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OF THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

VOL. II.

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A ROMANCE
of the
NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY
W. H. MALLOCK

AUTHOR OF 'THE NEW REPUBLIC' ETC.



'DEFECERUNT OCULI MEI IN SALUTARE TUUM'

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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BOOK III.

(continued.)



CHAPTER IV.

NOW,' said Vernon to Mrs. Crane, 'we will come in and have some tea together ; and you must give your own orders as to when you will have the carriage.'

Mrs. Crane was a woman who, as had once been said of her, could kiss with her eyes almost as unequivocally as with her lips. Several times during the afternoon she had already done this with the former ; and they had not many moments been left alone with the tea-things before she repeated the operation with the latter. She was lying back in

the depths of an easy chair, and seated on one of its arms, Vernon was bending over her.

‘If you were nice,’ she said presently, ‘you’d ask me to stop and dine with you. If the others wouldn’t wait for me, I don’t see why I should go hurrying after them.’

‘Very well,’ said Vernon, still smiling down at her.

She pulled a peacock’s feather from a vase beside her, and began to touch his face with it. As she continued looking at him, he felt he was becoming magnetised. His face was drawn down to hers, and once more he kissed her. ‘Naughty boy!’ she murmured, patting his cheek tenderly. Vernon now felt as if a net had been thrown over him—a net of the coarsest kind, and yet he could not escape from it. ‘Don’t you think you’re a naughty boy?’ she went on after a moment’s silence; and then contemplating him, she uttered his

Christian name. ‘Ralph,’ she said. ‘That’s what you’re called, isn’t it? Ralph—little Ralphie—is that what Miss Walters calls you?’

A shadow at this juncture flitted across the window. Vernon sprang from his seat, Mrs. Crane recovered herself like an expert, and her husband, a few seconds after, was ushered into the library. He was a small dissipated-looking man, and was apparently in very bad humour. ‘So here,’ he said to his wife, after a word or two for form’s sake to Vernon, ‘so here you are, are you? Why the deuce you must go off to those rocks is more than I can tell. We’ve returned this way, which we had not meant to have done; so you can come home with us after all, and your friends need not be at the trouble of sending you. It’s lucky for you, Mr. Vernon,’ he went on, with what was meant to be pleasantry, ‘that you’ve not got a wife.

They lead one a pretty dance, I can tell you.'

Mrs. Crane and her husband were gone. Vernon clasped his hands on his forehead ; he drew a deep sigh of relief ; and hurrying upstairs to his bedroom, washed his face in cold water.

' Oh that beast of a woman,' he exclaimed, ' and more beast I to talk to her ! '

The relief he felt, however, was only comparative. The reflections he was left with were composed of many disquietudes. His thoughts first went straying towards the Château St. John ; and he was restless with conjectures as to what was now passing there. For a moment he repented that he had refused Lady Walters' invitation ; but he was still aching with jealousy, and so this feeling was only momentary. Had he really gone, his mind might have been somewhat tranquillised. The Colonel's behaviour at dinner

was subdued, indeed almost sheepish ; and he left directly afterwards, by the earliest train available. As for Miss Walters, her ways had had a sad touching softness in them. She had done her best to harmonise the Colonel and Frederic Stanley ; and, finding the former quite unresponsive, had given most of her conversation to the latter.

The Colonel's departure, however, produced a strange effect on her. She all of a sudden became constrained with Stanley, instead of, what might have seemed natural, becoming more at home with him. She did not, it is true, relapse into reserve or silence ; on the contrary she talked on with a kind of nervous persistency, and seemed anxious to keep her aunt a party to the conversation. But her ease of manner had altogether quitted her, and was replaced by a liveliness that sometimes verged on flippancy. Stanley, though not on the outlook for any behaviour

of this kind, still could not fail to be slightly struck with it ; but it was not till later in the evening that he gave any serious thought to the matter. By-and-by, however, as her custom was, Lady Walters went to sleep by the tea-table ; and her niece, whose boudoir opened out of the drawing-room, took Stanley to inspect it and its contents. It was pretty enough, but as yet was in some confusion ; though even the confusion was not without signs of taste in it, especially when seen as now under a lamp with a shade of rose-colour. Some rich oriental stuffs had been thrown over ugly sofas ; some flowers and palms had been already arranged effectively ; there was an easel in one corner, with a picture of some sort resting on it, and every table was littered with books and bits of bric-a-brac. It was on the books that Stanley's attention centred. He was far too wise a man to be always or even often moralising, or to think he ad-

vanced his faith by referring to its claims perpetually. None the less, however, was it a part of his very life ; by a process he was often unconscious of, it coloured his view of everything ; and his zeal for souls, though many might see no trace of it, was still and silent, not from sleep but from watchfulness. When therefore on running over Miss Walters' books, he found volume after volume of the most pronounced sceptical literature, it was but natural in his case to revert to her altered manner, and, at least tentatively, to put two and two together.

Something of the truth, it seems, was divined by Miss Walters, for she said presently, ' I'm afraid, Fred, you won't much approve of my library. I suppose you think it is wrong to read Strauss and Renan, and books about géology and evolution.'

' There is hardly a book here,' said Stanley, ' that I have not read myself, and I don't

think that wrong in me. The wrong or right of a book depends on what the reader gets out of it, and out of modern science one may get good or evil, just according to the condition that one approaches it in.'

'Well,' said Miss Walters, 'don't let us talk religion, please, this evening; for you know quite well that we shall never agree about it. Tell me, if you're not above gossip, a little about Mr. Vernon. It was from him I first heard you were here, so I know he's a friend of yours; and as he's our next-door neighbour, it is only natural that I should be a little curious.'

'Did you never,' said Stanley, 'meet him before in London?'

'No,' she said, 'though of course I had vaguely heard of him. What I did hear I confess I did not much fancy; though there were always people, I think, who believed in his good qualities.'

‘Once,’ said Stanley, ‘I used to see a good deal of him ; but that was before things had changed with me. Since he has been here, I have often walked and talked with him ; but it was some time before he ever thought of calling on me ; and as, from his point of view, all the advantage to be gained was on my side, I did not like unasked to inflict my visits upon him. This last week, however, the ice has been broken ; and now we are good friends again. Poor fellow !—it makes me rather sad to hear of him, and I don’t wonder if he is looked at in many different lights.’

This conversation put the two on an easier footing. Miss Walters lost her flippancy and became soft, grave, and natural. Stanley went on to praise Vernon in many ways. ‘Naturally,’ he said, ‘he was a man of the finest feelings, and I think of the most generous aspirations. But there is something

wrong in him, I can't tell what. He was like a peach-tree : always blossoming, and being always nipped with frost. He can do a kind thing, which would make one love another man' (and he here told the story of the little crippled peasant-girl), 'but he does it as though he were anxious to disarm affection. Perhaps it is the craving for pleasure and the exactions of a brilliant vanity that have been eating his heart out silently. And yet even on this view he puzzles me. I have seen him in scenes of pleasure ; and yet pleasure has hardly pleased him. He has taken it as a man might who was looking for an angel, and was consorting meanwhile with the publicans.' Miss Walters was quite silent and Stanley resumed sadly, 'And yet the world—not only its sins but its vanities—has a power we little dream of. With quiet unobtrusive persistence, it can work miracles of evil on us. It was only to-day, as I listened to Vernon talking,

that I thought there was a remnant in him of what might once have made him a saint; and two lines of Dante flashed across my mind as I looked at him, "If vain thoughts had not been a petrifying fountain to your soul, and pleasure as Pyramus to the mulberry tree." What a true, what a perfect simile! I know nothing in any poetry that can equal it. Pyramus, do you remember, was killed at the foot of the mulberry tree, and it was his death-blood that stained the fruit red. It is pleasure, and dying pleasure, you see, that stains the whole fruit of life.'

Stanley had been looking towards Miss Walters, but not at her, while he was speaking. She, however, had had her eyes fixed on him, glazed with mute attention. When he ended she still said nothing, and her silence made him at length turn to her. She was pale as ashes, leaning back in her chair, and was now staring straight before her.

‘Is it not very hot?’ she gasped. ‘Would you mind opening the window a little wider.’

Stanley rose to do so, and when he came back to his place she had her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, and was in a flood of silent tears.

The subject of the above conversation—at that moment how was he employing himself? He was again seated at his writing-table, as he had been two nights previously; and the pages of his confession were lying open before him. He glanced at them, but with no look of sympathy. His mouth, which could smile so softly, had a hard, unpleasant curve in it; and, as he took up his pen negligently, there was a shadow of a sneer about his nostril. When he began to write, this expression deepened; nor was it out of keeping with the following deliberate sentences.

‘I am a brute—a dolt—a hypocrite. If I met my own double, how my gorge would rise at it! “For God’s sake,” I should say, “keep that filthy beast away from me.” And yet, upon my word, I am wiser than some of my betters, I think. Were I the Deity that I addressed the above whimperings to, I should—supposing my own existence—make short work of the whimperer. I should first kick, then kill him. Can I believe it? But two nights since I thought I would lay my mind bare to God! It seemed then to me a little rose-garden of delicate scented sorrows. I forgot, I suppose, that if the scented sorrows were there, there was an open sewer stagnant side-by-side of them. Ah, the shattered fabric of my whole moral existence! If a man can’t respect himself, there are but two escapes from torture—to die, or to respect nothing.

‘Wretched, wretched me, will no one

redeem or comfort me? No—no one; and indeed I do not deserve it. As I look round my heart there is nothing but unreality everywhere—selfish sham affection, a profanation of what might have once been highest in me; and this, when thwarted, turning—ugh!—to ill-temper and appetite. Good heavens—it was the other day only that I sat in judgment on Campbell when he told me what he should do in his misery: and here have I been doing the same thing; or if I haven't it is through no merit of mine—the same thing—but not with the same excuse for it. What my poor Campbell dreaded was a pain that only his own truth made possible. My pain was only a wretched, diseased petulance. And yet—am I right there? Oh, my Cynthia, have I no true feeling for you?’

Here he paused, and laid his pen down suddenly. The fact of having written her name sent a quick shivering thrill through

him, and her image came before him with a strange painful vividness—her image, and that of the Colonel close to her. Then all the events of the afternoon repeated themselves, in a series of sounds and pictures. Not only did her laugh come back to him, the clear colour of her cheek, and the curve of her vestal lips, but a number of trivial details also—the feather in her hat, her slightly soiled grey gloves, and her sleeve-links, shaped like a horse's curb and snaffle. The impression she made on him was, he came to see, a complex one. She was instinct, as when first he saw her, with an air of high refinement; but there was a something about her too that was not quite in keeping with this. What was it? He could not tell; or he could tell one thing only. It was connected with that side of her character which made her tolerate Colonel Stapleton. The remembrance of this man gave Vernon a sick

sensation—a man, so it seemed, with a wholly corrupted mind, utterly past the power of thinking a clean thought. This was Miss Walters' friend—her intimate chosen comrade. Vernon was not now jealous of him ; indeed such an emotion would be, he felt, ridiculous ; but there was something inexplicably tragic in that clear-eyed girl's familiarity with him ; there was something horrible in her want of horror of him. The eyes of the Vestal looking full into those of the Satyr, unknowing of the beast's nature ; his oily laugh mixing itself with the ripple of hers ; his coat-pocket in her very presence bulging with his hateful photographs—these images stung Vernon as they presented themselves, and filled his heart for Miss Walters with a strange passionate solicitude.

Again he had recourse to his pen and paper. He continued on the same sheet ; but it was not now to accuse himself.

‘Cynthia, my darling,’ it was with these words he began again, ‘I am sending a mute voice to you from my dwelling to yours. You have moved me—you have moved me : I feel your life upon mine, and a longing, intense to bitterness, is stirring me now for your sake. Is it love, my Cynthia ? It may be, but I can’t vouch for that. It seems to me like a wish on your behalf, far more than on my own. And yet I still would wish you in some way to open your heart to mine. I should like to have some possession in you. Keep one look in your eyes for me, and for me only ; and, ah, your lips !—shall I dare to breathe of them ? Whenever I think of you, I think of a “ garden enclosed,” my love, my dove, my sister, my undefiled. I think of dews, and roses, and of grey wet aloes, and of sleeping morning seas, and purple borders of cinerarias. Has the spirit of the morning passed into you ? or has your spirit passed

into the sights and smells of the morning ? Cynthia, you are also a mystery. I cannot yet understand you. We have all had our troubles. We have all done things to be repented of. Oh be true, my lovely one, to your own noblest self ; and may our holy God keep guard over you !’

Vernon cast his eye back again over this and his previous pages. The whole of his manuscript was written without break or date, and, so far as appearance went, might have passed for a coherent composition. As he looked he smiled—not with a sneer now, but with a sense of soft whimsical humour.

‘I begin,’ he said to himself, ‘with an address to God ; and I end it with a note to Miss Walters. I am like a girl I was once told of, who used to dose over her evening prayers ; and who caught herself murmuring as a conclusion to “Our Father,” “I am very sincerely yours, Kate Dixon.”’

The bitterness of the earlier evening had by this time passed away from him ; and he closed his eyes that night a little more in peace with himself ; although for many causes he was still sad and feverish.





CHAPTER V.

BY the following morning, whether through self-knowledge or self-deceit, he found he had settled with his conscience to pursue Miss Walters' acquaintance, and to become her friend in the closest degree possible. It was not therefore without some palpitation of the heart, that he received a letter brought to him, in her own hand-writing. It bore the date of the preceding night ; and he was still in bed when it reached him. Why was it sent thus early ? What could she have to say to him ? Would she decline his future acquaintance, and

express contempt and anger at him? His conscience was by this time smiting him, and reminding him of Mrs. Crane. His courage failed him; and it was some minutes before he broke the envelope.

‘You will be surprised at hearing from me,’ the letter began abruptly, ‘especially, I think, after the last few hours we spent together. You were angry with me, I do not know why. But let that pass; I am not going to reproach you with it. Reproach you! I can’t help laughing at having written that. What earthly right should I have to reproach you? And yet, I am going to do something even stranger. I am going to presume farther on our short, our very short acquaintance. I am going to break through every rule of common sense, of common etiquette, of common everything. I hope you will not think me a mad woman. I hope you will understand me. I hope—I believe you will.

I am acting on a perception sharper than common sense, which I do not think is deceiving me. And shall I tell you what makes me bold to do so? When I met you the other day in the garden, I hinted that I had had my sorrows. Now I tell you the fact plainly. I won't beat about the bush any longer; I am miserable. Sometimes my misery is good enough to keep its distance for a little; but before long it overtakes me; and I live in a helpless terror that it may add to itself. It has overtaken me now—yes now, within the last few days, since I have been here, since I have known you. To-night it has become unbearable; and I can't help writing to you. But why to you—you of all people? Oh, I can't explain; but I think you will understand why. You have had your sorrows also; and you have told me you have. You are looking for a something you have lost, and that you long to find

again. So far, you are a faint, faint image of me. A faint image only—I don't wrong you for a moment by thinking you more than that. But even that gives you sympathy; and what I want is a friend. Will you be a friend to me? Will you treat me as a woman who you know wants help and tenderness? I am utterly lonely; I shall die if I am not supported.

‘ And now, listen. I don't want to alarm you. I am not inviting you to a series of confessions, scenes, and hysterics. Don't ask me about my unhappiness; it would do you no good to hear about it; but be my friend. Talk to me as if you trusted me; try to talk to me as if you respected me, and believe me I long intensely to do and to be good. Try to know me—will you? You have not to come far to see me. I am not asking very much of you. Indeed, Mr. Vernon, why should I be mock-modest? As I write, I

am sitting opposite to a looking-glass : and that reminds me that many men would come much farther for my company. It is not a thought that I have any reason to be proud of. What I want to remind you of is, that if in the end you should not care to help me, you will at least have had a little amusement in finding that I am not worth helping.

‘One word more. When next we meet, don’t allude to this letter. Act if you will, upon what I have written ; and form your own conjectures from it ; but as for itself, let us consent not to mention it. So much depends, in the building up of a friendship, on what is said, and on what is not said. A thought understood, or written, may help to produce intimacy ; when the same thought uttered would produce only embarrassment, and perhaps estrangement. I think when you have read all this, you will see I am

using something more than a conventional form, when I sign myself, very sincerely yours,

‘CYNTHIA WALTERS.’

To this was added a postscript, that had been written the next morning. ‘I am very unwell. I have passed a wretched night : but unless I am unfit to appear, my aunt, I know, means to ask you to dine this evening. She is devoted to you. Don’t answer my letter, unless no invitation comes for you. If you dine with us, I can draw my own conclusions from you !’

As Vernon read this, a new life seemed breathed into him. The disappointments and the barren self-reproaches of yesterday were dispelled by a tumult of anticipations, and his whole being expanded. As for Mrs. Crane, she was quite forgotten. His late conduct with her ceased to give him any

uneasiness. The memory of it fell off him like a cloak, and seemed so little a part of himself, that he needed no repentance to get rid of it.

The day, however, proved a weary one ; till at last, about five o'clock, the invitation to dinner came. The long blank suspense had made his expectations keener, and by the time he came to dress his agitation was almost painful. His hands shook as he forced his shirt-studs into the button-holes ; and he murmured to himself as he was tying his white neck-tie, ' I feel for all the world as if I were just going to my dentist.'

Never till this evening had he entered the Château St. John. A long corridor led from the hall to the drawing-room ; and as he followed the servant over the noiseless carpet, he could almost have thought he trembled. Much to his relief, when the door was flung open, Lady Walters was alone down to re-

ceive him ; and he was thus able to recover himself before Miss Walters entered. The old lady was full of a pleasant if not a wise kindness. Age seemed to have mellowed out of her all the suspicions which give chaperons a practical value ; and Vernon saw that whatever intimacy he might contract with the niece, the aunt would accept it on trust as the fittest possible. Her niece, it was evident, was in her eyes nothing short of perfection. Vernon remarked on the taste with which the drawing-room had been arranged. ‘It is all Cynthia’s doing,’ said Lady Walters. On the chimney-piece were two delicate miniatures. ‘They,’ said Lady Walters, ‘were painted by Cynthia. They are her father and mother. That screen, too, is hers also, with the panel of lilacs and laburnums. But she has most of her things in her boudoir, which I have no doubt she will show you afterwards.’

‘Miss Walters,’ said Vernon, ‘was, I think, only in London for one season, and I was at that time out of England.’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Walters, ‘only for one season. But I hope she will go back next year. She is so much stronger now than she has been ; and it is a pity that a girl, so young and beautiful as she is, should see so little of the society of her own country. She hates society, so she says herself ; but I don’t think that such hates are the right thing at her age ; and whatever they may say, young people don’t really feel them.’

Just at this moment a door opened. There was a soft rustle of skirts, and then Miss Walters entered. Her appearance might well have justified her aunt’s last observation. It would have been hard to imagine a form that seemed more made for the world, or who could have added a tenderer charm to its most delicate pomps

and vanities. She was all in creamy white, with but two touches of colour upon her—a red rose-bud in her hair, and a red rose blown upon her bosom. Her whole toilette, as she softly advanced forwards, was like the art of a Greek sculptor, translated by a Parisian *modiste*; and with its double air at once of fashion and simplicity, it deepened the rapt expression of her dark regretful eyes.

All Vernon's embarrassment again rushed upon him at the sight of her; but it was not of long continuance. There are certain difficulties in which a woman is always a man's superior; and this was one of them. In Miss Walters' manner there was no trace of consciousness or of confusion. Her greeting was the perfection of calm high-bred gracefulness. Not by a glance even, or a gesture, which should be visible to him only, did she seek to allude to the smallest understanding

between them; and Vernon himself could hardly believe it possible that this was the same woman who had appealed to him so passionately only a few hours before. One good actor, however, sustains another. He felt instantly that he was in stronger hands than his own; and this girl who had been so lately asking for help, had already been first to give it. He was restored to ease by her almost in spite of himself. All his apprehensions were replaced by a delightful form of excitement: and he often thought, during the course of dinner, that he had never in his life felt so strong a stimulus to talk his best, whether about grave things or gay. In the presence of those two companions it seemed as though a new home were receiving him: nor was this charming sensation to be wondered at. He had fair reason to be certain of two most flattering facts, that the young lady admired, and that the old lady

was fond of him ; and he, in especial, delighted himself at every proof of the latter, because it seemed to reflect upon him a softened pleasure from the former. Thus, impatient though he was in general of any personal catechism, he bore with positive pleasure Lady Walters' numerous questions. Many of them would have been irritating from their mere generality, if they had not expressed an interest to which he attached a value, and if Miss Walters had not been present to make it worth his while to answer them. He was questioned about his tastes, his books, how he employed his time, and if he had ever been in any service, diplomatic or military ; and finally, if there were any pursuit to which he meant to give himself for the future.

‘When Goethe,’ said Vernon, ‘was about my age, he called it a solemn period. He was able by that time to take stock of his

powers and character ; and he renewed his resolves and deliberations as to what use he should put them. I am by way, here, of doing the same thing, and all my longings are leading me towards some kind of public life.'

Lady Walters smiled, and shook her head at him. 'Take my advice,' said she, 'and keep clear of that. Political ambition is as cruel a passion as gambling. It takes just as much out of your life, and adds just as little to its pleasures. A man with a good position like yours is far happier when he is content as he is. I should envy a country gentleman more than a prime minister.'

Vernon smiled softly, and turned his eyes to Miss Walters. 'The public life,' he said, 'that I am dreaming of, might perhaps have no connection with even the wish for office.'

Miss Walters answered with a look, which said, 'you will explain afterwards.'

For purpose of explanation there was certainly no lack of opportunity. In the course of the evening, as had happened before with Stanley, Miss Walters took her guest and showed him her own sitting-room ; whilst her aunt meanwhile closed her eyes peaceably. At the prospect of another *tête-a-tête*, Vernon's shyness was again returning ; but when he found himself alone with Miss Walters, he saw that his fears were groundless. So complete was the nerve and tact with which she managed the situation, that any awkward scene, or *éclaircissement*, was quite out of the question. It seemed as though she had given him a kind of mental chloroform ; and that she had, while he was under it, done in a day the work of weeks on him. He felt that between them there were now no formal barriers ; by some noiseless magic they had all been swept away ; and he could speak his mind to her with a calm but

entire confidence. He had no spasmodic wish to extort or to make confessions; but her presence seemed to act on his thoughts as the moon does on the sea it illuminates. They moved under her influence, and stirred with a new life in him; and he had the delicious fearless sense that when he spoke he should be understood by her.

‘See,’ she said, ‘here are all my books, and the signs of how I employ myself. That picture over there is of a nun praying. Some time or other I will let you see it by daylight. Frederic Stanley, I fear, looked rather askance at my library. It made him think that I was very wicked. It will make you think I am very *blue*. Which of the two faults do you think is the greatest shock to a man? However,’ she went on, ‘I have not done my reading out of *blueness*. I had my reasons for it.’

‘What reasons?’

‘I was brought up chiefly among Catholics, and I once had thoughts of joining the Church myself. Thoughts!—I was on the very point of plunging. I was on the brink of a precipice, and the sea of faith was under me. The longing to throw myself off was thrilling up my back bone, it seemed : but something held me back, and I regained my senses. Well—since then, I have been trying to see more clearly what an impartial world has got to say on the matter ; and I feel now that I have been saved from a mental suicide.’

‘Which is the best,’ said Vernon, with a half-serious smile, ‘to kill your own thoughts, or to be killed by the thoughts of others ? Will the Professor save you any more than the Pope ?’

‘You,’ she said abruptly, ‘don’t believe in the Pope, do you ?’

‘Once,’ Vernon answered, ‘I was engaged

to be married ; the marriage was broken off, and for this reason—I insisted that my children, if I had any, should be brought up Catholics.’

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I had heard that much about you ; and had I been the lady in question, I should have acted just the same. I could never—no matter how much I loved a man—I could never bind myself at the altar, that I could rear my children upon a lie. But that is a question,’ and she here smiled softly, ‘that a brother and sister can have no need to quarrel over.’

‘To me,’ said Vernon, ‘it is the only question of interest ; and I want you to tell me this. Have your books of science and history led you to anything better than Catholicism ?’

‘It is not a question of *better*, if by *better* you mean more comforting. If that were all, you would have found me in sackcloth long

ago. Could I only with my eyes open believe the Church 'true—were it on one side not so ridiculous—could we only discover some new proof of its authority——'

'That,' said Vernon, 'you may be quite sure we never shall : and if the Church on one side is ridiculous, so is every grave conception of life. If we cannot be persuaded by the proofs that are now before us, we should certainly not be even if one rose from the dead. It is we ourselves that must be changed, not proofs that must be multiplied. It is not the pole, but the needle, that needs to be re-magnetised. A fact, or a thought may in itself be single ; but its relations to men and women may be infinite.'

'Talk low,' said Miss Walters, 'for my aunt must be still asleep.' The doorway into the drawing-room was only closed by a *portière*. She rose, and pulled this aside for a moment. 'Yes,' she said, 'she is sleeping. She has

been very tired to-day. Go on, Mr. Vernon ; only speak softly.'

Vernon went to the window and opened it without noise. A breath of the night air came in, warm and scented, and the moon was shining with a clear, unclouded brilliance.

