mr. Rolf, I would."

Then looking searchingly around, to make sure that no indiscreet ears were within hearing, he drew nearer to me, and asked, impressively:—"Have you ever seen that man they call Mr. 'Ennadeen'?"

"Yes, once, for a short time."

Ben lowered his voice almost to a whisper:

"Some folks think he's Mr. Rolf himself. But," he hastened to add, as if fearing the consequences of this admission,—"I don't believe it, not a bit. 'Cause, don't you see, if 'twas Mr. Rolf, they'd clap him right into jail; so it can't be him."

Ben announced this conclusion in a tone implying that he was prepared to defend it to the death; so I forbore to hint that it was a question about which there might possibly be a difference of opinion.

Further investigation showed that, in accordance with the law of the state, he had more than once been captured and sent to the public school, but he had been so unmercifully teased for his backwardness and shabbiness as to make him hate the whole thing with all his heart, and had either run away to his aunt or hidden himself at home until starved out; finally he had been given up as incorrigible. and left to take his own course, there being no one to be interested in him for his own sake.

Yet he did not seem to be a vicious boy. I could discover no inveterate moral twist in him, inherited or acquired. He evinced much tenderness in speaking of his mother and aunt. His devotion to Rolf Kenworth was that of a true hero-worshipper; it was evidently the one fragrant, hardy flower which had taken deep root in the fallow ground of his nature, yet sufficed to indicate an underlying richness of soil, to repay careful tillage.

On the whole, I was well satisfied with the results of this interview. I believed that with patience, time and care, something better could be done with the boy than to leave him to the education of the street, the untender ministry of nature's frost and heat, the stern demands of the "sad

necessity of living," without any definitely good or pleasurable thing to live for.

Once again, as his visit drew to a close, I took occasion to ask where he lived. And as before, some swift recollection brought back his first shyness and distrust, and he seemed about to make a quick retreat.

"Not that it matters much," I hastened to add, in a reassuringly indifferent tone; "I merely thought it might be convenient to have your address, in case I should ever want to communicate with you."

Ben scratched his head thoughtfully. "If that's all, m'm, I c'n fix it. Can ye whistle?"

I confessed that my education in that art had been sadly neglected.

"I'll bring ye one!" he replied, delightedly. "I c'n make first-rate whistles; ye c'n hear 'em as fur as a bugle, most. And I'll be mighty glad to go errands for ye, or do any jobs I can."

"Thank you. But you cannot be expected to be always within hearing of even the shrillest of whistles."

"I s'pose we'll have to take our chance of that," responded he, a little ruefully. "But I'm right round here a good deal, and if I don't hear ye one time, I shall another."

There being no disputing this proposition, I accepted it as final; and after giving me his word that he would come regularly on certain mornings, for a course of instruction that would make it possible for him to enter school some day under better auspices than before, my visitor took his leave.

I could not but wonder why he had chosen to make such a mystery of his home. The conclusion was inevitable

that it was in some den of vice and lawlessness, which he was under obligation to keep secret. The better reason for trying to gain such an influence over him as might avail for his speedy removal to less unwholesome quarters.

XI.

A GARRET BEWITCHED.

We have reached the era of invitations out,—not a golden era to me, in whom the gregarious instinct is not strong. I delight in my friends; I can feel an absorbing interest in a *protégé* or two, but I have small liking for Society, so-called. Paul is more gifted, in this respect; he enjoys humanity in the aggregate; he meets the hundredth person with as much warmth, as much interest, as much pleasure as the first; his heartiness seems to grow by what it gives; I look upon it with a certain surprise, as at a social miracle of loaves and fishes. There is always enough of it and to spare.

Last evening we dined at Judge Ellenwood's, who proved to be a delightful host. It would be easy to like him extremely, if I could forget his hasty desertion of his church.

His wife has a sweet face, and quiet, graceful manners; and there are two young people:—Nathalie, a shy, pretty girl of sixteen or seventeen; and Percy, a college youth just at the age when the budding intellect is lost in admiration of its own promise,—an admiration not always in strict proportion to the occasion, and apt to mistake promise for performance.

General and Mrs. Fairfax were the other guests. The

latter is tall, with fine, dark eyes, a thick crop of brown hair worn in a somewhat startling fashion of her own, and a very animated style of conversation. Her first act, on entering the drawing-room, was to go to a window, draw back a curtain, and let in the last golden rays of the sinking sun.

"I cannot abide darkness," said she, sitting down in the flood of light; "material and moral obscurities are alike odious to me. There's Mr. Ennadeen, now (he was at our house this morning), why can't he tell who he is and what hs is after?"

"He is returned, then?" said Mrs. Ellenwood, in a mildly interrogative tone.

"Yes, in force," replied Mrs. Fairfax. "He brought with him a tall, lank, angular, jack-knife of a personage, whom he accounts for as, 'my western cousin, Mr. Wright; who has kindly consented to share, or lighten, my loneliness at the Manor.' Before their advent, he sent on a housekeeper and a small army of servants."

"Then it can't be—" Mrs. Ellenwood began, glanced at her husband, and stopped abruptly.

"Can't be Rolf Kenworth," said Mrs. Fairfax, coolly finishing the sentence, with no reference whatsoever to her husband. "That remains to be seen. If it is he, a gold-mine has opened before him somewhere on his travels. It is not often that a young man goes away empty handed, to come back in about three years with money enough in his pocket to take a place like the Manor, and live there in style conformable. As you say, it is a strong argument against the Rolf-Kenworth hypothesis."

"Mr. Ennadeen comes from the East, the land of Genii, magic, and marvels," remarked Paul, smiling.

"And bought Aladdin's lamp of a street-peddler for threepence," said Percy.

"What a wonderful lamp is that!" observed the Judge, with a certain suggestive alacrity. "It is positively inextinguishable. It bids fair to blaze while the world lasts."

Mrs. Fairfax looked at him with a mischievous smile. "Most potent, grave, and reverend seignor! what good will it do to turn the conversation at this table, when it is sure to run its course unhindered everywhere else in Bellerue? However, not to be guilty of rudeness, I will follow your lead. Yes, it is a wonderful lamp. Do you suppose the old story-teller had any purpose of a moral in it?"

> "'And is there any moral shut
> Within the bosom of the Rose?'"

asked Percy, with vast self-complacency.

"Certainly not, when there is no 'finer female sense' to be offended by its absence," replied Paul, with good-humored lightness, not to break this butterfly on too severe a wheel.

Percy looked perplexed. Probably, like many another, he had used the text with no knowledge of the context.

"And what might be the moral, to the 'finer female sense'?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"To a young girl, the rose might whisper, 'Be sweet as well as beautiful,'" replied Paul, with the same lightness of tone, not looking at Nathalie; but she blushed, nevertheless.

"And to a young man, it would shout, 'Blush for your folly, if you can," added Mrs. Fairfax, grimly.

And Percy, to do him justice, blushed too,—ruddily

enough to show that he still had the power. But he laughed also after a moment, with a certain amused recognition of his own discomfiture that was not without its grace.

The evening passed pleasantly; it was late when we took our leave. Outside we found that clouds were darkening the sky, and as we reached our own door, large rain-drops were falling fast.

"It promises to be a wet night," said Paul, as he let us in with his latch-key.

"I hope that the roof will not feel obliged to spring a new leak," observed I, with true housewifely anxiety. "All the spare bowls and pitchers are in the garret now."

I regret to state that the first heavy shower, after our occupation of the rectory, disclosed the fact that the roof, sadly infirm from age and neglect, had a sieve-like capacity for admitting water; eliciting from Paul the cheerful comment that though he had always supposed roofs were intended to keep it out, one had to "live and learn." Carpenters had been twice sent up with a view to repairs, but as their footsteps and ladders on the rotten shingles had the disheartening effect of making more leaks than they mended, we soon wearied of that worse than Penelope business, and contented ourselves with an irregular army of utensils carefully arranged on the garret floor, to catch and hold the in-flowing streams. A gentle intimation that a new roof was the thing really in order, was such a surprise to the vestry, in view of the fact that a new rectory, roof and all, was already on paper, that we never ventured to repeat it.

Paul went to his study; I ran up to my dressing-room. As I removed my bonnet, splash! came a large drop of

water, aimed at the end of my nose, and an excellent shot. I looked up; there was the discolored spot on the ceiling, the meaning of which I had learned to know so well.

Armed with a basin and a lamp, I mounted the garret stairs briskly, the quicker to head off the unwelcome intruder. As I neared the top, an unexpected sound smote my ears; there was a rush of swift footsteps; I seemed to see a dark, flying figure; next came a slam, as if a door hurriedly closed;—then, all was silent.

I stood motionless in surprise. The garret was never used;—who, what, could be in it at this hour?

Not feeling inclined to try to solve the problem alone, I retreated down the stairs in good order, shut and locked the door at the bottom, and went to Paul with my tale of adventure.

"It is a stray cat," was his comment, as, taking a stout cane from a corner, he rapidly mounted the main staircase.

"It is not," I replied, firmly, as I followed him. "Paul, don't fancy that you are only going to encounter a cat. Pray, be on your guard, not to be taken by surprise, whatever the creature may be."

"What do you think it is?" he asked, with his hand on the key of the locked door.

"Something human, certainly, though I cannot say what or whom. I really saw nothing but a dim, darting shadow."

He smiled. "In such circumstances, the imagination sees more than the eyes do. Give me the lamp."

"No, indeed; you may need both hands. *I* am going to carry the lamp."

He looked searchingly into my face; seemed to be satis-

fied with what he saw there, turned the key, flung open the door, and strode up the stairs.

Nothing was to be heard but the deep basso of the rain on the roof, and the lighter soprano of the various leaks, already in full flow. We advanced, cautiously at first, keeping a good lookout; after a little we grew bolder; we went this way and that, round and round the great chimney, flashing the light into every corner; and found—not so much as a cat!

"It must have been a shadow thrown by your ascending light," said Paul, finally, turning to me with a smile.

"But the slam, Paul,—the sound like a closing door! The lamp could not have made that."

"There is no door here, you know," replied he, casting a searching glance around. "How should there be? The house is detached. Did not the door close behind you?"

"Indeed, it did not! It was open when I went back, just as I left it."

Paul threw another perplexed glance around, then up into the dusky vault of the roof. "Ah, yes;" said he, in a tone of satisfaction, "there is the scuttle."

Taking the lamp from my hand, he mounted the rough, steep stairs leading to that rarely-used opening.

"It is fastened, as usual," he pronounced, after a careful examination. "Moreover, there is a fine specimen of a spider-web woven across the bolt. Nothing can have found egress this way."

"Paul," said I, as he came down, "don't tell me that I imagined it all, for I *know* I did not."

"Are you quite sure that you were not thinking of the rumors that this house is haunted, when you came up those stairs?" he asked, gently.

"Upon my word, I have not thought of it for a fortnight."

But I did think of it, now; and I dropped on the lowest tread of the scuttle stairs, thrilled through and through with a sudden, overmastering emotion,—not terror, but a keen excitement, a breathless interest, a burning desire to know more.

Paul stood regarding me silently. I saw that he was puzzled and anxious on my account; yet I could not speak. I could only try to recall what I had seen, what I had heard. I set myself the task of going back in thought to the moment of mounting the stairs, of remembering what mood I was in, on what errand I——

"Paul!" I exclaimed, starting up, "the leak! I have forgotten the leak! My dressing-room will be afloat."

And I ran to possess myself of the forgotten basin, and find the insidious stream for which it had been destined. As I rose from putting it carefully in position, Paul threw back his head and laughed the low, merry laugh which is his characteristic sign of extreme amusement.

"May I ask: Why?" said I, wonderingly.

"I am so glad to see that you are sane yet," he answered in a tone of relief. "I confess that I was beginning to doubt it. But what a sudden descent from a spectre to a basin and a leak! If the comic be rightly defined as the unexpectedly incongruous, here is surely a fine specimen."

"Enjoy it, then, while I take another tour of investigation," said I, coolly. "I am not yet satisfied."

And, seizing the lamp, I once more went through the great, dusky, empty place,—but no less fruitlessly than before.

XII.

ARIEL.

THE pleasant, early summer-time! The long, shining, flowery days! The birds singing for very happiness, and all the happier for their song! The prodigal waste of beauty—if beauty ever can be wasted!—Nature like a brimming cup of it, recklessly spilling it over in field and forest, by lake and river, on mountain-top and in valley-depth—an unwitting libation to Him from whom it came. For beauty was but His final, finishing touch to the work that He had seen to be "good."

Other things beside the season have advanced since my last record. Two or three days after his first visit, Ben brought me a whistle of really fine workmanship; bleached, carved, and polished in a way to do credit to his skill and taste. His eyes sparkled at my praises, although he soon cut short my thanks with:

"Now, m'm, put it to yer mouth, and blow as hard's ever you can."

I obeyed, but could not repress a start at the unexpected shrillness of the sound that came forth from the small instrument.

"I guess I can hear that, if I'm anywhere round," he opined, with much complacency.

"I should think you might! I wonder the police do not appear, to find out the meaning of such an alarm!"

In lieu of the guardians of the peace, Paul put his head in at the door, and asked, with smiling irony, if he were wanted.

"Certainly not," answered I, loftily. "This call is meant only for my 'tricksy spirit,' my Ariel, here; who promises, whenever I sound it, by day or night, in fair weather or foul, to appear on the instant :—

> "'To answer my best pleasure, be't to fly,
> To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
> On the curl'd cloud; and bids me strongly task
> Ariel, and all his quality.'—

Why, then, should I need you?"

"Why, indeed!" laughed Paul. "Nothing is left for me but to sulk and plot with Caliban."

And, after saying a few pleasant words to Ben, Paul shook hands with him, and went back to his study.

Ben had listened to these jesting remarks with puzzled interest; he now asked :—

"Please, m'm, could you tell me who Ar-i-el is?"—handling the word with great care and precision, as if he felt it to be a very fragile thing, indeed.

I took "The Tempest" from the book-case, gave a brief *résumé* of the opening of the drama, and began to read at the point where Ariel comes upon the scene. Ben hailed with a beaming face the repetition of the words which had already caught his fancy, and begged me to read them once more, that he might fix them in his memory.

"The 'curl'd cloud,' that means the kind o' hummocky

look they've got, like nice, round cushions to ride on," he commented, thoughtfully.

I finished the paragraph.

"'To thy strong bidding task,'—ye didn't say jest that before, did ye?" was his next inquiry.

"No; I had the audacity to alter the words a little, the better to suit the occasion."

The description of Ariel's pranks on the King's vessel was exceedingly to Ben's taste; and when it came to the torments and imprisonment from which Prospero had rescued the sprite, his enjoyment was so keen that I was irresistibly drawn on to give the scene with enough of dramatic fervor to make him hang on my lips with breathless interest. At Prospero's threat—

> "——I will rend an oak
> And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till
> Thou hast howled away twelve years,"

he grew thoughtful, and when I had come to a pause, observed:

"I know an oak that he wouldn't have to rend; it's holler."

"And where is it?" asked I, reminded of the one that Mrs. Clavrick had mentioned as belonging to the Manor.

"Somewheres," replied he, instantly assuming the blank, stolid look wherewith he discourages inopportune curiosity.

I took the hint, and returned to "The Tempest."

Caliban was only one degree less interesting to Ben than Ariel. He seemed to feel to the full the charm of the strong contrast between the dainty grace of the one and the vile deformity of the other, both physical and spiritual;

his expression changed in perfect keeping with the text; every phrase, every emotion, was reflected in his mobile face.

I went on to the end of the act, with such omissions as it seemed desirable to make; then I closed the book, saying:—

"That will do for this time, Ben. One of these days, when you have done your lessons particularly well, you shall have a second instalment as a reward. I have read enough to explain why I called you 'Ariel.' I have no doubt, that you, too, are ready to say—

> "'I will be correspondent to command,
> And do my spriting gently.'"

"I s'pose that means that I'll come when I'm called, and do as I'm told, and not be noisy about it," said Ben, sagaciously. "I'll be as good an Ar-i-el as I know how, m'm. I'd be awful glad to say sometime, jest as he did—what was that about 'worthy service'?"

I quoted:

> "Remember, I have done thee worthy service;
> Told thee no lies, made thee no mistakings, serv'd
> Without grudge or grumbling.'"

Ben shook his head slowly, not in denial, but in profound and dubious reflection.

"It ain't as easy as slidin' down hill," was his conclusion. "No lyin', and no mistakes, and no holdin' back; it's a goin' to put me right on the square, I guess. As for the grumblin', I h'ain't ever been much in that line o' business. If I had, and there was any money in't, I'd be as rich as a four-story bank with a stone front, by now; I've had to go

through some rough places since mother died. But grumblin' aint of any more use than blowin' against the wind to stop it, so I don't take any stock in it. But don't I wish I really was Ariel"—he was beginning to handle the name with more assurance—"wouldn't I do something fine for Mr. Rolf! And as for—for—someone else I know,

—"'I'd rack him with old cramps,
Fill all his bones with aches and make him roar,'—

and all the rest of it;—wouldn't I, though? You bet!"

"Very well remembered, Ben, though not quite literally But you are not truly so hard-hearted as to wish to inflict all those torments on any acquaintance of yours."

Ben shut his mouth too tightly to allow any indiscreet word to escape, and looked as if he defied anyone to open it.

He now comes to me on four mornings of the week; and it is really a pleasure to teach him. With me he is docility itself, anxious to please, and quick to learn both by labor and imitation. I am often amused to hear him unconsciously reproducing the very tones of my voice when repeating after me; but it is no parrot-like echo, seizing on sound, and ignorant of sense; on the contrary, Ben's mind is as alert as his body, and as susceptible of training. In right of one or the other parent, he inherits more than common ability. I must find out something more definite about his origin.

He did not do justice to himself in his own estimate; he can read very well for a boy of his age, with excellent comprehension of all words and meanings not absolutely foreign to his experience, and is able to give a very shrewd

guess at the rest. His reading may well be termed "desultory," for the newspapers have been his main dependence, —not always fresh from the press, either, but such waifs and strays as a sharp boy on the lookout for them could easily pick up. The result proves that mental training is less dependent upon the advantages enjoyed than the use made of them. If there are curious gaps in Ben's stores of knowledge, there are equally curious possessions ; while in the power of weighing, adjusting, and combining what is brought before him he is far ahead of most boys of his age.

Asking him when he found time for reading, I was told that it was "mos'ly evenings"; but when I sought to elicit some information about the place wherein his studies were prosecuted, I was soon made aware that in this direction there was "no thoroughfare." Indeed, having learned that the one thing certain to check the freest flow of his confidence, and remind him that it is "time to go," is to betray any curiosity as to the whereabouts of his home, I now avoid that subject as carefully as he does himself. But I am no longer so certain that it is in some grimy haunt of tramps and thieves. Street-arab though he be, Ben shows a degree of moral cleanness, in things essential, not easily reconcilable with the theory of habitually vicious companionship.

And in the matter of personal cleanliness, he was at first much better than my fears and soon became unobjectionable:—a few friendly hints with regard to the proper care of skin, hair and teeth being not only well received, as in the line of earlier teachings of his mother, but promptly acted on; so that we can now sit shoulder to shoulder, overlooking the same book, without more misgivings on my part than on his.

We were thus employed one day, when Mr. Brune passed the window, glancing up at it as he did so ; and though it was impossible for him to see within, the lace curtain being drawn, I noticed that Ben involuntarily ducked his head, as if to escape observation.

"Do you know Mr. Brune?" I asked, with some surprise.

"Yes'm," was the laconic reply.

Ben has a tongue that can run like a mill-race, or be mute as the great beam that crosses it.

"Do you know him very well?" I persisted, thinking that any relation between the street-arab and the prosperous lawyer was likely to be an interesting subject of investigation.

"Well 'nough," answered Ben, sententiously. And, after a moment, his lips opened again with the supplementary information ;—"Don't like him."

"Why not?" inquired I, carelessly. "He seems an agreeable gentleman enough."

To this Ben vouchsafed no more direct answer than a muttered, "I'd like to smash his figger-head for him, I would!"

"I was much surprised. It was the first time that I had known the boy to display any special animosity; yet I was amused too ; his resentment seemed so small and absurd a thing when compared with its object that it was difficult to take it seriously.

"How has Mr. Brune been so unfortunate as to incur your displeasure?" I asked, gravely ; but Ben's intuitions are quick and keen and he detected the latent irony.

"Ye c'n laugh, if you want to ; and so c'n he. But I'll get even with him some day ; see if I don't. He knows

how to hide things pooty well; but I know how to look an' look, and never get tired; and I'll find it,—ye c'n bet yer life on that."

"Find what?" I asked wonderingly.

"Something that belongs to—to me," replied he.

"And what can Mr. Brune want with anything that belongs to you?" inquired I, wondering what sort of labyrinth was this.

Ben shifted his position uneasily, looked up and down, scratched his head, and finally burst out with,—"Now, Mrs. Vennor, won't ye just please not to ask me anything else! I don't want to lie to you, 'cause you're awful good to me; but I shall, if ye ask me any more questions about this thing."

"I beg your pardon, Ben; I had no idea that there was any secret in the matter, or I should not have been so indiscreet."

"Now, ain't that enough to make a feller howl?" asked Ben, apostrophizing the ceiling:—"Mrs. Vennor a-askin' my pardon when I ought to go on my knees to her for being so sassy! I'd tell ye anything, ma'am—most anything, that is," he added, with a sudden recollection of some other mental reservation,—"I like ye better 'n anything in the world exceptin' Mr. Rolf. But this is his business, ye see; and I couldn't tell on't, even to you, if I was to be skinned alive for it."

"I am glad to learn that you can keep a secret so well; I shall know what to do with one when I want it kept," said I, lightly. "Mr. Rolf is fortunate in having won so discreet and devoted a friend."

"I want to be his friend, as fur as a poor boy like me can be," said Ben, humbly. "And that makes it worser to

think that I've done him an orful damage, without meaning it; and all along of that lawyer a snooping round:—I wish he may be—"

"Take care, Ben," interrupted I, warningly; "no bad words, you know."

Ben's lips closed like a vice, as if only the firmest pressure could shut in the impending anathema.

I sat silently considering the drift of his obscure hints, wondering if anything of importance could be behind them.

"Ben," I said, after a moment, "I have no wish to pry into your secrets or Mr. Rolf's, but if you do know anything which concerns him, it strikes me that it would be well for you to take his fast friend, Mr. Clavrick, into your confidence."

"Mr. Brune said I mustn't tell anybody, just for Mr. Rolf's sake. And I guess he was right enough in that."

"Then Mr. Brune is friendly to Mr. Rolf."

"No, m'm; he hates him."

"Hates him!" I could not help echoing, in amazement; "how do you know?"

"Oh, there's a good many ways of knowing things that ain't told ye."

"But you are obeying his instructions, if I understand you rightly."

"Yes'm. But he ain't a-goin' to hurt Mr. Rolf as long's he stays away, and keeps dark."

Decidedly the labyrinth was growing more and more intricate. But as any really satisfactory explanation seemed unlikely, I determined to drop the subject at once. So, putting my finger on the paragraph which Mr. Brune's appearance had interrupted, I signed to Ben to proceed.

But it seemed that he was not quite at the end of his voluntary revelations.

"He thinks I don't know what he's trying for," he continued, "but I do. I hain't been dancing after him on the sly, week in and week out, 'thout findin' out a good deal more'n he thinks of, I guess."

"But, Ben, I don't like to think of you being employed as a spy; it is not a very honorable calling, at best."

"Bless ye, ma'am!" cried Ben, opening his eyes to their widest extent, "I'm a-doin' it for Mr. Rolf."

The tone implied that no farther justification of his action was necessary. Nor did I think it well to try to disturb that conviction just then, for the name of Rolf Kenworth is my tower of strength in all my dealings with Ben. No lesson so difficult, no duty so distasteful, no habit so ingrained, as not to yield in some measure to the influence of that all-powerful spell. "I am sure that Mr. Rolf will be glad to see this"—"I know he would not like that," are the magic spells by which the victory is gained over sloth, restlessness or discouragement, in the person of his young admirer.

Naturally I am beginning to take a good deal of interest in the said "Rolf." It follows that when I recently met Mr. Ennadeen at General Fairfax's, where he is on terms of intimacy, I studied him somewhat carefully, seeking to discover the secret of his charm for Ben; as well as to materialize—if the term be allowable—the image that the narrative of Mr. and Mrs. Clavrick had left in my mind. Probably it is needless to say that I failed in my quest. One rarely finds just what one expects in a person known hitherto only by report. The daring, dashing young Apollo, the all-conquering hero, the frank, caressing, winning youth, of his

friends' loving portraiture found no satisfactory original in Hugh Ennadeen.

And yet he has a charm potent enough in its way. His quiet manners, his deep, low tones, his grave face—on which a smile is like the sudden glint of a sunbeam in a shadowy forest nook—are wonderfully inspiring of trust and liking. I cannot but think that he not only "knows what he is about," as Judge Ellenwood remarked, but is about nothing that will not bear the brightest blaze of ultimate daylight, however he may please to wrap it in shadow at present.

It is not so easy to decide about his cousin, Mr. Wright. While he is set down somewhat scornfully as having "no harm in him," and his lazy, listless manner is that of a man who has nothing in the world to do, and does it, I cannot rid myself of the impression that it is a much more than ordinarily keen observation that he brings to bear on people and things. If he is not a great deal shrewder than he seems, trust no woman's intuitions.

Both are regular attendants at church, Mr. Ennadeen having taken a pew and signified his desire to be considered as Paul's loyal parishioner while he stays at Bellerue.

Meanwhile, the question of the new rectory has not been slumbering; but just as it looked likely to become an irritating one, Paul came in one day with a beaming face.

"Hurrah!" cried he, throwing up his hat to the ceiling, with the boyish hilarity which he reserves for an audience of one, even me,—"I have good news for you. I have just been bidden to go ahead and finish the rectory according to the unmutilated plan; General Fairfax pledges himself to be responsible for any deficit."

"How generous of him!" exclaimed I.

"You are going too fast. He wishes it to be distinctly understood that he is only the agent of another person, who prefers to be nameless."

"Why, it must be Mr.—"

Paul laid his hand lightly on my lips.

"It must not be anyone. We have no right to try to look behind the veil drawn over such generosity. Enough for us that I shall have something to say to the vestry to-night that will put an end to discussion and delay."

Nevertheless he returned from the meeting looking so grave that I asked, as soon as I saw him :—

"What is gone wrong?"

"Everything and nothing. That is to say, everything in the beginning, and not much in the end. But the unpleasant impression made by the first was too strong to be all at once removed by the last."

"I suppose that they made themselves disagreeable, as usual," said I. "Probably they can't help it, 'tis their nature to.' Tell me all about it, please."

"I prefer to forget it. Briefly: instead of calling forth the grateful applause that I expected, my announcement was received in dead silence. Mr. Godine bluntly broke it with the hope that it was clean money, not blood-stained, that we were asked to accept. Mr. Pollard followed with an elaborate argument to prove that Mr. Holroyd was the donor. Mr. Lasker thought the deficit might be made to include a part of the parish debt. This brought out Mr. Brune, who had sat silent, looking darker and more portentous than any thunder-cloud. 'If you mean that as a joke, Mr Lasker,' said he, 'it is a very poor one. I think we are men of honor here. The money is offered for the rectory; if accepted it shall go for the rectory, every dollar of it, or

my name is not Harold Brune, but cheat and trickster,—a signature over which I don't intend to figure, if I know it.'

"There was a silence that might be felt, as you can imagine. Lasker was fairly livid with anger; and though I was glad to see Brune put himself so unequivocally in the right, I could have wished that his manner had been different. But his scornful speech was most effectual; the other members of the vestry awakened to the situation and looked a little ashamed of it. Mr. Pollard at once moved that the rectory be built according to the original design, or with only such changes as convenience might suggest; and the motion was carried unanimously. There let us leave it."

Nevertheless, I decided in my own mind that Mr. Ennadeen, not Mr. Holroyd, was our unknown benefactor; but I kept my decision to myself.

XIII.

A PASSING GLIMPSE.

Dana Heathcote has developed a very flattering liking for me, and is become my most frequent visitor. She has a talent for graceful informality, never degenerating into rudeness. In these sunny summer days, it often happens that the front door, being duly defended by blinds, is left open for the more perfect airing of the great dim halls. Finding entrance thus made easy, she goes into the parlor, seats herself at the piano, and announces her presence by a succession of grand, powerful chords like the deep chime of a bell, or a very trumpet-call of clear, strong tones; gradually subsiding into soft ripplings of melody, or snatches of singing, that rise and fall as naturally as the breath of the wind among the leaves of the forest. No music ever so charmed and moved me as these spontaneous outpourings of a sweet, sound nature, without a touch of doubt or morbidness in it, albeit, not unacquainted with sorrow. It is really painful, now and then, to remember that they are being wasted on a single listener, when hundreds might be the richer for them.

There is no doubt about it, music is her native element, time and tune are like another mode of breathing. There is often a subtile suggestion of them in her very quietude;

her thoughts seem to flow in happy consonance with some melody inaudible to us.

At other times, passing the window where I am sitting with my book or work, she pauses for a bright, brief chat, with her head a little below the level of the window-sill and her lovely face uplifted; and when she goes, it is as if a fresh breeze from a mountain-top had blown through the room. Sorrow has not quenched her brightness, though it has thrown some very deep shadows upon her young life. Often, just when her mood is sunniest, a wave of recollection seems to sweep across her mind, the smile fades, the eyes darken and deepen, the mouth takes on a curve as sorrowful as that of the Peri turned from the gate of Paradise.

There is a strange charm in these sudden transformations, an infinite variety that "custom doth not stale." Taking her all in all, she is a singularly fascinating girl when one comes to know her well; and I do not wonder than Kenworth Rixon was mad with disappointment in losing her. But how could Rolf leave her all these years and "make no sign"?

A few days ago, dropping on a stool at my feet, and laying her head on my lap, she looked up earnestly into my face and said:—

"I seem to have found in you something that I have wanted all my life, yet knew not what."

"And do you know what, now?" I asked, with some curiosity.

"Oh, yes. It is a friend whom I can not only love dearly but trust implicitly; a friend, too, who loves music, and understands both its outward signs and its inward spirit, what it expresses, and its strivings after the inex-

pressible ; and finally, a friend who loves God and can help me to love and serve Him better."

"And do you find all that in me ?" I asked, wonderingly.

"All that, and more. I cannot tell you all that I find, and all that I hope to find, in you, Mrs. Vennor."

Her enthusiasm made me very humble, and not a little sad. The sight of the ideal "I" which is the offspring of a loving friend's imagination, if it has its exquisite pleasure, has also its exquisite pain. No one else knows or feels so keenly its unreality. Yet very precious is the love which insists on seeing us through so glorifying a haze. It seems kinder, at first thought, than that of God, since His sight is subject to no such illusions, but sees us in all our blackness and bareness ; yet is not His infinite pity and patience with the plain truth the kindest thing of all ?

"Do not expect too much from me, Danita," I exclaimed warningly. "Moderate expectation is the surest bar to sore disappointment."

"Danita !" she repeated, paying no heed to my warning ; "ah, I like that ! It gives a more feminine flavor to my odd name. And it sounds as if you might be beginning to love me a little. Call me so always, please !"

Lately, Dana has begun to talk to me of her love and its sorrowful course,—very frankly up to a certain point, yet with a background of reservation that I can feel, but not define. Nevertheless she has shown me enough of her heart to make it clear that she loves Rolf Kenworth with a tenderness and trust that he should be a very fine character to call forth, and a still finer one to deserve. I hope the girl's imagination is not as active in his behalf as in mine, or a sad awakening may be before her,—married

life offering even more fatal facilities for disillusion than friendship.

Yet, surely, it is not from my own experience that I have hived that bitter honey of wisdom! Am I really so foolish as to think that I have drawn the one matrimonial prize which the world offers, leaving only blanks for those who come after! How easy it is to believe, when the sun shines on us, that there is no happiness equal to ours! Alas, too, when the night falls, that never sorrow was like unto our sorrow!

We had been for a walk this morning, Dana and I. She was in her most merry mood; memory and anxiety had withdrawn for the moment, and left her unshadowed; her face was as bright as it was fair: her talk was full of a richer humor and playfulness than I had seen in her before. It made me a little sad; I knew that such overflowing gayety was but a careless putting-forth of buds into a bit of winter warmth and sunshine. Frost is sure to come with the nightfall, and then, alas for the frail things!

We were scarcely a half-block from the rectory, when I saw Mr. Ennadeen coming towards us, with his eyes bent on the pavement, and a pre-occupied air. Almost at the same moment, Dana saw him, too; I felt the hand that rested on my arm clutch it with involuntary force; a deep flush rose to her cheek, and then, swiftly receding, left it as pale as marble.

He was close upon us ere he raised his eyes. Seeing me first, he lifted his hat and bowed; then, his glance rested for a moment on Dana, and it seemed to me that his face too flushed slightly, while the hat remained suspended for some little time, though he did not repeat the bow. Of one

thing I was certain, that he knew her instantly. It was not the careless, nor even the admiring, glance of a stranger that he gave her; but a deeply penetrating and comprehensive gaze, taking note of every detail of her face and figure, and carrying away a mental image as perfect as that of a photograph.

It was all over in a minute. He had gone his way, and Dana was clinging blindly to my arm, with a face of such deadly pallor and anguish that my heart ached with pity. I drew her hastily into the house, and the library, where she sank on a couch, with her face in her hands, and gave way to long, shivering sobs,—dry sobs they were, bringing no soothing tears with them.

I was on the point of going quietly out, and leaving her alone with her sorrow; but another glance at her slight girlish figure made me hesitate. She looked so young, so forlorn, so much in need of sympathy, that finally I sat down beside her, drew her head on to my shoulder and began silently to stroke her soft hair.

The tender, soothing touch soon took effect; the sobs became less convulsive, less frequent; and she murmured without lifting her head:—

"Three years! and he did not speak to me!"

It was no time to question my right to understand, to answer.

"Think a moment, dear," said I, gently. "How could he speak to you, meeting you thus, in public? If he is—as he professes to be—Mr. Ennadeen, a stranger in Bellerue, he had no right to speak; if he is—anyone else—"

"He is Rolf, and no one else," she answered, with sad decision, but oh, so changed! so changed! poor, poor Rolf!" And she burst into tears.

I was glad to see them flow: they would be the best relief for her sore heart.

"If he really is Rolf, it is a matter of prime necessity that he should not seem to be recognized by you: his life, or, at least, his liberty of action—depends upon it."

"Why, then, does he not contrive a way to see me in private?" she asked, lifting her wet face for a moment, and letting it fall again.

"It is probable that his every step and act is watched, and he knows it. And nothing would so soon remove every doubt of his identity, as the discovery of any secret communication between you."

Her tears ceased, and she sat in silent reflection. "No doubt you are right," she admitted, finally, heaving a deep sigh "But it is so hard to see him, to meet him face to face, and to have him pass me by as if I were a stranger,—without a word, a sign, a touch of his hand—oh! you don't know how hard it is!"

"It would be harder, I think," said I, gravely, "to feel that you were not strong enough, patient enough, unselfish enough, to render him the only help that you can in the hard task before him,—that of proving himself guiltless of a woeful crime, against a heavy weight of circumstantial evidence.

She sat upright now, looking at me with earnest eyes and a deeply-stirred face. Her reply was not immediate; but it was in a very different tone when it came.

"Thank you for saying that; it is like light on a dark path. I see that it is my part to wait and hope, not seeking to know or understand, but leaving Rolf to act as he thinks best. I can trust Rolf; he is sure to be doing the right thing."

"If you believe that," said I smiling, "you can easily wait patiently. It is when we cannot trust that it is so hard to wait. Besides, the proof of his innocence is the thing of utmost moment to you both; and if he be really living at the Manor under an assumed name, it is in order to seek and find that proof. No amount of persevering effort on his part, nor of silent endurance on yours, is too much to give for it."

"No, indeed!" she exclaimed, rising and walking round the room in a sudden access of excitement, "how could I fail to think of that! Forgive me, Rolf," she continued, pausing and stretching out her arms,—"forgive me if, for a few moments, I thought you cold and unkind! I ought to have known—I ought to have understood. I will not fail you again. No one shall think that I see in you any-other than—," she smiled ironically,—"Mr. Ennadeen, whom I neither know nor care for, except that he looks a little like you, but certainly not enough to lead anyone to mistake him for you, even for a moment."

She ended with a low laugh, which yet had little of mirth in it.

"I am glad to hear that resolve," said I; "no doubt you will have plenty of opportunities for keeping it. Mr. Ennadeen shows no intention of making a recluse of himself. Never be taken by surprise again; remember that watchful eyes are upon you, eager to detect some sign of fear or chagrin, and certain to construe every such sign to mean just one thing—namely, that the tenant of the Manor is Rolf. At the same time, be careful not to overdo the matter; too rigid an indifference would be almost as significant. Treat Mr. Ennadeen with just the degree of courtesy and interest that an agreeable gentleman, with an ac-

knowledged resemblance to the man whom you love, would be sure to receive from you ;—in short, treat him as—Mr. Ennadeen! I cannot feel certain, by any means, that he will turn out to be anybody else."

"Do you think that *I* could mistake anyone else for Rolf, then?" she asked, looking at me with surprise, almost with resentment.

"Remember that you have seen this gentleman only for a moment. And did you not say that, if he were Rolf, he was greatly changed?"

"I did not say 'if,'" she responded, with a faint smile. "And it is precisely the change that comes over the landscape when the sun is withdrawn behind a cloud. Rolf used to be so bright, so joyous! it was like watching the sun rise on a breezy summer morning to meet him. Now he looks as grave and sad as if he had forgotten how to smile. Oh, how he must have suffered!" Her eyes filled with tears again.

I had no doubt that she was right, yet it did not suit me to acknowledge it; I felt intuitively that it was better not to commit myself to any opinion in this matter; I remained silent, therefore, and Dana interpreted my silence as denial.

"Besides, did you not see that he knew me?" she persisted. "How should Mr. Ennadeen know me,—an Englishman, on his first visit to this country?"

"I *had* seen it ; and I felt that the argument was a strong one. Nevertheless, after a moment of consideration, I said :—

"My dear Danita, I wish that you were not so certain! If Mr. Ennadeen is ever brought to trial, and you are summoned to testify to this very question of identity, you will

be glad to remember that you had some doubt, some misgiving, some recognition of the proneness of the universal human mind to mistake. If you have no such feeling, allow me to advise you to cultivate it."

She shook her head drearily.

"Oh, I hope that will never be! I should not live to see the end; I should have died a hundred deaths before that time, and the hundredth would be final."

She wrung her hands in a paroxysm of grief and terror.

I took the hands in mine, and held them close.

"Listen to me, Danita! I feel perfectly sure that you have no occasion for such keen anxiety. Whether this gentleman be or be not Rolf Kenworth, he is not here without the power of proving himself to be Hugh Ennadeen, if need be. What is that man—Mr. Wright, his so-called cousin—here for, if not for that very purpose? Trust me, dear; he has a way of retreat open. I am sure that Judge Ellenwood is of that opinion; on that evening when we met first at Mr. Clavrick's, do you not remember his saying that Mr. Ennadeen looked like a man who knew what he was about; and that no event would be likely to find him unprepared?"

She looked at me eagerly, gratefully, glad to take the offered draught of hope and encouragement; for her need was great, poor child!

"Indeed, I remember it well," she replied. "I wondered if he knew at the time how it cheered me to hear him say it. And he, being a judge, ought to know."

"And the 'Judge of all the earth,' dear, does He not know, and is not the whole matter in His hands? Pray to Him, Danita, that He will, in His own good time, show

us the way out of all this tangle, and into His perfect peace."

"And you—," she began, but her sweet lips quivered so that she could not finish the sentence.

"I, too, will pray for you," I answered, kissing them; "and with all my heart."

XIV.

THE NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS.

If Mr. Ennadeen does not thrust himself unnecessarily before the public gaze, neither does he shrink from being seen as often as is consistent with his quiet, studious manner of life. He is said to pass much of his time shut up in the library of the Manor-house, rummaging among the books and pamphlets, and turning over the pages of the great, old, black-letter folios, in which the collection is unusually rich. But, nearly every day, he is seen on Main street, riding his powerful black horse with the easy, assured seat of the ex-cavalryman; or he saunters slowly along on foot, his keen, observant glance suggestive of a certain alertness of mental attitude not strictly in keeping with his leisurely pace and careless air.

As he goes his way, the glances that rest upon him express many degrees of indifference, curiosity, friendliness, or abhorrence. To some persons, he is simply what he professes to be; to others, a difficult and fascinating enigma; to many, Rolf Kenworth, under a dark but probably temporary cloud; to a few, a vile murderer who ought not to be at large a day longer.

The number of those who believe him to be Rolf, whether friends or foes, is increasing, in spite of their agreement

that he is greatly changed in certain particulars. The merely physical changes, to be sure, are only such as might be expected after a long absence, at a critical period of life; but even the sobering influences of time and circumstance seem scarcely to account for the utter loss of that sunny activity and elasticity of temperament which was so striking a trait of Rolf's younger character as to make him almost unrecognizable without it. Yet the inimically inclined profess to find therein the strongest confirmation of their theories. They maintain that it is the natural result, partly of the persistent cry of an accusing conscience, partly of the heavy strain of anxiety incident to his present perilous position. To the objection of his friends that if it were really so perilous, he would never have been so foolish as to put himself in it, they reply that he did so in the belief that his disguise was impenetrable, and in the hope of hitting upon something that could be twisted into evidence exculpatory of his crime; but failing in this quest, and seeing that he is recognized and kept under careful surveillance, he is in reality very ill at ease, notwithstanding his assumed carelessness of demeanor.

However that may be, Mr. Ennadeen still goes up and down the streets of Bellerue with every appearance of ease and security; gracefully acknowledging each bow, nod, shake of the hand, or other greeting, but rarely taking the initiative in these courtesies; while he passes by coldness, disdain, or abhorrence, with eyes that seem to see nothing nearer than the horizon. It is plain that he does not mean to lay himself open to the chance of a rebuff.

And yet he has met with one, of which I chanced to be an unwilling spectator.

Some days ago, word was quietly passed about that a

night-blooming cereus was expected to blossom at General Fairfax's, and that the house was to be freely thrown open to all friends, neighbors, and flower-lovers, who cared to witness the event. Paul happening to be out of town for a few days, Mr. and Mrs. Clavrick kindly arranged for me to go with them.

It was about ten o'clock when we sallied forth. The summer night was unspeakably soft and still; the full moon flooded the city with its magical light, embellishing all that was fair, veiling or softening all that was foul; and we went our way through the silvery brightness and dense shadow of the fast-emptying, silent streets with voices involuntarily hushed.

The house was already tolerably well-filled with guests, among whom I recognized the Ellenwoods, the Heathcotes, and other familiar faces. The reception was wholly informal; the street-door was wide open; a servant indicated the spacious, brilliantly-lighted drawing-room as the presence-chamber of the floral princess that we had come to see, in the centre of which she was carefully enthroned. Everyone went and contemplated her for a few moments, but as her seven long, pendant buds still kept their white petals jealously closed, the majority of the guests soon dispersed themselves through other parts of the attractive house; or went out to stroll in the grounds.

Mrs. Pollard—who happens to be Mr. Clavrick's particular horror—was the first person to greet us.

"Good evening, Mrs. Clavrick; isn't this charming! Though, to be sure, Percy Ellenwood just told me that it was 'a serious performance,'—inveterate punster that he is! How d'ye do, Mrs. Vennor?—I began to think you weren't coming; it's so late. To tell the truth, I came very

near not coming myself: I had a headache early in the evening: I'm a martyr to headaches. Do you know what is good for a headache, Mr. Clavrick?"

"That is a difficult question, and I am not a physician. I heard one recommend my wife to try margaretnesia."

"Wha-at?" gasped Mrs. Pollard.

"Well, he did say 'mag', but I couldn't take the liberty; I am not so well acquainted with the article."

She opened her eyes to their widest extent.

"You do say such queer things! I never know how to take you."

"In homœopathic doses, if I might venture to prescribe." And with a low bow, he made his escape.

"Here are chairs; will you sit down?" he asked, when he had put the cactus's throne between us and the lady.

"No, indeed," replied Honor, very positively. "Who would stay in-doors this blessed evening, when the finest grounds in all Bellerue are open to us! I want to go into the garden and interview the lilies."

"If they are wise, and have a fitting fear of print before their eyes, they will decline to be interviewed," rejoined Mr. Clavrick. "But, as you please;—only allow me to remind you that the 'serious performance' for which we came must soon begin, and you may lose your chance of a good place to witness it."

"I'll take the risk," returned his wife, undismayed. "Everybody is outside; what is to prevent us from getting inside as fast as the rest, when the time comes?"

The garden was flooded with moonlight, giving a more ethereal grace to the delicate flower-forms that welcomed us with sweet odors; except where the deep shadows of tall flowering shrubs or vine-wreathed bowers blotted out

everything in their reach, creating a sort of semi-*solitude-à-deux* of which more than one cooing pair had taken advantage. The winding walks were filled with slowly moving figures; as we drew near, an airy and vivacious murmur of voices came to our ears, with frequent ripplings of laughter; not only the clear treble of fresh young throats, but the deep bass of maturity, blending together in what, at a little distance, was really a very pleasant harmony.

"Listen!" said Mr. Clavrick, pausing just within the gate, and lifting his finger in warning, "would you not say that it was the murmur of winds in the forest, or of falling waters, rather than of human voices?"

"Or of fauns and satyrs,—some race of creatures so much nearer than man to the heart of nature that she accepts their voices as her own, and blends them indistinguishably with her chorus of winds and waves?" pursued Honor.

"I am not sure that anything is really nearer to the heart of nature than man," said I, doubtfully. "The greater nearness of animals is but a surface thing at best, it seems to me; it is a matter of contiguity, rather than of deep and intelligent sympathy. My dog does not hear the music in winds and waves that I do."

"Because he does not project himself and his moods into them," responded Mr. Clavrick, drily. "We humans have a bad habit of looking at nature only through our own smoked or rose-colored glasses; we cannot forget our miserable selves long enough to look at her *per se*."

At this moment, Dana Heathcote espied us, and came to link her arm in mine.

"How delightful this is!" she exclaimed, sighing, as it seemed, for very pleasure,—yet possibly not without some underlying pain. "Was there ever such moonlight!"

"Never!" replied I, solemnly.

"Mrs. Vennor! I took you for a person of truth and veracity!" remonstrated Mr. Clavrick.

"Nor need you take me now for anything else. Just such moonlight never was before. For one thing, it did not have Dana and me to look at it arm-in-arm."

"Specious, frightfully specious," commented Mr. Clavrick, shaking his head with mock disapproval.

"Not at all. As you were just saying, there is no such thing as moonlight *per se*, for us mortals. The circumstances through which we look at it, the memories it stirs, the longings to which it gives birth;—all these things have to be taken into the account. There is a deep truth in the jesting saying that, to the genuine, old-time Southron, the moonlight was finer 'befo' the wah.' There is no moonlight so bright as that of happier days, which borrowed its best radiance from shining eyes and tender hearts."

"Nor any so mournful as that which we see through weary, doubtful, disappointed, heartsick eyes," said a deep voice; and Mr. Brune emerged from the shadow of a tall lilac tree. "Pardon me, Mrs. Vennor; I heard only your last sentence as you drew near; I have not the least notion what went before."

"Only a statement that moonlight is not a simple, but a compound substance, made up of shine and gleam, and lover's vows, past, present, and prospective," laughed Mr. Clavrick.

"Why need we think of past or future, when the present is so pleasant?" asked Mr. Brune, half-absently, his eyes resting with evident delight on Dana's pure, flower-like face.

"The presen *is* the past, in part; and the future is both

past and present," she answered, with a certain cool, dry intonation so different from her usual sweetness that I glanced at her to make sure that it really came from her lips.

Something like a spasm of pain passed rapidly over Mr. Brune's handsome, clear-cut features. "True," rejoined he, quickly,—and his tone seemed subtly flavored with a warning or a threat, or both;—"very true; the past is a burden which not only hangs heavily round the neck of the present, but projects its shadow ominously into the future. Try as we may, we cannot shake it off; all our lives must be spent —or ended—in its dusky shade."

I felt Dana's light form shiver, and her arm trembled in mine. "At least," she replied,—and there was now a singularly appealing note in her voice,—"we cannot but compassionate those who have to suffer from such a burden; we need add nothing to the weight that is already so heavy."

"Nothing but what the preservation of the innocent demands, even more than the punishment of the guilty," replied Mr. Brune, with a calm, sad sternness like that of immitigable fate. "For my part, if the one were not so inextricably interwoven with the other, I would willingly let the guilty go free—in some cases."

"How is one to know always who is guilty?" asked Mr. Clavrick, in a tone between jest and earnest.

Mr. Brune did not reply; he was gazing at three gentlemen approaching. Two of them were arm-in-arm, and so deep in conversation that neither noticed our party until they were close upon us; the third was sauntering slowly along behind them, with his hands in his pockets and a lazy, listless air. Honor and her husband greeted them easily and composedly enough; so, of course, did I; then there

was a moment's hush—the hush that one intuitively feels to be heavily charged with excitement.

General Fairfax broke the silence. "Dana, permit me to present to you my friend, Mr. Ennadeen. Mr. Ennadeen, Miss Heathcote."

Mr. Ennadeen bowed ceremoniously; Dana courtesied with equal ceremony, and murmured a hope that he found his new home pleasant.

The introduction of Mr. Wright followed, who shook Dana's hand heartily, and remarked, with a pronounced Western drawl and intonation:—

"Now, this is what I call right pleasant,—making acquaintance in a garden. Reminds me of Eden, and kinder seems to promise a flowery future. Moonshine thrown in *ad lib.*; snakes omitted by request."

The General went on a little hurriedly: "Mr. Brune, let me make you acquainted with my friend, Mr. Ennadeen."

Again Mr. Ennadeen bowed, and this time extended his hand; but Mr Brune stood like a statue, seeming neither to hear the words nor see the person introduced. A deeper hush than before fell for an instant, through which we heard Dana catch her breath with a kind of gasp, as if in pain.

General Fairfax's eyes flashed fire; he drew himself up haughtily; his lips opened to administer, no doubt, a stinging rebuke; but Mr. Ennadeen—very pale, yet quite calm—laid a firm, restraining hand on his arm.

"Say nothing *now*, General," he entreated, or commanded—it was hard to tell which. "In good time, I will myself give Mr. Brune an opportunity to—apologize."

"I shall be ready to do so whenever I see cause," said Mr. Brune, stiffly, looking straight at his host and addressing

himself to him. "At present, General, I can do nothing more than relieve you of a presence that I regret to have made unwelcome. Allow me to wish you all a good evening."

His eyes rested for an instant with a kind of bitter sadness on Dana Heathcote; then turning quickly, he walked swiftly out of the grounds, and vanished through a gate leading to the street, near which we were standing.

"I am glad that the fellow had the grace to take himself off before he was sent," said the General, looking frowningly after him. "There is no room on these premises for a man who refuses to acknowledge my introduction to one of my most esteemed friends."

There was a moment of embarrassed silence; then Mr Wright came to the rescue with his lazy drawl, in odd contrast with the General's sharp, quick speech.

"Sorry you forgot to introduce me, too, General; I feel as if I'd missed an opportunity of making a valooable acquaintance. I always did like a man that had the courage of his convictions, and didn't care shucks how many were on the opposite side. Mebbe it ain't so pleasant as prophesying smooth things, as Scripture has it; but it lets you know exactly where a man stands, and that's a kind of knowledge you can put down on the profit side of the account every time. If there's anything on earth that I've no use for, it's a snake in the grass. But speaking of snakes carries my mind back to the Garden of Eden by the air-line express, and I'd just like to remark generally that if the folks there had any moonshine warranted purer silver than this, or any air better sweetened, or any faces built on cleaner lines of beauty" (he looked ostentatiously over Dana's head into space), "than we're enjoying right here in

this wide-awake Nineteenth Century,—why, they're kindly welcome. I don't envy them a mite. I ruther pride myself on knowing when I'm well off."

If this meandering monologue were meant to cover the retreat of inconvenient emotions, and give time for reinforcements of ease and composure to appear, it served its purpose well; but the speaker's face expressed only a kind of amiable vacuity.

Quite opportunely, a servant now came hurriedly from the house with the message:—

"Please, sir, Mrs. Fairfax sent me to tell Mrs. Clavrick and Mrs. Vennor that the buds are beginning to open, and they had better get in before the crowd."

Short as our absence had been, it had sufficed for a noticeable change in four of the cereus-buds. They were less pendent; they seemed to have lifted themselves to look at the circle of eager faces now gathering to look at them; the pure outer petals had parted slightly,—like lips trembling with emotion,—yet enough to allow the fragrant breath to escape and fill the room with its spicy sweetness.

Slowly, yet visibly, the beautiful process of expansion went on; more and more the petals loosened themselves from their close-folding, the opening grew wider, the deep, golden hearts of the inner calyx began to appear; the fragrance grew more intoxicatingly sweet. A hush had fallen on the crowd; their faces were scarcely less gravely intent than if they were assisting at some sacred rite or courtly ceremony; low-breathed exclamations of pleasure and interest alone were heard, but no hum of voices, no light, careless chatter of tongues, no sustained conversation,—the interest was too deep, the pleasure too delicate, for that.

Once, looking up, I saw that Mr. Ennadeen was standing

opposite, not only intently observing an opening blossom, but often looking from its pure petals to Dana Heathcote's face, as if he saw a resemblance between them;—perhaps the subtle, yet real likeness which one detects in sisters, even though they may be, in outward form and coloring, of diverse types. Or was it that his gaze went deeper, down into the maiden's sweet heart of gold, discovering what treasures of love and truth, of faith and fortitude had blossomed there in the deep night of her sorrowful experience?

As I asked myself the question, she lifted her eyes, and met his earnest gaze. A slight flush rose to her cheek, but secure in the absorption of the crowd, she let her eyes rest on his for a moment with a singularly wistful, yearning expression, a sort of mute "How long?" that must have gone very deeply into his heart, for I saw his lips tremble as with swift-rushing words,—which yet could not be uttered. But they were scarcely needed, after all, so expressive was the answering gaze of his deep, dark blue eyes; so soft, so compassionate, withal,—half-read, to swim in tears. In another moment, their expression changed; they were no longer soft and pitying, but clear, serene, steady luminous with encouragement and hope. "Be strong; be patient," they seemed to say.

Dana's eyes fell beneath that steadfast gaze; and a faint smile curved her lips, showing that she read its significance aright: yet she sighed, and moved uneasily in her chair. Something was lacking that she had looked for, but did not find, and drearily missed;—what was it?

As if he understood, yet had no help to give, Mr. Ennanadeen retreated a step or two; the crowd surged between; in a moment, he was lost from view.

The cereus buds were now unfolding almost simultaneously, the laggards having overtaken the prompter ones. Gradually, yet surely, the petals lifted and expanded ; the golden hearts were plainly disclosed; around them the delicately fringed stamens, re-curved as if for their protection, stood on guard. We never knew precisely when the full perfection of the blossom-time had come; but we plainly saw that it was there.

"How long will they last?" asked Honor, drawing a deep breath.

"They remain in perfection scarcely more than an hour," answered our host. "Then they begin to droop as gradually as they have bloomed ; before morning, they will be quite withered."

"It's a short life—and a sweet one," commented Mr. Clavrick, with a touch of sadness.

"Sweet, indeed!" echoed Percy Ellenwood. "But what a waste of sweetness! all lavished on a single hour of a single night!"

"I do not think so," replied Dana, in a low, earnest voice, that could only have been heard by those nearest to her. "What can any flower ask more than to have lived its true life out fully, sweetly, be its time long or short?"

"I cannot follow you there," said Percy, laughingly shaking his head, "you are too high up in the clouds for me. Think what a time this flower has been preparing for its blossoming, what care has been lavished upon it, what an amount of water, air, and sunshine it has consumed, and all for one brief moment, so to speak. I should like the result to be in better proportion to the means."

"What does it matter whether the sweetness be spent in a moment, or spread over two or three days?" persisted

Dana. "So that the flower has attained to the full measure of its sweetness, has fulfilled its destiny, has gladdened the sorrowful night of one heart that loves it, why need it ask or wish for more?"

I could not help glancing at Mr. Ennadeen, to see how he took this gentle insistence on the ideal of a self-forgetting, single-hearted devotion. He was standing with folded arms, looking not only over Dana's head, but straight through everything before him to some far distant but vividly present scene,—I could not but wonder what!

Turning his head, he caught my inquisitive glance, understood it, and answered it with a slow smile, so sad, so inscrutable, that every clue which I had fancied I possessed to the inner heart of his mystery seemed to slip suddenly from my grasp, leaving me in absolute darkness and confusion of mind.

It was Nathalie Ellenwood who answered Dana. "You are quite right," said she, her fair young face lighting up with a certain soft and fine enthusiasm, which was like a revelation to me, so shy and silent had she always been in my presence;—"to be sweet in one's whole measure is the main thing. Its earthly duration is—and should be—in God's hands.

It was plain that the surprise was not on my part alone; Mr. Ennadeen turned and looked at her as if a door or gate had suddenly opened upon some pleasant garden, full of unsuspected bloom and fragrance; his face kindling with interest and admiration that was natural enough, no doubt, but which I half-resented, as if it had been so much subtracted from the sum of his allegiance to Dana.

Nathalie's voice fell to a whisper with the last words, and she colored furiously,—looking, it must be confessed, all

the fairer for it. In the intuitive sympathy of one sweet, unselfish girl's nature with another, she had spoken almost unconsciously, forgetting both herself and her numerous auditors. Recollection had come, and confounded her.

There had been a slight pause after her speech, as is apt to be the case when the sacred Name is spoken unexpectedly in a secular gathering; then Honor started up with a sudden fear.

"I am going home," she cried. "General Fairfax has said that those lovely blossoms will begin to wither in about an hour. I, for one, decline to stay and witness it; I would almost as soon watch a death-bed, just to see how the thing is done! Mrs. Vennor, are you not ready to go?"

I had already risen from my seat, and Dana had followed my example. But, as we turned towards the door, we were waylaid by Mrs. Fairfax with the entreaty that Dana would sing "just one song" before she went.

For the first time in all my acquaintance with her, Dana shrank back and begged to be excused. Poor child! the emotions awakened by the events of the evening had been many and trying, and her heart was still heavily burdened by their weight; to sing before this unsympathizing crowd doubtless seemed well-nigh impossible.

But good, blind Mrs. Fairfax still urged her petition, and would not be denied. "So many are longing to hear you," she pleaded, "and you will give so much pleasure."

And Dana, with her unfailing self-forgetfulness, and readiness to oblige, finally suffered herself to be led to the piano, saying that, though she doubted if she could sing, she would try to play something.

There is no doubt of it, such talent as hers is graciously heaven-sent as a set-off against many trials,—possibly only the more perfectly developed by them. Her first chords were broken and uncertain as the stir of a fitful breeze in the pines; but her touch soon gathered firmness; gradually she forgot her audience; her drooping face lifted; her eyes shone with a deep, inward flame; her whole face was alight and aglow with the sacred fire of genius; I held my breath as I gazed upon it; nothing more wonderful or more beautiful, I thought, was ever seen.

