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WEIGHED AND WANTING.

BY

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'MARY MARSTON,' "GUILD COURT," "VICAR'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

MARY MARSTON.
GUILD COURT.
THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER.
ADELA CATHCART.
ORTS.
STEPHEN ARCHER.

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	BAD WEATHER	1
II.	FATHER, MOTHER, AND SON	9
III.	THE MAGIC LANTERN	13
IV.	HESTER ALONE	22
V.	TRULY THE LIGHT IS SWEET	29
VI.	THE AQUARIUM	33
VII.	AMY AMBER	47
VIII.	CORNELIUS AND VAVASOR	53
IX.	SONGS AND SINGERS	58
X.	HESTER AND AMY	66
XI.	AT HOME	71
XII.	A BEGINNING	75
XIII.	A PRIVATE EXHIBITION	83
XIV.	DRIFTING	94
XV.	A SMALL FAILURE	105
XVI.	THE CONCERT-ROOM	107
XVII.	AN UNINVITED GUEST	111
XVIII.	CATASTROPHE	114
XIX.	LIGHT AND SHADE	118
XX.	THE JOURNEY	126
XXI.	MOTHER AND DAUGHTER	130
XXII.	GLADNESS	133
XXIII.	DOWN THE HILL	135
XXIV.	OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN	143
XXV.	WAS IT INTO THE FIRE?	147
XXVI.	VAVASOR IN THE COUNTRY	151
XXVII.	A STRANGE VISITOR	163
XXVIII.	MAJOR MARVEL	167

CHAP.		PAGE
XXIX.	—Adventures	174
XXX.	—Poor Gentleman, poor Earl!	179
XXXI.	—A Strange Proposal	183
XXXII.	—The Major and Cousin Helen's Boys	191
XXXIII.	—Miss Vavasor	196
XXXIV.	—Courtship in Earnest	202
XXXV.	—Calamity	207
XXXVI.	—In London	213
XXXVII.	—A Talk with the Major	220
XXXVIII.	—Rencontres	226
XXXIX.	—In the House	231
XL.	—The Major and the Small-pox	236
XLI.	—Down and Down	241
XLII.	—Difference	245
XLIII.	—Deep calleth unto Deep	251
XLIV.	—Deliverance	254
XLV.	—On the Way up	263
XLVI.	—By the Dead	267
XLVII.	—More Yet	273
XLVIII.	—Amy and Corney	278
XLIX.	—Miss Vavasor	283
L.	—Mr. Christopher	293
LI.	—An Arrangement	306
LII.	—Things at Home	311
LIII.	—The Return	316
LIV.	—A Heavenly Vision	318
LV.	—A Sad Beginning	326
LVI.	—Mother and Son	331
LVII.	—Miss Dasomma and Amy	335
LVIII.	—The Sick Room	343
LIX.	—Vengeance is Mine	347
LX.	—Father and Daughter-in-law	355
LXI.	—The Message	362
LXII.	—A Birthday Gift	369

WEIGHED AND WANTING.

CHAPTER I.

BAD WEATHER.

It was a gray, windy noon in the beginning of autumn. The sky and the sea were almost of the same colour, and that not a beautiful one. The edge of the horizon where they met was an edge no more, but a bar thick and blurred, across which from the unseen came troops of waves that broke into white crests, the flying manes of speed, as they rushed at, rather than ran towards the shore: in their eagerness came out once more the old enmity between moist and dry. The trees and the smoke were greatly troubled, the former because they would fain stand still, the latter because it would fain ascend, while the wind kept tossing the former and beating down the latter. Not one of the hundreds of fishing boats belonging to the coast was to be seen; not a sail even was visible, not the smoke of a solitary steamer ploughing its own miserable path through the rain-fog to London or Aberdeen. It was sad weather and depressing to not a few of the thousands come to Burcliff to enjoy a holiday which, whether of days or of weeks, had looked short to the labour-weary when first they came, and was growing shorter and shorter, while the days that composed it grew longer and longer by the frightful vitality of dreariness. Especially to those of them who hated work, a day like this, wrapping them in a blanket of fog, whence the water was every now and then squeezed down upon them in the wettest of all rains, seemed a huge bite snatched by that vague enemy against whom the grumbling of the world is continually directed out of the cake that by every right and reason belonged to them. For were they not born to be happy, and

how was human being to fulfil his destiny in such circumstances?

There are men and women who can be happy in any—even in such circumstances and worse, but they are rare, and not a little better worth knowing than the common class of mortals—alas that they *will* be common! *content* to be common they are not and cannot be. Among these exceptional mortals I do not count such as, having secured the corner of a couch within the radius of a good fire, forget the world around them by help of the magic lantern of a novel that interests them: such may not be in the least worth knowing for their disposition or moral attainment—not even although the noise of the waves on the sands, or the storm in the chimney, or the rain on the windows but serves to deepen the calm of their spirits. Take the novel away; give the fire a black heart; let the smells born in a lodging-house kitchen invade the sitting-room, and the person, man or woman, who can then, on such a day, be patient with a patience pleasant to other people, is, I repeat, one worth knowing—and such there are, though not many. Mrs. Raymount, half the head and more than half the heart of a certain family in a certain lodging-house in the forefront of Burcliff, was one of such.

It was not a large family, yet contained perhaps as many varieties of character and temper as some larger ones, with as many several ways of fronting such a misfortune—for that is what poor creatures, the slaves of the elements, count it—as rainy weather in a season concerning which all men are agreed that it ought to be fine, and that something is out of order, giving ground of complaint, if it be not fine. The father met it with tolerably good humour; but he was so busy writing a paper for one of the monthly reviews, that he would have kept the house had the day been as fine as both the church-going visitors, and the mammon-worshipping residents with income depending on the reputation of their weather, would have made it if they could, nor once said *by your leave;* therefore he had no credit, and his temper must pass as not proven. But if you had taken from the mother her piece of work—she was busy embroidering a lady's pinafore in a design for which she had taken colours and arrangement from a peacock's feather, but was disposing them in the form of a sun which with its rays covered the stomacher, the deeper tints making the shadows between the golden arrows—had you taken from her this piece of work, I say, and given her nothing to do instead, she would

yet have looked and been as peaceful as she now looked, for she was not like Dr. Doddridge's dog that did not know who made him.

A longish lad stood in the bow-window, leaning his head on the shutter, in a mood of smouldering rebellion against the order of things. He was such a mere creature of moods, that individual judgments of his character might well have proved irreconcilable. He had not yet begun by the use of his will —constantly indeed mistaking impulse for will—to blend the conflicting elements of his nature into one. He was therefore a man much as the mass of flour and raisins, etc., when first put into the bag, is a plum-pudding: and had to pass through something analogous to boiling to give him a chance of becoming worthy of the name he would have arrogated. But in his own estimate of himself he claimed always the virtues of whose presence he was conscious in his good moods, letting the bad ones slide, nor taking any account of what was in them. He substituted forgetfulness for repudiation, a return of good-humour for repentance, and at best a joke for apology.

Mark, a pale, handsome boy of ten, and Josephine, a rosy girl of seven, sat on the opposite side of the fire, amusing themselves with a puzzle. The gusts of wind, and the great splashes of rain on the glass, only made them feel the cosier and more satisfied.

"Beastly weather!" remarked Cornelius, as, with an effort, half wriggle, half spring, he raised himself perpendicular, and turned towards the room rather than the persons in it.

"I'm sorry you don't like it, Corney," said his elder sister, who sat beside her mother trimming what promised to be a pretty bonnet. A concentrated effort to draw her needle through an accumulation of silken folds seemed to take something off the bloom of the smile with which she spoke.

"Oh, it's all very well for girls!" returned Cornelius. "You don't do anything worth doing; and besides, you've got so many things you like doing, and so much time to do them in, that it's all one to you whether you go out or stay at home. But when a fellow has but a miserable three weeks and then back to a rot of work he cares no more for than a felon for the treadmill, then it is rather hard to have such a hole made in it! Day after day, as sure as the sun rises—if he does rise—of weather as abominable as rain and wind can make it!"

"My dear boy!" said his mother, without looking up.

"Oh yes, mother! I know! You're so good you would have had Job himself take it coolly. But I'm not like you. Only you needn't think me so very—what you call it! It's only a breach in the laws of nature I'm grumbling at. I don't mean anything to offend you."

"Perhaps you mean more than you think," answered his mother, with a deep-drawn breath, which, if not a sigh, was very nearly one. "I should be far more miserable than any weather could make me, not to be able to join in the song of the three holy children."

"I've heard you say that before, mother," said the youth, in a tone that roused his sister's anger; for much that the mother let pass was by the daughter for her sake resented. "But you see," he went on, "the three holy children, as you call them, hadn't much weather of any sort where they sung their song. Precious tired one gets of it before the choir's through with it!"

"They would have been glad enough of some of the weather you call beastly!" said Hester, again pulling through a stiff needle, this time without any smile, for sometimes that brother was more than she could bear.

"Oh, I dare say! But then, you see, they knew, when they got out, they wouldn't have to go back to a beastly bank, where notes and gold all day went flying about like bats—nothing but the sight and the figures of it coming their way!"

The mother's face grew very sad as it bent over her work. The youth saw her trouble.

"Mother, don't be vexed with a fellow," he said, more gently. "I wasn't made good like you."

"I think your were right about the holy children," she said quietly.

"What!" exclaimed Cornelius. "Mother, I never once before heard you say I was right about any mortal thing! Come, this is pleasant! I begin to think strong ale of myself. I don't understand it, though."

"Shall I tell you? Would you care to know what I mean?"

"Oh yes, mother! if you want to tell me."

"I think you were right when you implied it was the furnace that made them sing about the world outside of it: one can fancy the idea of the frost and the snow and the ice being particularly pleasant to them. And I am afraid, Cornelius, my dear son, you need the furnace to teach you that the will

of God, even in the weather, is a thing for rejoicing in, not for abusing. But I dread the fire for your sake, my boy!"

"I should have thought this weather and the bank behind it furnace enough, mother!" he answered, trying to laugh off her words.

"It does not seem to be," she said, with some displeasure. "—But then," she added with a sigh, "you have not the same companion the three holy children had."

"Who was that?" rejoined Cornelius, for he had partly forgotten the story he knew well enough in childhood.

"We will not talk about *him* now," answered his mother. "He has been knocking at your chamber-door for some time: when he comes to the furnace-door, perhaps you will open *that* to him."