'This,' he said, 'is the same moon that all the world looks at. But what different thoughts it wakes nightly in a million hearts! And it is the same with scientific discoveries, and with thoughts and arguments. If you want another illustration, let us take our own personalities. You are one single soul, you are one single human character ; but are there two other souls to whom you have ever seemed the same ? Have you ever affected anyone as you affect me ?'

She had followed him to the window, and was standing close beside him. He had obeyed her injunction to the letter, and he certainly now spoke low enough. She had

hung her head, as though the better to listen to him, but she now raised it when he finished, and fixed her eyes upon his.

‘How do I affect you?’ she said in a voice that had sunk to a whisper. ‘So much depends upon that, that I have hardly courage to ask you.’

Vernon took her hand, he drew her towards himself, and slowly bent over her till his lips were approaching hers. For a moment or two she had remained passive, but she now gave a slight start away from him, though she did not withdraw her hand.

‘Remember,’ she exclaimed appealingly, ‘what I have already said to you. Nothing like *that* must ever come into our friendship.’

Vernon made no answer; and as if by some silent understanding the two walked out together into the moonlight. They were both of them emerging also into a new period of their existence.

BOOK IV.



CHAPTER I.

WHATEVER might be awaiting them in this new period, the portal by which they entered it was one of unearthly beauty. The gardens lay before them in mysterious light and shadow, and seemed to lure them onwards. Distinct out of the mist of foliage rose the black spires of cypresses, and here and there an almond-tree, like a fountain of pink moonlight: whilst beyond, with a dazzling sparkle, the waves shook dreamily.

The window opened on a flight of marble

steps. They paused for a few moments, and then went down together. Miss Walters' last injunction had been spoken with an appealing emphasis ; but to any outside observer the result would have been hardly obvious. Her hand was on Vernon's arm, and seemed to lean on it ; and they were for a long time silent as only lovers can be. But though they were silent, the night was not silent round them. The green frogs made a chorus of soft innumerable murmurs ; fountains gleamed and splashed half-hidden amongst the orange-trees ; the roses trembled in the balmy moving air ; the leaves of the eucalyptus whispered ; and through all these sounds continuously came a yet gentler sound of the sea.

The hour filled them as it has filled so many thousand others, with a sense of dreamy spiritual voluptuousness : and secret thoughts in both of them came floating up

out of their hiding-places, and gathered in soft impatience for the time when they should find utterance.

Miss Walters was the first to speak. 'You must tell me,' she began, 'about your public life, and the way you want to employ yourself. And you must tell me too,' she went on more tenderly—'you must tell me another thing, for I do not quite understand you. You believe in a God, don't you?—I think you do—and that it matters something whether we do right or wrong? Of course it matters to others, so far as our acts touch them. I know all about *organ and function*, which is the prig's duty to his neighbour. But I am not speaking of that. I mean as regards ourselves.'

'If I believe anything,' said Vernon, 'I believe that it does matter. If this poor human race of ours is worth a moment's unselfish care, it is worth it because we each of us

have a soul to be saved or lost. I have, and so have you.'

'Do you really believe that?' she said.

The question was put so earnestly that it a little embarrassed Vernon. 'You remember,' he answered, 'what I have said to you just now. One may know that a proof exists, and may yet fail to be touched by it. The soul may become demagnetised, and may cease to point to God; but one may know he is still somewhere, though one cannot tell where. That is my condition, and the condition I am struggling to escape from. I have come here as I told you, to arrange my plans for doing so. It is a hard, hard work,' he continued presently, 'this piecing together of a broken self again. I only see hope in one thing, and that, as I said at dinner, is public life.'

'And is your only hope then,' she said, 'in that kind of strong distraction? Do you

sh to forget your loss, not to retrieve
p,

'You think of public life,' he said, 'in the
ne way your aunt does. You heard her
vice at dinner to me : it was full of the old
spirit of *goodness*. Rest and contentment,
her moral was, are the truest springs of hap-
piness. But the time for that teaching is
gone, or is fast going ; even Frederic Stanley
feels this : and though the spiritual air is
growing each day darker about us, yet through
the disastrous twilight burns the shape of a
w duty—the duty to spend and to be
tnt for others. I call it new, but it is not.
only speaks in an ampler language. Look
me : I have wealth, and power, and I
k some talents. It is to others that I
these ; that is the sense that haunts me ;
the greater a man's power or place is, the
ter, in God's eyes, is the number of his
itors. If I ever find God again, it must

be with hands full of good deeds, not only clean of evil. Perhaps when I have something to bring him, he will again show his face to me. Such at least is my rather forlorn hope. It may turn out true, as I often used to say to myself, "He that doeth shall know of the doctrine."

'You speak of work in the world. What sort of work are you thinking of?'

'There was a time when I actually made a beginning of it; but since I put my hand to the plough, I have looked back again; and I am in a worse state now than ever.'

'You stood for Parliament and you were not elected. Yes, I had heard of that; but that was surely no fault of yours.'

'No, and besides, that was merely a piece of by-play. I should have liked to have been in Parliament, certainly; but my wishes to do good did not stand or fall with my active part in politics.'

‘Well,’ she said, ‘and have they been wishes only? Have you given the struggle up? Have you exchanged life in England for a dream by the Mediterranean?’

‘One of the oldest,’ he said, ‘of all old mysteries is the division between will and wish. I have still the wish to act, but at present I have lost the will: and though our work may be all cut out for us, we can’t do it if our arms are broken. I began my activity under a passing emotional stimulus; but that has now gone and has left me as weak as ever. For a life’s work, unless one’s own advancement is included in it, one needs some other motive than the strength of one’s own conscience. On a night like this, alone, and with you beside me, what dreams I might fill my soul with, of deeds done, and of hope and faith recovered; but to see one’s castle in a dream is one thing, and to build it with brick afterwards is quite another thing.’

Vernon felt on his arm Miss Walters' hand press heavier, and she looked at him with liquid eyes.

'Am I, then,' she said, 'any help to you in your dreaming?'

As she spoke they paused, and looked at the scene about them. They had just emerged from a walk of winding shadow, and found themselves suddenly face to face with the sea. It was close to them. They were on a long curved terrace, and the quiet ripples were lapping on its marble border. The sight for a moment held the two wanderers breathless, but presently they had to turn to a matter a little homelier. The air was warm, but Miss Walters shuddered slightly as a breath from the waves swept up to her. Vernon remarked it tenderly.

'It is nothing,' she said. 'However, just round that corner, in the boathouse, is a hat and a shawl of mine, which Jack Stapleton

left there. I think I will go and fetch them.'

They entered and found the things; and again they paused together. Into the dark gloom of the boathouse ran the waves in silver tendrils; the boat softly and slowly rocked with its freight of shadow. In the course of a few seconds they could distinguish the oars lying in it. The same thought seized both their minds simultaneously, and they exchanged a glance in silence. Vernon at last said, 'Shall I row you?' She gave no direct answer, and he had time to reflect a little. 'But what,' he added, 'would your aunt say? It must be getting late by this time.'

'Oh,' said Miss Walters, 'she never asks me questions. If I am not in the drawing-room, she goes to bed without enquiring for me; and she will think that, to avoid waking her, I sent you home through the gardens

not that she would in the least mind, if I were to stop out till midnight with you, except for my catching cold.'

'Come then,' said Vernon, and he drew the boat towards him; but she was still silent. He jumped in and began to arrange the cushions, and then in the shadow he held his hand out to her. At last by her movement he saw that she had consented. She gave him her hand, her form leant on his for a moment, and in a moment more they had shot out into the moonlight.

For the first five minutes or so Vernon pulled with vigour, and between themselves and the shore there was soon a good interval. Then his exertions lessened, the oars began to splash with a gentler dreamier cadence, and a consciousness of the situation dawned softly upon both of them. The imagination at times like these acquires stronger powers than ordinary; it transfigures places, and it does

what it will with distance. It seemed to these two that they had left the world behind them : they were solitary adventurers on some far enchanted ocean. There awoke in both of them a strange sense of exultation ; and at last Vernon murmured, ‘ Listen, and I will sing to you.’ He seemed to have scarcely spoken when the following song broke from him :—

Hollow and vast starred skies are o’er us,
Bare to their blue profoundest height ;
Waves and moonlight melt before us
Into the heart of the lonely night.

Row young oarsman, row young oarsman,
See how the diamonds drip from the oar ;
What of the shore and friends ? young oarsman,
Never row us again to shore.

See how shadow and silver mingle
Here on the wonderful wide bare sea,
And shall we sigh for the blinking ingle—
Sigh for the old known chamber—we ?

Row young oarsman far out yonder,
Into the crypt of the night we float ;
Fair faint moon-flames wash and wander,
Wash and wander about our boat.

Not a fetter is here to bind us,
Love and memory loose their spell !
Friends of the home we have left behind us,
Prisoners of content, farewell.

Row young oarsman, far out yonder,
Over the moonlight's breathing breast ;
Rest not, give us no pause to ponder,
All things we can endure but rest.

The song ended ; but it had broken the spell of silence. Miss Walters murmured some vague words of applause ; and then said abruptly, though in a low voice like music, ' I want you to tell me one thing. You made a new start in life, under the influence of some strong emotion. What emotion was that ? '

Vernon smiled slightly. ' It was emotion,' he answered, ' connected with my plan of marrying.'

She smiled also. ' That is surely an odd way of putting it. Was it falling in love, then, that nerved you to do your duty ? '

' Indirectly you may call it that,' said Vernon naively. ' I realised that to marry was

a very solemn step, and that it was the death-blow to everything that had hitherto made life enjoyable. It was as that I welcomed it. I would die through it into a new life. I resolved that thenceforward I would only live for duty. My personal interests would all be blighted ; and I would lay up interests for myself that should be more than personal. I looked on marriage as a sacrament not of joy or rest, but of sacrifice.'

'How strangely you talk,' she said, 'it is not like a human being. You might be some cold sea-creature floating on its own element. What, if these are your feelings, made you ever think of marrying?'

'Perhaps,' said Vernon, 'I have given a wrong account of myself. It is not every one that can write his own history truly : our hearts and memories are littered with false materials. Some people think—perhaps you are one of them—that a man, with a will to

do so, can of course confide to another his motives on any given occasion. But it is not so. There are actions we may account for in a dozen contradictory ways, and yet be doing our best, at each attempt, to be truthful. Try to catch on paper your own face in a looking-glass. Does the power to do that come to us for the wishing? It is as hard sometimes to describe your tastes or motives as to take a pencil and draw your own expression. Each is equally likely to elude your most painful touches. I perhaps made a wrong stroke just now. Let me rub it out, and see if I can't do better. Of course it was love that made me first think of marrying; but I don't think love acted well by me. He came like a porter, bearing a great pack of duties, which he left inside my door, and then he went away again.'

Miss Walters smiled at this whimsical simile. 'Then it was not true love,' she said,

‘ if it played you a trick like that. True love never goes away till you drive it.’

‘ No,’ said Vernon, ‘ I suppose it was not true love ; and yet at the time it must have seemed very like it. However, the whole affair proved a *fiasco* in all ways. When I gave up my frivolous interests, I wished to live for larger ones. My wife that was to have been wished me to live for her. She used often to say to me, “ Am I the chief thing in your life ? ” ’

‘ No doubt,’ said Miss Walters, ‘ she would have been ready to live for you.’

‘ Only too ready,’ said Vernon. ‘ But that was not what I asked of her. I wanted to find God, not to be made a fetish.’

‘ Still,’ said Miss Walters, ‘ you are talking like a merman. Would there have been no help to you in the sense of her near companionship ? ’

‘ If you mean by *her*,—the special person

I speak of, I doubt if there ever would. It is true that at one time I could honestly say *I love you* to her. But the love that I long for is but half expressed by *I love you*. One must be forced to add, *You comprehend me ; and you give a new life to my thoughts because I can speak them freely to you*. Or perhaps this would be more accurate—*Because you enable me thus to speak them, you are indirectly creating them.*

‘And have you never felt that?’ she said.

Vernon’s voice dropped low, and he looked with fixed eyes at her. ‘That,’ he said, ‘is what I feel with you. I could speak to you of my aims and hopes as I have never spoken to any woman before. My inmost thoughts, at present, are like dim spirits in prison. At your spell they would come forth and embody themselves. You would touch my lips, I should speak ; and there would be a new

world born in me. I feel your power now—here, as we are floating on together. Some of my thoughts you have set free already ; they can breathe, they have acquired shape, they may take a part in guiding me. Do I speak now like a merman ?—do I speak like a cold sea-creature ?’

Vernon was far from conscious of the directness of the declarations he was making ; but he was conscious certainly of the passion with which he made them. There was a tone in his voice which, had his words been merely about the weather, would have winged them like fire-tipped arrows to the woman they were addressed to. She would be unable, and he felt this, to miss their appealing earnestness. He looked at her as he spoke, to see the effect he made ; but her expression baffled him. Of one thing only he could be certain ; and that was, that he had not confused her. Then suddenly the thought flashed

across him that this was a woman who was used to be made love to. In an instant the air was peopled with hosts of phantom rivals, with whom she shared secrets that would be hid from him for ever. The hands of another man had lain clasped on hers; on her lips were the memories of another man's kisses; perhaps her heart was already in the grave of some dead lover. These imaginations fired him with a new longing for her. He would snatch her, he felt, from the arms and the lips of others; she should be his, and his only.

He drew his oars into the boat, and sat himself in the stern beside her. He was doubtful how she would take this, but he was reassured in a moment, for she moved a little to make room for him. Still she did not speak, she only softly looked at him.

‘Miss Walters,’ he said, ‘Cynthia—why

are you silent? Are you angry because I tell you how you have helped me?’

She gave a strange smile which seemed to have something of pity in it. ‘Once upon a time,’ she said, ‘perhaps I might have helped you; but I can never do so now. You have known me too late for that. And yet I am wrong. I can help you in one thing; I can tell you to beware of me. I say this for my sake, and for yours. I might so easily bring such untold evil on both of us.’

Vernon put his hand upon hers, and said in a whisper, ‘I am going to ask you one question.’ She turned her ear to him, and pressing her hand hard, almost painfully, he said, ‘Are you married to some one else?’

She drew back as if relieved, and shaking her head, murmured ‘No.’

‘Then,’ said Vernon, his voice once more getting stronger, ‘what harm can our nearer friendship bring us? Harm!—it can bring

only good.' His hand was still upon hers, and now in silence he drew her towards himself, and he could hear her heart beating. For a moment she yielded passively to him ; she was then again reluctant, holding her head averted, whilst her breath came quickly. Then again, and another change came over her. He felt her yield once more like a branch that breaks slowly. Her hand was on his shoulder, and his lips were on hers.

Whoever once had kissed them, he had made them his own now ; such was the thought that thrilled him. And yet in his caress there was no warm vehemence. It was passionate, but its passion was tempered by a gentle earnest reverence, and a sense of solicitude that he could not account for. She seemed to have lost herself far more wholly than he. It was she, however, who first found her voice again. She slowly drew back from him, as if she were waking up

from a dream, and looked at him with reproachful eyes.

‘Oh, why,’ she murmured, clasping her hands tightly, ‘why have you done this to me?’

‘Done what?’ he said. ‘Surely I have done no wrong to you. Is it doing a wrong to you if I can make you love me?’

‘If you could do that,’ she said, with a faint, unnatural laugh, ‘it would be yourself you were doing a wrong to. But’—and her voice softened—‘you have not done that; no, you have not done that.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Vernon in bewilderment; ‘and do you not love me then?’

He turned to her in expectation of her speaking, but she said nothing. She was looking straight before her with her eyes fixed on the distance, lost in some self-questioning. Then her lips quivered a little, and she shook her head slowly. That was her only answer,

and for a time there was complete silence between them. Presently, however, a sudden change came over her. A new smile lit her face up, like the gleam of a spring morning ; and with a soft expression of passionless, pure affection, ' Oh,' she said, ' but I do indeed wish you well. I do wish all that is best for you. God has given you many gifts ; I wish you not to squander them. I wish you strength and endurance, and a clear, unclouded faith, that you may act up to the brightest light that is in you. And if the thought will be any help to you that by doing yourself justice you are giving me pleasure, that help I may indeed venture to offer you. Come,' she went on, ' bend down to me once more. No—not your lips, but your forehead ; and I will kiss you once there, as a sister or as a mother might. The touch of my lips, like that, can do no wrong to you. And now—take your oars. It is late ; let us row back.'

The two said nothing more till they were again floating into the boat-house. Vernon's mind meanwhile was in a state of dim commotion. He had partly the sense of a delightful rest in loving ; partly a sense of hunger only half pacified. 'She must be more mine than as yet she is,' was one of the thoughts that shaped themselves ; and with many variations this kept on recurring to him. But below all there lurked another of a somewhat different character, which, only half-perceived, gave its special tone to the rest. This was, 'Let me love her never so well, our tie will still be slight enough. She has told me she could never unite her life to mine. I need have no fear that she will ever prepare a yoke for me. No, we will not unite ; we will meet on some neutral ground, in some lonely, sacred grove, far from the home of each of us. She shall be my spiritual mistress.'

He little thought how soon this mood was to change in him.

They walked back towards the Château, and the first pale glimpse of it keenly suggested parting.

Vernon paused in his walk, and turned to her. 'And is a sister's kiss,' he said, 'all you can ever give me?'

'All,' she said. 'You must ask for nothing more.' She moved a pace away, and stood still, confronting him. 'Do you see me,' she went on. 'Will you please to take a good look at me. My eyes are clear ; my lips and my cheeks look young enough. You perhaps think me a good woman. Well, shall I tell you the truth ? To make me fit to give what you are asking for, you would have first to cast seven devils out of me !'

Vernon was well accustomed to feminine self-reproaches. 'Hush,' he said ; 'it is foolish

to talk like that. We have all done wrong, and it may be right at times to acknowledge it. But exaggeration of that kind must be always morbid.'

'I do not exaggerate. I have already ruined one man's happiness, as you will perhaps realise some day, without my telling you. If you were to count upon my love, I should ruin your happiness also.'

'Nonsense!' said Vernon, with a quick but tender sharpness. 'Of course, for all I know, you may have behaved ill to some one, but you have not ruined your nature, you have not stained your heart, by it. I can see you better than you can. It is wrong, it is unreal, to talk of yourself as if you were a Mary Magdalene.'

'You are right,' she said, with a cold calmness that surprised him. 'You are right,' she repeated; and then hiding her face in her hands, 'I am worse,' she ex-

claimed, in a whisper choked with sobs, 'I am worse, far worse, than any Mary Magdalene.'

All kinds of conjectures as to her possible past history had floated through Vernon's mind. But to think of a thing as a possibility, does not always prepare us for hearing it at last as a fact; and he, as he heard, stood for a time petrified, feeling his temples grow deadly cold, and the skin on his forehead tighten. For a long time he could do no more than look at her—at that form pure as a snowdrop, drooping her head so near him, her hands still hiding her face.

At last he said in a low tone, 'Speak to me!' But she gave him no answer. Then softly and gently he tried to remove her hands. At that moment, however, a sound was heard from the house: it was the sound of a window closing.

'Come,' she said starting, 'this has lasted

long enough ; ' and she began to move quickly forwards, with her face still turned from him.

Lady Walters was already gone to bed, and a footman was busy putting out the lights in the drawing-room.

'Is the hall-lamp burning?' said Miss Walters. 'Mr. Vernon's greatcoat is there. The lamp is out? Then give me a candle, and I will open the door for him myself.'

She tried to hold the candle so that its light should not fall on her face, and she still refused to look at him; but when it came for her to unfasten the door, it was hard to avoid doing so.

'Don't make me look at you!' she said, as they stood together. 'How shall I ever be able to meet your eyes again? Don't you hate me? Don't you despise and loathe me? Tell me you do! Let me at last have justice done to me! I can't bear being thought

good, when I am worse than the worst of women.'

Vernon took the candle from her hand and set it down on the table. 'Look at me,' he said, 'and see if you think I hate you.'

There was a tone in his voice by which she seemed conquered; for with a helpless resignation she let him put his arm round her, and draw her towards himself. Then timidly she raised her face to him; it was like a poor, piteous child's; and he, with all the tenderness of a compassionate elder brother, stooped and kissed her.

Her eyes filled with tears, and she faintly faltered, 'Thank you.'

'God bless you!' he said. He pressed her hand and was gone.





CHAPTER II.

THE following morning Vernon sent a line to Miss Walters, to say that, unless she would not receive him, he would call at the Château in the course of the afternoon. The note in its wording was altogether common-place; and alleged as his excuse for coming his desire to see her picture. She wrote him no answer, and he appeared accordingly. The servant's manner at the door at once showed him he was expected, and with a beating heart he was ushered into her own sitting-room. There she

was, standing before her easel, calm and graceful. Again his fears of a painful meeting were dissipated. She had recovered all her self-control and luxurious air of worldliness ; whilst the pallor in her cheeks and her expression of languorous melancholy might have passed as the effects of a late ball, not of sorrow. Her hold over Vernon was increased by this new aspect of her ; the touch of her hand acquired a new charm for him. He stood with her by her easel, and they discussed her picture. The feeling and power displayed in it made a genuine impression on him, quite apart from any thought of the artist ; but connected with her it had a special and startling meaning. It was but a single figure, that of a kneeling nun ; who, despite her attitude, seemed less in prayer than in meditation. There was a crucifix on the wall above her ; a devotional book of some sort lay on the ground beside her ; and

tightly grasped in her hand was a species of small scourge.

Presently came a silence. She had moved a few steps away, and Vernon was still looking at the picture.

‘Well,’ she said at last; ‘and do you still think I am worth speaking to?’

He turned from the picture instantly, and went towards her. She had seated herself in a chair, and her face was bent downwards. He bent down over her, and, taking her face in both his hands, he made her look at him. ‘Do I *still* think so?’ he exclaimed. ‘I care a thousand times more for you than I should ever have done otherwise. I see your goodness and your truth a thousand times more clearly. Only you mustn’t talk of yourself again in the way that you did last night.’

He smiled a little, and she smiled in answer. Then she said sadly, ‘But it was quite a true way.’

He drew a low seat forward, and sat down beside her. 'Listen to me,' he said, 'my Cynthia, if you will let me call you that. What we all live by, what we all live down to, or live up to, is our own conception of what we ourselves are. If we subside into thinking that we are altogether lost and wicked, we are sure sooner or later to become what we think we are. To revive our goodness, we must realise that it is not dead. We must see it still in ourselves, and see that it is still breathing. But sometimes, if we trust to ourselves only, this becomes impossible. Our goodness gets so placed that we can no more see it, than you can see your own back hair in your looking-glass. What we should then do is to turn to another, and see our own reflection in the looking-glass of another's judgment of us. We may thus discover a truth we could never have taught ourselves. We may find that we are worthy of our own

reverence still, and that what is best and highest in us is not killed so easily as we had thought it was. Let me be the glass in which you will study your own condition. Learn in my reverence for you how pure and noble you are; and only in my sorrow for you that you may have ever shadowed your purity.'

She looked at Vernon with a curious, mixed expression. In her eyes was an earnest gratitude, but on her lips a faint smile of compassion. 'Even yet,' she said, 'I think you know very little about me.'

'Surely,' he said, 'I know all that I need know. I have no wish to trespass on your secrets, or to stir up memories that I wish to be laid to rest for ever. Believe me, I can see you more clearly than you see yourself. A woman may err and yet not ruin her nature, nor are those the holiest women who need no repentance. None in God's eyes have renounced what is good and pure, who still

even from far off long for it. Certainly you do that.'

'Yes,' she broke in, 'you are right there! Oh God, how I have longed and prayed for it! I don't suppose you could find a woman who had a clearer sight of what is good than I have: and yet no one can have shut herself out from it more hopelessly. You say those are not the holiest women that need no repentance. It may be so; I am not even sure of that. But, at all events, good women when they need repentance, repent. They do the one thing that I cannot do.'

'All can repent,' said Vernon, 'except those who have made peace with evil.'

'No; for we may love what we have no power to return to. Is not that what Judas did? I am not, I think, in any danger of hanging myself: it would not be a graceful death. But in my bed-room upstairs—this is perfectly true, what I tell you—I have a

bottle of laudanum ready, in case I should find any day that I was unable to endure myself. No doubt,' she went on, 'I could repent, if I were only my own mistress. But I am not. You see, that makes all the difference. I am the property, heart and soul, of another.'

A sick sensation came over Vernon. He looked at her in silence, with an expression of horrified inquiry. She, however, had still complete command of herself.

'We are each of us,' she continued, 'as we live on, building up within ourselves a second self, like the frightful monster in "Frankenstein," over whose actions we have no control, but for which we are still responsible. Out of my own past I have built up such a monster. It is my tyrant. It dogs me; it strides after me. Though I hate it, I cannot escape from it.'

Vernon listened with a quick sense of

relief. Her words did nothing now but increase his pleading earnestness. 'Hush, hush!' he said. 'You must, indeed, not speak like that. It is weak, wicked, foolish. Listen to one thing which will force you to see how wrong you are. Since you have known me, you have done an angel's work. You have breathed a new life into me. All my better self has gained strength again—and through your influence. Do you think a corrupt tree can bring forth good fruit?'