The broken chords slowly, surely grew into richest harmony; by-and-by, a low, clear melody began to untwist itself from their complex sweetness; her lips trembled, parted,—it was a living illustration of Jean Ingelow's—

> "I opened the door of my heart, and behold
> There was music within, and a song."

As usual with her improvisations, the words were very simple, almost nothing in themselves; but, as she sang them, they seemed informed with every beauty and fitness of which song-words are capable.

"O the gladness, O the glory, O the blessing of the light!
Birds are singing in it duly, roses blooming fair and sweet!
But the flower that keeps its fragrance and its beauty for the night,
Do you tell me that its being is one whit the less complete?

"Roses decked in flaming scarlet, deepest crimson, richest gold,
What were they without the presence of the clear, revealing light?
But *this* blossom keeps its color for its sweet heart's inmost fold,
And it lighteth up the darkness with its shining robes of white.

"Roses for the happy-hearted, roses for the loves uncrossed,
For the joys that open brightly in the gladness of the light:
But when sorrow cometh surely, with her shadow and her frost,
Give me flowers that bloom their sweetest for the darkest hour of night!"

Well-acquainted as I was with the exceeding beauty of Dana's voice, it seemed to me that I had never fully heard it before. Its jewel-like clearness, its honey-sweetness, its rich pathos, are unspeakable by any words of mine. A complete hush fell upon the crowd as the first tender, thrilling tones met their ears, which became a very pain of stillness as the song went on. Everywhere I saw wet eyes and falling tears, or faces turned aside to hide them.

And Rolf—Mr. Ennadeen? At first, he listened with a kind of wondering admiration, as if Dana's voice and genius were new to him, or had greatly developed since his earlier knowledge of them; but wonder and admiration were merged in simple, entire enjoyment as the music gradually freed itself from all hindrances of doubt, pain, and weariness, and the voice soared aloft like a bird let loose from a prison, while the singer became unconscious of everything save the relief, the uplift of the exercise of her marvellous gift. He watched her with rapt, breathless interest; he listened as to something too sweet, too precious, to lose one faintest tone, one least significant word. I was glad to witness his evident comprehension and delight. And yet, what was there lacking to my jealous eye?

As the song ended, his glance wandered off absently again, his face darkened with some sudden, painful recollection,— a secret knowledge or dread that was like the drawing of a sombre veil over its masculine beauty. And then, for a moment, his eyes rested on her with a

sad compassion, an ominous sympathy, which made me shiver.

And I told myself that I was done with trying to construe Hugh Ennadeen; I must leave that difficult work to the surer, more skilful hand of time.

Yet, even as I so decided, and as if to show me how little I am my own mistress, but the prey of influences beyond my control, an insidious voice made itself heard in a new theory.

"Can it be," asked this most unseasonable voice, "that he is really guilty of that woful crime: not of deliberate intent, nor even in the sudden fury of passion, but through some ghastly mistake, some fiendish combination of malign circumstances? And, weary of bearing the burden of guilt—even though it be only unintentional guilt—is he here in order to give himself up to justice whenever justice shall please to take him? Did he come in the hope and belief that Dana had forgotten, or ceased to love, as nine out of ten girls would have done in her place?—nay, may he not himself have forgotten, in his dreary wanderings over the world, seeking for oblivion of the past? And now, seeing how true and steadfast her love is, how perfect her trust; and foreseeing what dire woe and horror are coming to her through him, does he shrink back with pity and dread, asking himself if it were not better to vanish again into the night from whence he came, leaving her undisturbed, unenlightened, in her patience of hope, love, and faith? Is *that* the truth, at last!'

I would not listen another moment! With a kind of terror, I hastened to shake myself free of my tormentor, went to say adieu, with thanks, to my hostess, and was glad to escape into the silver peace of the moonlight night

without. Its soft hush was like a cool, kind touch on brow and heart.

As we turned the street-corner, I noticed a boyish figure scurrying away through the tree-shadows, that reminded me of Ben. Well, why not? Half the idle population of Bellerue had swarmed in the neighborhood of the General's, during the evening, dodging in and out of the gates, and peering in at the open windows to catch a glimpse of what was going on within: and my *protégé* might easily be among them. There was no harm in it; and he was endowed with a sufficiently lively curiosity.

XV.

A MYSTERIOUS WHISTLER.

My friends left me at the door of the rectory, with a kindly injunction to betake myself straightway to bed, and dream of nothing less delightful than songs and night-blooming cereuses.

"No doubt you must be lonely in Mr. Vennor's absence," added Mr. Clavrick, kindly, "but as you maintain that your loneliness never lapses into fear, and hard-heartedly refuse to come home with us,—why, the sooner we take ourselves off, the better. Good-night."

I closed the door on their retreating footsteps, locked it, and ascended the dim staircase slowly to my room, dreading the emptiness and loneliness awaiting me;—albeit, a loneliness that had seemed more tolerable here than elsewhere, since the whole place was full of signs of Paul's recent presence, and promise of his speedy return. Where could I be aught but lonely, in his absence; or feel otherwise than as if the soul of my life had fled, leaving me nothing but the inert, lifeless body?

And yet, there was a subtle sweetness in my loneliness, which I tasted with a slow, sombre delight. Not for worlds would I have had it any the less, since that must have implied less love, less oneness, less joy and peace in compan-

ionship. My eyes filled with happy tears to feel how sorely I missed my husband; in that very soreness was the certainty of blended being and the assurance of lasting happiness.

At this point, I suddenly became aware that a sweetly, softly whistled tune had for some time pervaded the air, that I had been unconsciously listening to it even while my thoughts kept on their course undisturbed. Where was it? Certainly not in the street; and yet, how could it be in the house!

The tune—was it familiar? I struggled for a few seconds with various vague, elusive recollections, and then identified it as one into which Dana's fingers sometimes glided when she was dreaming over the piano, and which had been a favorite of Rolf Kenworth's. She had caught it from hearing him whistle it.

I rose to my feet, suddenly reminded of Mrs. Heathcote's mention of a whistling ghost,—reminded, too, of the shadowy figure in the garret, which I had almost forgotten in the lapse of some weeks, undisturbed by anything even approaching to the supernatural. Taking a lamp in my hand, I began to walk slowly through the rooms, listening intently at every point, and doing my best to localize the puzzling sound.

As usual in such cases, it seemed here, there, everywhere, now near, now distant; but by dint of patience and persistence I gradually reached the conclusion that the sound was clearest at the rear of the two halls. The lower one ran the whole length of the main house, and offered no hiding-place in all its length and breadth; the upper one ended, as before mentioned, in a nest of closets; I hastily examined these, with no other result save that the whistling

ceased. Doubtless, the whistler was disturbed by my rummaging.

I went back to my room and sat down to think it over; when again came the whistling, but with a change of tune,—a melody of Dana's own that she had sung to me not long ago. Very deftly executed, too; the invisible whistler was an expert.

Seizing the lamp, I rushed swiftly and noiselessly up into the garret,—swiftly, to give myself no time for fear, and no one else time to escape. My haste availed nothing; no flying shadow met my eyes this time; no heavily closing door smote upon my ears; the garret was dark, silent, and empty, save for the grotesque array of tin and earthenware lying in wait for unlawful raindrops. I could not repress a smile as I looked round on the "motley crew," and wondered what the effect would be of inviting the vestry up in a body to view it. Would Mr. Brune—

The whistling again, close behind me! I started, and turned swiftly round,—too swiftly to take due heed to my steps; my foot came in contact with a huge pastry-bowl, upset it, and sent it rolling across the floor, capsizing two or three smaller craft in its way; altogether producing a discordant din that would be sure to put a musical ghost to flight, with its fingers in its ears.

Apparently, it had that effect, for, after the echoes died away, all was silent. I waited for some moments; then, with an intuitive feeling that the performance—whatever might be its origin—was over for this time, I made the best of my way down to my room.

Not, it scarcely need be said, to sleep. The events of the evening had sent me home in a state of smouldering excitement; the certainty of the presence of a mystery in the

house—ghostly or otherwise—was not likely to lessen it. I began to pace up and down my dressing-room, with a medley of thoughts, questionings, conjectures, about Mr. Ennadeen, Mr. Brune, and the whistling sprite, in my mind,—shifting, combining, and changing, in true kaleidoscopic fashion.

After a few turns, my eyes chanced to fall on the whistle that Ben Harding had given me, which, by way of doing fitting honor to the pretty toy and the giver, I have suspended by a ribbon from my mirror. With a hasty, inconsiderate impulse, I lifted it to my lips, intending to blow very lightly, but the result was a sound that smote sharply, shrilly, upon the deep silence of the night, and made me drop it with a quick sense of shame at having done anything so silly. I wondered if anyone could possibly be abroad at this hour, to be startled by it, and question what it meant. Scarcely, for the streets had long been empty and silent; the city seemed hushed in absolute repose.

But, nay; there was a rush of swift footsteps on the pavement below; they mounted the steps; a hand was laid on the doorknob; someone was trying to enter. My first impulse was to keep quiet; then reflecting that the next thing would probably be a ring at the door-bell, rousing the servants, and bringing them upon the scene, I put my head out of the window, with the inquiry, "Who is there?"

"It's me, m'm," was the answer, in Ben's well-known voice. "What's the matter?"

"What should be the matter?" I returned, evasively. "How came you here at this time of night?"

"Why, didn't yer whistle for me?" The intonation betokened vast surprise.

Reflecting that further conversation between the window

and the doorstep might be indiscreet, and that the boy's alacrity in my service deserved something better than a smothered, "Be off with you," I went down, opened the door, and bade him come in.

"Didn't yer whistle?" he reiterated, eyeing me keenly.

"Yes, Ben, I did whistle," I confessed, not without some mortification. "I was alone and wakeful, and a little disturbed by—by something; and so, happening to see the whistle, I tried it, in sheer thoughtlessness, not in the least minding what I was about. I never thought of calling you nor anyone; and how you came to hear and answer, is what I cannot understand."

"Oh, there's nothin' strange about that," said Ben. "I follered yer home from the General's; I know'd yer was all alone in the house; and I—I kept my ears open,—that's all."

"It was very kind of you; I little thought that I was under such faithful guardianship, or that such Ariel-like service" (Ben grinned) "was at hand. But don't keep it up any longer. Go home, and go to bed."

"Oh, I ain't a-sp'ilin' for want of sleep; don't yer trouble about me," said Ben, reassuringly. "I can ketch a nap anywhere, any time o' day; and I ain't partic'lar whether it's on boards or feathers; in two seconds I don't know one from t'other. Wouldn't it make you easier, now, m'm, if I was to lay down here at the foot o' the stairs till morning? Yer can bet yer life nobody'll get in 'thout my knowin' it. If I do sleep like a top, I wake as easy as a cat; nothin' stirs round me that I don't hear, an' put a name to, afore I goes on sleepin'."

A thought struck me. "Have you really been in the neighborhood ever since I came home, Ben?"

"Every minute, m'm."

"Have you heard anybody whistling anywhere on the premises?"

Ben stared. "Whistlin'? No, m'm; I guess not."

"Ben, do you know this?"—I lightly hummed an air.

"It's Mr. Rolf's tune," responded Ben, promptly. "I've heard him whistle it lots o' times."

"Ben, I heard someone whistling that tune not long ago in this house."

Ben opened his lips, and closed them again without a word, looking so dazed that I regretted my confidential impulse. Why burden the boy with the knowledge of a mystery that he could not possibly help to elucidate.

"At least, it *seemed* to be in the house," I hastened to add, "though it could not have been. It was one of those strange freaks of sound, which turn out to be the most natural thing in the world when one gets at their explanation."

Ben sat silent, considering the matter with a very doubtful, disturbed face.

"So now run home," I continued, lightly; "we will defer farther consideration of the subject until morning. Positively, the clock is striking two. It is time we were both in bed and asleep."

"Did it—did it frighten ye?" asked Ben, upon whose mind my last sentences had made no impression.

"Well, no, I think not. It startled me a little, because it seemed so odd and inexplicable."

"What did ye do?" he asked, with a kind of troubled curiosity.

"What should I do but try to find out where it came from?" I replied, smiling. "And probably it was some vague notion that one whistle ought to ferret out another—

on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief—that impelled me to try your whistle, Ben."

"Please, Mrs Vennor, *please* let me stay here the rest of the night!" he suddenly broke out in fervent entreaty. "I'll lay down right in front of your door, an' you can jest go to sleep like a baby; there won't be no more whistlin', nor nothin', to disturb ye, I'll bet."

Had my story infected the boy with such a degree of terror that he dared not go out again into the night! Yet his anxiety seemed rather for me than himself:—or was his proposal to stay on guard at my door prompted by the feeling that in such nearness to me there would be a comfortable sense of companionship, vastly preferable to the loneliness of the street? Yet how reconcile this hypothesis with his apparent confidence in his ability to prevent further disturbance? On the whole, was not Ben almost as much of an enigma as anything else,—sharp, slippery, homeless (or worse than homeless) waif that he undoubtedly was, in spite of some excellent qualities? When should I find the key to the hidden things of his life?

"Please, please,m'm, won't ye let me stay?" he pleaded again, with a fervor that it was difficult to deny, even though I felt it to be foolish to yield.

"If you really desire it so much, and will sleep on the couch in the library"—I began, hesitatingly.

"I'll sleep anyhow, anywhere, ye say," interrupted he, with a look and tone of such relief and satisfaction that my hesitation vanished.

There are houses in Bellerue where the presence of Ben Harding would not act as a soporific, but rather as an incitement to added wakefulness; nevertheless—whether on account of my blind faith in his guardianship, or because

there are limits to human excitement and emotion, ending inevitably in exhaustion—I slept, to borrow his phrase, "like a baby," undisturbed by sounds or visions, thoughts or anxieties.

I slept late, and woke refreshed. When I went down stairs he was already gone.

Paul came home that afternoon. He listened thoughtfully to my account of the night's adventures, and sat still for some moments, silently turning it over in his mind.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, at last. "There is an old, disused pipe or conduit somewhere in this house, which conveys sounds to us from some point in the neighborhood. I am going to look for it at once."

Which he did, with his wonted energy and thoroughness, sounding the walls, and thrusting various improvised probes into every crack and cranny, from cellar to garret; —and finding nothing.

"All the same, I am convinced that it exists; and we shall hit upon it some day;" he insisted, when at length considerations touching the inexpediency of pulling down the house on our heads in his search compelled him to desist from it, with great reluctance. "That is the only hypothesis which explains the matter, without resorting to the supernatural, which I decline to do. To conclude the whole matter," pursued Paul, "next time that the mysterious whistler is kindly disposed to favor us with a tune, I hope I may be there to hear!"

A hope wherein I fully concurred. But, up to the present time, it remains unfulfilled.

XVI.

AN EXPLANATION.

I had been softly playing the "Angels' Chorus" from Elijah, seeing as in a dream the stony hollow of the torrent's bed, where the lonely prophet watched the slow drying-up of the waters that had quenched his thirst while the ravens brought him food; and wondering if even his faith and trust could have made any more lovely harmony in his soul than that which Mendelssohn's conception of the scene had created, when there came a ring at the door, and my hands fell from the keys.

"Is Mr. Vennor in?" The inquiry was made in tones, not loud, but clear and resonant as a bell.

"No, sir; he went out a few minutes ago," explained Annie.

"Then ask Mrs. Vennor if she will kindly see me for a moment," was the next utterance.

I stepped to the parlor door. "Come in, Mr. Brune; can I do anything for you?"

"Thanks. I wish to leave a message for Mr. Vennor,—one in which you are not uninterested. Everything is arranged for the laying of the corner-stone on Thursday. We have been a long time in getting to it, but large bodies—

especially complex bodies—move slowly." He smiled a little satirically.

"I know that you have done everything in your power to hasten the movement," said I. "If the new rectory ever becomes a fixed fact, we shall be your debtors for no end of energy and perseverance."

I spoke heartily, and with good reason. When Mr. Brune ranged himself with Paul, as regards the rectory, he did it whole-heartedly, and has since fought its battle in a masterly way. For we were too sanguine in assuming that, when the funds were in hand, and the vote to build had been passed, no reason for delay remained. The architect's plan immediately became the target for such a rattling fire of criticism, and such a sapping and mining of proposed alterations, that the harmonious beginning of the work seemed farther off than ever until Mr. Brune came prominently to the front, bringing humor, sarcasm, good sense, and quiet diplomacy to bear on his colleagues, singly and collectively, with so much skill and force as to make victory perch on his banner in the end.

I know not to what his action was due,—probably to a mixture of minor motives rather than any single, powerful one. It was natural, in the outset, that he should think it his duty to act in concert with those to whom he owed his position; but, being unquestionably a gentleman, both by instinct and education, it was inevitable that he should eventually find himself more in sympathy with his rector than his colleagues. Moreover, there is a conviction, even in the secular mind, that the means and methods of a political caucus are unsuited to the management of church affairs. Without crediting Mr. Brune with excessive scrupulousness, it is easy to conceive that, when it came to the

point of continuous choosing between the aims and ways of Paul and those of Mr. Pollard, et cetera, he should either side with the former, or bestir himself to find a compromise.

Whether this analysis be correct or no,—and there may be deep influences at work of which it takes no cognizance,—it is a pleasant fact that Paul gets more and more of aid and comfort from Mr. Brune, in his calm, austere, clear-headed fashion; which, if it be somewhat lacking in personal warmth, evinces a good deal of confidence and esteem. Paul, for his part, likes his young vestryman much, even while he confesses that he is still, in a certain degree, a sealed book to him.

His dark, impressive face lighted up with a faint smile at my grateful words. "You give me too much credit," he replied; "it is to Mr. Vennor's patience, discretion, and perseverance, that the rectory will be chiefly due. Do you think that Thursday will suit his convenience? I think the ceremony should take place this week."

"I think he has no engagement to interfere," returned I; "and Thursday is certainly the best day. Friday has an ominous sound to some ears,—I never think of it for myself;—and Saturday savors of being driven into a corner."

"I think all days are alike to me," he remarked, sombrely.

"What!—Sundays and week-days, working days and festive days!" said I, lightly.

"Even festive days—or hours—may be unexpectedly spoiled," rejoined he, bitterly.

He bent his eyes absently on the floor for a moment, then lifted them to my face, with the expression of one who takes a sudden resolution, or gives way to a strong impulse.

"Mrs. Vennor, you were present when the promise of a pleasant evening was broken, to me; and doubtless you thought that I was more to be blamed than pitied. I am not much given to explaining my actions; but there is that in you which makes me loath to suffer needlessly in your estimation. May I say to you—what I have not said to anyone else—that I could not bring myself to take the hand which I firmly believe to be that of a murderer, and a particularly dastardly one? How could I, as a gentleman, do otherwise than I did?"

"I will not affect to misunderstand you," said I. "You think that Mr. Ennadeen is Rolf Kenworth, and a guilty man."

"Most emphatically, I do."

"Were you so well acquainted with Rolf, then, as to be perfectly sure of his identity?"

"By no means; I knew him very little. It is in the eyes and acts of those who knew him best that I find the sufficient proof of his identity. Two of them are intimate friends of yours; can you affirm that either has the slightest doubt who he really is?"

"The doubts and convictions of others are not under discussion," replied I, quietly; "I answer only for myself. But granting that he is Rolf, and that he is guilty, what is he here for?"

Mr. Brune frowned darkly, and answered impulsively:—

"He is here to see—one on whose pure face his eyes are not worthy to rest for an instant."

I dared not look at him lest he should see in my face how completely he had betrayed himself. It needed not another word to tell me that he, too, loves Dana Heathcote with all the concentrated force and fire of a reserved, but

deep and intense, nature. "He is a man, after all," thought I, with a certain pleasure,—"a man with a loving, sorrowful, human heart, and not the mixture of steel and ice that he has sometimes seemed to be." Yet I felt a little dismayed at the discovery, too; seeing what complications might arise from this new factor in the working out of events.

"Have you no faith, then, in the intuitive insight of purity, in its power to detect, and its impulse to recoil from, its opposite?" I asked.

"To the pure all things are pure, they reflect their own whiteness upon everything near them," he answered, his eyes softening to a degree inconceivable to one acquainted only with their customary cool brightness. His voice, too, was full of that heart-warmth of which I had always felt the painful lack.

"That is true to a certain extent," replied I, "but not so far as you carry it, I think. Mr. Brune, it is impossible for me to have any opinion whether Rolf Kenworth be or be not hidden under the name and person of Hugh Ennadeen, since I never knew him; but I tell you frankly, if there is any truth in physiognomy, any indications of character in voice and manner, any certainty in a woman's intuitions, he is no wilful, wicked thief and assassin."

He looked at me sombrely for a moment.

"Mrs. Vennor!" he exclaimed, with an unusual heat in his voice, "if I were to bring you the proof of his guilt that I possess, you would be as certain of it as I am; you would admit that there is no room for doubt."

"At least, I suppose that I may be pardoned for keeping my own opinion until I do see it," rejoined I, smiling.

"I swore that I would never produce it except under con-

ditions not yet existent. Otherwise, I might be tempted to —but no! I could not do that, even to right myself in your eyes!"

"Perhaps I should not see the thing with yours, if you did. But, Mr. Brune, you need no righting in my eyes. The same instinct which tells me that Mr. Ennadeen is not —what you believe—tells me also that you are a man of honor, honest in your belief, and upright in your motives. And I am disposed to trust it, in both cases. Do you advise me to the contrary?"

"Heaven forbid!" replied he, rising as if to go. "If you are misled, it will be by the same paths on which angels go on their errands of mercy and compassion. A thousand thanks for your good opinion of me; it is the only one with which I have any right to concern myself. I hope that you will be able to keep it."

"I am likely to do so, I think. You have perhaps learned that my convictions are not easily overcome. But I wish—"

I broke short off, a little surprised at the frankness with which I had been about to speak to one whose moment of guarded confidence did not lift him above the plane of ordinary acquaintanceship.

"May I beg you to finish that sentence," said he, persuasively. "I assure you that I shall only feel honored by any degree of friendly candor."

But I was still silent.

"Then you refuse me your friendship?" he went on, looking down upon me with a kind of sombre softness, singularly fascinating in contrast with his ordinary cool—not to say, chill—demeanor; and making me wonder if, given an equal chance, he would not have been a powerful rival, even to Rolf Kenworth.

To this question, it was impossible to answer explicitly. While I did not wish to seem either unsympathetic or suspicious, I was by no means ready to enter into a compact of friendship with Mr. Brune. So I could only recur to the previous question and give the delayed answer, altered enough to rob it of any special significance.

"I was only about to wish that you were less sure of your theory; we are none of us infallible."

"*Do* you wish it?" rejoined he, still with that most unwonted softness of tone and look. "Then I will try to obey you. In return, if you will try to infect Miss Heathcote with a like uncertainty as to *her* theory, I think you might do her a real service."

I gave him a quick, keen glance. So it was Dana that he was seeking to influence through me! It was for her that this melancholy sweetness, this attractive softness, was really meant! Like the Eastern poet, he would have said: If thou art not the rose, thou hast dwelt with her!

He met the glance with one as keen, and a bewildering smile. "Do not forget what your instinct tells you," said he, looking directly into my eyes, whilst his own fairly scintillated in their dark splendor. "Do you care to hear what mine tells me?"

"A man's instinct is not his strong point," said I, lightly, retreating a little, and mentally shaking myself free of the magnetic power of that dark, deep look; "it is his reason that we want. I shall take pleasure in hearing your reasons for whatever you please, Mr. Brune."

With an instant resumption of his ordinary manner, he replied: "Of reasons I have many more that I now have the time to set forth; I suspect that I am already late for the appointment that I am on my way to keep. I hope to

have the pleasure of seeing you at the laying of the corner-stone. My compliments to Mr. Vennor. Good afternoon."

He bowed and was gone.

I sat for a considerable time in meditative silence. It was difficult to reconcile former impressions of Mr. Brune with those of the recent interview. Though he did not wear his heart upon his sleeve, it seemed to be certain that he had one; which, for some reason or other, was just now in a most unwontedly expansive mood.

When I told Paul all about it,—in the quiet twilight-hour which is almost our only opportunity for real heart-communion, since he gives all the rest of his time, day and evening, to his work,—he surprised me by saying:—

"I regret that you did not meet him half-way. I have no liking for what is called a 'woman's man,' nor is Mr. Brune likely ever to come into that category; but there is such a thing as being too much of a man's man. In his office and his hotel, he has to deal exclusively with men; nor does he go into society much. The friendship of a good woman might do a great deal for him, by calling out the finer, softer nature that does not get fair play now."

"But, Paul, I am not a good woman."

He answered me only with a quizzical smile.

"Don't laugh; it is a serious matter. You don't know what struggles I have within myself to be decently, measurably good. The good and evil in me are continually bickering, like an ill-assorted married couple. Often I am near to believing that, if one cannot be wholly righteous, it would be more comfortable to be wholly evil."

"The wholly evil doesn't exist, so far as our cognizance

goes," replied he, decidedly. "Even Dives was good enough to wish to save his friends from the fate that he had brought on himself. As for comfort, I should advise you to shake hands with your desk and your easel, your work-basket and your *menus*, and spend at least a month in the open air."

"You think I am growing morbid!"

"I think you are too much given to introspection. One's mental processes may be profoundly interesting, but too much study of them is unhealthy."

"I doubt if you are so conscious of the 'triple chord of being' as I am."

"Very likely not. All the same, that trio may possibly find enough of good work to do without forever contemplating its own twist! Self-analysis may be a good thing in moderation; carried to excess, it is like the botanist's dissection of a flower; it determines the species, but destroys the life and beauty. In fact, analysis seems to me to be the intellectual vice of our days, tending to kill all the freshness and spontaneity in life, in literature, in art. It is well said: 'Modern culture is criticism.' Too much of it is self-criticism. A little more healthy objectivity would be a blessing, in my opinion."

"'Healthy objectivity'!" I retorted, glad to turn the tables transiently on my critic; "that means, in your case, spending your whole time and strength for others, and never thinking of yourself. Honor asked me yesterday when you were going to take your vacation."

"My vacation, indeed! My compliments to her, and I do not own any such property. Nor do I need it. I breathe well, eat well, sleep well, and I know not what it is to feel tired; poor qualifications those on which to base

a claim for a vacation! Think how my estimable vestry would receive it. Fancy the vast, illimitable astonishment of Mr. Jackman. Picture Mr. Pollard's vain attempt to see the need of it through his screwed-up eyes. Imagine Mr. Lasker cyphering up the cost. Listen to Mr. Godine's blunt demand for the explanation that he is unable to comprehend. Think of Messrs. Asher and Nagle, one darkly hinting that the parish is going to ruin, the other with his legs apart and his hands in his pocket, vaguely contemplating the ceiling. Finally, pity Mr. Darcy's painful endeavor to favor both sides of the question."

"You forget Mr. Brune."

Paul's eyes sparkled with mischief. "*He* won't forget that my wife turned a cold shoulder on his friendly overtures! He will seize upon the opportunity to avenge himself through me."

"Nonsense! But, seriously, you know that I do not believe much in friendships between men and women, anything more than can be taken for granted and not sentimentalized about."

"Neither do I, except where both are well protected by a prior attachment Mr. Brune, you affirm, is in love with Dana Heathcote. As for you—are you in love with anyone, little woman?"

"The witness is not obliged to criminate her——Paul! my poor violets!—they are crushed into next-to-nothingness!"

"They ought to be used to it by this time," was his laughing rejoinder, as he marched off to the study.

XVII.

THE CORNER-STONE OF THE HOME.

An unexpectedly large number of people had gathered on the pleasant turf-carpeted and elm-shaded lot next the church, to witness the laying of the corner-stone of the new rectory with due religious observance ;—a ceremony which few thought to be necessary, or even expedient, for the eminently sufficient reason that it was without precedent in their experience. I saw Mr. Pollard standing well in the forefront of the assembly, looking as if on the point of going to sleep, as his manner is when most keenly cognizant of everything around him; and Mr. Jackman was close by, with his hands in his pockets and a general air of having obligingly dropped in for a moment while on his way to business of more importance. The rest of the vestry were a little apart, doing their best, apparently, to look like the most indifferent of spectators. Mr. Darcy alone stood by Paul, his placid, kindly face mildly expressive of real sympathy with the occasion.

Mr. Brune, who had been busy with various preliminary arrangements, would perhaps have joined him; but, spying me in the crowd, he came to guide me to a better position for seeking and hearing, and remained by my side. I was not surprised at the attention, nor greatly flattered by it,—Dana Heathcote was on my other hand. And, as she turned

to speak to me, he could easily look straight into her lovely face, almost at its softest and sweetest thus,—an expression that he would doubtless have given his most valued possession to call up for himself.

Yet Dana is very civil, very gentle to him in these days. The ice of her earlier demeanor is melted a little; there is no warmth, but there is a studious care not to be noticeably chill. She once explained that it was chiefly on Paul's account; Mr. Brune was showing himself so loyal to his rector that she thought he deserved the recognition of all like-minded persons.

"I did not expect to see so many people," said he, casting a critical glance over the crowd. "In spite of Mr. Vennor's wish that there should be no formal advertising of the ceremony,—nothing to call out anything but a simple, informal parish gathering, to assist at an equally simple, informal service,—I venture to say that many members of the other parishes are present, not to mention a considerable number of persons that are emphatically extra-parochial. It appears that, even in these days of newspapers and telegraphs, the birds of the air do still carry the matter."

Mr. Brune's tones sank almost to a whisper with his last words, for Paul now came to the front of the little platform, Prayer-book in hand, and there was an immediate hush of the pervasive hum of voices. The silence was so complete that the cheerful twitter of a bird in a near tree-top was plainly heard.

Paul began with the three first verses of the one-hundred and twenty-seventh psalm; next came two or three collects of appropriate import; then followed the hymn:

> "We build with fruitless cost, unless
> The Lord the pile sustain."

Dana lent the pure sweetness of her soprano to the singing; after a moment, Mr. Brune joined it with a pleasant basso. As they thus sang, one on either side of me, I was curiously conscious of the long interval between the two voices, the harmony true enough in its way, but too remote to be satisfactory. It struck me that there was an oddly pertinent suggestion in it!

The hymn ceased; Paul closed the book, looked round upon the upturned, listening faces, and spoke:—

"'*Except the Lord build the house, their labor is but lost that build it.*'

"It is a saying that falls almost meaninglessly upon the ears of our modern, materialistic builders; a saying whereat some of them, perhaps, will shake their heads with contempt. 'If the wood, brick, and stone, be good,' say they, 'if the work of architect, mason, and carpenter be well done, what do we need more? What room is there for supernatural aid?' Yea, truly—'if.' In that little word lies all the force of the argument. But the bearing of the argument is not quite in accordance with the intent. The wood, clay, and stone, who made them? The brains that plan, the hands that execute, who made them? The forces that hold the good materials together in harmonious cohesion; the laws to be observed in construction, who made them? Unless the answer be 'chance,'—and I will not insult your intellects by the supposition—it follows that the Lord must needs have His part in every building that rises toward the sky, even though there may be neither private nor public recognition thereof, in act or in thought. In this primal sense, therefore, it is true that: 'Except the Lord build the house, their labor is but lost that build it.' Without His

aid, no dwelling nor temple, no court nor mart, however grand, however humble, can lift its façade on our city streets, or make the wilderness to blossom as the rose with the clustering walls and roofs of pleasant human homes.

"And homes are the best earthly things that Our Father gives His children. They come even before the temple, in place as in time; because men can do without the temple, but they cannot do without the home. They can make a temple of every home; they can consecrate it with prayer and praise and the daily offering of honest, useful, cheerful lives; but they cannot, in any literal, every-day sense, make a home of the temple. And without homes there is neither public nor private weal. The home is both the root and flower of all that is happiest and healthiest in our earthly life; from it flow out all good, pure, sweet influences; to it they converge; it is their final cause, so to speak. For what are the art and aim of good government but to make happy, peaceful, prosperous homes For them it labors; and on them it rests with far more safety and surety than on standing armies. It is of vital necessity, therefore, both to the individual and the nation, that we make the home 'first pure, then peaceable,' then active in every good work and good influence. And how are we to do this so effectually as to invoke the Lord's aid both for its building and its preservation, for its outward shell and its inward kernel, for the house and the household! Modern art and science have made many and valuable discoveries, they have added much to the comfort and beauty of life, but they have found no better way to make a true Home than to fill it with Christian influences, and order it on Christ-like lines. Other ways have been talked of, theorized about, but their superiority is not yet demonstrated; and we, my brothers,

may well refuse to exchange the old paths for the new ones until we have such demonstration. It is still the better wisdom to say with our lips and feel in our hearts that: 'Except the Lord build the house, their labor is but lost that build it.'

"And of such lost labor, alas! is there one of us who does not know something, perhaps too much? Homes built of poor, dishonest, meretricious materials: put together by the reluctant, grudging hands of oppressed labor and the iron fists of wealth and power. Homes unlovely with passion, pride, hatred, selfishness, tyranny; wherein the atmosphere is always winter, and the habit always strife. I need not describe, I need not particularize; you have but to look about you as you go on your daily walks, and see what comes of neglecting the warning, 'Except the Lord build the house, their labor is but lost that build it.'

"How fitting, then, is it that the corner-stone of the home, not less than of the temple, should be laid with prayer and hymn, and God's blessing invoked on the work thus begun, that it may turn out to be strong, true, beautiful work, the worthy offering of diligent hands and honest hearts, the fitting habitation of noble and beautiful lives! And if this be true of every home, surely it is not less so of the one which the members of a parish unite in building for him who is to minister unto them in His name. If the Lord do not help them build, if He do not put it into their hearts to build for Him in building for His servant, then, in truth, we may say that their labor is lost.

"Beloved, I know not, you know not, who is to occupy this home. Life is full of unlooked-for events, 'ye build, ye build, but ye enter not in' has many striking illustrations in our experience. The Lord only knows how many of us

will live to see the completion of this house. He only sees in what remote spot of earth people unknown to us may even now be entering upon the path which is to lead into these yet unreared walls. It is with no merely personal, selfish motive, therefore, that I ask you to think kindly to-day of the future inmates of this home ; to pray that they may be of 'the beloved of the Lord who shall dwell safely by Him,' and that you and they may so live and labor together that you may all finally come to that Everlasting Home, which is also the Everlasting Temple, whose walls are salvation and whose gates are praise.

"Finally, let us remember that Jesus Christ is the true, tried, precious corner-stone of the Christian life and the Christian hope; the firm foundation upon which we can alone build safely, durably, happily, whether we build with hand work or heart work, with brick and mortar or faith and love, with fair, shapely, polished stones, or fair, shapely, luminous lives."

Paul took up the trowel and hammer. With a slight creaking of the derrick, the stone was slowly lowered to its place, and, striking it thrice, he said:

"In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, we lay this corner-stone of the Rectory of St. Clement's Parish, beseeching Him that this work of ours, being ordered by His governance, may be righteous in His sight and prospered by His blessing: Unto Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Immediately there was a burst of song; the grand old Doxology, swelled by hundreds of voices, flooded the whole place with the gracious tide of thanksgiving. Everybody sang with the full measure of his more or less of tuneful gift;

and in the strong, resistless flow of the united currents all minor discords and differences were merged and lost, even as we trust that all these human dissonances may be merged and lost in the eternal harmony.

Paul lifted his hand:—

"*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with us all evermore.*"

"Amen," responded the people.

There was a moment of reverent silence, then the crowd began to break up into groups, many persons gathered around Paul with congratulations and compliments.

For me, I could not immediately look up. Those solemn words: "Ye build, ye build, but ye enter not in," would not at once cease to send their chill echoes through my heart and inopportune tears to my eyes. What change, loss and sorrow, that entering-not-in might involve!

With a quickness of divination that I did not expect, Mr. Brune stooped over, and said very low, almost in my ear:—

"Don't think about it, Mrs. Vennor; such thinking never yet hindered or hastened the steps of the coming event."

"Not even prayerful thinking?" returned I, lifting my wet eyes to his; which for once beamed softly, kindly on me, "like the glow of a household fire burning within a cave."

"Upon my soul, I wish I knew!" exclaimed he, earnestly. "I would pray for—something—with a persistency and a fervency that should avail."

"Try it," said I, gravely. "It is the only way to know."

His dark eyes deepened into a profoundly meditative look; but he could not answer, for Mrs. Fairfax now came to me with outstretched hands.

"What a simple, suitable, beautiful service!" she cried; adding with her customary mixture of earnestness and whimsicality, "I am really sorry that our house is not yet to be built, that we might have a similar one. Would it be worth while to pull it down and build it over, do you think?"

"It seems to be a case where the will must be taken for the deed," said I.

"I hope the Lord does it!" said she.

"Undoubtedly; where there is truly will, and not merely weak wish."

"That is a hard saying and cuts to the quick," she responded, ruefully. "You are only a Job's comforter, after all, Mrs. Vennor. Ah, there is a breach in the human wall around your husband; I am going to see if he is equally soothing."

And she went quickly in his direction.

Mr. Jackman confronted him at the same moment. "It has really been quite a success;—I may say, a great success," said he, loudly, in pleased and patronizing tones that grated on my ears—needlessly, perhaps. "I should say that there were at least five hundred people present. I did not expect to see fifty."

"I trust that there was *One*," returned Paul, with a face and tone so gravely sweet that Mr. Jackman stared, and stepped back, uncomprehending and silenced.

Mrs. Fairfax slipped into the vacant place, on the arm of Mr. Ennadeen, whom she had encountered on her way, and taken along with her. Their congratulations were evidently warm and sincere, but the voices were too quietly modulated to reach our ears.

Dana was now talking with a friend who had joined her,

but her eyes followed them with unconscious intentness; seeing which Mr. Brune's face first flushed angrily, then slowly darkened into troubled gloom, and finally became so sad that it awoke all my sympathies. The change was so marked that I could not help noticing and watching it.

Suddenly becoming conscious of my observation, he smiled bitterly. "Do I interest you so much? I need not ask whether the interest is born of pity, or curiosity,—or" He made a slight pause, as if not quite certain that it would be well to finish the sentence as intended.

"Friendship," said I, obeying a sudden impulse, without stopping to see what good account of itself it could give to my understanding.

He gave me a keen, surprised, questioning look. "You have changed your mind since Monday." Then, with unmistakable sincerity: "Thanks. Never man needed a good woman's friendship more."

I did not answer, as I had done to Paul, that I was not a good woman; I could better bear with that sort of overvaluation from Mr. Brune; and certainly, I did mean to be, or to do, good to him, so far as was in my power. For it was no merely personal feeling, no weak surrender to a subtle fascination, nor even a swiftly rising flood of sympathy, that had prompted my unreflecting speech; it was simply a strong, sudden intuition that I might be of real use to this man, who was evidently struggling with some strange, contradictory influences and temptations, and who seemed instinctively to turn to me with confidence and for sympathy. And if my attraction for him was far less in myself than in my nearness and dearness to Dana Heathcote, so much the better. He would yield to my influence the more readily; and there was no danger that the friend-

ship would take the devious—not to say, downward—course too often traversed by such friendships. Besides, I remembered what Paul had said; his approval was sure; and I could always trust both his instincts and his wisdom.

He now joined us, with the Clavricks, Heathcotes, Miss Deane, and others. They all began to talk to me at once, mingling together comments and congratulations upon the beauty of the service, the perfect weather, et cetera; under cover of which Mr. Brune drew Paul aside for a few minutes. Then he came towards us, hat in hand.

"I must say good-bye to you all for two weeks, or more I start for Washington this evening,—I have a case in the Supreme Court to look after,—and I have barely time to get ready. I am glad" (he looked directly in my face) "to take with me such pleasant memories as those of to-day."

He shook hands warmly with Paul and me, bowed to the rest of the party, letting his eyes linger wistfully on Dana's fair face, turned, and went off with a firm, brisk step.

Miss Deane looked after his erect figure, and spoke out her thoughts with characteristic frankness.

"How much Mr. Brune is improved! He used to be the most saturnine of men; to look into his face was like looking into the dark mouth of a cavern; one could not so much as guess what was hidden within, but was apt to take it for granted that it must be something grewsome. He is getting to be positively agreeable, yet he looks sad, too; I wonder if he has met with any special loss or grief lately!"

There was no answer; apparently, no one present was authorized to speak for Mr. Brune's personal experiences. Only, Paul said, after a moment:—

"My acquaintance with Mr. Brune is too recent for me to

find much change in him; to me he has always been both courteous and kind. I like and esteem him much."

The party now turned homeward in a body; but one and another diverged at various points by the way, until Paul and I were left alone.

"It was very nice, dear," then said I, giving his arm an impulsive squeeze.

"I am glad if you liked it, sweetheart," answered he, smiling down upon me.

We walked on for several moments in that happy silence which is better than speech; then he asked:—

"Do you want to know what Brune said to me?"

"If you like," returned I, a little surprised.

"He began by congratulating me upon what he was pleased to term my 'complete victory.' He affirmed that of all the doubtful, scornful, indifferent, or believing persons who had come to witness the ceremony of to-day, not one had gone away feeling otherwise than that it had been good to be there. He could speak the more confidently because he had begun by being among the doubtful himself, although it was not necessary to assure me that he had kept his sentiments strictly confined to their legitimate domain."

"Well?"

"I laughingly assured him that he had not kept them from me; but that I owed him all the more grateful thanks for his steady help and countenance, without which I could hardly have got on so well. He replied that I owed him nothing; on the contrary, he owed me more than he could express or repay,—"

Paul hesitated.

"I know without the telling," interposed I. "He said that your earnest sermons, and the still more earnest ser-

mon of your life, had awakened him to new ideas of life and duty; that he was unavoidably impelled to contrast your standard with his own, to ask what made the difference, and consider whether it were not to be aimed at for himself."

"He did say something a little like that," rejoined Paul, humbly. "He gave me cause to feel very glad and grateful that I had been enabled to do him some little good; for as I said just now, I like Brune."

"And is that all?"

"By no means; the important part is to come. First, he gave me a bit of information. He said that my wife had just done him the honor to permit him to consider her as his friend."

"Indeed! Were you struck dumb with surprise?"

"Not quite. I retained enough of composure to congratulate him—sincerely. I added that I know of no one who has a higher standard of friendship, or tries to live up to it more faithfully."

"As we are in the street, perhaps you will be good enough to take my courtesy down to the ground for granted!"

"With pleasure. Then he asked my permission to write to her, as he would have no opportunity to ask herself; their conversation had been interrupted before he had been able to thank her properly for her goodness. He said furthermore that he knew it did not matter to which one of us he preferred his quest, our oneness being patent to all observers."

"That was handsomely said—and done."

"So I thought. I gave him my cordial permission to write when and what he chose. He thanked me with much feeling, and—that is all."

"*Is* it all? Have you no comment, no counsel, no warning, to give?"

"None; unless it be that though I congratulated Brune, I am not sure that I congratulate you. The man is aching for a discreet, sympathizing confidant,—a woman, because in matters of the heart men do not confide in men;—he is going to hang heavily on your hands, to make large drafts upon your sympathies. When a reserved, self-contained nature does allow itself to overflow, it is apt to do it thoroughly; it is like opening the gates that have shut in a lake. No doubt you will do him good, but it will not be without cost to yourself,—cost of time, trouble, thought, feeling. He is not a man easy to influence; you will have to exert your strength. Whatever he may become in the future, he is at present a man of much egotism, who is likely to be exacting in friendship, to regard a friend as an annex to his own personality rather than as having a distinct one of her own. He will take all that he can get; it is a question with me how much he will give. That you are likely to find out. Finally, dearie, when your friends distress, disappoint, or weary you, be it through their fault or your failure, remember that you are but one instrument in God's hands. He has others to produce, at need."

"Yes, that is a comfort. I am apt to think it is all my fault when things go wrong with my friends. Perhaps I, too, am in danger of regarding them as only 'an annex to my own personality!' I will remember that wise saying of yours."

"We all need to remember, at times, that we are nowhere told to work out anybody's salvation but our own. We can lend a helping hand, but the real work has to be done by each individual soul."

"Sometimes that seems so hard! We would so gladly do it for them, if we could!"

"Would it be any kindness, think you, to carry a child always, so that it could never learn to walk?"

"I suppose not. But, Paul, to go back a little;—I thought that you liked Mr. Brune very much."

"Well, do I not?"

"You have been saying some very hard things about him."

"The nearer a thing comes to us, the more closely we look at it. As my vestryman, I did not need to subject Brune to a very strict examination; as a candidate for my wife's friendship, it is necessary to put him—especially his faults—under a microscope, so to speak. Do not look so troubled; I do not find them to be so many, nor of such a nature, that I am inclined to say to you: draw back. On the contrary, I bid you: Godspeed! I believe that there is a deal of latent good in him, which a woman's gentle touch will soonest set free. I can trust yours."

"Paul, there is no one in all the world like you!"

"Probably not—for you," was the smiling answer.

XVIII.

A LETTER.

I came in, heated and dusty, from a long walk, to find a letter in an unknown hand lying on my desk; doubtless Paul had put it there. A glance at the post-mark told me not only whence it came, but from whom.

There is a certain pleasurable excitement in opening a first letter: What will be its character, and how much will it reveal of that of the writer? we more or less consciously inquire in the brief pause between reception and opening. Will it strengthen or weaken the bond which has brought it into being? Will it be a fair outlook over a pleasant land, or a gray glimpse of a bleak, barren desert?

It was with some such feelings that I held Mr. Brune's letter in my hand for a few moments before opening it. I vaguely wondered if it would afford any justification for my impulsively offered friendship,—an offer that I was already more than half-inclined to regret, so little root had it in active personal liking. What reward was I to receive for having so unnecessarily taken upon myself the title, the duties, and the burdens, of a friend? I think that I sighed as I tore open the envelope, and began to read.

The writing was bold, firm, full of character and individuality, but not very legible. For the first page or

two, I had to proceed slowly; then, having found the key to the characters, or reading by intuition, I had no difficulty.

"WASHINGTON, D. C.
"*August* 20, 188–

"MY DEAR MRS. VENNOR,

"An unknown writer has said: 'A friend is one who can finish your sentences for you.' It was not because I doubted your ability to reach to the full height of that standard that I asked permission to write to you; I know well that my gratitude for your most undeserved kindness might safely be left to your womanly intuitions. They are sure to be finer and truer than my words can be. Yet it is my duty to say 'Thank you,' in such poor phrase as I can command; it is still more my pleasure. I like to write; the reserve which freezes my lips often leaves the point of my pen unchilled. Through it my inner self speaks out in a way that surprises me,—accustomed as I am to keep it so firmly pressed down under the thoughts, the duties, the anxieties, of an exacting professional life, that I scarcely know how it looks or of what it is made.

"I could almost say that I never had a friend before,—certainly, no woman to whom I could rightly give the title. My life has not run in channels favorable to the forming of close attachments, or my nature has not inclined to them. Till lately, I have always thought myself cold; undoubtedly my education was lamentably deficient on the emotional side. My mother died in my infancy. I have not the slightest remembrance of her. My father's sister took the vacant place in the household; she was a silent, austere woman, who tried to do her duty by me; if the sense of duty were at all quickened by affection, I never knew it. My

father, was as silent, as undemonstrative, as she; I never doubted his love, but neither was I ever invited to taste its full sweetness; I knew as little of caresses, kisses, endearing epithets, as I did of angry rebukes and blows.

"He was a scholar born and bred. He lived in books far more than in events; his library was his home, his world. It was rare to see him without an open volume in hand; he always brought one to the table, and forgot to eat as he grew interested. But his scholarship was not of the sort that brings money, or he had not the knack of turning it to advantage. So far back as my memory goes we were always poor, and always growing poorer as his patrimony slowly melted away. We lived in a great, dilapidated mansion that had once been fine, but within my recollection was only shabby.

"I grew up between these two silent, grave people, and was as much like them as was consistent with some natural spring of youthfulness. I inherited my father's passion for books, and might have lived among them as exclusively as he did, except that Nature also had attractions for me. I often took my lessons or the poets to her groves and hillsides; and she helped me to understand the one, and sometimes whispered to me words sweeter than anything that I read in the other.

"The time came for me to go to college: there, ambition seized upon me. I began to feel the limitations, the inconveniences, the hardships, of poverty; I chafed under them. I learned, too, that my brains were a little keener, quicker, clearer, than most of my fellows; it seemed to me that I had only to put forth a resolute hand and will to win wealth, power, fame. Hitherto, my study had been for the love of it; now it was for the advantages to be derived from it. It

had been the meandering path through a pleasant grove; it became the hard high-road to a definite goal. I allowed nothing to divert me from it; all the temptations of society, pleasure, vice, passed me by and found no open door; every entrance was closed by the one dominant purpose. I was in a fair way to become as hard as the nether millstone, and as grasping as the horse-leech.

"My studies, academical and professional, being ended, I was admitted to the bar, and began my career in a town not far from my birthplace. My father's death was the first thing that made any break in it. By his sick-bed, I learned that he had loved me well despite his undemonstrative ways; at his grave, I had my first feeling of loneliness; I had a suspicion that there might be objects in life sweeter and worthier than any that I had in view.

"Yet the impression might have been transient, were it not for an accidental meeting with—I need not write the name. I read in your face the other day that you had divined my secret, read it as well as if you had been less careful not to lift your eyes to mine. I read more—a certain gratification at your discovery, which, though I could not understand its origin, instantly dissipated my chagrin at having so unaccountably betrayed myself, and made my heart leap with a new and delightful sense of being understood and sympathized with."

I laid down the letter, and sought in my recollections for a key to the statement which, for a moment, puzzled me. Then, I remembered that, chiefly for Paul's sake, and somewhat for the honor of mankind in general, I had been pleased to find that Mr. Brune was less chill, less self-sustained and self-sufficing, than I had supposed him to be.

But how keen-sighted he had been to detect the fleeting feeling!

I returned to the letter.

"I understood that in speaking to you more freely than I had done to anyone else, I had not yielded to a foolish impulse; I had obeyed an instinct which it would have been folly to resist. Doubtless there have been many times in your life (and it will happen many times more) when you have found comparative strangers opening their hearts to you with surprising frankness; and you have set them down for ill-balanced cups, running over at the slightest touch, and upon the nearest object. You did them injustice. The fact is that you have a genius for sympathy. They felt it intuitively, and yielded to it; I have seen and felt it myself more than once.

"To resume my story: I came to Bellerue to investigate a title: I was sent to Mr. Heathcote for information—and I saw his daughter. At the first sight, I loved her; at the second, all my being went out to her. I learned that I was not cold, but full of summer warmth; not hard, but soft as melting wax. I would have flung—not my cloak—but myself down into the deepest slough, so that her feet might pass over dry-shod. I would have stood between her and the hottest fire, and slowly burned to a crisp, rather than that the hem of her garment should be scorched. If ever man loved as I loved—as I still love—God pity him!

"Through Mr. Asher, a second-cousin of my father's, I learned that there was a promising opening for a lawyer here; I need not say that I seized upon it. To be in the same place with her, to breathe the same air, was to be in

Eden. She had become my inspiration and aim, my beginning and end, my life, my light,—in a word, my love.

"I saw her many times. I had cared nothing for society; now, I began to go wherever I might hope to meet her. She was kind, gentle, gracious, sweet, as it is her nature to be; I was so unused to women and their ways that I took it for personal liking, and lived for a brief space in a fool's paradise. One day, when circumstances favored, I spoke. She told me that she was already engaged to Rolf Kenworth; —he was then absent, at college, or I should not have needed to be told.

"I spare you the recital of my misery. I don't know how I lived through its first intensity. Pride helped me somewhat; work helped me more. I had a difficult, labyrinthine case on hand; it compelled attention, concentration, hard study. If I allowed myself to forget it for an instant, I suffered such torture that I hastened to bury myself in it again, and wished it were a grave.

"Rolf returned, and I saw them together once or twice. Rage and jealousy and despair tore me like wild horses. Then came the murder; and—I breathed again. To do myself justice, I did at first feel real compassion for her—for them both; I tried to wish that his innocence might be proven, for her sake. But chance placed me in possession of the missing link which proves him guilty; and after a little, it was not in human nature—or in mine—not to feel reviving hope, and to rejoice in it. She had placed her love unworthily: soon or late she would find it out; sometime, it mattered not though it should be years hence, she would turn to me. In that hope, I could be patient.

"Mrs. Vennor, you doubt his guilt. He *is* guilty; no question about it. There is not a judge or jury in all

Christendom that would not convict him on the evidence I can produce. For her sake, I have suppressed it. For her sake, I suppress it still, even though he has had the incredible hardihood to present himself in Bellerue, under a mask. But, in order to save her from marrying him, if it comes to that, I *must* produce it. Putting myself entirely out of the question, I cannot, I ought not, to allow her to marry so unworthily, and so miserably. Innocence must not wed with guilt, nor purity with corruption. Yet, if discovery and disillusion come through me, she will never forget nor forgive it; farewell to hope, and forever!

"Mrs. Vennor, she loves you devotedly. Her lips smile and her eyes soften to you as I have never seen them do to anyone else—but him. Will you not help me to save her? Will you not exert your influence to warn her, to convince her, to lead her—by such slow and least painful degrees as your woman's wit may suggest—to see him as he is, and give him up? I do not say, to turn her to me; that must come afterward,—long afterward, perhaps—and must be my own doing. I can wait. But she must be saved.

"I began to tell you the story of my life;—very coolly, very calmly, I expected to do it;—I end by pleading with you for my love. I meant simply to show you what manner of man you had honored with your sympathy, your friendship; and I forget myself utterly in thinking of her,—forget everything but her danger, my dread, and those kind, listening eyes of yours, to which one pours out one's inmost heart almost unconsciously, unmindful that there is a personality behind them, a mind that perceives, analyzes, weighs, perhaps judges. Well, judge me as you will, but influence, help, save her!

"There is much that I might have said, or tried to say,

of my profound sense of the honor you have done me, of my sincere gratitude, of the high estimation in which I hold your husband, of the pleasant intercourse with you both to which I venture to look forward, but time presses and work waits. My friend, will you not finish my sentences for me?

"Most sincerely yours,

"HAROLD BRUNE."

I read it all through twice; once, slowly; afterward, more rapidly; then my head sank on my hand, my gaze went out of the window into the fair expanse of the summer-blue sky, and my mind into deep reverie.

The strong passion of the man, the deep, rushing, resistless flood of love, as well as the impetuous outpouring of confidence, were not what I had expected. Something much cooler, calmer, more deliberate and composed, less impulsive and headlong, would have been far more in keeping with the man that I had hitherto seen and known. This one was a new acquaintance.

Yet, in this fresh aspect, I liked Mr. Brune better than I could once have believed possible. His letter had somewhat of the same magnetic and masterful quality that I had once or twice felt in his presence; for the moment, it took both sympathies and judgment by storm; I was on the point of yielding to his influence, adopting his cause and his opinions, believing that Rolf was guilty and Dana deceived, taking for granted that the whole compact body of Rolf's friends were blind and only Mr. Brune clear-sighted.

But then I remembered the clear witness of Mr. Ennadeen's eyes, the truth in his accents, the high-minded character of his utterances, the gentle sadness of his expression, and I felt that if such testimony was to be dis-

trusted, then every face that I met in my daily walk might be set down as wearing a mask, concealing some unknown depth of foulness or of crime. No, I could not, I would not, believe that!

I went down to the study, and laid the open letter on the desk before Paul. He glanced at it, seemed to understand what it was, folded it up deliberately, and handed it back to me without a word.

"But I want you to read it!" exclaimed I, in surprise.

"Thanks; no. It was not for my eyes that Brune wrote those thick sheets."

"What do you mean? He knows that we are one, in fact as in theory. He took it for granted that you would read it."

"I think not. I hope he took it for granted that I am a gentleman."

"What has that to do with reading his letter, pray?"

Paul gave me an amused but slightly quizzical look.

"You women are good, sweet, unselfish, religious, everything that is delightful (I hope I have sufficiently smoothed the way to the coming exception!) but you have the crudest notions about honor."

"Umph! of conventional honor I am content to have crude notions. If it consist with writing a letter to a wife which a husband must not see, I decline to have anything to do with it."

Paul laughed at my indignant emphasis, and drew me down on his knee. "Cannot you understand that a man may talk or write to a woman about his heart affairs in a way that he would shrink from doing to a man, and that there need not be the slightest harm in it? And for any man to take advantage of his relation to the woman to read what was so

written, is to be lacking in delicacy to an extent that I, if you please, decline to have anything to do with. Tell me what you like about Brune's letter, but don't ask me to read it. Were I to do so, I could not look myself in the face in a glass afterward. It is perhaps right for you to offer it to me, but it would be distinctly the reverse for me to accept the offer."

"But I don't quite like to think that he would write me what you ought not to see!"

"My dear, I am perfectly sure that he will never write you what I *ought* to see."

"This point being so well taken that there was absolutely no more to be said, I made a swift retreat to the contents of Mr. Brune's letter:—

"At least, I am right about one thing,—he is in love with Dana. And he insists that Rolf is guilty,—that he has unimpeachable evidence of it, which he has suppressed for her sake, and implores me to help him save her from the consequences of so ill-placed an attachment. Do you suppose he is right?"

"I have no doubt that he thinks he is right; but even wise men fall into error. I think I would trust Dana's intuitions quite as much as Brune's reasonings. The whole thing is an enigma, the clue to which we shall have to wait for. Till it comes, do what you can to soothe sorrows, to smooth away bitternesses and misunderstandings, to promote pity, sympathy, unselfishness, forbearance, brotherly kindness, trust in God; but take care to embrace no theory and imbibe no prejudice, thinking always the best thing possible of each and all of the actors on the scene. It may not be an easy task, but you are in for it, and must get through with it as well as you can, with God's help.

When you cannot do good, you can be careful to do no harm.

"As for Brune, I am really glad that you have found the way to his deeper self; by-and-by, I hope it may prove to be his better self. To drop his saturnine mask—if it be a mask, and not simply one side of a complex character—will be good for him. I look for good, and only good, to grow out of your relation."

"He says the oddest thing!—that I have a genius for sympathy."

"Upon my word! he knows my wife better than I supposed."

"It is so nice of you to say that! But, Paul, am I to reply to this letter?"

"I think you can be trusted to answer that question yourself; it ought not to be a difficult oue."

I did write, briefly; acknowledging the receipt of the letter; thanking its sender for kind words for myself and husband; reiterating my belief that the gentleman called Hugh Ennadeen, whatever might be his true name, was no criminal, and postponing further consideration of the matter for a *vivâ voce* discussion.

XIX.

A CHANCE MEETING.

A MID-SUMMER picnic for parish and Sunday-school is a custom which, although some persons think it would be more honored in the breach than the observance, keeps a tenacious hold on the favor of a majority of the adults, while to every new generation of children it presents an unhackneyed programme of delights. It is a happy thing that the human race is always in blossom, and that each opening bud has all the freshness, subjectively as well as objectively, of the first-born of Eve. To these young eyes, the world is never worn and weary with its long journey; to these young ears there is no "old, old story"; everything is as fresh and sweet as it was in Paradise.