Cornelius returned no answer; he felt his mother's seriousness awkward, and said to himself she was unkind: why couldn't she make some allowance for a fellow? He meant no harm.

He had become still less patient with his mother's not very frequent admonitions since going into the bank, for, much as he disliked it, he considered himself quite a man of the world in consequence. But he was almost as little capable of slipping like a pebble among other pebbles, the peculiar faculty of the man of the world, as he was of perceiving the kind of thing his mother cared about—and that not from moral lack alone, but from dulness and want of imagination as well. He was like the child so sure he can run alone that he snatches his hand from his mother's, and sets off through dirt and puddles, so to act the part of the great personage he would consider himself.

With all her peace of soul, the heart of the mother was very anxious about her son, but she said no more to him now; she knew that the shower-bath is not the readiest mode of making a child friendly with cold water.

Just then broke out the sun. The wind had at last blown a hole in the clouds, and through that at once, as is his wont, and the wont of a greater light than the sun, he shone.

"Come! there's something almost like sunshine!" said Cornelius, having for a few moments watched the light on the sands. "Before it goes in again, as it's sure to do in five minutes at the farthest, get on your bonnet, Hester, and let's have an attempt at a walk."

Before Hester could answer came a sudden spatter of rain on the window.

"There! I told you so! That's always the way! Just my luck! For me to set my heart on a thing is all one with being disappointed of it."

"But if the thing was not worth setting your heart on?" said Hester, speaking with forced gentleness.

"What does that signify? The thing is that your heart is set on it. What you think nothing other people may yet be bold enough to take for something."

"Well, at least, if I had to be disappointed, I should like it to be in something that would be worth having."

"Would you now?" returned Cornelius spitefully. "I hope you may have what you want. For my part I don't desire to be better than my neighbour. I think it downright selfish."

"Do you want to be as good as your neighbour, Corney?" said his mother, looking up through a film of tears. "—But there is a more important question than that," she went on, having waited a moment in vain for an answer, "and that is, whether you are content with being as good as yourself, or want to be better."

"To tell you the truth, mother, I don't trouble my head about such things. Philosophers are agreed that self-consciousness is the bane of the present age: I mean to avoid it. If you had let me go into the army, I might have had some leisure for what you call thought, but that horrible bank takes everything out of a fellow. The only thing it leaves is a burning desire to forget it at any cost till the time comes when you must endure it again. If I hadn't some amusement in between, I should cut my throat, or take to opium or brandy. I wonder how the governor would like to be in my place!"

Hester rose and left the room, indignant with him for speaking so of his father.

"If your father were in your place, Cornelius," said his mother with dignity, "he would perform the duties of it without grumbling, however irksome they might be."

"How do you know that, mother? He was never tried."

"I know it because I know him," she answered.

Cornelius gave a grunt.

"If you think it hard," his mother resumed, "that you have to follow a way of life not of your own choosing, you must remember that you never could be got to express a pre-

ference for one way over another, and that your father had to strain every nerve to send you to college—to the disadvantage, for a time at least, of others of the family. I am sorry to have to remind you also that you did not make it any easier for him by your mode of living while there."

"I didn't run up a single bill!" cried Cornelius with indignation; "and my father knows it."

"He does; but he knows also that your cousin Robert did not spend above two-thirds of what you did, and made more of his time too!"

"He was in *rather* a different set," sneered the youth.

"And you know," his mother went on, "that his main design in placing you in your uncle's bank was that you might gain such a knowledge of business as will be necessary to the proper management of the money he will leave behind him. When you have gained that knowledge, there will be time to look farther, for you are young yet."

Now his father's money was the continuous occasion of annoyance to Cornelius, for it was no secret from his family how he meant to dispose of it. He intended, namely, to leave it under trustees, of whom he wished his son to be one until he married, when it was to be divided equally among the brothers and sisters. This was not agreeable to Cornelius, who could not see, he said, what advantage in that case he had from being the eldest of the family.

He broke out in a tone of expostulation, ready to swell into indignant complaint.

"Now, mother," he said, "do you think it fair that I should have to look after the whole family as if they were my own?"

This was by no means his real cause of complaint, but he chose to use it as his grievance for the present.

"You will have the other trustees to advise with," said his mother. "It need not weigh on you very heavily."

"Well, of course, I could do better with it than anybody out of the family."

"If you have your father's love of fair play, Cornelius, you will. What you can do to that end now is to make yourself thoroughly acquainted with business."

"A bank's not the place to get the knowledge of business necessary for that sort of thing."

"Your father has reasons for preferring a general to any special knowledge. The fitness resulting will depend upon

yourself. And when you marry you will, as you know, be rid of the responsibility. So far your father and you are of one mind: he does not think it fair that a *married* man should be burdened with any family but his own."

"What if I should marry before my father's death?"

"I hope, indeed, you will, Cornelius. The arrangement your father has made is one of provision against the unlikely. When you are married, I don't doubt he will make another, to meet the new circumstances."

"Now," said Cornelius to himself, "I do believe if I was to marry money—as why shouldn't I?—my father would divide my share amongst the rest, and not give me a farthing!"

Full of the injury of the idea, he rose and left the room. His mother, poor woman, wept as he vanished. She dared not allow herself to ask why she wept—dared not allow to herself that her first-born was not a lovely thought to her—dared not ask where he could have got such a mean nature—so mean that he did not know he was mean.

Although the ill-humour in which he had been ever since he came, was by himself attributed to the weather, and had been expended on the cooking, on the couches, on the beds, and twenty different things that displeased him, he had nevertheless brought it with him; and her experience gave her the sad doubt that the cause of it might lie in his own conduct—for the consciousness may be rendered uneasy without much rousing of the conscience proper. He had always been fitful and wayward, but had never before behaved so unpleasantly. Certainly his world had not improved him for his home. Yet amongst his companions he bore the character of the best-natured fellow in the world. To them he never showed any of the peevishness arising from mental discomfort, but kept it for those who loved him a thousand times better, and would have cheerfully parted with their own happiness for his. He was but one of a large herd of youths possessing no will of their own, yet enjoying the reputation of a strong one; for, moved by liking, or any foolish notion his pettiness made a principle of, he would be obstinate; and the common philosophy always takes obstinacy for strength of will, even when it springs from utter inability to will against liking.

Mr. Raymount knew little of the real nature of his son. The youth was afraid of his father—none the less that he spoke of him with so little respect. Before him he dared not show his

true nature. He knew and dreaded the scorn which the least disclosure of his feeling about the intended division of his father's money would rouse in him. He knew also that his mother would not betray him—he would have counted it betrayal—to his father; nor would any one who had ever heard Mr. Raymount give vent to his judgment of any conduct he despised, have wondered at the reticence of either of them.

Whether in his youth he would have done as well in a position like his son's as his worshipping wife believed, may be doubtful; but that he would have done better than his son must seem more than probable.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER, MOTHER, AND SON.

GERALD RAYMOUNT was a man of an unusual combination of qualities. There were such contradictions in his character as to give ground for the suspicion, in which he certainly himself indulged, that there must be in him at least one strain not far removed from the savage, while on the other hand there were mental conditions apparently presupposing ages of culture. At the university he had indulged in large reading outside the hedge of his required studies, and gained thus an acquaintance with and developed a faculty in literature destined to stand him in good stead.

Inheriting earthly life and a history—nothing more—from a long line of ancestors, and a few thousand pounds—less than twenty—from his father, who was a country attorney, a gentle, quarrelsome man, who yet never, except upon absolute necessity, carried a case into court, he had found, as his family increased, that his income was not sufficient for their maintenance in accustomed ease. With not one expensive personal taste between them, they had neither of them the faculty for saving money—often but another phrase for doing mean things. Neither husband nor wife was capable of *screwing*. Had the latter been, certainly the free-handedness of the former would have driven her to it; but while Mrs. Raymount would go without a new bonnet till an outcry arose in the family that its respectability was in danger, she could not offer two shillings a day to a sempstress who thought herself worth half a crown; she

not allow a dish to be set on her table which was not as likely to encourage hunger as to allay it; neither because some richer neighbours gave so little, would she take to herself the spiritual fare provided in church without making a liberal acknowledgment in carnal things. The result of this way of life was the deplorable one that Mr. Raymount was compelled to rouse himself, and, from the chair of a somewhat self-indulgent reader of many books, betake himself to his study-table, to prove whether it were not possible for him to become the writer of such as might add to an income showing scantier every quarter. Here we may see the natural punishment of liberal habits; for this man indulging in them, and, instead of checking them in his wife, loving her the more that she indulged in them also, was for this reason condemned to labour—the worst evil of life in the judgment of both the man about Mayfair and the tramp of the casual ward. But there are others who dare not count that labour an evil which helps to bring out the best elements of human nature, not even when the necessity for it outlasts any impulse towards it, and who remember the words of the Lord, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

For Gerald Raymount, it made a man of him—which he is not who is of no service to his generation. Doubtless he was driven thereto by necessity; but the question is not whether a man works upon more or less compulsion, but whether the work he is thus taught to do he makes good honest work for which the world is so much the better. In this matter of work there are many first that shall be last. The work of a baker for instance must stand higher in the judgment of the universe than that of a brewer, let his ale be ever so good. Because the one trade brings more money than the other, the judgment of this world counts it more honourable, but there is the other judgment at hand.

In the exercise of his calling Raymount was compelled to think more carefully than before, and thus not only his mind took a fresh start, but his moral and spiritual nature as well. He slid more and more into writing out of the necessities and experiences of his own heart and history, and so by degrees gained power of the only true kind—that, namely, of rousing the will, not merely the passions, or even the aspirations of men. The poetry in which he had disported himself at college now came to the service of his prose, and the deeper poetic nature, which is the prophetic in every man, awoke in him.

Till after they had lived together a good many years the wife did not know the worth of the man she had married, nor indeed was he half the worth when she married him that he had now grown to be. The longer they lived the prouder she grew of him and of his work; nor was she the less the practical wisdom of the house that she looked upon her husband as a great man. He was not a great man—only a growing man; yet was she nothing the worse for thinking so highly of him; the object of it was not such that her admiration caused her to deteriorate.