'I——,' she said, 'and have I been of help to you?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'and I only knew it last night—last night when I parted from you and found myself alone. Do you know what I did then? I prayed for you—upon my knees for a long time, and half the night as well, as I was lying wakeful. I have always been accustomed to say a word or two of prayer every morning, but these latterly have

been cold and brief. They have seemed only to keep up a sort of bowing acquaintance with a God that I could hardly speak to. But last night, when I had you to pray for, my words and my feelings rose as they have not done since my boyhood: and for the first time since then I felt that my prayers were answered.'

She raised his hand to her lips, and gently kissed it.

'I was awake,' he went on, 'at the dull gray daybreak. I saw

The casement slowly grow a glimmering square ;

and oh, my child of the morning, my whole soul went out to you. I have become a new man for your sake in one short evening.'

'Don't talk like that,' she exclaimed, 'or you will make my heart break ! Leave me to myself. You can do nothing, nothing for me.'

‘I can,’ he said, ‘and I mean to. I am not to be frightened off so easily, nor does what you say discourage me. You talk of your past, and you say that it is your master. It is so in some degree—such is the case with all of us. But the greater its power is, the more should that encourage you. For what is the past? Are not you every day, every moment, creating it? And if your bad deeds as they drift behind you become a monster, will not your good deeds and struggles turn behind you into a legion of angels? A bad past is like a snake, whose head is the present. Bruise the head, and the coils will no longer crush you. Just consider; by next year this year will be your past.’

‘What use,’ she said, ‘would be one year of good against so many years of bad?’

‘It will be the David,’ said Vernon, ‘that will kill the Goliath who pursues you.’

She shook her head, and at the same time

smiled faintly. 'Some animals,' she said, 'when they are caught in a trap, cannot be induced to leave it, even when the door is open. I am told you cannot get horses out of a burning stable. As you said yourself, one may have a wish to do the thing and yet be without the will.'

'You have roused my will,' said Vernon ; 'I will rouse yours. I will put my arms round you, and carry you off by force. We will have a moral elopement.'

'You talk of eloping ; but who can elope from self ? Will you ever give me strength to outrun my own memories ?'

'Yes,' he said ; 'that is the very thing I will do. Let me help you to form a new present, and whilst that is forming let us consent to bury the past. Then by-and-by, when we again go back to it, and roll the stone away from the door of the sepulchre, you will find no festering corpse, but only the

grave-clothes purified, and two white angels keeping watch over them.'

He spoke with a mixture of so much fire and tenderness, that she seemed at last conquered by it. Her face softened, her lips relaxed and trembled, and her eyes, wide open, began to fill with tears. His, too, moistened. Then slowly she bent forwards towards him. 'Come to me,' she said. 'Come nearer to me.'

He slipped from his low seat, and knelt close to her. They might have passed, so far as grouping went, for a mother with her child praying. Like a mother too, with utter frankness and innocence she gave him a single kiss, and passed her hand over his hair.

'Thank you,' she said; 'you are very good to me. I will struggle, and hope against hope.'

Vernon resumed his seat, and, the little scene over, they were both calm again.

'I shall not,' he said presently, 'be a very

hard taskmaster. You will let me walk and talk with you ; you will let me lend you books : and, if you are sad and desponding, you will let me raise your spirits. Let us try a quiet life together here, on these terms : and we will see what comes of it. If you want to tell me more about yourself, tell me. If not, I will never trouble you with my curiosity. And you too—you must do your part by me. I want help just as much as you do, and you, if you will, can give it me.’ He paused here, and there was a debate in him of some moments. There was something he was prompted to say by impulse, and withheld from saying by judgment. At last his eye fixed itself on her exquisite hand and wrist, as they lay before him on her dress of grey velvet.

‘ Tell me,’ he said, ‘ do you think that this would be possible ; do you think that you and I could ever make a life together ? ’

‘Don’t ask me now,’ she said. ‘How can I tell you what might happen some day?’

‘Some day! What—must I wait for *some day*?’ The feeling that had been a spark was now a flame already. ‘Cynthia—tell me, my loved one—have you no love for me now?’

She looked at him mournfully for a short time, and in silence. ‘Surely,’ she said at length, ‘you do not doubt my affection. I have said to you what I thought I should never have said to any human being—what I have not had courage as yet to say even to God. I would willingly think you had moved me to the deepest of all feelings for you. What may happen some day I cannot tell, but the special thing has not happened yet.’

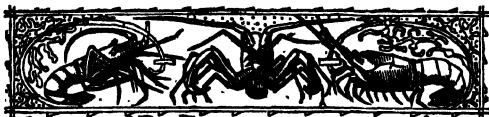
‘And yet,’ he pleaded, ‘you have kissed me as a lover might.’

‘If I have,’ she said, ‘the more shame for me. I dare give you nothing at present ap-

proaching what you mean by love. It would be unfit for you to accept it of me. Take my friendship, my gratitude, my affection. They may not be worth much, but they at least will not dishonour you.'

'Well,' he said; 'I can wait. I will bide my time, and till I see some new sign in you, I will never again trouble you with my importunity.'





CHAPTER III.

NOT many days had elapsed before Vernon wrote thus in his diary :—
‘I am like a pinnace that has slid out of a storm into a water of glassy calm. I have a sense of shelter around me, as of crags and gleaming woods.

Hic fessas non vincula naves
Ulla tenent : unco non alligat ancora morsu.

I have at last found rest in finding something for which to labour, and in the literal sense of the expression it is a labour of love. Love—that hackneyed word !—a week ago what a wretched sound it had for me ! and

now, as I hear or speak of it, it throbs with meaning like an organ-pipe. The choicest lamb of all the flock had lost itself. My wanderer, my white wanderer, I am carrying you home to the fold. My holy and precious burden, you little know what you have done for me. I had strayed from the fold myself; I had lost all count of its whereabouts; but now, with you in my arms, I am finding my way back again. It is for your sake only that God begins to look on me!’

Vernon smiled as he re-read this, and then continued writing. ‘During the present year I have made several expeditions with her aunt and her. I have been their guide, and have shown them some of the most striking places to be found within driving distance. We have seen old fortified villages, with their girdle of brown ramparts, rising on hilltops over their own grey olive-yards. We have explored for miles the windings of happy

valleys, walled on each side with hanging pine-woods, and paved with meadows of the intensest green imaginable, and we have wandered under willows and alders, by the margin of snow-fed rivers. She is growing happy, she is growing at peace with herself. I have watched her violet eyes, and her cheeks like rose-leaves, and I have seen how

Beauty born of murmuring sound
Has passed into her face.

More than this—I have been twice with her to the chapel in the cork-wood, for Vespers and Benediction, and I have seen her praying. I too—had I only been alone, my God, I could have prayed too. My care for her has opened my heart again, has revived my faith again. Surely I know, and see, and with my whole mind assent to this, that what we are and what we make ourselves is something of infinite and eternal moment. Vice and virtue are as heaven and hell asunder. Space, with

THE NINETEENTH CENT

its million stars, is as nothing to t
tween them : and Thou, my Judge
it must be that Thou art all in all
her heart ! Cleanse her from all iniquity !
Let me bring her back to Thee ! Mother of
Purity, she has knelt to Thee also. Oh
mother inviolate, consoler of them that
weep, refuge of sinners, pray for her !

‘ She is with me all the time I am writing.
I feel her in the air near me. She surrounds
me ; she is touching me whether her body
be there or no. I don’t know exactly how to
describe what has happened. I could almost
believe, not in the transmigration of souls,
but somehow in the transmigration of bodies ;
for, fanciful as the expression sounds, it seems
at times to me as if it were her blood that was
beating in my temples. A part of her body
seems to be mixed with mine. When I am
half asleep, if I put my hands to my face, it
seems to be her white hand caressing me ;

and sometimes I have started up in the night feeling almost certain that her lips were on mine, kissing me.'

Moods, motives, and affections are generally complex things. With Vernon in the present case they were so in a marked degree, as may be detected in the above extract. But any one who had judged him merely from what he thus wrote of himself, would have probably done him injustice. The passionate sentiments which he indulged himself in committing to paper, he committed to paper only. He kept his promise to Miss Walters, alike in letter and in spirit. He avoided all allusion, not only to the painful confession she had made to him, but also to his own feelings with regard to her. His one constant effort, in all his intercourse with her, was to direct her thoughts from anything that was personal to either of them, and to fix them on general questions and the wider interests of life. He

made her dwell on such subjects as poetry, scenery, and pictures. He discussed various characters with her in fiction and in history, and the various tastes, qualities, and occupations that make men's lives so many-coloured. He tried to fill her mind with a yet graver order of questions—the various social problems that are perplexing the modern mind, and to extend by this means her ideas of individual duty. He often spoke to her also of the chief axioms of religion, and the history of the Christian theologies ; but he was careful to approach them on their intellectual side only, and to make no appeal to her feelings. Despite, however, the impersonal nature of this conversation, it became inspired, under his management, with a delicate, earnest devotion that is often wanting to more direct love-making. It would be indeed wrong in this case to say he was making love at all. An impression of love, he doubtless did convey

to her, because, after its own fashion, his nature was then stirred with it ; but he did not do this intentionally. What he intended to express, and what was always present with him, was an anxious, tender solicitude that whatever was best and purest should be what she most admired. He became almost morbidly sensitive to anything that had the least taint in its beauty, and he tried by his presence to inspire her with a repulsion for it. He seemed as subtle and insidious in suggesting good thoughts to her as the devil is supposed to be in suggesting evil. As to evil, especially of the kind she was in danger from, it was his wish that she should not so much condemn as forget it. The wound would heal better, he thought, if its progress were not examined ; and every subject which they thought of or discussed together, he tried to administer to her as a sacrament of self-respect. He became too, in this way, a re-

velation to himself. Subtle moral instincts, which had been for years dormant, and as he thought dead, now woke to life again ; and he found himself once more regarding the world with the solemn earnestness of his boyhood.

Beneath the surface, however, there were certain things that troubled him. Now and again her manner jarred on him slightly, though it was some time before he could explain why to himself ; he had also two sources of a more defined uneasiness. One of these was the suspicion, which he could not be sure was false, that in speaking of religious questions he had assumed a stronger faith than he felt in order that her faith might gain strength from it. The other was the discovery, on his part, that she was singularly shrewd in her apprehension of religious difficulties—shrewder, indeed, than he conceived a woman had any right to be : and often, when she insisted on the grave nature of some of

these, he was tempted to borrow an answer from Dr. Johnson :—‘ That may be ; but I don’t see how you should know it.’ He several times smiled to catch himself feeling this ; and he at once translated his temper into the thought that really had excited it—‘ She has logic enough to see her way into an objection, but not logic enough to see her way out of it.’

These matters at times made his mind misgive him ; but they could not embitter, except for passing moments, the new life he was leading. Every morning when he awoke there was a day of duty before him, but it was duty allied with the keenest form of pleasure. His imagination wove for him a luxurious world of enchantment ; and his conscience looked down on it and said that it was very good. He seemed to himself like a rapt votary praying in a temple of roses, and he several times repeated an expression that

Campbell had used to him : ‘ I am leading a consecrated life.’

He was in this condition, whatever view may be taken of it, when he received one morning a letter from Campbell himself. This was the first news of him since the day on which he had set out for San Remo. That was not a fortnight ago ; but to Vernon it seemed years : and yet, so much meanwhile had his own affairs absorbed him, that he had not had time to wonder at Campbell’s silence.

‘ Well,’ thought Vernon, as he surveyed the envelope, ‘ his post-mark is San Remo. That, at least, is of happy augury.’ Here, however, he was not quite accurate, as the date of the letter showed him. He had misread the post-mark. It was Sorrento, not San Remo. The letter ran thus :—

‘ My dear Vernon,—I should have written long ago to you, could I have written with

any certainty. I have been waiting till I could do that: but I may as well wait no longer. I am not yet in Hell; still less am I in Paradise. You must think of me as one of those who are—not contented, but still hopeful in the flame. When I left you, I returned to Cannes to collect my luggage, and there, amongst my letters, I found the following:—"The plans of the person in whom you take an interest have changed since you were last told of them. She will not be at San Remo, and she is anxious that you should be told of this, as she has heard of your movements, and of course knows the cause of them. She is very anxious also about another thing, and one which I beg in advance you will not let discourage you. She is very anxious that at present you should not know where she is, and that at present you should not even try to see her. You could, no doubt, by taking some trouble,

discover her : but if you regard her wishes you will certainly not do so ; neither will you do so if you regard your own interests. My only fear is that this note may not reach you, before you are already on her traces. It is for your sake I am writing, even more than for hers. Were I not sure that by pressing your suit now you would be ensuring your own disappointment, I should not be so urgent that you should yield to her strange fancies. She is a curious girl. I don't in the least feel that I know her : but this I do know, that, however she regards you, it is at least not with indifference. You have moved her in some way, and I think very deeply : so it is well worth your while to have a little quiet patience." I need not, my dear Vernon, quote you any more of the letter. The rest was only to tell me how the writer had heard of my movements, and that she herself was leaving Florence for Sorrento. Well—what I

did was to go straight off to Sorrento myself, that I might learn more from my informant. I have not learnt much—at least not much that I can communicate. The details are all too slight to be conveyed by writing. But I have hope ; I believe that I have hope. Ah, Vernon, the love of a woman who knows no evil, almost makes evil incomprehensible to oneself ! Soft, tender, and innocent as my friend is, the thought of her is like a fire upon some of my past life. Tastes and habits, which I was long used to laugh over, now only fill me with indignant, burning shame. I don't quite know how long I shall stay here. I am awaiting more news. I mean to be patient, and not to attempt hurrying on things ; and if nothing is to be gained by my remaining here, I may possibly find myself in a week's time on my way back to England. In that case I will propose myself to you for a day or two ; or, if you should not be able to re-

ceive me, I could at all events get a bed at Stanley's *Pension*.'

This letter set Vernon thinking. But a few short days ago, the feeling expressed in it would have been a riddle to him ; and now, as though a sixth sense had been added to him, he saw it all clearly. 'And yet,' he reflected, 'between Campbell's case and my own what a difference!—more than a difference—what a contrast! He turns to another, and finds she raises him. I turn to another, and find I must raise her. Still,' he continued, 'here is one bright thought. Let me take it as a happy omen. If love has on Campbell the effect he says it has—the effect of a second cleansing baptism—*her* sins surely are fast being washed away. Her transgressions will vanish like a cloud, and like a thick cloud her sins. The shadow on her life will be as though it had never been. No—not so ; let me think this rather, that the fire of repent-

ance will make the gold of her purity still purer. And yet——' his train of thought seemed here to halt for a moment—' I do not yet know her thoroughly. I know she has much to repent of. I know she has much to purge away. It is not that knowledge that troubles me. I should love her far more could I bring her safely home again than I should have done if she had never wandered. What is it, then? Or is it nothing—a fancy merely? Is she not safe home already? I cannot tell. There is something in her still remote from me. There is some "untravelled region of her mind" which I cannot get to. When I am with her, when I am face to face with herself, I am conscious of it, I know not how. I feel always as if there were some third presence watching us—some ghost that will not reveal itself. Ah, Cynthia! will you never be quite open with me? Must your eyes still have glances that I cannot

tell the meaning of? Must my heart still ache, and still be anxious as I think of you?’

He was wandering in his garden when the above thoughts invaded him, with the leaves of Campbell's letter still fluttering in his hand. The uneasiness he felt was a surprise to him, dimming all his prospects like an unlooked-for driving mist, and he was trying to rouse his spirits by the morning air and sunshine. At this juncture a note was brought him from Miss Walters. ‘I have got,’ she wrote, ‘a small piece of news to tell you. It is not very tragic, but still I am sorry for it. My aunt and I are going away for a few days, to stay at San Remo with Mrs. Charles Crane. She's a connection of that slangy little woman that you seemed to find so amusing; but is not in the least like her. She is related to my aunt in some way, and is a very old and a very true friend of mine. She's somehow related, too, to poor

Jack Stapleton, whom I know you dislike so ; but that's neither here nor there. Well—it can't be helped. Go we must, and that either to-morrow or next day. I want to know if you will come over this morning, so that we may make the most of the little time that is left to us. You needn't go to the house ; but you will find me, at about eleven, by the little bay with the tunnel—the place where I caught you trespassing. Ah, those happy days that I have spent with you ! I hate to think that there is to be even so short a break in them ! Dear, dear friend—come to me. I do want you so.'

Vernon's anxieties, though somewhat vague in their nature, had had one effect upon him more intense than themselves. In proportion as they seemed to divide him from Miss Walters, they made his desire to be close to her more keen and more absorbing than ever : and the above note struck on his life like a flash of returning sunlight. The time

she had named for the meeting was but half-an-hour distant ; and there wanted still ten minutes to it when he found himself at the trysting-place. Early as he was, however, she was there before him. She was sitting on a rustic bench, with an open book on her lap ; but she seemed not to be reading, only watching the sea-water. The sight of her at once took him out of his solitary thoughts, and as if by magic set him down in a new world. The change was wonderful, and gave him an intoxicating sense as though he were being carried through the air rapidly to some untold distance. She rose to meet him with a bright, soft smile ; and every movement of her lips and figure charmed him with an insidious magic. She had on a new dress, of a delicate shade of brown, which fitted her to perfection. Her hat, her gloves, and the border of her pocket-handkerchief were all of the same colour. From the worldly point of view she had never looked more fascinating.

She read his admiration in his eyes, and she met his glance with a more than usual tenderness. She held his hand too, in greeting him, with a more lingering pressure.

‘I’m glad,’ she said presently, ‘that you like my frock. It’s my maid’s handiwork.’ And then turning her back on him, ‘Does it fit well? Tell me.’

The temptation was too much for Vernon. He put his hand on her shoulder, and let it slip down to her waist. She made no struggle; he felt her yield to his touch; and, still holding her, he led her back to the seat.

‘You are looking beautiful to-day,’ he murmured.

‘I’m glad of that,’ she said. ‘I should like your last impressions to be nice of me. Don’t you admire my rose too?’

It was in her button-hole, and Vernon stooped forward to smell it. As he was slowly drawing back, her breath stirred his hair. He raised his eyes, and his lips were

close to hers. Neither of them spoke : they each drew a breath sharply : in another instant the outer world was dark to them, and their whole universe was nothing but a single kiss.

It might have seemed natural, when they again woke to daylight, that Vernon should now renew in words his former declaration of affection. But for some secret cause he was not moved to do so. The occurrence just narrated had not put him in tune for it : and the only sign, when they spoke, of what had just passed between them, was not in the subject spoken about, but in the peculiar tone of their voices.

Vernon said, ‘ Had you been long waiting, when I came ? ’

‘ About twenty minutes. I was out earlier than I thought I should be. I brought a book with me and read a page, and since then I have been watching the water. The little bay is like a pool of crystal. Those

A great fire burned of smelling wood that sent
A fragrance of split cedar far and wide ;
And she meanwhile with lips of melody
Sate singing, and a golden shuttle plied !

Miss Walters here interrupted him, with a smile. ‘ I think,’ she said, ‘ I should have made a very good Greek nymph. I should have looked very pretty in the water. How delightful to have winged one’s way as Hermes did, and to have felt the sea-wind blowing over all one’s limbs, and to have been at peace with nature ! Calypso could yield herself to all the beauty round her. She had no feud with the gladness of the violet-coloured sea, and the sunshine, nor with her lawny uplands of green parsley and violets. Had I been a Calypso, I might have sheltered you as a Ulysses—for you know you are a wanderer—if you would not have been too proud to share a cave with me.’

Vernon glanced at her for a moment, and her look certainly was curiously in keeping

with her wishes. But his eyes did not dwell on her. He abruptly folded his arms, and subsided into complete silence. Presently his brows contracted ; his face assumed a look of distress and pain, and then again this softened into sadness. At last he turned to Miss Walters, and spoke very tenderly.

‘Cynthia,’ he began, ‘there are certain subjects about which we agreed to be silent for a time.’

She interrupted him. ‘I know there are,’ she said a little wearily ; ‘but don’t let us talk about them now.’ And as she said this she moved a little nearer to him.

The sense of her touch was like a dissolving charm. It might have been Calypso herself that was pressing so softly to his side—Calypso acclimatised to the air of the present century. He felt a thrill pass from her body to his, and a strong impulse was rising in him to fold her once more in his

arms. But impulse was this time thwarted, and will gained the victory.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ he said. ‘I am going to talk of nothing that will pain you ; but I want to ask you one simple question—perhaps two.’

His eyes, as he spoke, were full of a pure, grave earnestness, and, as she caught their expression, she gently drew back a little. He now put his hand out to her, but she would not take it. She only said, still speaking wearily, ‘Well—ask what you want to ask me.’

‘Do you remember,’ he began, ‘that when first I knew you, you told me you were unhappy. I want to ask if you are at all restored to happiness now?’

‘I have been very happy with you,’ she said, ‘very, very, very! I never thought when I came here that I should ever be so happy again. Then all the world was blank,

and dark, and hateful to me ; and now this place—these delicious gardens—I have grown to love them ; and it is you who have made me do so.'

When Vernon next spoke, he did so with more embarrassment. He even blushed a little, and his words came slowly. 'Tell me this too,' he said. 'Do not you find that the memories and the thoughts that troubled you have passed away like a dream? They have been no real part of your pure, high nature. You have had but to shake your wings, and you have soared away from them.'

'Whilst you are with me,' she said, 'such things never trouble me. You always give me a sense of safety and protection, as though your arms were round me. I can venture to take a happy interest in all that I once cared for ; and the shadows that used to threaten me are obliged to keep their distance. Even when I am alone at night they know that I

am going to meet you in the morning, and that now, when I wake up, I have something each day to look forward to. It is your doing—yes, yours—the whole of this.’

‘I am glad,’ he said hurriedly, ‘if I have been of any help to you ; but this new peace of mind surely does not depend upon me ? What I want to feel sure of is, that you have recovered your old trust in yourself, and that you are again reconciled with your best and purest nature.’

‘You have taught me,’ she said, ‘to love what is best and purest. I shall go on loving them if you are there to encourage me. I shall love them for your sake.’

‘What on earth,’ he said, ‘have I got to do with it ? You hardly, I think, understand my question. Good is good, no matter what I think about it ; and you had loved *it*, and hated its opposite, long before you had ever heard of my existence. Isn’t that so ?’

‘It is,’ she said. ‘By nature, I think, I was a very good person.’

‘Well then, what I want is that you should recover your own nature. It is this that I have asked of God, in my prayers for you. I wish you to love goodness for its own sake and for yours. Do you think virtue is virtue or purity is purity to us, if we value them only as the taste or the toy of another? What I want you to say to me is not “I love virtue because you love it;” but “I love you because you love virtue.”’

She hung her head for a moment as if lost in thought, and he watched for her answer. Presently there broke from her a little, soft murmur of petulance. ‘Why do you vex me?’ she said; ‘you are spoiling our last morning.’ And then raising her eyes she fixed them full upon him. As he met their gaze they seemed to expand and deepen, and soften second by second into a liquid tender-

ness. Her lips parted a little, a flush stole over her cheek, she opened her arms as if to call him to herself, and at last, in a breathless whisper, she said 'Come!' She saw that he did not stir, and she moved her head imperiously. 'Come,' she repeated, 'come closer. I want you here. There is something I wish to tell you.'

He did as she commanded; he moved quite close to her, and in another instant her fair arms were round him, pressing him to her breathing bosom. Her lips were close to his ear. 'My own one,' she said, 'I love you;' and still holding him, and almost in the same breath, 'you must pay me,' she said, 'for having told you that. Kiss me—kiss me on the mouth, and say that you love me too.'

In lovers' ejaculations there is considerable sameness probably. It may be enough to say that Vernon's response had all in it that could mark the most earnest feeling; and for

a few delightful moments her embrace brought perfect peace to him. He had no thought except that she was holding him.

‘My own one,’ she went on presently, ‘this has come at last ; but it has been growing up in me ever since I saw you. My first dislike of you at Monte Carlo was only the other side of attraction. I wanted you for myself—I’m sure it must have been that really, and I couldn’t bear to see you in unworthy company.’ At last her arms released him, and the two exchanged glances. ‘Tell me,’ she murmured, ‘are you happy now?’

‘Yes, and no,’ he said ; and there was then a long silence. ‘Cynthia, even yet you have not answered my question.’

‘What question?’ she said. ‘Do you mean if I love goodness? Oh, if I do not yet’ (and she pressed his hand to her lips), ‘you shall teach me to. You shall teach me everything. You shall do exactly what you

will with me. I will follow you like a dog. I will breathe your breath, I will think your thoughts, I will only live through you. Every thought of my mind, every passion of my body, shall be yours, and yours only. You shall fill my being so completely that there shall be no room in it left for evil.'

'My beloved,' said Vernon, 'you want a better guide than me.'

'You are quite good enough. You are all I should ever long for.'

'But suppose I died by the way : what then ? What I am anxious for is, that you should have a securer helper. I hope I do not vex you ; but let me talk on a little. What I want to be assured of is that, supposing I were to be taken from you—suppose I were die, for instance—you would still have the same incentive to be true to your highest nature.'