It often happens that the choice of a locality for the picnic is not made without some clash of controversy, but this year certain uncomfortable "memories of the last time" have brought about a general willingness to accept the truth, for the nonce, that the farthest search for pleasure often goes widest of what it seeks, while it brings home a heavy burden of weariness and regret. I think I never saw a lovelier place than that which was finally chosen. It is gently hollowed out among wooded hills, one or other of

which casts a pleasant shadow over it nearly all the day long; but it is open on one side to a view of a tiny lake, a green expanse of meadow land, and the blue, waving horizon-line of the Catskills. A tiny brook runs through it, sparkling brightly in the sun, crystal clear in the shade; here, rippling merrily over the stones in its bed, taking them for aids to pleasure and motives for song rather than obstructions; there, widening out into shallow pools for the better accommodation of aquatic plants and insects;—all irresistibly attractive to small fingers much better acquainted with the stones and dust of city streets. Besides these natural playthings, swings had been hung in tall trees, and level spaces furnished with croquet and tennis,—all of which were in lively use when the Clavricks and I came upon the scene, Paul having gone earlier with the main body of the children.

As we paused, half-way down the shaded hill-side, to enjoy the bright picture beneath, we saw him seated at the foot of the opposite declivity, surrounded by a bevy of little ones, clinging to his arms, his hands, his coat, his feet,—wherever a tiny hand could find somewhat to grasp.

"He looks like a flower beset by a whole swarm of bees," said Honor, laughing. "They love him with all their little hearts—bless them! And there is my Babiecita, hanging on his shoulder, and listening spell-bound to what he is saying. He must be telling them a story, one of those wonderful stories that she is always talking about. I am going to be a child too, and listen. Follow or stay, as you please."

And she darted down the hill. Almost immediately, Mr. Clavrick was seized upon by Miss Deane for some small service; and Dana Heathcote, having launched her class

in a game of croquet, came to me, with a most unusual disquietude in her face.

"Mr. Vennor thinks a Christian has no business with forebodings," she responded to my questioning look;—"would he set me down for a heathen if I were to confess that I do feel a little uneasy about to-day? Mrs. Fairfax just now told me that she had made Mr. Ennadeen promise to take a look at us by-and-by; you see, we are close on the edge of the Manor grounds here. And Mr. Brune is likely to appear—"

"Has he returned, then?" inquired I.

"Yes; he came back last night; father met him on the late train. Now, how are those two to be kept apart?"

"Surely, Danita, that is a most gratuitous anxiety on your part, seeing that they manifest so little desire for each other's society!"

"Do you think so?" responded she, doubtfully. "You do not know what cause I have for dread—"

But here we were surrounded by a party of new-comers, and swept into a noisy stream of laughter and chatter. Among them was Mrs. Pollard; and, oddly enough, in the glancing to and fro of her careless talk, she touched upon one object of Dana's anxiety.

"I happened to meet Mr. Brune this morning; did you know that he had returned? He comes with flying colors; he has won his case in the Supreme Court, and much sooner than was expected. Of course, it is a big feather in his cap; my husband says it will make him more dictatorial than ever, and he was enough so before. We may as well prepare ourselves for an extra touch of high-mightiness when we see him."

"I think there is no occasion," said I, coldly. "Mr.

Brune is gentleman enough to know how to temper his 'high-mightiness' with courtesy."

"Oh! if *you* are going to stand up for him, I'm dumb," returned she, with her frivolous, simpering laugh.

"Mrs. Vennor always champions the cause of the absent," said Dana, brightly; yet she gave me a slightly surprised glance, too, as if something in my tone or manner struck her as odd.

The day went on as such days go. There was work for willing hands, and play for idle ones; there were edibles, bewildering in variety and prodigal in abundance; there were games and frolics for the children, and gossip—let us hope in the good old signification of the word!—for their elders. And there were shadowy woodland walks and cosy lake-side nooks for lovers *in esse* or *in posse.*

At first, gentlemen were conspicuous by their presence, and chiefly of the order *paterfamilias;* but as the day wore on, they began to appear by twos and threes, until hats and coats were too numerous to be noticeable.

It was just at this time when, seeing Dana leaning wearily against a tree, with the look of one whose thoughts are far away, I accosted her with:—"I think we might indulge in a little stroll now, if it so please you."

She hesitated for a moment, casting a quick glance over the crowd; then, with a faint smile at her own inconsequence, she turned with me, and led the way up the hill, saying:—

"As if I could help or hinder anything by staying!"

"Believe me, dear, there will be no need of your help or hindrance," replied I. "The circumstances which brought about the unpleasantness of that evening at the General's are not likely to repeat themselves by daylight. Our two

friends may be trusted to give each other, in marine parlance, a wide berth hereafter."

"'Our two friends'!" she repeated, quickly. "Mr. Brune is no friend of mine."

"We will call him mine, then," said I, lightly, yet with a certain inflection that did not escape her notice.

She stopped short, and turned to me with a look of surprise. "You are not in earnest."

"Am I not? I had the contrary impression."

"You mean to say that you are a friend to him just as you are to everyone. I know well that there is no room in your heart for unfriendliness to any human soul."

"I mean something less general than that. Mr. Brune has a certain claim on my sympathy and regard. I have given him reason to believe that they will not fail him, at need."

She gazed at me for an instant, then resumed her way without a word. I followed as silently. I wanted to see what she would make of the thing by herself.

"Excuse me," said she, after a little; "but I feel as if I had unexpectedly been set adrift without chart or compass. It requires some study to find out where I am."

"It does not require any to find out where *I* am, Danita. As regards you, my position is not changed by a hair's breadth."

We were now far up the hill, quite out of sight; Dana turned quickly, and threw her arms round me.

"Forgive me," said she, penitently; "I ought to have known that without the telling. And since it is true, the other does not matter—much."

"It does not matter at all, in any disagreeable sense. My conviction is strong that nothing but good to you and

yours can come out of my friendly relation to Mr. Brune. But I do not make a practice of discussing one friend with another; your confidences and affairs, Danita, are as safe from Mr. Brune as if I did not know him; his"—I smiled—"are equally safe from you. Have you any idea what the other side of the moon is like?"

She smiled. "Not much. I have always taken for granted that it must be dark; perhaps that is only ignorance. Turn your shining side towards me, dear friend, and I will not trouble myself about the other."

"Agreed. But do you know where we are going?"

"We are almost there. It is the prettiest little hiding-place imaginable. I discovered it yesterday, by accident, when I was up here making arrangements for the picnic. I don't believe that anyone else has hit upon it."

A gigantic rock, thickly covered with wild vines, stood a little to the right of our path; Dana turned directly toward it.

"Are we going to climb up there?" I asked, looking dubiously at its steep front. "Allow me to remind you that I am not a chamois, whatever you may be."

She answered by parting the vines and disappearing from view. The effect was as if the rock had opened and admitted her. Hearing her laugh at my astonishment, I did as she had done, and found that though the vines, assisted by some slender saplings, mounted straight up like a wall, the rock receded sharply at its base, leaving a considerable, vault-like space between. A more curiously and pleasantly secluded nook it would be hard to find; for although we could see out through the screen of vines, my own experience had shown me that no one could see in.

Dana sat down on a fragment of rock and looked straight

before her, with the oddly intent gaze that takes no note of what is in its way. I continued to examine the place with interest.

"See there!" I suddenly exclaimed, pointing to a rude cutting overhead,—so rude that I failed to make it out at the first glance.

Dana looked up, studied it for a moment, and her eyes lit with a faint gleam of pleasure.

"Rolf must have known this place; those are his initials, probably cut in his boyish days. I don't suppose that there is a rock that he has not scrambled over, nor a tree that he has not climbed, in all this neighborhood; he had an intense, enthusiastic love of Nature; he was almost as much at home with her as Hawthorne's 'Faun.' I wonder what sort of scenery he is familiar with now!" And she heaved a soft sigh.

"Then you think he is farther off than the Manor," said I, with a good deal of surprise.

A swift look of recollection came into her brown eyes. "I forgot that he is there," said she, piteously. "Never was there a much sadder example of 'so near, and yet so far!' When I knew him to be in—(why should I hesitate to speak out? I know you are to be trusted.)—when I knew him to be in Egypt, he seemed a great deal nearer to me than he does in these days."

"It would seem, then, that your spirits were better able to overcome the bands of the flesh when—"

I stopped short; my ears caught the sound of approaching footsteps. In another moment, Mr. Ennadeen came slowly past, presumably on his way to the picnic ground.

Dana watched him with hands tightly clasped and a face of conflicting emotions;—love, longing, pain, doubt, eager-

ness, hesitancy, passed over it like clouds of diverse strata driven by opposing winds. But, as he was about to pass from our view behind a thicket of tall shrubs, she stepped forth with a hasty decision, and went after him.

"Rolf!"

He started, turned, and saw her. And I saw his face! A handsome face,—a kindly, generous, high-minded face, surely, as ever a man had;—but what was there in its expression that smote me with a sudden, unaccountable pain?

Evidently, Dana did not see it; she was going swiftly towards him, with outstretched hands.

"Rolf, speak to me,—just once—as yourself," she cried.

He took the two hands, clasped them together in his own, and looked down gravely, pityingly, upon the upturned face, the sweet lips trembling with unoffered but surely ready kisses.

"My dear Miss Heathcote, when I stand at the bar of yonder court-house, to answer to the grave charge brought against me, will you not be only too glad to be able to testify, under oath, that I never once spoke to you other than as Hugh Ennadeen?"

Dana stood for some seconds as if turned to stone. No doubt reason, prudence, foresight, thoughtful consideration, prompted his action; but to be met by these, and these only, where one looks for love, is indeed to be confronted by a Gorgon!

The silence was long enough to be painful; then, withdrawing her hands, she turned from him with a low, shivering moan, so suggestive of a breaking heart, that I hurried forth from my concealment, thinking only how to meet and comfort her as best I might.

But, as she turned blindly away in the bitterness of her disappointment, seeing not, heeding not, whither she went, her foot caught in an upcropping root, and she would have fallen headlong had not Mr. Ennadeen caught her in his arms, and held her firmly upright. Then, feeling those strong arms around her, she burst into such a passion of tears that he could scarcely do otherwise than draw her kindly, tenderly, to his breast, and let her weep them out there, while his own eyes filled with sympathetic moisture.

"Poor child!" I heard him whisper to himself, laying his hand lightly on her head. And, as her sobs continued to break forth, he touched his lips to her bright hair, murmuring some words that I did not hear.

I turned to go; surely, the severed hearts would now reunite, and be glad to utter themselves freely, unrestrained by even the friendliest observation. But, as I turned, I was startled to see Mr. Brune standing just at the bend of the path, gazing at the pair with a face so clouded, so fierce, so set, that it was like that of a demon. His dark features were singularly marked and prominent; his deep eyes shone with a lurid light; his brow was contorted with a heavy frown; he looked as if he could crush the lovers at one blow, and count it a good deed done.

It was but an instant, probably, that he so stood, though it seemed a slow age; then, he turned on his heel and plunged down the hill-side, seeking no path, pausing for no obstacles, but tramping straight on, the shrubs bending and breaking underneath his feet, the low boughs swaying and crashing with the force and swiftness of his mad rush through them.

Nor had I alone seen him. In my surprise, I uttered a low exclamation that attracted Rolf's attention. Lifting his

eyes, he became aware of Mr. Brune's presence; and as if intuitively aware of the intrusion of some discordant element, Dana raised her head, to meet Mr. Brune's dark glance for one breathless instant, and see him vanish.

Of my presence I felt that he had no consciousness; I was partly screened by a low, thick shrub; and the sight of Dana in Rolf's arms left him no eyes, no thought, no care for anything else.

Dana's first impulse had been to withdraw herself from Rolf's embrace,—not hurriedly, but decidedly, although her hand still rested on his arm. We stood looking at each other in silence, until the sound of Mr. Brune's rash footsteps ceased; then, she spoke, in low, frightened tones:—

"You were right, Rolf! I never ought to have spoken to you otherwise than as a stranger. Forgive me; I did not know what I was doing! But what a fatality that Mr. Brune, of all men in the world, should have come upon us! He will go to inform against you at once, and I shall have killed you! Fly! fly while there is time—for my sake, fly!"

"On the contrary," replied he, "it is for your sake—and Rolf's—that I stay."

"For Rolf's!" repeated Dana, opening her eyes wide in astonishment. "Ah, yes; I see. You do not mean to be taken off your guard again, even by me." But, the next moment, her fears came to the front again. "You cannot know what danger you are in!" she cried. "That man—Mr. Brune—swore to me that he was in possession of evidence that would convict you in the sight of all men, though you were as innocent as I am; and that your only safety lay in remaining concealed, unknown, for the rest of your life."

"Did he say what that evidence was?" asked Rolf, with eager curiosity, but no sign of alarm.

"No; he said he would spare me the pain of seeing it, knowing it; he seemed to think it would convince even me! At least, it could only distress me to no good end, he said. And I think he meant to be kind, according to his lights."

"Undoubtedly," was the somewhat dry rejoinder.

"Indeed, I care nothing for him, nothing," protested Dana, "except that I fear he may be able to harm you. It makes me wild to think what he may be doing at this moment!" And she wrung her hands in a sudden accession of terror.

"Have no fear," replied Mr. Ennadeen, taking those trembling hands in a firm, reassuring clasp. "My—Rolf's —*our* cause is not in Mr. Brune's hands, but in God's; and my faith is strong that He will bring it to some happy—or, at least, gracious—end."

But, hereupon, there was a sound of merry voices; apparently, a somewhat large party was coming up the hill. Mr. Ennadeen looked at Dana's face, where traces of recent tears were plainly to be seen, and said, hurriedly:—"Go back to your grotto; I will meet them and guide them past. Mrs. Vennor, do not allow her to be uneasy over what has happened; so far as I am concerned, it is not of the slightest consequence. I bid you both, Adieu."

He lifted Dana's hands to his lips, bowed to me, and was gone.

We sat down behind the veil of vines, and silently waited for the approaching party to vanish, under his pilotage.

"A little farther to the left, we shall find the ascent easier, and the view less obstructed by low-hanging boughs," we heard him say, as they drew near; and, turning aside in

obedience to this suggestion, they passed on at some little distance.

Not so far away, however, but that I could see Nathalie Ellenwood among them, and that she was walking at her guide's side, with that slight, unconscious swaying towards him wherein a keen eye often detects the first symptom of a dawning attachment. There was nothing in her air that was not perfectly delicate and maidenly; nothing that would not have made a pleasant picture for a more indifferent observer; yet I could have shaken her with a good will. At least, I should have liked to interpose between the two, and whisper:—"Take care! His love is not, and never can be, yours. You are only laying up misery for yourself; perhaps for others. Take care, in time!"

I wondered if Mr. Ennadeen were conscious of the attraction that he exerted over her. I could not see his face; but it was plain that he was looking down into hers; doubtless he was well aware that it was pretty, and growing prettier every day; for she is at the age when a young girl is continually putting forth some new charm—especially if she be in love,—each one of which seems fairer and more wonderful than any that went before.

Dana's eyes followed them thoughtfully while they remained in sight, but, apparently, not seeing what mine did. She was thinking over the recent interview; and not without a certain growing perplexity, as it seemed, for her brows began to knit slightly, and her eyes to deepen with importunate self-questionings, as the retreating footsteps died away in the distance, and the voices became simply a faint murmur of inarticulate sounds, whereof a boding imagination might make anything, and an idle or a preoccupied one, nothing.

For myself, my thoughts were busy with the question: Does he love her as she thinks,—with the truth, strength, tenderness, that she loves him? And alas! strive to repel it as I would, the conviction continually returned to me that, in all his bearing towards her, even in that caressing touch of his lips to her hair, there was far more of brotherly kindness than lover-like tenderness! And in my heart I echoed his words: "Poor child!"

"Winnie! Winnie! where are you?" called a cheerful voice at some little distance below.

"Paul is looking for me," said I, rising; "I must go."

"And I may as well go with you," returned Dana, with a heavy sigh. "I have little heart for it, to be sure; but since I cannot go home at once, it is best to return to my duty. I have left my class as long as I ought."

I saw Paul glance quickly and keenly at her face, as we joined him, but he gave no sign of seeing anything unusual there. And by the time we reached the main body, only a very loving and penetrating eye would have detected anything amiss. So strongly are we all, even the least conventional of us, bound and buttressed by conventionalism! With hearts nigh to breaking under the heavy strain of care or sorrow, we go to meet our acquaintances, discuss the weather and the news, bear our part in all the courtesies and common-places of social intercourse, making no sign of pain, and asking for no sympathy. Only, now and then, we send up the unspoken soul-cry: "O God! Thou knowest!" But for that, the poor heart would break under its burden.

And, surely, infinite knowledge is infinite compassion and infinite tenderness.

XX.

DISCORDS.

The rich red-gold of the sunset lay bright on the mountain-tops when we left the Hollow; it was early twilight when we reached home. Finding a summons to a sick parishioner, Paul went out almost directly; and I threw myself on the couch in the library, feeling how good were the home quiet, rest and comfort, after such a day. From my heart, I pitied those who had them not.

There was a loud peal at the bell; a guest was shown into the parlor, and Annie came to me with the announcement:—

"Mr. Brune, ma'am."

"One of the homeless ones," was my first thought; for a hotel is certainly not a home—scarcely so much as a next-door to one;—and I held out my hand cordially, saying: "You are welcome back." Not until I had spoken did I notice the haggardness of his aspect; that brought the chilling recollection of the scene at the Hollow, and I withdrew the hand quickly; but he was too preoccupied to notice it.

"You are kind to say so," he answered, sombrely rather than gratefully. "Would you do it, I wonder, if you knew what manner of man you are speaking to?"

"Are you so much changed, then, in a fortnight?" said I, evasively.

"Changed? I suppose not. But all the evil in me was not rampant then, as it is now."

"What have you been doing?" I asked, with a sudden fear that Dana's forebodings had not been groundless.

"Doing! Nothing. But if thoughts were deeds, I should be guilty of every crime in the calendar. In imagination I have done things which, if you could see them, would make you open that door and turn me out into the night like a dog. I have turned informer and prosecutor; I have hunted a man to prison and conviction; I have gloated over his death by the hangman's rope; I have broken the heart of the girl that loved him; I have—"

I put up my hand appealingly. "Pray! pray, Mr. Brune, spare me the rest of those phantasmal horrors! For phantasms they are, and shall be, please God. I know well that no temptation, no suffering of yours, can convert them into realities."

"Do you?" he replied, with a short, bitter laugh. "Upon my word, you know more than I do. To myself, I seem capable of any villainy."

"If you were," rejoined I, "you would not have come here to tell *me* of it."

With the last words, my voice quivered a little—a very little; I was conscious that I had really liked this man; I had believed that he was possessed of a latent nobleness of character, sure to be developed in good time; and his present state was a shock and a pain to me.

He heard the involuntary break, and his face softened. "Forgive me, Mrs. Vennor. I am a brute to speak to you in such a way, But I have been suffering unspeakable tor-

tures; I have learned what the bottomless pit is like. Will you sit down, and let me tell you about it? I will remember into what gentle ears I am pouring my tale, and try not to offend them. I have no one else to go to, and I must speak—or go mad."

I turned silently to look for a seat. He instantly wheeled forward an easy-chair, put me into it, and brought a foot-stool; all with an elaborate, but absent-minded courtesy that showed how ineradicable is the instinct of a gentleman, how strong the power of habit.

"I hope you are going to sit down, too," said I, seeing that he continued to stand before me, tall, dark, grim—a young and modern edition of the Ancient Mariner, I thought, with the sudden, incongruous sense of the humorous which seizes me at the most inopportune times. And the resemblance was increased when, in the same mechanical manner, he brought a chair and sat down directly in front of me, so close that I was as completely "fixed" in my place as the Wedding-Guest.

And then his story broke forth, like a torrent that has with difficulty been stayed for a time, but finally bursts every barrier, and goes on its headlong way unchecked.

"I set out for the Hollow this afternoon in a brighter and better mood than I have known for years. I had won my case in Washington; I had been complimented on my handling of it; I had seen much that was new, novel, and interesting; I was glad to return to Bellerue. I remembered that I had a friend here,—my first friend, almost,—who might perhaps listen with interest to my account of these things; I dared to hope, even, that the interest might be all the keener because these seeings and doings were mine,—a hope so new to my experience that I carried it in

my thought, as one carries a flower in the hand, smelling of it ever and anon, to enhance all the other delights of the way by its sweetness.

"My friend, they told me, had gone to the picnic ; everybody had gone to the picnic ; it was easy for me to determine to go to the picnic, too. I had a genial, friendly feeling for the whole human race—a sentiment to which I am ordinarily a stranger.

" Arrived at the Hollow, I met many acquaintances, who gave me an unwontedly cordial greeting,—the reflection, doubtless, of my own unaccustomed cordiality,—but I did not meet my friend. She had last been seen going up Oak Hill with Miss Heathcote ; and Mr. Vennor kindly authorized me to go and fetch her back, if I could find her.

"I climbed the hill slowly, keeping a good lookout in every direction, not to miss her ; when, suddenly, at a turn of the path, I came upon a sight that was like the burst of a cyclone, causing universal rack and ruin. There stood Dana Heathcote and Rolf Kenworth ; his arms were round her ; her head was on his breast ; his lips were pressed to her hair ;"—he started up and began to march, or rather, to rush, up and down the room;—" Oh, Heavens ! to think of it !—that lovely, innocent girl, whom I have reverenced as something better than angels—in the arms of a criminal ! a villain who could rob and slay the kind old uncle who had loaded him with benefits ! And she loves him with all her heart ! In her sweetness and purity, unable even to conceive of such guilt as his, she believes him to be innocent, and loves him all the better because he is—what he is ! She clings to him with blind, self-forgetting devotion—and will, till he dies on the scaffold. He will drag her with him down to the deepest depths of shame and

anguish, until, at last, she learns the miserable truth, and dies of horror!"

He stopped short, threw himself again into his chair, and gazed fixedly before him, as if the pictures of his imagination were actually present to his sight.

"And then?" I asked, quietly, after waiting some moments.

"Then!" he repeated, vaguely, staring round him and recalling with some difficulty where he was and what he was doing. "Ah, yes, I remember. I was telling you what I saw. My first impulse was to strike him down where he stood; and I should have done it, I think, only that in striking him, I must have struck her. Then, she lifted her head, and I saw her face grow pale with terror—terror of me, who love her better than I love my soul! Seeing that, I turned and fled,—I don't know where, nor for how long. All the fiends of rage, jealousy, hate, revenge, despair, went with me, and drove me on with prongs and scourges; every fibre of heart and brain bled and stung at the same time. I determined to denounce Rolf to the police at once,—no need to wait longer for proof of his identity; that question was settled!—I studied how to make his arrest and trial most torturing and disgraceful; brick by brick I would wall him up with incontestable evidence, as in olden times they used to wall up people alive; he should feel it relentlessly closing him in, and know that there was no escape. And then, I laughed to think of the gallows and the hangman!"

Again, he paused, and looked as if he saw even more clearly than he described. I sat silent and trembling; how powerless was I to cope with passions like these! If only Paul were here!

Mr. Brune went on :—"I dwelt with delight on all the details of the scene. Every pang that he had caused me to suffer, he should pay to the uttermost farthing. And then, I remembered that every blow aimed at him would fall most crushingly on her—on Dana. And I fell to the ground and groveled there in the impotence of my baffled rage, vainly seeking to find some way of destroying him without wounding her.

"By-and-by, I sat up and looked around me ; I was on a steep bluff overhanging the river. I went to the edge and looked down. The water beneath was so dark, so quiet, so cool, so inviting!—a plunge, a choke, and all my misery would be ended. And what matter? The world would go on unheeding. Who was there to miss me, to mourn for me?

"And then, Mrs. Vennor, a strange thing came to pass. Your face rose before me; I saw it as clearly as I do now. Just your face, looking at me over a mass of foliage, with so shocked and horrified an expression that I involuntarily recoiled from it, and hid my face in my hands. There was something in that look which I could not meet; it was sharper than a sword; it made me feel viler than the worm under my heel."

He had seen me, then. Although my face made no impression on his consciousness at the moment, it had somehow penetrated to the brain, and was reproduced by memory at the first opportunity.

He resumed!—"I think the next hour was the worst of all. I saw a sight which I suspect that many men—most men—never see in their whole life; I saw myself as I was—as I am. And I tell you—I, who ought to know—that a harder-hearted, more selfish, more unregenerate—aye, or a more miserable—man never lived!"

And, letting his face fall into his hands, his broad chest heaved with sobs,—the hard, dry, heavy sobs of a strong man's intolerable agony.

What could I do but lay my hand gently on that bowed head, and weep with him? For my heart was so full of thanksgiving that I could not speak.

But the sobs of a strong man are as few as they are rare. Looking up presently, he saw my wet eyes.

"You do not wholly despise me, then?" said he, with a faint surprise.

"My friend, the man who has fought such a battle as that, and come off conqueror, is to be honored, not despised."

His face lighted up with a transient gleam of pleasure, but he shook his head:—

"You mistake. I do not think I fought at all; I was tossed to and fro on the waves of passion like a boat adrift on a stormy sea. And as for conquering, I pity the victor who is broken and humbled as I am."

"You do not do yourself justice. In the depth of your shame and repentance, you tell me only the worst of it all; you say nothing of your struggles for self-mastery, nor of the better moods that alternated with the evil ones, nor of the broken, wordless heart-cries that you sent up to God for help, nor of the gentler, chastened frame of mind in which you came here, to the home of your pastor, to seek for human sympathy and help."

He looked at me with something like awe. "You *were* there, then! Was it in the flesh or the spirit?"

"I was not there, if you mean by the river. But I was present when you came upon Rolf and Dana; and you must have seen me, though you did not notice it at the time."

"You were present at the interview between Rolf and Dana!" he exclaimed, as if doubting his own ears.

"I saw the whole of it. And it was not what it looked like to you. It was accidental, and it was brief. More I cannot say. But, oh, Mr. Brune, if you love Dana as you say—"

"If!" he interrupted, lifting his hands above his head with a helpless kind of moan, which seemed sadder than anything that ever I heard,—"Oh, my God! I wish I loved Thee as well."

For an instant, I could not speak, for pity. Recovering myself, I said, deprecatingly:—

"But love, as I apprehend it, seeks the happiness of its object rather than itself. It gives much, but demands little. It makes not only death sweet, for the loved one's sake, but life also,—even long, lonely, unrequited, self-denying life. If it cannot wear love's crown, it takes up love's cross, and bears it in such wise as to make it something better than a crown—a glory around a saintly head."

"That is no description of me," he replied, sadly.

"If it is not a description, it may be a prophecy."

"It might be, if Dana's love were not set on a— The word chokes me in connection with her name! Do you really think it is my duty to put forth no effort to save her from such a terrible fate?"

"Do you think it would be any kindness to tear a frail, delicate vine from the support to which it clings, because there is a possibility that it will fall some day?"

"You press me hard. But there is such a thing as justice; have I any right to hinder it?"

"And there is such a thing as mercy; have you any right to hinder *it*?"

He sat silent for a few moments; then he turned to me with a somewhat softer expression.

"Mrs. Vennor, my friend, what would you like me to do?"

"First, admit the possibility of Rolf's innocence."

"You ask the impossible. You do not know what I know."

"I said, the possibility, not the probability. Unless you saw the deed done, you must admit so much. Having done that, go forward in the natural direction from that standpoint. It may not look like an easy path to you, but once in it, the way will open as you go."

He looked at me gloomily. "To be frank, I don't want it to open."

There was the welcome sound of a latch-key in the door; the handle turned, and Paul entered. Seeing us, and feeling instinctively that the atmosphere was surcharged with some unusually deep, strong emotion, he was passing straight on to the study with a bow, when I called after him:—

"Paul, come in, please; I think that Mr. Brune would like to speak to you."

Certainly, Mr. Brune's face did not confirm the statement; it flushed with embarrassment and annoyance. Paul flashed a keen, searching glance into our eyes, and said, smiling gravely:—

"Or I would like to speak to him; it amounts to the same thing. Will you come to the study, Brune?"

I went up to my room, and sat down by the window. There was no light within, and I wanted none. Without, the night was clear, though moonless; the stars shone brightly in the sky's calm depths; they seemed to look down

solemnly yet tenderly upon all sinning, aching, groping hearts, and to promise them, if not the sun's cheering brightness on their path, at least light enough to find their way home at last.

The sound of voices came up from below, through the open windows. Although no words were audible, I could easily distinguish Paul's grave, earnest, pleading, and, at times, even commanding tones, from Mr. Brune's shorter, colder, hoarser replies. Yet these grew softer, by-and-by; broken, too, as with overpowering emotions. An hour or more went by; then came low, hushed tones of prayer. I knelt, and burst into tears; I knew that Paul had conquered. The evil passions had, for the time, at least, been exorcised; the broken heart had been led to the only place of healing and rest, the foot of the Cross.

The study door opened; I heard them come out into the library.

"Winnie, come down!" called Paul, joyously.

I was not long on the way; seldom has a lightened heart carried me more swiftly down-stairs. The two men were standing together; their arms were round each other; in Mr. Brune's face was a wonderful peace and softness; as for Paul's, it was like that of an angel, I thought.

He put one arm round me, and drew me close.

"Congratulate us, congratulate yourself," said he, with grave sweetness. "For this is our brother, who was lost, and is found!"

XXI.

UNISONS.

Some weeks have passed away,—weeks that have done much to perfect and strengthen the bond between Harold Brune and ourselves. We call him "Harold," now,—Paul and I;—we do our best to make him feel at home in our house, our lives, our liking; he knows that, come when he may, he will be made free of all,—taken into whatever we are doing, thinking, enjoying or suffering, as if he were one of us. Paul really loves him as a brother; having none by nature, he is the more easily satisfied with one by adoption. His eyes brighten at sight of him; he grasps his hand with affectionate heartiness; not infrequently he throws his arm round his shoulders with the warmth and demonstrativeness of a school-boy towards his chosen mate. Nor is Harold's love for him any the less deep and tender; and it has an added element of reverence, and a grace of humility, very beautiful and touching in a man hitherto so cool, so proud, so self-contained.

It is pleasant to see them together; their enjoyment in becoming better acquainted with each other's individuality is almost lover-like; they are continually making discoveries of unexpectedly delightful similarities of intellectual taste and touch, and of equally delightful differences. Neither

of them belongs to the order of men who desire to see their own opinions continually reflected back to them from their friends, like faces from a mirror; both enjoy the play of thought, the excitement of debate, the piquancy of contrast; they like to compare, to analyze, to attack and defend; they go at it like brothers trying a turn at the foils; each does his best to win, yet with no point to his weapons which can wound, and with such strong fraternal love in his heart that he is almost as proud of the other's victory as if it were his own.

Paul's study is now the pleasantest spot in all Bellerue to Harold. Many an hour he spends there after his day's work is over; and the two talk of everything on earth and in heaven, I fancy, judging from the sentences which come to my ears whenever I happen to be within hearing.

Next to the study, I think, comes the library, where, in quiet twilight moments, Harold talks to me of his love for Dana (in comparatively gentle, chastened phrase now-a-days); or where we all consider the chances for and against Mr. Ennadeen;—for Paul always resists our tendency to call him "Rolf," as a prejudging of the case, and involving heavy risks of future embarrassment.

Harold sometimes admits, now, the possibility of Ennadeen's innocence. Paul's calm, confident, steady assertion that that gentleman's face, bearing, and manner of life, all go to prove it,—to say nothing of my like-mindedness,—has not been without some effect upon him; aided by that subtile change in his own heart, which, in bringing him to say for the first time with utter sincerity, "God be merciful to me a sinner," has disposed him to be, not only more merciful to the sins of others, but less ready to take them for granted.

Not that this change has been wrought in a moment. The better we come to know him, the clearer it grows that his struggles with himself began months ago; that all along he has had moments of relenting, compassion, doubt; his cold, saturnine demeanor often covering a woful unrest and weariness of heart. The shock of the meeting with Dana and Rolf in the Hollow, and the resultant fire of rage, and agony of self-revelation, were but the later, finishing strokes to a work that had been long in progress. Before that, too, he was so alone, so unhelped! Afterward, Paul's strong, skilful, loving hand was constantly held out to him; he knew that friendly eyes were watching the fight, bright with interest, tearful with sympathy, ready to sorrow in his defeat or rejoice in his victory;—and victory, in such conditions, becomes comparatively certain. Many a soul, doubtless, would go down in the spiritual fight, were not the helping human hand, by God's grace, held out at the right moment.

We were discussing the mystery of the Manor, one day, with as much freedom as was possible under the circumstances. Harold, having been in the confidence of the chief of police, and being the soul of honor, can speak unreservedly only of his own observations and conclusions; but these add a good deal to the width of our horizon. We know that Mr. Ennadeen's every movement is watched by trained detectives of the expertest kind, and that others are tracing out his antecedents abroad. Not to be either fooled or foiled this time, the police will take no public action until they are certain of their man, neither will they allow him to escape them. But certainty is fast being arrived at; and that he will soon be arrested and brought to trial is a foregone conclusion.

At this point, Harold began to wonder if he had any idea of the extent of the danger that he is in.

"I hope he is not deluding himself with the idea that he can escape at the last moment," said he.

"Perhaps he has no wish to escape," suggested Paul. "The trial may be the very thing that he is after."

"He little thinks what sort of testimony he is to confront," returned Harold, with a grave shake of the head.

"My dear Harold, there is a converse to that;—we little know what sort of rebutting testimony he has to offer."

"I hope he has it in abundance. Otherwise, his chance is not worth a nickel."

Paul and I exchanged a glance of mutual congratulation. Such a hope from Harold's mouth signified a notable advance in self-conquest.

He saw the look and understood it. "I think I *am* a little less bloodthirsty than I was," said he, with a faint, sad smile. "And I hope that I am, by just so much, worthier of the fraternal affection with which you honor me."

Ben Harding has not witnessed Harold's growing intimacy at the rectory without manifest discomposure. The first time that he saw him in the library, evidently thoroughly at home, his face was a study of startled surprise, and he went through his lessons in a mechanical and preoccupied fashion which showed that he did not cease to turn the matter over in his mind while he stayed.

On the second occasion, he ventured upon a sort of remonstrance. Pointing with his thumb over his shoulder toward the study, whence came the voices of the two friends in animated discussion; he asked:—

"Is he a-coming here that way all the time?"

"Pretty often, it must be confessed," I responded. And I added, jestingly;—"Have you any objections?"

Ben did not respond to my smile; he looked at me very soberly for a moment, and said, in a kind of pitying, excusatory tone:—

"Of course, you never knew Mr. Rolf. If you did, you wouldn't want nothing—I mean, anything—to do with Mr. Brune, that you could help."

(Ben's speech, being now under correction, is subjected to many halts and emendations. He is doing his best to overcome bad habits, but sometimes forgets himself in moments of excitement.)

"On the contrary, I might find in that another reason for being friendly with Mr. Brune," said I.

Ben stared in silence; evidently, he thought me the victim of a hallucination too absurd to combat.

Harold was perhaps scarcely less surprised to see upon what a familiar footing Ben stood at the rectory.

"So you have taken that *gamin* in hand," said he; "and the very noticeable improvement in his outer appearance is due to your magic. I suppose a corresponding inner one would appear, if I were not the last person in the world to draw it out."

"You seem to imply that you and Ben are not in sympathy," said I:—"do you mind telling me the special cause of the discord?"

He mused a moment. "I can tell you in part. It was through Ben that the connecting link in the chain of circumstantial evidence against Rolf Kenworth came into my possession. And a trying time I had of it to make the young rascal—I beg your pardon,—to make your young

friend give it up. I carry the mark of the contest to this day!"

And he laughingly showed me a deep red scar on his thumb.

"Yes," he went on, "that is the mark of Ben's teeth, set with an excellent will, I assure you. I had to choke him till he was black in the face before he would let go But it would not do to leave that—that thing in his possession, with all his devotion to Rolf, he is but a boy, with the average amount of boyish discretion; besides, no one knows where he lives, nor with what sort of people he consorts. By the way, do you know?"

"I have not the least idea"

"I wonder what sort of a kennel it is," mused he. "I happen to know that the police have more than once tried to follow him up, under the impression that they might get a clue to some hiding-place of stolen goods, or den of thieves; but he always managed to elude them."

"Did they suspect him of stealing, then?" said I. "I am sure that they did him injustice. He goes over this house almost at his will; and I leave all sorts of valuables in his reach, when he is quite unwatched, too."

"Your defence is unnecessary. They made up their minds long ago that the boy is honest enough, himself, but that blind, dogged devotion of his to whomsoever he happens to fancy might be turned to the advantage of some arch-thief who had the wit and luck to win his liking."

"I do not believe that he has any such associations," protested I, stoutly. "In his way, he is as upright as—as you are."

"So be it! I have learned to respect your convictions, though you do not arrive at them by any road laid down in

dialectics. But Ben has owed me a rigid grudge ever since that day I was telling you about. Yet it was solely for Rolf's sake—or Dana's, rather—that I insisted on dispossessing him of his find, and promised him a heroic dose of birch, as well as the weight of Rolf's death on his conscience, if he ever dared to breathe a word about the matter."

"The latter threat was the only one to the point," said I. "If you had promised to roast him at a slow fire for refusing to do anything to injure Rolf, he would have laughed in your face, and walked into the flames without an instant's hesitation."

"I do believe that he would! A wonderful fascination that fellow must have possessed, to knit so closely to him such different natures as Dana's and Ben's."

Nor is Ber the only surprised and not altogether pleased observer of the increasingly intimate relations between Harold and the rectory. The vestry, with the exception of good old Mr. Darcy, plainly regard their colleague as in some sort a renegade. He was not elected to his post that he might go over, heart and mind, arms and munitions of war, to the enemy,—perhaps I should say, the opposition. For it is scarcely to be assumed that they would go quite so far as to set down Paul as their foe, even in thought. In truth, I think they all like him personally.

Nevertheless, to their minds, their rector is a man who needs a deal of holding-back and hemming-in; his zeal is not duly tempered with discretion, nor his energy with moderation, which lacking graces it is their duty—and pleasure—to supply.

"You are going too fast, Mr. Vennor," remonstrated Mr. Pollard, lately, after listening with shut eyes to Paul's urgent plea for a speedy enlargement of the crowded Sunday

school-room,—"You are going too fast; don't you think it is time to put on the brakes a little?"

"I leave that for you to do," returned Paul, with most unwonted dryness of tone.

Nor is too rapid a progress the vestry's only subject of discontent; they greatly deprecate Paul's friendliness with Mr. Ennadeen. Not that there is any decided intimacy; but the two appear to meet with pleasure and part with regret, when circumstances bring them together. A dignified aloofness towards a man who is nearly certain to turn out to be either an adventurer or a criminal in disguise, would be a more becoming attitude in a clergyman, they maintain. At all events, it would be better to wait and see how things turn out before committing one's self.

Paul listens courteously to their advice; but reminds them that the Master came to call, not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance; also, that he who sits down to wait passively for results, doing nothing to help or hinder them, nor to fix their character for good or evil, loses an opportunity that he was meant to improve, and that will never return.

But he looks a little weary of it all sometimes; until I break out into indignant denunciation, when he smilingly suggests that it would be well to remember that we are still in the Wilderness, and must not expect the ease, the brightness, the peace and joy of the Promised Land.

XXII.

TOLD IN MUSIC.

Dana Heathcote must also have found some difficulty in adjusting her relations with the rectory to those of the new intimacy; and it is a noteworthy fact, casting a pleasant light upon the sweetness and strength of her character, that she has done it quietly and pleasantly, without word or sign of reproach, jealousy, or suspicion. Finding that Harold's visits are usually in the evening, she has ceased to come hither at that time; but she comes at all other hours of the day, and in precisely the old way—no less frank, no less affectionate, no less charming in her brighter moods, and no less pathetically lovely in her sadder ones.

Yet there is surely a change in her, of late; the bright moods are rare and brief, the sad ones almost continuous. The strain of this trying situation is telling on her; it is dimming the sunshine of her smile; it is withering the fresh bloom of her young life. There are times when I feel as if I could not have it so, when I could almost wish that Rolf and Harold, the Manor and everything connected with it, were at the bottom of the Red Sea, if only the rose might return to Dana's cheek and the brightness to her eyes.

And then I remind myself that the Father knows well

what is good for us all,—for the shaping and polishing of character, the nourishing of the life that is not only "more than meat," but more than happiness. Can I not trust my friends, here as well as hereafter, to the Love that is always loving, and the Wisdom that is wholly wise! I am not so foolish as to pity the athlete for the rigid training that develops his muscles into the perfection of strength and symmetry; the student for the unremitting application that fits him for future usefulness and fame; the statesman for knitting his brows over problems the happy solution of which lifts him to be the guide and stay of nations; why should I deprecate the training which prepares the soul for a future more brilliant and more enduring than any of these?

I was in my room this morning, busy with that task of Ocnus—the family mending—when the piano-keys suddenly woke from slumber, and the whole house was filled with vexed and doleful harmonies,—if that be in truth the term for such strange, ghastly intervals, such mixed and broken chords, such wild, bewildering progressions, as assailed my surprised ears. It was as if the Spirit of Music had gone blind and deaf, and were groping its way over the key-board; with too much of knowledge to make absolute discord, and too much of grief and dismay to create harmony.

I endured it as long as I could; then I dropped needle and thimble, and ran down-stairs.

"Danita *mia!* what is the matter with you?" I cried, putting my arms round her, and kissing her with lingering, sympathetic tenderness.

She hid her face on my shoulder. "I dare not tell you."

"Am I so formidable a personage, then? I did not sus-

pect it. Look up, and make sure that there is nothing to fear."

She lifted her head, gave me one glance, and let it fall again with a moan.

"You are kindness itself; I did not need to see you to know that! But this is such a despicable thing. I am so ashamed of myself! I feel so false, so weak, so mean, so—"

"My dear! will you be good enough to remember that it is my friend to whom you are applying all those uncomplimentary epithets? I decline to listen to another one of them."

She did not smile, as I expected; she merely answered, sombrely:—"They are well deserved, nevertheless."

And she turned again to the piano, dropped her hands upon the keys with a sharp crash and clangor, and began to run her fingers up and down the key-board in broken chromatic phrases more lugubrious than any wail, bound together by chords, struck in *arpeggio*, like convulsive sobs; —in truth, the whole instrument seemed to moan and shriek in the very abandonment of shame and grief. I felt a momentary pity for it, as if it were a living thing. Never before, in all its existence, had it been forced to give utterance to such an agony of anguish. Involuntarily, I was extending my hand to interpose, and save it from farther torment.

But I drew back in time, remembering that the girl was only availing herself of her most natural and adequate mode of expression. For her, musical sounds are as much of a relief as sobs and tears, cries and prayers, to other women; in no other way could she so surely and quickly ease her heart of its over-burden. Besides, if her mood were suffered to have its way, it must wear itself out ere

long, as all human moods do; the most tender as well as the most bitter, the most loving as well as the most wrathful,—alas! even here the weakness of the flesh is a hindrance to the willingness of the spirit! Exhaustion comes alike from pain and pleasure, from joy and sorrow.

I sat down and waited; feeling as if I, too, were an instrument played on by remorseless fingers, so inevitable did my heart ache and thrill with the power and passion of that marvellous playing; for marvellous it was—the very essence of genius,—albeit, I fervently hoped never to listen to its like again!

By-and-by, the girl's voice was blended with the agony of the instrument; not in articulate words, but in such weird, sombre, heart-breaking tones that tears welled up into my eyes and fell heavily into my lap. And surely, it could only be a dirge that she sang! yet not the calm, sweet, "Rest in peace," which is brightened by a vision of the sure resurrection, but a wretched, hopeless, despairing, "Let us bury our dead out of our sight," ending with a protracted monotone of pain.

She swung round on the piano-stool, and looked at me as drearily as if she had just turned away from an open grave

"Did you ever suppose that love—deep, tender, unselfish love—could die?" she asked.

"Such love never did die, dear; in the words of Parthenia's song: 'That was not love which went.'"

She went on as if she had not heard me—"Did you suppose it could die just when it ought to be most alive, that it could fail when it ought to be most stanch?"

"My dear Danita! what has come to you?"

The answer was such "an exceeding bitter cry!"—"My love for Rolf is dead—dead!"

The statement was so unexpected and so incomprehensible, that I could do nothing but stare at her incredulously.

"No wonder you look at me as if I were a monster!" she moaned, covering her face with her hands, and bursting into tears.

I went to her, took her in my arms, made her lie down on the sofa, and knelt beside her. "Tell me all about it, dear," said I, soothingly, "and let me help you, if I can."

The confession came slowly, falteringly, broken with sobs. "It began—I don't know when—but I first became conscious of it that day—on Oak Hill. I thought I was so glad to see him, at first;—but when I really came to know—how I felt—it was not what I thought—what I expected. Even when I stood with his arms round me, my heart—my lips—did not spring up to meet his as they would have done—once. When we had to part so suddenly, it was not the pain of separation that I felt, so much as the ache of disappointment. Yet I did not understand the meaning of it, at the time; I thought it was the danger—the haste—the interruption of Mr. Brune—and the others—which so troubled and annoyed me that I could not feel as I ought— As I ought! think of that!—that I should live to speak of what my heart ought to feel, instead of what it does feel as inevitably and unconsciously as it beats!"

She paused, moaned, shivered, and went on :—

"Every day since that, I have felt that my love for him was growing less and less—though I tried to shut my eyes to it—I would not acknowledge it even to myself. But the death-chill crept on and on, all the same—I could not stop it, do what I would. It is all over—my love is dead! it is dead."

She burst into a passion of weeping, wringing her hands

in unspeakable sorrow. But in a moment, she broke out with a lamentation all the more piteous in that it was so curiously impersonal :—

"O my love! my love! the joy and pride of my heart!—my love that I lived for and believed in;—my love, that was my star of hope and crown of rejoicing—my strength, my life—myself. How am I to live without it."

Pathetic question! who could answer it?

"But that is not the worst of it," she went on brokenly. —"How am I to live so self-despised?—that is the question. How can I ever believe in myself again? How can I trust my own feelings, how ensure my own fidelity? If I did not love Rolf once with all my heart, I do not in the least know what love is."

"My dear child," I began, scarcely knowing what to say, but trying to grope my way to something like comfort for her, "if your love for Rolf be really gone—which I can not yet believe, for I suspect that you are so overwrought by your painful situation that you do not know your own heart;—but if it be true that your love is really at an end, it can only be because you did not love Rolf as you thought. You were very young when your engagement began; you have grown to be a woman in his absence; and many a girl has lived to learn that her youthful love was not the deep-rooted, life-long thing that she had taken it to be. Better that the knowledge should come to you now than later."

"If my love for Rolf was not genuine," she replied steadily, "I have no test by which to know genuineness. I did love him, Mrs. Vennor, when he went away. Why did he ever come back! If he had only stayed away, I should never have known what a poor, pitiful, make-believe of a love was mine;—which can be warm and true in the sunshine, but

shrinks from the gloom. What would he say and do, if he knew? But he shall not know. At least, I can be true to him outwardly,—and I will."

She had no suspicion, then, that his love might also have cooled. Would it comfort her to suggest that such might be the fact?

"Danita," I began, carefully choosing my words, "is it not possible that this change in yourself, which you so deplore, is but the instinctive, unavoidable reflection of a similar change in—"

"Hush! hush!" she exclaimed, laying her hand on my lips. "You are insulting Rolf; he is too true, too noble to change. And let me tell you, if I could believe that of him, I should have no faith left in anybody—anything."

What could I do but bow my head, and pray—

"O God, Heavenly Father, who knowest the weaknesses and wanderings of our hearts better than we can possibly do, yet dost not therefore cease to love us, grant that all our loves, whether true or false, happy or sorrowful, brief or lasting, may but serve to show us the way into that blessed haven of love to Thee, which is the true goal of all our loving and living. We ask it for the love of Jesus Christ Our Lord."

"Amen," said Dana, brokenly. And again, after a moment, she repeated, more firmly, "Amen."

I cannot say that she went from me consoled, but she was certainly calmed. I tried to make her understand that there are not only mysteries about us, but mysteries within us, to which we have no satisfactory clue. The spirit and the body, the will and the affections, seem at times to act independently of each other; and the present result is a most painful discord, however it may resolve itself into

future harmony. To be patient with herself, as she would be to another in her sorrowful case; to avoid fruitless harrowing introspection; to do to-day's duty resolutely, as the surest way to make to-morrow's clear; to seek constantly for God's grace, and believe that by it she would eventually find the way out of darkness into light;—this was the best counsel that I could give.

She accepted it as meekly and gratefully as if it had been something new and wonderful, instead of an old, old prescription which has done duty in thousands of cases; to be sure, it has lost none of its efficacy thereby. As she went out, her face was almost bright in comparison with its earlier expression.

When I opened the door for her egress, Harold Brune was coming up the steps. She greeted him pleasantly enough, but hastened on her way. His eyes followed her thoughtfully, anxiously.

"What is the matter with her?" he asked, as soon as she was out of hearing. "I have never seen her look like that before; has some new trouble risen above her horizon?"

"Is there not enough to harass and harrow her in the old situation, without anything new?" I answered, evasively.

"Alas, yes. I wonder what can be done to better it. That face of hers went through and through me like a knife."

He sat down in the library, and fell into deep thought. I did not disturb him by a word. Taking up a late magazine, I ran my eyes mechanically over the page, but I could not read. Dana's recent confidence sounded in my ears; I could not make it seem other than a most incongruous link

in the chain of events, which no amount of mental manipulation could make to fit ;—albeit, it was impossible to get rid of it.

As for Harold, his preoccupation continued throughout his visit. And very soon he went.

XXIII.

A WARNING.

The clock had just struck half-past eight. I was alone in the library, wondering, with a mixture of pleasure and discontent, if the world would be able to keep in its orbit without my husband, when Harold came in.

"Where is the dominie?" he asked, hurriedly.

"That tiresome Mrs. Jimmons sent for him ten minutes ago. Her good-for-nothing husband has gone mad-drunk again, and forsooth! no one but Paul can set him in order. Do you want him particularly?"

"I hardly know! If he could do anything, yes. Probably he could not. It is the impulse to share my anxiety with you two which brought me here, rather than the conviction that there is anything to be done about it. The fact is, I have just learned that Rolf—Ennadeen—will be arrested early to-morrow morning. The police have the case all ready at last."

He began to pace restlessly up and down the room. I looked at him inquiringly; I divined that he had not uttered all that was in his mind.

"I cannot help wishing that he knew of it," he went on, pausing in his walk. "I have always suspected that he had

some sure means of escape to which he trusts whenever the worst comes to the worst;—there is no telling what secret hiding-places and exits may be contrived in that old Manor-house. Still, I am haunted by a fear that he may be caught before he can avail himself of them. In any case, it would be something not to be taken off his guard. But how to get a warning to him is the question."

I half doubted my own hearing. Here was a change, indeed! Harold actually anxious for Rolf's escape, hoping for it, willing to aid in it, at least so far as to warn him of danger! After all, when it comes to the crisis, generosity is easier than revenge to a nature that is not wholly base.

"The Manor is guarded at every point," he continued; "the servants are instructed to admit none but well-known persons, who cannot be supposed to have any knowledge of what is on foot. Now, Mr. Vennor, being a clergyman, would probably be allowed to enter unchallenged."

"And he may not be home in an hour, or more," returned I.

"And then it will be too late. His appearance at that time would arouse suspicion. I suppose we must let events take their course. Don't look so distressed about it."

But I could not help both looking and feeling so. No matter how long a blow may have been impending, we shudder when we see it falling; we instinctively stretch forth our hands to succor him on whom it is to fall. Almost involuntarily, I kept turning the difficulty over in my mind, seeking for some way to overcome it. At last an idea flashed upon me.

"I have found the messenger," I cried, starting up;—"at least I think I have. Please excuse me a moment."

I ran up-stairs, seized Ben's whistle, went to the open

window, and blew a shrill call,—repeating it after a moment. Scarcely was I half-way down-stairs again before I heard his feet on the steps, and his hand on the door. I flew to open it.

"'Why, that's my spirit!' I knew he would not fail me," I exclaimed, triumphantly.

"'Why, that's my noble mistress!
What shall I do, say what?'"

he responded, all smiles at the warmth and manner of my greeting; for nothing pleases him more than to be hailed as Ariel, and to reply, in the words of the play, much of which he now knows by heart.

But when I ushered him into the library, and he saw Harold standing there, tall, dark, and gravely watchful, he shrank back, looking dubiously from one to the other, as if he suspected some sort of a trap.

"What do you want of me?" he asked.

"I wish to send a message to—Mr. Ennadeen, at once,—a warning that may be of use to him; I fancied that you might manage to deliver it. But it is not going to be an easy task, Ben; there is a watch all around the Manor, and orders have been given that no one shall be admitted without good reason. Do you suppose that you can get in, unseen, or on any pretext?"

Ben looked silently at Harold; plainly, his presence was a puzzle to his mind, and a hindrance to his tongue.

"Never mind Mr. Brune," said I, reassuringly. "This is our business, Ben—yours and mine;—he is not going to interfere. Do you think you can deliver the message, or, are you willing to try?"

"Where is it?" was the laconic answer.

"Shall I write?" I asked, turning to Harold.

"Not if the boy's memory can be trusted. If he should be caught and searched, there should be nothing on him to get him or others into trouble."

Ben stared for an instant at the speaker; then, turning to me, with whom alone he deigned to hold any communication, he said, confidently:—

"Don't you trouble about that; I shan't get ketched—I mean caught."

I dictated a message, accepting a slight amendment by Harold, which opened Ben's eyes to their widest extent; and he repeated it word for word. Then, in an encouraging tone, he said:—

"Make yourself easy, ma'am; he'll get it all right;" and he added, as I opened the outside door for him:—

> "'I drink the air before me, and return
> Or ere your pulse twice beat.'"

And he was off like an arrow from a bow.

"Well!" said Harold, when the door had closed behind him, "I should like to know where that imp came from!"

"So should I."

"Do you mean to say that you do not know!"

"Precisely that."

"How did you happen to get hold of him so opportunely?"

"I whistled, and he came to me, my lad."

He sat down, and looked at me incredulously. "You are jesting."

"Not in the least. Did you not hear the blast of my bugle above!"

"Then he lives somewhere around here."

"I do not know as to that. It is undeniable that he manages somehow to be within call when I want him."

And I related the incident of the mysterious whistling, and the part played by Ben on that occasion.

He listened very attentively to the end, sat in deep thought for a minute, and declared, very positively: "Ben knew the secret of that whistling."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed, unbelievingly.

"There is no question about it. And, knowing whence it came, he could easily put a stop to it."

"You forget that he did not go out after he came in."

"Probably, then, he was the invisible whistler himself,—the mischievous imp!"

"Now, Harold, it is labor lost for you to insinuate that Ben ever tried to frighten me, or anyone in this household. I know better."

"Politeness forbids me to question so positive a statement."

"I wish politeness bade you do justice to Ben! I am certain there is no harm in him."

He laughingly held up the scar on his thumb to my view.

"You must admit that he had some provocation," I rejoined to this mute argument. 'He regarded you as an enemy to Rolf Kenworth; and his devotion to him is little short of idolatry. To my mind, it argues a rare and noble character to be capable of such strong, unselfish devotion."

"Dare I venture to remind you that it is a capability shared, in a high degree, by animals?" he asked, mischievously.

"Only the higher and more intelligent ones, if you please. What looks like it in the lower ones is probably a mixture of appetite and habit."

"I fancy that a cynic would accept that as a very good definition of the feeling in the higher ones," he remarked quizzically. "It is the hand that feeds and strokes them which calls out the strong devotion. Its key-note is doubtless beef, and its underlying essence electricity."

"Nonsense! I know a dog who is always fed by the cook, yet he shows her no sign of personal attachment; whereas, his devotion to his master is really pathetic; it is adoration."

"Shall I put your remarks into a syllogism?" he asked, with a teasing smile. "A dog is capable of unselfish devotion; Ben is capable of unselfish devotion; therefore Ben is a—I leave you to draw the conclusion."

"Your syllogism is a false one; it has an 'undistributed middle;' you would better have called it a sillygism. Not to waste words on so poor a thing, allow me to remark that the really interesting and important point to me is that, as soon as any high degree of intelligence is attained, the animal becomes capable of admiring, adoring,—in a certain degree, sympathizing with, if not absolutely comprehending, a superior order of being,—and that this capability lifts him higher in the scale than any former one."

"And you infer that the same capability in man also lifts him higher in the scale of being than anything else? Religion is certainly a factor in the elevation of the race that no thinking man can ignore. Of however low a sort, there seems to have always been in it the elements of sacrifice to and worship of a being much above the worshipper."

"And the question is, Whence came it?"

"There is a school of philosophers which would reply to you: 'Evolution.'"

"Doubtless. The word is pronounced as if it were the

end of controversy. But what is evolution but a process, anyway,—the method by which a cause works out its effect; or an antecedent its consequenee? Can anything be evolved that was not in the cause or the antecedent?"

"Logic, certainly, has not hit upon any way of getting at a conclusion that was not contained in the premises, or producing an effect that is not related to the cause."

"Exactly. Supposing that man was evolved from a monad—whatever that may be!—was it not potential of, pregnant with, everything that man now is, his religious nature, and all?"

"I do not see how it can reasonably be questioned," said Harold, thoughtfully. "To tell the truth, I am getting rather tired of evolution, on the whole; it seems to me that a great deal of gratuitous fuss is made about it, both by believers and skeptics. As a phenomenal process, it is interesting, of course; but as an answer to the great problems of being, it is pitifully inadequate. Grant, if you please, that every form of life on the earth came from one primal monad, and you merely fall foul of the question: Who endowed the monad with this marvellous power of evolution? All the later complexity must have been at least implicit in the earlier cause; the only possible evolution is from the implicit to the explicit. Any theory of a primitive simplicity so minute as to be invisible and indivisible, which is itself the cause of an astonishing final complexity strikes me as very bad logic. If we assume a cause which we express by A, it cannot be used to explain any effect which is not potential in A. To get anything more out of it, we must admit that there was something not expressed by A, and add another factor, X, to represent the unknown quantity necessary to complete the equation."

"Thanks; you put it more learnedly than I could do. And that X is God,—at least, to us. Not wholly an unknown factor, either, we may hope and believe; but still, so far above our human comprehension that we may reverently so term Him, for the purposes of this present equation. And the result which we get is, I think, that, from the beginning, it was meant that man should be religious, that religion is as inherent in his nature as love and hate, and that those who believe that it will ever be wholly eliminated, have embraced a faith which is not 'of reason.'"

"You are going a little fast, flying from point to point without touching the ground between," said Harold, smiling; "nevertheless, I will not pretend to say that you would not get there just the same, if you took time to take the logical steps."

"And when we do get there, does any religion satisfy our needs, our hopes, our longings, like Christianity? Just before you came in, I was reading that passage of Morley's which has been quoted as 'an example of the best expression of modern atheism,'—and we might add of agnosticism, positivism, *et cetera*. Here it is.