The daughter of a London barrister, of what is called a good family, she had opportunity of knowing something of what is called life before she married, and from mere dissatisfaction had early begun to withdraw from the show and self-assertion of social life, and seek within herself the door of that quiet chamber whose existence is unknown to most. For a time she found thus a measure of quiet—not worthy of the name of rest: she had not heeded a certain low knocking as of one who would enter and share it with her; but now for a long time he who thus knocked had been her companion in the chamber whose walls are the infinite. Why is it that men and women will welcome any tale of love, devotion, and sacrifice from one to another of themselves, but turn from the least hint at the existence of a perfect love at the root of it all? With such a message to them, a man is a maundering prophet! Is it not that their natures are yet so far from the ideal, the natural, the true, that the words of the prophet rouse in them no vision, no poorest perception of spiritual fact?

Helen Raymount was now a little woman of fifty, clothed in a sweet dignity, from which the contrast she disliked between her plentiful gray hair and her great clear dark eyes, took nothing: it was an opposition without discord. She had but the two daughters and two sons already introduced, of whom Hester was the eldest.

Wise as was the mother, and far-seeing as was the father, they had made the mistake common to all but the wisest parents, of putting off to a period more or less too late the moment of beginning to teach their children obedience. If this be not commenced at the first possible moment, there is no better reason why it should be begun at any other, except that it will be the harder every hour it is postponed. The spiritual loss and injury caused to the child by their waiting till they fancy him fit to reason with, is immense; yet there is nothing

in which parents are more stupid and cowardly, if not stiff-necked, than this. I do not speak of those mere animal parents whose lasting influence over their progeny is not a thing to be greatly desired, but of whose who, having a conscience, yet avoid this part of their duty in a manner of which a good motherly cat would be ashamed. To one who has learned of all things to desire deliverance from himself, a nursery in which the children are humoured and scolded and punished instead of being taught obedience, looks like a moral slaughter-house.

The dawn of reason will doubtless help to develop obedience; but obedience is yet more necessary to the development of reason. To require of a child only what he can understand the reason of, is simply to help him to make himself his own God—that is a devil. That some seem so little injured by their bad training is no argument in presence of the many in whom one can read as in a book the consequences of their parents' foolishness.

Cornelius was a youth of good abilities, and with a few good qualities. Naturally kind-hearted, yet full of self and its poor importance, he had an admiration of certain easy and showy virtues. He was himself not incapable of an unthinking generosity; felt pity for picturesque suffering; was tempted to kindness by the prospect of a responsive devotion. Unable to bear the sight of suffering, he was yet careless of causing it where he would not see it; incapable of thwarting himself, he was full of weak indignation at being thwarted; supremely conceited, he had yet a regard for the habits and judgments of men of a certain stamp which towards a great man would have been veneration, and would have elevated his being. But the sole essentials of life as yet discovered by Cornelius were a good carriage, good manners, self-confidence, and seeming carelessness in spending. That the spender was greedy after the money he yet scorned to work for, made no important difference in Cornelius's estimate of him. In a word, he fashioned a fine-gentleman-god in his foolish brain, and then fell down and worshipped him with what worship was possible between them. To all home-excellence he was so far blind that he looked down upon it; the opinion of father or mother, though they had reared such a son as himself, was not to be compared in authority with that of Reginald Vavasor, who, though so poor as to be one of his fellow-clerks, was heir apparent to an earldom.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAGIC LANTERN.

CORNELIUS, leaving his mother, took refuge with his anger in his own room. Although he had occupied it but a fortnight, the top of its chest of drawers was covered with yellow novels —the sole kind of literature for which Cornelius cared. Of this he read largely, if indeed his mode of swallowing could be called reading: his father would have got more pleasure out of the poorest of them than Cornelius could from a dozen. And now in this day's dreariness, he had not one left unread, and was too lazy or effeminate or prudent to encounter the wind and rain that beset the path betwixt him and the nearest book-shop. None of his father's books had any attraction for him. Neither science, philosophy, history, nor poetry held for him any interest. A drearier soul in a drearier setting could hardly be imagined than the soul of this youth in that day's weather at Burcliff.

Does a reader remark, "Well, wherein was the poor fellow to blame? No man can make himself like this or like that! The thing that is a passion to one is a bore to another! Some with both ear and voice have no love for music. Most exquisite of sonatas would not to them make up for a game of billiards! They cannot help it: they are made so"?—I answer, It is true no one can by an effort of the will care for this or that; but where a man cares for nothing that is worth caring for, the fault must lie, not in the nature God made, but in the character the man himself has made and is making. There is a moral reason why he does not and cannot care. If Cornelius had begun at any time, without other compulsion than the urging within him, to do something he knew he ought to do, he would not now have been the poor slave of circumstance he was, at the call and beck of the weather—such, in fact, as the weather willed. When men face a duty, not merely will that duty become at once less unpleasant to them, but life itself will *immediately* begin to gather interest; for in duty, and in duty only, does the individual begin to come into real contact with life; therein only can he see what life is, and grow fit for it.

He threw himself on his bed, for he dared not smoke where his father was, and dozed away the hours till lunch, then

returned and dozed again, with more success, till tea-time. This was his only resource against the unpleasantness of the day. The others were nowise particularly weighed down by it, and the less that Cornelius was so little in the room, haunting the window with his hands in his pockets.

When tea was over he rose and sauntered once more to the window, the only outlook he ever frequented.

"Hullo!" he cried, turning from it quickly. "I say, Hester! here's a lark! the sun's shining as if his grandmother had but just taught him how! The rain's over, I declare—at least for a quarter of an hour! Come, let's have a walk. We'll go and hear the band in the castle-gardens. I don't think there's anything going on at the theatre, else I would take you there."

The sight of the sun revives both men and midges.

"I would rather walk," said Hester. "It is seldom one sees good acting in the provinces. At best there is but one star. I prefer a jewel to a gem, and a decent play to a fine part."

"Hester," said Cornelius with reproof, "I believe you think it a fine thing to be hard to please! I know a fellow that calls it a kind of suicide. To allow a spot to spoil your pleasure in a beauty is to be too fond of perfection."

"No, Corney," answered his sister, "that is hardly my position. What I would say is rather, that one point of excellence is not enough to make a whole beautiful—a face or a play—or a character."

Hester had rather a severe mode of speaking, especially to this brother, which if it had an end, failed of it. She was the only person in the house who could ever have done anything with him, and she lost her advantage—let me use a figure—by shouting to him from a distance, instead of coming close up to him and speaking in a whisper. But for that she did not love him enough, neither was she yet calm enough in herself to be able for it. I doubt much, however if he would have been in any degree permanently the better for the best she could have done for him. He was too self-satisfied for any redemption. He was afraid of his father, resented the interference of his mother, was as cross as he pleased with his sister, and cared little whether she was vexed with him or not. And he regarded the opinion of any girl, just because she was a girl, too little to imagine any reflection on himself in the remark she had just made.

While they talked he had been watching the clouds.

"Do go, Hester," he said. "I give you my word it will be a fine evening."

She went to put on her hat and cloak, and presently they were in the street.

It was one of those misty clearings in which sometimes Day seems to gather up his careless skirts, that have been sweeping the patient, half-drowned world, as he draws nigh the threshold of waiting Night. There was a great lump of orange-colour half-melted up in the watery clouds of the west, but all was dreary and scarce consolable, up to the clear spaces above, stung with the steely stars that began to peep out of the blue ope of heaven. Thither Hester kept casting her eyes as they walked, or rather somehow her eyes kept travelling thitherward of themselves, as if indeed they had to do with things up there. And the child that cries for the moon is wiser than the man who looks upon the heavens as a mere accident of the earth, with which none but *unpractical* men concern themselves.

But as she walked gazing at "an azure disc, shield of tranquillity," over her head, she set her foot down unevenly, and gave her ankle a wrench. She could not help uttering a little cry.

"There now, Hester!" said Cornelius, pulling her up like a horse that stumbled, "that's what you get by your star-gazing! You are always coming to grief by looking higher than your head!"

"Oh, please, stop a minute, Corney," returned Hester, for the fellow would have walked on as if nothing had happened. "My ankle hurts so!"

"I didn't know it was so bad as that!" he answered, stopping. "There! take my arm."

"Now I can go on again," she said, after a few moments of silent endurance. "How stupid of me!—on a plain asphalt pavement!"

He might have excused her with the remark that just on such was an accidental inequality the more dangerous!

"What bright particular star were you worshipping now?" he asked scoffingly.

"What do you mean by that?" she rejoined in a tone affected by her suffering, which thence, from his lack of sympathy, he took for one of crossness.

"You know quite well," he answered roughly, "that you are always worshipping some paragon or other—for a while,

till you get tired of her, and then throwing her away for another!"

Hester was hurt and made no answer.

There was some apparent ground for the accusation. She was ready to think extravagantly of any new acquaintance that pleased her. Frank and true and generous, it was but natural she should read others by herself; just as those in whom is meanness or guile cannot help attributing the same to the simplest. Nor was the result unnatural either, namely, that, when a brief intercourse had sufficed to reveal a nature on the common level, it sufficed also to chill the feeling that had rushed to the surface to welcome a friend, and send the new-found floating far away on the swift ebb of disappointment. Any whom she treated thus, called her, of course, fitful and changeable, whereas it was in truth the unchangeableness of her ideal and her faithfulness to it that exposed her to blame. She was so true, so much in earnest, and, although gentle, had so little softness to drape the sterner outlines of her character, that she was looked upon with dislike by not a few of her acquaintance.

"That again comes of looking too high, and judging with precipitation," resumed Cornelius, urged from within to be unpleasant—and the rather that she did not reply.

He was always ready to criticise, and it was so much easier for him that he had not the least bent towards self-criticism. For the latter supposes some degree of truth in the inward parts, and that is obstructive to the indulgence of the former tendency. As to himself, he would be hand and glove at a moment's notice with any man who looked a gentleman and made himself agreeable; nor, whatever he might find him to be, was he, so long as the man was not looked down upon by others, the least inclined to avoid his company because of moral shadiness. "A man can take care of himself!" he would say.

Hester stopped again.

"Corney," she said, "my ankle feels so weak! I am walking in terror of twisting it again. You must let me stand a bit. I shall be all right in a minute."

"I'm very sorry," rejoined her brother disagreeably. "We must take the first fly we meet, and go home again. It's just my luck! I thought we were going to have some fun!"

They stood silent, she looking nowhere, and he staring now in this direction, now in that.