'If you were to die,' she said, 'I think I

should. I should wish to follow where you had gone before.'

'Well, put death out of the question. Suppose, simply, that somehow I did not care for you?'

'In that case I don't know what would happen. Why do you ask? Cannot you be content to let things be as they are? I love you, and you help me to love goodness; but without your help I don't know that I could be sure of myself. Why should I pretend what is not true? My memory is still full of the past; no magic can alter that; and if you went from me, and made a vacuum in my present, the past would probably rush in and fill it up.'

'Listen to me,' said Vernon, with a sudden coldness in his voice. 'Let us suppose I am very fond of the smell of eau-de-cologne. Do you think that if I had none left in my bottle, I should dip my pocket-

handkerchief in the next drain as a substitute ?’

‘I think you would be very silly if you did,’ she said, her voice growing cold also.

‘Then would you not be equally or even more silly, if, on losing a comrade in the search for the thing you loved, you were to try to console yourself by seeking the thing you hated ?’

‘Only the worst of it is, you see,’ she said with a slight laugh, ‘that the things that would console me are not things I hate. If it were so I should not be what I am. When drunkards have not got wine, they will drink stuff out of the next spirit-lamp.’

‘Cynthia,’ he exclaimed, with an intensity that was half anger, half earnestness, ‘I will not have you speak like this ; you do not mean it, and I cannot endure to hear you.’ Then his voice softened. ‘What is it—tell me—what makes you so distrust yourself ?’

Forgive me if I just now spoke a little roughly. It all comes from my intense care for you. My Cynthia, let me take your burden, if you will not be afraid to trust me. Surely it is not that ——.' Here he hesitated and looked in her eyes pleadingly. 'It is not—is it—that you love that other man still?'

She flushed scarlet, and she turned her face away from him. 'No,' she said; 'good God, no!'

'What, then, is it? You are a complete mystery to me. If only I knew the truth, I could be of so much more help to you.'

'Don't ask me,' she said. 'Why harp upon this one subject? Is there any use in trying to stir up all the dregs of my nature? In all conscience I have told you enough already. Do you know,' she went on with a smile of expiring tenderness, 'you must be, I think, a very innocent-minded person,

or you would have understood it pretty well by this time.'

'Is that so? And have you nothing more to tell me?'

She bit her lip, and said, in a low tone, 'Nothing.'

Vernon rose from his seat, and walked away for a space or two: then he came slowly back again, and stood confronting her. She did not look at, or seem to notice, him, but she began to trifle with a bunch of charms upon her watch-chain. When Vernon spoke he did so very quietly—with a quiet, indeed, that was not unlike apathy.

'Then in that case,' he said, 'I suppose I have done all I can do. I am sorry for it, for at first I was more hopeful. I thought at first I might have come to really know you; but it seems I have overrated one of two things—either my own power of understanding you, or your wish to be understood.

Still, even thus, I have one thing left to ask you. Give me credit for at least good intentions; and believe that I have never wished to vex or pain you needlessly. I have never asked you a question out of any idle curiosity, nor do I wish to do so now; and now that I have come to a part of your character to which you can give me no clue, there is nothing left for me but to cease troubling you to no purpose.'

There occurred at this moment an unforeseen interruption. A servant made his appearance through the arch of the little tunnel, and announced to Miss Walters that Colonel Stapleton was in the drawing-room.

'Tell him,' she said, 'that I am coming up immediately. I will be with him in a few minutes.'

She waited till the man was out of sight, and then she rose to go. 'Good morning, Mr. Vernon,' she said coldly as she swept

past him. 'I suppose I shall hardly see you again to-day—or, indeed, for some time to come—as we may possibly go to-morrow.'

She was already on the first step that led up to the gardens, when he had overtaken her and had grasped her hand. She turned round and faced him, with a stare of cold inquiry. 'Cynthia,' he said, to her, speaking between his teeth, 'you shall not go up and see that man.'

'And pray why shall I not? Colonel Stapleton is one of my oldest friends. Have the kindness, Mr. Vernon, to let my hand go.'

'Cynthia,' he said, still detaining her, 'for God's sake do not be angry with me.' He looked on her flower-soft cheeks and longed bitterly that she would again touch his with them. 'I only speak for your good; that is the one, one thing that I long for. I can't bear that your sacred lips should talk to a

man like that, who is everything—who is everything that a man should not be. His friendship can do you no good. It is no real friendship, and I hate to think of your enduring it.’

‘Nonsense!’ she said indignantly. ‘What harm do you suppose this man can do me?’ She stopped suddenly, and then with an angry flush—‘You don’t suppose,’ she said, ‘do you, that Colonel Stapleton could be the —, the —?’

‘Good God, no!’ Vernon broke in, interrupting her. ‘Little as it seems I know you, I know you too well for that.’

She seemed hardly to hear his words, but went on with a scornful laugh: ‘If I could have got any harm from his company, I should have got it, you may be sure, long ago. If my morals, that you seem so anxious about, are ever in danger again, it will be from some new friend, not from any old

one. The women that men make love to are those they have only just seen. I believe you, Mr. Vernon, can bear witness in that—not those they have been familiar with for seventeen years.’

‘You mistake me,’ he said; ‘I am not jealous of Colonel Stapleton in the common sense of the word: I am only jealous of him in the way that God might be. I love you so well that I am jealous of the very tone of your mind: and is there one thought that you really wish to cherish, in which this man could sympathise, or which you could so much as utter to him?’

Words could not have been spoken with more piteous earnestness; but she showed no sign of relenting. Rather, the more he pleaded, the more did she seem to harden.

‘Really, Mr. Vernon,’ she said, in the same unrelenting tone, ‘if one is to cut all one’s acquaintance who do not come up

to such a lofty standard as yours, one would be obliged to go into a convent. I have far too much need of indulgence myself not to extend some to others: and I believe that your own young lady friends are not above suspicion. Including myself, I have seen you amusing yourself with three of them, and I can't say that of these any one has been a model of virtue. Come,' she went on abruptly, 'do you not see I am waiting? I cannot wrench my hand from you, if you still persist in holding me; but I believe I am speaking to a gentleman, and once more I must ask you to let me go.'

Vernon released her without a word. 'Good morning,' she said with perfect coldness and self-possession, as she turned away from him. But he stood silent, and only stared at her; nor, as she disappeared, did he make any attempt to follow her.



CHAPTER IV.

VERNON returned to his house in a state verging on stupor. He found his late breakfast waiting for him, among the dishes of which was a mayonnaise of lobster ; and the very sight of it turned him sick. But though he could eat nothing, he made up for the want by drinking, and he got through the better part of a bottle of fine Chambertin. From drink he had recourse to tobacco, and from his cigarettes he again went back to his Burgundy. He had not the least wish to drown thought in intoxication. All he wanted was somehow

or other to sustain himself. He was battered, bruised, and crushed. He had not known a shock of this kind before, and he staggered under it in lost bewilderment. He ached through and through with a forlorn sense of desolation ; and he sometimes muttered to himself in the words of Lear :

Down thou climbing sorrow,
Hysterica passio, down !

The wine by-and-by began to have some effect upon him ; he went out of doors, in the hope of getting rid of this ; and he turned with unsteady steps towards the hotel gardens. He wandered about there for he knew not how long, abjectly, like a wounded animal, or like a scapegoat, and bearing a kindred burden. At last, however, his wretchedness took the shape of resolution, and, returning in-doors, he wrote the following note to Miss Walters :—

‘ Cynthia, I must see you. If you are

really resolved that we are to part for ever, you shall at least not part from me as you did this morning. Something more I must say to you, and say it before the day is over. Do not refuse to hear me. I beseech you give me an opportunity. You have never been out of my thoughts since that moment when you turned away from me. Your last words have been bruising me, they have been weighing me down ever since. I could have borne it better that you should have beaten me with a horsewhip, than that you should have spoken as you did then. I could almost think that till to-day I had never known sorrow. It is not for myself I am sorry; it is for you, for you only. If you are tired of me, send me away; but oh, do not send your own soul away from your own self. It seems to me now that I have no feeling left but one, and that one has swallowed all the others. It is an intense desire that you may

become true to yourself. As for me, think what you will of me. I am asking you for nothing on my own account. And yet I am wrong ; I am asking for one thing. Do not be angry with me ; if I have done anything to pain you , forgive me, and see me if for only one half-hour, and let me say what I have to say to you. Come to me to-night in the garden. Be at the seat we know of—will you? Write me one line to say yes or no. I shall have no peace till I get your answer.’

The servant who took the letter brought back to Vernon word that an answer would be sent in the course of an hour or two. At last it came. It was only a pencil scrawl. ‘Why,’ it ran, ‘should I be angry with you? Yes, come if you like. I will be there at ten this evening.’

The tone of this did not altogether reassure him, and when he reached the rendezvous, his heart was still aching. She was not yet there, and his spirits sank still lower. As

he waited the moments seemed like hours to him, and a clear presentiment shaped itself that she would never come at all. The night was soft and lovely, the fountains splashed and glimmered, all nature was full of the same luxurious languor that had so well accorded with the earlier stages of his passion. But now all was changed. His passion had passed from romance into hard reality. There was nothing now in it akin to the scent of flowers, or the splash of fountains, or the glimmer of moon-lit seas ; and the human anxieties that could be affected by things like these now seemed to him but silly toys and child's-play. He waited in weary impatience for he knew not how long, and still she did not come. At length through the quiet he heard a faint, far sound. It ceased for a few minutes, and then again he heard it. It was now sharper and more clear, and he recognised it as the sound of carriage-wheels. Presently

a gleam of white was visible, slowly gliding amongst the orange trees ; and in another moment Miss Walters was before him—softly perfumed—daintily dressed as ever.

‘ I thought,’ he exclaimed, ‘ that you were never coming ! I thought you were drifting altogether away from me !’

‘ I couldn’t come sooner,’ she said softly and calmly. ‘ Forgive me for having kept you waiting.’

Her tone and her expression were both ambiguous, as though two minds were being balanced in her, the one against the other.

‘ Has *he*, then, only just left you ?’ asked Vernon coldly.

‘ If by *he*,’ she said, ‘ you mean Colonel Stapleton, he has only just left us. I was obliged to wait till he was gone. I could hardly, you see, ask a guest to excuse me, on the ground of having an assignation in the garden.’

‘I am not vexed with you,’ said Vernon, ‘for having kept me waiting. I am only grateful to you for having come at all. Sit down by me, Cynthia, for a little, and let me talk to you.’

She folded her hands before her, and fixed her eyes on the ground. ‘I am listening,’ she said. ‘Please begin, will you?’

Vernon, however, was for a good while silent. He seemed to have some difficulty in finding either his words or voice. At last he began, speaking very low and slowly.

‘Do you know,’ he said, ‘why I have begged you to meet me here? I have had one reason, and one only. It is because I see into your character—see down into the inmost depths of it, and because I see how noble, and pure, and beautiful it really is. My Cynthia, you are akin to all that is best and holiest; and if my death could help you, I would very gladly die for you. Till

this morning I thought you were safe, and that I had no more cause for anxiety. You looked at peace ; and myself, I had seen you praying. I watched your eyes in the chapel, as they were fixed on the altar. I listened to your voice, as it said to God's mother, " Pray for me." My own one, I had hoped that all was right with you. But now, suddenly and without warning, you tell me I was quite deceived. You said very little to-day, but the little was like a ghastly flash of lightning. It revealed an unsuspected cavern that I have not explored—that I knew nothing at all about. I do not understand you yet. Cannot you bear to trust me ?

‘What more can I tell you ? You know too much already.’

‘Too much and yet too little.’ There was a long pause.

‘I am sorry,’ she said at last in a con-

strained voice, 'that I ever told you anything. It was very foolish of me.'

'For God's sake,' he 'exclaimed, 'don't say that! Surely I have been some help to you, even thus far. You are less unhappy now than you were when first I knew you.'

She gave a low, bitter laugh. 'Certainly,' she said, 'I could not possibly be more so.'

'You make it very hard for me,' said Vernon, 'to say what I wish to say; you perplex me so that I get almost bewildered as to my own meaning. Will you bear with me for a minute or two, and let me try to collect my thoughts? I am so miserable that I feel as if I were turning silly.' He was silent for some time, leaning his forehead on his hand. At last rousing himself, and with a wretched look in his eyes, 'Listen,' he said; 'I think I can speak now. You told me when first we met that you were very unhappy, and what I have been trying to do

has been to show you that you were not just to yourself. I have been trying to force you to see the good that I see in you. My Cynthia, I see it now ; for your soul's garden is still white with lilies which, with pure hands, you may place upon God's altar. It is this that I have been trying to show you. And I thought you had seen it too, just as one sees a thing when one wakes up from a dream, and finds one is not drowning, but is safe in bed. I thought that whatever wrong you may have done, had become to you "but a sleep and a forgetting ;" and that you were reunited to your own taintless nature. But now you tell me that you are still not sure of yourself, that the very thing you hate has still some mysterious hold upon you, and that it is I only—a chance support like myself—who keep you where you are. If I were taken from you, you might again be false to your true self, you say. And yet how ? Where is your danger ?

All other affection, so you tell me, is dead in you.'

'My meaning,' she said, looking straight before her, 'is, I think, simple. If a woman has some one to lean upon, who will fill her life with affection, and will not only show her what is right, but will give it a living meaning for her, then she will love the right and be true to it. Her human love will make all other love clear to her. But suppose she is left alone—with no one to guide her, or even to care whether she is guided! But why should I talk? You are not a woman. You can never know what to a woman affection is. You talk of losing affection as you might talk of putting down one's carriage, or getting rid of an extra footman; whereas in reality it is like tearing out half one's sinews. No——; if I were left alone, I could certainly not answer for myself. When a woman has once found

pleasure in a way she ought not, misery will always, if it comes to her, lay her bare to temptation. It is not a new affection by which such women are tempted. It is simply by the hunger for distraction.'

'But what I can't endure,' he said, 'is to think that what sullies you, can distract you even. It wouldn't distract you—at least not in the way you mean—to stand in the street and let a mob pelt and spit at you. Why should it distract you, then, to let a far worse insult be put upon you? Cannot you understand the state of mind I wish for you?'

'Perfectly,' she said; 'it is an extremely simple one: indeed, no one by nature could have had it more strongly than I had. But you could as easily give a tumbled plum its bloom back, as give that back to me. One may recover many things when one has lost them; but one will never recover that. If I live to be old enough I

may perhaps be childish ; but I shall never again be innocent.'

He rose from his seat, and began pacing slowly up and down before her. His abstraction and prolonged silence seemed to chill and harden her.

'Well,' she said, 'and do you understand me now? It was better to be honest with you, even if I have made you think me too depraved to be spoken to. I at least love truth, if I have no other virtue ; and I would far sooner that you did not care for me at all, than that you cared for me under false pretences.'

'You are not depraved,' said Vernon, 'and I do not think you are.'

'It is foolish of you,' she said, 'to eat your own words in that way ; nor is it the least comfort to me to hear you do it. If I were not a lady, I could describe my own character far better and more tersely than

you have done ; only, unfortunately, the only word I could use is not generally found in a well-bred lady's vocabulary.'

Vernon sat down by her and was about to begin speaking ; but she did not give him time.

'Come,' she said, 'am I looking well to-night ? Why don't you kiss me, and tell me how soft and pretty I am ? Isn't that what you say generally when you talk to girls like me ? By the way, I have found a word that will at least describe what I might have been, had circumstances only favoured me—an *hetaira*. If I had lived at Athens, I should have performed that part capitally. I was made for a life of pleasure, I think, if —, if —.' She stopped abruptly for a moment, and then broke out once more—'If only there were not something in me that had made all my pleasure a hell.'

Vernon had been listening to her hitherto

aghast, silent, and motionless, bût he caught at this last sentence, and eagerly bent forwards to her.

‘My Cynthia,’ he said, ‘my poor, unhappy loved one, do you think people really bad are unhappy in the way that you are? I am torn as I think of you by two conflicting impulses—to worship, and to pity you.’

The word *pity* stung her. ‘Thank you,’ she said, ‘but I have no wish to be pitied. I am as much too proud for your pity as I am too depraved for your worship.’

Her voice, as she said this, had an icy coldness ; but just at the last word or two it trembled ever so little, and in another moment her face was hidden in her hands, and she was sobbing violently.

‘Oh, can’t I do anything to stop this?’ she gasped. ‘If I can’t I shall die. I have been often told so by the doctors. My heart is all wrong, and I might die at any moment.

And yet why should I not? It would be the best thing for me. Then at last—then at last I might be at rest.'

Vernon took her hand, but it was cold and limp, and wet with tears that had fallen upon it. He spoke to her with the most tender kindness, and said all he could to comfort her.

'Oh, why,' she said, 'are you so hard upon me? Why do you send me away from you when I tell you I am only good for your sake? Oh, you have been cruel—you have been cruel to me. If you only knew, when a person is in my condition, how easy it is to wound them—how the least hard word can be like a dagger to them!'

'Indeed,' said Vernon, 'I did not mean to be hard on you. If I had hurt you by the way I have spoken, I'm sure I may say, like the schoolmaster when he whips the boy, "It hurt me most."'

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you might say that just like the schoolmaster, for it would not be true,’ and she looked up at him timidly with a little faint smile of humour. This to him was like a gleam of returning sunshine: and now her voice softened and she began to speak pleadingly. ‘Why,’ she went on, ‘if you really wish me to be good, won’t you let me begin with thinking that you are pleased with my goodness? Let me do that first; and I will learn afterwards to love goodness for its own sake.’

‘Yes—and for your own sake also; for the sake of your own self-reverence. I wish you to shun and to flinch from evil as you would from a wound, or from hot iron. And surely you do now, if you only knew yourself. Surely you wrong yourself by your own fears, don’t you? Tell me, my Cynthia, my love with the saint’s eyes, is what I say not true?’

She had ceased sobbing now, but her eyes were still damp with tears. As he said this she suddenly collected herself, and with a forced firmness in her voice, said, after a pause, 'No; it is not true.'

'Cynthia!'

'Don't speak in that tone—please don't. If you don't wish to kill me, please be kind and patient with me. Oh, God, how my heart is beating! Will you listen?' she went on, gasping. 'I have several things to tell you, which perhaps will make you think a little more kindly about me. Ever since I knew you—since that night when we drove home together, and you spoke to me about your having wandered from your true self—ever since then I have been struggling, battling with my evil. Then afterwards, when some impulse moved me to confess to you, I have tried yet more earnestly; and I have had temptations fawning upon me which

you little knew about—yes, during the last fortnight, since we have been at the Cap de Juan.'

'Temptations !' echoed Vernon.

'Yes,' she said ; 'but I can't tell you what or whence. I can only say they were from some one that you never saw or heard about. And oh, how I prayed, and prayed, and prayed, and received no answer ! You little thought what a poor creature there was, within a few hundred yards of you. Well ! what do you think has helped me ? My only hope and help has been the thought of you. Roman Catholics pray to dead saints. Why should I not get help of the same sort from a living friend ?'

'You shall !' exclaimed Vernon ; 'all help that is mine to give you. But there is one thing that I must once more beg of you. Don't go on yielding either in word or thought to these extravagant self-accusations.

Let me only whisper to you, Go, sin no more ; and, if I may venture to use the words, Neither do I condemn thee.'

She looked him in the face wistfully. 'What I say of myself is not at all extravagant. I know you think so ; and each time I see you do I feel that I am still deceiving you. You think, I believe, that there is some pretty story connected with me. You think no doubt that I am some sort of Juliet : not, I am sure, that poor Juliet had much to tax herself with. But I must shatter that bubble if I can. And yet how can I ? How can I begin ? Oh, me ! the wretchedness and the shame of it all !'

'My darling,' said Vernon, 'if to tell me is any relief, tell me. But if not, let things rest as they are. I can trust you without forcing your confidence.'

'That is the very thing,' she said. 'You trust me too much. It *will* relieve me to tell

the entire truth to you—that is, if I can only manage it. And don't be afraid I shall break down over it, and make a scene again. I am quite myself now, and my heart has done throbbing. Would you mind walking a little with me? I think I could talk better then.'

Her manner was perfectly calm now, yet without hardness. They rose at her last request, and walked along the path together. Vernon offered his arm to her, but she gently refused to take it. 'No,' she said, 'not now if you please. I mean you first to know better who it is you are talking to. Well—to begin with, you know this much already, that I am only received in society because the world knows nothing about me. I am there upon false pretences. That is hardly a pleasant sense to have always with one. However, we will let that pass. I have two things besides that to tell you: one is how I

have treated a certain man ; the other, how a certain man has treated me. I can tell the first story easiest, and I will begin with that. Rather more than a year ago I made a retreat with a friend of mine—it is the very Mrs. Crane we are going to visit at San Remo—at a quaint little watering place between Genoa and Spezzia. For me it was really a retreat—a retreat in the religious sense. I was very unhappy about myself, and I had been trying to take up with religion. Didn't I tell you that I very nearly became a Catholic ? Well—Mrs. Crane there made friends with a man, who having nothing better to do fell deeply in love with me. Love is hardly the word for it. He simply worshipped me. He thought me a saint. He told me that I had saved him from all kinds of evil courses.'

'Did you care for him ?' said Vernon.

'Yes ; I liked him. I had an intense re-

spect for him. I was trying to be good myself, and I respected all goodness then. But I did not behave well. I encouraged him. I made him think I cared more than I really did for him, and at last he asked me if I would marry him. I had dreaded for a day or two before that this might be coming. I told him No. I had really not the least love for him, and yet it was difficult to give him too hard a denial. I suppose I had become so demoralised that I couldn't bear losing an admirer. Well, in course of time he had to return to England, and I managed to put him off with some indefinite hope, which I believe he still indulges in and regards as his most sacred treasure. If ever a woman played with a human soul, I have played with his.'

She paused. 'You have shown me,' said Vernon, 'how right I was in what I have said to you. You look on your own misdeeds in far too gloomy a way. God knows that we

should be all of us more careful than we are in matters such as these. But there are many good women who might make much worse confessions.'

'Perhaps,' she said; 'but you must remember when I knew this man I fancied myself to be going through the most solemn religious experiences; and yet even then my wicked vanity was misleading me. However, it is not for its own sake that I tell you this incident. It is for an accidental reason, and one that is personal to yourself.'

'To me!'

'You,' she said hurriedly, 'to you. But we won't stop to talk about that now. I must get through the task I have set myself, and the worst is not over yet.' Here her voice failed her. She caught hold of Vernon's arm, and gulped down a spasmodic sob.

'Don't go on,' said Vernon, 'if it gives pain to you.'

‘I must,’ she said. ‘I will be brave and get it over. Only two months after this man had left me, I was staying at Nice, with some rather fast friends I had. One reason why I hate Monte Carlo so is because ——.’ Once more she stopped. Then tightening her hold on his arm, so as almost to give him pain, she put her lips to his ear, and spoke in a quick whisper. ‘I used often to go over there with a very bad person—a man. I used to gamble there—anything to drown thought. He used to bank with me, and I won a lot of money. I couldn’t touch it—not a penny of it. I gave it all away to charities. Do you understand what I have just said to you?’

‘I do,’ said Vernon sadly. ‘My poor, poor Cynthia!’ Presently he added, ‘I must beg your pardon for one thought, which did cross my mind this morning. I mean about Colonel Stapleton ; for I know, from what he

has told me, that at that time he was away in Palestine.'

'He was,' she said. 'I had not seen him till the other day for a long time.'

'Well——,' said Vernon, as if he expected her to continue.

'Haven't I told you all? I believe I don't quite know what I'm saying. I wish, for one reason, that you were a worse person. You would understand me so much more easily. What I have to tell you is——. God help me, I am sorry I began this. It is nothing that can be said exactly in so many words. It's a question rather of what I am, than of what I have done. Stay——,' she exclaimed. 'I think I know one way of enlightening you. Come with me into my sitting-room. The window is open. There will be nobody about by this time, and I will only keep you a moment.'

He followed her into the house in silence.

She went to a large despatch-box that stood on one of her tables by a lovely vase of roses, and she slowly opened it.

‘What I am going to show you,’ she said, ‘I have myself only glanced at; but the very fact that such a thing should be sent me will throw some light for you on the character of the sender, and the sort of character which I have let him impute to me. It comes from the person I told you of.’

She put into Vernon’s hands a small oblong something, which in the dim light he did not at first see clearly. ‘It is locked,’ she said. ‘I believe there is a key somewhere.’

But she was stopped in her search by two sounds behind her. The one was an exclamation from Vernon, the other was the fall on the floor of the object she had just given him. It lay there at his feet. It was the book of photographs that had been shown him by Colonel Stapleton.

There was a pause of some seconds, while the two stood staring at each other. At last Vernon said, in a low distinct voice, 'I have seen that book before. I know too who it has come from.'