I turned to my book, and read:—

"'The swelling consciousness of height and freedom with which the old legends of an omnipotent divine majesty fill the breast, may still remain; for how shall the universe ever cease to be a sovereign wonder of overwhelming power and fixedness of law? And a man will already be in no mean paradise, if at the hour of sunset a good hope can fall upon him like harmonies of music, that the earth shall still be fair, and the happiness of every feeling creature still receive a constant augmentation, and each good cause yet

find worthy defenders, when the memory of his own poor name and personality has long been blotted out of the brief recollection of men forever.' "

"There is certainly a fine, generous ring about that," said Harold, admiringly.

"Yes; it is full of rhetorical and emotional music. But does it ring quite true when one comes to examine it closely? That 'overwhelming power and superhuman fixedness of law,' for instance! Skeptics may be able to believe in power that was not generated anywhere, and fixedness that was never fixed, and law that had no law-giver; but I, being a woman, with a woman's proverbial tendency to the illogical, cannot!"

"Upon my word, I had no idea that you could be so sarcastic; it is a new revelation! But the use of the words 'power' and 'law' as an ultimate cause of phenomena, is an illustration of the common tendency to mistake words for things, effects for causes. When we come to examine them, power, force, and law, are all effects, and we still have to look for the generating, originating, ordaining cause."

"Very true. However, that is not the point that I wished to make. If there be such a thing as this 'overwhelming power and superhuman fixedness of law,' how is any man to suppose that his poor efforts are of the slightest consequence in bringing about that ultimate fairness and happiness of which he is, nevertheless, to entertain such 'good hope'? Either his efforts, whether for good or evil, are all implied in that fixed and forceful law, and he need not trouble himself about them; or, they will be utterly powerless against it, and there is still less occasion for his trouble. As for that 'constant augmentation of happiness'

which is to eventuate, I suppose, in the greatest possible bliss and perfection of the human race at the end of some eons,—even allowing that to assist toward such a grand consummation is enough to console us for all the pains and penalties of our darker day,—what is to become of that poor, perfect, final flower of the race and the ages, for whom everything has been done, and nothing remains to be achieved; who can never be cheered and thrilled by the idea that he is helping forward some 'good time coming'; who can never experience the joy of self-sacrifice nor the divine blessedness of mercy; and, finally, who knows that all the bliss, the beauty, and the perfection of his being is to end in death—hopeless, irremediable, everlasting death!"

"I don't envy him!" exclaimed Harold, with energy. "If it needs all our woes and weariness, limitations and imperfections, to reconcile us to the thought of death,—even when we picture it as the gentle angel who not only opens to us the door of deliverance from present miseries, but that of entrance upon more abundant life,—what would it be if this life were all joy and completeness, and death appeared to us only as 'the leaden footfall of an inflexible law of matter,'—in other words, annihilation, so far as our personal identity is concerned? What could we do but go back to the philosophy of Epicurus: 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!'"

"I am so glad to hear you say that," returned I, heartily. "For I think you were a little infected with agnosticism, or some other 'ism,' more or less materialistic, when we first knew you."

He smiled. "I suspect that I was, more than I knew. One can with difficulty help breathing it when it is in the

air; one sees it in almost every book or paper that one takes up. But Mr. Vennor has not fought over the whole ground with me for nothing. I have come to feel that Christianity, if it does not offer one a complete, categorical answer to all the problems that beset us, is at least the best answer that we have yet had, or are likely to get, in this world."

"Paul would add a warning to the effect that we need not suppose that we have exhausted the meaning of that answer as yet; he would affirm that there are depths in it that the human plummet has not yet sounded. A Divine answer is not to be fully translated into human thought and action in eighteen centuries; there is matter in it for many more. Does not Science begin to admit that she has done little more than scratch the surface of things? And is religion to assume that she has penetrated to the innermost depths of the life and teaching of Him in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead? Not that I would imply that He *could* put all of it into any earthly speech or type,—but enough, surely, be it ever so 'ill-reported,' to keep the human intellect busy in interpretation, and the human heart in incarnation, for ages to come."

XXIV.

ARIEL AT WORK.

The door-bell rang, not loudly, but with a certain note of eagerness, easily perceived by a sympathetic ear.

"That must be Ben," said I, starting up. "He has been quick with his errand."

"With your permission, I will beat a retreat to the study," observed Harold, rising:—"You will be able to get but little out of him, in my presence. For him, I seem to be a regular stop-gap."

"Leave the door ajar, please," said I. "I prefer that you should hear his account; it will save me the trouble of repeating it after he is gone. And as the warning is due to you, it is right that you should know how it was received."

"As you choose," said he,—a little hesitatingly, nevertheless. "But I beg you to observe that it will be the first time that ever I played eavesdropper. However, I do it at your request; and 'I live to obey you.'"

Ben entered, sent a hasty glance around the room, and was evidently so much relieved to see me alone, that I half-repented of what I had done; it seemed dishonorable to give him an unsuspected listener. But it was too late to retreat.

"Well, Ben, what luck?" I asked.

He silently extracted a fold of paper from some occult place of deposit among his garments, and handed it to me with the grave importance of an envoy extraordinary. It was without address or signature and contained only these words:—

"You have kindly sent me good news, the best that I have received for many a long day. Thanks."

I read it over two or three times before I was quite sure that I understood it; so different was its tenor from what I expected. "Good news!" Certainly, it had not struck me in that light when I despatched it! I wondered within myself if Mr. Ennadeen's mind were not a little off its balance. I was silent so long that my messenger finally ventured to recall himself to my recollection with the inquiry:—

"Is it all right, ma'am?"

"I suppose so," replied I, doubtfully; so doubtfully that he kindly volunteered the information:—

"*He's* all right; ye can bet your end dime on that!"

"Indeed; what reason have you to think so?"

"Looked as bright as a new cent when I told him what ye told me to. Ye needn't lie awake to-night a-thinkin' about him; he'll sleep like a woodchuck with three foot o' snow piled a-top of him."

I accepted the nature of Mr. Ennadeen's sentiments as settled, and turned my attention in the direction of facts.

"Did you have any difficulty in getting to him?"

"Nothin' to speak of," was his answer, with the lofty scorn which reverses the common order, and reduces mountains to molehills.

"Where did you see him?"

"In his room; he was just a-gettin' ready to go to bed."

"How did you get there, pray?"

"Climbed in at the window."

"Indeed! What did he take you for, I should like to know!"

Ben laughed. "There's no fear of upsetting *him*, whatever you do! He axed—no, asked—me if that way was really more convenient than the door. Said he shouldn't ha' thought it."

"Well?"

"And I told him I guessed 'twas about the quickest way, when every outside door had a cop—I mean, a policeman—a-squintin' at it with all his might. Then his eyes gave a sort o' flash that fairly made me wink, 'twas so like lightning; and then, he asked me very perlitely, to what he owed the honor of this visit; and so I told him exactly what you told me to. And he smiled all over, yet kinder grave, too, as if I'd told him he was 'lected President. And then he asked me what sort of a time I had a-gettin' at him."

"In good season, Ben. It is information that I also am thirsting for."

"Well, ma'am, as you told me the place was watched, I didn't waste any time a-tryin' the front way. I went clear to the back of the grounds, and climbed the wall, and crept very still towards the back-door, till I see a cop—oliceman behind a big tree a-watchin' it; I knew him as soon as I set eyes on him. So then I sheered off to the side where there ain't any door, and if there wasn't another one a-prowlin' round under the trees! And I looked up, and I saw a light in Mr. Rolf's room, and I guessed Mr. Ennadeen was there. And I knew there was a leader—for rain-water, you know—near that corner; so I waited till the cop had turned his back,—it was so dark you couldn't see three feet

beyond yer nose,—and then I jest shinned up the leader kinder easy, ye know, so's not to make any noise, and always stoppin' when I heard him turn round; and when I got up as far as the winder, one blind was flung back close to the leader almost, and I could swing in jest as easy as not. Of course, I had to do it when the policeman's back was turned, and I couldn't stop to give any notice that I was a-comin', so I had to take my chance of scaring Mr. Ennadeen; but—" Ben hastily swallowed an expletive of some sort,—" he don't scare wuth a cent."

And then, with what he thought the proper dramatic effect, he inquired:

"'Was't well done?'"

"'Bravely, my diligence!'"

replied I, clapping my hands. "Ariel himself could not have done better. And then?"

"He asked me if I was sure of gettin' back as safely as I come; and I told him I didn't advise him to take any odds that I shouldn't. And then he wrote that letter,—said he'd done it so that nobody would know anything if they did get hold on't. And I shinned down the pipe again, and—here I am."

But a certain indescribable something in his manner suggested that there was more to come, if it were duly encouraged. Accordingly, I asked:—"Is that all?"

Ben suppressed a gleeful chuckle. "Well, ma'am, I just lay down in the grass—to rest a little, ye know—square in that cop—oliceman's way; and when he was a steppin' over me, I riz right up and upset him so quick he didn't know what was the matter, and he sorter hollowed as he went down, and another one came and helped him get up, and asked him what the—deuce he was about. And he said

that a blamed dog had got under his feet in the dark, and flung him down, and be blamed to it! He didn't say just them— *those* words, ma'am, but I thought you'd like 'em better'n what he did say."

I listened to this narrative with as grave a countenance as I could command, but I fear that its expression did not indicate much sympathy for the unfortunate "cop," whose path of duty was made so unexpectedly rugged.

"Where were you during this conversation?" I inquired, preferring not to dwell on the late incident.

"I was up a tree not a great way off."

"You seem as expert at climbing trees as if you lived in one."

He started, and gave me a keen, sidelong glance, as if he suspected some ulterior meaning. Not thinking it well to seem to notice it, I asked:—

"What else happened?"

"Oh, nothin' much. Only, one good turn deserves another, ye know; and as the last policeman was going back to his beat, he come right under the tree where I was; and as I'd riz up under one of 'em, I thought 'twould kinder even things to drop down on the other; so I let go, and come right down on his shoulders, and jammed his cap over his eyes, and clapped my hands around his throat with a sort of a grunt, and you'd orter seen him jump. I got a free ride, and no mistake! My! how he did prance! I s'pose he thought 'twas a bear, or somethin'."

"Ben! how could you take such a risk!" I exclaimed.

"Not a mite of a risk, ma'am. I knew he'd be too astonished to know what he was about right off, and I didn't mean to hold on till he came to his senses. I dropped off in a good dark place, and dodged behind a bush, and from that

to another one, and I was over the wall and half-way home before he could get his eyes out of his cap, and find out where he was."

"And is that all?" said I.

"Yes'm, every bit. Only, won't you please to take this? Mr. Ennadeen would give it to me; I didn't want to take it, but he made me; he's got a way that ye can't help givin' in to."

And Ben displayed a double-eagle, handling it with the awe due to something quite unknown, and of the value of which he was probably ignorant enough to regard it as something enormous.

"Have you no safe place to keep it?" I asked.

"Yes'm; safe enough. But I don't know what to do with it."

"Ah, it is the spending of it that troubles you. Well, we will have a consultation about it some day. Until then, I will keep it for you. But Ben, 'my fine Ariel,' I don't know how to thank you for your service this evening. I certainly do not want to do it as Prospero did, by giving you your liberty. I prefer to bind you to me all the closer, if I can. You are a friend worth having, Ben."

And, as he was standing by my side, I laid my hand caressingly on his shoulder. To my great amazement, he gave me a singular, inexplicable look, burst into tears, and ran straight out of the house!

Harold appeared almost immediately. "A precious young scamp, that!" said he; "especially for one who 'has no harm in him,' as you remarked just now."

"Surely, you don't mean to be hard upon him for playing a boyish trick on the police," said I. "He is, or has been, enough of a *gamin* to consider them as his natural enemies.

And what is that in comparison with his faithfulness and shrewdness in carrying out the business that was entrusted to him?"

"If you will be good enough not to crow over me too lustily," said he, laughing, "I will confess that I could apostrophize him in the words of the poet: 'I never thought to love thee half so well.'"

"Then you are beginning to do him justice at last!"

"If he plays any more such pranks with the police, he'll be apt to get justice done him! So Ennadeen was not at all disconcerted by the news he brought," he went on, with a change of tone.

"*Au contraire,*" replied I, handing him the slip of paper which had so confounded me.

He read it, as I had done, more than once; studying it as carefully as if he expected it would turn out to be an ingenious cryptogram, with a concealed meaning quite different from the one on the surface; finally he returned it with the comment:—

"I confess that I don't understand it, unless he takes this news to be his *congé*, and means to leave an empty nest for the police to overhaul in the morning, availing himself of some secret means of egress from the Manor."

As he finished, Paul came in. He greeted Harold with his usual warmth, but he glanced inquiringly from one of us to the other, with an evident comprehension of the lateness of the hour, and that something unusual was in the air. I hastened to tell him the story of the evening, to which Harold added various foot-notes, grave, humorous, explanatory, and conjectural. It was he, too, who took care that Ben's exploits should lose nothing of force or coloring in the recapitulation.

Having listened quietly to the end, Paul took up Mr. Ennadeen's note, considered it for a moment, and said, confidently :—

"He means to stand his trial. And as he has probably known all along that it was hanging over him, it is not to be wondered at that he is glad to have reached the beginning of the end."

"He might have reached it earlier by giving himself up as Rolf Kenworth at once," observed Harold, slightly lifting his eyebrows.

"In which case he would probably have been kept waiting in prison till this time for his trial. And, judging from what I have seen of our jail, the Manor is the more desirable residence."

"There is something in that," admitted Harold.

XXV.

ARRESTED.

Apparently, Paul was right. About ten o'clock next day Mrs. Clavrick rushed in, and, scarcely stopping for the matutinal greeting, burst out with the inquiry :—

"Do you know that Rolf Kenworth was taken to prison this morning?"

"We had not heard of it," replied Paul.

He did not add that we knew it was probable; we thought it advisable to limit the knowledge of Harold's and Ben's doings to the parties concerned.

"General Fairfax came and told us all about it," pursued Honor, breathlessly. "The officers were on hand as soon as he rose; they had been watching the place all night. He treated them as politely as if they had been his guests, hoped it would not inconvenience them to wait while he made his toilet, invited them to breakfast with him, asked permission to send for the General as his counsel, and altogether amazed them by his coolness and cheerfulness. Naturally, his courtesy compelled them to be courteous in return. And he was not haled ignominiously to jail between two officers, I am glad to say! The General came in his carriage; his high character and standing had

their effect; he gave his word that Mr. Ennadeen (he will not call him anything else!) would not try to escape; so the two gentlemen got into the carriage, one of the officers mounted the box with the coachman, and they drove to the prison as cheerfully as if they were out for pleasure. The General commended Rolf to the warden's kindest keeping, and did not leave him until he saw him in possession of every comfort and privilege that the prison allows,—books, writing materials, and so forth. But it is a sorrowful thing to think he is in a prison, poor fellow! If he should be convicted, I think I should put on black, and go mourning for the rest of my days,—not only for him, but for my dead faith in an overruling Providence."

"You do not quite mean *that*, I am sure," said Paul, gently. "They who truly believe in Providence, do not lose their faith whenever the ruling is not according to their wish. They remember Our Lord's words: 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter'; and they believe that, when that knowledge does come, it will be worth the waiting for. A poor thing, indeed, is the trust in God which fails us just at the moment when we need it most! It is when the storm is upon us, and the darkness around us, that faith begins to have its perfect work; before that time, we walk tolerably well by sight."

"You are right, and I am ashamed of my hasty speech," replied Honor, with frank humility. "But you do not think it possible that Rolf can ever come to the scaffold!"

"No, I do not," returned Paul, firmly. "No doubt innocent men have come there, but not of his sort,—at least not in our day. That is to say, men of Mr. Ennadeen's sort; for Rolf Kenworth is an unknown quantity to me. But if in Ennadeen we see the refined product of his earlier

character, it follows that there must have been very good material in it, to begin with."

"I suspect that I should not care very much for Mr. Ennadeen were it not for that earlier Rolf," said Honor, with a slight grimace. "Not that he isn't all that is refined and estimable, but Rolf was just delightful. Will he be like that again, I wonder, when all this dreadful labyrinth is straightened out? Because if he is not, I should hardly blame Dana Heathcote if she changed her mind, on the ground that he is no longer the man with whom she fell in love."

I think I gave a slight start; Honor's speech was so curiously *apropos* to the fact. But she did not notice it; and she soon rose to go, evidently somewhat cheered by her visit.

"It does one good to come in contact with your husband's strong, bright faith," she remarked, as I went with her to the door. "Still, some cynic or other has said it is easy to trust God for one's friends!"

"It was indeed a cynic of the straitest sect who said that," said I. "I find the contrary to be much the easier. I know that my own burden, however heavy, will not be more than I can bear; but I never feel quite the same certainty where my friends are concerned."

"It looks as if it might be your friends that you doubt, then," said she.

"Perhaps so. But there must also be a latent misgiving that the Father does not know their strength—or their weakness!—as well as I, and will not make due allowance for it, don't you see? It is an unreasonable feeling, of which I ought to be ashamed; and I am."

And we kissed each other, and she went her way.

It being lesson-morning, Ben was the next comer. But his mind was too full of other things to settle down easily to study; and I, too, had something else in view, which prompted me to shorten the session, much to his gratification.

"I s'pose you know that Mr. Ennadeen was carried off to jail this morning," was the first use that he made of his opportunity to talk.

"Yes. But we will hope that his stay there will be short," I answered, half-absently.

"It's got to be," was his confident rejoinder. "Somebody's going to slip up in his calc'lations, one of these days, and it won't be Mr. Ennadeen, neither. Jest you tell him, if you get a chance—I s'pose they won't let me in to see him—that one gun is sure to be spiked, and the biggest one, too."

"It sounds very oracular, Ben; do you think that he will understand it?"

"I s'pose not; only the general meaning of it. That's plain enough, ain't it?"

"Do you mean to imply that something which was expected to tell heavily against him, is going to be made harmless?"

"That's about as near as ye'll come to't, first time o' tryin'. That 'something' won't answer when it's called for, I guess."

And now Ben began to screw about in his chair, and look much embarrassed. "Please, please—ma'am," he stammered, "don't ever be so good to me again as you was last night,—not till the trial's over, anyhow! I can't stand it."

Doubtless my face showed that I was wholly at a loss for

the meaning of this adjuration; seeing which, he turned scarlet with confusion, and tried to explain.

"'Cause—'cause—you've no call to treat me so—so loving-like, when I'm keeping things from you that you'd oughter know, and it makes me feel meaner'n an apple with a worm inside."

I could not but smile kindly on him. His secrets were doubtless unimportant enough; but the nice sense of honor which could not endure to return reticence for kindness, even in a small thing, was a joy to me. It showed that Ben was developing spiritually not less than mentally.

"If there is anything that you really ought to tell me, I think you would do so," said I. "You certainly have a right to keep your own affairs, and those of your friends, to yourself, if you think there is good reason for it. Even the closest friends cannot tell each other things which concern a third one."

"That's it," he answered, eagerly. "It's all mixed up, now, with Mr. Rolf's affairs; my part of it I'd tell you this minute, if I could. And just as soon as his trial's over, I'll make a clean breast of it; I will, as true as I live, if you turn me right straight out o' doors the next minute, and tell me never to come near you again. But I didn't mean to do anything wrong; I truly didn't."

"I believe you, Ben. Make yourself easy; I never shall cast you off for any unintentional harm,—or even for a wilful one, duly confessed and repented of. I think too much of 'my fine Ariel' for that! Please God, he and I will not part for many a long day to come."

And, putting my hand under Ben's chin, I lifted his downcast face, and smiled into it reassuringly.

He burst into a sort of howl, kissed my hand shame-

facedly, and ran out almost as hastily as on the preceding evening.

I did not try to detain him; neither did I spend any time in thinking over his statements, for I was anxious to be gone. It had occurred to me that, if the news of Rolf's arrest had not already reached Dana, it might come to her with somewhat less of a shock from my lips; if it had, I could at least give her as much comfort as was to be derived from Mr. Ennadeen's reception of the warning sent him.

Mrs. Heathcote opened the door to me; she had seen me from the window, and did not wait for me to ring.

"I am so glad to see you," said she, warmly shaking my hand. "You have heard the bad news."

"I am not sure that it is bad; I hope it may turn out to have been quite otherwise. Where is Dana?"

"She is in her room; she is much upset; it is very hard upon her, poor child! Go right up, please; you know the way."

A moment or two elapsed before my knock was answered by a low, 'Come in';—probably there was a certain measure of composure to be attained, or of sorrowful absorption to be overcome, ere the words could be spoken.

It was a very sad face that was turned to me, as I entered; and with a certain fixedness of expression that looked as if it believed itself to be a life-long thing. Dana is still too young to count upon time's healing, or at least softening, of all emotions; to say to herself: "Yes, it hurts; it hurts almost beyond endurance; but it must be easier some day."

"Oh, it is you!" she exclaimed, with a faint intonation of pleasure. "It is kind of you to come; I was just wonder-

ing if I had courage and energy enough to go to you. Do you know that he is in prison?"

"I have the best reason in the world for knowing it; I sent him word that he was to be arrested this morning, and got in return his thanks for the 'good news.' You need not look so incredulous; those are his own words. So you see that there is no occasion to be so doleful about it, dearie."

I spoke more cheerfully than I might have done but for Ben's visit. His confidence that the "biggest gun" was sure to be "spiked" had inspired me with a certain hopefulness; albeit, I took good care not to reckon with it too rigidly. At this cloudy juncture, one may make the most of a stray sunbeam, without insisting that it shall furnish absolutely unquestionable credentials.

Dana looked at me dubiously; but, as I went on to tell her the story in detail, making the most of every encouraging point, her face brightened almost insensibly.

"Truly, it does not look as if he were either unwilling or unready to be arrested," she admitted, when my story was done. "But may not his strong consciousness of innocence lead him to think too lightly of the evidence against him?"

"Danita! you really shall not look so persistently on the dark side!" cried I. "Do you not know that half the sorrows, half the cares, of life are mere phantoms; clouds that never let fall a drop of rain, nor send forth so much as a cat's paw of wind, though we anticipatorily shrink and shiver as if we were in the thick of both. Do we call ourselves Christians, then, to behave as if we were the veriest heathen, with no Everlasting Arms beneath us, no wise Providence around us, no ever-present Love above us?"

Dana shook her head drearily. "I should not be so depressed if my own consciousness of ill-desert were not so strong. It is the loss of faith in myself that has taken the spring and spontaneity, the joy and the peace, out of my faith in God."

"My poor child! is not this the time when you need it most? And where did you get the idea that faith in one's self is necessary to one's faith in God? In the Bible, we are told that our weakness is our strength, that our great need is our strong claim on His tender love, that the lost sheep is the one most carefully sought for, if only it cries to Him out of the desert, the thicket, or the morass into which it has wandered."

"You are right," said she, bursting into tears; "I am thinking more of my own short-comings than of His mercy and goodness."

"It is not too late to mend," I answered encouragingly. "To know ourselves is not a very useful or cheering sort of knowledge, if we rest there. To go onward to 'the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,' is to go from knowledge to wisdom."

She sat silent for a little time, her head resting on her hand, her eyes fixed on the waving foliage of a tree just outside of her window.

"One thing I want to say to you," she said, finally:—"Rolf's arrest is a call to loyalty that I cannot ignore. While he is in prison, on trial, it is not for my feelings towards him to give an uncertain sound. In his extremity, I must, I will, I do, love him;—I forget—I pray you to forget—that I ever doubted it."

She spoke with the calm decision which, seeing the path of duty clearly before it, means to walk directly therein,

not asking what thorns are in the way, nor where it is to end. Enough that the direction cannot be mistaken.

Yet I knew not how to answer her. The words that Paul so often quotes, "The truth shall make you free," came to my mind with singular vividness. And it was a falsehood, —a noble, unselfish, generous one (strange conjunction of words!)—but still a falsehood, that Dana was minded to act. But how could I hinder her? It does not seem a fitting time to turn one's back on one's standard when it is in the thickest of the fight, even though at that very moment we are smitten through and through with the conviction that it does not, after all, represent the things to which we owe allegiance. How can we persuade others, how can we be quite sure ourselves, that it is moral heroism, and not moral cowardice, that prompts the desertion!

Moreover, if the truth which makes one free is to bind another in the chains of disappointment and anguish, must it be spoken? If the final truth be the outcome of previous failure and falsehood, must it be proclaimed? Questions requiring more time and better wisdom than I could command at the moment.

Besides, might not these present circumstances be the effectual means of reuniting hearts which former ones had tended to dissever? I seemed to see light in this quarter; so, when Dana turned to me with some surprise at my delay, I said evasively:—

"As to that, you cannot do better than obey your own conscience. If it says: 'This is the way,' I have no counter counsel to offer."

"Do you suppose that I shall be permitted to visit him?" she asked after a short silence.

"Doubtless. I think he will be allowed all possible privi-

lege, and treated with all possible leniency. The fact that he is in prison by his own act, will be sure to tell in his favor, as long as he is not convicted. But, if conviction should finally turn on the question of identity, would it not be better for you to stay away?"

"Perhaps so. How can I tell? I want to do the best and kindest thing for him—putting myself entirely out of the question. Will you ask Mr. Vennor about it?"

"I will do better; I will ask General Fairfax."

"But he will consider only the legal bearing of the thing."

"We will put it to himself then,—I mean Rolf—Mr. Ennadeen. Paul will be sure to see him very soon; he will submit it to his consideration, if you like."

And thus it was settled.

I did not quit Dana without taking an opportunity to set forth Harold's prompting of the warning to Mr. Ennadeen in a fitting light; it was to him alone that the thing was really due.

"Such an act on his part would have surprised me greatly a few months ago," answered she, with a faint smile; "but he has changed so much of late that I can only be glad and grateful. Please try to make him understand that I am both,—without—without—"

She hesitated; it was not easy to put the delicate, maidenly shrinking into plain words.

"Without committing you to anything more, or suggesting it to him," I finished. "You need not fear, Danita; in these days, there is no room in Mr. Brune's heart for anything but the truest sympathy for you and yours."

"It is pleasant to think so, if I may," she answered; "for I liked him much when I first knew him; it was impossible

not to admire his talents. But afterward he became so cold and stern and cynical, that it was painful to meet him. He was firmly persuaded of Rolf's guilt, too, and that I could not endure. What have you done to him, to change him so much?"

"Nothing Stronger and more subtle forces than I can exert are at work upon him. Some of them came from you, in a way; and all, I think, had their origin above. The wind of the Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and we do not always hear the sound thereof; but we see the effects, and they are marvellous in our eyes."

XXVI.

THE WEIGHT OF A FRIEND.

Paul was busy during the day ; not until evening did he set out for the prison.

"I do not fear to leave you lonely," said he, with a smile, as he kissed me good-bye. "Harold is sure to be here."

We looked at each other, but neither spoke. Where the true oneness of wedded life exists, speech may be a convenience, or a luxury, but is rarely a necessity. And now and then, it is simply a superfluity.

It is a fact—I was about to say, a sad fact, but I refrain from a characterization which may turn out to be a superficial one,—it is simply a fact, then, that Paul's predictions touching my friendship with Harold are tolerably well fulfilled ;—if my good angel had not interfered, in the nick of time, to divert a large share of his regard and confidence to Paul himself, I might write, "intolerably well." To look at him open-eyed and critically, our friend and brother is certainly an egotist by habit, and not even the dawning of the new life can make anything else of him in a day, nor a month. The processes of the spiritual, as of the natural world may begin with cataclysms and upheavals, rending of rocks and liberation of gases ; but afterward must come

the period of slow culture and gentle growth ; of a silent progress, which gives little account of itself from day to day, although in a year one discovers, with a certain surprise, that it was really continuous and considerable.

Harold has lived a self-centered life so long that his own ideas, hopes, fears, pains and pleasures, have come to seem of paramount importance, while the delight of pouring them forth into sympathetic ears and minds is so new that he can never get enough of it. The evenings are few when he does not appear at the rectory for a longer or shorter stay ; and as Paul is often out or busy, the brunt of listening and sympathizing falls upon me. I hear of Dana's beauty and perfections, of his own unalterable love for her, of his forebodings for her future, and a thousand kindred subjects, until I am as weary of contemplating the ebb and flow of his emotions as if they were my own ; yet without the power (which I should be driven to exercise in my own case) of flinging them all aside when the farthest point of endurance is reached, and turning to something else. Much as I like him—and I do like him more and more—there are times when, after having twice or thrice turned the conversation and found that it continually came back to the same point, like an ejected cat to the old spot in the chimney corner, I draw a long breath of relief to hear the door close behind him. I suspect, at such times, that my fount of sympathy has been drawn perilously near to the bottom, that the mud of weariness was about to be stirred up, and that it is well to give it an opportunity to be filled again before the draining process is renewed.

And yet, having written these paragraphs with much inward satisfaction and relief, I am half-inclined to draw my pen through them, as being the more or less of over-state-

ment which is sure to result from an attempt to put very subtly mixed emotions into words. The thoughts and feelings which drift across the mind like cirrus clouds over a summer sky, take a very different aspect and consistency when fixed upon paper. What was at first only the inevitable mists due to the imperfection of human nature, becomes disloyalty by the condensation of speech. But, on second thoughts, I let it stand, as not inappropriate to what is to follow.

For Paul was right. Scarcely a half-hour elapsed ere Harold's ring came, which I recognize at once by a subtile individuality, not easy to define. He came in looking very sombre, asked for Paul, was told that he was out and the occasion thereof, gazed abstractedly out of window into the evening gloom, and fell into a brown study. I turned back to my book, willing to respect his silence, though it should last for an hour.

"Did you ever have evil impulses?" was the cheerful inquiry with which he finally opened the conversation.

"What if I answered you in the words of the immortal Artemus: 'I don't have nothing else.'"

He brought his eyes back from their trip out of window and fixed them on my face.

"You are jesting."

"I never was more serious—more deadly serious, if that pleases you better. You see, my evil impulses make a much stronger impression upon me than my good ones. They have to be challenged, fought with, vanquished if possible; in short, they cost me time and trouble enough to fill an inordinate share of my mental horizon."

"Do you mind giving me an example? My preconceived notion that you are the most serenely and inevitably right-

minded of women, refuses to give way without a clear and convincing illustration."

Would he be convinced, I wondered, if I were to tell him that my first impulse, on hearing his ring, was to flee to my room by way of the back stairs, and make the slight headache which was teasing me an excuse for not seeing him? And the impulse to open his eyes by such a confession, what adjective would best befit that!

Good or evil, I suppressed it, and sought for a substitute. "Paul being well out of hearing, I don't mind confiding to you that there are times when, meeting one of your respected colleagues of the vestry, my fingers ache to pull his eyes well open for once, literally and figuratively."

"Mine ache, the rather, to close them indefinitely with a straight-out-from-the-shoulder!"

"Shake hands! Such harmony of sentiment is as delightful as it is unexpected."

The hand-shaking went off cordially enough, but Harold's thoughts went directly back to the starting-point, from which I had only succeeded in diverting them for a moment.

"How little you know, Milady," (it is his usual name for me now), "of such evil impulses as I have to struggle with! Could you believe that there is still a part of me which was glad to hear of Rolf Kenworth's arrest?"

I longed to ejaculate, "Incredible!" with a suggestive lift of eyebrows. It seemed to me that I had been breathing the heavy atmosphere of the Ennadeen mystery long enough to be indulged with a brief interfusion of laughing-gas. But Harold's sense of humor is not always at home, ready to answer to the lightest knock, like Paul's and mine; when he is serious, it is a dense and deadly seriousness,

greeting any side-play of levity with an incredulous stare of surprise. So I answered, with due gravity :—

"I will try to believe whatever you please to assert."

"It is a lamentable fact that after having done what I could to prevent it, there was a hellish moment or two when my heart leaped because I had failed. The unregenerate man is rampant in me yet."

"Did you expect, then, to get the better of all your evil dispositions in a few weeks? Most people find it to be the work of a lifetime, and none too well done, then."

"But I have been accustomed to think my will practically invincible, at least so far as I myself am concerned. Nature endowed me with a rigid inflexibility of purpose. I suspect you would say that no mortal man has the right to be so determined as I am apt to be."

"Most likely your will *is* in fault, then. To wish and to will are not the same thing, though we sometimes cheat ourselves into that belief."

"Doubtless you are right. I do wish to be a better man, but if I really willed to be so, with all the dogged strength of will that belongs to me, no doubt I should succeed."

"I am not so sure of that. You would be like a man trying to drag a heavily loaded car uphill, by mere muscular strength."

"How should I do it, then?"

"Like an electrician,—preparing batteries, laying wires, making connections, and trusting to the power of a force of which you know little except that it comes at your call, as soon as you have fulfilled the necessary conditions, and does your work for you with a celerity and efficiency that you could never hope to equal."

"And the wires and the connections?"

"Prayer, reading the Scriptures, doing the plain duty until the obscure one becomes plainer."

"Will you set me down as incorrigible if I tell you that I read without interest and pray without fervor?"

"When you first began to read law, did you always find it interesting."

A swift flash of recollection passed over his face:—"Dull and heavy as lead, some of it. Ore that seemed to pay but poorly for such hard digging. But it grew to be intensely, absorbingly interesting after awhile."

"Would it have done so if you had not kept on digging."

"Hardly. I see what you mean: studying Scripture in the same way, I should meet with the same reward. And you would say the same thing of prayer."

"Very nearly—if it be real prayer."

"A pertinent 'if.' How am I to know whether mine be the real thing, or no?"

"By its sincerity. Don't ask for what you don't want."

"Not to love my enemies, because I know so well that I greatly prefer to hate them?"

"Certainly not. Beg for grace to *want* to love them. Prayer is so often ineffectual because it is so perfunctory. We pray for the things that we think we ought to pray for; we are insincere both to God and ourselves. If we cannot show Him heart-deeps of love and faith, then let us frankly open to Him the depths of our coldness and unfaith; we shall find in Him depths of goodness and mercy to answer such a cry:—

> "'Deep calls to deep;—man's depth would be despair,
> But for God's deeper depth; we sow to reap;
> Have patience, wait, betake ourselves to prayer;
> Deep answereth deep.'

Better, a thousand times better, to say: 'O Lord, I don't want to be pure, or honest, or merciful; help me to want it!' than to ask formally for all the graces in the calendar."

"Yes, that must be true," he answered, thoughtfully. "Absolute sincerity, in word and thought, is surely the essential thing." And he added, after a moment;—"I fear it would not do for me to ask for Rolf's acquittal."

"You surely do not want him to be convicted!"

"Not if he be innocent; I am not so bad as that."

"Pray, then, that the right may be done."

"Don't you think it will be done without my praying for it?"

"Undoubtedly. But your attitude will not be the same towards it. By praying for it, you virtually promise to help it on, to receive it as the best of gifts, and not to murmur nor to mourn though it contravene the dearest wish of your heart."

"Do you know that you are probing me deeply, sharply, there!"

"If it be my hand that holds the probe, it is your own that guides it to the sore spot, and presses it home. What do I know of your inner life that you do not choose to unfold?"

"There is a fellow-query to that: "What do I know of my inner life that I do not choose to unfold to you or your husband? It is simply amazing when I stop to think of it! I, who have never before felt the smallest disposition to confide in anyone! Will it last, I wonder!"

"Presumably; while the need lasts. To the special need there must be a special outlet; to the occasional demand an occasional supply."

"Ah, but the special need often becomes the regular one;

the occasional demand grows into a confirmed habit. Does the prospect appal you?"

"Sufficient unto the day," said I, lightly shrugging my shoulders.

His dark eyes searched my face with sudden suspicion; my own fell before their keen, incisive glance.

"Confess, now, Milady, that I bore you unmercifully," said he, leaning forward.

How quickly it flashed upon me that a far worse thing would be the consciousness of having failed to meet a friend's need with friendly aid, that my sometime weariness and irresponsiveness were but inconsiderable eddies on the surface of a deep, steady current of real regard, that friendship means something stronger than liking and deeper than enjoyment, that, like everything else that is good on earth, from our Lord's life down to that of His humblest disciple—nay, down to the earthworm and the minutest fungus—its essential meaning is Service. What is the finest essence of all human relations, from the king to the subject, but just that! What else can give them so strong a claim upon immortality!

If there had been a certain amount of truth in my earlier analysis of my feelings, there was a far greater one in that which now prompted me to lift my eyes to Harold's unshrinkingly, and answer:

"I confess that to be bored—if that be the proper term—is, on the whole, a deeper delight than to be entertained."

He still searched my face with his keen gaze; there had been enough of a pause before I spoke to make him wonder at it. But he saw nothing to awaken doubt of my sincerity, and he replied, with energy:—

"If ever I have an opportunity to serve you or yours,

and do not seize upon it with avidity, though it should cost me my life, count me forsworn."

There was a deep, rich fervor in his voice that could only come from a deeper, richer sincerity. And I had counted this man an egotist! But there may be a thoughtless, surface egotism, covering deep treasures of devotion which are ready to respond to the plain call of the urgent need.

And there is such a thing as a superficial analysis, busying itself with the sand and earth and stones on the surface of character, and never reaching down to the bright ore-beds beneath. Happy the friends who find that the deeper their analysis of each other goes, the richer the results! For all deep things are of God; it is the shallow only which is of the earth, earthy. Even things evil on the surface are often found to be pregnant with an unsuspected good. And wherever there is depth beneath depth, truth within truth, beauty above beauty, an endless unfolding to a persevering search, we may be sure that there the human trenches upon the divine, the mortal upon the immortal, the temporal upon the eternal.

Yet I smiled inwardly, too, when after a brief silence, Harold asked, hesitatingly;—"Have you seen Dana—I mean, Miss Heathcote—to-day?"

"Yes; I was with her an hour or more this morning."

"Would it be an indiscretion to ask if she was very much cast down by the news of the arrest?"

"It certainly would. You will have to trust to your imagination for the answer to that question."

"It is quite equal to the occasion," he answered, sighing heavily. "I have seen her white, distressed face before me all day; it has looked up to me from every law-book, every page of testimony. It has nearly driven me wild."

Having no answer *apropos* to this, I made none. Her "white, distressed face" rose before me, too; not as I had seen it this morning, sweet and calm with generous resolve, but as it had looked two weeks ago, when she had cried out so piteously that her love was "dead—dead!" What would Harold give, I wondered, to know of that cry! Could there be in it any element of hope for him!

I glanced at his face. He was lost in thought, his fine features clearly indicative of inward struggle. And I, too, fell into reverie.

He looked up at last. "Winifred, do you think it would be right to suppress the evidence in my possession, if I can?"

My heart gave a great leap; nor did I comprehend at the moment the deeper, fairer ground of its elation. I thought it was wholly for Dana's sake, but I knew afterward that it was Harold's victory over self whereat I rejoiced most heartily.

"Why not?" I asked, impulsively. And then, doubt seized me. "I don't know—I am not sure," I faltered. "I am afraid— Ask Paul."

XXVII.

TRUTH AT ANY COST.

PAUL came in almost immediately, and Harold referred the question to him.

"I think it neither right nor expedient," replied he. "The truth shall make us free, you know. What we need to suppress is our own private construction of it,—the personal hopes, fears, antipathies, and predilections with which we blur and color it."

He spoke decidedly, yet with the look and tone that indicate a pre-occupied mind, and directly, he seemed to be lost in thought.

Seeing this, Harold, with instinctive delicacy, rose to go; perhaps he suspected that he was in the way of a free flow of conjugal confidence.

But Paul stretched out a detaining hand. "Not yet, Harold, if you please. I have something to say to you."

Harold sat down again, but Paul did not immediately speak. It struck me that he was carefully disentangling whatever he wished to say from other things about which he meant to be silent.

"You just asked me," he began, at last, "if it would be right for you to suppress certain evidence in your posses-

sion. You may be glad to know that my conversation with Mr. Ennadeen, this evening, makes it certain that such a suppression would not be anywise agreeable or helpful to him. On the contrary, he wishes that everything bearing on the case may be brought forward, as it is in the most thorough probing of the matter to the bottom that he hopes to bring out the truth. So you see that you can produce the worst thing that you know with a clear conscience and a heart at ease, so far as he is concerned. It is only for yourself that you are responsible."

A look of disappointment clouded over Harold's face. Perhaps he has liked to feel that Rolf's destiny was in his hands; perhaps it has been pleasant to him, in his darker moods, to picture himself as adding the conclusive link to the chain of convicting evidence; or, in his softer ones, as destroying it, and thereby establishing a lasting claim upon the gratitude of Dana Heathcote. If he has indulged such visions, Paul's words put an end to them.

He sat in profound silence for some moments; when he lifted his eyes, it was to answer Paul's last sentence, which had been uttered with a gravity approaching to solemnity.

"Myself! my motives and aims, do you mean?"

"Yes. If you produce your evidence with a single eye to truth and right, hoping and believing that it may help to further those ends—as all truth, properly used, must—it is well with you. But if you produce it from any selfish motive whatever, it is ill. And the time is coming, my brother, when to be able to lay your hand upon your heart, and tell yourself that your motives have been pure and peaceable—at last, if not at first—will be better to you than riches or pleasure, favor of man or love of woman."

Harold rose, and his face was very pale. I did not won-

der ; there was something in Paul's words and tones that made me shiver as if a grave had been unclosed before me.

"You compel me to subject my motives and acts to a closer scrutiny than I have been doing," said he. "I will go home, and set about it."

Paul laid his hand affectionately on his shoulder, and went with him to the door. "I will pray for you, my dear fellow," I heard him say, kindly, ere it closed.

He came back and sat down wearily ; yet oppressed with no physical weariness, I knew well. What a life of vicarious emotion is his ! He is continually called upon to enter into the deepest depths of the trials, woes, sins, difficulties, hopes and fears, of a whole parish ; to deal out, in fitting proportion, sympathy, consolation, warning, counsel, encouragement, condemnation. If I sometimes feel that to be the willing confidant of a few friends is a sufficiently onerous task, what must it be to stand in that relation to so many !

He looked at me with a smile of singular sweetness ;— "Come here, sweetheart ; I want you close."

I went and sat down by him.

"I have been listening," he began, "to one of those stories of real life which are stranger than fiction; although, like all true stories, it has no end. It explains some things which have puzzled us all, but it leaves the main mystery as much in the dark as ever, while it sets some things oddly awry. Our friend Dana, for instance—"

He stopped, and looked thoughtfully into the flame of the lamp. His silence lasted so long that I was about to remind him that he had left his sentence unfinished, when he roused himself, and went on :—

"Winnie, I long to tell you all about it, and I was just

beginning to do so, when the conviction suddenly and strongly seized me that it would be better not. Your path is going to be much easier and clearer if you do not know what I have learned to-night. I see plainly that, were I in your place, I should prefer to remain in ignorance. Can you trust my judgment, and wait?"

It was hard to answer affirmatively. What he had said had excited my interest and curiosity to the utmost; it was no easy thing to put the untasted cup of satisfaction from my lips. Nevertheless, I made shift to do so.

"If only I were sure that you do not doubt my ability to keep the secret," I faltered.

He smiled, and gave me a word or two which abundantly satisfied me on that head.

"It is for your sake, chiefly, that I deny myself the pleasure of telling you," he added. "And secondly, for Dana's sake; you can meet her with heartier, freer, more helpful sympathy, if you are not weighted with the knowledge that even I, in my less intimate relation to her, may find it difficult to carry off easily. You would find it a constant source of difficulty and embarrassment. Do you agree to wait?"

"As you will," said I quietly. It must be confessed that seldom have I spoken, or am likely to speak often in future, words costing so much effort. But if the effort was great, so was the reward. Paul's look and smile, as he thanked me for my trust, would have repaid me for a greater sacrifice.

"But, Paul," said I, after a little, "I should like to ask one question: Did you get any clear conviction of Rolf's innocence?"

"I am certain of it. He is as innocent as you or I."

He spoke decisively, yet I was conscious of an odd tone in his voice.

"And is there good reason to hope that it will be proven on the trial?"

"Plenty of hope, if you like, but less reason than I could wish. I found an extremely depressed and disheartened prisoner in our friend Ennadeen. Although he went to prison so cheerfully and bravely, a reaction had set in, and he was despondent to the verge of despair. General Fairfax and Mr. Wright were with him, doing their best to lighten the gloom, but succeeding very poorly. So, as a last resource, the General suggested that I should be taken into confidence; I think they felt that their burden was getting too heavy for them, and a fresh hand might ease the weight a little. It certainly did Ennadeen good to spread the whole affair before a new listener, with new interest, new suggestions, new ways of looking at it. And as I saw excellent reason for believing that Providence would bring the truth to light, I left him looking much brighter than I found him."

"Did you ask him about Dana's coming to see him?"

"Yes. And although a visit from her would have no effect on the result, we all agreed that she must not recognize the prisoner as Rolf Kenworth, either by visit or letter. You can tell her the decision, without the preamble."

"Poor Dana!" said I; "she is so anxious to give him the help of her sympathy, her strong confidence in his innocence, her certainty that it must be made clear in the end!"

I could not include "her unfaltering love and truth," but Paul did not notice the omission.

"He understands all that," he replied.

I was surprised at the lack of heartiness in his tone. Had he been made aware that Mr. Ennadeen was not really anxious to see Dana, that her presence was likely to be an embarrassment rather than a pleasure, a reproach to his waning or vanished love! And was it in this way that the answer to the sorrowful problems caused by her own unfaithfulness was to be made plain to her?

It scarcely needs to be said that not even to Paul had I ever mentioned Dana's confession. To me, it seems little short of sacrilege to discuss the delicate movements and mysteries of a maiden's heart with one of the opposite sex, even though it be one's own husband. There, surely, is a case where the law of oneness may cease to be operative; being overruled by the higher law of the Golden Rule.

To say truth, I did not quite credit Dana's defection; I fancied that it was a temporary obliquity, sure to be corrected by time and patience. In that case, better it should never be known,—I would forget it myself.

She looked very sorrowful over the decision that she must not visit Rolf; it was not the relief to her that I half anticipated it would be; perhaps she believed that the sight of him in prison, by its powerful appeal to all that is best and womanliest in her nature, would inevitably revive her love, and restore to it its primal bloom and sweetness.

Since then, she has had to endure the pain of being summoned as a witness. She had hoped to be spared this trial; indeed, there was a general expectation among us that the prosecution would show a delicate consideration in that respect. There were enough other witnesses to the question of identity, we thought; but it turns out that few

persons are willing to speak with any positiveness to a point where error is possible, and involves results so momentous. People who did not hesitate, a month ago, to proclaim their conviction that Rolf and Ennadeen were one and the same, now hesitate and qualify. And the State's attorney, being very much in earnest, sees that Dana's affirmative would be almost final ; or, if she chooses to perjure herself, he imagines that it will be done in a way to deceive no one.

It is a suggestive fact that the alternative of a truthful negative is not taken into consideration.

"What am I to do ?" she asked me, yesterday, with a very troubled face. "I cannot utter a falsehood : I don't know how."

"I think that Mr. Ennadeen wishes to have the exact truth told in every particular," replied I.

"That is like Rolf," returned she, with a certain gentle pride in her lover. "No one ever had a loftier scorn of a lie."

I did not think it necessary to remind her that he seemed to be acting one, in posing as Hugh Ennadeen, but the thought flashed over me, nevertheless !

She went on, meditatively:—

"It should be the right thing to tell the truth always, one would think. I suppose I can decline to answer."

"I think that is allowed only where answering would criminate one's self ; otherwise it becomes contempt of court, and may be punished with imprisonment.

"I could endure that," she answered, quietly.

"But what would be the use ?—the inevitable inference being that the truth which is suppressed must be damaging in its character. If you could truthfully state that you had

ever doubted that Rolf and Mr. Ennadeen were identical, that statement might be of some avail."

"How can I doubt it? The truth is, I got two or three long letters from him by a safe, confidential route, while he was in Egypt, and the last one came shortly before he did. I must tell you that, up to that time, he had been in the interior, quite out of the way of regular mails; besides, Mr. Holroyd, who sent him out, seeing that accident had hidden him as successfully as if it had been intention, and knowing that nothing would keep him there a day after he learned what had taken place here, took the responsibility of ordering that all papers should be suppressed at Cairo by his agents there. Of course, there were no letters except from ourselves, as no one else knew where he was. Well, the news did finally reach him; and naturally, he was overcome by surprise, horror, grief, and indignation; and very impatient to get home. He told me that he should follow the letter almost immediately, just as soon as he could procure passports, funds, and so forth. He ended by telling me not to be surprised nor taken off my guard if he should appear in a very different way from what I might expect; he had no time to explain farther, because he was writing very hurriedly, to catch the mail. But I understood as soon as I heard of the arrival of—of Mr. Ennadeen," she added, with a faint smile. "Without that letter, I might not have been so sure; with it, how could I doubt?"

The argument was conclusive. It swept away my latent hope that Mr. Ennadeen might prove that he was not Rolf; though how that could better matters it would puzzle me to explain. In setting him free, it would leave Rolf and Dana precisely where they were before, the one under a

cloud of mystery and danger, the other subjected to the slow torture of separation and suspense.

But here, Paul came in ; and Dana turned to him with her perplexing alternatives,—not truth or falsehood, be it understood, but truth or silence.

"My dear child," said Paul, kindly taking her hand ; "I not only dare tell you to speak the truth, as you understand it, without fear or favor, but I dare promise you that it will injure no one. The only question of importance to Rolf and his friends to be settled by this trial, is whether his innocence of the crime imputed to him can be proved. In order to get at that, the sooner the question of identity is disposed of, the better ; and in helping to dispose of it, you will have done a very good thing. We want to clear the ground of minor matters, and get at the main business at the earliest possible moment."

"Oh, are you quite sure?" asked Dana, breathlessly, not yet certain that she was free to avail herself of such a welcome relief.

"Quite sure," replied he, smiling at her eagerness; "I have just come from talking with General Fairfax, and that is his opinion. So put off that troubled face of yours as soon as you conveniently can. Let me see it brighten with the serenity of one whose own way is clear, and who believes that the obscurities of God's ways will be cleared up, too, in His own good time."

"Indeed, I will try," replied she, with the simple obedience of a child.

Her face was already brighter. There had been a certain authoritativeness in Paul's manner, to which she was only too glad to yield. It was just the touch needed to lift the over-weight of responsibility from her young shoulders.

She left with a more cheerful smile than she had given us for many days.

I turned to Paul. "There is a curious inconsistency in this decision; I wonder that Dana does not see it! If it be really true that it will do good rather than harm for her to testify that Rolf is Rolf, why is she not allowed to visit him?"

"You are quick-witted," answered Paul, with a smile that was quickly gone. "But may it not be a desirable thing to puzzle the prosecution? Let them study on that riddle as much as they like; there is no reason why you should rack your brain over it."

Harold came in the evening, for the first time since he quitted us for that work of self-scrutiny to the need of which his eyes had so suddenly opened.

He did not speak directly of its process or results; but he soon began to talk in a way that made direct statement unnecessary. Before this, he has had spasms, so to speak, of kindliness and generosity, notably on the night when he was impelled to send that warning to the Manor; but they have alternated with colder, harder, more selfish moods, and have been prompted by motives too mixed to bear a rigid analysis. Now, there was in his whole bearing a softness, a kindliness, an absence of recurrence to self, which told of conquest complete. Who could tell what it had cost! Yet it might be well worth it all, and more. Notwithstanding a certain underlying sadness, visible even through his smile, his face was sweeter and peacefuller than it had ever been before, in the best of his better moods. The sight made me draw a quick breath; and Paul's brotherly embrace told more of comprehension and approval than any words.

It was a foregone conclusion that we should talk of the trial, which forms the staple of conversation in Bellerue; but it was a new and delightful thing to find ourselves talking of it without any hesitation or reservation, as if Harold were in full sympathy with the defence, and anxious for its triumph. At least, it was so for me; Paul's words were few, but he listened smilingly, and showed no inclination to check the free flow of my speech.

It was Harold who finally changed the subject. Happening to notice a recent Review lying on the table, he took it up with the question:—

"Have you read this article?"

"Yes; I read it with some interest," answered Paul.

"Interest only! No doubt, no fear, no perplexity?"

"Not any; there was no occasion. It is easy for modern criticism to pick surface-flaws in documents necessarily handed down to us by transcription, but it fails to give any satisfactory answer to the question: Whence comes their wonderful power and wisdom, which have been such an inspiration to life, in all its forms, ever since? Deception, delusion, fanaticism, is not an answer to satisfy a reasonable mind. Suppose it were proved (of course, it never can be absolutely, the necessary data do not exist,) but suppose it were proved that the Gospels and Epistles are not the literal work of the authors to whom they are attributed, what does it matter to the main point?—which is, whether we do or do not have in them the true account of a Life that was lived on a plane above anything which preceded or followed it,—a Life so wonderful both in itself and its results that to deny to it some divine and superhuman power savors far more of illogicalness than the opposite course. There have been founders of religion, successful and unsuccessful,

before Christ and since, and they and their followers have written and preserved characteristic documents; it is open to anyone to compare them with those of Christianity. Whence comes it that the 'carpenter's son' and the fishermen that he gathered about him, were able to leave behind them, or to inspire, those which the most enlightened taste and criticism of the world acknowledge to be of such transcendent superiority?"

"I see," said Harold, musingly. "That is the root-question. All others are but an investigation of the spots, rents, worm-marks and like imperfections of the foliage."

"Precisely. Such investigations have their interest, and their usefulness, if conducted in the right spirit. But I, for one, decline to believe that they will ever furnish results important enough to disprove the deeper, stronger evidence of the authenticity and authority of the Gospels which the Christian deduces from their influence on the world, and on his own heart and life. Let the war of words go on over the twigs and leaves of the grand old tree; let them be cut off age after age by the frost of research and the heat of debate,—what does it matter? Its massive trunk, its far-spreading boughs, its deep roots, still live, and will while the world endures. It has borne the winters and summers, the storms and calms, of eighteen hundred years; and not only is its shadow no less, and its wonderful healing and strengthening properties unexhausted, but its fruits are ever sweeter, richer, and more plenteous. Happy they who live under its shelter!"

"Happy, indeed!" echoed Harold, catching and reflecting the light of Paul's kindling eyes and earnest face. "What a blessed thing it is to be sure of something! Most

—or, at least, many—of the people whom I meet, seem to be all adrift on these subjects."

"Yes; it is the restless, troubled tendency of the age to assume that nothing in religion is settled, but that everything is seething and revolving, in endless change and tumult; and, apparently, that it will always be. Whereas, I prefer to believe, because I see good reason for so doing, that the truths of the greatest moment to mankind are settled; fixed in a form that is final as to essence and substance, though it may have enough of flexibility to adapt itself to the needs and circumstances of every age, and enough of profundity to give them all something to do in the way of interpretation. It will take better proof than guesses, speculations, hypotheses,—linguistic, geologic, or historic,—to shake that conviction. These things touch but the external and phenomenal; the depth beneath is as undisturbed by them as the depths of the ocean are said to be by the storms that billow its surface. Indeed, when one looks at the Bible, and thinks how long it has been the centre of attack for all sorts of skepticism, agreeing only in their enmity towards it, one is reminded of a lofty mountain; around its sides the mists and clouds gather, at its base men work and dig and mine, or cut from its flanks the growths of a decade or two,—but it stands ever the same, in respect to form and substance, rooted far below his reach, while

"'Eternal sunshine settles on its head.'"

"I think you are right," returned Harold, with emphasis. "For you, at least, have the time and training for looking more intelligently into these things than I can do. I am not of those who fancy that, while it takes the lifetime of a

Darwin or a Wallace to settle the probabilities of a question of natural processes (with important disagreements, too), any layman who knows something about one department of knowledge—history, ethnology, geology, and the like—is competent to decide in a magazine article one of the great questions of theology, or offer anything of much value towards their final settlement. I should not go to a naturalist to get valuable ideas on jurisprudence!"

Paul smiled. "If everyone were as wise, we should get less discussion and more knowledge, less controversy and more wisdom. Not that I undervalue discussion; it may for the time obscure the truth with the dust and smoke of battle, but when the atmosphere clears (sometimes we have a good while to wait for it!) the truth is sure to emerge unharmed, and is occasionally enriched by new lights, as well as stripped of encumbering garments.

"But I must leave you to Winnie, Harold; I have work in the study. Look in before you go, if you like."

Harold's eyes followed him thoughtfully. "I wish my good angel had brought me into contact with a man like him in my youth," said he. "I might have been moved to choose his profession."

"Are you tired of your own, then?"

"Not at all. In theory it is a noble one; but in practice it is apt to sink to the level of an arena. I take up a case because it is brought to me, and it is not proper to decline it. As a client's statements are not apt to be the whole, unadulterated truth, I have no means of knowing whether I am on the right or wrong side; by-and-by I begin to suspect that strict justice is not in my favor; but by that time I am committed and interested; I resolve that I will limit my efforts to the procurement of a fair trial; the opposing

attorney marshals his forces with skill and energy; my pride is enlisted; the natural dislike to be beaten comes to the fore; my blood is up, and I fight as if it were a personal battle, losing sight of everything but the desire to win. And my experience is that of my colleagues, almost *en masse;* they have told me so. The upshot of it all is that it is an uncommonly hard matter for a lawyer to be a Christian—as Paul understands the calling!"

He ended with a sigh.

"The more credit, then, if he succeeds," said I. "And what was that strong will of yours given you for, if not to succeed where other men fail?"

"Are you trying to enlist my pride on the side of self-conquest?" he asked, smiling.

"It is the side for it to enlist on, if it must needs be enlisted. I don't know of anything that pride may more legitimately be proud of than a hard-won victory over the evil in one's own heart. But we will hope that what pride begins, love for the right—that is to say, love to God—will complete."

"It certainly will, if love has its perfect work," he answered.

But the thought probably suggested love of another sort, for his eyes grew deeper and more thoughtful, and his dark, handsome features softened with the expression of tender human care and sympathy that Dana alone seems to have power to call out upon them in perfection. And I wondered at the might of human love to soften and mould the strong man, like clay in the hands of the sculptor.

I was to wonder yet more. For, in a short time, he lifted his eyes to mine, and spoke as if he took it for granted that I had followed the course of his thoughts.

"Milady, will you tell her that I will do anything for her —anything? And make her believe it."

"Do you believe it yourself?"

"Implicitly. From this time forward, I am as thoroughly on the side of the defence as if I had received a retainer."

A swift dew of joy came into my eyes. "My friend, I congratulate you," said I, earnestly. "For the bitterness of your cup is almost over, and its dregs will be sweet."

"At least the prophecy is," he answered. "Kind oracle, in heaven be all your prophecies fulfilled! I dare not look for it here."

And he smiled upon me with a face so gentle that it cost me a pain to see it, beautiful as it was. For only suffering could have so transformed him from the man that he had once been.

I correct the simile of a moment ago; human love is *not* the sculptor, but only an instrument in the hands of Love Divine.

XXVIII.

ROLF OR NO?

THE court-room was crowded to overflowing; never in all the history of Bellerue had there been a trial that awakened such general interest. The friends of Rolf Kenworth gathered in force, determined to show that he possessed their sympathy and confidence; disbelievers in his innocence came to see truth prevail and justice done, or persuaded themselves that they did; and there was the usual drift of the idle and the curious to fill every vacant place. Looking around, I saw in more or less close contiguity nearly every face known to this chronicle, Judge Ellenwood being on the bench.