"Hullo! what's this?" he cried, his gaze fixing on a large

building opposite. "The Pilgrim's Progress! The Rake's Progress! Ha! ha! As edifying as amusing, no doubt! I suppose the Pilgrim and the Rake are contrasted with each other. But how, I wonder! Is it a lecture, or a magic lantern? Both, I dare say! Let's go in and see! I can't read any more of the bill. We may at least sit there till your ankle is better. 'Admission—front seats sixpence.' Come along. We may get a good laugh, who knows?—a thing cheap at any price—for our sixpences!"

"I don't mind," said Hester, and they crossed the road.

It was a large, dingy, dirty, water-stained, and somewhat dilapidated hall to which the stone stair, ascending immediately from the door, led them; and it would have looked considerably worse but for the obscurity belonging to the nature of the entertainment, through which it took some pains to discover the twenty-five or thirty people that formed the company present. It was indeed a dim, but not therefore a very religious light, that pervaded rather than overcame the gloom, issuing chiefly from the crude and discordant colours of a luminous picture on a great screen at the farther end of the hall. There an ill-proportioned figure, presenting, although his burden was of course gone some time, a still very humpy Christian, was shown extended on the ground, with his sword a yard beyond his reach, and Apollyon straddling across the whole breadth of the way, and taking him in the stride. But that huge stride was the fiend's sole expression of vigour; for, although he held a flaming dart ready to strike the poor man dead, his own dragon countenance was so feebly demoniacal that it seemed unlikely he would have the heart to drive it home. The lantern from which proceeded the picture, was managed by a hidden operator, evidently from his voice, occasionally overheard, a mere boy; and an old man, like a broken-down clergyman, whose dirty white neckcloth seemed adjusted on a secret understanding of moral obliquity, its knot suggesting a gradual approach to the last position a knot on the neck can assume, kept walking up and down the parti-coloured gloom, flaunting a pretence of lecture on the scenes presented. Whether he was a little drunk or greatly in his dotage, it was impossible to determine without a nearer acquaintance. If I venture to give a specimen of his mode of lecturing, it will be seen that a few lingering rags of scholastic acquirement yet fluttered about the poor fellow.

"Here you behold the terrible battle between Christian—or was it Faithful?—I used to know, but trouble has played old Hookey with my memory. It's all here, you know,"—and he tapped the bald table-land of his head—"but somehow it ain't handy as it used! In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withereth. Man that is in honour and abideth not, is like the beast that perisheth.—But there's Christian and Apollyon, right afore you, and better him than me. When I was a young one, and that wasn't yesterday, I used to think, but that was before I could read, that Apollyon was one and the same with Bonaparty—Nap-poleon, you know. And I wasn't just so far wrong neither, as I shall readily prove to those of my distinguished audience who have been to college like myself, and learned to read Greek like their mother tongue. For what is the very name Apollyon, but an occult prophecy concerning the great conqueror of Europe! Nothing can be plainer! Of course the first letter, N, stands for nothing—a mere veil to cover the prophecy till the time of revealing. In all languages it is the sign of negation —*no*, and *none*, and *never*, and *nothing*; therefore cast it away as the nothing it is. Then what have you left but *apoleon!* Throw away another letter, and what have you but *poleon!* Throw away letter after letter, and what do you get but the words—*Napoleon*, *apoleon*, *poleon*, *oleon*, *leon*, *eon*, or, if you like, *on!* Now these are all Greek words—and what, pray, do they mean? I will give you a literal translation, and I challenge any Greek scholar who may be here present to set me right, that is, to show me wrong: Napoleon, the destroyer of cities, being a destroying lion! Now I should like to know a more sure word of prophecy than that! Would any one in the company oblige me? I take that now for an incontrovertible" —he stammered over this word—"proof of the truth of the Bible. But I am wandering from my subject, which error, I pray you, ladies and gentlemen, to excuse, for I am no longer what I was in the prime of youth's rosy morn.—Come, I must get on! Change the slide, boy; I'm sick of it. I'm sick of it all. I want to get home and go to bed."

He maundered on in this way, uttering even worse nonsense than I have set down, and mingling with it soiled and dusty commonplaces of religion, every now and then dwelling for a moment or two upon his own mental and physical declension from the admirable being he once was. He reached the height

of his absurdity in describing the resistance of the two pilgrims to the manifold temptations of Vanity Fair, which he so set forth as to take from Christian and Faithful the smallest possible appearance of merit in turning their backs upon them.

Cornelius was in fits of laughter, which he scarcely tried to choke. When the dreary old soul drew near where he sat, smelling abominably of strong drink, the only thing that kept his merriment in bounds was the dread that the man might address him personally, and so draw upon him the attention of the audience.

Very different was the mood of Hester. To the astonishment of Cornelius, when at last they rose to go, there were tears in her eyes. The misery of the whole thing was too dreadful to her! The lantern itself must, she thought, have been made when the invention was in its infancy, and its pictured slides seemed the remnants of various outworn series. Those of "The Rake's Progress" were something too hideous and lamentable to be dwelt upon. And the ruinous wretched old man did not merely seem to have taken to this as a last effort, but to have in his dotage turned back upon his life-course, and resumed a half-forgotten trade—or perhaps only an accomplishment of which he had made use for the benefit of his people when he was a clergyman—to find that the faculty for it he once had, and on which he had reckoned to carry him through, had abandoned him. Worst of all to the heart of Hester was the fact that so few people were present—many of them children, at half-price, some of whom seemed far from satisfied with the amusement offered them. When the hall and the gas—but that would not be much—and the advertizing were paid for, what would the poor old scrag-end of humanity, with his yellow-white neckcloth knotted hard under his left ear, have over for his supper? Was there any woman to look after him? and would she give him anything fit to eat? Hester was all but crying to think she could do nothing for him—that he was so far from her and beyond her help, when she remembered the fat woman, with curls hanging down her cheeks, who had taken their money at the door. Apparently she was his wife—and seemed to thrive upon it! But alas for the misery of the whole thing!

When they came out, and breathed again the blue, clean, rain-washed air instead of the musty smells of the hall, involuntarily Hester's eyes rose to the vault whose only keystone is

the will of the Father, whose endless space alone is large enough to picture the heart of God: how was that old man to get up into the high regions, and grow clean and wise? For all the look, he must belong there as well as she! And were there not thousands equally and more miserable in the world —people wrapped in no tenderness, to whom none ministered, left if not driven—so it seemed at the moment to Hester—to fold themselves in their own selfishness? And was there nothing she, a favoured one of the family, could do to help, to comfort, to lift up one such of her own flesh and blood?—to rescue a heart from the misery of hopelessness?—to make this one or that feel there was a heart of love and refuge at the centre of things? Hester had a large, though not hitherto entirely active aspiration in her; and now, the moment she began to flutter her weak wings, she found the whole human family hanging upon her, and that she could not rise except in raising them along with her. For the necessities of our deepest nature are such as not to admit of a mere private individual satisfaction. I well remember feeling as a child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was love essential to my nature—the love of me, a man, not of me, a person—the love therefore that all men needed, the love that belonged to their nature as the children of the Father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men.

But this was not the beginning of Hester's enthusiasm for her kind—only a crystallizing shock it received. Nor was it likely to be the less powerful in the end that now at the age of three and twenty she had but little to show for it. She was one of the strong ones that grow slowly; and she had now for some years been cherishing an idea and working for its realization, which every sight and sound of misery tended to quicken and strengthen.

"There you are again," said Cornelius, "—star-gazing as usual! You'll be spraining your other ankle presently!"

"I had forgotten all about my ankle, Corney dear," returned Hester, softened by her sorrowful sympathy; "but I will be careful."

"You had better.—Well, I think between us we had the worth of our shilling! Did you ever see such a ridiculous old bloke!"

"I wish you would not use that word, Corney," said Hester,

letting her displeasure fall on the word, where she knew the feeling was entrenched beyond assault.

"What's the matter with the word? It is the most respectable old Anglo-Saxon."

Hester said no more, but heaved an inward sigh. Of what consequence were the words her brother used, so long as he recognized no dignity in life, never set himself *to be!* Why should any one be taught to behave like a gentleman, so long as he is no gentleman?

Cornelius burst out laughing.

"To think of those muffs going through the river—sliding along the bottom, and spreading out their feelers above the water, like two rearing lobsters! And the angels waiting for them on the bank like laundresses with their clean shirts! Ha! ha! ha!"

"They seemed to me," answered Hester, "very much like the men, and angels too, in that old edition of the 'Pilgrim' papa thinks so much of. I couldn't for my part, absurd as they were, help feeling a certain pathos in the figures and faces."

"That came of the fine interpretation the old—hm!—codger gave of their actions and movements!"

"It may have come of the pitiful feeling the whole affair gave me—I cannot tell," said Hester. "That old man made me very sad."

"Now you do strand me, Hester!" replied her brother. "How you could see anything pathetic, or pitiful as you call it, in that disreputable old humbug, I can't even imagine. A more ludicrous specimen of tumble-down humanity it would be impossible to find! A drunken old thief—I'll lay you any thing! Catch me leaving a sov where he could spy the shine of it!"

"And don't you count that pitiful, Cornelius? Can you see one of your own kind, with heart and head and hands like your own, so self-abandoned, so low, so hopeless, and feel no pity for him? Didn't you hear him say to himself as he passed you, 'Come, let's get on! I'm sick of it. I don't know what I'm talking about'? He seemed actually to despise himself!"

"What better or more just could he do? But never you mind: *he's* all right! Don't you trouble your head about *him*. You should see him when he gets home! He'll have his hot supper and his hot tumbler, don't you fear! Swear he will too, and fluently, if it's not waiting him!"

"Now that seems to me the most pitiful of all," returned Hester, and was on the point of adding, "That is just the kind of pity I feel for you, Corney," but checked herself. "Is it not most pitiful to see a human being, made in the image of God, sunk so low?" she said.

"It's his own doing," returned Cornelius.

"And is not that yet the lowest and worst of it all? If he could not help it, and therefore was not to blame, it would be sad enough; but to be such, and be to blame for being such, seems to me misery upon misery unbearable."

"There I don't agree with you—not at all. So long as a fellow has fair play, and nothing happens to him but what he brings upon himself, I don't see what he has to complain of."

"But that is not the question," interrupted Hester. "It is not whether he has anything to complain of, but whether he has anything to be pitied for. I don't know what I wouldn't do to make that old man clean and comfortable!"

Cornelius again burst into a great laugh. No man was anything to him merely because he was a man.