Then his voice failed him. He sank back in his chair as if dizzy, and his eyes were fixed on the ceiling in a dull stony stare. As for her, she had sunk helplessly to the ground, pressing her face against the low cushions of a sofa. So far as human life went, the room was a ghastly silence. The only sounds heard were the tick of the small carriage-clock on the chimney-piece, the croaking of the frogs outside, and the faint splash of the fountains. Silence seemed to both the only thing possible. There was nothing in either mind that could lead to a wish to break it. Suddenly, however, there was the noise of a door slamming. The effect was as quick on Miss Walters as the kiss on the Sleeping Beauty. 'Quick,'

she said to Vernon. 'It is Braham coming—our butler. I know his footstep. Get into the garden till he's gone ; but don't go away, unless you mean quite to leave me.'

Vernon went as he was bidden. He could hear Miss Walters' voice as she was talking to the servant. He heard a door closing, and then she re-appeared at the window.

'I am coming out,' she said. 'Don't let us go back into the room again.' She spoke very solemnly, and there was a strange calm in her face. 'I shall not keep you long,' she said. 'I am come to say good-bye to you.'

Vernon answered nothing, he only stood and looked at her. 'Am I not fit,' she said at last, 'to have even a good-bye said to me?'

Again he gave no answer, so far as words went, but he drew a little nearer to her, and softly folded her in his arms. Her face as she looked at him was full of astonished

gratitude, but there was no trace of a smile on it ; it seemed even more sad than before.

‘ Oh,’ she murmured presently, ‘ you are very, very kind to me. You are being kind, as it were, to a person upon her death-bed ; for of course now it is all—all over between us.’

‘ All over ! ’ he echoed.

‘ You can never,’ she said, ‘ be my friend now you know me, especially now you have found out how I have been lying to you. But oh the shame of it all ! I was always so afraid you might guess it ; and I couldn’t bear to think you should know who the person was.’

He took her hand and placed her arm in his, and they moved away towards the shadow of some orange trees. She was quite passive ; she went exactly as he guided her : but she seemed reassured a little by all his tender treatment. Presently she

began again, and her voice sounded like a child's.

'I was so young,' she said, 'when he made me bad first; and at one time, long, long ago, he had been really good and nice to me. I don't know when he became different. I suppose when I got prettier. I had hardly left the school-room, I remember, when he began to lend me horrid French novels. I didn't understand them; that was one thing; at least not till a long time afterwards. I have had—' and she gave a little nervous laugh—'I have had, you see, to live up to my education.'

At last Vernon spoke. 'By-and-by,' he said, 'when I have gone away from you, I shall pray Almighty God to damn that man's soul for ever.'

'Hush! hush!' she said. 'It was my fault as well as his. I knew what was right then as well as I do now. But you see by

this time, don't you, that I can never again be what I once was? I know you are horrified at me ; but I can't help it.'

'I believe,' said Vernon, slowly and with effort, 'that some feelings of moral revulsion are pride in its hardest form. I might be pleased perhaps to think you had never sinned; but God would condemn that feeling, and I condemn it also. The shepherd loves the lost sheep when he finds it, even though it is lame and wounded by its wanderings ; and surely he knows best what is loveable. You will be a far finer character when you come to your soul's home again, than you would have been had your never left it.'

'*When !*' she repeated. 'Yes, you may well say that ; but that *when* is never. I can still see the gates of that very home you speak of, but I see them

With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.

There is no way back into Eden.'

‘I was foolish,’ said Vernon, ‘in the way I talked this morning. I don’t ask you any longer to become an innocent girl again. I ask you to become a holy woman instead ; that is far better. Amongst the highest saints in heaven, will be faces deepest scarred by the battle. You are right, very likely, that there is no way back into Eden ; but—I am not a great quoter of texts, yet I still remember this one : “We all die in Adam, but we may all live in Christ.”’

She looked at him with a piercing eagerness, and said, ‘Do you really believe that ?’

Vernon was embarrassed, as he had been once before already, by her direct questioning.

‘I believe it,’ he said slowly, ‘and you will help my unbelief.’

She dropped her eyes, reflecting. ‘Sit down,’ she said, ‘on that seat for a moment.’

It was strange how, through all her sorrows, the feminine fascination of her

command still continued. Vernon obeyed silently. No sooner had he done so, than softly, like a shadow, she sank on her knees before him. 'If you will not mind hearing me, I am going to say a prayer,' she said. With a movement of kindness that was then almost mechanical, he laid his hand upon her shoulder; her hands were folded before her face. Vernon was glad that she was not watching him. He felt that his thoughts were wandering far from hers, and that his face, rigid and melancholy, would at once have betrayed the fact. Presently a low sound broke from her, and he caught the familiar accents, as of a little child's 'Our Father.' He meanwhile, in a bitter and blank wonder, let his eyes stare at the stars and the palm-branches, as he thought, 'Does prayer mean anything?'

That night he slept a heavy, dreamless sleep. He had not yet had time to settle either

into hope or misery ; and his last memory as he sank to sleep was simply one of Miss Walters' parting words : ' Will you see me to-morrow morning ? If we go to San Remo that day, it will not be till the afternoon at any rate.'





CHAPTER V.

THEIR meeting next day began with a low-toned quiet, that came of intense exhaustion. The first things said referred to the Walters' movements, and Vernon learned that they were actually going, in the course of the next few hours.

‘For one reason,’ she said, ‘I am rather glad. There are so many things I can write far more clearly than I could say them.’

Vernon meanwhile had had time to be struck with one thing ; and this was a curious

change in the style of Miss Walters' dress. In place of her usual dainty toilette, what she wore now might have been almost called dowdy, but for the unconscious grace which her figure and bearing gave it.

'I never saw you,' he said, 'in that frock before.'

She smiled faintly. 'Thereby hangs a tale,' she said. 'I used to wear this dress when your friend Mr. Campbell knew me.'

'Campbell!' exclaimed Vernon. 'Do you mean Alic Campbell?'

'Didn't I tell you?' she said. 'I meant to have done so; but I was so confused last night.'

'Are you, then, the person that has changed his whole life for him? Good God! why, but a fortnight back he was here in this very place, and he was telling me all about you; only he never said your name, neither did I mention yours. He was with

me only a night, and then went on his way, little dreaming he had been so near you. Do you know where he was going? To a friend of yours, that he might hear news of you.'

Miss Walters gave a long sigh of relief. 'What an escape!' she said. 'I knew he was coming abroad to hunt for me; but I got my friend, Mrs. Crane, to contrive me some respite. He has been at Sorrento, I know, with her, talking night and day about me. Perhaps, now, you wonder less why I reproached myself.'

'He thinks you a saint, poor fellow; and has been trying all he can to become worthy of you.'

'I know he thinks me a saint,' said Miss Walters; 'and that was what I could not bear. It is more crushing to be thought better than it is to be thought worse than you are. Yet I should not be surprised at

Alic Campbell's misjudging me. He only thought I was what at the time I was really trying to be. I seemed to him to be a very simple person. Yes—this is the dress he knew me in : I think almost the only dress. I really did hate the world just then ; and I tried in every way to mortify my vanity. I wore the same dress this morning, as a sign of the same spirit. I couldn't bear to put anything on that should make my wicked body seem beautiful.'

Vernon answered her in an oddly absent manner : 'And has the spirit of that time come back to you ?'

'Do not you know it has ?' she said vehemently ; 'and if you will only help me it shall never leave me again. Oh, please be kind to me, and let me lean on you for a little while longer, and don't refuse me your support, because I tell you I can't do without it. It's quite true—I shall go straight to the

dogs without you.' But Vernon gave no answer : he was simply staring into vacancy. 'What is it?' she asked, half frightened. 'Is anything the matter with you?'

Then he fixed his eyes on her. As he did so she seemed to divine his meaning, and her lip quivered with a sort of expectant terror.

'You told me,' he said, 'about your unhappy time at Monaco ; and at that time Colonel Stapleton was in the Holy Land.'

He spoke very slowly, and her cheeks turned from pale to scarlet. With a sudden effort she regained command of herself ; the flush died from her cheeks, and she said to him in a sad clear voice, 'Do you think such affection as Colonel Stapleton gives a woman is of a kind that is likely to keep her faithful during his absence?'

'Cynthia, my dear, Cynthia!' cried a voice in the adjoining drawing-room, 'is that you? and are you talking to Mr. Vernon? Ask

him to stay and have breakfast with us. It is ordered at twelve o'clock.'

'It is my aunt,' exclaimed Miss Walters. 'Yes, Aunt Louisa, we will be with you in another moment. Come'—and she turned to Vernon—'our conversation is over now; and now—at once—I can speak the utter, utter truth to you. You have got now the lowest dregs of my cask.'

'Must we go yet?' Vernon whispered. 'Only one word more with you?'

'No,' she said. '*I* must go, even if *you* need not. It is twelve already. Come, will you have breakfast with us?'

She was about to push the curtains aside, and go into the drawing-room, when Vernon caught her by the arm, and forcibly drew her near him. 'God bless you!' he murmured. 'God guard and save you!' And, instead of kissing her, he made a hasty sign of the cross upon her.



CHAPTER VI.

THAT afternoon, left to his own thoughts, he did what he had not done for a fortnight. He called upon Frederic Stanley. He found him in his little bare sitting-room, apparently deep in thought at a table strewn with papers ; but Vernon's entrance brought a pleasant smile to his face.

‘It is a long time,’ began Vernon, ‘since last I came to see you.’

Stanley detected Vernon's feeling, and adroitly disclaimed the apology. ‘Had I more room for visitors,’ he said, ‘I would

have asked you to come before now. I fear you will think that I affect to be very inaccessible.'

He spoke in this way out of a quick sense of delicacy. The emotion betrayed by Miss Walters, when he dined at the Château St. John, he had set down to a feeling on her part for Vernon ; and though this particular conjecture was wrong, it had led him more or less to the truth. He had gathered that between the two there had arisen some special intimacy, which he hoped might result in good ; and it was little surprise to him that he was himself lost sight of. What did surprise him most, however, was the dejection of Vernon's aspect, which was but ill concealed by his constant efforts at talking. Indeed, at last he ceased to attempt concealment.

'Stanley,' he said, 'the last time I was here—the day I came with Campbell—I asked a favour of you. I wonder if you would now

repeat it. Will you come and dine with me this evening, and name your own hour? I am out of spirits for many reasons, and to give me your company would be an act of Christian charity.'

'You look worn out,' said Stanley. 'You have had, I trust, nothing much to trouble you. I will certainly come to dinner. Shall we say six thirty?'

The rest of that afternoon was to Vernon a vigil of misery. The painful excitement of the last two days was ended, and he now for the first time grew conscious of the effect those days had had on him. It was as though he had been bruised all over in an accident, and the bruises one by one were becoming distinct tortures. Every movement of thought or memory made him feel what his condition was. Several times, as he dwelt upon Miss Walters, tears too quick for repression filled his eyes and fell from them. In another

moment, as he still dwelt upon her, sorrow gave place to loathing ; and loathing in its turn to intense attraction. At one time it was, 'Can I ever touch her again ?' at another, 'Why did I not make her my mistress ?' And then again sorrow obtained the mastery. The *hysterica passio* had its own way with a vengeance ; tears blinded him, and he let them fall helplessly.

The sum of his sorrows, however, did not end here. He had the thought of Campbell also to prey upon him—Campbell, the friend whom he had supplanted, or towards whom at least he had played a supplanter's part. But this sorrow was of a somewhat different order. It did, it is true, but add to and complicate his wretchedness ; but it braced, it did not unnerve, him. It demanded his judgment even more than it roused his feelings. Finally, there was an image that did both equally. It was the image of Colonel Staple-

ton. When he had run the round of his other wretched reflections, he found fierce relief in his hatred of this man. At first he was busied with various schemes for fighting him ; but, considering the pretext, this did not seem possible. He would be blasting a reputation, most likely, in the very act of avenging it. Nothing was left him, at any rate for the time being, but to fan his anger by the most elaborate expressions of it. 'May he die slowly, and may the Spirit of God curse him ! May he cry for eternity for a single drop of water, and may none be given him ! May my own death be sweetened by the sound of his shrieks in Hell !' Such were a few of the ejaculations in which his anger embodied itself ; then anger in its turn would again collapse into sorrow. 'My angel, my angel,' he would say, 'what has this devil done to you !' And the procession of tortured thoughts would begin once more where it started from.

Such excitement, however, brings its own relief, and by the time Stanley came Vernon was wearied into a sort of quietude. But though the waves had ceased to lash themselves, there was only night over them, and with their spent force they were still murmuring disconsolately. 'The meaning of life is still blind as ever to me,' was the thought that was now filling him. 'God will not answer; all the heavens are silent. In the infinite hush of space is but one solitary sound—the tides of human history, as, without any purport, they moan like a homeless sea.'¹

Vernon did not season his dinner with this forlorn philosophy; but its results were visible in his sad and spiritless conversation, which was relieved only by an occasional show of irritation at the mention of two subjects. These were none other than Campbell

¹ 'The moanings of the homeless sea.'—TENNYSON.

and Miss Walters. Stanley, as was not unnatural, spoke often about them both—of Miss Walters guardedly, of Campbell with more freedom; but Vernon's answers were so short and listless, that it was plain there was something wrong with him. Stanley could not guess what, though he tried many solutions. By-and-by, however, he thought he had found a clue.

‘May I ask,’ said Vernon, with a tone of reviving interest, ‘what sort of work it is with which you are always occupied?’

‘I am writing a small volume,’ said Stanley, ‘on the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas. I am doing so at the suggestion of the Archbishop, who wishes to issue a series of primers, containing each an account of some great Catholic theologian.’

‘Happy man,’ said Vernon; ‘how I envy you!’

‘Do you mean you envy me because of

the kind of work? Or do you envy me merely because I have work at all?’

‘A little,’ said Vernon, ‘because you have work at all, but chiefly because it is work that subserves a cause you worship.’

‘I know,’ said Stanley, ‘that you do not worship my cause; if you did, you would belong to it. But your envy has a moral that may apply even to you.’

Vernon drank a glass of wine and stared blankly at Stanley. ‘I wish to goodness,’ he said, ‘I could find out how that was.’

‘Well,’ said Stanley, speaking now a little drily, ‘if you will not be offended with me, I will try to tell you. A man of your powers, and in your position, may have either the fullest of lives or else the emptiest; and if he does not achieve the first, he will probably have the second thrust upon him. I am not speaking of religion; I am speaking of common happiness.’

‘Well,’ said Vernon, ‘go on. I am listening.’

‘A fool, if he be rich,’ said Stanley, ‘is occupied very easily. There is no saying what trifles may not content him. But a strong man’s mind is like a corrosive acid. It eats through countless interests that suffice to absorb others. It even takes the guilt off vice, and it makes gambling vapid. What it asks is, “Give me something to work for that I can feel is worth the work.” Now for the bulk of mankind there is a ready answer to this. They must work to live, or at least to live in comfort; and all that they need do is to make a virtue of necessity. But the rich man’s task is by no means as simple as this. He has not to make a virtue of necessity, but to make a necessity of virtue. By an act of will and choice he must take that yoke upon him, that the larger number are born with. He must choose some

line of action ; he must devote himself to something. What makes a man is the sense that he has committed himself.'

'True,' said Vernon ; 'but the struggle lies in choosing. In choosing a life's work it is just the same as in marrying. Life *might* be lived with a hundred different women ; it *can* with consistency be lived with only one ; and however charming might be the choice I pitched upon, her one welcome would be drowned by the ninety-and-nine farewells. It is all very well to say *choose* ; but what is to make one choose ?'

'No doubt it is often difficult,' said Stanley. 'It is one of the rich man's trials. That is the very point I am urging. But ~~such~~ choices, or, if you like to put it so, such renunciations, are made daily. Every one makes them who meets with any success in life. The soldier does, the statesman does, even the man of fashion does. Every one

of these men, in some sort, takes the veil. He chooses one part, and he renounces others. Let him once do this, and his life is thronged with motives. He walks firmly, with firm ground under him. For the first time he becomes, properly speaking, a man.'

'He may gain his manhood,' said Vernon, 'but he says good-bye to his youth.'

'Well,' said Stanley, in a slight tone of contempt, 'would you keep youth beyond its time? Belated youth is sillier than second childhood. You ask me what is to drive you to your choice? I should say many things might do so. Ambition might, or common sense, or a natural interest in the welfare of others; or, as to the point of marrying, natural affection. You see I am putting religion, for argument's sake, quite out of the question.'

'Yes,' said Vernon; 'and, so far as I am concerned, that prevents you from understanding me. Given religious faith, all the

rest becomes simple. Things worthy of your self-devotion at once surround you on every side, and you welcome—you do not deplore—your sacrifices. Happiness comes to you then by a very different process—by supernatural sight, not by artificial blindness.'

'I think,' said Stanley smiling, 'you are paying religion a somewhat misplaced compliment. It, no doubt, does bring us happiness, but it does not bring it to us ready-made out of a bandbox. You don't have a good cry and then get a sugarplum. Indeed, too many tears, I believe, and too many sensations of peace, are less often signs of religious depth, than of shallowness. One of the worst spiritual signs we can detect in ourselves is, that we are touched with the pathos of our own condition. I remember a young Catholic who once told me of the doubts he was tempted by, and who had resolved very rightly to submit

reason to faith. "Of course," he said at last, "I can never forget my difficulties, but"—and the tears filled his eyes—"I will wear them round my head, as an intellectual crown of thorns." I advised him to do so, but not to talk about it: "If you suffer patiently God will bless you; but do not suffer before the looking-glass." Religious life, Vernon, you may depend upon it, has, when it is worth anything, a very prosaic side to it.'

'I,' said Vernon, 'connect religious life with emotion less, perhaps, even than you do. Faith would redeem me not through the heart, but through the intellect. To do our work in the world we must suppose that men are lovable, and worth working for; but it would quite content me to believe the fact without feeling it. Love in this case is like gold, and belief is a sort of paper currency. If the bills of faith were only endorsed by the intellect, I should be quite content, and

should be in no hurry to cash them. The only wages I should ask for my work, would be to know that my work was not wasted. That knowledge, my dear Stanley, would guide me through the shadows, though I have not the least expectation that it would conjure me into the sunshine.'

'Surely,' said Stanley, 'you don't want faith to tell you that you could at least do something that would be of some use in the world. There are certainly some whose lives you could make easier.'

'I measure,' said Vernon, 'my fellow-creatures by myself. If I have no soul, they have no souls either; and if I am a fool to be pleased by the best of the world's play-things, they are even greater fools if they are pleased by worse ones. If I consider myself not worth working for, how can I find satisfaction in working for inferior replicas of myself?'

‘Of course,’ said Stanley curtly, ‘you can never know till you have tried. But I am wrong ; you have tried. You were very kind to the lame child here. You would find it easier than you think to discover some path of duty.’

‘Listen,’ said Vernon ; ‘you speak of that child. You may say, if you like, that what I did for her was a kindness. Very well, then ; consider this. A certain old peasant woman has an extremely dirty daughter. This fact, even were the daughter healthy, would hardly make me radiant. Why should it do so, because I have made her but half a cripple ? The result of my kindness at its best is something that is less than uninteresting.’

‘Why did you do it, then ?’

‘Out of good nature, I suppose. I have plenty, I think, of that. My dear Stanley, we are talking openly, so, perhaps, I may say

to you what I should say to no one else. I have tried philanthropy on a more extended scale. I happen to have about nine thousand a year. Of this I give a good two-thirds to entirely unselfish purposes—I do so at this moment. But I get no pleasure from this; or if at times I do, my reason very soon steps in and destroys it. It acts, as you said most justly, like a corrosive acid upon it. But you were only thinking of frivolous pleasures. I assure you I find them all equally destructible.'

Stanley looked at Vernon in perplexed surprise; and then with a faint smile, 'You're a curious man,' he said.

'Excuse me,' said Vernon, 'I am not at all curious. I only have a habit of applying logic to everything.'

'Yes,' said Stanley; 'and natural love to nothing.'

'I could love well enough,' said Vernon,

‘if ——,’ Stanley stared at him. He had stopped short abruptly; his eyes were fixed upon the ceiling; and he was biting his lip as if in acute pain. Presently, with a visible effort, he recovered himself.—‘If,’ he resumed, ‘if I could be sure of two things—that the woman I loved had a soul to give to God, and that she cared to give it. But even then, you see, an assent of the reason is needed. Belief should precede, or at least accompany, feeling.’

‘If you would listen to me,’ said Stanley, ‘I should tell you that love was far more likely to produce belief, than for belief to produce love.’

‘You are speaking, I think,’ said Vernon, ‘of the love of man for woman. Surely for you, then, that is a somewhat singular doctrine. As far as I can understand the Catholic view of life, its chief aim and object is the love—not of woman, but God.’

‘You are perfectly right there.’

‘Very well,’ said Vernon ; ‘rob life of its aim, and begin your amours then. A woman, then, is a mere animal like yourself ; and if your desires are very strongly set on her, she will be far more likely to quench your religious longings than to excite them. So far as I can see, there is but one single way in which human love can be allied with divine love, and blessed by the Christian Church ; and that is by treating it as a mutual exhortation on the part of those concerned in it to the service and love of God. In so far as it is more than this, in so far as their attention fixes itself not on God, but on their own two personalities, it seems to me that it must be, from your standpoint, a concession to human weakness, not an element of Christian strength.’

‘You are wrong,’ said Stanley. ‘You are confusing two things—the characteristic error

of the whole modern school. Let me explain to you how the Church regards the matter, and you will find that her view is a more liberal one than yours. The Church teaches that, sin only excepted, God made everything. He made man and He made man's affections, and He implanted in each of us, what Saint Thomas calls an *interior instinct*, by which, when developed, we recognise His existence. From my point of view, as you call it, that is a fact, is it not, as much as the law of gravity ?'

'I have no doubt of it.'

'Very well, then ; the fact remains, whether or no we believe in it. Apples fell to the ground before the days of Newton, and souls may be moved to God even before they know of His existence. One of the chief ways in which they are thus moved is through the affections. These human affections are the expressions of God's will, and, rightly exercised, they are in themselves good.

There is something holy in the love of a brother as a brother, or of a wife as a wife ; but these are not to be confounded with the love of God, any more than they are to be divorced from it. They are so like it however, that they prepare the way for it.' Stanley looked at Vernon and saw how worn his face was. 'Do you see,' he added gently, 'what my meaning is ?'

'Partly,' said Vernon ; 'and yet it does not meet all my question. Still, I shall think it over.'

He said this sadly, and with an absent air as if his thoughts were wandering.

'I hope,' said Stanley, who had been watching his face anxiously, 'that you did not mistake my meaning when I spoke about religion and emotion. Emotion, that is affection, is the very heart of religion ; and the surest way to be for ever cut off from God, is not to be misled by the intellect, which does

but divert your eyes from Him ; but to quench your powers of loving, which is putting your eyes out.'

'He says the same thing that Campbell said,' thought Vernon when Stanley had departed. 'After all, I suppose there is something in it. Something!—why, once, when I had faith like Stanley's, I might have said the same myself. A pure human affection is the calix of Divine faith. But what is my condition? Stanley has not touched upon that. What haunts and threatens me is the foregone conclusion that Divine faith is a lie.' This set of thoughts seemed for a long time stationary, occupying his mind like the figure in a kaleidoscope. But at last a touch came, and the figure changed. That touch was given by the image of Miss Walters, as, with her 'pale, predestined face,' she came gliding like a ghost across his imagination. 'My own!' he exclaimed aloud, as he started from

the sofa he was lying on, 'you may at least reach God through me, though I may never reach Him through you.' This passionate thought filled and overmastered him, and the listless bitterness he had felt all through the evening disappeared before it. 'I must write to you,' he said, 'even though I cannot speak to you.'

His pen moved rapidly ; he never paused to hesitate. 'You entirely fill my thoughts,' he began. 'Your image haunts me ; your eyes are looking at me. My white angel, my pure lily of Eden ! Yes, you are that by nature. For God's sake, my own one, be true to yourself. For God's sake, I say ;—well, and for mine too, if you like it—for mine too. All my life is turned into one long, mute prayer for you, that you may put away from yourself every taint of evil. Hate it ; learn to hate it ! Let it revolt you as it once revolted you ! I will do all I can ; but don't

trust to me only. Help me too; try to see with your own eyes. My sight is very feeble; I am but a poor guide to God. I am like a blind man leading the blind. I only discern a glimmering, feeble light, and I am trying my best to feel my way towards it, carrying you with me. Will you not try to open your own eyes also, and give me a little counsel—a little assurance? My head is heavy; my eyelids ache with sadness. Did I not love you, I should have only asked to possess you. Your lips and arms could have given me all I longed for. But love is stronger than passion, and its demands are limitless, not for the lover, but for the loved. I am not trying to use fine language when I say that I am *consumed* with care for you. Scales have fallen from my eyes; I see now what I never saw before, and that is the meaning of Christ's love for men—His longing for their salvation. Oh, Cynthia, could I only die for you—could

I only take your sins on my head! Pierce my hands with nails—let me hang on the tree in agony—if only I might bear your sins and leave you once more spotless! I would be scourged, and spit upon! I would let my whole life be broken!

‘Cynthia, my knowledge of you has indeed worked a change in me!’



BOOK V.



CHAPTER I.