My own pleasure would have been to secure inconspicuousness by absence, not being an important personage enough to give it the opposite quality. But Dana Heathcote had entreated me to be with her, or near her, too earnestly to be denied; Honor, being also on the roll of witnesses, had preferred the same request; so it came to pass that the Heathcotes, the Clavricks, Mrs. Fairfax, Paul and I, went in one party, and were guided by Harold to an excellent position, from whence we could see and hear all that occurred, without being ourselves subjected to an overpowering amount of eye-shot.

The court opened in the usual way, and the time-worn routine began. Mr. Acton—a thin, wiry, prematurely gray gentleman of forty or thereabouts, with a hard, metallic, clangorous voice—told us, in the opening speech for the prosecution, what he purposed to prove; and assured us that proof was not only possible, but highly probable,—not to say, certain.

General Fairfax followed in a much briefer speech. The only point upon which he dwelt was the rarely winning and lovable character of Rolf Kenworth, as known and read of all men in Bellerue,—his truthfulness, kindliness, and generosity, his scorn of all meanness and cruelty, his open hand and warm heart. He pictured the tender, filial affection that he had always manifested for his uncle, the sincere gratitude that he had plainly felt for his great kindness; and he insisted on the inherent improbability that, in a moment as it were, even under the strong pressure of a most righteous anger at being grievously misunderstood, he could so have falsified his whole nature as to set out deliberately to rob his benefactor, or raise his hand against him in any fashion, deliberate or impulsive.

In this part of his speech, he was really eloquent; Rolf's best friends could ask no better presentation of the young man's graces of character. I saw Dana's eyes fill and her lips tremble with satisfaction at such glowing praise of the one she loved. Yet, with the delicacy which marks all her actions, she did not once glance at the subject of the eulogy; evidently she expected him to feel some modest discomfiture in listening to it under the gaze of so many curious eyes, and forebore to add thereto by observing it.

But I saw no reason why I should refrain from sending one searching look in his direction, to see how he bore this

flattering fire. Certain it is that in some school he has acquired a high degree of the self-control in which the earlier Rolf appears to have been conspicuously deficient; he listened to the General with his eyes bent on the ground, to be sure, but with a face absolutely devoid of any sign of discomposure. In truth, I thought he experienced a certain enjoyment in listening; and I am not sure that I liked him the better for it;—although to insist that a man shall give no sign of satisfaction at hearing that he is held in high esteem by his fellow-men does seem to savor of captiousness.

His tribute to the beauty and worth of Rolf's character being finished, the General lapsed into the perfunctory and the commonplace, and soon brought his speech to a close. It struck me that, if he had ventured to put his thoughts into plain English, it would have been something like this: Proceed, friends of the prosecution; we are more anxious than you are to find out what you can prove.

The first thing to be settled was the identity of Rolf Kenworth and Hugh Ennadeen. Two well-known citizens testified to this point; the first was as certain of the fact as he could be of anything that he did not positively know; the second would commit himself to nothing more than a tolerably strong impression.

The next witness was our friend, Mr. Pollard. In his wontedly deliberate speech, and with even more that wontedly drooping eyelids, he testified that he had recognized Rolf under the name and character of Hugh Ennadeen on their first meeting, and that he had never found any good reason to reconsider that recognition. He had seen a good deal of Rolf, in one way or another, both as boy and man, and he considered himself competent to judge.

He was now eligible for cross-examination; and though there was little to be gained by it of advantage to the business in hand, the General was too human to let slip such an opportunity for annoying his supplanter on the vestry.

"Be kind enough to open your eyes," he began, with an emphasis that made the witness close them almost to the point of complete occultation: "take a good look at Mr. Ennadeen, and tell us what you see in him that looks like Rolf."

"He has the same general appearance," replied Mr. Pollard, briefly.

"Um! that is a little too general. If you please, we will descend to particulars. Is not his hair darker than Rolf's?"

"Well, yes, a little; but hair grows darker as people grow—"

"Be so good as to confine your statements to the facts about which you are asked," interrupted the General. "Is he not broader-shouldered?"

"Well, he may be a little stouter; but—"

"Had Rolf a beard?" asked the General, ruthlessly cutting him short.

"No; only a moustache."

"And his expression, was it at all like Mr. Ennadeen's?"

"Well, of course, Rolf's was younger and more joyous, as was natural."

"How many times have you met Mr. Ennadeen?"

"I am unable to give the number, but quite frequently."

"Did you have any talk with him at these meetings?"

"Yes; certainly."

"What conversations with him do you recall?"

"Well, nothing of importance, you know; just a few pass-

ing remarks about the weather, and so forth, such as gentlemen are in the habit of exchanging at casual meetings"

"Will you kindly give us that 'and-so-forth' a little more in detail?"

"Such remarks are not of the sort that I am accustomed to take notes of," answered Mr. Pollard, stiffly, shutting his eyes so close as to suggest that he had retired within himself to contemplate the blank where notes were *not*.

"And on the strength of *that*, you dare to pronounce him identical with a man of lighter hair, slenderer figure, smooth face, and very different expression, whom you have not seen for nearly four years!" exclaimed the General, severely. "Upon my word, you have a good deal of—courage. You may stand down."

And the witness was about to stand down, considerably crestfallen, but Mr. Acton interposed for his relief.

"Stop a moment, if you please; I have one more question to ask: Is it your candid impression, resulting from many meetings with the prisoner, with or without conversation, that he is the Rolf Kenworth whom you used to know well, and that the changes in him are only such as are to be looked for after such a lapse of time?"

"Yes, most certainly," was the emphatic answer.

And Mr. Pollard was allowed to lose himself in the crowd.

Mr. Calyo, the artist who had once painted Rolf's portrait, came next. He declined to speak to the point with the positiveness expected. Although there were many striking similarities in the faces of the prisoner and Rolf, there were also some marked divergences. And there was a decided difference of expression,—a degree of gravity and maturity which it was difficult to believe could be the result

of little more than three years; he might easily pass for a man seven or eight years older than Rolf was when he left Bellerue. On the whole, he had no definite opinion to give.

And that was the worst that could be extracted from Mr. Calyo. There was no cross-examination.

Mr. Clavrick came on the stand with his usual frank *bonhomie*. He described his first meeting with Mr. Ennadeen at the Manor, and his recognition of him as Rolf; but he insisted that if he had met him elsewhere, and his business had been anything but the renting of the old home, it was by no means certain that he should have thus recognized him. Finally, he had never been able to range himself positively and permanently on either side of the question, the convictions of one day being generally undone by the next.

Mr. Clavrick descended from the stand, and handed up his wife, with a smile and a word of encouragement that were evidently much needed. Her speaking face showed with what reluctance she gave her testimony, which made it all the more telling. She unwillingly corroborated her husband's account of the meeting at the Manor; and it was drawn out of her, bit by bit, that she had been sure of Rolf's identity from the first, and had never doubted it for a moment. Tears filled her eyes as she finished, and she cast a remorseful glance at the prisoner, which was met by a smile of such reassuring friendliness as, in many eyes, furnished more convincing evidence of his identity than her testimony had done;—in which it must be allowed that the prosecution had scored a point.

Mr. Wright's tall, lank figure next mounted the witness stand with cheerful alacrity; and he looked composedly around, nodding to this and that familiar face, and smiling

upon the whole assembly as cordially as if he were about to take them all into his closest confidence.

In answer to the usual questions, he gave his name as Simeon Dawson Wright, age about thirty-eight, and "guessed" that his profession was that of a jack-of-all-trades, as he had been and done about everything that a man could be or do, who was not unprovided by natur' with a reasonable stock of gumption. From driving the cussedest mule-team that ever kicked double, down to dabbling in mining stocks that kicked ten thousand times worse, he had turned his hand to most everything that a man could, to get an honest living—

"Tell us what you know of the prisoner," said Mr. Acton, as soon as he could check this free flow of information.

"We-ell! that's rather a large order, at short notice, ain't it?" was the apparently surprised response.

"Try to fill it, if you please."

"Do ye want me to go clear back?" asked the witness, anxiously.

"Yes, to the beginning, if there is one," replied the lawyer, with some impatience.

"We-ell!" drawled the witness, reflectively, putting his hands deep in his pockets, as if the desired facts were to be drawn thence like truth from her well,—"I really didn't suppose that you wanted me to go 'way back, and I don't know as I'm all ready primed for that, but I'll do my prettiest. Ye see, my grandmother was a Battershall; she lived at Criss-Cross Meadows, and married, if I remember right (sometimes my memory is 'the thing you forget with', as the little girl said), a Yelverton; his mother was a—"

"It is not necessary to give us your whole genealogical

tree," interposed Mr. Acton. "What relation are you to the prisoner?"

"That's just what I was a-coming to," responded the witness, reassuringly. "To be sure, 'twas the longest way round; but you said you wanted to begin at the beginning, and that's as near to it as my knowledge goes: it ain't everyone that can give all the items of his descent straight back to Adam. But if you want the short-cut, here it is: My grandfather was half-brother to his great-great-aunt; what relation does that make Hugh and me?"

"Please to answer that question yourself," said Mr. Acton, as a laugh ran round the court-room. "And try to remember that you are here to answer questions, not to ask them."

"And don't I answer 'em when I can?" asked Mr. Wright, in a grieved tone. "The reason why I put that question to you was just because I can't answer it! I've never had time and brains enough to cipher out the exact relationship. I knew 'twas some kind of a cousin, and that was enough for me. As he's a pretty good sort of a fellow, Hugh is, when you come to know him well,—nothin' off-color about him anywhere,—I don't mind in the least if folks think the relationship's a degree nearer than 'tis."

"How do you know that you are related at all?" asked Mr. Acton.

"Know! If you want the documents, I haven't got them to give you. There's always been a sort of tradition in our family, that we're related to the Ennadeens of Scotland; and I never had any call to disbelieve it. Now, there are folks, I know, who don't take much stock in tradition,—think its rather small potatoes for authority;—but bless you, sir; where'd *you* be, if you didn't believe what your

parents told you about your forbears?" continued Mr. Wright, with such an engaging smile that no one could suspect him of knowing what an exceedingly hard hit he had given his questioner, whose ancestry was shrewdly supposed to be somewhat different from the parental version.

The lawyer's brow darkened. "Will you confine your remarks to the matter in hand?" he demanded, sternly. "Where did you first meet with the prisoner?"

"Oh, I could have told you *that* easy, if you'd asked afore! 'Twas in Omaha. I was pretty much down on my luck. I had been engaged in a speculation that didn't pan out to be all my 'fancy painted it';—to speak plainly, I was dead beat; I didn't know where my next ration was coming from. I didn't doubt that 'twould come; I've been just as bad off before, and I never failed of my rations yet—nor an appetite for them. Well! I was sitting comfortably in the shade,—'twas a mighty hot day,—when up comes a regular swell,—everything about him tip-top and first-class,—puts out a hand, and says: 'Cousin Simeon, how d'ye do?' I told him I *had* felt better in spirits; but I was downright glad to see him all the same, and only regretted that I hadn't a quarter to ask him to take refreshments with. And he laughed, and said it didn't matter, as long as there was one between us. So I took him into the tavern—Jim Dunn Brown's tavern, and no misnomer;—and we soon got to be the best of friends."

"Did he give you any proofs of his identity and relationship?"

"Proofs! bless ye! lots of 'em! Gave me money to square my accounts thereabouts, and the politest sort of an invite to come and help him keep the blue-devils out of

that cantankerous, ghost-ridden old Manor-house,—that I'd set a torch to, if 'twas mine, and build up something new and wholesome. What more proofs did I want, I should like to inquire, if I was asking questions, which I ain't, ye know."

"No doubt the proof was sufficiently convincing—to you," said Mr. Acton, with dry emphasis. "Do I understand you to state that he brought you no letters of introduction, nor credentials of any sort?"

"We-ll," responded the witness, slowly, with an obliging air of carefully searching his memory for any small matter that he had previously overlooked, "I think he did know my grandfather's name—or, stay! let me see! was it my great-grandfather's? Anyhow, he knew who his great-great-aunt was. But, ye see," he went on, apologetically, "we're neither of us old enough to take much stock in genealogy; a man wants to be sixty-five or seventy before he comes to feel much interest in that sort of thing. Odd, too, ain't it? that just when he begins to pull up stakes to quit this world, he should be clear eat up with curiosity to know exactly how he got into it! Perhaps, when you and I come to a ripe old age, we may take to studying genealogy; and much pleasure may we get out of it!"

The court-room rang with laughter, which the judge promptly suppressed, though not without a sympathetic twinkle in his own eyes. The witness gazed around in blank surprise and perplexity, as if quite at a loss to know what could have prompted so unseemly an outbreak. His own face was absolutely solemn; there was not the suspicion of a smile about his mouth; nor did his dull-blue eyes kindle with the faintest gleam of amusement.

Mr. Acton frowned fiercely on the smiling crowd; but

he had the wit to see that his annoyance would only add to its enjoyment; and he turned again to the witness, who met his look with one of childlike simplicity and frankness.

"What was the prisoner's object in seeking you?" he asked.

Mr. Wright bent his head reflectively, and put his hands still deeper into his pockets. "I guess I didn't inquire. 'Blood's thicker than water,' ye know; I rather think he quoted that well-worn saying at our first interview. I took it for granted that he'd found out somehow that he had a sort o' cousin out West, who wasn't exactly rolling in luxury, and he came to help me out a bit in a real cousinly way. If he had any other object, he didn't blab; Hugh can keep his mouth shut as close as a bank-vault when he likes."

"Did you never have any suspicion that he was not the person he represented himself to be?"

"What on earth should I suspect that for!" exclaimed the witness, opening his eyes wide with surprise. "I s'pose you're thinking about Mr. Rolf Kenworth, but what should *he* be coming to hunt *me* up for, unless 'twas for a blind? and I rather guess I'm not the sort o' timber to work up in that way." And he drew up his long, lank figure with an assumption of shrewdness that seemed to fail of the intended effect, for the crowd only laughed again.

"I have done with the witness," began Mr. Acton—

"Thanks," said Mr. Wright, graciously. "I supposed we'd only just begun, but I'm willing to stop, if you are."

Mr. Acton glared at him for a moment, but proceeded without otherwise noticing the interruption:—"I think his testimony is quite pertinent to the question of identity; I

leave the jury to judge of its bearing and weight." And he sat down.

General Fairfax rose. "Mr. Wright, will you tell us how Mr. Ennadeen has spent his time at the Manor-house, so far as you know?"

"Rummaging," was the prompt answer;—"rummaging as conscientiously as a miser for a dime in a dust-heap. If there's anything in that carnivorous old dwelling, from ridge-pole to sub-cellar, that he hasn't turned upside down, and inside out, and hind side afore, and end for end, I should enjoy being introduced to it."

"That is all," said the General; and Mr. Wright came back to our neighborhood with as cheerful a face as if he thought he had done his cousin excellent service.

Perhaps he had; for, seeing me looking at him doubtfully, unable to reconcile his behavior on this occasion with the impression of shrewdness that I had received at former meetings, he flashed into my eyes a glance of such amused understanding of my dilemma as to awaken a suspicion that his testimony might not have been so guileless as it appeared.

Miss Jessie Lawrence was next called to the stand; and her testimony was of a sufficiently startling nature to some of us.

She stated that she, like others, had first taken Mr. Ennadeen for Rolf, but she had quickly settled down into the conviction that she had made a mistake, until—

"Well, Miss Lawrence, go on," said Mr. Acton, encouragingly. "Tell us what caused you to change your opinion. Were you present at the picnic in the Hollow?"

"I was."

"And what happened on that occasion which is pertinent to this case."

"I had been over Oak Hill with friends; I was returning in haste, and alone. As I came round the corner of the big rock near the top of the hill, I saw Mr. Ennadeen and Miss Heathcote standing together—"

The young lady hesitated.

"Was there anything lover-like in their attitude?" asked Mr. Acton.

"Her head was on his shoulder, and his arm was round her; I thought she was weeping."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I shrank back directly, and stole off quietly in the direction that I came from, and went back to the Hollow by another way."

"And that caused your change of opinion?"

"Yes, sir. I thought—I *knew* that Dana Heathcote would not be standing in—in that way with anybody else."

"That will do," said Mr. Acton.

General Fairfax instantly rose and asked:—"Was anybody else present on that occasion?"

"Oh, yes; Mrs. Vennor was there."

"Was she with Miss Heathcote?"

"I thought so; she was standing quite near, looking on."

"Anybody else?"

"No, I think not; I did not see anyone."

I drew a long breath, thankful with all my heart that she did not arrive upon the scene a moment later, and see Harold's face of jealous rage. I was glad, too, for Dana's sake, that the General had been quick-witted enough to bring out the fact that she was not alone.

Dana turned to me with a face of dismay. "How

could I have been so thoughtless!" she exclaimed, in a whisper. "Yet who would have supposed that there was anybody near?"

"Just make a note of it that there is always somebody near," replied Mrs. Fairfax, austerely. "I never am sure that I am alone, except when I am in my own room, with the door locked and the curtains drawn,—all the closets and corners having been previously examined with a microscope. If people were not so insanely certain that there is nobody near, there would be a good deal less trouble in the world!"

Her words of wisdom were scarcely uttered when Dana was called to take the place vacated by Miss Jessie.

Her face flushed deeply as she rose, and felt that every eye was turned upon her; but in a moment or two the color retreated, leaving her deadly pale.

I think Mr. Acton was touched by that sweet, white face; for his manner was very gentle as he began the examination.

"Have you met the prisoner frequently?" was his first question of any moment.

"Not very; several times in the course of the summer."

"Was it in public or in private?"

"In public—except once." The exception was given in a very low, but clear voice.

"Was that the one mentioned by the last witness?"

"It was."

"Was Miss Lawrence's account of it correct?"

"Yes,"—in a very low voice.

"Do you assert that that is the only private meeting that you have had?"

"Yes; the only one."

Mr. Acton looked surprised and incredulous, as was natural enough. But he only asked :—

"Do you believe that the prisoner is Rolf Kenworth?"

And now a most singular thing came to pass. As the question was put, Dana looked involuntarily at the prisoner, who was leaning forward in his chair, listening to the examination; and their eyes met. Hers opened widely after the first moment, and the look became almost a stare, in which I seemed to see a swift succession of changing, conflicting emotions. There was a breathless hush in the court-room; every eye was fixed on her face; every ear listened intently for the response that did not come. She seemed to be conscious of nothing but the eyes into which she was gazing, and reading some strange, startling revelation.

Mr. Acton finally called her by name, and repeated his question distinctly and deliberately.

One moment longer Dana gazed at the prisoner; then, turning to her questioner, she answered, firmly :—

"I do not."

If the hush of the court-room had been deep, it was now death-like for a few moments. Then came the low murmur of intense excitement.

"She has lied," whispered Mrs. Fairfax grimly. "I don't blame her; in her place, I might have done likewise."

For myself, I was too much surprised to know whether I blamed her or not. Why did she do it, when she had been so positively assured that her testimony would not affect the result? was the question which I was asking myself in such a blind, confused way, that I quite forgot to be sorry for Truth wounded in the house of her friend. And after that

public mention of her meeting with Rolf on the hillside, how *could* she do it! It was simply inexplicable.

Mr. Acton looked as if he found it difficult to credit his hearing; in bringing to light that interview, he doubtless thought that he had fixed the character of Dana's testimony beyond a peradventure.

"Do I understand you to say that the prisoner is not Rolf Kenworth?" he asked, with slow, deliberate emphasis, and even a touch of scorn.

Dana winced a little at the tone, but she answered steadily, nevertheless :—

"That is what I said."

Mr. Acton considered the subject for a brief space; then he asked:—

"Did you never believe that he was Rolf Kenworth?"

"Oh, yes," replied Dana, quickly; "I have always done so until to-day."

"And what has caused such a sudden change of opinion?"

Dana hesitated a moment; her eyes fell, and her cheek flushed.

"I cannot tell you," she said, in a low voice.

"Do you mean to say that you decline to answer?"

"No; I mean to say that it is impossible for me to explain to you what I have not yet had time to explain to myself."

"You recognized him as Rolf, then, when you first saw him?"

"I did."

"And also on the day of the picnic?"

"Yes." The swift, deep blush that overspread not only her face, but her ears, her throat, every bit of the delicate

flesh that was visible, showed that she had not until that instant comprehended the unpleasant position in which her denial had placed her.

"And you believed that he was Rolf when you came here to-day?" pursued Mr. Acton, pitilessly.

She bent her head; it was plain that she could not speak.

"Your change of opinion, then, has occurred since you have seen him in this court-room, on trial for his life?"

"Yes," she faltered.

"I have done," said Mr. Acton. And he added, significantly, "The jury will probably not need the witness's explanation of her remarkable change of opinion."

General Fairfax turned to his client with a whispered question; the latter shook his head, and Dana was allowed to leave the stand. Her father stood ready to hand her down, and Harold was also there to make a way for them through the gaping crowd. Even at that moment, I was struck by the deep, compassionate gravity of his face.

"Of course, she did not tell that lie of her own free will," murmured Mrs. Fairfax. "Did you not notice the singular look that Rolf gave her, and how impossible it was for her to take her eyes off of his for full two minutes? It is a case of mesmerism, hypnotism, or some diabolism or other; there's not a doubt of it."

For a moment, I was half-inclined to accept this hypothesis; then I remembered Paul's repeated assurance that both the General and Mr. Ennadeen desired her to tell the exact truth, and I felt that it would not work. Granting that Rolf possessed any mesmeric influence, there was no reason to suppose that he would exert it to any such end.

He would merely have striven to inspire her with confidence.

"What does it mean?" here whispered Honor, over my shoulder; she was sitting just behind me. "Can she have told the truth? Is it possible that her belief has undergone such a sudden, entire revolution as she asserts! And if so, wherefore?"

Half-involuntarily, I turned and gazed intently at the prisoner's face, seeking to get some answer to the question there.

To my eyes, he looked precisely as usual; grave, even to melancholy, yet with a certain sweetness of expression which is one of the fine touches given in the school of sorrow; and—yes!—there was a faint indication of relief, as if one, at least, of many weights had been lifted from his mind.

It would seem that he was keenly alive to spiritual influences, for, as I still studied his face as a scholar might an ancient sheet of parchment which he suspects to be a palimpsest, he turned his eyes full upon mine, and gave me the same quietly comprehending but incomprehensible smile that he had done on the night of the night-blooming cereus's reception.

Dana's approach diverted my attention. She sat down quickly, and turned her face to her mother's shoulder, as if she would fain hide herself from the eyes that followed her with so many different expressions,—curiosity, doubt, sympathy, and in a few cases a trace of contempt. Yet I saw that she was, at most, but dimly, dully conscious of them; her face showed that she was just beginning to escape from the effects of a powerful shock; to ask what it really was, whence it came, what destruction it had wrought,

what necessary or precious things it had spared. Feeling her tremble, I gently took her hand, and began to whisper something meant for comforting, I scarcely knew what ; but, in another moment, my attention was completely engrossed by certain words that came to my ears from the witness now on the stand.

XXIX.

ON THE TRAIL.

He was a man of medium size, light hair worn rather long, light gray eyes, a firm mouth and a square jaw; the kind of person that may pass a dozen times before one's sight without arresting it, yet is felt to possess no common force and energy of character as soon as one notices him. Although I had missed hearing his name and profession, it was easy to understand that he was the detective to whom had been given the task of searching out Hugh Ennadeen's antecedents.

He was telling his story in a thin, high voice, which, nevertheless, was easily audible in the farthest corner of the hushed court-room.

"Well, I had examined the army list and hunted Warwickshire from end to end, and was no wiser than when I began. Chance finally gave me the clue that I needed. While turning over an old copy of the British peerage in a village bar-room, my eyes suddenly lighted on the name that I had got to know as well as my own, and I learned that the son of the Earl of Blank was called Hugh Ennadeen Murray—the 'Ennadeen' being the name of his mother's family. In an hour I was off to the earl's place in

Scotland. By judicious questioning of the servants, I learned that the Honorable Captain Hugh Murray, on his way home from the Soudan, where he had seen the late campaign through, and distinguished himself by uncommon bravery, had been pretty near killed in a steamboat explosion on the Nile, and was still at Berber, under the care of his sister, Lady Glenorm, the only member of the family who could stay with him, his father being a confirmed invalid, and his brother in a responsible government post.

"My next step was to set out for Egypt. In due time I reached the sun-baked town where Captain Murray was slowly struggling back to life, with many halts by the way, and some retrograde movements, serious enough to raise a pretty strong doubt if he would ever reach his goal. He had not only had two or three ribs broken, but was badly scalded, and had also received an injury to the brain that had produced a mental eclipse from which he would not soon recover, if ever. Of course, I could not see him,—no one but his nurses was allowed to do that,—but I talked with them and the doctor, and the landlord, and everybody else who could give me any shred of the information that I was after. In my capacity of tourist, desirous of seeing some of the localities made so interesting by the insurrection, I managed even to get a few words with Lady Glenorm herself, when she was obliged to leave her charge for a little fresh air and exercise; from which I learned nothing of much importance,—merely that her brother was kept so constantly under the influence of opiates that he was more like a dead man than a live one; and that the chief ground of hope for his recovery was that he had lingered so much longer than was expected. But when I took occasion to mention that I was anxious to learn something of one Rolf

Kenworth, who had also been in the Soudan, and about whose fate his friends were getting to be anxious, my lady suddenly froze, remembered that her patient needed her, and never came nearer than bowing distance again.

"But I had learned more from her sudden coolness than from her previous affability,—namely, that Rolf Kenworth was not unknown to her. It remained for me to find out what connection there was between him and her brother. It went without saying that he must have known of the Captain's condition, and, with or without her connivance, had seized upon the opportunity that it gave for appearing in his name and character on the other side of the globe. It occurred to me that it might be worth while to extend my investigations in the direction of the accident which had done so much mischief; for Captain Murray was not the only sufferer, if the worst one. So I hunted up the captain of the steamer, which took some weeks, and from him I learned that *two* gentlemen of the English army were on board when the boiler exploded, who were so astonishingly alike that he had taken them for brothers; and they had treated each other in such a way as to warrant the conclusion. One was unhurt; and it was he who had searched for and found the other in the confusion, and arranged for his removal to the house where he still remained.

"I now had material for a little more work at Berber, and back I went. I was not received with effusion; it was plain that I was unwelcome to those who had the Captain in charge, and that there was a systematic attempt to cut off every source of information. However, the oriental mind that will not open to a bribe is a rare article;—it does not in the least mind taking one from both sides, and betraying both. I soon learned all that I needed to know

of the gentleman who had superintended Captain Murray's transportation to his sick room, sent for physicians, engaged nurses, telegraphed for his sister, and watched over him with the devotion of a brother for about two weeks; I got a description of him that tallied well with that which had been furnished me of Mr. Rolf Kenworth ; and, what was more important, I was assured that he was known by that name and no other, while he stayed at the hotel.

"It only remained for me to follow up the trail that I had struck. I took the same steamers, the same cars, and stopped at the same hotels, that my quarry had done on his journey home; and more than once I saw his name registered as 'Rolf Kenworth.' Not until he reached Italy did he begin to write himself as 'Hugh Ennadeen,' but afterwards he stuck to it. It was in that name that he took passage for the United States; I came in the very same steamer four months later. I wish to do him the justice to state that he left behind him everywhere the impression of a true soldier and gentleman."

The witness's voice, that had so long held the large audience spell-bound, ceased. I could hear the long-drawn breaths, and the light rustling made by changes of strained positions, which told how strong had been the spell, and how slowly it was loosed.

Now, first, it occurred to me to look at Rolf, and see how he was affected by this disclosure. He sat with his elbow on the table, his head leaning on his hand, his eyes fixed on the opposite window, and both face and attitude were expressive of the deepest dejection. Yet there was nothing of consternation, nothing of guilt, in his aspect; he simply looked like a man so heavily burdened with care or sorrow as to be completely unconscious of his surroundings; for

him, judge, jury, witnesses, and spectators, had ceased to exist; he was alone in the midst of a throng of sad and painful recollections that wholly shut out the present and the actual.

Glancing from him to General Fairfax, I saw that he, too, was looking very solemn. By-and-by he addressed a few whispered words to his client, who heard them with the slight start that indicates attention suddenly recalled from wandering; and not until they were repeated did he seem to hear and answer intelligently. Then, to be sure, he quickly roused himself to the need of the moment, and absorption was succeeded by keen watchfulness and anxiety.

He looked earnestly at the detective, as if he had only just begun to comprehend the nature and bearing of his testimony, and to consider what was likely to be its effect. Marmot—that is the detective's name—was still on the stand, quietly waiting the cross-examination which was now in order.

But Judge Ellenwood here interposed. It was too late in the day, he declared, to enter upon that business; and the court was adjourned to the morrow.

Harold immediately came to bid us remain in our seats for a brief space, when he would conduct us out by the same door through which judge and jury were vanishing, so that we might escape the jostling and staring of the crowd;—a timely bit of consideration that it was easy to set down to Dana's account, although I doubt if she were at all conscious of it.

We waited in grave silence, unable to talk of commonplace matters, yet unwilling to enter upon those of deeper moment while so many curious ears were within hearing.

But I could not help noticing a curiously illogical light in Dana's face,—a subtile suggestion of inward peace and satisfaction unlike anything that it had shown for weeks. And I saw that Harold observed it, too, and wondered at it as I did.

As we made our way singly through the narrow passage back of the court-room, she slid in at my side for an instant, gave my arm a rapturous squeeze, and smiled up into my face as if expectant of some very bright answering look of understanding and sympathy.

"Why are you so glad, dearie?" I whispered.

"Don't you see!" she replied, in the same way, but with an accent of intense joy; "I have got my Rolf—my love—back again!" And she added, in a tone of blissful relief: "I am not a faithless renegade, after all."

I was too bewildered to answer; nor was there any opportunity, for we now emerged into the roomy court-yard and our party drew together again. By Harold's order, who had foreseen the necessity and provided for it, two carriages were in waiting on the back street. Dana and her parents entered one; Paul, Mrs. Fairfax, and myself the other.

"I will come and see you, in the early twilight," Dana had said, as we separated. It was easy to understand why she chose that hour.

"And, with your permission," said Harold, as he closed the carriage door, "I will call toward the end of the evening; there is a matter that I would like to consult you about."

Lifting his hat, he stood a moment to watch us drive off, then re-entered the court-house.

"Well!" burst out Mrs. Fairfax, with a promptness that

showed how irksome had been the previous restraint on speech, "if to-day is a sample of what we are to expect throughout the trial, we shall all be surprised into dumb, staring statues by the end of it! Between Dana's insane denial of Rolf, and Marmot's swift identification of him, I feel as if I had been witnessing a blundering sort of campaign, with the victory on the wrong side."

I looked at Paul, but he only smiled in a grave, pre-occupied way; and the answer fell to me:—

"Is it not too early to say which side has won the victory? If there be future surprises in store for us, let us hope that some of them will be managed by the defence, and in Rolf's favor."

"I fear that we shall have to take it out in hoping," she replied, with a shake of the head. "My husband is always as close-mouthed as a combination-lock about his cases; but I have not lived with him for twenty years without learning to read the sign of the times in his face; and if this is not a time of the most intense and wearing anxiety, I have gone blind as a bat. You see, he loves Rolf dearly because he was such an intimate friend of our boy, who died twelve years ago."

But the years had not effaced the mother's grief, for her voice broke, and she put her hand to her eyes.

Paul now roused himself to reply. "Surely, I need not tell a lawyer's wife that a case always looks dark when the prosecution is presenting its side of it," said he, reassuringly. "Do not prejudge it, or you will have to reconsider when our turn comes."

"You are hopeful, then?" she asked, eagerly.

"Certainly I am. It is a part of my faith that the Lord will aid the right in His own good time."

"And if He does not?" she returned sadly.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," said Paul, reverently.

Here the carriage stopped at our door, and Paul handed me out. Then he re-entered it, and went on with Mrs. Fairfax, his fine courtesy not permitting him to send her home alone, although he knew well that I was aching to talk over the events of the court-room with him.

Nor did the opportunity come later, for we had a chance guest to dinner, immediately after which Paul hastened off to see a sick person. He had not returned when Dana came, with that mystical light still in her face.

"Do you think me as wild as they do at home?" were her first words, as we stood with our arms around each other.

I looked at her inquiringly.

"Do you not understand, then, that he—that gentleman on trial, whoever he may be—is not Rolf?" she asked, in surprise.

"Not Rolf!" I exclaimed. "Who is he, then?"

"I am sure I don't know. The Honorable Captain Hugh Murray, perhaps."

"But, Danita! did you not hear that detective's story?"

"Some of it, towards the end. But my heart was speaking to me then, with a certainty and emphasis that a dozen detectives could not have silenced. It had spoken before, but I did not rightly understand it, and I would not listen. I thought it was faithless to my love, when it was really true to it,—truer than the reason with which I tried to smother its voice."

"But what made its voice so much more convincing to-day?" I asked, still incredulous.

"I can hardly tell you. It was one of those flashes of intuition that do not explain themselves. But the chief thing, I think, was Mr. Ennadeen's expression as he sat listening to my testimony. It was kind, compassionate, anxious,—a little curious, too,—but so calm, so composed;—and all at once it occurred to me how differently Rolf would have looked; what love, what sympathy, what encouragement, would have shone in his eyes for me! what lightnings of indignation for those who caused me any annoyance! His face would have been like the sky when it is one half sunshine and the other half thunder-storm—and, oh! how beautiful it would have been!"

I was silenced, if not convinced. But, in a moment, I asked, "Where is Rolf, then?"

"Where, indeed!" she echoed, with tears starting in her eyes. "That is what I want to find out. Perhaps it is he who lies there in the Soudan, between life and death."

"But, Danita, think a moment! Lady Glenorm, an English peeress, is watching over him night and day, with all the devotion of a sister; don't you see how impossible it is that she should be doing that for Rolf Kenworth, a stranger?"

"That is what father and mother have been insisting on, and it does seem of some weight. No matter. One thing I *know*;—this Mr. Ennadeen—if that be his name—is not Rolf; I am as sure of that as I am of my own identity. And he, Rolf, wherever he is, is still my Rolf, the Rolf that I loved, and do love, with all my heart;—he is mine, and I am his."

And opening her arms wide and clasping her hands together, with an indescribable grace and warmth of affection,

she exclaimed, in a voice of lute-like sweetness,—"Oh Rolf! my love; my love."

There was such conviction, such certainty, in her tones and manner that it was impossible not to be impressed, almost convinced. Albeit, I felt my head whirling with the thought of the new questions held in solution by the situation, ready to be precipitated at the first opportunity.

"But," I objected, "you surely thought at first that he was Rolf."

"I did," she answered, sadly. "I am ashamed to say that I did! But is it not some little excuse for me that General Fairfax's statement in the vestibule on that Sunday, and Mrs. Clavrick's story and inferences later, and Rolf's letter, all seemed to point unmistakably to that one conclusion,—taking into consideration, too, Mr. Ennadeen's strong resemblance to him? But I was miserable all the time—you cannot think how miserable!—because my heart did not, and would not, leap with joy at the sight of him. And—I can own it now—I was nearly as miserable because his manner to me was so disappointing, so puzzling. I could not conceive how the Rolf of my remembrance could possibly hold himself in such cool, firm check; it was so unlike him. That day on the hillside, too; it was no lover's embrace that he gave me then; it was just the kind, sympathizing clasp of a brother or a friend;—and how it made my heart ache!"

I reflected that I had felt much the same thing in witnessing that embrace!

"One thing I am sure of," she went on, after a moment; "be he what or who he may, he is Rolf's friend; he feels kindly, brotherly, towards me; he is here for Rolf's sake. And now, I must see him and talk with him; he knows

where Rolf is; he can explain all this mystery, which only seems to thicken as the days go on."

And then again, she broke out with that touching cry of exceeding joy :—"At least, I have my Rolf—my love—back again!"

Paul's step now sounded in the hall, and she went to the door to meet him, with outstretched hands.

"Tell me, Mr. Vennor—for I think you know—am I not right in thinking that he is not Rolf?" she exclaimed, pleadingly.

He took the two small hands kindly, and smiled down into her eager face. "I can tell you nothing, dear child; I am under a promise not to divulge anything that has been made known to me. But I do not tell you to distrust your own heart."

"I knew it! I knew it!" she cried joyously; "I was sure that I had made no mistake this time! But, Mr. Vennor, I must see him, now,—Mr. Ennadeen,—I *must*, don't you see? Won't you please manage it for me? I know you can," she continued, coaxingly.

Paul looked at her with a singularly deep, compassionate gravity, led her to the couch, and made her sit down.

"You forget," said he, "that Rolf is on trial for his life."

"Rolf!" she repeated, looking at him incredulously.

"Certainly, Rolf," replied he, impressively. "Whatever else may or may not be true, one thing is certain;—namely, that Rolf Kenworth—whether in person or by proxy makes no difference—is now on trial for the murder of his uncle. It follows that we need to walk very warily in this matter."

Dana gazed at him as if she wondered at his obtuseness. "But if Rolf is dangerously ill—perhaps dying—over there in the Soudan, I must go to him at once, don't you see?"

"On the contrary," replied Paul, still in the same deeply impressive tone, "I see that you must *not*. Wherever he may be, and in whatever condition, the one important thing at present is that the police should think that he is in their power, and press the trial to its conclusion. And if you were to leave Bellerue for any place, on any errand, it would be to suggest to them that he is not here, and invite them to follow you."

Her eyes slowly dilated with reluctant comprehension and dismay, and every vestige of color left her cheeks.

"Oh! this is cruel! cruel!" she cried, covering her face with her hands, and bursting into tears.

"It is trying, no doubt, to our human short-sightedness," said Paul, very gently; "yet I seem to discover in it such plain traces of a Higher Love working out His own loving ends, that I should not dare to call it 'cruel.'"

"Indeed, I did not mean to be faithless or irreverent," replied she, quickly raising her wet face. "I was just blindly feeling how hard it is to have to sit down in ignorance and inaction when one so longs to know and do something."

"Do you not know, then, that sometimes 'your strength is to sit still'?"

"I know that it needs strength—a great deal of it—to do it," she answered, dolefully.

"Yes, the strength of faith and trust."

"Then, I can do nothing but wait," she said, after a pause.

"Yes, you can do much more—you can wait in cheerful submission to Our Father's will:—there is a vast difference between that and simply waiting."

"Indeed, I will try," she answered.

The door-bell rang, and Annie brought the message :—

"General Fairfax begs that you will meet him at Mr. Ennadeen's room as soon as convenient."

"I expected that," said Paul, rising. "Dana, I hope you will stay till I come back; it is too late for you to go home alone."

"On the contrary, I must go at once," replied she, starting up. "I promised that I would be back soon; they will be expecting me,"—adding, after a moment, "They will be glad that you have convinced me that I must just keep still for the present."

"Then, I will drop you on the way," said Paul.

And the two went out together.

I was left to reflect that a clergyman's wife has as little outward part and lot in her husband as may well be! Everyone could come to him, send for him, talk with him over the engrossing subject of the trial, but me! Yet that need not make the inward part and lot, the inward oneness, any the less perfect.

After all, was I not really proud, to the core of my heart, that he was in such demand for help and sympathy? What better could I ask, for him or myself, than that, in never so humble a following of his Master, he should continually go about doing good!

XXX.

WANTED—A BOY.

Scarcely had I reached this conclusion when Harold's ring sounded, and I went myself to let him in. Seldom had I been so distinctly and selfishly glad to see him. Now, at last, it would be possible to discuss the events of the day somewhat more freely and generally than could be done with Dana. There were so many questions that I wanted to ask, so many speculations that I longed to utter in an intelligent ear, so many impressions that it would be interesting to confirm or correct by comparison with others, so many points upon which I desired some additional light;—and here was my opportunity!

I was about to seize upon it with avidity, but was delayed by the question:—

"When did you see Ben Harding last?"

"Yesterday afternoon; he always comes at five o'clock for a Sunday talk of fifteen or twenty minutes."

"And before that?"

"On Friday, his last regular lesson day."

"How did he get in?"

"Why, opened the door and walked in, of course," answered I, with some surprise. "To come in on his hands

and head might seem a little more in character, but, in this house, to borrow his own phrase, he 'puts on an extra belt.'"

"He does not ring, then?"

"Only when the door is locked. Why should he? He comes at a fixed hour; and it is not worth while for Annie to leave other work in order to admit him. He has *carte blanche* to admit himself, when the way is open."

"Front or rear?"

"Just as he pleases. In fact, he uses both entrances, at his convenience. Are you under the impression that you are examining a witness on the stand?"

Harold noticed this sally only by a smile. "I should like to know which of those two entrances he used on the two occasions you mention. So would the police."

I opened my eyes wide with astonishment.

"The fact is," he explained, "they have been looking for him about a week, and have not found so much as a hair of his sandy head."

"What has he done?" I asked, in some consternation.

"No need to be alarmed for your *protégé*,—it is as a witness that he is wanted. His domicile not being known, it was impossible to summon him in the usual way, nor did anyone suppose it to be necessary,—it was taken for granted that he could be found on the street at an hour's notice. It turns out to be a most unfounded assumption; now that he is wanted, he is exasperatingly *non est*. You should hear the sheriff swearing at himself for an idiot, in not locking him up and making sure of him a fortnight ago. His language is of the sort that in a politely correct report would have to be represented by unlimited dashes."

"A fortnight in prison would have killed Ben," cried I, indignantly.

"I am not so sure of that. He must be keeping very close somewhere. It really is a little mysterious that he should have been in here twice, when I know positively that the police have been on the watch near this corner, as one of his known haunts, since Wednesday, without getting so much as a distant glimpse of him."

"I don't think there is any mystery about it," declared I, with some scorn. "Ben is as small and quick as a weasel, and the police big and clumsy as bull-dogs; he would slip under their very noses without their seeing him."

"It is possible. Still, I confess that I am curious enough about the matter to wish that you would question your servants as to the manner of his latest appearances, if you are willing to oblige me so much."

Forthwith, I sought the kitchen. "Bridget, did you see Ben come in yesterday?" I inquired of the cook.

"Ov coorse, an' I did, thin, ma'am," was the surprised answer. "He coom in at the back-door, an' went through me kitchen jist the same as iver he did."

"Did you see him come in the door?"

"No, ma'am, not the door, jist. When I see him, he was in the passage, outside there. But ov coorse he coom in at the door; how else could be git in, sure?"

"Well, did you see him go out?"

"No, ma'am; he must have gone out the front way."

"And do you remember anything about Friday?"

Bridget examined her memory, and found it a blank. "He must have coom in at the front that day, ma'am. It's not I that's loike to be out o' the kitchen, mornin's."

Annie's testimony was to the effect that he did not come in by the front door on Friday, for she remembered seeing him enter the library from the rear of the hall. She was

slightly surprised, too, because the more direct way was through the kitchen and dining-room, and Ben usually took that route.

Yet there is a dark passage from the back-door, past the back stairs, by which one can get into the main hall, and it appeared that he must have made use of it. He could easily have slipped past the kitchen-door unseen by the cook, and that he did so argued that he knew he was sought for, and meant to keep out of sight. But how did he get into the back-yard unseen;—the two gates into which open from the two streets, and must have been under the eyes of the police, if they were really on the watch? To be sure, he might have climbed over the rear fences; but was it likely that that possibility would not have been foreseen, and provided for?

I went back to Harold with my scanty gleanings of information.

"I fancy that there is more in the shock head of your 'Ariel' than you dream of," was his smiling comment.

"Possibly. But if he knew that he was wanted to give testimony against Rolf, he would be sure to hide himself, and stay hidden as long as necessary. There is nothing mysterious about that."

"No; certainly not. The mystery is that he should be able to enter and leave this house without being seen, when both entrances are under careful surveillance. If the police had imagined that he could be inside, what an easy capture they might have made. Do you suppose that you could whistle him up now, if you wanted him?"

"I shall not try. I do not feel called upon to assist in entrapping him. Is his testimony really of importance?"

"It is not essential. Its loss will not affect the result, as

it merely furnishes a preparatory link to mine; but Acton has a natural dislike to see his neatly arranged programme interfered with in any particular." And he added, after a moment, with a sudden outburst of weariness or disgust: —"I wish I could hide, too! I am sick of the whole business."

"I sympathize with you. The strain is getting to be well-nigh intolerable."

He gazed straight before him, as if he had not heard my words.

"What did Dana mean by that incredible denial of hers to-day?" was his next utterance.

"What should she mean but to tell the truth according to her lights?" responded I, quickly, unable to endure that she should be misunderstood.

"Do you really think so?"

"I know it."

"Did she not go there intending to admit that she knew he was Rolf?"

"So much the more reason for believing her when she said the contrary."

"To the legal mind, that does not seem to be an inevitable *sequitur*," said he, with a faint smile. But his expression instantly changed, and he exclaimed with energy:—"Good heavens! it follows that she was mistaken about him all this time."

"You would not wonder at it if you knew all the circumstances," said I.

He smiled somewhat quizzically. "It would seem that love is not so clear-sighted as the romancers would have us believe."

"On the contrary, love's sight is clear enough; it is rea-

son that is blind. Dana was not deceived by her heart, but by her head."

"Your speech is a little dark, but I suppose I have no right to ask for more light."

"Nor I to give it. I could not give so much except to disabuse your mind of an unjust impression."

"It is more than enough, in one way," said he, with a slight—a very slight—touch of bitterness. "Let me see what I can make of it."

He leaned back in his chair, and his fine features settled into the firm, fixed lines of profound reflection. I watched him with a sympathy of which he was perhaps unconscious; knowing well that the "more than enough" referred to the involuntary spasm of pain with which he hears any mention of Dana's love for Rolf, and which even his strong will cannot always prevent.

Suddenly he sat upright and gave me a startled look out of his dark eyes.

"But, Milady! do you not see that if Dana spoke the truth, and Marmot's story is true, there is but one way of reconciling their statements!"

"Well," I faltered, seeing that I had given him a clue that he was sure to follow up, and doubting if I ought to have done so.

"You know it, then, do you! You know that our prisoner is not Rolf Kenworth at all, but Captain Murray!"

"On the contrary, I know nothing."

He went on quickly, leaping, as it were, from point to point, now that he was on the right track.

"That is just what he came here for—to be tried in Rolf's place. Without once telling a falsehood, or even distinctly acting one, he did what he could to create and

strengthen the impression that he was Rolf in masquerade. He means to find out exactly what the evidence is against Rolf, and what there is to offset it. If the verdict should be adverse, he furnishes indisputable proofs that he is—himself! If it should be favorable, Rolf emerges from his hiding-place, and is a free man."

He paused. I waited in silence, curious to see what would come next. For I had been over the ground before, with somewhat more helpful guidance, to be sure,—and it was interesting to see a new traveller on the same route.

It was but a moment ere he went on, in a tone of growing surprise. "And Rolf,—why, of course! it is he who lies there at Berber,—'more dead than alive,' Marmot said,—Poor fellow!"

There was genuine compassion in the last words.

"I see nothing to contradict it but the presence of Lady Glenorm as sister and nurse," said I.

"That's nothing. If Ennadeen—Murray, I mean—is here to take Rolf's place in this way, there is some uncommonly strong bond between those two, strong enough to influence Murray's sister as well. Besides, there are women who positively enjoy nursing a very sick man, whoever he may be;—is it because they like to get the stronger sex at such a disadvantage, I wonder!"

"Or because they aspire to the crown of martyrdom."

"That is really too severe of you! And it is only the convalescents that are so irritable. When he gets to that stage, she can take herself off. But what a change in the game! I am dizzy with the suddenness of it."

He rose and began to pace up and down the room, as is his way when deeply stirred; stopping, now and then, to

offer a conjecture or a conviction, or listen to one,—for we said many more things than can here be set down. Once it was:—

"Dana may be thankful that Acton gives her credit for telling a foolish, needless, transparent falsehood."

"May he continue to do so!" responded I.

"Amen!"

He resumed his march. But soon he stopped to say:—

"What a mere thread Rolf's fate hangs on! At any moment, something may happen to give Acton the clue, and off goes a telegram to set a watch over him, and take him as soon as he recovers,—if ever he does."

"Are you so certain, then, that the trial will result unfavorably?"

"Upon my word, I wish I were as certain of the contrary!"

It was impossible to doubt the sincerity of his energetic ejaculation. I must have looked my pleasure, for he answered as if I had spoken:—

"I don't think I was ever quite so bad as to feel anything but sympathy for a man in Rolf's condition,—a mere mass of sore, bruised, burned humanity, with an almost hopelessly beclouded brain. When I think of that gay, handsome, strong, young fellow being brought down to that, I am completely conquered. I would give my right hand—yes, and my left one, too—to save him, even though it must be to save him for *her*. Does she know it? How does she bear it?"

"She suspects it. She wants to go to him."

"And they will not let her, of course. That would be to disclose the secret at once. Poor thing! Poor, true, sweet heart!"

His eyes moistened, and he resumed his slow pacing to and fro.

It was I who broke the silence. "Mr. Ennadeen is doing a very noble thing."

"Yes, certainly. He is a friend worth having. And he must be uncommonly devoted to Rolf. To be sure, he is in no real danger."

"I fancy he would do it all the same if he were. Anyway, he has suffered much discomfort. It must have been far from agreeable to be looked upon as a criminal incomprehensibly at large, as he has been by some people. You yourself have reason to know that things have not always been made pleasant for him in Bellerue."

Harold gazed at me inquiringly for a moment; then his eyes gleamed with recollection.

"I know to what you refer," said he, "and I have the grace to be ashamed of it. I was in a dogged frame of mind, in those days, to be sure! But he said he would give me an opportunity to apologize; you may be certain that I shall not wait for it. At the first opportunity, I will go to him and tell him that if he will now do me the honor to offer me his hand, I shall be only too proud to take it. Will he do it, think you?"

There was just that delicate touch of feeling in his words which always chokes me more certainly than distinct pathos; so, instead of speaking, I held out my hand.

"Is it as an earnest of his that you offer me this?" said he, smiling down upon it as he held it in his firm, grateful clasp. "Milady, if my future does not look like an altogether sunless desert, it is due to you and your Paulus. I can trust the Providence who gave me such a brother and friend in my hour of need."

"And is it not wonderful to think that all our lives, unknowing, we have been coming to this point by different ways?" mused I. "It is so nice to know that all these pleasant things have been waiting for us, as well as the more painful ones that we now and then come to."

"There is a more wonderful thought than that," said a kind, deep voice behind us,—for Paul, entering unnoticed, had caught my last words :—"Some day, in heaven, we shall say each to each : How strange, how sweet, that all our lives, unknowing, we have been coming to *this* point!—

"'Through the frost and through the heat,
Through the sunshine, through the haze,
Happy heart or weary feet,
Home by different ways!'"

XXXI.

THE HOLLOW OAK.

"PAUL," I began, while they were still standing with clasped hands, after a cordial greeting. "Harold knows—the truth. I am afraid that I gave him the clue. I insisted that Dana had not told a falsehood, and he followed that up like an Indian on a buffalo trail."

"And I am much relieved to know it," added Harold. "It was getting to be a real nightmare to think of going on the stand to give my testimony against Rolf. It is not quite the same thing to do it to Mr. Ennadeen, or Captain Murray, *quocunque nomine gaudet!* It is a much less direct blow; besides, time is gained, and that is always something."

It may be noticed that Paul did not enjoin secrecy, nor Harold promise it. What need was there of saying what was so perfectly understood? Both were men of honor; both felt that the obligations of honor are made neither stronger nor more sacred by any protestations.

Paul looked smilingly from one of us to the other. "I shall be interested to hear your conclusions," said he, "but I shall make no admissions."

Nevertheless, he did make some tacit admissions before the talk was over. It was not easy to avoid it, since Har-

old flung himself, heart and mind, into the consideration of the legal aspects of the case;—on one side or the other of which he would surely have been retained had he not chosen to consider himself as rendered ineligible by his quality of witness; and in which he could not but take a deep professional interest, aside from his personal one. His keen glance had noted signs enough in the court-room that Marmot's story was an unpleasant certainty, if not a surprise; and he now thought he understood wherefore.

"If our conclusions—Milady's and mine—be correct," said he, "it strikes me that the sooner our good friend, the General, sets his professional wits to work in the direction of legal obstructions, the better for his real client, if not for his ostensible one."

"I think I can venture to assert that Mr. Ennadeen will not chafe at any delay which shall be deemed either necessary or expedient," replied Paul.

"Yes; that may be taken for granted, after what he has already done. But it seems to me both expedient and necessary that this trial should be prolonged until Rolf's state is decided one way or the other; that is to say, if he improves, until he is well enough to be gotten out of the way in time to prevent any unpleasant complications arising from a verdict of 'Guilty.'"

"Yet as the one thing that we are all most anxious to find out is whether that verdict is going to be rendered, or no, there are some reasons for pushing on the trial as fast as possible, are there not?"

"Well, yes; if you are sure that no accident will set some keen mind on the track that now seems to me so plain."

"Because someone was kind enough to show you where

it started! But the end in view is worth some risks. And I prefer to think of the pleasanter termination of the trial which may be in store for us. All this network of circumstantial evidence may be so completely cut away, at one stroke, by some small, keen edge of truth, that men will wonder how they were ever deceived by it."

"Heaven grant it!"

I saw that Paul was struck by the evident, unforced heartiness of this wish, as I had been by the earlier one, but he said nothing.

Harold went on :—"I suppose you agreed upon the necessity of doing everything possible to strengthen the conviction that it is really Rolf, and no one else, who is shut up in our prison. Did you consider the value of a visit from Miss Heathcote?"

"What, after her denial of him to-day!"

"All the more on that account. Women (I beg your pardon, Milady!) are not always expected to be consistent in such matters. Let her go to see him, very quietly; that will tend to undo any mischief that her denial may have done."

I looked at him in surprise. Could he have divined Dana's wish?

"Perhaps you are right," said Paul, thoughtfully. "Up to this time, it has been supposed that her staying away would be set down to a deep-laid policy on the part of the defence, a determination to avoid anything tending to fix Rolf's identity; we believed that every such avoidance would make the prosecution all the more sure of it. We also decided this evening that her denial in court to-day would be regarded as part and parcel of the same policy; though how anyone could look her in the face, and not see

that she was speaking the truth from her heart, passes my comprehension."

"It is best not to 'play it too fine,'" said Harold, warningly. "As you say, there was truth in her face to-day, although its nature was so unexpected that it only served to bewilder me; but someone, with no prepossession to hinder his sight, may have been enough impressed by it to try to find some ground of accommodation between her statement and Marmot's;—Marmot himself is quite keen enough to hit upon it. Yes; take her to see Ennadeen at the first opportunity, and do it with such an elaborate secrecy as shall not fail to be noticed." And he added, after a moment, half-absently:—"How I envy him!"

"I do not see," said Paul, looking at him with kindly eyes, "that you need to envy anyone."

"Ah, but think what a hero she will make of him for acting as Rolf's substitute, and of the contrast when I come to stand up in court and apparently do my best to commit him to a felon's cell or grave! He will establish a life-long claim to her affection and gratitude, I to the opposite feelings. Is it not enough to make a man perjure himself, if he could bring his mind to it?"

"Is your testimony so certain to be damaging, then?" inquired I.

He looked at me thoughtfully a moment:—"You two shall judge for yourselves. There is no longer any reason why I should not tell you all about it. My promise to Dana is virtually at an end. Besides, you will soon hear the tale in court, or, at least, so much of it as is pertinent to the trial; and I should like you to hear the whole, in a more informal way."

He paused for a few moments, as if to set his recollections in order ; then, quietly, dispassionately, he told us the following tale :

"When the circumstances of Mr. Rollin Kenworth's death and the finding of the coroner's jury were made known, the whole thing had a kind of horrible fascination for me; I could not think of anything else. There was, first, the natural professional desire to get at the bottom of the mystery that was puzzling and exciting all Bellerue; and, second, the fact of its bearing on Dana's heart and fate. While I pitied her sincerely for the suffering of the present, I confess that I could not help some slight undercurrent of thought setting towards future possibilities, in case the suspicions of Rolf should turn out to be well founded. These things made the Manor very attractive ground to me ; my walks tended almost unconsciously to its vicinity ; more than once I found myself standing among the trees of the park, staring at the ancient face of the dwelling, and speculating about the strange occurrences that had made it so interesting a mask.

"Well, one day, at sunset, I was strolling slowly across the grounds, and I stopped to look at that gigantic oak which is clothed half-way to its top with such a thick growth of ivy that a square inch of bark is scarcely to be seen anywhere through it. There is something about a grand old tree that always goes to some deep place in my heart, not often reached; and, with the sunset light on its top and the falling shades around its base, this one was a sufficiently striking and picturesque object:—

> "'On its head a double crown,
> Green of leaves and years of green.'

But as I gazed, I was surprised to see the vines part about ten feet from the ground, and a boy's face appear in the opening ;—evidently, there was a hollow there, uncommonly well concealed, too. He looked cautiously around, but I was hidden by an intervening bough ; then he held up some article to the light, in order to examine it more closely than could be done by the dimness within the hollow at that hour ; and I saw the gleam of gold and the flash of jewels. His curiosity being satisfied, he pocketed the article, and began to scramble down the trunk,—backwards, of course. And as I had no doubt that he was a thief, who had not come honestly by the treasure, whatever it might be, I quietly stepped forward, received him in my arms, and bade him deliver up his plunder.

"But he had no mind to do my bidding; on the contrary, he fought like a wild-cat;—I still carry the marks of the fray, as you know. It was only by main strength that I succeeded in getting hold of the article that I had seen. Imagine my surprise to find that it was the identical stiletto with which it had been decided that Mr. Kenworth was slain; I could not but recognize it on the instant from the description so often repeated in my hearing. Moreover, it was still stained—that is to say, it bore unmistakable traces of the evil work that it had done.

"Up to this time, Ben (I need not say that it was he) had writhed, bit, and scratched to the best of his ability ; now he changed his tactics and began to beg for the thing in the most abject fashion, pleading that it was Mr. Rolf's, that he meant to keep it carefully for him; that, as he had found it, he had a right to it, while I had none ; and a great deal more to the same effect. I told him sternly to cease his howling, and tell me how the thing had come into his

possession, or I would straightway hand him and it over to the police.

"So I learned that the hollow had been a haunt of Rolf's, and that Ben had discovered a deep cavity or seam in the inside of the tree, into which he had carelessly thrust his arm, and found the stiletto lodged on an internal projection. The cavity went much deeper, and the person who flung it there had doubtless expected it to go to the bottom, but had been in too hot and feverish haste to make sure of it. Ben's first thought,—which he now deeply regretted not having acted upon,—was to fling it into the depth; then with a sudden perception that it was just possible it might be of use to Rolf some day and somehow, he had determined to take possession of it and secrete it in some safe place that he knew of

"I cannot tell you exactly how I felt when I knew that I held in my hand the missing link which must surely fix the guilt of the crime upon my rival. I believe it was unmingled horror, at first; and if some sense of elation came afterward, I hope it was not all personal and selfish; I think there was mingled with it a righteous satisfaction that justice should be done, and a pure heart unlinked from an evil one. But soon, I think, every other feeling was merged in a deep compassion for Dana; I began to understand what suffering this discovery implied for her; as long as there was any uncertainty about Rolf's guilt, she could love and hope, but now!—

"So many thoughts crowded upon my mind that I could decide on nothing then and there; so, telling Ben that if any harm came of the matter, it would be through him, and promising to flay him alive if he dared to breathe a word of it to anyone, I sent him off in a white-heat of impotent

rage, and walked slowly homeward, revolving the matter in my mind as I went.