"A highly interesting protégé you would have!" he said; "and no doubt your friends would congratulate you when you presented him! But for my part, I don't see the least occasion to trouble your head about such riff-raff. Every manufacture has its waste, and he's human waste. There's misery enough in the world without looking out for it, and taking other people's upon our shoulders. You remember what one of the fellows in the magic lantern said: 'Every tub must stand on its own bottom'!"

Hester held her peace. That her own brother's one mode of relieving the suffering in the world should be to avoid as much as possible adding to his own, was to her sisterly heart humiliating.

CHAPTER IV.

HESTER ALONE.

When the family separated for the night, and Hester reached her room, she sat down, and fell a thinking, not more earnestly, but more continuously.

She was one of those women—not few in number, I have

good reason to think, though doubtless few comparatively—who from the first dawn of consciousness have all their lives endeavoured, with varying success, with frequent failure of strength, and occasional brief collapse of effort, to do the right thing. Therein she had but followed in the footsteps of her mother, who, though not so cultivated as she, walked no less steadily in the true path of humanity. But the very earnestness of Hester's endeavour, along with the small reason she found for considering it successful; the frequent irritation with herself because of failure; and the impossibility of satisfying the hard master Self, who, while he flatters some, requires of others more than they can give—all tended to make her less evenly sympathetic with those about her than her heart's theory demanded. Willing to lay down her life for them, a matchless nurse in sickness, and in trouble revealing a tenderness perfectly lovely, she was yet not the one to whom first either of the children were ready to flee with hurt or sorrow: she was not yet all human, because she was not yet at home with the divine.

Thousands that are capable of great sacrifices are yet not capable of the little ones which are all that are required of them. God seems to take pleasure in working by degrees; the progress of the truth is as the permeation of leaven, or the growth of a seed: a multitude of successive small sacrifices may work more good in the world than many a large one. What would even our Lord's death on the cross have been, except as the crown of a life in which he died daily, giving himself, soul, body, and spirit, to his men and women? It is *being* that is the precious thing. Being is mother to all the little Doings as well as the grown-up Deeds and the mighty heroic Sacrifice; and these little Doings, like the good children of the house, make the bliss of it. Hester had not had time, neither had she prayed enough, to *be* quite yet, though she was growing well towards it. She was a good way up the hill, and the Lord was coming down to meet her; but they had not quite met yet, so as to go up the rest of the way together.

In religious politics, Hester was what is called a good churchwoman, which in truth means a good deal of a sectarian. She not merely recoiled from such as venerated the more primitive modes of church-government rather than those of later expediency, and preferred far inferior extempore prayers to the best possible prayers in print, going therefore to some

chapel instead of to church, but she looked down upon them as from a superior social standing—that is, with the judgment of this world, and not that of Christ, the carpenter's son. In short, she had a repugnance to the whole race of dissenters, and would not have soiled her dress with the dust of one of their schoolrooms even. She regarded her own conscience as her lord, but had not therefore any respect for that of another man where it differed from her in the direction of what she counted vulgarity. So she was scarcely in the kingdom of heaven yet, any more than thousands who regard themselves as choice Christians. I do not say these feelings were very active in her, for little occurred to call them out; but she did not love her dissenting neighbour, and felt good and condescending when, brought into contact with one, she behaved kindly to him.

I well know that some of my readers will heartily approve of her in this very thing, and that not a few *good dissenters* on the other hand, who are equally and in precisely the same way sectarians, that is bad Christians, will scorn her for it; but for my part I would rather cut off my right hand than be so cased and stayed in a narrow garment of pride and satisfaction, condemned to keep company with myself instead of the Master as he goes everywhere—into the poorest companies of them that love each other, and so invite his presence.

The Lord of truth and beauty has died for us: shall we who by haunting what we call his courts, have had our sense of beauty, our joy in grace tenfold exalted, gather around us, in the presence of those we count less refined than ourselves, skirts trimmed with the phylacteries of the world's law, turning up the Pharisaical nose, and forgetting both what painful facts self-criticism has revealed to ourselves, and the eyes upon us of the yet more delicate refinement and the yet gentler breeding of the high countries? May these not see in us some malgrace which it needs the gentleness of Christ to get over and forget, some savagery of which we are not aware, some *gaucherie* that repels though it cannot estrange them? Casting from us our own faults first, let us cast from us and from him our neighbour's also. O gentle man, the common man is yet thy brother, and thy gentleness should make him great, infecting him with thy humility, not rousing in him the echo of a vile unheavenly scorn. Wilt thou, with thy lofty condescension, more intrinsically vulgar than even his ugly self-assertion, give him cause too good to hate thy refinement? It is not

thy refinement makes thee despise him; it is thy own vulgarity; and if we dare not search ourselves close enough to discover the low breeding, the bad blood in us, it will one day come out plain as the smitten brand of the *forçat*.

That Hester had a tendency to high church had little or nothing to do with the matter. Such exclusiveness is simply a form of that pride, justify or explain it as you will, which found its fullest embodiment in the Jewish Pharisee—the evil thing that Christ came to burn up with his lovely fire, and which yet so many of us who call ourselves by his name keep hugging to our bosoms—I mean the pride that says, "I am better than thou." If these or those be in any true sense below us, it is of Satan to despise—of Christ to stoop and lay hold of and lift the sister soul up nearer to the heart of the divine tenderness.

But this tenderness, which has its roots in every human heart, had larger roots in the heart of Hester than in most. Whatever her failings, whatever ugly weeds grew in the neglected corners of her nature, the moment she came in contact with any of her kind in whatever condition of sadness or need, the pent-up love of God—I mean the love that came of God and was divine in her—would burst its barriers and rush forth, sometimes almost overwhelming herself in its torrent. She would then be ready to die, nothing less, to help the poor and miserable. She was not yet far enough advanced to pity vulgarity in itself—perhaps none but Christ is able to do that—but she could and did pity greatly its associated want and misery, nor was repelled from them by their accompanying degradation.

The tide of action, in these later years flowing more swiftly in the hearts of women—whence has resulted so much that is noble, so much that is paltry, according to the nature of the heart in which it swells—had been rising in that of Hester also. She must not waste her life! she must *do* something! What should it be? Her deep sense of the misery around her had of course suggested that it must be something in the way of help. But what form was the help to take? "I have no money!" she said to herself—for this the last and the feeblest of means for the doing of good is always the first to suggest itself to one who has not perceived the mind of God in the matter. To me it seems that the first thing in regard to money is to prevent it from doing harm. The man who sets out to

do good with his fortune is like one who would drive a team of tigers through the streets of a city, or hunt the fox with cheetahs, I would think of money as Christ thought of it, not otherwise; for no other way is true, however it may recommend itself to good men; and neither Christ nor his apostles did anything by means of money; nay, he who would join them in their labours had to abandon his *fortune*.

This evening, then, the thought of the vulgar, miserable, ruinous old man, with his wretched magic lantern, kept haunting Hester, and made her very pitiful; and naturally, starting from him, her thoughts went wandering abroad over the universe of misery. For was not the world full of men and women who groaned, not merely under poverty and cruelty, weakness and sickness, but under dullness and stupidity, hugged in the paralyzing arms of that devil-fish, The Commonplace, or held fast to the rocks by the crab Custom, while the tide of moral indifference was fast rising to choke them? Was there no prophet, no redemption, no mediator for such as these? Were there not thousands of women, born with a trembling impulse towards the true and lovely, in whom it was withering for lack of nurture, and they themselves continuously massing into the common clay, a summer-fall of human flowers off the branches of hope and aspiration? How many young wives, especially, linked to the husbands of their choice, and by this very means disenchanted, as they themselves would call it, were doomed to look no more upon life as the antechamber of the infinite, but as the counting-house of the king of the nursery-ballad, where you may, if you can, eat bread and honey, but where you *must* count your money! At the windows of the husband-house no more looks out the lover but the man of business, who takes his life to consist in the abundance of the things he possesses! He must make money for his children!—and would make money if he had nor chick nor child. Could she do nothing for such wives at least? The man who by honest means made people laugh, sent a fire-headed arrow into the ranks of the beleaguering enemy of his race; he who beguiled from another a genuine tear, made a heavenly wind visit his heart with a cool odour of paradise! What was there for her to do?

But possibly Hester might neither have begun nor gone on thinking thus, had it not been for a sense of power within her, springing from, or at least associated with, a certain special

gift, which she had all her life, under the faithful care of her mother, been cultivating. Endowed with a passion for music —what is a true passion but a heavenly hunger?—which she indulged, relieved, strengthened, nor ever sated, by a continuous study of both theoretical and practical music, she approached both piano and organ with eager yet withholding foot, each as a great and effectual door ready to open into regions of delight. But she was gifted also with a fine contralto voice of exceptional scope and flexibility, whose capacity of being educated into an organ of expression was not thrown away upon one who had a world inside her to express—doubtless as yet not a little chaotic, but in process of assuming form that might demand utterance; and this angelic instrument had for some years been under careful training. And now this night, came to Hester, if not for the first time, yet more clearly than ever before, the thought whether she might not in some way make use of this her one gift for the service she desired—for the comfort, that was, and the uplifting of humanity, especially such humanity as had sunk below even its individual level. Thus instinctively she sought relief from sympathetic pain in the alleviation and removal of its cause.