VERNON'S state of mind next morning was little changed ; he was still possessed by the same sorrow and solicitude. This, it is true, was not utterly unrelieved. The woman who had thus so completely filled his imagination, had confessed—had insisted on her love for him. In this fact certainly there was food for satisfaction ; and flying gleams of the most delicious happiness would at moments illuminate all his mental landscape with

The light that never was on sea or land.

But these did but serve to make his gloom

gloomier; and his heart ached with pain whenever it beat with pleasure. In this sombre condition he betook himself out of doors, to chew the cud of his disquietude. First he paced his garden, but its bounds seemed soon too narrow for him, and he strayed into the public road. Not far from his own gates were those of the Château St. John; and as he was passing these, he could not but pause. He leaned his forehead against the bars, and looked up the winding drive. It was a green vista of eucalyptus and of orange-trees, with here and there a cloud of foamy lilac-blossom; but its soft beauty did but fill Vernon with bitterness. The one thought that kept on repeating itself was, 'My Cynthia, could I save you, I would die for you.' Once a carriage passed, which had two well-dressed strangers in it. At the first sound of wheels he had suddenly faced about, in the fantastic hope that it might be

Miss Walters coming back again : but after an instant's glance he turned away impatiently. He could not endure the sensation that he was stared at. Not long after he heard more wheels approaching ; but this time he had no impulse to look ; he tried not even to listen. Listen, however, he soon found he must, when the following sounds struck on him.

‘ John ’—it was uttered in a voice that, though somewhat raised, was like velvet—‘ is this where Lady Walters lives, do you know ? ’

‘ I believe it is, your Grace.’

‘ Is it worth trying, I wonder ? ’—this was addressed to another person. ‘ Shall I go and leave a card on her ? Come—get up for a moment ; you must be sitting on my card-case.’

In answer to this injunction came a slight leonine groan ; but it was quickly drowned, for the velvet voice welled forth again,

‘Upon my word,’ it said, ‘if that is not Mr. Vernon!’

Vernon at this was compelled to turn and show himself, and there face to face with him in a large open carriage, were the Duchess, Lord Surbiton, and a smart-looking young lady of some sort.

‘Well,’ said her Grace, ‘and you are a nice young man, you are! I have been here for two whole days, and you have never once been to show yourself.’

Vernon replied that he had not known of her arrival.

‘The fact of the matter is you’re a great deal better employed. This is far more romantic, isn’t it, than red fans and restaurants?’

‘What is?’ said Vernon absently.

‘What? to be looking through a gate up a lovely young lady’s avenue—especially when it’s a young lady you have already carried off in your carriage. However, Mr.

Vernon, you go further than the gate, I suppose, sometimes.'

The Duchess did not laugh; but her voice when she was amused had a certain subtle quality which not only expressed her amusement, but transmitted it. It passed now into Vernon like an electric shock. He was instantly confronted with an absurd image of himself, and to his own intense surprise, he heard himself burst out laughing.

'Certainly,' he said, 'I was not waiting to take her another drive, for both she and her aunt are away at the present moment.'

'Very well then,' said the Duchess, 'there is one question solved. We will put off leaving our cards, and will go straight home again. Wait a bit, though. Lord Surbiton, you had better get out and walk, or else you'll be having indigestion again, and be unable to eat your dinner. Come, out you get—I know exactly what is good for you.

And listen,' she added, when Lord Surbiton had at last descended, 'you may as well give me my boa back again. You won't want it, you know, when you're getting warm walking.' Then turning to Vernon, 'And now,' she said, 'since you're not waiting for anybody, suppose you come back with us, and let us give you some tea. Whenever I see anyone now, I am dying to show my mansion to them.'

Vernon mechanically accepted this invitation. He took his seat opposite the young lady, and was vaguely conscious of being introduced to Miss Ethel somebody. 'Mr. Vernon,' the Duchess said—'a philosopher, and a great admirer of every species of beauty. Miss Ethel's eyes were sparkling, and they watched the Duchess continually, as though every instant she was expecting some amusement.

'Has Lord Surbiton,' she said presently,

‘got indigestion ? What a very unromantic thing for a poet !’

‘My dear,’ said the Duchess, ‘it is no wonder he has, considering the way he feeds himself. When he arrived the other day to stay with me, what should you think he had brought with him ? A cold plum pudding, if you please, wrapped up in his carpet-bag ; and he actually eats slices of it at six o’clock in the morning. What did he do, Mr. Vernon, that time you were good enough to entertain him ? One thing I know he did not do—and that was to give my orders to the gardener. What I told him to say was that I could have no ants on the walks, and that they were to be all killed with boiling water. Now I ask old Surbiton if he made this quite clear to the man, and that when I give an order I mean it ; and all I can get out of him is that Countess somebody—I don’t know her name or nation—has the

finest ankle he ever saw. I told him ankles were all very well ; but it's not so nice when you have ants biting them.'

'Yes,' smiled Miss Ethel, 'but didn't Colonel Stapleton give your message?'

'As for Colonel Stapleton,' said the Duchess, 'he's even worse than Lord Surbiton. He seems to have spent his entire time with Miss Walters, till the wind was taken out of his sails by—who should you think? The curate. It strikes me, Mr. Vernon, that you have not been doing all you might have done, if you let your special young lady fall into other people's hands like this. I assure you our fat Colonel is full of her. I was going to have asked him over to stay with me, only I was afraid Mrs. Grantly would have his eyes out. However, he shall come for my fancy ball. That will be quite safe. There will be no time then for quarrelling.'

‘I think,’ said Miss Ethel, ‘Colonel Stapleton is very amusing.’

‘Do you know him?’ asked Vernon with an odd blank abruptness.

‘Oh yes. He has stayed with us twice for Ascot-week. We have a small house near the racecourse.’

‘Amusing!’ said the Duchess. ‘Oh yes, of course he is: and so useful, which is far better than amusing. He’s going to order me all my Chinese lanterns, and my blue and red fire, and—I forget what else. Oh, some Strasburg pies, and some specially dry champagne. I quite delight in the Colonel. He’s a most unselfish creature.’

Vernon listened to all this, as though it were a noise in a dream, making little effort himself except at some random smiles. Presently under the wheels came the crunching of new-laid gravel, and in another

moment or two they were at the door of the great hotel.

Vernon had been in the building several times before ; but when he now entered, he saw such a metamorphosis, that for the time being at least he was surprised into common attention. Where there had hitherto been a bleak solitude, there was now life and luxury. The large entrance hall was green with palm-trees, and gay with flowers. The white marble floor was strewn with oriental carpets, and on the softest of these was a yelping Pomeranian dog. There were larger tables draped with bright-coloured heavy cloths, and covered with books, photograph-frames, and a thousand-and-one knick-knacks. A stout English butler and a spruce groom-of-the-chamber gave to the scene a dignity all their own, and busy under their direction were some footmen with red waistcoats. Hardly had her Grace entered when a variety of

orders, in tones of silver conveying a will of iron, went flying in all directions. 'Put that plant nearer the wall.' 'Where are you going with those Venetian glasses?' 'How often have I told you that those doors are to be never left open!' In answer to which came the rapid but hushed response of 'Yes, your Grace;' 'No, your Grace.'

'Now, Mr. Vernon,' said the Duchess, 'you must come and look at the drawing-room; or rather, to be *quite* accurate, I should say one of the drawing-rooms; for I assure you our splendour here is quite palatial, and we have five or six of them. There!' she said as they entered, 'it's getting to look liveable; but there are still some screens and things that I want a little advice about.'

'My! Mr. Vernon, and is this you again?' exclaimed a lady, slowly raising herself from an exceedingly deep arm-chair. It was none other than Mrs. Grantly, looking the picture

of piquant languor, and arrayed in the most charming of tea-gowns. 'I guess, Duchess,' she said, 'I'm just tired out. I've been around for the last two hours showing Barnes where to place the flowers. Well, Mr. Vernon, and how are you by this time? Are you getting along pretty well out here?'

Vernon made some answer to this, but one so little in his usual manner, that Mrs. Grantly was struck by it. 'Duchess,' she exclaimed, 'here is Mr. Vernon quite out of sorts. He thinks, like Lord Surbiton, that all life is hollow.'

'That's a great deal more than Lord Surbiton himself is,' said the Duchess, 'at least at six o'clock in the morning. I've been telling him, and I may now tell Mr. Vernon, that if they think life hollow, they had better go in as I do, not for cold plum-pudding, but for old furniture. Look, Mr. Vernon, there is my last purchase—those six *Louis Seize* chairs.

I bought them at Grasse, out of the house of a certain notary. Four thousand francs is the sum he has done me out of; and now his daughter, I hear, is going to law with him, because she declares they are an heir-loom.'

Vernon praised the chairs with as much interest as he could muster, and then forced himself to say something *à propos* of the fancy ball.

'You'd better,' said the Duchess, 'be getting a dress ready, for I can tell you, we shan't allow any idle make-shifts—none of your black dress coats with a bit of pink satin tacked on to them.'

'I have a dress,' said Vernon. 'It is a Spanish pedlar's. It makes me look rather a blackguard, but I suppose that doesn't matter.'

'Oh, dear no,' said the Duchess. 'It will only make you popular.'

'And when,' said Vernon, 'is this festivity to be?'

‘As soon as we can manage it. I don’t quite know yet who will be in the house, but I shall know more presently, when the post comes. I mean to ask about a hundred from Cannes, and about half that number from Nice.’

At this moment tea made its appearance, and with the tea a large budget of letters. ‘You must excuse me,’ said the Duchess, as she tore open envelope after envelope, ‘but these are all from our expected guests. I think,’ she went on presently, when the work of inspection was over, ‘I think we may manage the ball towards the end of the coming week. Montey Moreton comes to-morrow, who will of course lead the *cotillon*, and I must have a talk with him about it.’

The sight of the post’s arrival made Vernon restless. He longed to go home to see if there were no letters for him; but the Duchess loved conversation, and he was un-

able to get free. At last, however, a sudden rescue came. Captain Grantly entered the room, with the 'Sporting Times' in his hand. In an instant the Duchess turned to him, and a sudden gust of the spirit sent her thoughts in a new direction. 'Well, Captain Grantly,' she exclaimed, 'and what about the City and Suburban?'

Vernon saw his opportunity, and at once made use of it; but when he was at the door he was again recalled for a moment. 'Mr. Vernon,' said her Grace, 'come and dine with us to-morrow. We shall be a larger party by that time.'

He had no excuse to plead, so he accepted and went his way.

This plunge into the common noises of life confused him at first as a sudden fall from a cliff might. It made him feel for the moment doubtful where he was. Perhaps in some degree this was a slight relief to him,

but the shock soon wore away, and his former cares returned to him. When he entered his own house, however, he at once found food for excitement. Lying on his table was a letter from Miss Walters. It was dated 'San Remo.'

'We arrived here,' she wrote, 'at about six o'clock. There was such a lovely sunset—such spaces of clear primrose, fading behind violet hills. I don't know why—but as I looked at it, it made me think of you. Perhaps it is because I associate you with everything that is pure, and suggests withdrawal from earth.' As Vernon read this he raised the letter to his lips and kissed it. 'The post goes at ten,' it went on; 'and I have very little time; but I must, I must write to you. I have been so saddened this evening. Mrs. Crane has been talking to me about Alic Campbell—only for a few minutes, it is, true; but she will begin again to-morrow. It is so

hard—I was going to say so tiresome ; but this is not the thing that I want to write about. It is you—it is only you. I want to tell you how good, how forbearing you have been to me ; and yet words can never give my meaning. No, my own, and nothing ever can, unless some day or other my life does. I was miserable when you knew me, but it was with a hopeless misery. There was no germ of any amendment in it, and the only effort I made was a lazy effort to kill it. Don't you remember what I said to you that first morning in the garden, about my thinking that the Church laid too much stress upon purity ? I tried to persuade myself that we daily—even the best of us—did things far worse than those special things that tormented me. But oh, I could not. I was but a very half-hearted liar to myself ; and you at a touch put all my lies to flight. Had you not done that I should have gone on sinking deeper.

You found me not so much drowning as being sucked down in a quicksand ; and you held out a hand to help me. If you do not let me go, I shall by-and-by, I hope, free myself ; but oh, I have one prayer to make to you. Do not be too hard on me. Make a little concession to my extreme weakness. Let me love you and love goodness for your sake, a little while longer, without asking me to do more than that. Some day, if you will still help me, and hold me, and keep me pressed close to you, I may be able to say what I suppose you want me to say :—" I love God even more than I love you ; and yet for this very reason I love you more than ever." But I can't say that yet. Have patience: I shall learn in time. I wonder, I often wonder—was God ever as kind to a sinner as you have been ? Your own unhappy Cynthia.'

All this covered several pages, and from the middle of them there dropped out a small

packet. The nature of this was explained in a brief postscript : ‘ I have found in my despatch box the enclosed little picture of myself. I hate it for what it reminds me of ; but if you can allow it to remind you only of me, perhaps you might like to have it.’

Vernon undid the wrappings of silver paper, and found within a small oval photograph, finished with extreme skill like a miniature. There Miss Walters was ; there was no mistaking her. She was in a white ball dress, with her fair shoulders visible, and a scarlet and silver opera-cloak clinging, but barely clinging to them. Her eyes looked full at you ; her cheek rested on her beautiful clasped hands ; and round her fair hair was a wreath of the darkest myrtle-leaves. Vernon gazed at it fascinated ; it seemed to speak to him. There was in her cheeks a deeper rose-tint than, when he had known her, was habitual. He could have almost fancied that

they blushed because he looked on them. What did the picture mean? Her expression in it, her very attitude, was ambiguous. It might be that of a Magdalen in sanctity, on the brink of relapsing into sin; or a Magdalen in sin on the eve of seeking for the Saviour. As he continued looking, the Duchess and her friends faded in his memory till they became nothing but irksome shadows; and his one impulse was to immure himself with the image of this beautiful woman. The direction his thoughts were taking became soon apparent to him. 'If she will not be God's,' he said, 'she must and she shall be mine!' He looked at the picture again, and he noticed a new detail in it. On her bosom there hung a locket. His attention fixed on this, and it seemed to him that it bore some inscription. There was a small magnifying glass on the table close at hand, and with its aid he deciphered two initials. They were 'J. S.'

‘Jack Stapleton!’ he exclaimed, and seizing the picture he tore it into small fragments.

He was a sober man again. He now went back to her letter. He read it, and he re-read it. There was much in it, but not all that he longed for. The anxiety that had preyed upon him, the anxiety for another’s sake, once more took hold upon him; and when night came he had still failed to be comforted.

The day following he wrote again to Miss Walters. His letter expressed the same solicitude as his last one, and his day was occupied with the same thoughts about her. As for himself, and his own private claims on her, these were cauterised, so to speak, by the fire of his unselfish longings. Her welfare, not his own satisfaction, was in literal truth the one thing that engrossed him—at least the one personal thing. There is

that exception necessary. For with his wishes for Miss Walters wider thoughts would mix themselves; and he could no but identify the hopes of the human race, as a whole, with those he entertained or despaired of for one woman in particular.

Much to his annoyance a certain recollection haunted him—the recollection of his engagement to dine that night with the Duchess.



CHAPTER II.

IT was not to be helped, however. As eight o'clock was striking, the tall doors of the hotel were being thrown wide to receive him. Well-trained servants, with all the manners of London, were adroitly helping him to get rid of his great-coat. More doors were opened, and then, sharply and in an instant, came the sea-like murmur of the polite world conversing.

The Duchess's party had indeed increased by this time. The dim air of the drawing-room, starred with subdued lamp-light,

seemed full of varied colourings, from the dresses of divers ladies. Vernon as he entered had almost a sense of shyness. His eyes were not dazzled, but he felt as if his mind were blinking. He was breathing an atmosphere that it seemed he had long been a stranger to. Here was the London world once more enfolding him with its familiar sights and sounds, and full of the memories of the pleasures it once gave him. He felt it to be all unreal. It gave him a giddy sense, as if he had just come off a steamer. Still he was obliged to exert himself; it was impossible to shrink into a corner. Before long he discovered an old acquaintance or two, and as he moved from one to the other, he felt himself getting more at home again. When they went into dinner, Miss Ethel fell to his share, looking exceedingly bright and pretty; and she reminded him with a slight tone of reproach, that she had met him

before in London. The long dinner table, with all its gleam and glitter, gave Vernon an experience like that of a saint's inverted. He was being dazzled by a vision—not of the next world, but this ; and it seemed to be moving him to renew his old communion with it. Miss Ethel's brightness began presently to tell on him. It was of a quiet, almost a demure kind, but it possessed the power of provoking men to respond to it ; nor did Vernon prove an exception. Champagne too came to assist its influence, and very soon he began to laugh quite naturally. By the middle of dinner he had become so mundane in his mind, that he turned round and glanced at his neighbour on the other side. He wondered when he had done this, that he had not done so sooner. She was a dark woman, singularly beautiful, with voluptuous long-lashed eyes. In a minute or two these eyes met Vernon's, and said plainly

that she would be very glad to talk to him : and upon this he achieved one of the prettiest of all toy adventures—the breaking that dainty delicate ice-film which exists between guests in the same house, when they have not been introduced formally.

After dinner, when the gentlemen had rearranged themselves, Vernon found that sitting next to him was the Lord Lieutenant of his county—a peer of great distinction, and a Conservative ex-minister. Here was a new distraction. The noble lord at once plunged into politics and home matters ; and he soon gave them a flattering personal turn. ‘ I can tell you,’ he said, ‘ you made yourself extremely popular in ——shire. I was talking the other day to one of the farmers from your part, who calls himself—so he told me—a Radical. Well, in spite of your politics, you had won his heart, I can assure you ; and I hear the same story of you in

various other quarters. The Workmen's Conservative Club, which you did so much to help forward, is getting on admirably. I hope sincerely that you are still thinking of Parliament. I've not the least doubt, for my own part, that if there were a petition, we should unseat Tom Bowden ; and in the event of another contest, no one would have a chance against you.'

All this discourse put Vernon in better spirits. He began to feel he was waking up in earnest. He waived the allusions to himself, although he was not insensible to them ; but he plunged with interest into various questions of politics ; and the image of Miss Walters, which had been hitherto still watching him, seemed to melt at such magic words as *land, labour, and capital*.

Meanwhile, there had been a change made in the drawing-room. A large curtain at one end had been raised, and displayed the

drop-scene of a charming miniature theatre. The gentlemen once more showed themselves; and, to the slight alarm of certain of them, it appeared there were to be some charades. Vernon was pressed to take part, but he refused stoutly. His sadness, banished for a moment, was already coming back to him. He found, however, that no denial would be taken; and when he realised that he would be acting with his dark-eyed neighbour of the dinner-table, he consented with sufficient grace.

As the *corps dramatique* were retiring to mature their plans, he discovered a familiar presence, which had till now escaped him. This was Mrs. Crane, exceedingly well pleased with herself for being of the Duchess's party, and looking at him with a charity all her own. She informed him she was not going to act herself, but that she was ready to do her best in the green-room,

and that she would rouge or powder anybody, provided it was not a woman. Nothing could have been less pleasant to Vernon than the apparition of this lady ; and though he tried to be as civil as he could to her, he left her on the very first opportunity.

The charades began. Vernon felt from the first moment that he and his dark-eyed beauty had some sort of attraction for each other ; and when the concluding act came, it was his part to make love to her. From old habit he could not help infusing a flavour of personal tribute into the tender things he said to her : and when, at the end of the scene, he had to lead her off the stage, he continued the process till he had brought her out of doors into the moonlight. There he remained talking with her, leaning against a great vase of geraniums. All his attentions to her were as unreal as a ghost's ; but for this very reason he did not attempt to check them,

and they certainly to one observer looked marked enough. This observer was Mrs. Crane, who was leaning against the window-curtains ; and, as she observed, the small passion broke in her, which, by straining a compliment, might perhaps be called her jealousy. It was a passion certainly of no very dreadful intensity. It might lead her to laugh from malice ; it would never make her pale from rage ; and instead of poisoning its object, she would be far more likely to play him a practical joke.





CHAPTER III.

THE events of that evening were not without their after-effect on Vernon. He carried away with him from the Duchess's a certain amount of excitement, which deranged his mind and was very far from pleasing it. Since his intimacy with Miss Walters, it was as though he had been descending deep into the hidden places of life, and the world on the surface, with its laughter, noise, and sunlight, had faded away to a mere shadowy memory. His only companions had been thoughts of sin.

and holiness, and the awful gulf between them ; and his only lights had been tapers at shrines for prayer. But now the darkness seemed to be slowly parting, and the day and the things of day appearing like grey clouds through it. Sounds which he thought he had said good-bye to for ever, once more assailed his ears, and mixed themselves grotesquely with the voices to which only he had of late been listening. He felt as though two worlds had come into collision, and he was surrounded by the dissolving fragments of both of them. The world of prayer, of penitence, and of aspiration, where sin was the one calamity, and communion with God the one success worth striving for ; the world, on the other hand, of balls and duchesses, of private theatricals, and the gossip of Mayfair—these two worlds seemed to have struck and wrecked each other, and each seemed equally unreal.

So Vernon felt when he lay down to rest ; so he felt too when he awoke next morning. But next morning there was a new symptom in him. The world which had thus come back again, he now felt had brought with it a breath of grateful air. He had been amused for moments, and had forgotten the burden that was bound to him ; and it was on his lips—only he checked himself—to say in so many words, ‘ I have climbed up out of a chanel house, and have breathed the air of heaven.’

He was first conscious of this change of disposition when he began to write to Miss Walters, which he did that afternoon. His words and thoughts would not flow freely as hitherto. The intense solicitude which had racked him for days into misery was more or less relaxed. It was not that his intention for a moment wavered. He was still resolved, as much as ever, to help her ; but

he was now master of the resolve, the resolve was no longer master of him. He was not happy, he had not become light-hearted. He was in some ways more wretched than ever ; but a vision of happiness, a vision of gay spirits, had, like a gleam of sunshine, once more broken across his life. 'Ah, Cynthia, Cynthia,' he thought, 'why do you compel me to be serious? Could I only be sure that you had recovered your own natural strength, that you were strong and confident in your own self-respect, how happily we might walk together! Our fears, our hopes, our anxieties need not be kept always on the stretch. What could I not give to be able to laugh again without an aching heart!' The consciousness of such feeling in himself had, so far as he knew, one effect only. It turned his moral devotion to Miss Walters from an impulse into a duty. Because he found some difficulty in writing to her, he

only wrote more earnestly, and with intenser consideration.

He had just completed this task—it was then about four o'clock—when two male figures passed the windows of his library. A moment after these were announced and entering. They were Lord Surbiton and the Conservative ex-minister. The visit, it appeared, was one of more than ordinary compliment. There was something like business at the bottom of it, and of a very flattering nature. The ex-minister had just received intelligence that a relation of his own, who sat for a certain borough, was to accept the Chiltern Hundreds, and it was now suggested to Vernon that here was a new opening for him. The conversation lasted for some time, and then Vernon was left to consider the matter over. The new range of prospects that were now presented to him stirred his mind like fresh bracing sea-wind, and he wandered out of

doors to digest the sudden excitement. He paced nearly the same ground that he had paced two days ago, but with different thoughts to busy him. He passed again the gates of the Château St. John, but he did not stop now to peer through the bars and meditate. Instead of that, he again had recourse to Stanley.

‘My dear fellow,’ he exclaimed, as he broke into the priest’s sitting-room, ‘I have come to have another talk with you.’

Stanley stared at his visitor. It was hardly the same Vernon. A new light danced in his eyes, there was a happy smile on his lip. ‘Stanley,’ he went on, ‘I have taken your advice at last. I am going to commit myself, or at least I shall try to do so. There is another chance of my getting into Parliament, and if matters turn out as I think they will, I shall be going home directly.’

‘I am very glad to hear it,’ said Stanley. ‘You will find,’ he went on, smiling, ‘that to have a useful purpose before you, will change your views about many things.’

‘It not only will,’ said Vernon. ‘It has already done so. I have a little property in the East end of London.’ A project has revived in my mind with regard to that, which I had a year ago, but which I have since let drop. It is for a kind of workhouse arranged on a new principle, which shall give more relief than such places do at present, and yet be without what I consider their chief drawbacks. I made the plan for the building myself, and had arranged nearly every detail. I thought, for a sort of motto above the door, to put this : “Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you.”’

‘And who was the “I”?’ said Stanley. ‘Did that mean *you* ? Take care, Vernon,

take care! Have we not already agreed to distrust too eager emotion?’

Vernon, however, was not to be disheartened. All his serious thoughts, all his anxieties to find something in life worth working for, forced themselves into the mould of this new excitement; and Stanley, as he heard him talk, began to feel stronger hopes of him. Vernon indeed at this moment drew vigour from three sources. First there was the thought of Miss Walters. She was a beautiful woman, she had a strong hold on him, and it seemed in his power to redeem her whole character. Then there was this prospect of active life suddenly breaking in on him; and lastly there was the pleasant world at the Duchess's, which was stinging him back into common social consciousness. This last influence indeed so far increased upon him, that on the following day he proposed to give a luncheon-party: and the idea

being approved by everyone, arrangements were made accordingly.