"On the top of View-Hill I met Dana; and her pallid, anxious face stirred up all the pity and generosity of my nature. With a sudden impulse, I stopped her, and said: 'Miss Heathcote, allow me to offer you a word of friendly advice. If you know where Rolf Kenworth is, or have any means of communication with him, warn him to put half the globe between him and Bellerue, and to bury himself under some other name and character, if he would avoid a felon's death. For accident has put me in possession of evidence that leaves no possible doubt of his guilt.'

"She turned a shade paler, but she answered firmly that nothing—no evidence of any sort—could ever make her believe that. Moreover, she added, presently, that she was quite sure Rolf would return and face the accusation as soon as it should be made known to him.

"And I rejoined, with the strongest possible emphasis, that if he did, he would come to face certain death on the scaffold; for, granting that he were as innocent as herself, the evidence against him was so strong that no one could discredit it for a moment; on the contrary, as soon as it was produced, all men would join in execrating him, and demanding that justice should be done.

"And then she clasped her hands, and burst into tears, and asked if it must be produced now, while he was absent and unable to defend himself.

"And I answered, in my deep pity and sympathy, that as long as he kept away from Bellerue, or until he was brought to trial, I would bury the secret in my own breast—for her sake. If ever he returned, I should think it my duty, equally for her sake, to tell the whole truth.

"And I think she must have read in my face or manner the dim hopes that were latent in my heart; for she drew herself up with a certain stateliness, even while she thanked me, for my promise,—a promise, she added, to which she was sure she could trust unfalteringly, for she knew me to be a man of honor. And she bowed, and went on her way,—doubtless with a new thorn in her heart, poor child! And I went home, and locked up the stiletto in a safe place, where it remained until I handed it over to the sheriff the other day. Naturally, he was a good deal surprised that I had kept it so long; but I told him that as I had produced it as soon as it was needed, my reasons for keeping it till then were of no value to anybody but myself. Perhaps he had a suspicion of the true state of the case, for he questioned no farther.

"Now, you can judge for yourselves what effect my testimony and that stiletto are likely to have, even without Ben's corroboration. The oak-hollow has always been a secret; its existence is known to only a few persons—"

"Allow me to stop you long enough to ask how Ben came to know of it," said I.

"It appears that his devotion to Rolf often prompted him to follow him unseen, just for the sake of keeping his idol in view; so it chanced that he once saw him climb into this nook, after which he naturally took occasion to investigate it for himself. But he swore to me that he had never presumed to visit it since, until after Rolf's disappearance, when, I suppose, he went there to assuage his grief and loneliness by being where Rolf had been, and touching something that he had touched.

"To resume: the hollow was a favorite and secret haunt of Rolf's; the stiletto was found there; it must have been his

because its fellow was known to have been lost. What follows?"

"Looking at these things from the outside, the conclusion does seem to be very clear," said Paul, meditatively; "but an inside view might make all the difference in the world with their relations and indications. Anyway, I am glad to know that the stiletto is forthcoming. Did you notice Wright's testimony about Ennadeen's rummaging?"

"Yes; and I wondered what he was after."

"That stiletto. He was possessed with the idea that it was secreted about the place, and he meant to find it."

"To what end? Did he mean to make sure of its destruction?"

"By no means. It was its existence that he wished to make sure of. Have I your permission to tell him that it is found?"

"I see no reason to refuse. To be sure, Acton means to make a sensation with it, as well as a telling stroke of evidence,—he has a taste for the dramatic. Yet it cannot interfere with his plans, now, to let the defence know that it is to appear."

But Paul did not see the prisoner that day, nor for some days after. Mr. Godine fell violently ill of a fever, attended by persistent delirium, over which it soon appeared that Paul's voice alone had any certain control. Consequently, he spent all the time possible in the sick room; he was in attendance most of the day and much of the night; and he was present no more in the court of justice until the trial drew near its close.

He sent a note to acquaint Mr. Ennadeen, through General Fairfax, of the finding of the stiletto, and received a grateful acknowledgment of "most timely help."

Nor did Dana visit the prisoner, in spite of Harold's recommendation. For some reason, and doubtless at the prompting of his client, General Fairfax persisted in declining the honor, for the present.

When this was made known to Dana, gently but firmly, she sat for a long time in deep and troubled thought.

"Does it mean that Rolf does not need me?" she then asked.

"You know that he recognizes no one," returned I, soothingly; "it cannot make much difference to him."

"Perhaps not," she answered, drearily, with a heavy sigh, fixing her eyes on the horizon.

Tears came into them after awhile, and a certain look of patient sorrow that it made my heart ache to see; but she offered no farther remonstrance.

And very soon she went.

XXXII.

A MISSING LINK.

A WEEK or more went by without any noteworthy event. Knowing that the court would now have to do with the actual crime, and that the testimony would be chiefly that of surgeons and police officers, I determined that there was no good reason for subjecting myself to the unpleasant ordeal of listening to it; especially as Dana, whose attendance in the capacity of witness was no longer necessary, professed herself to be more than willing to follow my example. I cannot, therefore, if I would, and I certainly would not if I could, give the minute, harrowing details connected with poor Mr. Kenworth's abrupt "taking-off," which occupied the attention of the court for several days. The main points have already been indicated. Not until the body was left to rest in silence and its ancestral vault, and the grewsome atmosphere of the court was exchanged for fresher, purer air, did I enter the court-room again.

Meanwhile, my life resumed its wonted flow, except for the absence of Ben Harding, who came no more for either lessons or talk. That Sunday visit about which Harold had been so curious, had been his last. Doubtless the closer watch of the police had made it more difficult for him to come and go unseen, and he did not mean to fall into their

hands. It was a boyish freak that I could not but regret. More than once, I was on the point of trying whether the little carven whistle still kept its spell; and, if my Ariel proved "correspondent to command," I would advise him to give himself up at once; assuring him that no harm was intended him, and that his absence was quite as likely to be prejudicial to Rolf's cause as his presence. But a mixture of feelings—fear lest he should be captured before I could see him, unwillingness to pierce his affectionate heart with a call to which he could not respond, dislike to find my own summons and authority set at naught—made me lay it down again with a sigh. It was strange how much I missed the boy!

So the days wore on until Harold informed me that he was to go on the stand the next afternoon, when a friendly interest led me to visit the court-room once more; and Dana decided, after some little solicitation, to accompany me, in order to see what was the present aspect of the trial.

Our fresh eyes immediately detected certain changes. General Fairfax had parted with his wary, anxious look; he was leaning comfortably back in his chair, and glancing carelessly about, with the ease and composure of a man who sees his road clear before him, and dreads neither the journey nor its end.

Mr. Ennadeen's face wore its accustomed gravity, but it was calm and confident; not without a certain repressed eagerness, too, implying that he saw his goal well in sight, and was desirous of reaching it without delay, whatever might come afterward.

On the contrary, Mr. Acton looked annoyed and perplexed. He sat gnawing his moustache and frowning por-

tentously at judge, jury, and audience; evidently something had gone very much awry in his plans; and left him some exceedingly difficult, harassing problem to solve.

Once, a policeman came in and spoke to him in a way to suggest that he had returned from a fruitless errand, for he shook his head two or three times discouragingly; and Mr. Acton's frown deepened, and his moustache twitched with discontent.

Noting these things, Dana and I took heart, and smiled cheerfully into each other's faces. Something must have occurred to encourage the defence, and had proportionately disheartened the prosecution. And the narrow strip of sunshine was a pleasant thing to bask in, even though the shadow might wait beyond.

Too soon we learned how little there really was upon which to felicitate ourselves.

Mr. Wright happened to be seated just back of us, and these signs of the enemy's dissatisfaction did not escape his observation. Leaning forward, he said, in a low voice:—

"It looks as if friend Acton had missed a figure out of his calculations; there's going to be a considerable falling-off in the sum total. Kinder cheerful sort o' countenance he pulls over it, don't he!"

There was little of interest or importance until Harold took the stand, and told the story of his capture of Ben with the stiletto, at the hollow oak. His clear, musical tones brought an instant hush over the crowded court-room; and his quiet, dispassionate manner, not without a touch of melancholy, could not fail to impress every hearer with his entire truthfulness.

Having heard it all before, my own mind was free to note its effect upon others. The crowd listened in breathless

silence; the judge and jury with the profoundest attention. General Fairfax and Mr. Ennadeen showed signs of the deepest interest, but not one of surprise or anxiety; indeed, the conviction presently dawned upon me that the drift of this testimony was not only expected (Paul had seen to that), but distinctly gratifying. The prisoner's face, in particular, brightened to such a degree that it looked almost cheerful; and again I noticed that look of repressed eagerness, as if he were holding himself firmly in check until the fitting time for action should come.

As for Dana, her color came and went, and her breast heaved quickly; but I bade her look at Mr. Ennadeen's face, and put aside her fears. Moreover, I asked her to note the grave quietude of Harold's manner, and see that here was a man simply doing his duty, with no personal feeling save of regret that it had become his duty, and without a trace of anger, hatred, jealousy, or prejudice.

I wondered, too, if she saw how exceedingly handsome he was as he stood there,—calm without coldness, easy without assurance, modest without diffidence;—he has changed wonderfully for the better since first he came into our lives, this Harold Brune! He seems to me now a man of finest, truest, gentlest manliness, after the pattern best approved of all good and wise men.

He finished his recital, and stood quietly waiting. General Fairfax rose and said, with much urbanity:—

"I have a question or two to ask. Did you examine this stiletto with any particular care?"

"As minutely as I could without removing—" he changed the phrase—"without doing anything to alter its appearance."

"Did you discover anything to show to whom it belonged?"

"Nothing."

"That is all."

As Harold left the stand, he glanced quickly and deprecatingly in our direction; it was the look of one who expects to be misunderstood, condemned, for an unavoidable act. But Dana, with a quick and delicate perception of his feelings, answered to the look with a faint but friendly smile. And I saw his face brighten and his broad chest heave with a sense of relief, as unlooked-for, doubtless, as it was delightful.

There is no doubt of it; Dana understands and likes him better than she did. She feels the change in him, and instinctively responds to it with the esteem and trust that it deserves.

They will be good friends yet, these two good friends of mine!

Mr. Acton now rose and addressed the court. In carefully constructed phrases, but with a most lowering and threatening brow, he expressed his keen disappointment at certain lamentable gaps in the complete chain of evidence that he had expected to produce. First and least, was the testimony of Benjamin Harding, which should have furnished a preparatory link to Mr. Brune's and would have corroborated it in some points,—although no one who had listened to that gentleman's calm and lucid statement would be likely to need anything corroboratory. Nevertheless, he was sorry that Ben had not been forthcoming; but though the police had been on the lookout for him for some time, he was unaccountably missing. He wished it to be distinctly understood that he made no accusation,

but the advantage of the boy's absence to the defence was patent enough.

General Fairfax half-rose and suavely remarked that, as no accusation had been made, there was none to repel; if there had been, he should have known how to repel it.

Mr. Acton's next witness was the sheriff. He testified briefly that he had received the stiletto in question from Mr. Brune, enclosed in a suitable box; that he locked that box up in the drawer of a desk in his house for safe keeping; that he knew both box and contents were there a week ago; that since that time he had more than once seen the box, but had not opened it; finally, that on opening it last evening, he had found it to be empty; the stiletto had been stolen. The police had been at work all the night and morning, but nothing definite had been discovered; there was a slight clue,—obviously, he could not say more. The search would be prosecuted with diligence, and he hoped to produce the missing article before the trial was ended.

Mr. Acton's "sensation" had certainly come off, though not strictly in accordance with the original programme. There was a hushed and startled surprise throughout the court-room as the disappearance of the stiletto was made known; then, as the sheriff left the stand, there arose a growing murmur of excited voices; everybody was discussing the strange event with his neighbor;—what it meant, how it could have come about, what would be the effect of its absence, and the numberless kindred questions to which it gave rise.

"We-ll!" drawled Mr. Wright, in a tone of exceeding bewilderment, "that's about as neat a conjurer's trick as ever I saw done:—'Now ye see it'—'Now ye don't'—'Now

ye've got it'—'Now ye haven't!'—I'm dashed if I know what it all foots up to!"

And lifting his tall, lank figure slowly from his seat, he began to make his way through the crowd towards the lawyer's precinct, probably in the hope of getting a word with his cousin or the General.

But Mr. Acton was now on his feet again, and his long-repressed wrath burst forth. In a short but vigorous speech, edged with bitter sarcasms, and delivered with passionate energy, he managed to convey, if not to state, his firm conviction that the stiletto had been stolen at the instance of the defence, as the only possible way of saving the prisoner from the utmost severity of punishment that the law allowed for crimes of such magnitude as his.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth before General Fairfax was also on his feet, not only repudiating the suspicion in tones of apparent sincerity, but protesting that not even Mr. Acton himself could regret the loss of the weapon so much as he and his client. Instead of being to their advantage, it was a severe and unexpected blow. There was nothing for which they prayed more earnestly than that it might be recovered, and that speedily.

If this speech needed confirmation, it was surely to be found in Mr. Ennadeen's face, unless he were wonderfully skilled in concealing his real sentiments and counterfeiting their opposites. So far from manifesting any gratification at the turn of events, he looked as if some exceedingly pleasant draught had been snatched from his lips just as he was preparing to drink. The disappointment and perplexity of his expression were unmistakable.

On the whole, I could not avoid the conclusion that, however much the prosecution might be amazed and con-

founded at the miscarriage of an important portion of its well-arranged plan, the defence was even more so. It was an odd—well-nigh an incredible—unanimity of feeling, rare enough to be set down as unique; but it was undeniable.

Yet Mr. Acton plainly doubted it. His brow was still clouded; his face wore the angry, protesting expression of a man who has been injured, and whose injury rankles too deeply to be forgotten or forgiven. In answer to General Fairfax, he uttered some venomous sentences which brought that gentleman to his feet with an appeal to the judge; who responded with a few well-chosen words, admirably calculated to pour oil on the troubled waters

Finally it was decided that, this being Friday afternoon, well advanced towards the hour of closing, the court should adjourn until Monday morning; giving the police time to search more thoroughly for the missing links, and the prosecution and defence opportunity to decide upon their course in case the search should prove unsuccessful.

XXXIII.

A SEARCH.

It was pleasant to find Paul in the study; Mr. Godine being under the influence of a powerful anodyne, he had seized the opportunity to come home for a brief space.

We exchanged reports of the day's doings. He told of the fight for life that was being waged in the sick-room,—doctors, nurses, friends, pitted against the one invincible foe, who is never defeated, although he may be for a time repulsed,—and the growing probability that it was being waged in vain. The tones of his voice were very deep and soft as he spoke of the present strain of anxiety, and the coming pangs of sore sorrow; yet ever with the eye of faith he saw the partial, broken curves of present trials rounding out beyond our sight into the perfect circles of the infinite love of God. It is a blessed thing to have such confidence as his in the one, unchangeable, everlasting Fatherhood!

It was now my turn; and he listened with keen interest to my account of the afternoon's events in the court-room.

"Stolen!" he repeated, musingly. "But who could possibly have cared to steal it, except those who are quite above

suspicion? It must have been some vulgar thief attracted by the value of the gold and jewels. Have they any clue?"

"It was intimated that they have a slight one. I confess that I felt small confidence in the statement; I fancy that the police seldom admit that they are at their wit's end until the fact becomes patent to everyone else without the admission. They seem to think it more becoming to put on lofty airs of diplomatic mystery."

At this moment, Annie knocked at the door, and handed a card to Paul. He glanced at it with some surprise, then held it out for me to read the name:—"Mr. Justin Armstrong."

Now, Mr. Armstrong is the sheriff!

Paul went to the parlor to meet his unexpected visitor; I sat down and wondered what had brought him. Before I had exhausted the wide margin of surmise open to me, Paul re-entered, and held out his hand to me with a smile.

"Come, sweetheart; and don't be alarmed; it is only that he wants to put a question or two to you about Ben."

The sheriff is gigantic in size, but quiet of voice and mild of manner,—a very Bottom of alion, who can "roar you as gently as 'twere a sucking dove,"—yet is none the less a terror to evil-doers. It is related that he has been known to take two recalcitrant offenders by the collar, one in each hand, and calmly knock their heads together, as the quickest way of taming two birds with one touch; while his tones lost nothing of their softness, nor his manner of its gentleness. He looks as if nothing less than an earthquake would shake his massive frame, and nothing less than its

mental or moral equivalent disturb his equally massive composure.

With many apologies for troubling me, he stated that it had transpired through one of our servants that Ben Harding had been in our house on the preceding Sunday, although the strictest watch of the police had failed to get so much as a glimpse of him. Hearing that I had been so kind as to take a friendly interest in the boy, and to give him regular instruction,—a charitable work for which he had the highest admiration ; if more of it were done there would be less for him to do,—it had occurred to him that I might be able to give a clue to his place of residence. Had I any idea where it was?

And then I learned that if the sheriff has a soft voice he has a keen eye ; for, as he asked the question, he bent on me a look penetrating enough to disconcert the most ingrained hardihood of guilt or treachery.

But as I had nothing to conceal, I met his eyes without flinching, and replied that I had not the remotest idea of Ben's place of abode, or manner of life outside of the rectory ; in it, if not a model of all the virtues, he was at least docile and grateful enough to have established a very strong claim upon my liking, and even esteem.

"Ah?" said the sheriff, in a pleasantly questioning tone. "I am glad to hear so good an account of him ; I do not doubt that you will turn him out an ornament to society in time. But the boy must live somewhere! It is strange that he has never given you a hint where. Just think back a little, please, and see if you cannot recall some small indication, unimportant in itself, but which I, in conjunction with other things in my knowledge, may find to be of value,"

I replied, smiling, that if I were to venture any suggestion, it would be that Ben and the birds were of similarly arboreal habits ; and I explained, in answer to his look of bewilderment, that on once remarking to him that he climbed trees expertly enough to suggest that he lived in one, he had visibly colored.

Mr. Armstrong reflected for a moment, and shook his head ; evidently, he did not find the hint "of value."

"Has it never occurred to you," he asked, with another keen look, "that he might be concealed somewhere on these premises?"

"Certainly not," replied I, opening my eyes with a surprise that was doubtless more convincing than my words.

Yet scarcely were they uttered when it flashed over me that the supposition was not so preposterous, after all. I recalled the whistling and other untraceable sounds, I remembered Ben's prompt appearance at night, and felt my confidence shaken.

Had the sheriff been looking at me, I think he must have noted my change of countenance ; but, satisfied with my prompt negative to his inquiry, he had turned to Paul.

"Mr. Vennor, have you any objections to my searching the house? Not your personal, everyday rooms, of course ; —I don't suspect you of knowingly harboring a—an unwilling witness. But this queer old house was built by an equally queer old sea-captain, and there may be places of concealment in it wholly unknown to you."

"You are quite welcome to search it as thoroughly as you please," answered Paul, promptly. "I think you will have your labor for your pains, but that is your lookout."

"Thank you. With your permission, I will step to the door, and signal for assistance."

The signal brought a policeman, and the search began.

Our private and living rooms were not disturbed, but the rest of the house was ransacked with professional thoroughness. Especially did the garret and cellar receive an unaccustomed degree of attention that ought to have puffed them up with pride forever after. In the latter, the sheriff revealed to our astonished gaze a kind of supplementary cellar under the dining-room, the door of which was in a dark corner, and skilfully masked by a set of shelves; but it was empty of everything but valueless rubbish, with enough of mould and dust to make it clear that it had not been opened for a considerable portion of a century. There was also a loft over the kitchen-wing, reached by a movable ladder and a scuttle; into which none of us had ever penetrated, but the policeman was more enterprising, to his sorrow. He shortly emerged, not only so covered with dust and cobwebs that he might have passed for a very Rip Van Winkle of the force just awakened from his sleep of a hundred years, but followed by a swarm of wasps, furious at the disturbance of their time-honored privacy, and emphasizing their protests with so many stings on his head and face that he turned dizzy, staggered, and would have fallen but for the prompt assistance of the gigantic sheriff, who took him in his arms and sat him in a chair as if he had been a child, while Annie ran for the common remedies. My own sympathy with the unfortunate investigator was slightly alloyed with the thought how Ben would have enjoyed the spectacle!

The garret came last. And the search there was thorough, the sheriff's persistency growing with the disappointment which gave it such a Barmecide feast; it seemed as if a ghost could not have escaped his quest. I need not say

that I breathed freer when it was over, and proved to be unavailing. Remembering my experience in that quarter, I regarded it as the only really promising one; and if the truth must be told, I was not desirous of seeing Ben fall into the hands of his pursuers.

Closets were overhauled; chests and boxes wherein Tom Thumb would have found narrow quarters were turned upside down; chimneys were probed; outhouses were minutely examined; much ancient dust was raised; a few interesting relics were discovered; the labor of generation on generation of industrious spiders was brought to nought; but of Ben not a trace, not a sign, fresh or faded, clear or obscure, was found.

The sheriff looked somewhat blank when his search was over, in fine harmony with its paucity of results. Again he begged pardon for troubling us, thanked us for our courtesy, and bowed himself out.

Paul and I looked gravely at each other. "He suspects that Ben is the thief," said he.

"It is a shame!" cried I, indignantly. "Ben would not steal a penny to keep himself from starving."

"Very likely not. But are you quite sure that, to save Rolf Kenworth from any danger or damage, he would not steal what he considers as Rolf's own property from the police, and think he was doing a righteous deed?"

I was silenced. This view of the case was not without some elements of plausibility. Besides, I suddenly recalled Ben's enigmatic mention of the gun that was "going to be spiked."

Paul proceeded:—"I hope that Ben has not been meddling with edge-tools, and cutting where he meant to heal. If your impressions of to-day are correct, our friends were

quite as much disconcerted by the loss of the stiletto as their foes. If that whistle of yours really has the power of calling him out of the vasty—unknown,—it might be well for you to try it by-and-by, and see if you cannot convince him that a straightforward, open, honest course is likely to lead to more satisfactory results than the crookedest underground ways of deceit or policy. It would be better for him to deliver himself up to the police than to be caught, as he surely must be soon or late; such a boy as that cannot slip through their fingers always, sharp as he may be. No doubt we could make easy terms for him, if we could bring him forward at once."

"Oh, Paul! don't ask it!" cried I, deprecatingly. "If I were sure that he could get to me without being intercepted, I would gladly try it; but I cannot run the risk of delivering him over to the enemy, through his affection for me, and his readiness to do my bidding."

"I do not ask anything, dear; I merely make a suggestion, which you can consider at your leisure."

And late in the evening, after Paul had returned to his post in the sick-room, I did consider it so deeply that at last I put Ben's whistle to my lips and blew a somewhat faint, timid blast.

It was not without a vague sadness, blended with a definite relief, that I watched the minutes slowly slip away and bring no answer. My Ariel, whether he heard or no, was for once deaf to my call!

XXXIV.

A TIMELY RAIN.

A FRENCH philosopher has broached the ingenious theory that, although the reign of law is nearly universal, there is a small, fixed domain—an interregnum, so to speak—purposely left for the operation of Chance, wherein that freakish force has things all its own way, and can indulge to its heart's content in confusion, zig-zaggedness, and incoherence. Beyond the limits of this domain it is not allowed to go, or it would bring wholesale ruin; within them it is sovereign. In no other way could he account for what is called "accident" in the world.

Yet a profounder thinker might suggest that even in that narrow field, law acts as surely as outside, only in ways less expected by human foresight, and unprovided for by human prudence.

At all events, Chance (I am obliged to use the word, though I repudiate the ordinary meaning) plays an important, if apparently *impromptu*, part on the stage of human affairs. And, so far as my own experience goes, it is nearly as often a benignant force as the opposite. Frequently it has come to my aid when my best efforts have failed; it has given the clue, opened the path, flashed the light, that neither diligence nor intuition could find.

Now, it was to be seen what it could do when courts and police-officers, lawyers and friends, were powerless.

Late on this Friday evening, rain began to fall as if not only the windows, but the doors and all other apertures of the sky, were flung wide open. It continued with little abatement all night; and when morning dawned it was still coming down in a steady, gray, business-like way that augured well for its power of holding out all day, or even longer. The rectory roof was ill-conditioned to stand such an assault; it surrendered almost to a shingle. Before noon, every available vessel in the house, not in actual use for the table, was doing sentinel duty in connection with some new leak in the garret or elsewhere.

Nevertheless, as in all the more recent showers, a wet spot soon appeared on the ceiling of the rear portion of the main hall, and spread, and spread, until it covered an irregular space of some four or five square feet. By-and-by, a small stream began to flow more and more freely from one point, and a tub was placed to receive it.

In vain, with such professional help as was to be procured, had we tried to find the leak that fed this unwelcome fount. After every recent rain, a wiry little carpenter, with his assistant and an imposing show of ropes and ladders, poked for awhile among the shingles and clapboards, discoursing eloquently meanwhile of the "'tarnal way water's got o' sneakin' in at some blasted little, out-o'-the-way hole, an' creepin' along j'ists an' studs, an' never showin' a mite till it gits ten foot or more from whar it started, when it comes down like a flood on your best clo'es or your best carpet, an' there's no such thing as followin' it up, 'nless ye're willin' to pull your house all to pieces to do it; which most folks thinks don't pay."

After which words of wisdom he cheerfully went his way,—and so did the water, the one as unimpeded as the other.

So, all the day long, the rain fell merrily outside ; and the inside rill poured as merrily into the tub. Dusk dropped upon the scene ; it deepened into darkness ; and still the flow went on as if stopping were the one thing farthest from its thought.

"Really!" said Paul, pausing in the library for a moment on his way to the study, "so far as the sound goes, we might fancy we were among 'wood-nooks and purling brooks,' listening to—"

The rest of the sentence was lost in a startling crash. Seeking its origin, we found the long-enduring ceiling of the hall had finally succumbed, and was lying on the floor, or piled in and around the tub in picturesque fragments. In one place, a portion of the lathing, rotten with age and moisture, had accompanied the plaster; leaving a considerable opening through which could be seen the flooring above, wherein was an inch-wide knot-hole, showing a bright gleam of light. Paul looked at this gleam attentively.

"Why, Winnie!" said he ; "I thought this part of the hall was directly under those closets."

"So it is."

"Whence comes that light, then?"

"Perhaps one of the closet doors is open, admitting the light from the upper hall : I'll go and see."

"It is too bright for that," returned he, shaking his head ; but I went, nevertheless, and came back with the information that the doors were all tightly closed, and that Egyptian darkness reigned within.

Paul's face instantly assumed the determined expression which means that he is bound to get to the bottom of the matter, if it has one. He went quietly for the tallest step-ladder, and then bolted the rear door, preferring to make his investigation without the aid or knowledge of the servants.

Mounting the ladder, he found that the first floor-board on which he laid his hands was loose ; with a little exertion of strength he lifted the end, laid it over on its next neighbor, and thrust his head into the opening thus made. I, standing below, and looking up, saw the resolute expression of his face swiftly exchanged for one of the utmost amazement.

"What is it?" I asked, seeing that he was too much surprised to think of giving any prompt account of what he saw.

"There is a room here—a small room—that we have never so much as dreamed of," he murmured, much as if he thought it might be a dream, nevertheless. After another look or two, he went on, with more assurance, "It is occupied, too ; there is a lighted lamp and—various things. Fortunately, the owner appears to be absent, at the present moment."

"Are you sure?" inquired I, in some fear lest that unknown personage might be craftily lying in wait, the more vengefully to punish this unwarrantable intrusion.

"Tolerably sure, unless he has the gift of invisibility. The place is not large enough, nor the furniture massive enough, to afford a hiding-place for anything human."

"Oh, Paul! cannot I look for just one moment?"

He good-naturedly descended, and assisted me up to his late post of observation.

I saw a room about eight feet by nine or ten. Midway of one side was a window slightly raised, but the blinds were closed. In a corner was a narrow mattress, with blankets; in another an oil-stove, on which a sauce-pan was merrily boiling, giving forth an odor of potatoes. Over this hung two or three other cooking utensils; and on shelves higher up were meat-cans, dishes, and other adjuncts of "light housekeeping." Near the middle of the floor was a small, gray, threadbare rug, on which stood a tiny table, with a chair by its side. The whole place was as neat as if the fairy Order had made it her head-quarters.

These things I quickly noted in my first curious and comprehensive glance. Now I began to make more enlightening discoveries. On the table was a pile of books with a well-worn strap round them; both strap and books were nearly as familiar to my eyes as anything in our own library. A row of hooks held various garments, among them a boy's suit, nearly new; I had assisted at the purchase of that suit. Against a rude easel lay a mahl-stick that had once been mine; and though there is a democratic sameness about old brushes, I was nearly sure that the half-dozen of them thrust through a nondescript palette were also old acquaintances, which I had once passed over to hands in which I seemed to discover an itching for "daubing a little."

"Oh, Paul!" I cried, with a gasp, "it is Ben!"

"I was just arriving at that conclusion myself," responded he. "But how in the world does he get into that place?"

"I looked around the room; on every side the walls rose unbroken to the ceiling, except for the one window.

"How, indeed!" I echoed. "There is no door anywhere. He must climb in at the window."

"If the edge is sufficiently taken off your curiosity, perhaps you will allow me to come up and investigate that point."

Not content with simply looking into the room, as before, Paul now enlarged the opening enough to allow him to draw himself up through it. Whereupon, I promptly mounted the steps, and watched him while he made a careful examination of the small apartment.

As before said, there was no door. But Paul soon pointed out divers broad cleats nailed to the wall in one corner, by means of which an expert climber could easily ascend to the floor above:—the ceiling, be it said, was not of plaster, but of stout boards.

"I see," said Paul, after staring upwards a moment; "there is a trap-door there, which gives access to the garret."

"Oh! now I understand the flying figure that I saw that night, and the door that shut so heavily!" exclaimed I, with a sudden flash of inspiration.

"Precisely," said Paul, with a smile. "Also, the mysterious whistler sinks at once into the category of the comprehensible."

"Yes, surely," said I, with an inconsequent sigh.

After all, the shadow of mystery about the house had not been without a certain charm, as I found when I saw it vanishing in the light of common day, and felt myself fall with a kind of mental "thud" into the comparatively barren region of the known and the commonplace.

"Still, Ben cannot often enter his cell by way of the garret," objected I, after a pause. "He would have been caught a dozen times before this."

"No; as you surmised, he enters by the window. One

of those tall spruces in the alley grows just in the right place to serve for a ladder. No wonder he was a little confused when you suggested that he lived up a tree! It was a chance shot that came too near the truth to be quite comfortable."

Paul continued to look about him with interest, and to make discoveries and comments. Suddenly, he stooped over the table, his smile vanished, and his countenance took on an almost startling gravity. In a moment, he came towards me, holding out something for my inspection.

In a small, open box lay a stiletto, with a gold handle, richly jeweled!

Everything had been carefully restored to its place; there was nothing to suggest to the occupant of the secret chamber that it had been entered in his absence;—Paul even plugged up the knot-hole, lest light from below should be as suggestive as light from above had been. Then the servants were called to remove the litter made by the fallen ceiling; while Paul and I returned to the study to talk the matter over.

First, we could not but consider in what a masterly way the closets, passages, and rooms above had been contrived to make it appear that every foot of space was in use, and nothing left to be accounted for;—not even Sheriff Armstrong's thorough search for places of concealment had disclosed any ground of suspicion. The window, too, opened on the narrow side alley which was almost never entered; and being on a line with the rest, and precisely like them, there was little chance that any occupant of the dwelling would ever stop to notice that there was one more than he was accustomed to see from within; especially as the corre-

sponding windows belonged to the servants' and store rooms. And, as a matter of fact, during many years, and a succession of occupants, the place had never been discovered before.

How Ben came to know of it was a question upon which there was too little light to make its discussion profitable. His absence this evening was not surprising; probably he had seized upon the opportunity afforded by the rain and darkness to steal out for exercise or supplies. The cookery in progress showed that he was not to be long away.

For what purpose the place was originally contrived was an equally unprofitable subject of speculation. The only way of getting into it from the house being by the garret and the trap-door, Paul suggested that the eccentric sea-captain must have designed it as the receptacle of his valuables; neither of us liked to think that it might have held some darker secret. For why should we think of the worst when the best was just as easy and probable!

But our talk, in whatever direction it strayed, came inevitably back to the stiletto, and the strange fact that Ben had managed to outwit all his foes—or Rolf's—and get it finally into his own possession.

"Was there ever a more faithful, blind, touching devotion?" said I, with moistening eyes.

"Not often, it must be admitted. Certainly, you are not wasting your time on that boy; he has more than common depth and strength of character; he is capable of being made 'a man of' in the best sense of the words. However," he added, rising, "it is time for me to go back to the Godines; I leave you to deal with Ben at your leisure and discretion. I do not doubt that you will make him listen to reason."

As Paul went out, Harold came in. For a brief space of time, I heard their voices in the hall; then the one went his way, and the other entered the library.

"How delightful it is here!" was his first remark, looking around with evident pleasure, which was probably intensified by the contrast with the outside gloom. "It seems to me that there is no room in all Bellerue so attractive as this. How do you manage it?"

"We do not 'manage it.' It does itself."

He smiled.

"I did not expect to hear you number yourself among the believers in chance."

"Nor do I. The room is simply the expression of a life —or of two lives 'that beat as one.' Everything in it is natural and legitimate;—the books, the pictures, the very ornaments, were none of them gotten and posed for mere effect, but have taken their places as outgrowths from or ministrants unto the aforesaid life. If there is any such attractiveness in it as you think, that is probably its secret."

He had been looking at me thoughtfully while I spoke, and his answer showed that only my first words had made any impression on his mind.

"There is something in that. I wonder if the universe might not also be said to be the 'expression of a life';— albeit, a life reaching so far beyond our ken or conception that we only partially understand the few phrases that we see;—which, like many phrases taken apart from their context, may seem now and then to have a meaning very different from the real one. But, ah, Milady, of what, then, is sin the expression?"

"Of evil; that seems plain enough. But, if we go very far in this direction, are we not taking 'phrases apart from

their context,'—a context, too, quite beyond our reach in this world?"

He sighed. "I suppose so. Certainly, we see enough of the expression of evil to be warned against expressing it ourselves."

"Probably that is enough for us to know here."

"And the full, satisfying context is to come hereafter! But I did not come for a talk of this sort to-night; I have but a few moments to stay. I wanted to ask you what you thought of yesterday's revelation in the court-room."

"You allude to the disappearance of the stiletto."

"Yes. Did it occur to you, when you heard of it, that your young friend, Ben Harding, might be able to give a shrewd guess as to its present whereabouts?"

"It did not," I answered, promptly.

I could do so truthfully; no such thought had entered my head at the time.

"It is plain that you do not give that imp of mischief credit for all he is worth. Possibly I might not have done, but for a certain circumstance which I have kept for your ears alone. A few days before he set the fashion of mysterious disappearance, I happened to see him in a tree just before the window of the sheriff's room. I was passing through the street when the sudden flight of a bird made me look up, and there sat Ben astride of a bough, apparently as much at ease as if he were 'to the manner born.' Knowing his ways, it did not strike me as anything suspicious at the time; but it came to me like a flash when Armstrong told me of the loss."

"And was that the reason of the search that we enjoyed yesterday?"

"No; that was the result of Armstrong's unaided wis-

dom. He took it into his head that if Ben's hiding-place could be found, it might give a clue to the lost article and the thief. That it cannot be found is in itself a circumstance curious enough to give rise to all sorts of conjectures."

"And what sent him here to find it?"

"Ben has been seen going in and out of the premises at hours when it was scarcely to be supposed that he was paying you a visit."

"Ah, indeed?" said I, briefly, too conscious of what had recently come to light to have any more appropriate remark ready, inasmuch as I was not inclined to divulge Ben's secret.

Harold fixed his keen eyes on me for a moment, and resumed:—

"Did you notice how confounded our friends of the defence seemed to be at the announcement that the stiletto had disappeared?"

"'Seemed to be!' It struck me that they really were,—even more so than the prosecution."

"Your penetration does you credit. It put a strange notion into my head—which, however, I am not going to impart at this time. My special object this evening—besides the pleasure of seeing you—"

"No unnecessary digressions, please!"

"—was to advise you, as the best thing that you can do for Rolf and Dana—to use your influence over Ben for the immediate restoration of that stiletto."

"How am I to find him?" I asked gravely.

"That was the question which troubled me when I came in; but now, if you do not know where to find him, I have not learned to read your face—that's all."

"'Your penetration does you credit,'" I laughingly quoted. "At least, I promise you to try my whistle, and see what it brings forth."

"I have great faith in its efficacy, if you sound it forcibly enough to show that you are in earnest. And, to give you a chance to try it forthwith, I will take my leave. Good night."

But, as he passed into the hall, he caught sight of the gap in the ceiling, and stopped short.

"You seem to have had a descent from above—not angelic," said he.

"Yes; the result of a leak that refuses to disclose its origin, though we have searched for it again and again. Life in this old mansion has a very spicy flavor about it, I assure you. What with new leaks and old ghosts, police searches and the like, we are seldom without a sensation on hand."

"The leaks seem to be monotonous enough! It is a shame that you should be subjected to such an annoyance:—I am going to talk like a stepfather to those vestrymen at our next meeting."

"Don't waste your breath! Is not the roof of the new rectory nearly finished?"

He made a grimace, and went out into the night.

XXXV.

ARIEL BROUGHT TO BOOK.

Not until the house was shut for the night, the curtains drawn, the servants in their rooms, and everything quiet, did I summon Ben. It was not without a distinct sensation of pleasure, a real heart-warmth, that I prepared for the interview; my feeling for the boy was passing beyond the stage of charity and interest; I was beginning to love him.

And there was now no reason for hesitating to call him, since I knew that he could come to me without going outside of the house. As I put the whistle to my mouth, I smiled to think how simple was the explanation of his swift appearance on former occasions; he could safely assure me that he was generally within hearing.

I sounded the whistle once, waited a few moments, and repeated it more shrilly and persistently, though not loudly enough to be noticeable in the street. In another minute, I heard his light footsteps on the garret stairs; soon, he was standing just within the door, looking at me with an exceedingly anxious, doubtful face.

"'Come with a thought! I thank thee, Ariel, come!'"

said I, smilingly holding out my hand.

His brow cleared; he had looked for a different, a more

serious reception; he expected to be called to account for his absence from lessons. Taking the cue at once, he answered :—

"'Thy thoughts I cleave to. What's thy pleasure?'"

"Come in Ben," I responded ; "I want to have a talk with you ;

"—'The time 'twixt now and ten
Must by us both be spent most preciously',

for we are going to take each other into confidence, like the good friends that we are ;—for we are the best of friends, are we not?"

"I'm sure you are my good friend," replied he, humbly. "I never had such a friend before ; nor ever expected to have, either. But I ain't fit to be your friend, ma'am; I wish I was."

"We will see about that, presently," said I, cheerfully. "But first, I want to tell you something about Mr. Ennadeen's trial. I fancy that you have not been keeping track of it with the interest that I expected ; I don't see you in the court-room, though I think everybody else who is at all interested in Mr. Rolf's fate, is there."

And I smiled at him quizzically.

He smiled in return ; this tone set him quite at his ease.

"I thought I could find something better to do," he answered, with twinkling eyes.

"Dodging the police, for instance. I need not tell you that they have been really anxious for a little of your society, and have had their anxiety for their pains."

"'Twouldn't have been of any use if they had caught me," said he, more gravely. "I wouldn't have said a thing

to give Mr. Rolf away,—not if they had locked me up till I was as gray as a rat."

"Perhaps you might have said something to help him."

He shook his head. "I couldn't, ma'am. The only thing I knew was dead against him—I mean, it looked so. Of course, I knew 'twas only looks; but other folks might not have seen it that way, so I made up my mind to hold my tongue. And I thought 'twould save trouble all round to keep shady till the court was over. But I *had* to come when you whistled, and did it as if you meant it, too."

"I have no doubt that you intended to do the best and kindest thing, Ben; but the wisest people make mistakes. Mr. Vennor would be sure to tell you that 'all open and above-board is the true diplomacy.' But we will not stop to discuss that matter now; I wish to tell you what happened in the court-room to-day; I think it will interest you."

And I gave as graphic a description as I could of the consternation caused by the disappearanc of the stiletto, especially to those who were presumably to be injured by its production. "It really looked as if the main plank in the line of the defence had dropped out," I concluded, solemnly, "leaving General Fairfax and Mr. Ennadeen to stare at the gap in dismay, and wonder what on earth they were going to stop it with."

"That can't be," returned he, looking somewhat troubled, nevertheless. Then, gathering confidence, he added:—"For Mr. Brune told me himself that that thing was enough to hang Mr. Rolf, without anything else."

"Doubtless, Mr. Brune believed so at the time," said I; "but I suspect that he is not so sure of it, now. Anyway, he is far from infallible; it is not to be supposed that his

judgment is never at fault. The stiletto by itself may appear to be a very damaging thing ; but taken in connection with other facts in Mr. Ennadeen's possession, it may prove to be of a different complexion. And what a shame it is that the thief "—I saw Ben wince at the word as if he had received a blow—" should have stolen it now, just at the time when the proof of Mr. Rolf's innocence may depend on its presence! I hope his conscienco pricks him sharply for the deed, if he has a conscience!"

Ben was gazing at me with a look of piteous distress and perplexity.

"Perhaps he didn't think of stealing it at all," he urged, with a faltering voice ; " perhaps all he thought of was just to get it out of the way for Mr. Rolf's sake."

" That is to say, he did evil that good might come ; he might as well have sown nettles and expected to reap strawberries! Or perhaps the real fact is, he had such an exalted idea of his own wisdom that he thought he could manage matters better than all the older and wiser persons whom he might have consulted."

The boy's changing face showed that I was hitting him hard.

" But—but—perhaps he thought he had a better right to the thing than anyone else," he persisted.

" He should have remembered that the law has the best right to whatever it needs to serve the ends of justice. And, as a general thing, it is only the guilty who need to suppress the truth ; innocence is best served by its fullest exposition. It is the half-truths only that we need to fear, Ben."

He sat staring into vacancy for some minutes without speaking, and I sat silently waiting for him to work out his

own conclusion. Finally, he turned and looked me long and searchingly in the face.

"I'm sure *you* wouldn't try to cheat me, ma'am," said he, with a quivering lip.

"Come here, Ben, look in my eyes, and see if you think I am trying to cheat you."

He did not come nearer, but he did look very steadily into my eyes; it was a look at once penetrating and beseeching. Then he turned and ran out of my room as swiftly as if he feared that his resolution would endure no stress of delay.

I waited quietly, knowing well that my work—or at least a part of it—was done. More quickly than I expected, he was back again. Putting the box that I had seen into my lap, he threw himself on the floor and burst into sobs, partly of wounded pride and still more of unselfish anxiety.

"I'm the thief, you see. But I didn't mean to be one; I didn't, truly; I just wanted to help Mr. Rolf out of his trouble. And, oh, Mrs. Vennor! I can't help trusting you when you look at me like you did just now, but are you sure—*sure*—that 'twon't do him any harm?"

"I am sure you have done the right thing in producing it; and that is all that you and I need think of. We can leave results to God, knowing that He will not bring forth thorns of grapes nor thistles of figs! And I thank you with all my heart, Ben, for showing such trust in me."

"I'm sure I don't know who I should trust, ma'am, if I didn't you. You've always been as good to me as an angel. I feel it in my heart, if I can't say much about it. And I'll do anything you tell me."

"Then you will go with Mr. Vennor to Sheriff Arm-

strong, give this thing to him, and tell him just how you came by it, first and last."

"But he'll lock me up!" cried Ben, drearily; not, to do him justice, with any tone of protest, but as if he heard already the bolts being shot between him and freedom.

"I think not," said I. "If Mr. Vennor makes himself responsible for your appearance when wanted, I fancy he will let you off this time, in consideration of your voluntary coming forward. In any case, that is the only brave, manly, right course to pursue, and therefore the only one that my friend, Benjamin Harding, can make up his mind to, when he comes to think about it."

Ben lifted his head with dawning resolve, but it sank again. "He'll want to know where—"

He hesitated.

"Where you live," suggested I. "Likely enough. But if Mr. Vennor is able to assure him that your home is a respectable one, perhaps he can be induced not to pursue the investigation any farther."

And then, putting my hand on his shoulder, I looked smilingly into his face, and said, quietly:—

"How much longer is it to be before you can make up your mind to trust me with the secret of your home?"

He colored violently, and would have drawn away, but I held him fast.

"Oh, Mrs. Vennor!" he cried, entreatingly, "don't look at me that way! I can't keep anything from you if you do!"

My only answer was to draw him a little nearer, while I continued to look expectantly into his face.

He trembled like a leaf under my hand. "What would

ye say, then," he burst out, "if I told ye that I lived in your house?"

"I should say that I was very glad to hear it, if you are comfortably housed."

"Ye wouldn't be mad about it?"

"Certainly not. It would be a relief to know that you lived in so safe a place. But how can such a thing be?"

He put my arm aside with the solemn, resolute air of one who burns his ships behind him, marched to the door, and said:—

"Come; I'll show you."

Taking a lamp from the table, I followed him up to the garret, and, raising the trap-door with the ease of practice, he bade me look down into his small abode; watching my face closely meanwhile, but too fearful of seeing signs of displeasure, and too thankful for their absence, to notice that my surprise was scarcely adequate to the occasion.

"So that is your den!" said I, laughingly, as the little room was disclosed to view. "And very comfortable and wholesome it looks, too. But how do you get into it, as a general thing? I know you cannot often come this way."

He explained that his more usual mode of entrance was by the window.

"But how came you to know the place?" I persisted.

"I'll tell you all about it; it was just this way: Some time before mother died, we got to be so poor that we had to find a cheaper rent, and we moved into a house that turned out to be a horrid sort of a place. The people in it were drinking and swearing and fighting about half the time; and we was both afraid of 'em, and wouldn't have stayed there only that mother was too sick

to be moved. And pretty soon she died; and I'd ought to say that they were real kind to us all that time, and did what they could for us. But one day, after the funeral, when I was all alone in our room, crying and wondering what I was going to do, they had a regular set-to again; and one of the men came in with a glass of whiskey, and tried to make me drink it, 'cause, he said, 'twould make me forget my trouble, and put some life into me. And I was so mad—for I'd promised mother that I never would drink—that I ran right out into the storm,—it was a cold, snowy winter day,—and I vowed I'd never go back again, to stay. But I hadn't got a nickel in the world, and I didn't know what to do, nor where to go; the world didn't seem like the same place without mother.

"But as I came round this corner, I happened to think that this house was empty,—one minister had gone away, and t'other one hadn't come. So I climbed over the fence into the back-yard, and huddled up into a corner of the back porch, and tried to think I was pooty comfortable, but 'twas no go. I was cold and wet, and my teeth chattered like a rattlebox.

"So I began to wonder if I couldn't get inside. I knew 'twould be all locked up down-stairs, but I thought some of the upper windows might have been left unfastened; and I looked round till I spied that big spruce in the alley, growin' as close to the side of the house as if it had been put there on purpose. And when I got up to the window it opened just as easy as you please. But wasn't I beat when I got into this place, and found there wasn't any door into the rest of the house! There wasn't a thing in it, either, but dust and cobwebs, thick enough for carpets and curtains. But finally I spied those cleats in that cor-

ner, and this trap-door, and it didn't take a Solomon to know what they meant. And when I climbed up into the garret, there wasn't anything to hinder me from going all over the house.

"Well, I found some wood and half a box of matches left in the kitchen, and I made a fire, and lay down in front of it, and slept as warm as a bee-hive; though I was hungry, an' no mistake;—I hadn't put a thing into me since morning. But 'twas worth a good deal to be warm and peaceable, after the time I'd had in that miserable hole.

"In the mornin' I went out to look for a job; and I got a chance to shovel the snow off from some sidewalks and steps, and earned enough to feed me two or three days,—I wasn't very particular about my feedin'. At night I came back here again; I thought there wasn't any harm in my stayin' here as long as 'twas empty; and I took lots of care not to disturb anything, or make any litter.

"And after I'd been comin' and goin' that way for two or three nights, it popped as sudden into my head as a mouse into a hole, why shouldn't I go on a-livin' in this little room, as long as 'twasn't of any use to the people in the house? And the more I thought about it, the more it looked as if it might be made to do. So I set to work and cleaned it out;—'twas an awful job, but I found an old broom and wash-cloths in the back kitchen, and I bought soap, and I worked at it like a steam-engine for a week; and by that time, you wouldn't have known it for the same room.

"Then, nights, I went back to the old place, and I brought over, piece by piece, on the sly, the things I wanted to live with, and put 'em in order. Ye see, I didn't have to tug 'em up the tree; I could unlock the back door

from the inside, and bring 'em up here, and pitch down everything that wouldn't break, and ease down the rest with a rope. It took me another week before I got all fixed to my mind; but 'twas real fun, if 'twas right hard work. And when I got it all fixed up clean and comfortable, I felt as grand as a king on a throne, you can bet.

"It was more than a month after that before the new minister came, and, by that time, I'd learned all the ropes, and knew just how to manage. I felt just a little skittish after they moved in, and hardly dared to breathe aloud for a while, lest someone should hear me, and light on me sometime; but nobody ever did."

Here Ben stopped to laugh quietly over some amusing reminiscence.

"*You* come nearer to ketchin'—I mean, *catching*—(I can't stop to think *all* the time, 'cause it's such a long story!)—nearer catching me than anybody else ever did," he went on. "It had been raining hard, and the water began to leak into my room like a pump spout, as it does oftentimes; so I came up here to put something under the place where it got in; then I stepped to the front window to look out into the street for a minute; and then you came flying up the stairs so quick that I didn't get any warning till you were almost to the top; and my! didn't I have to skip! And I was so scared, I let the trap fall down with a noise like thunder; and then I heard you and Mr. Vennor rummagin' round and talking for a good while; so I knew you mistrusted that something was wrong, and my heart was in my mouth for fear you'd find me out; but you didn't.

"I s'pose that's what they call a 'digression,'" continued

Ben, sagely. "I'll get back on to the main track, though I haven't far to go now.

"In a year or so, I'd got to feel as if the place belonged to me; and I was as happy as a king in it till after you came and begun to be so good to me, and kept a-gittin' more and more so; and then it came over me by degrees that it wasn't just the square thing to be livin' under your roof that way, and never let on to you about it. And after that day when you put your arm round me as if I'd been your small brother, I begun to feel so mean I couldn't bear myself; and I vowed, true and strong, if ever Mr. Rolf's business was settled, I'd tell you the whole story. I didn't see how I could do it before, for I depended on this place for hidin' me and the stiletto, that I'd made out to get track of after watchin' and waitin' for weeks,—I knew nobody'd find either of us here. But I did mean to tell you then, sure, if I had to clear out the next minute."

"As if I were likely to object to you as a neighbor!" said I, smiling.

His face brightened with a look of great relief; but I was too interested in learning about his manner of life to talk of anything else just then.

"And do you have to bring everything up that tree?" I asked, wonderingly.

"Oh, no. There's a basket and a coil of rope on that shelf, don't ye see? Well, anything that I can't put in my pockets or strap on to my back, I haul up that way. I get my water so; I let down my pail; I fill it at the pump; I tie it to the rope, climb the tree, and draw it up. I always do that after dark, when there's no one round. It's as easy as slidin' down a greased pole, when you get used to it; for nobody ever comes round this way in the evening,

you know, and scarcely ever in the daytime. I could always get a chance to go in and out, by waitin' a bit, and keepin' my eyes open. I knew your meal-times, and 'twas certain nobody'd be lookin' out this way then. And the tree is so thick that it hides me from the street and the next house."

"And your laundering, how do you manage that?"

"I carry my things to a washwoman; I made a regular contract with her to split kindlings enough to pay for 'em."

"And you do your own cooking?"

"Yes'm, what I don't get at the baker's. After mother got to be so sick, she taught me how to do lots of things; she said I must be her son and her daughter, too. So I d.dn't starve much; though when I first begun, I did have to go pooty empty sometimes; but after I got to sellin' the evenin' papers reg'lar, and doin' odd jobs for people that knew me, I made out first-rate. As I didn't have any rent to pay, I could spend what I liked for food; and so I lived a sight more comfortable than I could any other way; for ye know I didn't have a choice of all the tip-top hotels."

I could not but think, as I listened, of Sir Henry Wolton's:—

> "Lord of himself, though not of lands,
> And, having nothing, yet hath all,"—

so impressed was I with the spirit of independence and readiness of resource that the boy had shown, in circumstances that might easily have depressed and discouraged him to the point of weakly yielding to the evil current into which he had been swept, and becoming in fact what he had been in reputation,—a mere street-arab, with the habits and vices of the race. I gave a passing thought, too, to

the providence that had given him a home under the same roof that sheltered Paul and me; and I smiled to think how little the old sea-captain had suspected to what good use his secret-chamber would come at last.

Its occupant, meanwhile, had gone down the cleats with the agility of a squirrel, and was now explaining his household arrangements and devices with much animation, many of which were wonderfully ingenious. Where there is real ability, outside limitations more often stimulate than hinder its development. And not only were there method and contrivance in his small *ménage*, but certain decorative touches showed a true feeling for beauty; the soul of which, as of goodness and truth, will find room for expression within the narrowest bounds;—no frost can throughly chill, no shade wholly repress, its heaven-born force and fire.

XXXVI.

THE ARTIST.

In this direction a new revelation was awaiting me. During my former brief and hurried observation of the place, I had noticed that the walls were nearly covered from floor to ceiling with a heterogeneous collection of pictures; of which only three or four somewhat striking lithographs, of the sort given as a bonus by illustrated papers, had made any sensible impression on my mind; but in this more leisurely and detailed survey, I became aware that between and around these were many small sketches much better worth my attention;—so well worth it, in truth, that I could scarcely believe that the proprietor of the small domain, moving so blithely about, and turning up his eager boyish face to me with every fresh remark or response, was really their creator.

"Ben," said I, finally, breaking ruthlessly into an exposition of the many uses served by a dry-goods box, skilfully painted and shelved;—"who made all these sketches?"

Ben colored as violently as if he had been caught in some particularly preposterous piece of mischief.

"I did 'em, ma'am," he avowed, with manifest reluctance. "I did 'em in rainy days and evenings, when I hadn't any-

thing pressing on hand," he continued, apologetically. "I s'pose you'll think 'twas flinging time away, but I allers liked it better than play; and—"

He stopped, too deeply conscious, apparently, of the insufficiency of his justification, to think it worth while to finish it.

"Did you really make that sketch of the bluff, and that tumble-down shanty, and that old farmhouse,—did you do all those things unhelped?"

"Yes'm," replied he, in the same shamefaced and deprecating tone.

"Take those three down, and bring them to me, please; I want to look at them more closely."

His face showed some surprise, but he obeyed, nevertheless, without a word.

I took the sketches and examined them, one by one, with increasing surprise and delight. Taking into consideration the boy's age and lack of training, they were simply masterly. Many a promising art-pupil, with the help of the best teachers and appliances, might be proud to do as well as Ben had done, with his bits of common charcoal or the worn-out brushes and ends of color-tubes that I have carelessly resigned to him. To be sure, the sketches were crude and imperfect in many ways; but there was a directness of purpose, a simplicity and efficiency of method, and a truly artistic feeling for composition and color, that told a very pleasant tale to a seeing eye.

I silently laid down the sketches, took the wondering boy by the hand, and kissed his brow with a mixture of tenderness and esteem quite new in our relations. For it was no longer a bright, mischievous *gamin*, a cunning street-Arab, a charity-pupil, nor even an interesting *protégé*, that I saw in

him, but a genius,—unmistakably a genius of the order *nascitur* ;—and the thing is rare enough to cause no common pleasure when it is found.

Ben received this demonstration with a wide-eyed astonishment that had no ready language ; but very soon he burst out with a cry, half of pain, half of pleasure,—the memory of the sad past mingling its bitter with present sweetness :—

" Oh, Mrs. Vennor ! nobody has done that since mother died !"

" The better reason that it should be done now," was my inward, unspoken comment.

Poor, lonely, loveless life ! Yet how bravely and cheerfully it had been lived,—with what sturdy energy, what ready wit, what patient endurance ! In Ben's character, as revealed in these last days, there was something even more noteworthy than his artistic talent,—a manly independence and self-reliance, a steadiness of aim, and an unconquerable determination, as well as a lofty ideal, only to be found in the finest and strongest characters.

Yet, though his manner of life had only served to mature and discipline him thus far, the time was coming when it would harden and narrow him ; for, in every symmetrical development of character, the growth of the affections must needs keep pace with that of the intellect. Something more like a true home than he now possessed was a necessity both for his mental and physical culture. And he must and should have it. Already my mind was busy with plans for his future.

But the great dusky garret was no place to linger in longer than was necessary, so Ben and I now betook ourselves to my studio ; for I would not run the risk of having

our voices overheard in the lower region of the house, by outside watchers. There we talked unceasingly until long after midnight.

In that time, I learned much of the boy's past life and present ambitions;—it amused me to find how little he thought of his art-work as work; for him it was merely the most enticing of recreations. But when I tried to give him some idea of what an artist's life might be, in its highest development, his eyes shone with unwonted radiance, and it was plain that I had given expression to some real, but hitherto only half-understood ideal. He knew that he loved his drawing and painting with all his heart, that it had been food, warmth and light to him in a frequent dearth of these things in their more literal forms, but it had never occurred to him as a possible vocation. Something harder, sterner, sturdier, with more of the dig-and-delve character, had naturally been suggested by his rough and laborious experience of life. And although I did not fail to assure him that an artist has plenty of digging and delving, in his own line,—that there as elsewhere the road to success is by way of hard, earnest, unceasing labor,—his smile did not vanish, nor the light in his eyes grow dim; like every true artist, every true worker, he saw in that only a deeper and more definite delight. When work means growth all along the lines of one's finer, fitter nature; when it implies continual progress up the height that it is gladness enough to climb even though the fair, far-off summit be unattainable; when it can be made to coincide with all that is best of earth and hopefullest of heaven; what other thing yields a joy so keen, so pure, so enduring!

As the talk went on, I was glad to find more and more satisfying indications that Ben's nature is sound and sweet,

—albeit, his boyish judgment may sometimes be at fault, as in the matter of the stiletto. But time will mend that.

I also learned—not with surprise, for I had begun to suspect something of the kind—that his origin is not so obscure as has been supposed. His mother was of good family, but had eloped with a worthless fellow, with whom she had slowly descended into the depths of poverty,—too proud to ask aid from those who had predicted her fate, and cast her off. She had also desired Ben never to make himself known to them until he could do so on equal terms, —a request which showed whence he had derived his independent spirit. Perhaps, if she had known that death was coming to her so soon, and to what perils her boy was to be exposed, she might have done differently.