But pity and instinctive recoil from pain were by no means all the elements of the impulse moving Hester in this direction. An honest and active mind such as hers could not have carried her so often to church and for so long a time, whatever might be the nature of the direct teaching she there received, without gaining some glimpses of the mightiest truth of our being, that we belong to God in actual fact of spiritual property and profoundest relationship. She had much to learn in this direction yet—as who has not who is ages in advance of her? —but this night, came back to her, as it had often already returned, the memory of a sermon she had heard some twelve months before—on the text, "Glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." It was a dull enough sermon, yet not so dull but it enabled her to supply in some degree its own lack; and when she went out of the dark church into the sunshine, and heard the birds singing as if they knew without any St. Francis to tell them that their bodies and their spirits were God's, a sense awoke in her such as she had not had before, that the grand voice lying like an unborn angel in the chest and throat of her, belonged not to herself but to God, and must be used in some way for the working of his will in the

world which as well as the voice he had made. She had no real notion yet of what is meant by the glory of God. She had not quite learned that simplest of high truths that the glory of God is the beauty of Christ's face. She had a lingering idea—a hideously frightful one, though its vagueness kept it in great measure from injuring her—that the One only good, the One only unselfish, thought a great deal of himself, and looked strictly after his rights in the way of homage. Hence she thought first of devoting the splendour and richness of her voice to swell the song of some church-choir. With her notion of God and of her relation to him, how could she yet have escaped the poor pagan fancy—good for a pagan, but beggarly for a Christian—that church and its goings-on are a serving of God? She had not begun to ask how these were to do God any good—or if my reader objects to the phrase, I will use a common one saying the same thing—how these were to do anything for God. She had not begun to see that God is the one great servant of all, and that the only way to serve him is to be a fellow-servant with him—to be, say, a nurse in his nursery, and tend this or that lonely, this or that rickety child of his. She had not yet come to see that it is as absurd to call song and prayer a serving of God, as it would be to say the thief on the cross did something for Christ in consenting to go with him to paradise. But now some dim perception of this truth began to wake in her. Vaguely she began to feel that perhaps God had given her this voice and this marriage of delight and power in music and song for some reason like that for which he had made the birds the poets of the animal world: what if her part also should be to drive dull care away? what if she too were intended to be a door-keeper in the house of God, and open or keep open windows in heaven that the air of the high places might reach the low swampy ground? If while she sang, her soul mounted on the wings of her song till it fluttered against the latticed doors of heaven as a bird flutters against the wires of its cage; if also God has made of one blood all nations of men—why then surely her song was capable of more than carrying merely herself up into the regions of delight! Nay more, might there not from her throat go forth a trumpet-cry of truth among such as could hear and respond to the cry? Then, when the humblest servant should receive the reward of his well-doing, she would not be left outside, but enter into the joy of her Lord. How

specially such work might be done by her she did not yet see, but the truth had drawn nigh her that, to serve God in any true sense, we must serve him where he needs service—among his children lying in the heart of lack, in sin and pain and sorrow; and she saw that, if she was to serve at all, it must be with her best, with her special equipment.

I need not follow the gradations, unmarked of herself, by which she at length came to a sort of conclusion: the immediate practical result was, that she gave herself more than ever to the cultivation of her gift, seeing in the distance the possibility of her becoming, in one mode or another, or in all modes perhaps together, a songstress to her generation.

CHAPTER V.

TRULY THE LIGHT IS SWEET.

THE cry of the human heart in all ages and in every moment is, "Where is God and how shall I find him?"—No, friend, I will not accept your testimony to the contrary—not though you may be as well fitted as ever one of eight hundred millions to come forward with it. You take it for granted that you know your own heart because you call it yours, but I say that your heart is a far deeper thing than you know, or are capable of knowing. Its very nature is hid from you. I use but a poor figure when I say that the roots of your heart go down beyond your knowledge—whole eternities beyond it—into the heart of God. If you have never yet made one discovery in your heart, your testimony concerning it is not worth a tuft of flue; and if you have made discoveries in it, does not the fact reveal that it is but little known to you, and that there must be discoveries innumerable yet to be made in it? To him who has been making discoveries in it for fifty years, the depths of his heart are yet a mystery—a mystery, however, peopled with loveliest hopes. I repeat, whether the man knows it or not, his heart in its depths is ever crying out for God. Where the man does not know it, it is because the unfaithful Self, a would-be monarch, has usurped the consciousness; the demon-man is uppermost, not the Christ-man; he is down in the crying heart, and the demon-man—that is the Self that worships itself—is trampling on the heart, and smothering it up in the rubbish of

ambitions, lusts, and cares. If ever its cry reaches that Self, it calls it childish folly, and tramples the harder. It does not know that a child crying on God is mightier than a warrior dwelling in steel.

If we had none but fine weather, the demon-Self would be too much for the divine Self, and would always keep it down; but bad weather, misfortune, ill-luck, adversity, or whatever name but punishment or the love of God men may call it, sides with the Christ-self down below, and helps to make its voice heard. On the other hand, if we had nothing but bad weather, the hope of those in whom the divine Self is slowly rising would grow too faint; while those in whom the bad weather had not yet begun to work good would settle down into weak, hopeless rebellion. Without hope can any man repent?

To the people at Burcliff came at length a lovely morning, with sky and air like the face of a repentant child—a child who has repented so thoroughly that the sin has passed from him, and he is no longer even ashamed. The water seemed dancing in the joy of a new birth, and the wind, coming and going in gentle conscious organ-like swells, was at it with them, while the sun kept looking merrily down on the glad commotion his presence caused.

"Ah," thought the mother, as she looked from her windows ere she began to dress for this new live day, "how would it be if the Light at the heart of the sun were shining thus on the worlds made in his image!" She was thinking of her boy, whom perhaps, in all the world, she only was able to love heartily—there was so little in the personal being of the lad, that is, in the thing he was to himself, and was making of himself, to help any one to love him! But in the absolute mere existence is reason for love, and upon that God does love—so love, that he will suffer and cause suffering for the development of that existence into a thing in its own full nature lovable, namely, an existence in its own will one with the perfect love whence it issued; and the mother's heart more than any other God has made is like him in power of loving. Alas that she is so seldom like him in wisdom—so often thwarting the work of God, and rendering more severe his measures with her child by her attempts to shield him from his law, and save him from saving sorrow. How often from his very infancy—if she does not, like the nurse she employs, actively teach him to be selfish—does she get between him and the right consequences of his

conduct; as if, with her one feeble loving hand, she would stay the fly-wheel of the holy universe! It is the law that the man who does evil shall suffer; it is the only hope for him, and a hope for the neighbour he wrongs. When he forsakes his evil, one by one the dogs of suffering will halt and drop away from his track; and he will find at last they have but hounded him into the land of his nativity, into the home of his Father in heaven.

As soon as breakfast was over, the whole family set out for a walk. Mr. Raymount seldom left the house till after lunch, but even he, who cared comparatively little for the open air, had grown eager after it. Streets, hills, and sands were swarming with human beings—all drawn out by the sun.

"I sometimes wonder," he said, "that so many people require so little to make them happy. Let but the sun break through the clouds, and he sets them all going like ants in an ant-hill!"

"Yes," returned his wife, "but then see how little on the other hand is required to make them miserable! Let the sun hide his head for a day, and they grumble!"

Making the remark, the good woman never thought of her son Cornelius, the one of her family whose conduct illustrated it. At the moment she saw him cheerful, and her love looked upon him as good. She was one of the best of women herself: whatever hour she was called, her lamp was sure to have oil in it; and yet all the time since first he lay in her arms, I doubt if she had ever done anything to help the youth to conquer himself. Now it was too late, even had she known what could be done. But the others had so far turned out well: why should not this one also? The moment his bad humours were over, she looked on him as reformed; and when he uttered worldliness, she persuaded herself he was but jesting. But alas! she had no adequate notion—not a shadow of one—of the selfishness of the man-child she had given to the world. This matter of the black sheep in the white flock is one of the most mysterious of the facts of spiritual generation.

Sometimes, indeed, the sheep is by no means so black as to the whiter ones he seems; perhaps neither are they so much whiter as their friends and they themselves think; for to be altogether respectable is not to be clean; and the black sheep may be all the better than some of the rest that he looks what he is, and does not dye his wool. But on the other hand he may be a great deal worse than some of his own family think him.

"Then," said Hester, after a longish pause, "those that need more to make them happy, are less easily made unhappy?"

To this question rather than remark, she received no reply. Her father and mother both felt it not altogether an easy one to answer: it suggested points requiring consideration. To Cornelius, it was a mere girl's speech, not worth heeding where the girl was his sister. He turned up at it a mental nose the merest of snubs; and well he might, for he had not the least notion of what it meant or involved.

As little notion had his father that his son Cornelius was a black sheep. He was not what the world would have called a black sheep, but his father, could he have seen into him, would have counted him a very black sheep indeed—and none the whiter that he recognized in the blackness certain shades that were of paternal origin. It was, however, only to the rest of the family that Cornelius showed his blackness: of his father he was afraid; and that father, being proud of his children, would have found it hard to believe anything bad of them: like his faults they were his own! His faith in his children was in no small measure conceit of that which was his, and blinded him to their faults as it blinded him to some of his own. The discovery of any serious fault in one of them would be a sore wound to his vanity, a destruction of his self-content.

The co-existence of good and evil in the same person is perhaps the most puzzling of all facts. What a shock it gives one to hear a woman who loves God, and spends both time and money on the betterment of her kind, call a pauper child a *brat*, and see her turn with disgust from the idea of treating any strange child, more especially one of low birth, as her own. "O Christ!" cries the heart, "is this one of the women that follow thee?" And she is one of the women that follow him—only she needs such a lesson as he gave his disciples through the Syrophenician woman.

Mr. Raymount had such an opinion of himself that, while he never obtruded his opinions upon others, he never imagined them disregarded in his own family. It never entered his mind that any member of it might in this or that think differently from himself. But both his wife and Hester were able to think, and did think for themselves, as they were bound in the truth of things to do; and there were considerable divergements of the paths in which they walked from that he had trodden. He had indeed always taken too much for granted, and ought to

have used more pains to have his notions understood by them, if he laid so much on their intellectual sympathy. He supposed all the three read what he wrote; and his wife and daughter did read the most of it; but what would he think when he came to know that his son not only read next to nothing of it, but read that little with a contempt not altogether unconscious—for no other reason than that it was his father who wrote it? Nor was the youth quite without justification—for was he not himself a production of his father? But then he looked upon the latter as one of altogether superior quality! It is indeed strange how vulgar minds despise the things they have looked upon and their hands have handled, just because they have looked upon them and their hands have handled them: is there not in the fact a humiliating lesson, which yet they are unable to read, of the degrading power of their own presence upon themselves and their judgments? Whether a man is a hero to his valet or the opposite, depends as much on the valet as on the man. The bond, then, between the father and the son, was by no means so strong as the father thought it. Indeed the selfishness of Cornelius made him almost look upon his father as his enemy, because of his intentions with regard to the division of his property. And selfishness rarely fails of good arguments. Nor can anything destroy it but such a turning of things upside down as only he that made them can work.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AQUARIUM.

"LET'S go and see the people at the aquarium," said Cornelius.

"Do you mean the fishes?" asked his father.

"No, I don't care about them; I said the people!" answered Cornelius stupidly.