The life of Miss Walters meanwhile had been outwardly less eventful, but not less so inwardly. Whenever she could she retired to her own bedroom, the view from which was beautiful : and at a table by the window she pored over Vernon's letters. The first that reached her from him, after she had left the Château St. John, was the one to which she recurred the oftenest. The strength of the feelings it stirred in her may be gathered from the very first words of her answer.

‘ My beloved,’ she wrote, with the accent duly inserted—a fact which made her smile herself after she had written it, ‘ I should be indeed ungrateful if I did not live for you, since I know you would die for me. As I read your letter, it was as though you were close to me—as though your arms were round my waist holding me. Will you ever know

what to a woman that sense is of being held, of being clasped, of being supported? It seems to draw the very soul out of one.— If you were here I could fall on my knees and worship you. Between these two last sentences do you know what I have done? For a good ten minutes I have been leaning forwards, with my face upon your letter, thinking, thinking, thinking about you. It was very silly, no doubt; but oh, my darling, could you only know what my thoughts were! You need have no fear for me, as long as you fill my being. There is no room for any evil then. But I won't bore you with my affection any longer. I will tell you what has been boring me. Dear Mrs. Crane has been at me again about Alic Campbell. She is always asking me if I don't like him; and I believe if I have ever said a word in his favour, she has written off and told him of it. I do like him in a way. But he treated me

like a saint, and a simple saint into the bargain, which you know I am very far from being. That is one thing in him which was always jarring me. But he is your friend. I would like him for your sake, if he only would not love *me*. Well, Mrs. Crane has heard from him, and he is coming, it seems, back from Sorrento soon. What shall we do? Poor fellow, I am very sorry for him. He will want to come to you, at least for a day or two. You told me he would do that. You must think over what had best be done about it.'

The next letter she received from Vernon contained the full news of the arrival of the Duchess's party, and of his own intercourse with them. This, however, was very soon told; and he then passed on to graver subjects, repeating his former advice, and his former wishes for her welfare. 'As to mere affection,' he said in concluding, 'I cannot

express myself properly. But you must remember me as I have been, when I have been speaking to you ; and with the aid of this memory you must read between the lines when I write to you. If I did not care as I do for you I could pour out fine expressions by the page ; but to be really serious makes me silent.'

This letter crossed that of Miss Walters's which has just been given above, and, though she tried to avoid the impression, it struck her as a cold return to it. It seemed to blow like a chilly air over her ; it produced in her a sense of isolation ; and though she succeeded in concealing its exact nature from herself, she could not avoid giving it some expression. This took the form, when she wrote that day to Vernon, of begging him to come to San Remo. ' We are planning an expedition,' she said, ' into the mountains ~~and~~ here. They are so beautiful—a world

of woods and gorges, where every valley has its snow-fed river in it, and every height its village and its domed sanctuary. We think of going next Friday. Oh, if you could only come! We want it to be Friday, because on Saturday the other Mrs. Crane—the one you know, will be here for a night or two, and I would so far rather go without her. Try and come. It is a very short journey, and hour by hour I feel I want you more. I told you,’ she went on—her pen was now running away with her, ‘that I felt as though your arm was round me. Do not withdraw it; I might so easily fall away again. To see you even for one day would be a kind of sacrament to me. Come to me—oh, do come—keep my life full of you, or something else will fill it. I can throw a new light, I think, on the way in which you have helped me. You have made me believe again in the possibility of goodness in men.

Before I knew you I thought they were all bad. The Duke of Wellington said that the cause of panic in an army was the belief on the part of each soldier that the others had lost confidence, and would not obey orders. I was suffering from a kind of moral panic. Human nature is not logical, and the feminine nature, I suppose, is the least logical part of it. It is for that reason that example helps me so. I am not logical, my love. All my trust in goodness, and all my strength for it, is founded upon you.'

The letter went, and before she could get an answer to it, there came another from Vernon. In this there was more description of the various doings at the Duchess's, and a long account of the suggestions made to him *à propos* of standing for Parliament. 'If this plan,' he wrote, 'really comes to anything, it may require me to return very soon to England. If I were not anxious for you,

I should go happily ; but how can I be happy when every step I take, my heart is almost broken with anxiety for fear a poor wounded child I am carrying may be in pain ? ’

As Miss Walters read this, she was conscious of a painful agitation. She repeated an action which she had already described to Vernon. Her head drooped, she leaned heavily upon the writing-table, and her face rested blindly on the letter that lay before her. ‘Going’—she thought—‘going back to England! and so little said of his sorrow for leaving me!’ These were her two thoughts, and long as she remained motionless, there were none but these that occupied her.

By-and-by, however, a revulsion of feeling came. She reproached herself and said, ‘I am selfish. Why should I be always troubling him?’ And she set herself then

and there to write to him in a changed tone. 'I have been wrong,' she began. 'I have been crying to you like an unrestrained child, and I believe I have fostered my sense of weakness by thus going on deploring it. Surely it is time that I now felt confident; and your last letter, I think, has given me some reason for being so. It has made me feel that I can take an unselfish interest in the career which I hope may be opening to you. And what a relief to fix one's thoughts on something utterly apart from one's own condition—one's own bad or good, and to project one's interests outwards! When you come on Friday, as, my love, I know you will, what joy it will be to me to talk all this over with you! Did I not tell you that I could at least do one thing for you—that I could stimulate you to make the very best use of your powers? Even now I foresee that when you come over here, there will be a new light,

a new gladness in those eyes of yours, whose looks I know by heart ; and which so many a time I have known full of sadness only.'

In this account of herself, undoubtedly there was a certain amount of truth ; and she did her best to bring her feelings into accord with it altogether. She took Vernon's letter in her hands, as if she would grasp her nettle, and went out of doors with it. The house was fronted by a long strip of garden, which had a pleasant terrace as its boundary, overhanging the public road. Beyond the road was the railway ; beyond that moved the glossy blue of the sea ; and the view for the saunterer was framed by the fronds of palm-trees. It was to this terrace that Miss Walters took herself ; and attempting to compose her thoughts she paced it to and fro slowly. Her dress was still of extreme simplicity. She was very different from the Miss Walters whose entrance had been so

noted in the restaurant. Still, since the day that Vernon had marked the change, she had become more *soignée* again in some ways. Her dove-coloured velvet hat, it is true, was old and faded. Her dress, of the same colour, was faded too, and was of a common stuff; but by some magic on her maid's part or her own, its simplicity savoured more of the world than of the cloister; and she was gloved and shod daintily now as ever. She had studiously avoided lately much contemplation of herself in the glass; but to-day as she went out, she could not avoid noticing that she looked beautiful, and that the faded tints became her; and in spite of her sorrow, there went through her a thrill of vanity. In an instant this was cast into the treasury of her dominant passion; and she said to herself, with her heart full of Vernon, 'My body at least is worthy of your acceptance.'

Had she wished on the terrace to consult another looking-glass, she might have found one in the many glances that were turned to her from the road below. But of these she took little heed. So absorbed indeed was she in her own thoughts, that a servant from the house had overtaken her, without her having heard his footsteps. In his hand was a tray, and on the tray was a telegram. Her eye fell first upon the name of the sender. It was Vernon. Her face flushed with pleasure. She crushed the paper in her hand, and continued her walk at an increased pace, feeling that between her palm and fingers she was clasping tight a treasure. She would not read it yet ; she would enjoy the throbs of uncertainty. ‘ Perhaps,’ she thought, ‘ he may be coming even before Friday—this evening—this afternoon—perhaps by the next train.’ This last possibility was suggested by the noise of a railway-

whistle ; and presently, like a black reptile, smelling of smoke and coal-dust, the train went sliding by. She watched the carriage windows, hoping to detect his face at one of them ; but not having done this, she resolved to inspect the telegram. She half unfolded it ; but then she stayed. Uncertainty still charmed her ; and she looked at the unread paper with a smile of pensive tenderness. It was still not opened, when the sound of her own name startled her. It did more than startle her, for she knew the voice that uttered it. It was that of Colonel Stapleton. Instinctively she thrust the telegram into her pocket ; and in a state of mind that was at first but blank astonishment, she stood stock still for a moment, and then went forward and greeted him. As she did this, there was a smile on her lips that came of long habit. It is impossible to make an entire change in one's

manner to a person who is unconscious of any reason for a change. Some change in hers, however, there without doubt was, for the Colonel at once declared she was 'grumpy,' and 'out of sorts.' When this meeting took place they were standing near a small summer-house; and by a rapid move of the Colonel's in another moment they had sat down in it.

'Come,' said he, 'what on earth is the matter with you? You shouldn't treat me in this way, for I can only stay ten minutes. I've come over with some lawyer's papers, for Molly Crane to sign, and in another half-hour I shall have to start for Nice again. I heard you were in the garden, so I couldn't help having one try at finding you.'

The news that the Colonel was going gave Miss Walters great relief, and brought a smile to her face that was perhaps more cordial than she meant it to be; for the

Colonel took her by the chin and turned her face towards him. At his touch, however, she started back abruptly, though the smile did not desert her.

‘Remember, Jack,’ she said, ‘I’m going to have no more of your nonsense. We are too old, both of us, for that kind of thing.’

‘*I’m* not,’ said the Colonel, ‘though I believe, at this moment, I’m in too great a hurry for it. However, I shall be back here to have another look at our Molly, in a couple of days. I’ve engaged a room—a first-rate one—at the Hotel Victoria. Such a view from it, I can tell you! You must come,’ he went on, fixing his gleaming eyes on her, ‘and see it yourself one of these days—little cross, vindictive minx that you are!’

When the Colonel said he was in a hurry, he really spoke the truth. There was a certain bal masqué at Nice that evening, to

which he was going to escort a select party of friends; and so anxious was he that he should not miss this, that he very soon was taking leave of Miss Walters, though without informing her as to the joys that lay before him.

As soon as he was out of sight, Miss Walters took out the telegram, and now she at once read it. It was not a lengthy document; it consisted simply of this; 'I can't come on Friday. I am asking a party that day to lunch with me. I will explain by letter.'

The curtness and the coldness, as she thought it, of this despatch had an effect as sudden on her as that of a physical blow. Her first outward expression of her inward feelings was a rapid movement to the parapet of the terrace, on which she leaned her arms, and looked fixedly towards the railway-station. 'What a fool I was,' she murmured, 'to have driven Jack away!'

An hour after this she was in her bedroom kneeling, for the most part silent, but now and again whispering, 'How wicked I am! Shall I never make myself good for anything?' The same night she began another letter to Vernon.

'I don't know,' she wrote, 'if I shall send you this. I shall see as I go on. I don't like to trouble you, and to make you wretched; but nothing that I could tell you could make you half so wretched as I myself am. You tell me to say my prayers; you tell me to love God. I try to do both. I have tried each night to do so. But I feel more or less as you do. It is not a man's privilege only to find his reason at war with his faith. A woman sometimes can have the same greatness thrust upon her; she, too, can doubt the reality of all that she thinks most valuable. I have had bitter experience of this, these days I have been

away from you. All the holy things that we were brought up to long for, and for which, till I had ruined myself, I did long——what do you think they now seem to me? Like one of those fabulous rocks in the middle of a great ocean, which sailors see sometimes, and which then disappear suddenly. What tricks are played one by the various faculties of one's being! Yes; I believe one five minutes, and I disbelieve another. You know my opinion about the Catholic Church. I have often told you how impossible it is to me to believe in its teachings literally. Well——what do you think I have done, and done in real good faith, more than once lately? I have prayed to Saint Mary Magdalene! What does it all mean, my friend, this *bizarre* confusion of emotion, thought, and judgment? If I had no faith, I should not be so miserable as I am. That is what seems so hard to me. I have enough faith left to make

me miserable, but not enough to make me hopeful. My faith has lost its courage; but like other cowards, it can still bully. My life is bitter with the lees of a belief whose finer spirit is evaporating.

‘Do you not see how, when one is in this state, the desire for self-respect becomes of the same nature as one’s belief and faith? Self-respect, it is always being whispered to one, is nothing; neither is there any need for any self-condemnation. It is our judgment of our past, not our past, that fills us with self-reproaches.

‘My friend, out of this chaotic mind of mine your love might call peace and order. But now—what shall I say to you? I begin to feel, or at least to fear, that your love is getting——. But no. I will not finish the sentence. I will wait till I hear what you say to-morrow morning. My darling, I dread your letter.’

Vernon's letter arrived. It was full of regrets that he could not come to San Remo on Friday. It was full too of little details and incidents that he judged would amuse Miss Walters ; and it begged for her sympathy in his hopes of a new career. It was impossible to say that it was not written most affectionately. But for all this, her instinct observed a want in it—not a want she could blame, one only she could shudder and wonder at. It did not put *him* in a different light before her, but her own relation to him. Her answer expressed this.

‘ Dear,’ she wrote, continuing her last night's letter where she had left off, ‘ I have got yours of this morning, and I think I will send you what I have already written. I am sorry you can't come on Friday, but I have no doubt you are amused better where you are. So far as I can gather, you are very gay. That must be pleasant. And now let me tell

you that I *have* done one thing that you told me to do. I have been reading between the lines of your letters, and doing this very carefully ; and I feel that a change is coming over them. I can't explain to you what or where it is. You write still as kindly—even as lovingly as ever. But my instincts, as you know, are very quick ; and my instincts tell me this—that you, though you do not yet know it, are getting tired of me. I do not complain. I know I am not worthy to keep you : and yet you cannot wonder if I feel it a little bitterly, when I see my last hope in this world, and for aught I know in another, slipping so soon—so soon away from me. My aunt and I are coming back in a day or two.

‘A letter has been sent on to us from your dear friend the Duchess, to ask us to come to her fancy ball. I think we shall go. I have a dress with me which I once wore in

Florence ; and I shall have it done up at Nice, where we stop for a night on our way back. Of course you will go. I expect you will find it very amusing.

‘ I am sorry to have to write as I have done. It took me some time to bring myself to do so ; but it is best to be quite honest, at least with the people one is fond of.’

What reply to expect to this Miss Walters did not know. The effort she had made in writing it, and in acknowledging to herself what she had said in it, left her in dull dejection. At luncheon, however, this was somewhat broken in upon by an unwelcome and unexpected sight. When she went down into the dining-room her aunt and Mrs. Crane were already seated : but they were not alone. Miss Walters perceived that there was a beautifully dressed visitor with them, whom in a moment more she recognised. It was the other Mrs. Crane.

This lady was fresh from the Cap de Juan, and was full of accounts of the Duchess and her doings. Many smart people were shy of Mrs. Crane; but Mrs. Crane was never shy of them. Everyone of a sufficient position was spoken of by her with a familiarity that implied anything but contempt, though it continually took the form of it : and an immense amount of gossip was rattled off by her during luncheon about Algy *this* and Mabel *that*, with their proper style and title sometimes added in a parenthesis. Vernon's name occurred several times. He was going to give a luncheon-party, he had written a charade, he had taught a young lady to play lawn-tennis, he had frequent private conferences with the Conservative ex-minister. All this, however, was being only dropped by the way, amongst the other flowers of information that Mrs. Crane was scattering, till Miss Walters said with affected carelessness,

‘Mr. Vernon seems to be contributing much to the general amusement, and I have no doubt to his own.’

There was something in her tone—a certain pain or pique in it—that touched as it were a spring in Mrs. Crane’s being. Mrs. Crane had amused herself so well at the Duchess’s with a certain young guardsman, that Vernon’s coolness to her had quite escaped her memory. But when Miss Walters spoke, it somehow or other came back to her, and seemed in common justice to demand some slight punishment. Memory and imagination at once came to her aid, in friendly struggle as to which should be most active.

‘Mr. Vernon,’ she said, ‘may amuse other people well enough, but he amuses himself even more. Perhaps, however, it is ill-natured to say that, for there was one

other person at least who I imagine has been as well pleased as himself.'

Miss Walters, as she heard this, drew a sharp breath, and her hand closed tightly on a fork she was idly trifling with. Her eye fixed on Mrs. Crane with a helpless stare of attention, and she was struggling for self-possession to make some common remark on the matter. Her aunt, however, saved her the trouble.

'And is Mr. Vernon,' she said smiling, 'a great admirer of young ladies? What should you say, Cynthia? You and he are such friends.'

Mrs. Crane shrugged her shoulders a little. 'As for young ladies,' she said, 'it depends what we mean by that. Mr. Vernon likes them married. There's one who just suits him at the Cap de Juan now, and he sits in her pocket every evening.'

Miss Walters at last contrived to force a

smile to her lips, and to utter three words, while it was still on them. 'Who is that?' she said.

It was the lady with the dark eyes, to whom Vernon had made love in the charade. 'She's one of my best friends,' Mrs. Crane said, 'so of course one can allow for her little eccentricities; but we all know that dear Lily is not bashful.'

Miss Walters discovered after luncheon that Mrs. Crane was going to stay at San Remo for a day or two, and for the first time in her life she sought her company voluntarily. She proposed that they should go a walk together. During the course of this *tête-à-tête*, Mrs. Crane was brought back to the subject of Vernon's doings, and induced to give more particulars, which she did on the following principle. Mr. Ruskin has observed that one of the commonest faults in painting is the representation by the painter of more than his

eye sees. He thinks he has seen distinct leaves, whereas really he has only seen green shadow. Mrs. Crane was afflicted with exactly the same delusion. She saw shadow, and she thought she had seen kisses. The little scene on the terrace, after the charade was over, was presented in this way to Miss Walters, and a number of other incidents of something the same nature.

The following morning when Mrs. Crane met Miss Walters, 'My dear child,' she exclaimed, 'what a lovely frock that is of yours! You weren't looking half so well yesterday. Indeed, I did think you were wearing the willow for a certain friend of ours, whose little doings we talked about. But this, I suppose, is put on in honour of Colonel Jack ; as to-day, I believe, he is going to honour San Remo.



CHAPTER IV.

VERNON'S time meanwhile had been passing pleasantly enough; but though his conduct here and there might have been such as to explain, it was in no case such as to justify, Mrs. Crane's conception of it. The letter, therefore, that Miss Walters had sent to him, when she received his telegram, was an unexpected and inexplicable blow. Its immediate result was to rouse his anxiety for her to a greater intensity than it had ever reached before; and he proceeded at once to write to her, with even more than his accustomed earnestness. He

was full of wonder at the impression he had given her ; he was hurt bitterly at having hurt her. But next day, when he thought the matter over again, he could not deny that there was some foundation for her charge, even though there might be no direct truth in it. The brightness of the world certainly had attracted him. It had come to him like fresh air and sunshine ; and it had been little short of rapture to him to be able to laugh gaily and talk lightly again. He could not deny, too, that amongst the fair guests of the Duchess there were several whose good graces he had found some pleasure in winning. He had felt himself to be popular ; he had felt himself to be fit for the world. He had felt himself to be *liked* by many ; and he had found this a refreshing change after having been *loved* by one. He acknowledged all this to himself ; but was there, he asked, any wrong in it ?

What answer, he wondered, would this letter of his elicit from her? He had to wait a day before it elicited any. It reached Miss Walters the afternoon of her walk with Mrs. Crane, and that evening she was unable to write anything. But by the evening following her answer was written and posted. Vernon at last received it.

‘My dear, dear friend,’ she said, ‘I have received that last kind letter of yours. You will think that my answer to it is very strange. I am intensely weary; there is the same languid heaviness in my mind that there is in the air before a thunderstorm. I cannot tell, but I think, perhaps, that this may be a good condition for me to write in. I am not perturbed for the moment by any violent feeling.

‘You know how little sanguine I have been about my own case. My mind misgave me all the time, that I needed more help than I

had any right to expect of you. The intense, the tender devotion that you have shown for me, and for my welfare—I know how true it has been. I do not for a moment doubt it. I am not one of those unjust women who say that a feeling cannot be true because it does not last for ever. We do not judge of bad feelings in that way. Why should we judge so of good ones? No; I believe that you have had at heart my welfare in the truest and best of ways. I believe that you have loved, and that you do love me. Were I other than I am—were I only now what I once might have been, we might have been happy all our lives together. It is my fault, it is not yours, that what has happened has happened. I am speaking deliberately, and with the conviction that I speak truth, when I say that the only love, the only devotion that could have saved and redeemed me, would have been a devotion too sad and

sorrowful for your bright nature to have endured it.

Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?

—I am not applying that line to you, but somehow or other you suggested it. What I would say with regard to you is, who expects a swallow to carry a millstone? I in life should be a millstone hung about your neck. You could not lift me. There is nothing left for you but to spread your wings and leave me.

‘Dear, the strongest *personal* hold I could have had on you, would have been through your lower nature. Had you had less self-command, less self-denial, I might have held you through that. I know it, though I ought not to know it. But you can command yourself; and I revere your strength, because I realise your temptations. I must explain myself. I say the strongest *personal* hold.

What is actually your strongest feeling for me, indeed what is practically now almost your only feeling for me, is your desire that a soul should save itself. But listen to me. It is *a* soul, not *my* soul, that you are anxious for.

‘You remember the little lame child you so kindly carried to its home. You carried it in your goodness ; but you were glad to put your burden down. I am to you like that poor child.

‘I have no anger against you as I write this. I feel no bitterness or desperation ; though these may very soon come on me. But I am calm, just yet.

‘I have not formed this judgment of you from your own letters only. I have heard of you from a third person—a person I cannot endure, and who, I am sure, said what she did say out of a more or less defined ill-nature. The person I speak of was Mrs. Crane, who tells me that she has been at the

Duchess's ; and seems to have kept a sharp eye on your doings. There are several things she told me which I, of course, do not believe for one instant. But, subtracting the falsehood, I could easily see the truth. I could see how, as the world and its brightness once more came back to you, your letters to me grew not less kind, not less purely intentioned, but shorter and less earnest. If a man would really redeem a woman, she must be all in all to him. That is a truth, dear friend, you have not learnt yet. I think—yes, I think that, had I been different, I might perhaps have taught it to you. But never mind. The dream is over. Had it been longer, the awakening would have been harder to bear even than it is. After all, what does it matter ? You know many women as bad as I am, perhaps even worse, and you think their company pleasant

enough, and you never waste a tragic thought on them.

‘ Well, we have talked about the world. It will be in the world that we next meet. The fancy ball is the day after to-morrow, and we do not return till that evening. We shall meet again there. I wonder if you will recognise me.

‘ I told you Mrs. Crane had been over here. Someone else comes to-day. Ah me !’

She had added in a postscript, ‘ No, you are not all I thought you were. Surely were you what a man ought to be, you would be able to love in a more human way than you do. There is something wanting in you. You are good enough to make me wish for holiness ; not good enough to make me able to attain to it. You are——.’ But here she stopped, and tore off the leaf on which all this had been written.



CHAPTER V.

MISS WALTERS in her letter had spoken no more than the truth. Until the ball Vernon was not able to see her, neither was there any chance of writing to her. It is true that the ball was to be the following evening, and the interval of waiting was not long. But to him it seemed long. He was perplexed, bewildered, miserable. Miss Walters filled his mind to the exclusion of all other thoughts. They had been driven away by her letter, as though by a scourge of cords. He could fix his attention on nothing excepting her. His grave plans for the future, his pleasant amuse-

ments of the hour or the moment, were all ruined by her image. It shattered his peace like a persistent street organ. It would not let him alone. It forced itself on his consciousness. What should he think of Miss Walters? What of himself? He could give himself no answer. In forlorn hope of comfort he betook himself to Stanley, with whom lately he had been having much serious intercourse, and talked long and earnestly with him about our influence over others, and the responsibility that influence lays on us.

His acquaintance with Miss Walters was the first incident in his life that made such influence a reality to him. That opened his eyes to the vast and appalling issues that might hang on his own conduct. It seemed suddenly to have placed in his hands the entire future of another; and he trembled when he saw the value of what he was thus unexpectedly holding. He had resolved, however, with the

most intense sincerity, that he would do his utmost ; or rather, he had not so much resolved as been seized with a desire to do so. The desire had come first, and the resolve afterwards ; and the thought that here at least was one good deed made plain for him, had been a taste of the bread of life to one who spiritually was starving. But now, it seemed as if this bread was to be like Dead Sea fruit. It was turning to ashes in his mouth. And why ? How had he been false to his trust ? What on earth had he done that Miss Walters should write thus to him ? His first impulse was to tax Mrs. Crane with lying, and he trusted very soon to set the matter right again. But by-and-by he began to suspect uneasily that in Miss Walters' impression of him there might be some amount of truth. He might be wanting, possibly, in that *personal* solicitude which was the thing she seemed to hunger for, and which

indeed he had himself professed ; and this misgiving was haunting him when he went to talk with Stanley.

By the time, however, the conversation was over, he had worked off some of his more painful excitement, and went away once again prepared to be sanguine. But his hopes now were of an anxious and solemn kind. The night before the ball he spent alone, thinking over his life, his powers, and what he should really do with them ; and his earnest purpose with regard to a single woman tinged with its earnestness all his other resolutions. As for Miss Walters he had fears about her of which he could not define the nature. The closing words of her letter, in especial, made his mind misgive him : ‘ I told you Mrs. Crane had been over here. Someone else comes to-day. Ah me ! ’ Who was the someone else ? What did it all mean ? There were moments that night, as he tried to compose himself to sleep,

when he hardly dared to think of this ; and when after hours of weary tossing, his eyelids at last closed themselves, he had been forced to stifle arbitrarily all such doubts by determination.