While we talked, he sat near me, with my hand resting on his shoulder ; and once or twice when quick tears of grief or sensibility filled his eyes, I drew him still nearer, smoothing his hair, and speaking words of sympathy and comfort.

"Because," said I, when he looked up inquiringly into my face, as if seeking the reason of this unwonted tenderness, "you are really going to be my 'small brother' now, until you get to be too big for the name."

His face lit up with a singularly beautifying radiance, then quickly grew grave again.

"But—Mr. Vennor?" he faltered.

"Mr. Vennor need not adopt you unless he chooses," returned I, laughing. "The fact that he has already adopted Mr. Brune may stand in the way;—I suppose it will not do to bring you and him into close relationship."

Ben smiled. "I like him a good deal better'n—*than* I did," replied he, graciously. "But it's just because you

and Mr. Vennor have made him over; he ain't anything as he used to be; not near so cold and set-up, just like a monument in winter. I don't know but I shall begin to like him first-rate one of these days, if he keeps on."

The clock striking one made us both start, and Ben looked at me deprecatingly.

"I'm going this minute," said he, apologetically; "I never thought 'twas so late."

"I am afraid there is a pair of us in that misdoing," said I, smiling; "it is very chivalrous of you to assume all the blame. But perhaps we may as well leave our talk to be finished to-morrow, so far as it ever can be finished; I suspect that we have really only begun to talk, Ben."

Ben had risen, and turned as if to go; but now he was seized with a fit of hesitation, and stood shifting uneasily from one foot to the other; he seemed burdened with some weighty matter which it was difficult to broach.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, finally, taking pity on his indecision.

"I s'pose—I know—I've got no more right to that room," he began, coloring and stammering; "but I don't know where—"

"My dear Ben!" I interrupted, laughing, "you are welcome to your side of the house as long as we occupy this one, or, at least, until you find a better place; so, do not give another thought to that matter. Go home, and sleep your soundest. Good night."

XXXVII.

NOT A "DAY OF REST."

NATURE smiled sweetly enough the next morning to suggest that she was making gracious amends for the tears and frowns of the two preceding days. The pavements were washed clean and sweet; the grass was as freshly green as in the early summer; the sky was like a vast, generous benediction, whereof every soul on the whole earth might drink its fill and be thankful. It seemed a day for quietness and peace, for songful prayer and prayerful song, for joy that is at once rest and beatitude.

Yet Sundays are not days of rest to a clergyman, and scarcely more so to those near enough to feel at least the edges of the currents that bear him along. And this one was no exception. First, almost as soon as I had risen, came a pencilled note from Paul, to the effect that, as Mr. Godine was not expected to live from hour to hour, he should not be home until it was time to prepare for church. Then followed the sentence:

"Put the business of the stiletto into Harold's hands; for I think Armstrong should know it is found, otherwise he and the force will be hunting for it all day; it is right to spare them such unnecessary Sunday labor."

The fitting sequence to this was a message to Harold,

which brought him to the door just as I had finished breakfast.

"Shall I tell you why I am wanted?" said he, as we shook hands.

"If you like."

"Your whistle had a magical effect; it brought Ben as promptly as touching a spring brings up a 'Jack-in-the-box.' And—look me full in the eyes now, no scattering glances; I am going to try my skill in mind-reading, after my own fashion—you have learned where—" (he made a long pause, and his gaze assumed the curiously penetrating and scintillant quality that I had seen in it once or twice before),—"yes; there is not a doubt of it; you have learned where the imp lives."

"I deny the conclusion. I have learned nothing about 'the imp.'"

"The 'cherub,' then, if that pleases your ladyship better Does he 'sit up aloft'?"

I made no answer; but there was probably some involuntary movement of the facial muscles in amused recognition of this chance hit, which did not escape his notice; for he went on, with calm, confident assertion:—

"He does. Let us see";—(bending over and fixing on me a gaze as keen and bright as a surgeon's knife)—"it is not overhead; that would land us in the guest-room"—(a pause)—nor over the library; that is 'my lady's chamber" —(another pause)—"nor the study, nor the dining-room; —no; it cannot be on that side of the house; but on the other"—(a long pause)—"ah! yes, I see; in that queer nest of closets and passages, there is a chance for a little space to get lost, if it were worth anyone's while to lose it; and" (standing upright) "you have found it."

"Don't be a humbug! Your mind-reading, like everything else of the kind, consists in keeping a close watch for involuntary looks and movements of the person under examination, and making a skilful use of them. Nor is it a time for nonsense; I have something serious to say to you."

"Ah!" said he, quickly, "you have found the stiletto. That little shudder tells the whole story."

"Yes. It is in the table-drawer yonder; please get it yourself; I don't want to see or touch it again. It is odd what a horror clings even to the inanimate accessories of a crime."

"In my case, I think it is more of an interest than a horror," replied he, as he closely inspected the box's contents. "Ah, if that pretty little weapon could only speak, what a tale it would tell!"

"You will find its earlier history in any old Italian romance. As for its more modern experiences, I hope it may be made to speak unmistakably in Rolf's favor, though I don't see how. I need not tell you that Ben was the one that took it, out of a mistaken idea of benefiting Rolf. And now, what is to be done about him?"

Harold gave me a kindly, comprehending glance. "I see. You are trembling for your *protégé*. You fear that his next hiding-place may be a prison-cell. I think you can dismiss your anxieties. Armstrong is a good-natured fellow always, and he knows that Ben is no habitual thief,—besides, he fancies himself under obligation to me,—so, if I make myself responsible for the boy's appearance in court to-morrow, I think he may let him off with a reprimand to-day, and a warning to keep his fingers out of police-pies hereafter. Will you kindly produce the young rascal?"

"I suppose I must. But, Harold, please do not be severe or sarcastic with him. His faults are boyish ones, soon to be outgrown; underneath are rare and valuable qualities, to be developed into something worthy of your esteem. For my own part, I have grown to love the boy."

His face softened. "Must I really tell you that you have no reason to fear? Trust me, Milady; I will handle him as gently as if he were made of spun glass."

Ben came at my call. I briefly explained the state of affairs which made it necessary for Mr. Brune to act in Mr. Vennor's stead. He looked dubiously enough at Harold; who, nevertheless, frankly put out his hand, and said, in the clear, deep tones that he can make so wondrously soft and winning when he will:—

"Ben, you and I are working on the same side of the case, now; and under the same leader, too,"—he glanced laughingly at me;—"and there is no longer any reason why we should distrust each other. Can we not be friends?"

Ben's eyes opened their widest; probably Harold's look had never before met his but in mockery, antagonism, or indifference; its present gentleness was a revelation. Scarce knowing what he did, he put his hand into the offered one, and an involuntary smile broke over his face as it was taken and shaken both courteously and cordially. And Ben's smile is of rare sweetness; it makes his face almost handsome.

"It is a compact," said Harold, with a grave smile. "When people like you and I shake hands, it means something. It is like the eating salt of the Arabs; it implies truth and kindness forever afterwards."

I went to the door with the pair, and looked after them

somewhat anxiously,—not without reason, either, as was quickly proven; for scarcely had they set foot on the pavement before a policeman confronted them.

I was glad to see Ben shrink close to Harold, who put a kind hand on his shoulder while he gave the policeman an explanation which seemed measurably satisfactory; for he allowed the two to go on together, and contented himself with following them at a few paces in the rear.

The next incident was a note from Dana; she was suffering from a cold, would I be so good as to take her Sunday-school class?

An affirmative answer was scarcely sent ere Paul came. Mr. Godine still lived; he had even slightly rallied; he might linger on for hours yet. Death is doing his work with the strange, fell slowness which is such a long-drawn-out agony both to the watchers and the sufferer.

"I trust it is not wrong in me to hope that, when my time comes to go hence, the transit will be made more speedily," remarked Paul, gravely, as he finished his narrative.

"Yet we pray, in the Litany, to be delivered from sudden death," said I.

"That prayer dates from a time when 'sudden death' meant primarily violent death; when highwaymen and hired assassins, duels, wars, and swift, illegal executions, were among the common things of life. In our day, its only legitimate significance is unprepared death. To one who feels that this life is only a vestibule, a training-school, or an outside porch, the door which admits him into the fair temple, the actual service, the true home, can never open too suddenly."

"To him whom it shuts in, probably not; but to those whom it shuts out, the shock may be very terrible."

"Perhaps so, for the moment. But a really unselfish love will soon be able to rejoice that the beloved one was spared pain, weakness, and decay, that it was not so much death as translation which made the vacant place. So, sweetheart, if ever it should be my happy lot to make but one swift step from the seen to the unseen, from half-blindness to clear sight, from the type to the reality, from earth to Paradise, I pray you be glad of the manner of my going, if you cannot of the fact."

I could not answer; my eyes were swimming with tears. He stooped to kissed them away.

"I wish you could take it a little more cheerfully," said he, with a sort of tender lightness of tone. "For my part, I always like to think that death may be the next thing; it makes the present thing so much clearer and easier. Well —to change the subject, since you will not smile over it,— nay, *that* smile is sadder than tears!—tell me what you did with Ben!"

I gave the desired information,—briefly, of course, for there was no time for minute details.

"So far, so good," said he, when my story was done. "I am glad to be able to put that matter out of mind;—I hope that Armstrong will do the same for to-day. It was not pleasant; whenever I went out or came in, to find a policeman hanging round this corner, though he did his best to look as if he had only happened along by the merest chance, and was just on the point of going away. A rectory does not seem to be the proper objective point of that sort of observation! Well, now for thoughts and cares more harmonious with the blessed Day."

And Paul went into his study, and closed the door.

An hour later, we set out for church. Ben had not returned, but our confidence in Harold left us no room for uneasiness ; we knew he was not the man to undertake, or at least to promise, what he could not perform. And, just as we reached the church steps, a carriage drove up, and he sprang lightly out of it.

"It is all right," said he, cheerfully. "I have just left Ben at the rectory, safe and sound. When he comes to tell you his tale, it will not be a sorrowful one, I think. I drove right on, hoping to catch you before you got inside,—as I have done, though it was a close connection. I knew Milady's heart would be lighter if she got the news."

"A thousand thanks," said Paul, as he turned away towards his private entrance. Harold, with graceful courtesy, ushered me into my pew, and then went to his own.

And how good were the subdued light, the grave quietude, the prayers, the hymns, the fresh currents of thought, the ever-growing peacefulness, after the excitements and anxieties of the week! How much do they miss of refreshment, healing, uplifting, whose Sunday is wholly secular, whether in its occupations or its enjoyments! Nature and art, science and literature, libraries and galleries, are all excellent things in their way ; but the church aisle is surely the better way for a burdened heart and weary spirit; there only does the weight lift and the pressure cease; there only does one feel the full blessing of a Day of Rest.

Ben lunched with us—he is henceforth one of the household, in and of it, to be cherished, educated, trained accordingly—and gave an account of his interview with Sheriff Armstrong.

"He asked me questions enough to make half-a-dozen geographies, and I told him most everything that ever I done—*did* I mean,"—(Ben's language is on its best behavior now, in recognition of his family footing)—"except a few things that I thought he'd be better off for not knowing. He was a little sharp at first, but he laughed pretty much all the time before we got through; and he can laugh like—like an earthquake when he sets about it; it's a big shake, I can tell you!"

Apparently, Mr. Armstrong had been so amused by Ben's story, or so glad to recover the lost stiletto, or so amenable to Harold's influence, that he had let him off with a very light reprimand, ending in a promise to come and visit him "in a friendly way" soon,—being curious to see the secret chamber that had so skilfully eluded his search.

Yet the secret is to remain a secret for the present so far as the public is concerned, in order to spare us from the flood of inconvenient curiosity that will be sure to set towards the rectory as soon as it shall be made known.

"When you get out of the house will be time enough for other people to throng it," was Harold's considerate decision, in which Mr. Armstrong had the kindness to acquiesce.

Ben was advised to keep housed to-day, in order that the police-force might be notified that he was no longer subject to arrest; to-morrow, he would be free to go and come at his pleasure.

Lunch over, I laughingly gave him the "freedom of both sides of the house," and went to inform myself more perfectly of Dana's condition. I was glad to find that, though she had enough of cough and feverishness to make it expedient for her to keep quiet a day or two, there was no reason for alarm.

In truth, I had never seen her look more lovely than now, lying on a couch, clad in a simple white wrapper, with a large knot of pansies on her breast, which Mrs. Heathcote had insisted on fastening there; "so that she need not look quite so much like a sick angel," she explained, somewhat irrationally, since angels are generally supposed to have no personal experience of illness.

Yet the term did not seem wholly misapplied, for there was a strong suggestion of something not quite earthly and mortal about Dana to-day; her pure face wore an expression of lofty calm instead of its usual animation, her soft brown eyes seemed to gaze far beyond the near and the visible into the fair realm of perfect peace and blessedness. It was as if strong spiritual wings had lifted her for a time quite above life's ordinary level into a region where its pains and pleasures alike dwindle into insignificance beside the wonders of the infinite heavens.

"On the whole, I am not sorry to be sick a little," said she, with a smile, as I sat down by her couch. "Every day life grows more crowded and complex; I seem to be always hurrying to get through with one thing before the next one is in order. I really need time to be quiet and think, to prepare myself for whatever may be before me, to meet it with a brave heart and steady mind. And there does seem to be no way to secure any such time except by being sick."

She did not say for what she thought it well to prepare herself, nor did I ask her. I knew that she would have answered me frankly; but I remembered that to put a foreboding into words is often to give it a clearer outline. Perhaps hers was but a vague, formless mist, hovering dimly in the remote horizon of consciousness; let it so remain, I would do nothing to precipitate it into definite shape.

"I hope that you are not borrowing trouble, Danita, dear," was all that I ventured to say.

"On the contrary, I am trying to borrow peace," she replied, smiling softly.

"And you look as if you had found it," was my thought, but I did not utter it aloud. Instead, I plunged into an account of the events of the past two days; to which she listened with due interest, yet with but little diminution of that singularly rapt composure; as if these things could but indirectly concern her, or touch more than the surface of her mind.

Yet interest did quicken into animation as my story went on, and she exclaimed, eagerly, clasping her hands:—

"Ah, if Rolf can only be fully vindicated, that is indeed something worth hoping for, striving for, living for. That will be a joy indeed!"

"I cannot but be sure that it is a joy to be won, in good time," said I; "and I hope to see some important advance towards it to-morrow."

"You will be at the trial to-morrow, then?"

"Yes; I have promised to see Ben through the ordeal of the court-room, of which he has a wholesome dread;—and I trust that I shall also see the solution of the mystery of the stiletto, or at least an approach to it,—if, indeed, it does not turn out to be no mystery at all. I am sorry that you are not to be with me."

She smiled slightly, and the far-off look came back to her eyes. "I have a feeling that I shall be better off at home. There are too many curious eyes upon me in that court-room, and their effect is that of an emotional strait-jacket. I can neither weep nor laugh freely. If I could be put down to a piano, I might be able to forget myself and their

observation; but in no other way. My father will bring me a prompt report of whatever concerns me nearly. And you will come to me, if—if I need you, will you not?"

There was something in the look that she lifted to me which brought a quick dew into my eyes.

"Certainly," I hastened to answer; "you surely know that without the telling. But it is time for me to go to that class of yours. I shall tell them that you will be able to resume your place next Sunday. Good-bye, dearie."

Sunday-school came next, then a talk with Ben on the collect and gospel for the day, then Evening Prayer; and so the busy day wore on to its close.

XXXVIII.

A SURPRISE.

NEVER was there a finer day of late September than Monday. The rain had freshened the verdure into a fair, if fleeting, likeness of summer-time; and there had been enough of the Sunday sunshine to coax all the later buds into brilliant bloom, giving plenty of color to the fancy that Nature was holding high festival, and inviting all her children to come out and rejoice with her.

As a natural result, if not a desirable one, the court-room was more densely packed than ever, and Harold's familiarity with the precinct did Ben and me excellent service in piloting us to our respective seats;—Ben being placed among the witnesses, for the present, and I as near as practicable.

Honor was my immediate neighbor; she welcomed me with a bright smile and a whispered :—

"I am so relieved to find that you recognize me! After my long-continued efforts to cover two seats, I thought I must have broadened into the shape of a Dutch *vrouw*. I was just settling into the pleasant conviction that my own husband would not know me."

"Were you kindly saving a seat for me? Thanks."

"Harold Brune requested me to do so, if possible. See how he has padded me out on either side;—this is his over-

coat, and that is a roll of papers. Spreading my skirts widely over them, I looked, not merely daggers, but all sort of edge-tools, at whomsoever dared to approach within six inches of my outworks. Have the lines of my face settled into an irretrievably vixenish expression?"

"Do you wish to be complimented on your good looks?"

"Ah, now I am sure they are no more!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands tragically. "You are speaking on the principle of '*De mortuis nil*,' et cetera. Now, please do be quiet! Judge Ellenwood wants to speak; he has opened his mouth twice, and shut it again; he is wondering if we are never going to stop talking!"

However, the judge's remark being suspiciously like a yawn, and uttered into the hollow of his hand, Honor began again.

"I talk the most nonsense when I am in the lowest depths; Mark always looks frightened when I begin to be funny. The fact is, there is something in the air of the court-room to-day that makes me shiver as if someone were walking over my grave. I wonder what dreadful thing is going to happen! Look at Mr. Ennadeen's face,—what do you make of it?"

"He looks like a man who sees his goal before him."

"But is he glad to get there?"

"No—yes—I cannot tell."

"Good! It was neck-and-neck with your answer and his expression,—not a hair's-breadth in favor of either of them. That is the way he has been going on ever since I came. Heigh-ho! I feel as if I had set out for a festivity and dropped into a funeral. I think I will go home again."

But here the judge did speak, and the court opened.

First, a witness came on to the stand to correct a slight misstatement; then the name of "Benjamin Harding" was called.

Ben glanced at me, and his face grew pale; I could see that he was very nervous—not so much from actual diffidence as the consciousness that his testimony was likely to have an important bearing on Rolf Kenworth's fate. But he rose and mounted the stand promptly enough;—on the whole, I felt proud of my *protégé*. His new clothes—the result of Mr. Ennadeen's bounty—suited him well; his curly head had been reduced to all possible decorousness; and there was a certain manliness in the way that he faced the trying situation, in spite of his inward shrinking.

But I was surprised to see how small and youthful he looked, thus lifted above the crowd; and so, it appeared, were some others. There was a brief consultation; then the judge asked, kindly:—

"My boy, do you know the nature of an oath?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ben, throwing a glance in my direction; "I learned about it yesterday."

"Ah! a very good Sunday lesson," said the judge. "Will you tell us your understanding of it?"

"An oath," said Ben, slowly, trying to use his own words, as I had been in the habit of requiring him to do in giving a definition, "is asking God to witness that I speak the truth, and—and *meaning it.*"

"The witness can be sworn," said the judge, leaning back in his seat, as if well satisfied.

To the question where he lived, Ben answered, as he had been instructed to do: "In the rectory, with Mr. Vennor"; to the manifest surprise of most people, and the disappointment of some, who had taken it for granted that

now, at least, the secret of the boy's domicile must come out.

The substance of Ben's testimony having been already given, there is no occasion for repeating it. But his clear, boyish voice was listened to with the deepest interest as he told of his visit to the Manor oak and its motive, his accidental finding of the stiletto, his determination to conceal it until he could give it into its owner's own hands, because he did not believe that its apparent witness was a true one, and, finally, of Mr. Brune's interference with his design. No one could doubt that he was telling the truth not only with true heart and sensitive conscience, but with a deep and sorrowful sense of its importance.

I saw many surprised glances and whispers exchanged among the hearers;—"Can this be the homeless waif, the mischievous *gamin*, the sly street-Arab, that we have known or heard of?" they seemed to be saying one to another.

Certainly, there was nothing in his appearance on this occasion to suggest street life and training; many a boy of his age, fresh from a comfortable home and a mother's careful hands, might have appeared to worse advantage. Even his language rarely tripped badly; it is only "in hours of careless ease" that he now lapses into the vernacular; and he felt the solemnity of his present position keenly enough to hold himself well in hand.

Of the stiletto's later adventures nothing needed to be said, as they had no bearing on the case. That it had been unaccountably missing from Sheriff Armstrong's possession, and had been timely recovered, was all that was allowed to transpire of that matter.

Possibly the police department saw no good reason for

confessing that it had so long been checked and outwitted by that small boy !

A murmur of excitement now went round the room like a swift gust of wind through a forest; the stiletto was produced, and Ben was called upon to identify it, which he did most emphatically; and Harold returned to the stand long enough to do the same.

Meanwhile, all heads were lifted, all necks craned, to get a sight of the small weapon ; but I, having no curiosity in that direction, looked straight at Mr. Ennadeen, and saw his face brighten and his eyes shine like those of a hunter, who, after a long, weary, disappointing search, sees his game plainly before him at last. It was worth coming to court, I thought, just to see that change in his face. For the moment, all doubt, anxiety, gloom, were forgotten in a rush of exceeding gladness. He leaned eagerly forward; his breath came and went quickly; I fancied that I saw his hands trembling with impatience.

When Ben left the stand, he turned so reluctantly towards the witnesses' bench, and looked so longingly towards me, that Harold good-naturedly aided him to make his way to a seat directly in front of mine, where Mr. Wright had kindly intimated that two or three inches of space were at his service.

" Bright as a button, and does you no end of credit," was that gentleman's gracious comment, over his shoulder, as Ben was worming himself through the crowd and slipping past the knees of the other persons in the seat.

On his arrival, Mr. Wright put his arm round him, and by some mysterious process of self-elongation increased the two or three inches to a space large enough for his accommodation; into which, when I had given his hand a warm

pressure and whispered to him that he had done well, he settled himself with great contentment.

Mr. Acton, meanwhile, was briefly reminding the jury what had been proven in relation to this stiletto,—namely, that it was the only one of the kind in existence, that it had belonged to Rolf, that it had been seen in his possession shortly before the murder, that medical experts had agreed that Mr. Kenworth's death was caused by such a weapon, *et cetera.*

It was then given to the foreman of the jury, who, after a careful inspection, passed it to the next juror; and so it went from hand to hand until every one of the twelve had duly noted its sharp blade, its handle of embossed gold set with jewels, and the dark stains lingering in many of its crevices to show how hastily and imperfectly it had been cleansed; and each one had gravely shaken his head over the conviction that here, in truth, was most weighty evidence against the accused,—so weighty that everything else was but as dust in the balance compared with it.

As the last juror lifted his head, signifying that he had done with the mute witness, General Fairfax stretched his arm across the intervening space, and quietly asked that he also might be allowed to examine it; but, with the merest passing glance, he placed it quickly in the hands of the prisoner, eagerly outstretched to receive it. He held it up to the light; there were two or three swift movements of the strong fingers, indicating some sort of skilful manipulation; and, with a single glance, it was handed back.

The General received it, examined it closely for an instant, and exclaimed, in tones of low, deep fervency:—

"Thank God!"

A swift wave of excitement swept through the court-

room, felt alike by judge, counsel, jurors, witnesses, and spectators. Many people rose to their feet, and the cry, "What is it?" was heard in several voices.

The stiletto, meanwhile, was passing from hand to hand; wherever it went there were exclamations of amazement and looks of wonder and awe, which only served to fan the excitement of the crowd into a more fervid heat. At length, it was handed up to the judge, who looked at it keenly, started, looked again, exchanged a few words with his neighbors, and finally rose.

"I have to inform you," said he, "that one of the ornaments on the handle of this stiletto is artfully contrived to turn back, disclosing a bright steel plate, on which two names are engraved. One is Italian (probably that of the first owner of the weapon); underneath is another, well-known to us all,—"Kenworth Rixon."

And the judge sank back on his bench, too much amazed at his discovery to be immediately conscious of its full bearing, and desirous of giving it a more careful consideration; while a deep murmur ran swiftly through the crowd, each man turning to his neighbor with impulsive queries or comments,—many talking at once, and few listening.

"What does it mean?" asked Honor, turning to me with trembling lips, and a face like a cloudy dawn, hope and fear contending together for the mastery.

I knew not how to answer her, but Mr. Wright had heard the question, and came to my relief:—

"It means good news for Rolf's friends, and I want it to be understood that I'm one of 'em;—I love him like my own brother, though I never set eyes on him. And it means—or it will in just no time—confusion to his enemies, and Heaven have mercy on their mighty little souls!"

Even as he spoke, I became aware of a new and growing murmur around the lawyer's table and jury-box; it rose and swelled like the flame that is lighted to extinguish another flame; the crowd began to notice it, to inquire what it meant, to subside into a new stillness of wondering expectation.

Soon it appeared that another object was being passed from hand to hand; speedily it reached the judge; he gave it a brief and astonished examination; finally, he rose and looked around with a deeply agitated face.

"My friends," said he, "I hold here another stiletto. It is exactly like the one that you have just seen, except in two important particulars;—namely, there are no stains upon it, it is clean and bright from end to end; and on the plate, under an Italian name slightly different from the other one, is plainly engraved—'Rolf Kenworth.'"

There was a moment of dead silence, during which it seemed to me that one might have heard not only a pin drop, but a much lighter thing; then, Ben impulsively sent his cap up to the ceiling, and cried "Hooray!"

To do the boy justice, the word was uttered in little more than a whisper; but it was caught up by dozens of voices, and the court-room rang and rang again with a hearty, "Three times three for Rolf Kenworth!" led by Mr. Wright, who finished with a fervent "God bless him!"

And the crowd answered as with one voice, "Amen!"

To be sure, the cheering was promptly suppressed by the judge, with great apparent severity of aspect, and a threat to order the clearing of the court-room if any farther disturbance were made.

"It's all very well for you to *say* that," murmured Honor,

apostrophizing the judge through her fast-flowing tears, "but you would join in that cheer yourself, if you dared; and so would I! I am thankful with all my heart that I have lived to see this day. Why don't Mark come to me, I wonder? I cannot settle down into perfect beatitude until I have given him one good squeeze."

Apparently, the other marital half was like-minded, for Mr. Clavrick straightway bent over his wife, having managed to get in behind us; and the "squeeze" was rapturously administered to his coat-sleeve; albeit, if she had flung her arms around his neck, I doubt if it would have been observed in the absorption of the crowd.

I, too, had a feeling that a familiar coat-sleeve would be a pleasant contiguity, in this supreme moment; but in how different a scene was Paul! It rose before me in strong contrast with the packed, excited court-room,—that hushed and darkened chamber, that delirious, fever-stricken sufferer, those few sad-eyed watchers, and the solemn expectation of the end—which truly ends so much that only the clearest, firmest faith can realize that it is in fact no "end," nor even, as the poet hath it, "a beginning still," but a single, wonderful link in the chain of endless life.

Not having Paul within reach, I was fain to content myself with shaking hands with the Clavricks, and with Ben, whose boyish face was all aglow with intensest delight. Other hands, too, were reached out to us from as many interested friends as were near by, among whom was Nathalie Ellenwood, whose eyes shone softly through her tears like spring violets through morning dew; nor did I now feel any jealous pang in seeing how beautiful they were!

But General Fairfax was speaking, and I recalled my wandering attention.. I had lost the opening sentences

but the closing one was comprehensible enough by itself :—

"And I would say to your Honor that we are willing to rest our case now and here."

The General sat down, and the Judge looked hard at Mr. Acton.

That gentleman contemplated the ceiling for a minute; then he lowered his eyes, bringing them to bear sharply on his surroundings. On every hand, he saw plainly that the cause of the "The State *vs.* Rolf Kenworth" was virtually decided; to go on with it would not only be labor lost, but it would be taken as an intolerable imposition.

So, yielding to the force of circumstances with as good a grace as could be assumed at such short notice, he likewise signified his readiness to "rest the case."

Judge Ellenwood's charge was probably one of the shortest on record. He saw that there was but one thing to say, and but one fitting way to say it—even the briefest possible.

"Gentleman of the jury," said he, suavely, "if, in your judgment the evidence laid before you is sufficient to convict Rolf Kenworth of the crime of murder, you will find him guilty; if the contrary, you will find him innocent."

The jury rendered a verdict of "Not Guilty" without quitting the court-room.

Almost on the instant, I saw Mr. Heathcote rise, and slowly make his way out; I knew that he had promised Dana to bring her the earliest intelligence that Rolf's name and fame were henceforth spotless. Glad tears filled my eyes to think what that news would be to her!

XXXIX.

THE MORNING COMETH.

With the rendering of the verdict, another irrepressible cheer rang through the court-room, and a dozen congratulatory hands were held out to Mr. Ennadeen, who, just touching those nearest to him, rose and addressed the judge.

"This being my first experience of a court, I know little of its laws, written or unwritten. Will your Honor kindly inform me if there is anything to prevent me from making a statement which will not only throw light upon some points now left obscure, but is also necessary to the complete rehabilitation of Rolf Kenworth's character in the eyes of his fellow-citizens. So much injustice has been done him, that this tardy atonement of to-day should be made complete;—as complete, that is, as is now possible to human justice."

The concluding words were spoken with a deep solemnity that awakened intense surprise and interest; and some voices cried out, excitedly:—"Go on"—"Speak"—"We will hear you!"

The judge instantly rose, and his dark eyes seemed to flash silence into the crowd. When all was still, he said, quietly:—

"There is no reason why we may not listen to your statement."

Mr. Ennadeen bowed, rested one hand on the table before him, and spoke in the quiet conversational tone that demands perfect stillness and careful attention; yet, with these, is both audible and agreeable:—

"First, I wish to state distinctly—and there is now no reason why I should be disbelieved—that I am not Rolf Kenworth, but the identical Hugh Ennadeen Murray of whom the detective, Marmot, has told you something. But I am proud to proclaim myself Rolf's friend and debtor; knit to him by a tie no less firm and tender than the fraternal one; indebted to him twice over for what is commonly counted a man's most valuable possession—life. But for his bravery, coolness, and generosity, I should not be here to-day; I should have neither the honor, nor the sorrow, of telling you the story of the three years that he passed out of your sight and ken.

"In order to make the whole clear to you, before telling you what I know from my own observation, I must give you a few facts that I had from Rolf himself. When he decided to leave Bellerue, he went to a person well known to most of you—Mr. Holroyd—and asked for employment. That gentleman had a brother largely engaged in the eastern trade, especially in the importation of ivory, feathers, *et cetera*, from Egypt and the Soudan; which trade had been greatly disturbed by the preliminary outbreaks of the insurrection. His most intimate business connection was with the house of Nadig, at Suakim; but the former head of the firm, Osman Nadig, was a leader in the uprising: he could get no returns from him; he was naturally anxious to know what had become of certain invoices that he had

failed to receive, and how much was to be set down to profit or to loss in his accounts. A trusty agent was to have been sent out by the next steamer, but he had been taken suddenly ill, and the present question was where to find another at such short notice.

"Rolf was young and inexperienced, but he was energetic and brave,—two qualities likely to be of service in the state of the country,—and Mr. Holroyd thought he might possibly do. He took him in his own carriage across country by night, to catch the early morning train on the connecting railroad, and sent him on to Boston with a letter to his brother. The elder Holroyd was glad to get anyone to undertake the errand, time being a paramount consideration, since the whole country might soon be in the throes of war; so the terms were scttled, instructions given, and in about three hours, Rolf went on board the steamer; and in so doing disappeared from view on this side of the world.

"Yet it was in no wise intentional on his part; it was simply one of those strange happenings which some people call accidents and others providences. There were few passengers on the night train, and none of them knew Rolf; he was also unknown in Boston; and when the news of the murder reached there, he was already some hours at sea, on a French steamer. The two Holroyds did not in the least believe in his guilt, and they decided to hold their tongues. They argued that, for some months, it was as unlikely that he would get any intelligence of what had happened at the Manor as that the public would learn of his whereabouts; meanwhile there would be time enough on the one hand for him to do the business entrusted to him, and on the other for discoveries to be made here to lessen the weight of the circumstantial evidence against him, or

destroy it. They adopted, therefore, and maintained the policy of silence both of and to him. There was but one other household that knew of his destination; there, too, the secret was kept.

"Arrived in Egypt, Rolf found that Osman Nadig had already set out on his journey of eight hundred miles through the Soudan to El Obeid, the camp of the Mahdi; purposing to throw himself at his feet, acknowledge him as the new Messiah, and beg to be allowed to serve him in any capacity in which he could be of use to him. Nothing daunted, Rolf followed on his heels, through the wild Arab country where the term 'white-face' was significant of the utmost scorn and hate;—a deed of such incomprehensible daring as to win his way by its very audacity, aided by his handsome face, his winning ways, and his sublime confidence in himself and—everybody else! Wherever he presented himself, with his easy, cordial manners and his calm statement that he had business of importance with Osman, and positively *must* see him, the astounded nomads settled it in their minds that he was in Osman's confidence, and dared not do otherwise than send him onward,—well-guarded, perhaps, but in all honor and safety.

"His nationality was also in his favor; most of the Arab officials had at least heard of the great Republic of the West; and their quarrel was only with the Egyptians and their English allies. So, in time, Rolf arrived at El Obeid, where Osman had been warmly welcomed and enrolled in the Mahdi's service, with the title of "Ameer," or Lieutenant, in the eastern Soudan.

"Of the business results of Rolf's mission, it is not necessary to speak; suffice it to say that the Messrs. Holroyd

have given ample proof of their entire satisfaction with their agent.

"It is more to the point that Rolf's attractive personality was as potent in the East as the West; Osman and the Mahdi took a great fancy to him, and did their best to induce him to enter their service, promising him fortune and honors in lavish measure; at the same time insisting that it would be utterly impossible for him to make his way back to the coast in safety, the whole country being now alive and seething with insurrectionary bands. On this pretext, and in the hope of finally securing his adhesion to the cause which he had at heart, Osman kept him as a half-prisoner, yet treated with the utmost friendliness, during the whole of the pre-English portion of the campaign; and Rolf witnessed the various engagements between the Arabs and Egyptians, with their varying results.

"As long as Osman was unsuccessful, a certain feeling of gratitude and generosity kept Rolf from making his escape; but, with the turn of the tide, and the two wholesale massacres of the Egyptians under Khilil Bey and Mahmoud Tahir, disgust took the place of sympathy, and he managed to make his way through unheard-of perils to the Trinkitat sands just in time to fall in with the forces—if such a disorganized rabble may be so termed—who marched, under Baker Pasha, to their doom at El Teb. It was rather as an interested spectator than as an actor that he went on the field; but before long he had thrown himself into the fight with a splendid valor that drew the General's attention, and led to a friendship and associations which resulted in his being asked to join the forces under General Graham later on. By this time, he had become interested in the campaign; he was anxious to see it through; doubtless

he felt that 'blood was thicker than water,' and the English nearer than the Arabs; and as no word came from his uncle, and his business was completed, there was no reason why he should not accept the proposal.

"It was in Graham's first engagement that I first saw Rolf. Sitting on my horse, in the cavalry squadron, watching with amazement that verged on stupor the most renowned regiment of the British army, the Forty-Second, retreating—slowly, obstinately, but still retreating—before one of the mad "rushes" of the half-naked barbarians, my attention became riveted upon a tall, handsome youth, standing a little apart from his comrades, in an easy, graceful attitude, and loading, levelling, and firing his rifle as coolly as if he had been at a shooting-match. At every puff of blue smoke, an Arab fell, as long as there was any room to fire; but the rush was all the time coming nearer; soon, a half-dozen Arabs were upon him. Taking his rifle by the barrel, he felled two of them at one sweep; then, his legs were seized by two more on the ground, but with a leap and a vigorous kick he sent one sprawling, while a swift, left-handed blow of his fist capsized the other.

"But now came the order to charge, and for the time I lost sight of him. We went dashing straight on through the elastic masses of the foe, when an orderly overtook us with the message that Colonel Webster was being 'cut up' at the left, and we were ordered to wheel about and go to his assistance. As we rode back we were assaulted by hundreds of Arabs, who were darting hither and thither through the 'scrub' or hiding behind the bushes and adroitly hurling their spears at us; while others, lying flat on the ground, started up nimbly beneath us, and tried to hamstring our

horses with their knives, or break their legs with resounding blows from tough mimosa clubs.

"Almost simultaneously, one of their spears pierced my arm, and my horse went down upon his knees, flinging me forward at the feet of a tall Arab, who, with a grin of delight, lifted his knife to give me a fitting reception. I felt that my last moment had come, when what was my surprise to see the barbarian go down like a cornstalk before the sickle, to feel myself grasped, lifted into an empty saddle (there were plenty of riderless horses at hand!), and next to be trotting towards our lines, while my rescuer ran lightly by my side and steadied me with one hand,—for already my head was swimming and I was reeling in my seat from loss of blood. Yet, even then, I recognized the same brave youth who had so recently attracted my attention. My last conscious thought was that he had a strangely familiar face, and I must have seen him somewhere—but where? With the question, I fell forward on my horse's neck, and then came oblivion.

"When I next opened my eyes, I was in the *zereba*, in charge of a nurse; and I was told that I had been brought in by my 'brother.' On replying that I had no such kin in those parts, the surprised rejoinder was that the gentleman looked enough like me to be my twin; and then I understood why his face had seemed so familiar to me; it was simply a younger and handsomer edition of my own;—Mr. Calyo was right, I am nearly four years the senior.

"Not until the next day did I get an opportunity to thank Rolf. Having placed me in safety, he went his way, unaware that he had done anything calling for gratitude or acknowledgment; and I had to beg a friend to look him up and bring him to me;—not a difficult thing to do, for

wherever he was seen by one of our corps he was taken for me; and many comical situations, and some serious ones, were the natural result. When I did see him, it was impossible to make him understand that I was under an obligation to him which I could never repay; he scouted the idea, averred that it was merely the fortune of war that had made him the savior and me the saved, that it might just as well have been *vice versa*, and insisted on talking about something else,—especially the queer incidents of the engagement, of which there were many to be recounted by one who had kept his head so cool and his eyes so well open as Rolf.

"Like everyone that came in contact with him, I was quickly captivated by the rare charm of his personality; and we grew to be fast friends before the campaign was over, during the latter part of which we fought side by side, for I easily got him admitted into the corps to which I belonged. And I wish to say—and every man in it would bear me out in the statement—that never was there a braver, brighter comrade, nor a more ideal soldier and gentleman, than Rolf Kenworth. Impressionable as water in some respects, and easily wrought up to a fine pitch of scorn and wrath at any cruelty or treachery, in the field he was as cool and firm as a rock; the heavier the shock of battle, and the greater the resultant confusion and excitement, the calmer and steadier he became. More than one man in the corps, besides myself, owes his life to Rolf's quick eye, strong arm, and dauntless valor,—and the better part of his courage, perhaps, to the contagion of his example. His coolness inspired confidence, and his bravery provoked emulation.

"For myself, I came to depend upon him as I never did on any other man. Under his gayety and energy, there

was that solid basis of principle, and that ready response to the call of duty, without which all his graces might have been but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. I never knew a man so entirely 'without guile.' He never said a word or seemed to think a thought that the whole world might not hear and know. More than once, as I watched him on the field, the beautiful lines came into my mind,—

> " ' His strength was as the strength of ten,
> Because his heart was pure.'

"The history of the war in the Soudan is fresh in your memories; there is no need for me to linger over its incidents. On the return to Suakim, after Graham's brilliant little campaign, I was taken down with enteric fever, and just as I was beginning to get about a little, a relapse took me to death's door, during all which time Rolf looked after me like a brother. I had liked, admired, and trusted him before; now I learned to love him—better than I can say. He was as gentle and helpful by a sick-bed as he had been brave and reliable on the field; there were long nights when the light of his blue eyes was about the only star of hope and cheer in my earthly sky. And when the danger passed, and recovery began, he was the brightest and most inventive companion that ever a convalescent had. It was in those days that he began to talk to me freely of his former life,—painting such wonderfully vivid word-pictures of Bellerue and its people, of the Manor-house, his favorite haunts and his particular friends, that, on my arrival, I recognized most of them at sight.

"At that time, too, he showed me the curious, antique weapon which has been produced here to-day, and, as a mark of special confidence, mentioned the existence of the

concealed name-plate. After it came into his possession, he could not rest until he had found out its secret; then he had imparted it to the owner of its duplicate, and, after engraving their names on their respective property, they had agreed to be silent. On account of that compact, he did not show me how the thing worked, or I should have been spared some trouble. For so artfully is it devised that neither my efforts nor those of anyone to whom I dared to show it could find the clue, until my kinsman, Mr. Wright, came to my help. He, like Rolf, has the power of penetrating intuitively into the secrets of mechanism.

"I got the better of the fever just in time for us to take part in Colonel Sir Charles Wilson's unsuccessful attempt to open communications with General Gordon at Khartoum, the incidents of which have become matters of history.

"When we got back to Metammeh, Rolf found a long accumulation of letters and papers, disclosing, in part, the facts of his uncle's death; his correspondents having foreseen that it would be impossible to keep him much longer in ignorance, and fearing the effect of a sudden discovery. He came to me in a frenzy of grief and indignation, and announced his intention of coming straightway home, to confront the accusation awaiting him. But I, looking into the matter a little more dispassionately than he could do, was struck by the gravity of the circumstantial evidence against him, as well as deeply impressed by the earnestness with which his friends entreated him to stay in Egypt until the mystery should clear up a little, unless he knew that he could furnish counter evidence of the most convincing character,—considerations to which he had not given a thought, so secure was he in his consciousness of innocence, so certain that he only needed to show himself to

cause every seeming proof of his guilt to melt away like a mist before the morning sun.

"And now the idea flashed over me, that by reason of our strong resemblance to each other, and the length of his absence from Bellerue, it might be possible for me to appear and be tried in his stead. I had been two years in the Soudan ; I was shortly to receive leave of absence for a visit home of some months ; I should be only too glad to do anything—everything—to prove the warmth of my regard, as well as my deep sense of overwhelming obligation.

"At first, he would not entertain the proposition for a moment ; his lip curled with the loftiest scorn at the notion that he could consent to delay his appearance before his accusers for an unnecessary hour, or that he could suffer anyone to take his place. But I urged and implored, buttressing my arguments by references to his home-letters, until I gained a reluctant promise that he would 'think the matter over' before coming to a final decision. With this conversation in mind, he made an obscure, half-jesting allusion to it in a letter written to the young lady to whom he was engaged ; which letter led her to look for his prompt appearance, possibly under a disguise. Without that letter, I need not say she would never have mistaken me for him ; her heart would have decided more quickly against me—as it did finally in your presence. She told the truth ; then and there it first became clear to her that I was not what I had seemed to be.

"And let me explain here—for the opportunity may not recur,—the real nature of that brief embrace which has been testified to in this court. On her part, it was due to a slip of the foot which threw her involuntarily into my arms ; on mine, it was at first but the instinctive aid which

a gentleman everywhere renders to a lady; and if I held her a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, it was because, Rolf being to me as a brother, the girl to whom he had given his loyal heart was also to me as a sister. In all honor, in all reverence, and with a depth of affectionate compassion that you can better estimate when my story is done, I ventured to hold her for one moment in a brother's embrace, while I breathed a heartfelt prayer that God would make the light of His love as clear to her as I should one day have to make its shadow."

XL.

AND ALSO THE NIGHT.

THERE was a deep thrill, almost a sob, in Mr. Ennadeen's —I should say, Captain Murray's—voice, as he spoke the last words, and he paused an instant to recover its steadiness; while an answering thrill ran through the crowd, and people looked inquiringly into each other's faces, as if seeking there some sign of what was to follow.

Ben's sensitive heart was quick to feel the influence; he stirred uneasily in his seat, and turned such an anxious face over his shoulder, that I instinctively bent forward to whisper an encouraging word in his ear, and give his hand a sympathetic clasp.

Up to this time, I had regretted that Dana was not present to listen to this glowing, triumphant vindication of her Rolf; now I felt how fitting was her absence,—surely an instance of that wonderful working together of all things for good to them that love God.

In this brief interval I noticed, too, that Paul had come in, and, with Harold, was leaning against the wall at the right. Both were listening attentively; Paul with the sympathetic interest that knows well what is coming, Harold with the startled look that begins to foresee something from which it would be glad to escape, if it were only possible.

It needed but a glance to note these facts; then my eyes went back to Captain Murray, who now resumed his story:—

"Rolf's 'thinking over' the matter wrought no change in his feelings. Policy, diplomacy, subterfuge, were alike odious to him; the open, straightforward course was the only one in harmony with his character, or which commended itself to his adoption. Not without much difficulty did I get him to yield to me so far as to wait long enough for me to arrange to accompany him on his homeward journey; for I could not allow him to encounter the peril of the trial alone; I trusted that my presence, my report of his character and services during the campaign, and my inalterable conviction of his innocence, might be of some aid and comfort to him.

"It happened that two infantry companies whose term of service had expired were going home at that time, and an old, ill-conditioned steamer was sent up the Nile to meet them, on which Rolf and I embarked. The trip was not without danger; the boat was overcrowded, and we had to run the gauntlet of hostile fortresses and batteries along shore. We did this safely, however, and had reached a less dangerous part of our course, when, one day, as we were standing on deck in the neighborhood of the engine-house, I saw a look of apprehension cross Rolf's mobile features;—he had somehow picked up knowledge enough of a steamer's management to notice anything abnormal.

"'Somebody ought to put a check on that engineer,' said he quickly, 'he is getting more steam on than this crazy thing can stand.' The next instant, he caught me by the shoulder, and with a thrust of his strong arm sent me reeling across the deck, to fall with such stunning force against the bulwarks that I was but half-conscious of the roar, the

crash, the rift, that followed. It was only when I had pulled my dazed senses together a little, and heard cries of pain and fright all around me, that I understood what had happened, and that owing to his self-forgetting love I was unhurt. I need not say that I went straightway in search of him.

"Well—I found him—but only by affection's keen instinct—for there was little that was recognizable in the senseless, disfigured form that we gently lifted from the deck and carried on board of one of the Nile boats that came to our assistance. My friends, you remember how far, far above most men was Rolf in beauty of face and form; be thankful, all you who loved him, that you do not share my memory of its woful eclipse! There was little left but the rare beauty of soul which, thank God, shines but the more clearly under such circumstances. If he had thought of himself, instead of his friend, our places might have been, in a measure, reversed I dare not say that I wish it had been so; there would have been one fair deed the less to enrich the world's annals,—to show us that there are better things than life or beauty, success or happiness; to illustrate anew the beautiful old truth, 'He that loseth his life shall find it.'

"A physician was fortunately at hand; we did what we could for Rolf at the time, and we landed him at the first place where we could hope to command any of the comforts and attention that he required. I telegraphed to Cairo for my sister, Lady Glenorm, who, as a solace in her widowhood, had joined the corps of hospital-nurses there; she came at once; and together we lavished on him every care and every tenderness that affection, gratitude, or skill could suggest. For most of the time, partly by reason of

the overpowering shock to the system, partly from the effect of opiates, he was mercifully unconscious.

"One night, seeming to see signs of struggling reason, I put my lips close to his ear, and spoke his name. 'It is Hugh's voice,' I heard him murmur—alas! he could see nothing. I answered with words of as much cheer and love as I could frame. In a few moments he spoke again, in a clearer, stronger tone:—'I shall not live to do it; see my name cleared, Hugh, will you?' 'I will, so help me God, if it takes the rest of my life,' I answered. I think he smiled, or would have done so if he could,—I saw a slight movement of the bandages around his mouth; his head was one mass of them, except for a breathing-place.

"Towards midnight, his lips moved again; he spoke a name—I need not tell you whose—and gave me a message. After a little, I heard him begin to murmur the sweet old prayer, so familiar to our childhood; and I recollected that one night when we were seeking sleep, side by side, on the desert-sands, not knowing at what moment we might be awakened by the Arab yell and 'rush,' he had told me that he could just remember learning it from his young mother's lips, and that it always came spontaneously to his own whenever he lay down at night in circumstances of peculiar peril, or joy, or sorrow, and brought him instant peace. I know not how much of it he said now; I only know that, before it was finished, like a tired, trusting child, he—fell asleep."

Strong and hardy soldier though he was, I think that Hugh Murray ended his sentence with a sob. I am not quite sure, for such a gust of grief swept through the court-room that I might easily have been deceived. Everywhere there were quivering lips and long-drawn sighs; many men

furtively wiped their eyes and many women sobbed convulsively; poor Honor frankly laid her head on her husband's shoulder, and cried like a child.

I noticed these things mechanically, as one does at such times—to remember them afterward. My own eyes were streaming with tears; I also was bereaved. Through Ben, Dana, and the Clavricks, the personality of the handsome, generous youth had been so vividly and persistently presented to my mind, that it was easy to forget he had never stood before my literal sight; I could better have spared some people better known! Not all the beautiful story of his heroism could—

Mr. Wright touched my hand, and directed my attention to Ben lying across his lap. The boy had fainted!

Paul's eyes and mine had already met in sympathy; he saw Mr. Wright's gesture, understood, and tried to come to us, but the crowd was too dense and too pre-occupied readily to make way. Harold, also becoming aware of what had occurred and better acquainted with the place's resources, made a long arm to the judge's bench, seized a glass of water, and sent it to me, passing from hand to hand. The swoon lasted but a minute; Ben soon opened his eyes, looked first dazed, then embarrassed, then annoyed at finding himself the object of so much attention; and, finally, slipping through the open back of the bench, he sank on the floor at my feet, hid his face in my lap, and wept in a silent, hopeless way that went to my heart. For a moment, I thought of trying to make our escape; then I saw that it would be a difficult thing to do; nor was it necessary, for Judge Ellenwood's voice now drew the attention of the audience, and Ben was forgotten.

"Friends," said the Judge, "we do well to grieve for our

brave young townsman ; he deserves our tears, our honor, our lasting remembrance, our earnest emulation. But if we would know what more his friend has to tell us about him, we must now restrain our sorrow, and listen."

The grave tones, the dignified manner, the plain good sense, had their due effect ; eyes were wiped ; sobs died away in sighs, people straightened themselves up into attitudes of attention.

Captain Murray had been gazing mournfully into vacancy, with precisely the same expression that I had observed more than once before,—seeing, it was now easy to understand, every detail of that sad but beautiful death-scene, and listening to the voice forever silent, henceforth, on this side of the river that we call "dark" simply because it is unknown. Recalling himself with evident effort, he went on :—

"I will not speak of my sorrow, nor did I give much time to its indulgence. I remembered the task that I had undertaken ; I comprehended only too clearly that there must be no delay in setting about it. Yet it came to me with disheartening force that, for a dead man, no fair and open trial, no really exhaustive investigation, no public, satisfying vindication, are possible: Friendship passionately asserts his innocence and neglects to prove it ; Enmity shakes its head and is silent or darkly suggestive : Indifference asks,'Is he not dead ! why disturb his ashes ?' Inevitably the plan that he had rejected recurred to me as practicable, now that his reasons for rejection were no longer existent. In my person, he could be publicly and impartially tried, as he had wished to be ; he could manfully confront the worst evidence that could be brought against him ; he could finally and authoritatively be pro-

nounced innocent,—for I refused to believe that he could be found guilty. This would be an atonement in some degree proportionate to the injury ; and the only one that could satisfy either him or myself.

" My sister is a woman fertile in resource and of excellent judgment ; she sympathized strongly enough in my deep sense of obligation to Rolf to be willing to assist me to the utmost; I took her into counsel. Together, by that dear, dead friend, we discussed and settled the plan that she has faithfully helped me to carry out.

" It was of the first importance to conceal Rolf's death ; for we foresaw that detectives might be sent to strike my trail ; it was essential to make it in such a way that it should seem to be his. I had one servant who was faithful and incorruptible ; my sister's maid was also to be trusted; the physician was an English army surgeon and could be taken into confidence; our Egyptian landlord's co-operation could be bought ; latterly none but these had been admitted to the sick-room. The body was embalmed by the Egyptian process, placed in a hermetically sealed metallic coffin, and deposited in a small inner chamber. To all appearance, the routine of the sick-room went on unchanged ; the doctor made his daily visit ; food and medicine were prepared and brought in; my sister and the two servants were the devoted, indefatigable nurses, one of whom was always on guard ; and the patient's extreme feebleness of body and mind was the sufficient pretext for keeping out all intruders. Occasionally, by way of extreme precaution, one of the servants was placed in the bed and the door left ajar just long enough to afford a passing glimpse of an interior carefully arranged to disarm suspicion. The fact that from the first, there had been a mis-

apprehension about our names, which I had intuitively refrained from correcting, helped to make the task easier.

"Everything being thus made secure in the rear, I set out on my journey. It has been asked why I did not openly present myself as Rolf Kenworth, and ensure a speedier trial; first, I was unwilling to speak or act a falsehood—I beg to remind you that I have never answered to Rolf's name nor acted in a way that was distinctively his;—second, such a course would have brought about many embarrassing situations, sure to awaken suspicion in the end; finally, I wanted time to search the Manor thoroughly for the other stiletto, which I thought might be concealed somewhere on the premises. Nor could I come here with my own patronymic; that would have been to invite discovery from the first acquaintance who came anywhere within hearing of me. My middle name being comparatively unknown, I ventured to wear that. General Fairfax has been my confidant and helper from the first; Rolf had spoken of him in such a way as to suggest that he would best fill that position.

"I have fulfilled my task to the best of my ability. Nothing remains but to bring Rolf's precious dust back to its birth-land, and lay it to rest with its fathers; now that it is certain to be welcomed with the honor and affection due to one who lived uprightly, died nobly, and left a stainless name behind.

"One word more. When Rolf told me the facts of Mr. Kenworth's death, I said, as doubtless many of you have done, that it was plain enough who was the real criminal, Rolf and his stilleto being eliminated from the case; but he instantly replied:—'Don't say that again, please. I have not much reason to love my cousin Ken; he never liked me, and he did his best to embitter my uncle against

me ; but he is not so bad as that. Circumstantial evidence may seem to accuse him as strongly as it did me, but it is lying evidence, nevertheless.'

"I do not know whether he would have said the same with that bloody stiletto before him ; certainly, when I held it in my hand awhile ago, its testimony did seem to be unimpeachable ; but now, Rolf's earnest face, Rolf's impressive voice, as he so firmly repelled my suspicion, come back to me with singular force ; and I am constrained to tell you and myself that we shall do well to be slow in assuming Kenworth Rixon's guilt, lest it turn out that we have judged him as prematurely and wrongfully as some people did Rolf. It was *his* beautiful impulse always to say the best, believe the best, expect the best, of everyone ; and we cannot honor his memory better than by imitating it. For thus

> "'To live in hearts we leave behind
> Is not to die :'

it is to be almost as blessedly immortal on earth as in Heaven."

XLI.

THE LIGHTER SORROW.

Captain Murray sat down, put his elbow on the table, and shaded his face with his hand. No doubt there came to him in that moment the inevitable reaction which follows close upon the accomplishment of any long-cherished purpose,—a reaction made up of weariness, thankfulness, and misgiving. It is only the conceited or the mechanical worker who feels elated in laying down the task which has long absorbed the best of his thought and energy; the deeper, more humble, more thoughtful soul, after the more personal, thoughtful work, is quite as conscious of regret as gladness, of failure as success. He knows that the measure of human limitation is also the measure of his achievement; he takes small satisfaction in the Done because he is haunted by the shadow of the Undone; by a singular fatality, the woful gap between conception and execution looks widest to him when narrowest to others. And not always, in the midst of his self-questionings and self-disparagement, is the Divine Voice audible, gently saying: He hath done what he could.

Probably, too, the Captain felt the loss of his friend more at this moment than when he saw him breathe his last. As

long as he was busy in carrying out his wishes—planning for him, acting for him, suffering for him, all his days and nights filled with loving thought of him—Rolf had still been a part of his life. Now, he must go forth into a world wherein his friend had no longer any distinct object to be furthered, and with which his connection seemed to be fully and finally severed; henceforward he was to know the real pain and loneliness of bereavement,—they had only been deferred for awhile, but they were waiting for him; their hour was now come, and they would not be denied. I think there were tears in his eyes and a sore ache in his heart.

The silence was very deep after his voice ceased; it seemed a long time before the faintest rustle showed that the people were breaking loose from the spell of his eloquence,—for he had been eloquent at times, in the quiet, feeling, unstudied fashion that nature prompts, and the best of art can only imitate. But the rustling soon grew into definite movement; people began to stir in their seats, to rise and turn about, to recover the use of their tongues, to find that they were themselves again, to remember that the trial was but a brief, if interesting, episode in their lives, and that the familiar and the commonplace were waiting to re-absorb them. In a few hours, for the majority, the events of the court-room would be as if they had never been; a few only would carry away a lesson, an influence, that might help to transform the commonplace into the consecrate.

I seemed to see in Harold's face something like a promise to this effect; for he had turned to Paul, grasped his hand, and was speaking to him with unusual fervor. Perhaps he recalled, as I did, Paul's solemn warning that the time was coming when, to be able to look into his heart and

see that his motives in this business, at last if not at first, had been pure, peaceable, unselfish, would be a greater satisfaction to him than any other thing whatsoever. If he now felt some such satisfaction, it was surely partly due to that friendly warning.

Captain Murray and General Fairfax were undergoing at present that somewhat trying ordeal of hand-shaking wherewith the American public is wont to emphasize its approval of man or deed. Every lawyer, juror, or spectator, who could find a decent pretext, was waiting his turn to present himself with extended hand, engaging smile, and more or less happily turned phrases of congratulation. The General bore it beamingly; there was no measure of alloy in his gratification at the turn of events. But his companion's face was worn and weary; more than once I saw him look around as if seeking a way of escape.

However, the crowd was slowly thinning out, and the lingerers were gathering into groups, discussing the trial and its unlooked-for termination. A little to my left, several of our vestrymen were listening to Mr. Jackman's loud-voiced denunciation of Kenworth Rixon, ending with a caustic hope that he would get his deserts without delay.

"For, if he did not kill his uncle, who did, I should like to know?" he demanded, with the air of one who knows that his question is unanswerable.

Who, indeed! Was Rolf right or wrong in insisting upon his cousin's innocence? Apparently, Ken's stiletto had done the deed, and in whose hand, if not in his? The mystery of the Manor was still unexplained.

Mr. Pollard's voice now came to my ears. "A fine fellow, a very fine fellow indeed, is that Captain Murray; I am

proud to know him. The son of an earl, I think Marmot said. I hope the people of Bellerue will take occasion to show that they appreciate what he has done for one of us."

"And a month since he was rebuking his rector for his unbecoming fraternization with a hardened criminal! Truly 'the son of an earl' is a formula of excellent virtue, a very spell to conjure with!" thought I, vindictively.

"I don't care a fig whose son he is, he's a *man*," returned Mr. Jackman, bluntly. "Mr. Vennor was right, and we were wrong. I, for one, am ready to own it."

"And so am I," said Mr. Asher, in quieter but no less emphatic tones. "The plain truth is that we have made fools of ourselves in all this business. Rolf Kenworth turns out to be something for old Bellerue to be proud of:—I don't know when my blood has stirred so lively as it did while Captain Murray was telling how he behaved on the battle-field. It took just two minutes for me to right-about-face in all my feelings toward him. I'm glad I did it before I knew he was dead, poor fellow!"

Mr. Asher paused and cleared his throat; but no one spoke, and he went on.