"The people of an aquarium must surely be fishes, eh, Saffy?" said the father to the bright child walking hand in hand with him. It was Josephine. Her eyes were so blue that but for the association he would have called her Sapphira. Between the two he contented himself with the pet name of *Saffy*.

"Ah but, papa," said Hester, "Corney didn't say the people *of* the aquarium, but the people *at* the aquarium!"

"Two of you are too many for me!" returned the father

playfully. "Well, then, Saffy, let us go and see the people *of* and the people *at* the aquarium.—Which do you want to see, Hester?"

"Oh, the fishes, of course, papa!"

"Why of course?"

"Because they're so much more interesting than the people," said Hester, rebuked in herself as she said it—before she knew why.

"Fishes more interesting than people!" exclaimed her father.

"They're so like people, papa!"

"Oh, then surely the people must be the more interesting after all, if it is the likeness of the fishes to people that makes them interesting! Which of all the people you love do you see likest a fish now?"

"Oh, papa!"

"What! is it only people you hate that you see like fishes?"

"I don't hate anybody, papa."

"There's a way of not caring about people, though—looking down on them and seeing them like fishes, that's precious like hating them," said Cornelius, who enjoyed a crowd, and putting his sister in the wrong still better: to that end he could easily say a sensible thing.

"If you mean me, Corney, I think you do me injustice," said Hester. "The worst I do is to look at them the wrong way of the telescope."

"But why do you never see any one you love like a fish?" persisted her father.

"Perhaps because I could not love any body that was like a fish."

"Certainly there is something not beautiful about them!"said Mr. Raymount.

"They're beastly ugly," said Cornelius.

"Let us look into it a little," continued his father. "What is it about them that is ugly? Their colours are sometimes very beautiful—and their shapes too."

"Their heads and faces," said Hester, "are the only parts of them in which they can be like human beings, and those are very ugly."

"I am not sure that you are right, Hester," said the mother, who had not spoken till now. "There must surely be something human in their bodies as well, for now and then I see their ways and motions so like those of men and women, that I feel for a

moment almost as if I understood how they were feeling, and were just going to know what they were thinking."

"I suspect," said Mr. Raymount, "your mother's too much of a poet to be trusted alone in an aquarium. It would have driven Shelley crazy—to judge from his Sensitive Plant."

They had now reached the middle of the descent to the mysteries of the place, when Cornelius, who, with an interest Hester could not understand in him, and which was partly owing to a mere love of transition, had been staring at the ascending faces, uttered a cry of recognition, and darted down to the next landing. With a degree of respect he seldom manifested they saw him there accost a gentleman leaning over the balustrade, and shake hands with him. He was several years older than Cornelius, not a few inches taller, and much better-looking—one indeed who could hardly fail to attract notice even in a crowd. Corney's weakest point, next to his heart, was his legs, which perhaps accounted for his worship of Mr. Vavasor's calves, in themselves nothing remarkable. He was already glancing stolen looks at these objects of his jealous admiration when the rest reached the landing, and Mr. Raymount, willing to know his son's friend, desired Corney to introduce him.

Cornelius had been now eighteen months in the bank, and had never at home even mentioned the name of a fellow clerk. He was one of those youths who take the only possible way for emptiness to make itself of consequence—that of concealment and affected mystery. Not even now but for his father's request would he have presented his bank-friend to him or any of the family.

The manners and approach of Mr. Vavasor were such as at once to recommend him to the friendly reception of all, from Mr. Raymount to little Saffy, who had the rare charm of being shy without being rude. If not genial, his manners were yet friendly, and his carriage if not graceful was easy: both were apt to be abrupt where he was familiar. It was a kind of company-bearing he had, but dashed with indifference, except where he desired to commend himself. He shook hands with little Saffy as respectfully as with her mother, but with neither altogether respectfully; and immediately the pale-faced, cold, loving boy, Mark, unwillingly, therefore almost unconsciously, disliked him. He was beyond question handsome, with a Grecian nose nearly perfect, which had its large part in the

aristocratic look he bore. This was favoured also by the simplicity of his dress. He turned with them, and redescended the stairs.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming, Mr. Vavasor? I could have met you," said Cornelius, with just a little stretch of the degree of familiarity in use between them.

"I didn't know myself till the last minute," answered Vavasor. "It was a sudden resolve of my aunt's. Neither had I the remotest idea you were here."

"Have you been seeing the fishes?" asked Hester, at whose side their new acquaintance was walking now they had reached the subterranean level.

"I have just passed along their cages," he answered. "They are not well kept; the glass is dirty, and the water too. I fancied they looked unhappy, and came away. I can't bear to see creatures pining. It would be a good deed to poison them all."

"Wouldn't it be better to give them some fresh water?" said little Saffy. "That would make them glad."

To this wisdom there was no response.

When they came to the door of the concert-room, Cornelius turned into it, leaving his "friend" with his "people" to go and look at the fishes. Mr. Vavasor kept his place by the side of Hester.

"We were just talking, when we had the pleasure of meeting you, about people and fishes—comparing them in a way," said Hester. "I can't make it clear to myself why I like seeing the fishes better than the people."

"I fancy it must be because you call them fishes and not fish," replied Vavasor. "If the fishes were a shoal of herrings or mackarel, I doubt if you would—at least for many times. If, on the other hand, the men and women in the concert-room were as oddly distinguished one from another as these different fishes, you would prefer going with your brother."

"I'm sure I shouldn't," said Saffy to Mark.

"Phizzes is best on fishes," answered Mark sententiously. "I like faces best; only you don't *always* want to look at what you like best!—I wonder why."

"And yet I suspect," said Mrs. Raymount to Vavasor, "many of the people are as much distinguished from each other in character as the fishes are in form."

"Possibly," interjected her husband, "they are as different

in their faces also, only we are too much of their kind to be able to read the differences so clearly."

"Surely you do not mean," said Vavasor respectfully, "that any two persons in the concert-room can be as much unlike each other as that flounder shuddering along the sandy bottom, and that yard of eel sliding through the water like an embodied wickedness?"

Hester was greatly struck with the poetic tone of the remark.

"I think you may find people as different," replied her father, "if you take into the account the more delicate as well as the more striking differences—the deeper as well as the surface diversities. Now you make me think of it, I begin to doubt whether all these live grotesques may not have been made to the pattern of different developments of humanity, possible or actual!"

"Look at that dog-fish," said Vavasor, pointing to the largest in the tank. "What a brute! Don't you hate him, Miss Raymount?"

"I am not willing to hate any live thing," answered Hester with a smile, "from selfish motives, perhaps. I feel as if it would be to my own loss, causing me some kind of irreparable hurt."

"But you would kill such a creature as that—would you not?" he rejoined.

"In possible circumstances," she answered; "but killing and hating have nothing necessarily to do with each other. He that hates his brother is always a murderer, not always he that kills him."

"This is another sort of girl from any I've met yet!" said Vavasor to himself. "I wonder what she's really like!"

He did not know that what she was really like was just what he, with all his fancied knowledge of women both in life and literature, was incapable of seeing—so different was she in kind from poor-gentleman Vavasor.

"But just look at the head, eyes, and mouth of the fiend!" he persisted.

Hester, forcing herself a little, did regard the animal for two or three moments. Then a slight shudder passed through her, and she turned away her eyes.

"I see you've caught the look of him," said Vavasor. "Is he not a horror?"

"He is. But that was not what made me turn away. I

found if I looked a moment longer I should hate him in spite of myself."

"And why shouldn't you hate him? You would be doing the wretch no wrong. Even if he knew it, it would be only what he deserved."

"That you cannot tell except you knew all about his nature, and every point of his history from the beginning of the creation till now. I dare not judge even a dog-fish. And whatever his deserts, I don't choose to hate him, because I don't choose to hate."

She turned away, and Vavasor saw she wanted no more of the dog-fish.

"Oh," cried Saffy, with a face of terror, "look, look, mamma! It's staring at me!"

The child hid her face in her mother's gown, yet turned immediately to look again.

Mr. Raymount looked also, following her gaze, and was fascinated by the sight that met his eyes. Through the glass, high above his head, and not far from the surface, he saw a huge thornback, bending towards them and seeming to look down on them as it flew slowly through the water—the action of the two sides of its body, fringed with fins, and its consequent motion, were much more like the act of flying than that of swimming. Behind him floated his long tail, making him yet more resemble the hideously-imagined kite which he at once suggested. But the terrible thing about him was the death's-head-look of the upper part of him. His white belly was of course towards them, and his eyes were on the other side; but there were nostrils that looked exactly like the empty sockets of eyes, and below them was a hideous mouth. These made the face that seemed to Saffy to be hovering over and watching them.

"Like an infernal angel of death!" thought Mr. Raymount, but would not rouse yet more the imagination of the little one by saying it. Hester gazed with steadfast mien at the floating spectre.

"You seem in no danger from that one," said Vavasor.

"I don't think I understand you," replied Hester. "What danger can there be from any of them?"

"I mean of hating him."

"You are right; I do not feel the smallest inclination to hate him."

"Yet the ray is even uglier than the dog-fish."

"That may be—I think not. But who hates for ugliness? I never should. Ugliness only moves my pity."

"Then what do you hate for?" asked Vavasor. "—But I beg your pardon: you never hate! Let me ask then, what is it that makes you feel as if you might hate?"

"If you will look again at the dog-fish, and tell me the expression of its mouth, I may be able to answer you," she returned.

"I will," said Vavasor; and betaking himself to a farther portion of the tank, he stood there watching a little shoal of those sharks of the northern seas. While he was gone Cornelius rejoined them.

"I wish I knew why God made such ugly creatures," said Saffy to Mark.

The boy gave a curious half-sad smile, without turning his eyes from the thornback, and said nothing.

"Do you know why God made any creatures, pet?" said Hester.

"No, I don't. Why did he, Hessy?"

"I am almost afraid to guess. But if you don't know why he made any, why should you wonder that he made those?"

"Because they are so ugly.—Do tell me why he made them," she added coaxingly.

"You had better ask mamma."

"But, Hessy, I don't like to ask mamma."

"Why don't you like to ask mamma, you little goose?"

"Because," said Saffy, who was all the time holding her mother's hand, and knew she was hearing her, "mamma mightn't know what to say."

Hester thought with herself, "I am sometimes afraid to pray lest I should have no answer!"

The mother's face turned down towards her little one.

"And what if I shouldn't know what to say, darling?" she asked.

"I feel so awkward when Miss Merton asks me a question I can't answer," said the child.