With the following morning, however, they all came back again, and his excitement before long had grown a physical pain to him. One picture only was before his eyes all day. That was his meeting this very night with Miss Walters ; and as he dwelt continually upon this single prospect, he felt, or hoped he felt, that the personal love she longed for was growing distinct and strong in him.

Evening at last drew on. He had invited Stanley to dinner. The priest's company was the only thing that soothed him. He went upstairs to prepare himself before his guest's arrival ; and here he experienced another jar to his feelings. His fancy dress, now that the time had come for

wearing it, seemed a hateful and degrading mockery, and he several times thought of avoiding the ball altogether. How could he bear to be making a fool of himself outwardly, when his whole inward being was as dark as death itself, and concerned with as serious issues? But to remain away was even more hard than to go; so he overcame his reluctance, and put on his costume. It was a relief to him, beyond any of his expectations, that this was quiet both in form and colour, and required no alteration, or, as he would now have called it, disfigurement of his face. It is true that there should, by rights, have been a gaudy scarf about his waist, but he would not submit to this; and he found himself, when his toilet was completed, all in black with the exception of some coarse stockings. He was simply a Spanish pedlar—a familiar figure in every town on the Riviera. He looked so little fanciful, that he might

pass unnoticed amongst any Southern crowd. He even found something in his appearance that actually harmonised with his feelings.

Stanley remarked, when he came to dinner, on the sombre aspect that this dress gave Vernon, and said with a laugh, 'I should feel rather afraid of you, if I met you on the Cap de Juan, in any of these dark lanes. By the way,' he went on presently, 'you have not heard, I suppose, about Alic Campbell.'

Vernon started. 'Heard what about him?'

'He is coming to-night, to sleep at my little *Pension*. I got a telegram from him a few hours ago. He is on his way back to England; but he only says a word or two.'

The mixed shock and pleasure which this news caused was not, in one way, a bad thing for Vernon. It brought him face to face with an anxious practical embarrassment, and acted on him as a species of moral shower-bath. His first fear was that Camp-

bell would come to him that evening, before he was safe out of the house : and his wish was to write to him before meeting him. 'What time does he come ?' he asked of Stanley. The answer somewhat reassured him. It could not well be before half-past ten.

Vernon abruptly rose from the table. 'Stanley,' he said, 'will you excuse me for a minute or two ? I will write Campbell a note. I have something particular I wish to say to him ; and I shall be more at ease when I have got it off my mind.'

He went into his library, and before long came back again. 'Perhaps,' he said to Stanley, 'you will give this to Campbell. Life is full of sad coincidences. This afternoon I received, sent back to me, a letter I wrote to him some three weeks ago, begging him to come and stay with me. , There is something ghastly in having your own

words sent back to you, especially when you have in many ways much changed since you wrote them.'

After this Vernon became more restless ; and his eyes began to gleam with an unnatural excitement, which contrasted curiously with the worn look of his face. When dinner was over, he went to the open window, and remained there for some moments silent. The evening was warm, but the moon had not yet risen, and the sky was thick with stars. A soft breeze came blowing up from the sea, and brought a splash of waves with it. Vernon sniffed the air, as if it were a kind of smelling-salts, and proposed to Stanley that they should go outside and enjoy it. Stanley assented. No sooner were they on the gravel than Vernon began to step out vigorously. At an increasing pace they made the circuit of the garden ; they did the same thing for the second time. Then the

garden bounds grew too small for Vernon, and nothing would satisfy him but that they should wander out upon the rocks. The project pleased Stanley ; he was himself being braced by exercise. The rocks in question were part of the same reef as that on which Vernon with other companions had been clambering not so long ago ; and access was to be had to them from his own garden, as well as from the Duchess's. In a few moments more he and Stanley had descended a winding path, and found themselves almost on the sea-level. The long reef before them was indented with miniature fiords, in which the dark water swayed and gleamed under the starlight. Here the breeze breathed fresher, the noises of the waves came clearer, and the naked skies and stars towered over them in the treeless air.

Presently Vernon began abruptly, ' We have often, Stanley,' he said, ' talked about

human affection; and even yet I hardly know what to think about it. Is it more than, or is it less than, a desire for another's good?'

'It includes that,' said Stanley, 'but it is beyond doubt more than that. A desire for another's good, and a wish or will to work for it, is what we should have for every human being; but if, in speaking of affection, you mean that special personal longing which is what we mean by the word usually, then affection is more than a mere zeal for souls. Indeed, it is almost impossible to have the latter, unless you have at least the capacity for the former. You must have at least the power of being fond of some *one*, or of some special *ones*, or you will never have the power of being zealous, in God's sense, for all.'

'To me,' said Vernon, 'that longing for the individual seems sometimes but the

intensity of self-indulgence. Stanley, for reasons which I cannot explain to you, this has been brought home to me with a fearful personal force. In following one's own salvation, one may be stealing the salvation of a friend.'

'I have no wish,' said Stanley calmly, 'to enquire into any of your secrets; but the case you state I can very easily imagine. It is by no means uncommon. The life of the Christian is full of such paradoxes, and the Christian philosopher accepts and is not daunted by them. I have been studying you, if you will let me say so, for some time past; and in a certain way your condition, I think, is singular. The most sensitive part of you is the intellect, just as with many men it is the senses; and there has fallen full on your intellect the dissolving forces which are at work in the world about us. They are everywhere; in the air we breathe, in the

light we see by. Only on your mind the scattered rays have been focalized. The denials of the intellect have gone far, in your case, towards paralysing the affirmations of the affections.'

Vernon was picking his way carefully over the ledges of the rocks ; and this slow fashion of walking gave him full time to attend to Stanley. At last he said in a slow constrained voice, with his eye fixed on the sea :—

'That is just my stumbling block. The intellect *does* deny the affirmations of the affections. Against my will it annihilates them.'

'And why is that ?' said Stanley, with sudden vigour. 'Is it the fault of your intellect or your affections ? My dear Vernon, I know quite well that our intellectual difficulties are not things to be pooh-pooh'd, nor can they be in all cases set down as wickedness or perversity. But believe me, that in many

cases intellectual denial is based upon moral trifling. The intellect is a mill. It will grind if you bring grist to it : if not, it will only turn and turn. And what brings grist to it ? First and foremost I should say that love did. In that thing, so despised of you—a man's common natural affection for another human being—is the germ not only of all morality, but of all philosophy. To love another, is to affirm the external world ; it is to create creation, it is to open the eyes to God. What can the senses do for you ? Can they even prove to you that you are not alone in the universe, and that all its shapes and seemings are anything but modes of your own aimless consciousness ? No—were it only for the senses, you would be unredeemed in dreamland. There is a passage,' Stanley went on, 'in the writings of a modern English physicist—one of the bitterest of the younger generation of English freethinkers—which

seems to me very happily put, and which I know well by heart. *The inferences, he says, of physical science are all inferences of my real or possible feelings ; inferences of something actually or potentially in my consciousness, not of anything outside it. There are, however, some inferences which are profoundly different from those of physical science. When I come to the conclusion that YOU are conscious, and that there are objects in YOUR consciousness similar to those in mine, I am not inferring any actual or possible feelings of my own, but YOUR feelings, which are not and cannot by any possibility become objects in my consciousness.'*¹

'I agree with you,' said Vernon ; 'that is very happily put. It is your first step towards redeeming yourself from dreamland to realise that you are not the only dreamer. I was trying some time back to write down my own feelings with regard to life ; and my one

¹ *Lectures and Essays*, by W. K. Clifford, vol. ii. p. 72.

complaint was that I lived in a world of shadows, and that my fellow-beings had no living reality for me.'

'Exactly,' said Stanley ; 'that is the very point I am insisting on. To a man who does not love, his fellow men will be shadows. What gives them reality for you is the act of loving—of loving some other creature of a like nature with yours. Love truly is in that way creative. It is the passionate affirmation of a fact which your senses never can assure you of. It seems to be small, and to deal with passing and local issues ; but it contains in it the assent of your nature to the reality of the universe. Look at the stars above us—look at the sea about us ! It is but a commonplace of philosophy, which no school doubts of, to say that all the worlds are held in the hollows of our own minds. The only universe you would ever know, or dream or think of, would perish, so far as you could

tell, with your perishing, were it not for one belief—that in that universe there were other minds like yours, which like yours reflected it. Doubt this, and you must then doubt everything; but if you love, you will be unable to doubt this. The man can never logically be a sceptic who can say what a man I know said to a woman who is now dead: “In your soul also, there is for me a universe. Time, space, and eternity—these are there also; so too is the infinite world of matter, from Orion and the Pleiades to that blue forget-me-not in your bosom.”’

At this moment they were rounding a small headland that ran out between Vernon’s garden and the large domain of the hotel. The reef of rocks stretched right ahead of them, brown and black, towards the open sea. The moon was still unrisen, yet the rocks looked more distinct than they would have done under mere starlight; and here and

there it seemed a wan colour flickered on them. This was remarked both by Vernon and Stanley ; and when they had gone some paces farther, they suddenly came on the explanation of it. Far up, beyond a slope of shrubs and cypress trees, were a thousand lamps burning, and coloured fumes of emerald-green and ruby were floating up into the clear night air ; whilst in the midst of all stood the great hotel itself, looking like some palace of enchantment—a mystery of cloud and marble.

The thought of Miss Walters came to Vernon with a renewed intensity. He turned to Stanley and said, ‘ I must go : my time is come. I will go this way, I think, through the Duchess’s gardens, if you can get back without having me to guide you. Your companionship, my dear fellow, has been more comfort to me than I can tell you ; and there is one thing which, if it did not

trouble you, I should like you to do for me. I told you I had jotted down some of my thoughts on things—especially such things as religious faith and affection. I did my best to be honest, and I wish you would read over what I wrote. I left it on my writing-table in the library, in a blue envelope. If you go through the house you will find it there. And by the way,’ he added, as Stanley and he were separating, ‘if Campbell does not want to go to bed directly, I shall be back from the ball soon. He will find me in by half-past twelve. I am very tired. I shall be sure to be back by then. Last night I slept ill. To-night I am looking forward to sleeping better, and more calmly.’





CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Vernon parted from the priest, climbed from the lonely rocks, and at last entered the Duchess's brilliant portals, he was like a man just dead coming to life in another world. Before his eyes in gay confusion was a throng of moving colours, amongst flowers, and lights, and palm trees; and on his ears in quick cadence burst the measured crash of waltz music.

He was at first quite bewildered; he could recognise nobody. At last he saw the Duchess, who was standing near the ball-room door. He exchanged a few words with her,

and she rallied him on the severity of his appearance. But while she was speaking another sound startled him. It was the voice of Colonel Stapleton. Vernon did but catch a word or two, but these few words were enough. 'The fact is,' the Colonel was saying to somebody, 'I've been away from Nice for some days; and, of all the places in the world, at San Remo.'

The Duchess heard the Colonel's voice also, and at once called to him. 'Well,' said her Grace, 'and where is she? I'm dying to have another look at her.'

'Coming,' said the Colonel gaily. 'Something has tumbled out of her hair, and she's gone into the cloak-room to get it put straight again.'

'We're talking, Mr. Vernon,' said the Duchess, 'of your friend Miss Walters. If you haven't seen her yet, I can tell you, you should at once go and look at her. We had

expected, you know, that we should have had you in attendance on her, instead of our fat friend here. Look, now—there she is, with a dozen men round her already. Go at once and talk to her.'

Vernon looked as the Duchess bade him, and there Miss Walters was ; but for some time he was rooted to the spot. His limbs seemed to be giving way under him. He could not move an inch. What he had heard since he entered the ball-room had, to all appearance, petrified him ; and he could only stare about him stupidly.

'Can't you see her?' said the Duchess, as she was turning away to speak to a new arrival. 'There she is ; I believe she calls herself "A Snow-drop."'

Thus urged, Vernon moved mechanically towards the place where Miss Walters was. She was all in white. Her dress was trimmed with snowdrops, and she wore in her

hair a wreath of the same flower. She had her usual calm manner, which seemed to show that admiration came to her as a thing of course ; but through this calm more animation than usual showed itself ; her eyes looked larger and more luminous, and her cheeks had a deeper flush on them. No wonder she was the centre of an admiring circle.

As he drew nearer he saw she was slightly rouged, and that the darkness under her eyes was not only that of nature. In the case of most women he would have thought nothing of this, but here it gave a strange shock to him. He joined the group, pressing his way into it with a something that, had he been less preoccupied, he would have felt to have been almost roughness. But he could think of no such trifles now. He moved like a somnambulist more than a waking person. In a moment Miss Walters caught his eye. She advanced in a marked way to meet him,

and the others perforce had unwillingly to disperse themselves. 'Come with me,' she said, 'to that window for a moment. I can talk to you only for a moment now.'

'Only for a moment!' he exclaimed. 'Good God, Cynthia, tell me what is this that has happened to you!'

'Be in this window,' she said, 'at half-past eleven. I can't talk to you now—not with all these people about me; and I can't get away before. But be here then, and we will go for a little into the garden. Remember the place—that door close by the ladies' dressing-room. I shall escape there on pretence of finding a smelling-bottle, and shall be with you, unobserved, in an instant. Don't talk to me to-night in public if you can help it. I don't think I could bear it. Now—go away, and amuse yourself. I know you have many friends here.'

They went back to the throng, and were

almost instantly parted in it. But Vernon was utterly unable to collect his wits to talk, and he could hardly reply coherently to the commonest greetings or inquiries. Before long he had found the scene unendurable, and he escaped by himself into the garden. The walks about the house were too bright with lamps. What he wished for was silence and darkness. He found his way into a by-path, and slowly paced up and down in meditation, waiting wretchedly for the appointed time to arrive. On Miss Walters herself he could hardly bear to let his thoughts rest ; but the image, if not the thought of her, was continually present to him. His thoughts, however, found another object, and this was Colonel Stapleton. His whole being grew concentrated into a hatred of this man, and signs of the feeling began to rise to the surface, in the shape of broken mutterings. ' May God in heaven for ever damn and

curse you ! May I be cursed myself, so that I only secure your everlasting misery. Beast, the clay you were made of, was black and fetid with the vilest sewage of life ! For your own filthy pleasure you have broken and trampled on the whitest and purest soul that ever looked out of the holy eyes of woman. God curse you, you dog ! May I die to-night and awake in hell to-morrow, if only I might gloat for ever there over your everlasting agony !' Such were the sounds that came from his lips half audibly ; and in this condition he wandered to and fro, for he knew not how long. He was roused by-and-by, however, by hearing a step behind him, and in another instant a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a rough voice was ordering him to be off and about his business. The stranger addressed him in a mixture of French and English—the former broken, the latter coarse. The mean-

ing of the incident presently became clear. The man was one of the house servants, and Vernon in his pedlar's dress had been seen and mistaken for some suspicious character; nor, when he cast a glance down at his garments, could he much wonder at what had happened. The servant departed with many apologies, and some suppressed amusement and Vernon, annoyed at the interruption, went back towards the house. He consulted his watch. Time had passed faster than he had thought possible. It was a few minutes after half-past eleven. He hastened to the appointed window, from which a flight of steps led down into the garden, and there Miss Walters was. She had plainly been waiting. She was looking about her anxiously. He ascended a step or two. She came down to meet him. 'You are too late,' she said in a low tone.

'Too late!' he echoed.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Someone else has discovered that I was about to escape into the garden. It is with difficulty that I have secured ten minutes or so, alone. He will be looking for me presently. I told him I would remain here. But come now, let us move away quickly. The time is short, for wherever I go I know he is sure to find me. At the end of the straight terrace there is a bench—take me to that.’

They passed down the walk in silence, nor did either speak until they had sat down together. Then Vernon very gently put his arm round her waist, and tried to draw her to himself. But she would not permit of it. ‘No,’ she said passionately, ‘that must never happen again. I am not fit for you. We know both of us—we have quite agreed by this time—that I am not fit for you.’

‘Cynthia,’ he exclaimed, ‘tell me what all this means! Who is it that is coming here

to look for you ? I am not asking you out of any captious jealousy. If it were anyone who would be good to you, and for his sake you chose to leave me, I would tease you with no prayer to keep you.'

'That is just it,' she cried bitterly. 'I knew you would let me go. That is just the bitterness. You have the same care for me that a priest might have or a doctor ; it is not the care of a human being that loves me. It is my welfare you care for, it is not me. I am your penitent or your patient ; I am not the one woman who could make life happy for you.'

'You are wrong,' said Vernon ; 'for I do love you. If you knew how wretched you had made me, you would not doubt my love.'

Her eyes softened, and she looked at him with a despairing tenderness. 'You speak the truth,' she said. 'You love me enough

to be made wretched by me, but not enough—not nearly enough to be made happy by me.'

'Tell me,' said Vernon in a whisper, 'who is it that you say will come here to look for you?'

'You asked me,' she said, 'if he was a man who would be good to me. He is not. He knows no more of goodness than he knows of Hebrew; and he has no more compunction for the soul that he has crushed by his kisses than he would have for a beetle that he trod on, in his path, by accident.'

'What do you mean?' said Vernon. 'It seems that my head is swimming. I must know who you mean. I need not ask his name. But for God's sake tell me—what have I done? What horrid crime have I committed that you should leave me for him? Surely, my own one—surely, my angel, it is not too late to come back to my arms again. He can never—'

surely this is not possible—have recovered his old influence over you ?’

‘ Oh, my heart !’ she exclaimed, pressing her hands hard on it. ‘ How my heart is beating.’

He put his arm about her waist, and she now made no resistance. She let herself be passively drawn towards him, and once again she was resting quietly in his embrace. As she yielded she fixed her eyes on him, and said with a quick painful gasp, ‘ He has recovered everything !’

There was a long silence. Neither looked at the other. By-and-by Vernon again spoke to her, but her eyes were closed, and she would give him no answer. He took her hand, and then again he spoke to her, but there was still no answer ; and he now saw that she was unconscious. He tried to revive her by fanning her, but this produced no effect. He then bethought himself of a foun-

tain close at hand, and he hurried off to dip his handkerchief in the water. On his way, however, he heard footsteps ; and he stood aside for a moment under the shadow of a cypress tree to listen. The sound came nearer. It was a man's firm tread. He was walking slowly ; and presently Vernon caught, whistled softly, a fragment of a vulgar song, popular in London music-halls. A moment later, and the man's figure was visible. It was Colonel Stapleton. One of the many pet dogs of the Duchess was trotting by his side, and with a soft kind caress he stooped down to pat it. The moon that was now risen shone full on his face—on the sleek blonde moustache, the well-trimmed beard, and the waterish grey eyes, with their somewhat puffy lids. It shone, too, on his well-shaped hands, and glittered on his heavy gold rings. At sight of him, Vernon was, as it were, fascinated. His eyes fixed them-

selves on the Colonel ; his teeth were set, and his hands clenched themselves till the nails tore the palms.

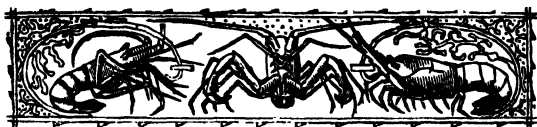
The Colonel never dreamed that he was watched.

I'm getting a big boy now—
I'm getting a big boy now—

Such was the burden of the ditty with which he was enchanting the ear of night, as he went past the cypress tree. At that instant, from the shadow, a Spanish pedlar sprang on him, and laid a hand upon his throat. It was like the grip of a wild beast in its strength, its rapidity, and its savageness. The Colonel was utterly unable to free himself from the grasp of his unrecognised assailant, who said nothing, but whose shadowed face was fixed on him. The Colonel knew in an instant the strength of the grasp that held him. He made no effort to free himself, nor did he seem in any degree to lose his presence of

mind. What he did was the work of a single instant. In a single instant from his pocket there had flashed out a small revolver : a sharp sound for an instant broke the silence, and the form of a Spanish pedlar fell flat and motionless across a bed of purple cinerarias.





CHAPTER VII.

ABOUT half an hour previous to the above incident, a battered and dirty carriage had arrived at Stanley's *Pension* ; and Campbell, seated at supper in the little brick-floored *salle-à-manger*, was opening Vernon's letter.

‘My dear, dear Campbell,’ it ran, ‘do you remember some idle words of mine, for which you reproved me? I said that my true *métier* would be that of wooer-in-ordinary to all my male friends. I would make love for them, and when once I had won the heart of whatever woman was in question, I would hand it over to the man who wanted it. I

remember also I said to you, Would you let me do your wooing for you on these terms? Campbell—God, Destiny, or the Devil heard me when I said that. Unhappily I have fulfilled my *mêtier*, only I cannot hand the heart over to you, that I have won. Do you know who my neighbour is, at the Château St. John—the woman about whom I spoke to you—the woman I drove home at night with? You need not tell me the name of *your* friend. I know it; she is my neighbour. I could not help what has happened. I never knew that I was fighting against you, till it was too late. The event in many ways has been to me a sad one. I have become much changed since that day when last you left me. If you can bear to do so, come and see me directly. You told me that my face was changed from what it was when first you knew me. Perhaps when next you see me it may have suffered one change more.'

Campbell had supped alone, as Stanley was upstairs busy ; but when Stanley by-and-by came down again, he found Campbell with his face white as a sheet. He rose abruptly, and seized Stanley's hand. 'Stanley,' he said, 'do you know the news you brought me in that letter ? Do you remember,' he went on in a whisper, 'what I told you about myself the last morning I was here ? The woman I told you about was Miss Walters ; and Vernon is going to marry her.'

Stanley started and remained quite silent, staring in Campbell's face. Presently he cast his eye down to some papers he had in his hand, and said, 'I have been just reading some of Vernon's thoughts. He wants you to go and see him. Will you come to-night ? Can you bear it ?'

'I don't know,' said Campbell, 'what I can do or bear ! Then suddenly he exclaimed, 'Yes, I will go. I will face everything ; and

you, Stanley—will you come with me ? Come !’

The two men set out together, and they went silently along the white moon-lit road. On their way the silence was only once broken. Once Campbell opened his mouth, and said, ‘ I hope Vernon will be happy.’

They reached the garden gates ; they saw lights in Vernon’s villa gleam through the leaves like glow-worms. When they got near the door there were several men standing about, and conversation of some sort was proceeding rapidly. ‘ Stanley,’ said Campbell, ‘ I wish you would go in first, and see if he has people with him.’

Stanley advanced, and the group at the door eyed him. He was recognised in a moment or two by one of the servants, who at once advanced to meet him, and said something to him in a very subdued voice.

Stanley was led by the servant into a

small dimly lighted vestibule at the back of the villa, and remained there for some minutes. When he came out, he set himself to find Campbell, and he at last discovered him in the library. He was reading. He had found open on the writing table Vernon's letter to himself, which had that same evening been sent back to the writer ; and it had now at last reached the person it was addressed to. One or two of the passages arrested his attention, in spite of the perturbation of the moment, and in a dreamy dazed way he kept reading and re-reading them. 'What do I find has happened ?'—this was one of the passages—'Something glad, strange, and altogether unlooked-for. Out of the ashes of my manhood has re-arisen my youth—my youth which I thought I had said good-bye to for eternity ; and the divine child has again run to meet me, with its eyes bright as ever, and with the summer wind in

its hair.' There was another passage also— 'Oh, the sweetness and rest of this serene self-possession.' He was repeating these last words to himself when Stanley entered.

'Campbell,' said Stanley, in a strange unnatural voice, 'there is another shock in store for you. Shall I break it to you slowly, or can you bear it now? It has to do with the most solemn of all human events.'

Campbell rose with a sort of desperate look, and Stanley whispered a few words in his ear. 'Good God,' gasped Campbell, and he seemed to be almost tottering. Stanley grasped him by the arm, and led him into the vestibule. There on a sofa was something like a human form, covered with an oriental tablecloth, with gaudy arabesques on it, and fringed with heavy gold. Stanley slowly raised one extremity of it, and a face was visible, calm and placid like a boy's, only bloodless and with no colour in it.

Campbell stood over it as if petrified. Some words he had just been reading came into his mind. 'Out of the ashes of my manhood has re-arisen my youth. Oh, the sweetness and rest of this serene self-possession !' Except for this, his mind seemed like an utter blank, till with a start he turned to Stanley, and said piteously, 'And she—— what of her ? Does she know of this ?'

Stanley looked into Campbell's eyes fixedly for some moments, and in the room there was a deathly silence. At last he said, 'She knows nothing, and she never will.'

In the Protestant part of the Cannes Cemetery may be now seen two headstones, not close together, for it was found impracticable so to place them ; but still not far apart. Under one of them sleeps Vernon, more soundly than he had done during the last three weeks of his life, with the leaves of his

confessions clasped on his breast and buried with him. The other headstone bears this inscription, suggested by Alic Campbell,—

CYNTHIA WALTERS.

SHE DIED SUDDENLY OF HEART DISEASE,
APRIL THE 10TH, 1881.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’

THE END.