"Steadiness under fire is a quality that one can't help admiring, especially with cheerfulness superadded. And it doesn't need a battle-field to bring it out, either. Mr. Vennor finds plenty of use for it right along, I reckon! And the way that he has been on duty in poor Godine's sick-room is a good deal like heroism, too. One day of it would flatten me out thinner than a wafer:—I've been there, and I know what it's like. It gave me something to think about,—rather solemn thinking, on the whole. And the upshot of it all is that I am going to stand by my rector,

from this time on." He ended in a tone that was at once apologetic and defiant.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Jackman, thrusting his hands into his pockets, "that's what we all do, isn't it?"

Mr. Pollard screwed up his eyes and studied them both attentively.

Mrs. Fairfax now came to us, wiping her eyes, but speaking with characteristic whimsicality :—

"To think that my husband has known this thing for months, and never told the wife of his bosom! I wonder if I couldn't revenge myself by instituting proceedings for a divorce, and retaining him as my counsel: at once ensuring his secrecy and enlisting his professional pride on the side of success!"

She looked at Honor, but in *her* heart sorrow was still uppermost; so I answered :—

"I am only too glad that my husband did not tell me! With what sort of face should I have met Dana all this time, and talked with her about these things!"

"Poor Dana!" she returned, compassionately; "who is to carry her this news! I saw her father go out just as the verdict was rendered; so it is probable that they know nothing of it as yet."

Honor's sobs broke out afresh as she spoke; and Ben, who had recovered a modicum of composure, buried his face in his hands, and echoed them with a sort of subdued howl.

Mr. Clavrick now roused himself, and spoke for the first time, but as usual, with a clear head and kind heart :—

"It is hard to give up the expectation that Rolf will sometime come to his own again, but I suppose it must be done. It is certain that for some of us, life has lost an ir-

recoverable charm. The heart into which he really entered will never be able to fill the vacant place ;—Rolf was Rolf, and there is no other like him. But life still goes on ; its duties, its sorrows, its pleasures, still call to us, and we must hear. We will not forget him, but we will try to keep his memory bright. Never was there a nature so little akin to gloom, so redolent of sunshine ; let our thoughts of it be in harmony with it.

"Yes ; that is the right sentiment," said Paul, coming up just in time to hear the last sentences. "It is much to have been permitted to know such a bright soul ; it is a pleasure to remember that it will have no farther experience of earth's shadows; it is best of all to be confident that it goes on shining in a happier state of existence, into which we may hope to follow it in good time, and renew our enjoyment of it. For it has not gone out in darkness, but only entered into more abundant light. It has drawn nearer to the Source of light, henceforth to reflect its rays even more brightly."

Honor's sobs quieted somewhat ; and Paul turned to me.

"Captain Murray is going to see Dana at once ; he has a message for her. He would like you to go with him. Will you come ?"

He led me out by the private way afore-mentioned, Ben going with us. In the court-yard a carriage was in waiting ; near it Captain Murray and Harold were talking earnestly together, with clasped hands ; it was evident that all misunderstanding was over, and a basis of mutual esteem established for their future relation, be it more or less intimate.

Paul put me into the carriage, declining an invitation to

go with us ; he opined that Dana would not need him just at present as much as the Godine household, to which he was about to return. Be it understood that its head had passed beyond the reach of his ministrations, or he would not have appeared in the court-room even for that brief space. Having occasion to pass by, a rumor that something unusual and interesting was in progress had caused him to enter for a few moments.

Ben and he went away together ; I saw the Captain look after them curiously and thoughtfully enough to make me wonder a little.

"I am not going to congratulate you," said I, as we drove off; "you have had enough of that sort of thing. I merely want to tell you that I heartily congratulate myself on what I have seen and heard this morning,—indeed, on all my acquaintance with you and Rolf. For I shall always be under the impression that I knew Rolf—perhaps even better than I know you."

"He was better worth your knowing," returned he, with a slow, sad smile.

But *was* he ? Ah ! that ineffable charm of a handsome, sunny, frank, brave, energetic personality—what a wonderful thing it is ! Who can rightly estimate its intrinsic value ! Incapable of description or definition; too subtle and ethereal to be put into words; yet such a powerful and penetrative aroma that whatever comes in contact therewith—places, persons, things, thoughts—forever after keeps a trace of it ! Ally it to goodness, and painting the lily and gilding the refined gold are no longer paradoxes; ally it to evil, and the prince of darkness puts on the seeming of an angel of light. It is as imperishable, too, as it is fascinating; witness the thrill with which the heart of the world

still answers to the names of Mary Queen of Scots and Henry of Navarre!

In all that is best of manliness Captain Murray can hold his own with most men, but beside that glowing, gracious image of Rolf Kenworth, he is like an etching by the side of an oil-painting. Only a few find out its quiet charm; one or two may even prefer it as more subtly informed with a more spiritual beauty; but that of the painting is patent to everyone. Yet the Captain feels no spasm of jealousy on that account; he is his friend's unreserved admirer; he talked of him with loving enthusiasm all the way until we drew near the Heathcote mansion; then he sank into silence, thinking, no doubt, of the coming interview—possibly dreading it.

We had taken it for granted that Dana would still be in her room, and had agreed that I should quietly take Mrs. Heathcote aside, tell her our errand, and ask her to break the tidings to her daughter, who would doubtless send for the Captain as soon as she was able to see him; but the event turned out quite differently, as is apt to be the case with pre-arranged events.

Dana was much better to-day, her cold had yielded with unexpected ease to quiet, rest, and the usual remedies, and the news of Rolf's complete vindication had so cheered and invigorated her that, longing for her only really satisfying method of giving expression to her feelings and relief to her heart, she had come down-stairs to her piano. As we were ushered into the parlor, the whole place was full of musical sound, proceeding from the adjoining room.

The maid was about to announce our presence, but Captain Murray—almost involuntarily, I thought—stopped her with an authoritative gesture.

"Do not disturb her; we will wait," said I, in a low tone, comprehending and sharing his feeling.

The girl knew me, and obeyed,—going out quietly, and leaving us to ourselves.

In truth, it seemed to me that to have interrupted that golden stream of sound would have been to sustain a life-long loss. It was a pæan of triumph that she was playing,—the song of one who stands victorious, exultant, on the hard-won field, yet not without a mournful sense of its cost. It seemed incredible that such power, with such pathos, should come from those slender girl-fingers. Chord after chord, passage after passage, of majestic splendor rang through the room, and through our hearts as well; the grand flood of harmony rose higher and higher, fuller and fuller, lifting our souls to glorious heights of jubilation, yet unto which still mounted that sharp undertone of sorrow. But the sorrow grew less and less intrusive; one by one the moaning minors were submerged in gathering swells of purest major sweetness, till all were rolled into one mighty hymn of perfected praise; and the heavens seemed to open, and all the "innumerable company" to break forth into shouts of welcome, ending in a burst of rapturous hallelujahs.

Then, after a brief pause, came the shining ripple of an accompaniment, and Dana's sweet voice sang that wonderful passage from Revelation:

"*These are they which have come out of great tribulation. . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*"

Captain Murray and I exchanged glances of surprise and pleasure; surely some prophetic whisper was preparing Dana for our errand.

The final chord ending at last in "echoless silence," she

turned, saw us, and came towards us a few steps, while a swift flash of comprehension passed over her face, which I was at loss to understand. Surely, no one could have been before us with our tidings, I thought.

Seeing nothing better to be done, I stepped into the music-room, closing the door after me. She stopped and waited, looking at me expectantly. But when I tried to speak, my heart was so full of love and sympathy for her that no words came,—only tears.

She put her arms round me, and laid her cheek to mine. "Do not cry so, dear friend," she said, soothingly. "I know what you would say; I have known it a good while; Rolf is—gone home."

I looked at her in astonishment; her voice was firm, her eyes bright, her face full of soft light and peace; she was like one who has come through deep waters and dark night to rest at last on a firm, moon-lighted shore.

She understood my look and answered it. "Yes, I know it, and have accepted it. It is God's will—and mine; I dare not set mine in opposition to His. I have known it ever since the last time that Mr. Ennadeen declined to see me, though I could not bring myself to speak of it. I thought it all out that night; I understood at last that he could not face me and my questions, that there was something which he had not the courage to tell me until he could preface it with: 'Rolf's name is untarnished.' He thought the gladness would help me to bear the sorrow. He feared that if I knew it before, I should show my grief so plainly that everyone would know. He did not think that I had endured a worse sorrow and made no sign, except to you."

"A worse sorrow, Danita!"

"A great deal worse. When my love seemed so unac-

countably dead, everything was dead,—Rolf, I, hope, faith, past, present, future. There was no life anywhere. Rolf was truly dead, then! But now, he lives. He is quite near to me, nearer than he was in the Soudan, merely not in sight. I love him with all my heart; I think of him every minute of every hour; I bid him good night and good morning; I sing to him and talk to him; I tell him everything that I feel or think or desire. Nothing can ever rob me of him now, nothing in life. And as for what is called death, that will but lift the veil which hides him from my sight and touch."

I was too much moved to answer. This was love indeed! worthy to be so called; not the poorer, weaker thing that so often borrows its name.

"Besides," she went on, "do you think that I would disturb his peace in Paradise by my weeping? 'Send me away with a smile, Sweet, or I shall see your tears wherever I go,' he said to me when we were parting. And I did; I shed no more tears until he was gone. So now, whenever his spirit has been quite close to me for awhile, he whispers, 'Send me away with a smile, Sweet.' And I do my best to please him."

She smiled into my face—such a smile! It brought tears into my eyes; but so does anything which is ineffably, divinely beautiful.

The smile faded after a moment; the clear eyes dimmed a little. "How did he—go?" she asked, with a slightly quivering lip. "I hope that it was swiftly, painlessly."

"Captain Murray is waiting to tell you about that as soon as you are ready to see him."

"Captain Murray! Ah, yes; he has ceased to be Mr. Ennadeen. I am ready now."

"Shall I send him in to you, then?"

"We will go to him. He can have nothing to tell me about Rolf that my dearest friend may not hear. But first, let me find mamma; she, too, will want to know. Father is gone out, I think."

She was absent for several minutes. Mrs. Heathcote came back with her, looking absolutely dazed—as well she might—with the mingled shock of the news and the bearer's composure; two things that she could not reconcile. She seemed to think that her daughter had received a mortal wound, which, though she were as yet unconscious of it, must kill her finally.

Dana opened the door into the parlor with a firm hand, and waited for her mother and me to pass in before her. I saw Captain Murray's slight start of surprise; probably this was something very unlike the love-lorn, tear-stained, dishevelled maiden that he had expected to see. There was rare grace and dignity in her aspect, and he bowed as low as if she had been a princess.

She gave him her hand, which he lifted reverently to his lips, thanked him for coming to her so promptly, and said, earnestly:—

"Please tell me everything—everything. I want to feel as if I had been there and seen and heard it all."

"Where shall I begin?" asked he.

"The last days, after he decided to come home. Before that, he told me a good deal himself, in his letters. Sometime, I shall like to hear all that you can tell me of him, from the very earliest days of your acquaintance, if you will be so good. But now, I want to know the way he—went."

It will be noticed that she always avoided the word "death" and all its next of kin. Although she did not like

to seem singular, she could not bring herself to utter them, which sometimes caused a little hesitation. "It seems such a misuse of terms," she once explained to me. "A stone or a stock is dead; so is a crushed worm; but what fitness has the term for a beloved one whom we believe to have really entered into eternal life!"

Captain Murray retold the story of the accident, and of the days that followed it, only much more in detail, in answer to Dana's eager eyes and questionings. She had her wish; the scene became no less clear and accurate than a photograph; it might easily take its place in memory as if actually lived through; even I, in recalling it, find it difficult to believe that I was not an eye-witness thereof.

But when it came to Rolf's message, instinctively the two rose and neared each other, and it was given into Dana's ears alone.

"O Rolf! my love, my love!" I heard her murmur, clasping her hands, and bursting into tears.

"Then," continued Captain Murray, "he lay quite still for some minutes. 'Kiss me, Hugh, good brother,' he said next; and we kissed each other. 'Once more—the last—for her,' he murmured, faintly. He never spoke again, except to begin his childhood's night-prayer for heavenly keeping. With that prayer on his lips, he entered into rest."

He paused and hesitated.

Simply as a child, Dana raised her tear-wet face, and,

"He kissed her with all pureness, brother-like."

XLII.

THE OWNER OF THE MANOR.

Mr. Godine was one of those men who can be forgiven for being brusque, narrow, rigid, because, with their nature and environment, it is not easy to see how they could have been otherwise. The path by which they have "arrived" is not thickly strewn with unimproved opportunities for better things; it is for the most part a rough, toilsome, up-hill track, calling peremptorily for strength and endurance, but in a much softer and easily unnoticed voice for sweetness and patience. They found in it room for the exercise of some real virtues,—truth, honesty, energy, courage, thrift,—but very little for the graces and amenities which transmute rough stones into polished gems. They trod in it long enough for continued routine to harden into confirmed habit, which stays when the goal is reached. The community holds them in a certain cool esteem; but, outside of their own families, they leave no void that cannot readily be filled. The really pathetic element in their death is its lack of pathos to the ordinary beholder.

To judge by the sincerity with which he was mourned at home, Mr. Godine had been a good husband and father; but there were few widening ripples on the surface of so-

ciety to show where he had gone down or that he was missed. After the day of his funeral, I never heard his name mentioned except by the black-robed widow; and occasionally by Paul, whose unwearied attendance by his sick-bed had awakened that gentle, compassionate interest which is like affection for the time. To him the family came for comfort and counsel as freely as if its head, blindly following the lead of the majority of his colleagues of the vestry, had not generally maintained toward him an attitude of tacit disapproval, if not of actual opposition. I doubt if Paul ever remembered this fact; his nature is too sweet, his mind too full, his sympathies too unselfish, to harbor recollections of past unfriendlinesses; being over, no matter how, they are to him as if they had never been.

Harold and I were less forgetful and more consciously forgiving; for of course we forgave freely, fully, gladly, when death held up before us the magical lens which is at once so softening and so revealing.

"Mr. Godine did his duty according to his lights, and that is more than can be said for all of us," remarked Harold, thoughtfully, as we walked home from the funeral-services together. "However," he added, after a pause, "I must say I hope his place on the vestry will be filled by someone whose lights come from a different quarter, and are more luminous altogether."

I must have looked somewhat shocked; for he went on:—

"Does that seem very heartless to you? Remember that practical men are accustomed to think promptly of the practical bearing of events; and it is a habit not to be suspended even though the event be death,—unless it comes so close as to daze and stupefy with personal sorrow. I can tell you that Pollard and Jackman began to consider

the chances of filling his place with an equally stanch henchman of theirs, as soon as they knew that it was vacant. They happened to be in my office when the news was made known to them, and I could not help hearing their speculations about the future with one ear, while the other was at the service of a droner who can put fewer ideas into a square mile of talk than anyone that I have the pleasure of knowing. Fore-warned is fore-armed, you know," he added, smilingly.

"That accounts for the long conversation between you and Mr. Clavrick that I witnessed—at intervals—from the library window yesterday," said I, shaking my head deprecatingly. "I marvelled at such a sudden accession of friendship!"

"Undoubtedly we are on better terms than we were; in obedience to the rule that two persons in harmony with a third person should be in harmony with each other."

"Is it a rule? I fancy it is best known by its exceptions!"

"You are thinking of closer relations than those concerned in church politics."

"Alas, that there should be such a thing! Cannot—ought not—the church to be managed without them?"

He lightly shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see how, under the present civil law of membership. Here, as in State politics, if the good and true men stand back because they do not like the methods, the bad men will have things all their own way."

"And is that always to be so?"

"Well, not to be too sanguine, we will hope for something better about the year Two-Thousand-Eight-Hundred-and Eighty-Five!"

"Much good will it do us then!" exclaimed I, ironically.

He looked at me thoughtfully.

"Why not? If the universe be a single organism, with an intimate connection between all its parts, as there seems to be strong reason for believing, any good in one part must needs have its influence on all the rest."

"And, logically, any evil, too!"

"I do not shrink from the inference. I have an idea that the bliss of heaven will not be complete until the sin and suffering of this lower world—and of every world—are done away with. There too, it seems to me that the text from which Paul preached not long ago may apply: 'God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.'"

"I suppose that may be so, without implying that the preceding heavenly bliss has any considerable lack. There are many degrees between competence and affluence."

"Yes; and progress has a deep joy of its own that one would not like to miss."

It was my turn to look thoughtful.

"And there we seem to have the only key to the problem of evil which is at all fitted for the use of our human understanding. But, oh, Harold! does it not follow, then, that it is to be a long time before we get any true ease and rest, any end to this continual yearning after something which we have not!"

It was Paul's deep voice that answered. I had known that he was fast overtaking us, and had turned to meet him just as I was speaking. He was even nearer than I thought, and his hearing is very acute.

"Where there is no weariness, there is no need of rest," he said, encouragingly. "And the present may be quite

sweet enough to ensure us against any absolute thirst for the sweeter, without entirely robbing us of the joy of anticipation. The elimination of acute pain and sorrow will count for a great deal at that stage of the account, I think."

Harold did not pursue the subject. He said to me, with some surprise :—

"You knew that Mr. Vennor was behind us, then?"

"Certainly. I have heard his footsteps for some time."

"I shall be a happy man when some sweet woman knows my footsteps so well as that."

Paul laughed, and looked mischievous.

"Be a happy man, then. Often in the evening, when the street is quiet enough for sounds to be heard from the porch, Winnie says to me: 'That is Harold's step.'"

"Don't put him into such an embarrassing position—" I began, deprecatingly; but Harold stopped me with a grave gesture.

Such a revealing one, you should say. I see that I am like a man whose boat has quietly drifted down the stream while he is too busy with his lines to notice it. Lifting his eyes, he finds that the landscape is entirely changed. I *am* a happy man in comparison with what I was when you first knew me. I was then hard, selfish, narrow, absorbed in the day's work and bounded by the earthly horizon; it is a new world of thought, faith, duty, hope, that you have opened to me. If I do not yet fully go in and possess it, that is my fault, not yours; and I humbly trust that fuller, richer possession will come in time. Already, I have tasted enough of its fruits to know that they are infinitely better than any that ripened in the land left behind. Though happiness may never come to me in the form that I had in

mind when I spoke just now, I can do without it better than I could once, and—"

"And find blessedness, as Carlyle says," finished Paul, seeing that he hesitated.

"Yes, I hope so,—thanks to you and Milady, who has come to know my step so well," he added, smilingly. "After all, it is not so much to be wondered at, as it comes to your door so often—even as it does now. I hope you are going to invite me in."

"As if it were necessary," laughed I. "You know that the door would open to you of its own accord, if it were sentient."

Apparently, the qualification was quite unnecessary; as we came to the door, it swung wide open,—and without hands, so far as we could see. However, when it closed, there was Ben's face behind it, beaming with welcome. Clasping my hand, he went with us to the library; as there was no reason why he should not, inasmuch as he is a recognized member of the family, with all the rights and privileges thereto pertaining. He has a room on our side of the premises now, and his old one becomes a kind of study and workshop, to which he quietly betakes himself when he chooses. It is good to see how he expands and brightens in this happy home-life; Paul and I fancy that he grows in intelligence and winsomeness every hour. And certainly he grows even more rapidly in our affections.

Harold fixed on him the same sort of thoughtful, comprehensive look that I had observed in Captain Murray two or three days previously.

"Ben," said he, finally, "there is a package of papers in my desk at the office which I should like to show to Mr.

and Mrs. Vennor; will you, with their permission, do me the favor to fetch them?"

"Why, certainly," replied Ben, coloring with pleasure at the quiet kindness and courtesy of Harold's address, which is still new enough to him not to have lost the charm of novelty.

Harold produced a key, gave minute instructions, and the boy went off at his swiftest pace; doubtless marvelling within himself at the turn of affairs that had made him the trusted messenger of Harold Brune.

"I suppose I need not tell you," said that gentleman, when he was out of sight, "that I sent him off chiefly to get rid of him—politely."

"I suspected as much; what is the matter?"

"That is what I am here to tell you. Captain Murray paid me a visit this morning, on business that deeply concerns your *protégé*. If his search for that stiletto failed in its special object, it was not without important results. In an ingeniously contrived secret drawer of the secretary which figured so prominently on the trial, he found a will—or Wright did—duly signed and witnessed, which gave the Manor and most of the property to Rolf. Its date showed that it had been made in the days when he was the prime favorite, and his uncle never had the heart to destroy it, although he kept a blank one of a later date on hand, which he could fill up with Ken Rixon's name, if ever he saw fit to do it. But he never did. It follows that when Rolf died, he was the owner of the estate."

"I do not see how that affects Ben."

"I am coming to that. Just before Rolf went on that vain expedition to Khartoum, having saved a few hundred dollars from his pay and the proceeds of a certain profita-

ble commission from Osman Nadig, he naturally considered the question what should become of it in case that he never returned; and, remembering Ben's pathetic devotion to him (of which he seems to have been better aware than is supposed), he laughingly decided: 'I'll give it to him, poor little chap! There is not enough of it to be of consequence to anyone else among my friends, and as I unthinkingly prevented him from making a swift passage to a better world, I feel a degree of responsibility for his turning out well in this one. It will serve to give him a good education, and a chance to make something of himself, if he has the right sort of stuff in him.' So he made a will in due form, bequeathing everything of which he died possessed to Ben."

"Do you mean us to understand that he is the owner of the Manor?" exclaimed Paul, starting up in some excitement.

"It looks uncommonly like it. The Captain brought me the will, and it is all right,—drawn up by an ex-lawyer who happened to be in the corps, and witnessed by Murray himself and two brother officers."

Paul and I looked at each other in amazed silence, trying confusedly to consider Ben from this new point of view.

"So you see, Milady," went on Harold, smiling, "that you plucked up the boy out of the street and gave him a start in the right direction, just in the nick of time."

"I hope it will not quite spoil him," said I, somewhat illogically, but Harold understood.

"We will do our best to prevent that," said he, with such gravity that I cast a questioning glance at him, divining some hidden allusion.

"I said 'we' advisedly," he explained. "The most amazing thing about the whole affair—at least to me—is still to come."

He paused, and there was a liquid softness and brightness in his dark eyes.

"I am quite won over to the belief that Rolf was the most generous-hearted fellow in the world," he went on, in a tone of deep feeling. "He must have known that he had come between me and my dearest hope of happiness, and divined how I felt about it; and what does he do but appoint me joint guardian and trustee, with Mr. Clavrick, of Ben and his property!—just to show me that he felt kindly towards me, trusted me, and had altogether a better opinion of me than I deserved."

"Or," said Paul, quietly, "he had that rare insight into character which is able to see the fair form of the future in the rough blocking-out of the present."

"At all events, he puts me upon honor with the boy," pursued Harold. "Happily, I cannot do my duty by him any better than by leaving him in your hands as long as you will have him. If such a home had been open to me when my mother died, I might have been a better man."

Paul's only answer to this was a smile, but it was eloquently expressive of his satisfaction with the present Harold and his indifference to the one that "might have been."

For me, I fell to thinking what a singularly strong influence Rolf Kenworth's fascinating personality has exerted and is still to exert over the lives and characters of those who have come in contact with him; even Harold, who began with a sentiment akin to hate, ends by falling under

the spell. Was Rolf's life really so short, his end so untimely, as it seemed? If he had lived longer, could he have done more good,—nay, might he not have done less? To Ben, Harold, Captain Murray, Dana—and who knows how many more? his memory will possibly be a mightier instrument in the hands of the "Power that makes for righteousness" than his living presence and daily example. If there had been anything more winning, more subduing, more convincing than a heroic death, any more perfect seal to set to a beautiful life, would Our Lord have chosen the Cross as the most potent means by which to draw all men unto Him?

"And is Ben to be informed of this most unexpected revelation?" I asked, bringing my mind back to the subject in hand.

"Is it anything more than a remote possibility, anyway?" inquired Paul. "Are there not other heirs who will forthwith plunge the estate into litigation, and consume the whole of it in the process of finding out to whom it rightfully belongs?"

"I have been looking up that question. This branch of the Kenworths seems to be extinct; Rolf was the last of the name; Kenworth Rixon is the last of the blood, and the only eligible contestant. And after the revelations in the court the other day,—well, you can estimate as well as I the chances of his presenting himself."

"I do not believe that he is guilty," said I, with a quick recurrence of the sympathy which I had felt for him on that first Sunday in Bellerue—so far back it seemed now!

"Rolf thought him innocent, you know," observed Paul.

"Yes, I know; it was like Rolf's generosity. And it is fair to admit that, as the stiletto bore such false testimony

in his case, there may be the tenth part of a chance that it does the same thing in Ken's."

Nevertheless, there was something in his tone which seemed to reduce the tenth to a hundredth.

"But what about Ben?" asked I, caring little, it must be confessed, for the unknown 'Ken,' in some unknown land, in comparison with the boy under my own roof. "Must we unsettle him with this business while it is all an uncertainty? Why not keep still about it until we know something more final?"

"You know my motto," said Paul: "'the truth shall make you free.'"

"I doubt if Ben will be so much unsettled as you think," added Harold. "Since I have known about his solitary housekeeping, and from all that I have seen of him lately, I am inclined to think that he has an uncommonly clear head of his own, and will manage to keep his footing, whether on the slippery ground of suspense or the dizzy pinnacle of sudden good fortune. Moreover, your influence will be strongly counteractive of any tendency to light-headedness."

"Does Mr. Clavrick know?" asked Paul.

"Yes. I saw him this morning, and took the liberty of requesting him to meet me here; but he had an important engagement. He summed up the matter, so far as he is concerned, in this fashion: 'As for the property, I shall do my best with it, just as I have done: as for the boy, while Mrs. Vennor has him in charge, my motto will be "Hands off!"' He is ready to qualify, with me, as soon as I can attend to the preliminaries. In good truth, my office will be only in name. With Mr. Clavrick for the financial department, and you for the personal guardianship, I can rest easy."

"You can do no such thing!" cried I. "That is not what Rolf meant. He intended that the relation should be a benefit to both of you. I insist upon it that you shall cultivate your ward's acquaintance, and make him feel that you take a genuine interest in what he is and what he does. Who can tell how soon a change of circumstance may make your influence the controlling one! By way of a good beginning, you cannot do better than to tell him yourself about this matter; I should like him to hear it from you."

In his surprise, Harold gave a low whistle, immediately begged my pardon, and looked beseechingly at Paul.

"I think that Winnie is right," said the latter; "the announcement may well come from you. Trust her to improve the occasion afterward," he added mischievously.

"As you say," replied Harold, after a moment of consideration. "In truth, I should like to see how the young gentleman takes the news!"

"'The young gentleman'! indeed!" cried I. "A few weeks ago, it was 'the young imp,' 'the young vagabond,' and similarly complimentary titles! Don't let him hear you, or he will think the world is turned upside down."

Harold laughed. "My term was meant to suit Milady's ears, not Ben's. Yet it does not seem inappropriate to the owner of Kenworth Manor. And there he comes, I think," he added, as the hall door was heard to open and close.

Ben carried the package directly to its owner, and asked if it was "all right"; Harold took with it the extended hand, and drew the boy kindly to his side.

"I have something strange to tell you, Ben," he began, in the singularly rich, melodious tones which are only the more winning because rarely used. "I had the feeling that it would come to you with a better grace from Mrs. or Mr.

Vennor, but they are of the opposite opinion, and I yield to their judgment, as in duty bound."

Ben's eyes dilated, and his cheek paled. In this preamble, from this quarter, he foresaw only calamity. Seeing this, Harold hastened to say, reassuringly:—

"It is not bad news that I have for you; at least, most people would not think it such. But only time can bring out its real nature clearly. If its results should be to make you forget, now or ever, what you owe to your friends in this house, or that it is character, not property, which makes the man, I shall be sorry that I ever had such news to bring you."

Ben drew himself up with a sturdy self-reliance, yet with no touch of conceit.

"You needn't be afraid of that," said he.

"I am not 'afraid,'" returned Harold, with a smile; "I know that Mrs. Vennor would never have taken you to her heart and home in the way that she has, if she had not discovered something in you worthy of her confidence and affection, some fineness and strength of nature which will enable you to stand that subtlest test of character—a sudden accession of good fortune."

If the adjective had been "bad" instead of "good," Ben's face could not have fallen more visibly. "I hope it ain't anything to take me away from Mrs. Vennor," he exclaimed, with a trembling voice.

"Not unless you choose," replied Harold, reassuringly.

Then, in very clear and simple phraseology, suited to the boy's understanding, he told him about the making of Rolf Kenworth's will.

Ben burst into grateful tears.

"He was always so good to me! And I can never

do anything, now, to show him how much I loved him!"

"Try to be like him," said Harold, kindly; "that will show it plainly, not only to him but to everyone who knew him. Try to make the world as much better for your living in it as he has done; try to leave behind you a memory as fragrant with kindliness, generosity, courage, purity, manliness. So shall he still live in you and in those who come after you; so shall all that was best in him be as enduring on the earth as it is immortal in heaven."

Ben's tears still flowed; but his eyes lit up with something that was not grief; it was more like high and firm resolve.

When, finally as Harold continued his explanation, it began to dawn upon Ben that the Manor was possibly his inheritance, I was glad to see no trace of exultation; on the contrary, he looked much startled and perplexed.

His story finished, Harold waited silently for Ben's comment. It was some moments before he spoke; and his brow was knitted as over some deep problem.

"Did—did Mr. Rolf mean me to have the Manor?" he asked, lifting his eyes searchingly to Harold's face.

"No, probably not; since he died without knowing that he was its owner."

"I thought so," said Ben, drawing a long breath. Gently, but firmly, he withdrew himself from Harold's grasp, and came to my side.

"Tell him," said he, simply, as if quite sure of my understanding and aid,—"tell him that I can't take it."

My heart gave a great leap of joy and pride, but I dared not be too hasty. Holding him off a little, so that I could look full in his face, I asked:—

"Do I rightly understand you to say that you will not accept the Manor, if the law decides that it is yours?"

"Yes, ma'am; that's just it. Mr. Rolf did not mean me to have it, you see. Next to him, Mr. Rixon has the best right to it; old Mr. Kenworth would have given it to him. If Mr. Rolf had known about it, I am sure that *he* would have done it, too. So you see, Mrs. Vennor, that I really couldn't take it; it wouldn't be what he meant. And I know *he* would never have done such a mean thing as to take a property that came to him just by a chance twist, when there was someone else with a better right to it. And so I couldn't, either. I know I don't express it very well, but you know what I mean."

There was a moment of silence. Then Harold rose and came to us.

"Shake hands, Ben," said he, with deep, rich emphasis; "I honor you."

Ben mechanically allowed the hand-shaking, but was evidently too bewildered to understand or answer.

"And I, Ben," said Paul, solemnly, laying his hand on the boy's head, "I thank God for His grace to you."

This was too much; Ben could only hide his blushing face and filling eyes on my shoulder. Not to overwhelm him completely, I contented myself with quietly kissing his cheek.

"Mr. Brune has not told you what I rejoice in most," said I, when he had recovered himself a little; "that shall be my privilege. Knowing that you are still young, and anxious to do all that he could to fit you for an useful, manly life, Mr. Rolf wisely provided you with a guardian—with two guardians, in fact—to take care of your property and have an eye to your welfare generally, until you are of age.

One of them is Mr. Clavrick; and no better one could be found. The other,—guess who it is, Ben."

The boy lifted his head, and looked doubtfully, questioningly into each of our faces.

"Why do you puzzle him so?" asked Harold, a little sadly. "Ben, strange as it may seem, Mr. Kenworth named my unworthy self as Mr. Clavrick's coadjutor. But if you prefer someone else—as well you may!—speak out frankly, and I promise you to arrange it so that he shall take my place."

"I don't want anyone else," replied Ben, quickly. "It's true I didn't use to like you once, Mr. Brune, but I—I love you now!"

I think the strong man's eyes were a little misty as he took the two boyish hands so impulsively held out to him, and drew Ben into a warm embrace. As for Paul and I, we smiled at each other in vast contentment; we foresaw that the relation of guardian and ward would not only be sufficiently harmonious, but productive of great good to both. It will be Harold's first experience of the softness and sweetness of tender human care and responsibility, as well as of answering trust and love; it will ensure firm, steady, watchful guidance to Ben in that critical period which is seldom passed so wisely and so well as not to leave some very stinging memories behind, unless there be a faithful pilot and counsellor at hand. Some day, looking back on the seemingly chance conjunction of circumstances which knit their lives together, how clearly will they see that only definite purpose and wise provision could have brought forth such rich and rounded results!

XLIII.

ROLF AT HOME.

NEVER did our Indian Summer—or our Summer of All-Saints, as I like to call it—vouchsafe us a lovelier day than that on which Rolf Kenworth was brought home and laid to rest with his kindred. The landscape had lost the brightness of summer bloom and verdure, but the grass was still green in sunny, sheltered spots, and the soft haze over the mountains was like the light cloud of resigned sorrow upon a beautiful, beloved face.

To a stranger's first careless glance, the city would have seemed to be keeping high holiday, so general was the cessation of business, so dense the throng in the streets; but a second look would have discovered the sombre insignia of mourning everywhere,—few dwellings too poor to display a shred of black drapery, few persons that did not wear a more or less conspicuous badge of crape. The whole military contingent was out to do honor to the memory of the heroic youth who had once been a member of the volunteer corps; and the citizens vied with one another to prove that their estimate of their young townsman's character was high, their pride in him large—if late. While he walked among them in the flesh, many of them had loved him well, most of them had felt the wondrous charm of his manner, but

few of them had seen him as they saw him now, removed by absence and death to that fair distance which softens outlines, harmonizes colors, brings out the true perspective, and gives atmosphere. Not a dissenting note was raised when his friends—as friends will—mingled enthusiastic praises with their tears. If envy or detraction were anywhere present, to-day they held their peace. It was through one long, unbroken harmony of grief, affection, esteem, and pride, that Rolf was borne along the home streets to the home grave.

How much did it all matter to him in his new estate, I wondered, as I watched the funeral cortége pass by to the pervasive strains of martial music. It was a question not easily answered. Our ideas of the future life are general and sketchy, at best; for details and finish we must await the hour of personal knowledge. Doubtless Rolf is glad in knowing that his earthly reputation is free from stain; but for the publicity and pageantry that accompanied his mortal dust to its resting-place, was there anything in that to thrill his immortal spirit with pleasurable emotion? I could not think so.

Yet I would not have had it any the less. It was good for those who took part in it; it was their sign-manual of regret for having misjudged him; it set their seal to his complete vindication; it would perhaps teach them to let caution wait on decision hereafter; and it was valuable as an evidence that the popular heart is not incapable of being touched to finer issues.

Moreover, it would show the youth of Bellerue how certainly, in the long run, character outlasts and overshadows possessions. The merely rich men of the past, those who added coin to coin and left them stored up in earthly

strongholds for earthly uses, where are their names on the pages of history? Love, loyalty, generosity, heroism, are there in sunlit letters; even great vices and crimes have their black record; but of riches, naked and unadorned, there is scant mention. There have been many lords of Kenworth Manor, and not one of them has brought dishonor on the name; but to none has been given a tithe of the honors so lavishly showered upon their young scion, whose title to them is simply that of pure, unselfish manliness, doing with its might whatsoever its hands found to do.

Dana had no mind to make any part of the public spectacle; she declined with thanks the offer of close carriages for herself and friends, and came to watch unseen its passage from the rectory windows;—the shrouded banners, the nodding plumes, the palms and flowers, the marching battalions, the pall-bearers (among whom was Harold, and not even she questioned his right to be there), the close ranks upon ranks of civic organizations, the long line of carriages from which not alone the local dignitaries but many persons of wider distinction looked out upon the well-nigh solid masses of humanity that lined their way on either side, extending almost without break from curb-stone to house-tops,—every porch, window, balcony, and roof being crowded to the utmost. Bellerue gave the best that she had of youth and age, of beauty, talent, dignity and power,—aye, and the worst of her commonness, poverty, and degradation, too!—to make of Rolf's passage to the grave a veritable triumphal march. Shoulder to shoulder, the rich and the poor stood together to do him reverence; he had been sunnily kind and courteous to both alike, and their tears fell in concert as the hearse went by with its precious freight and its guard of honor.

Dana had told me beforehand what she would like to do; so, after all the pomp and clamor had gone by, a carriage came to the door, and by a shorter and nearly deserted route we drove to a point whence we could easily climb to the wooded hillside overlooking the cemetery, arriving just in time to see the procession slowly winding to the grave. Among the tree-trunks and shrubs we were quite unnoticeable, yet could see clearly all that took place. We could hear Paul's voice, too, in the familiar words with which the Church lays all her children down to rest in the quiet, darkened chamber wherein they sleep so well, be it after "life's fitful fever" or its sound health; and Dana opened her Prayer-book and followed the service carefully, joining with a clear voice in the responses and hymns, and looking as rapt above all purely earthly emotion as if we had climbed to a spiritual height where time had ceased to be, and eternity moved calmly on to a majestic rhythm of perfect peace.

Not till the coffin was being lowered into the grave did her tears come and her face sink into her hands; but it was soon lifted again.

"Why do I weep for that?" she asked, faintly smiling at her own inconsequence. "Surely I ought to feel nothing but gladness in seeing Rolf's mortal part finally laid to rest with its kin. And I know that his spirit is neither coffined nor buried; it is free to come to me here, at home, wherever I may be. He is mine, and I am his, everywhere, always. Do you not think that the spirits of those we love can visit us?"

"Most certainly. Without admitting that they must quit the peace of Paradise to dance attendance upon professional mediums, or even upon our sickly whims and fancies,

I do believe that, whenever it is good for both, their spirits can hold communion with our spirits as perfectly as ever they did on earth—perhaps even more so. Sight and sound are quite unessential to such communion; it is of inward feeling, not outward touch; known and felt, not demonstrated. Those who enjoy it can easily believe in it; those who do not—alas, for them! they know not what they miss."

There was no time for more, as Paul's voice again rose on the air, and we gave our attention to the closing service.

We waited in silence until the cemetery was deserted, and the grave left to the sunset's golden quietude. Then we went to it in our turn; and notwithstanding that it was covered with elaborate floral emblems, the whole costly pile testified not so eloquently to the sorrow of love and the patience of hope as the three white rosebuds that Dana had worn hither on her own bosom, in order to lay them over Rolf's.

By-and-by, as she sank on her knees, I left her to feel, do, say, what she pleased, alone and unobserved, while I wandered away into the silent city of tombs stretching away on every side; stopping now and then to read, somewhat idly and mechanically at first, the records of lives linked to mine by no stronger bond than that of a common humanity, I thought.

But, no; I was too hasty. Here, in a hillside vault, lay the ancestors of General Fairfax; here, a group of Clavricks, clustered round a massive monument, stayed my steps; farther on, I read the name of Pollard on a tall shaft; next came a score or more of Heathcotes;—these people were not unknown to me; they touched my life at many points; continually my spirit was cheered or irritated

by their good or bad qualities. There were few of them who did not meet me often, shake hands with me, give me pain or pleasure, in the persons of their representatives of to-day. It was still the city of Bellerue wherein I walked, the people of Bellerue who silently greeted me on every side.

I had no time to follow out the thought, for Dana rejoined me, with a face of such fair, unworldly peacefulness as it was good to see. Certainly, those ancestors of hers had left her a precious heritage. She had reason to be grateful to them—and so had I. For a sweeter friend it would be hard to find.

It was a silent return journey; very few words were spoken by either of us until we bade each other adieu when I left her at her own door,—to run with patience the race set before her, to be still the sunshine of their home to her parents, to transmute her sorrows into prayers and her prayers into songs, to learn more and more of the deep significance of that short clause of the *Te Deum:*

"Also the Holy Ghost, the Comforter."

But the day's tale of events was not yet complete. Paul, of course, had reached home some time before me; on my arrival, he was closeted with a stranger,—someone who had come from the train, Annie said. An hour passed ere I heard the door close behind the departing guest; then Paul came to find me with a face at once grave and glad, and a legal-looking document in his hand.

"The mystery is out," he began. "The clergyman who is just gone, Philip Gray, was a classmate of mine; he has recently returned from the south of France. Six weeks ago, a gentleman came to the hotel where he was staying,

who was on his way to Calais, whence he expected to sail for this country; and he had stopped over, as he said, to recruit his strength. But he was far gone with consumption, and his stop proved to be final. By dint of stern resolve, he had gotten thus far on his way; but he had now reached a point where the flesh refused farther obedience to the spirit. Learning that a compatriot, who was also a clergyman, was in the house, he sent for him and desired him to write down a statement that he wished to make; then a notary was called in, and it was signed and sworn to in his and Gray's presence, making it a legal deposition."

"And it was Ken Rixon," said I. "And is it possible that he was the guilty person, after all!"

"Don't go so fast," replied Paul. "It was Kenworth Rixon; you are right so far. As for his guilt, listen, and see what you make of that."

Opening the paper, and passing over some preliminary matter he read :—

"The mania for gambling had me fast in its clutches, and dragged me into scenes and companionship that I should once have abhorred. So it came about that I lost a large sum to a fellow who could imitate the manners of a gentleman, though he turned out to have been in the penitentiary for burglary. He pressed me pitilessly for payment, and finally threatened to go to my uncle if the debt were not speedily discharged. The fear of him was uppermost in my mind at the time of Rolf's sudden departure, so that I had little sympathy to spare for either my uncle's distress or my mother's suppressed satisfaction. It seemed to me that more urgent matters claimed my attention. But

my mother would keep me talking late that night, and when I left her I was full of fever and unrest; I could not go to bed; I could not remain quiet in my room; I determined to go out and try to walk off my uneasiness in the grounds.

"The night was cool for the season, and I took from a remote corner of my wardrobe a coat that I had not worn for months. As I flung it on, something hard and stiff struck against me; on examination, I was surprised to find the stiletto that I had given up for lost. It had slipped through a rent in the pocket, and slid down between the cloth and the lining to the bottom of the skirt. But I was too much pre-occupied to give the matter a thought; hastily thrusting it into another pocket, I went out into the night.

"I was near the entrance-gate when a figure came quickly out of the shadow, and I recognized the ex-convict. 'I've been hanging round for hours on the chance of seeing you,' said he; 'I want to know what you're going to do about that money you owe me; I'm too hard up to stand any more fooling. Just say what you'll do, and be done with it.' But when I named the sum that I could command, he only jeered at me. When I insisted that it was every dollar I had, he replied: 'Then I'll go to your uncle; I can make better terms with him.' I begged him to wait a little longer, and I would see what could be done, but he was in no mood for delay;—I learned afterward that he had excellent reasons for quitting Bellerue before morning. 'Your uncle got a good price for the bit of land that he sold yesterday, and I know it is still in the house,' he urged, finally; 'what hinders you from helping yourself to that? Don't you know where it is?'

"I did know, as he saw in my face; and he only sneered

when I indignantly protested that I was no thief. '*I* am, and a right bright one, too,' he answered with an oath; 'and if you're so squeamish about doing the job yourself, tell me how the land lays, and I'll do it for you.'

"It is needless to dwell on the discussion; I was morally weak and in his power; I knew the loss would cause my uncle only a temporary embarrassment, and it ended by my telling him that the money would probably be found in a certain drawer of my uncle's desk; and that one of the library windows, with a broken fastening, could easily be entered from a balcony to which it was not difficult to climb. Just as we were separating, he turned back, and said: 'Give me something to force the lock with; I didn't come prepared for this business, and I don't seem to have so much as a pen-knife with me.' I put my hand in my pocket, and felt the stiletto. 'Will this do?' I asked. He examined it, smiled and nodded. 'Be sure that you don't leave it behind; keep it and return it to me,' I enjoined, and left him.

"Going to my room, I flung myself on the bed, but I could not sleep. One moment, I was hot with shame; the next, an unreasoning dread of—I knew not what—made me shiver as with a chill. Suddenly, I heard a noise as of some heavy body falling. I held my breath, and my heart swelled almost to bursting; it seemed to me that the sound would rouse everyone in the house,—to be sure, my room was nearest. I waited as a criminal might wait for the axe to fall, but everything was silent; nothing stirred but my own throbbing pulses.

"Yet the sound had greatly excited and alarmed me; vainly I turned from side to side; I could not sleep; I could not rest; I could do nothing but wonder what had happened.

Perhaps the robber had stumbled and fallen; perhaps he had severely wounded himself with that stiletto; perhaps he was lying helplessly on the floor, filling the air with silent curses because I did not come to his aid. Finally, the situation became intolerable; I was forced to steal cautiously and noiselessly down to the library, in order to satisfy myself as to what had really taken place.

"I say nothing of the horror with which I saw my uncle lying dead on the floor, with the stiletto beside him. I do not know how long I stood there staring at the sight; I was too dazed to know what I was about. But after awhile, the instinct of self-preservation awoke within me; I saw that I must pull myself together and decide what was to be done to prevent any suspicion of my complicity, unless I was prepared to own it, which I certainly was not. By-and-by, I began to understand what had happened;—my uncle had surprised the thief at his work, very likely had seized him (for he was a Kenworth and knew not fear); in order to free himself, the man had been obliged to stab him with the weapon that he had in his hand; then, as he fell, fearing that the noise would rouse the house, he had dropped it and fled. Possibly, he had dropped it purposely, to divert suspicion from himself by casting it upon me!

"I picked up the stiletto shudderingly, but I dared not keep it in the house or in my possession; it was necessary to hide it in a safe place; and again I went out into the night, intending to fling it into the lake. But the sky was clear, the moon bright, and the distance considerable; moreover, one end of the lake was skirted by a public road, and some late traveller might see and recognize me. Then, as I passed the Manor Oak, it occurred to me that it contained a little-known hollow, and a cavity which Rolf had once

plumbed and averred to be several feet deep,—what better hiding-place was so near at hand? I committed the terrible witness of the crime to its keeping, and went back to my room, to wait for the morning with an intolerable anguish and dread. I could not but feel a certain attachment to my uncle, who had always been kind to me; and though I strove hard to convince myself that I was not really responsible for his death, but that a malign fate had wrested my acts to its own ends, conscience continually reminded me that if I had stood firm against temptation, he would still be alive.

"The morning came, and brought the discovery for which I had been bracing myself for hours, till I thought that I could meet it with composure. But what I had not foreseen was my mother's death. Rightly or wrongly, I believed that it was also my doing; I divined that her first agonized thought had been that I was the murderer, and that it had killed her.

"But I swear that it never once occurred to me that suspicion could fall on Rolf. I indignantly repudiated the idea when it was broached; and I never believed that the coroner's jury could find him guilty. Yet when that finding was announced, I did not—I could not—declare the truth. Rolf had disappeared; no one knew where he was nor when he would return; it was easy to decide that I need not denounce myself just yet. If ever circumstances should require it in order to shield him, I would do so. Bidding them cable me as soon as he was heard from, I came abroad to seek forgetfulness.

"I did not find it. I wandered restlessly from place to place, not beckoned from before, but goaded from behind; daily my burden grew heavier, and nothing on the face of

the whole earth gave me rest or pleasure. By-and-by my health began to fail; the hereditary disease of my father's family had fastened upon me. I consulted a physician, and was not sorry when he gave me to understand that it would be well to settle my earthly affairs speedily, for life had become unbearable.

"Then, for the first time, something like homesickness came over me. I resolved that I would see the old familiar places and faces once more, and die among them; just before death, I would declare the whole truth, so that when Rolf should come to his own again, he should not be molested.

"But, again fate, or circumstance, is too strong for me; death overtakes me before I reach my goal. No matter, this statement clears Rolf, and that is the main thing. Dana will be Lady of the Manor, and I am as glad of that as I can be of anything;—perhaps some day she will be able to think of me gently and pityingly, as one to whom circumstance was not kind, and who always did more evil than he meant.

"Now, I am ready for the end. I have nothing left to live for; and, what is worse, as I long ago parted with any faith in a future life, I have nothing left to die for.

"[*Signed*] KENWORTH ARMADALE RIXON."

Paul silently folded up the paper.

"Poor soul!" cried I, much moved by the dreary pathos of the last sentences.

"Poor, indeed!" he echoed, with a certain sad dryness. "A more abject, hopeless, remediless poverty than one like to contemplate!"

"At least, for this world," mused I. "And as for the next—"

"If almshouses are provided for spiritual paupers, he will be an unexceptionable candidate!"

"After all, circumstances *were* hard on him," I ventured to remark, after a moment.

"Circumstances are apt to be hard on him who simply drifts with the current, instead of making it serve to carry him to the haven whither he would go. Goodness is not a passive thing, it requires will and energy; whereas, sin may demand nothing more than a limp yielding to the first strong breeze that blows."

"At least," said I, after a considerable pause, "I am glad that the mystery of the Manor is explained at last, and also that Kenworth Rixon is not so guilty as that stiletto seemed to show. The only thing that I do not quite understand is why the Captain went after Mr. Wright."

"I can answer that question," replied Paul; "Wright told me about it himself. In looking over some ancient family records that fell into his hands as his mother's heir, Murray seemed to discover that the branch of the Ennadeen family from which Wright is descended did not get fair play under the administration of an old will; and, although there was no legal claim upon him, he took the very first convenient opportunity to look up his cousin and make restitution. Finding in him a man of uncommon shrewdness and extraordinary mechanical genius, it naturally occurred to him to see what he could do with the stiletto, which had steadily refused to give up its secret thus far, so that he feared it would have to be broken up. Whether by chance or skill, Wright solved the problem with magical quickness. It then dawned upon Murray that he was just

the man to aid him in his coming investigations at the Manor, and as Wright happened to be without pressing business on hand, his invitation was accepted."

"And Mr. Wright's testimony on the trial, was it quite true?"

"Quite, so far as it went; I will not say that there was no *suppressio veri.* For instance, the money that he said Murray had 'given' him was of course the restitution aforesaid. As to his being 'dead beat,' a recent cyclone having fairly wiped out the western town wherein his business was located, he could so describe himself, if he pleased; but it goes without saying that a man of his resources is practically independent of circumstances. Set him down in a desert, and he would soon discover some marketable quality in sand. And he knows how to manage men as well as matter;—while Acton fancied that he was manipulating him most skilfully, he was being twisted round his witness's fingers in a way that was simply convulsing to those in the secret, being artfully led to bring out every fact tending to show that Murray was Rolf in disguise, and not one to the contrary. To enable him to do it the better, the defence declined to summon him, which compelled the prosecution to do it, and to take the direct examination, which could only have been embarrassing to the former, while they could waive the cross-examination, which might have been so embarrassing in the hands of the latter.

"The truth is, Mr. Wright did his cousin excellent service all the way through. Nothing escapes his observation; he sees everything while seeming to see nothing, and has a power of putting this and that together which makes Marmot's work seem almost bungling in comparison. By some astute reasoning, he came several weeks ago to the

conclusion that Harold either had the stiletto or knew where it was; although Murray dared not credit it, on the principle that it was 'too good to be true.' It was he, too, who brought the will to light under which Ben will probably inherit; but for him it might have remained buried in the old secretary for a century."

"I almost wish that it had!" sighed I.

"Do you really think, then, that you know better than Providence does what is for Ben's good?"

"No; not when you put the matter in that light."

"It is the only light wherein we see the true relations of things," said he, with a smile.

XLIV.

FLOWERS UNDER THE SNOW.

The first light snows have fallen on Rolf's grave, but they never fail to find fresh flowers there over which to fling their soft white veil. If they are oftenest due to Dana's care, others share in the labor of love:—Honor offers many a beautiful, tear-bedewed bouquet to the memory of the youth who won such a warm corner in her warm heart; Captain Murray scatters the choicest of hot-house flowers; and Ben is seldom happier than when he can carry thither a few sweet blossoms to show that Rolf's image and influence are still fresh and fragrant in his heart and life. Every day gives stronger evidence that he will do no discredit to his hero,—nor to the Manor, if ever he becomes its owner, as he is likely to do, now that Kenworth Rixon is out of the question.

Ben is not in the least elated by the prospect; he would rather be simply an artist, making his way in the world by his own genius, unhampered by the duties and responsibilities that are the thorn-crown of a great estate. But Paul and Harold have taken him in hand, and made him understand that though wealth may come unsought, as a burden rather than an easy couch, it is none the less a trust, to be accepted and used accordingly.

No doubt time will accustom him to the situation,—I

fancy that few things sooner become familiar than possession!—yet I sympathize more perfectly with his present feeling than I care to acknowledge. I should like well to see him begin his career in a little by-studio, and work his way up to the higher levels of fame by his own talent and energy.

Yes, the snows have fallen, but Captain Murray seems in no haste to be gone. Almost daily he is seen on Main Street, strolling along with the air of a man who has plenty of time on his hands. Not a glance rests on him unkindly or indifferently now; he has made good his title to the warmest regard of Bellerue; nearly everyone is eager to exchange bows or shake hands; and his progress is almost as much of an ovation as Rolf's used to be, although in a different way. It is to a valued acquaintance, or perhaps a remote relative, that the present homage is rendered; it was to "our Rolf" that the old greeting of mingled affection and pride was so universally given. Captain Murray can never rival Rolf in popularity; yet in certain houses he is a frequent and welcome guest. If he visits Rolf's grave during the day, he is pretty sure to turn up at Judge Ellenwood's in the evening; sometimes it happens that he stops on his way to the cemetery and asks Nathalie to go with him; and whoso meets the pair will observe that the color on her cheek is like the heart of a wild rose. I am getting used to hear people remark, with a certain pleased surprise:—

"How pretty Nathalie Ellenwood is growing! I never thought it was in her to turn out to be such a beauty."

And someone who knows her well is sure to add:—"Ah, yes; but that is not the best of it, she is as good as she is pretty."

No one will be surprised, I think, when it transpires that the Captain, like many of his compatriots, is going to transplant an American flower to British soil. Nathalie will do no discredit to either her native or her adopted country; she has something better than her beauty,—the delicate tact, compounded of good sense and kindliness, which gives such gentle grace of adaptation to a new home and new friends. But she will leave an aching emptiness in many loving hearts, that not even ocean-scented letters, brim-full of happiness, can quite fill and heal.

Harold, too, often visits Rolf's grave, not with flowers, but the finest of ferns, palms, or evergreens, woven together with singularly original and artistic skill.

"I little thought to love Rolf so well," he said to me one bright day, when we stood there together; "I could easily cheat myself into the notion that we were bosom friends. Ah, that was a master-stroke of his—making me Ben's guardian; it shattered at a single blow the last survival of a barrier between our spirits. Do you think he understood what he was doing?"

"Do I think he did it as a deliberate stroke of policy?" returned I, smiling. "No; I do not. It was the instinctive reaching out of one true soul to another, the intuitive consciousness of a real, though latent, kinship and sympathy. I think that Rolf had the rare power of reading character as a few gifted people read books, seizing on the whole drift of a page at a glance. See how unerringly he chose his friends, —the Fairfaxes, the Clavricks, Captain Murray;—even in Ben he saw something more than the hopeless, mischievous *gamin* that most people set him down for. And as for his love, where is there anyone like Dana?"

I stopped and looked at him deprecatingly, but he did

not wince as I expected, and as he would have done once.

"That did not need much power of divination," he answered, smiling faintly; "her sweetness is patent to everyone. Yet I think there are also unfathomable depths of it below the surface, enough to satisfy a lifetime of acquaintance and study."

He sighed heavily.

I chose to recur to the previous subject. "And his cousin, how well Rolf understood him! 'Not so bad as that,' was his suggestive estimate."

"Ken was too small even to be great in wickedness," was the caustic reply.

Naturally, Harold has small sympathy for Kenworth Rixon. Weakness being no part of his character, he scorns it in others. We are apt to be most lenient to the faults wherein we see our natural faces as in a glass;—if, indeed, we are clear-sighted enough to recognize them as faults at all, and do not rather take them for misfortunes, due to inheritance, education, circumstance, fatality, in a word, to anything but ourselves.

Harold walked home with me, accepted an invitation to enter, and threw himself on the sofa in the careless fashion of a man whose thoughts are elsewhere. We talked of many things,—Ben's prospects, the growing promise of a Sunday school-room, the strong probability that another year would give the parish a vestry with a majority on the right side,—in short, we discovered many signs of clearing weather in the parish's sky, and predicted that Paul's future would be brightened by as much of sunshine as is consistent with earthly conditions. Yet ever and anon Harold failed to keep up the ball of conversation, and fell into

reverie. Or he carefully paved the way to some subject on which his inward gaze was fixed, and then shrank from entering upon it. By-and-by, growing weary of his halting indecision, I looked him full in the face, and asked, quietly :—

"What is it, Harold, my friend?"

His dark cheek flushed a little, but his eyes met mine frankly, and he answered at once:—

"It is just this, Milady. I cannot help it; the question will continually come into my mind whether there is any more hope for me. I do not mean this year, nor the next; I am willing to wait five years, or seven, or ten,—no time would seem too long if I could look for joy at the end. Tell me frankly, what do you think?"

I sat a good while in reflection before I dared to answer; even then, I could only say:—

"In truth, Harold, I do not know. I dare not bid you hope, and I am loth to bid you despair. But if ever such joy does come to you, it will be largely due to Rolf."

He looked at me questioningly.

"I am going to tell you something which perhaps I ought not," I went on, recklessly. "Not long ago, Dana was speaking of Rolf's wonderful unselfishness, and she quoted in proof a part of his last message to her. As nearly as I can recollect, it was this:—

"'Tell her, if ever love comes to her again, with power to enrich her life, to remember that her happiness is mine.'"

Harold's face showed how deeply he was touched; yet he only shook his head the more despondently.

"'What can the man do that cometh after the king?'" said he.

"At least," suggested I, "you are sure of her friendship from henceforth."

"And it is more to me than any other woman's love," he answered.

Months have passed since he asked me that question, and were he to ask it again to-day, my answer would still be: I do not know. It will be a long time yet, if ever, before Rolf's memory ceases to be an invincible rival, before time and growth and losses make room in Dana's heart for another love. Yet she is young and fair, and who dare say that the day will never come when a strong arm to lean upon may not have a potent attraction for her soft, sweet, clinging, womanly nature! Let those who believe in the everlastingness of human love take it for granted that she will always remain Rolf's maiden-widow; let those who have faith in the might of "love that hopes and endures and is patient" trust that, soon or late, Harold will win his bride.

The only thing whereof there is no question in my mind, is that he is worthy of her.

The little city of Bellerue still sits among her green hills, with the beautiful River flowing at her feet, and the Delectable Mountains smiling upon her from over the way; and still she is fair. And the tides of life ebb and flow in her; and the persons of this chronicle go up and down her streets or sleep well in her graves, because such people are found everywhere, always. But Paul prophesied better than he knew; we never dwelt in the rectory that was built for us; the lines of our life were quickly made to fall

in other places; and the recollections of those days become "as a dream when one awaketh," whereof it is hard to tell how much is memory and how much imagination, what is founded on fact and what is the airiest fantasy. As the years go by, Bellerue is irradiated more and more with "the light that never was on sea or land" because it is the sunshine of the heart; and our thoughts of her fall naturally into the Psalter's sweet phrases:—

"*Peace be within her walls, and plenteousness within her palaces!*"