"And you are afraid of making mamma feel awkward?—You pet!" said Hester.

Cornelius burst into a great laugh, and Saffy into silent tears, for she thought she had made a fool of herself. She was not a priggish child, and did not deserve the mockery with which her

barbarian brother invaded her little temple. She was such a true child that her mother was her neighbour, and present to all her being—not her eyes only or her brain, but her heart and spirit as well.

The mother led her aside to a seat, saying,

"Come, darling; we must look into this, and try to understand it. Let me see—what is it we have got to understand? —I think it is this—why you should be ashamed when you cannot answer the questions of one who knows so much more than you, and I should not be ashamed when I cannot answer the questions of my own little girl who knows so much less than I do. Is that it?"

"I don't know," sobbed Saffy.

"You shouldn't laugh at her, Corney: it hurts her!" said Hester.

"The little fool! How could that hurt her? It's nothing but temper!" said Cornelius with vexation. He was not vexed that he had made her cry, but vexed that she cried.

"You should have a little more sympathy with childhood, Cornelius," said his father. "You used to be angry enough when you were laughed at."

"I was a fool then myself!" answered Cornelius sulkily.

He said no more, and his father put the best interpretation upon his speech.

"Do you remember, Hester," he said, "how you were always ready to cry when I told you I did not know something you had asked me?"

"Quite well, papa," replied Hester; "and I think I could explain it now. I did not know then why I cried. I think now it was because it seemed to bring you down nearer to my level. My heaven of wisdom sank and grew less."

"I hope that is not what Saffy is feeling now: your mother must be telling her she doesn't know why God made the animals. But no! She is looking up in her face with hers radiant!"

And yet her mother had told her she did not know why God made the animals! She had at the same time, however, made her own confessed ignorance a step on which to set the child nearer to the knowledge of God; for she told her it did not matter that she did not know, so long as God knew. The child could see that her mother's ignorance did not trouble her; and also that she who confessed ignorance was yet in close

communication with him who knew all about everything, and delighted in making his children understand.

And now came Vavasor from his study of the dog-fish. His nature was a poetic one though much choked with the weeds of the conventional and commonplace, and he had seen and felt something of what Hester intended. But he was not alive enough to understand hate. He was able to hate and laugh. He could not feel the danger of hate as Hester, for hate is death, and it needs life to know death.

"He is cruel, and the very incarnation of selfishness," he said. "I should like to set my heel on him."

"If I were to allow myself to hate him," returned Hester, "I should hate him too much to kill him. I should let him live on in his ugliness, and hold back my hate lest it should wither him in the cool water. To let him live would be my revenge, the worst I should know. I must not look at him, for it makes me feel as wicked as he looks."

She glanced at Vavasor. His eyes were fixed on her. She turned away uncomfortable: could it be that he was like the dog-fish?

"Now, I declare," said Cornelius, coming between them, "there's no knowing you girls! Would you believe it, Mr. Vavasor—that young woman was crying her eyes out last night over the meanest humbug of a Chadband I ever set mine on! There ain't one of those fishes comes within sight of him for ugliness. And she would have it he was to be pitied—sorrowed over—loved, I suppose!"

The last words of his speech he whined out in a lackadaisical tone.

Hester flushed, but said nothing. She was not going to defend herself before a stranger. She would rather remain misrepresented—even be misunderstood. But Vavasor had no such opinion of the brother as to take any notion of the sister from his mirror. When she turned from Cornelius next, in which movement lay all the expression she chose to give to her indignation, he passed behind him to the other side of Hester, and there stood apparently absorbed in the contemplation of a huge crustacean. Had Cornelius been sensitive, he must have felt he was omitted.

"Why can it be?" she said—to herself, but audibly—after a moment of silence, during which she also had been apparently absorbed in the contemplation of some inhabitant of the watery

cage. But she had in truth been thinking of nothing immediately before her eyes, though they had rested first upon a huge crayfish, balancing himself on stilts innumerable, then turned to one descending a rocky incline—just as a Swiss horse descends a stair in a mountain-path.

"Yes, the fellow bristles with *whys*," said Vavasor, whose gaze was still fixed on one of them. "Every leg seems to ask, 'Why am I a leg?'"

"I should have thought it was asking rather, 'What am I? Am I a leg or a failure?'" rejoined Hester. "But I was not thinking of the crayfish. He is odd, but there is no harm in him. He looks indeed highly respectable. See with what a dignity he fans himself!"

"And for the same reason," remarked her father, who had come up and stood behind them, "as the finest lady at a ball: he wants more air. I wonder whether the poor fellow knows he is in a cage?"

"I think he does," said Saffy, "else he would run away from us."

"Are you thinking of the dog-fish still?" asked Vavasor.

The strangeness, as it seemed to him, of the handsome girl's absorption, for such it veritably appeared, in questions of no interest in themselves—so he judged them—attracted him even more than her beauty, for he did not like to feel himself unpossessed of the entrée to such a house. Also he was a writer of society verses—not so good as they might have been, but in their way not altogether despicable—and had already begun to turn it over in his mind whether something might not be made of—what shall I call it?—the situation?

"I *was* thinking of him," Hester answered, "but only as a type of the great difficulty—why there should be evil or ugliness in the world. There must be an answer to it! Is it possible it should be one we would not like?"

"I don't believe there is any answer," said Vavasor. "The ugly things are ugly just because they are ugly. It is a child's answer, but not therefore unphilosophical. We must take things as we find them. We are ourselves just what we are, and cannot help it. We do this or that because it is in us. We are made so."

"You do not believe in free will, then, Mr. Vavasor?" said Hester coldly.

"I see no ground for believing in it. We are but forces—

bottled up forces—charged Leyden jars. Every one does just what is in him—acts as he is capable."

He was not given to metaphysics, and indeed had few or no opinions in that department of inquiry; but the odd girl interested him, and he was ready to meet her on any ground. He had uttered his own practical unbelief, however, with considerable accuracy. Hester's eyes flashed angrily.

"I say *no*. Every one is capable of acting better than he does," she replied; and her face flushed.

"Why does he not then?" asked Vavasor.

"Ah, why?" she responded.

"How can he be made for it if he does not do it?" insisted Vavasor.

"How indeed? That is the puzzle," she answered. "If he were not capable there would be none."

"I should do better, I am sure, if I could," said Vavasor. Had he known himself, he ought to have added, "without trouble."

"Then you think we are all just like the dog-fish—except that destiny has made none of us quite so ugly?" rejoined Hester.

"Or so selfish," implemented Vavasor.

"That I can't see," returned Hester. "If we are merely borne helpless hither and thither on the tide of impulse, we can be neither more nor less selfish than the dog-fish. We are, in fact, neither selfish nor unselfish. We are pure nothings, concerning which speculation is not worth the trouble. But the very word *selfish* implies a contrary judgment on the part of humanity itself."

"Then you believe we can make ourselves different from what we are made?"

"Yes; we are made with the power to change. We are meant to take a share in our own making. We are made so and so, it is true, but not made so and so only; we are made with a power in ourselves besides—a power that can lay hold on the original power that made us. We are not made to remain as we are. We are bound to grow."

She spoke rapidly, with glowing eyes, the fire of her utterance consuming every shadow of the didactic.

"You are too much of a philosopher for me, Miss Raymount," said Vavasor with a smile. "But just answer me one question: What if a man is too weak to change?"

"He must change," said Hester.

Then first Vavasor began to feel the conversation getting quite too serious.

"Ah, well!" he said. "But don't you think this is rather —ah—rather—don't you know?—for an aquarium?"

Hester did not reply. Nothing was too serious for her in any place. She was indeed a peculiar girl—the more the pity for the many that made her so!

"Let us go and see the octopus," said Vavasor.

They went, and Mr. Raymount slowly followed them. He had not heard the last turn of their conversation.

"You two have set me thinking," he said, when he joined them, "and brought to my mind an observation I had made—how seldom you find art succeed in representing the hatefully ugly! The painter can accumulate ugliness, but I do not remember a demon worth the name. The picture I can best recall with demons in it is one of Raphael's—a St. Michael slaying the dragon—from the Purgatorio, I think, but I am not sure: not one of the demons in that picture is half so ugly as your dog-fish.—What if it be necessary that we should have lessons in ugliness?"

"But why?" said Hester. "Is not the ugly better let alone? You have always taught that ugliness is the natural embodiment of evil!"

"Because we have chosen what is bad, and do not know how ugly it is—that is why," answered her father.

"Isn't that rather hard on the fish, though?" said Vavasor. "How can innocent creatures be an embodiment of evil?"

"But what do you mean by *innocent?*" returned Mr. Raymount. "The nature of an animal may be low and even hateful, and its looks correspondent, while no conscience accuses it of evil. I have known half a dozen cows, in a shed large enough for a score, and abundantly provisioned, unite to keep the rest of the herd out of it. Many a man is a far lower and worse creature in his nature than his conscience tells him. It is the conscience educated by strife and failure and success that is severe upon the man, demanding of him the all but unattainable."

Talk worse and worse for an aquarium! But happily they had now reached the tank of the octopods.

Alas, there had been some mismanagement of the pipes, and the poor devil-fishes had been boiled, or at least heated to

death! One small wretched skinny thing, hardly distinguishable from a discoloured clout, was all that was left of a dozen. Cornelius laughed heartily when informed of the mischance.

"It's a pity it wasn't the devil himself instead of his fish!" he said. "Wouldn't it be a jolly lark, Mr. Vavasor, if some of the rascals down below were to heat that furnace too hot, and rid us of the whole potful at one fell swoop!"

"What is that you are saying, Corney?" inquired his mother, who had but just rejoined them.

"I was only uttering the pious wish that the devil was dead," answered Cornelius; "—boiled like an octopus! ha! ha! ha!"

"What good would that do?" said his father. "The human devils would be no better, and the place would soon be re-occupied. The population of the pit must be kept up by immigration. There may be babies born in heaven, for anything I know, but certain I am there can be none in the other place. This world of ours is the nursery of devils as well as of saints."

"And what becomes of those that are neither?" asked Vavasor.

"It were hard to say," replied Mr. Raymount with some seriousness.

"A confoundedly peculiar family!" said Vavasor to himself. "There's a bee in every bonnet of them! An odd, irreverent way the old fellow has with him—for an old fellow pretending to believe what he says!"

Vavasor was not one of the *advanced* of the age; he did not deny there was a God: he thought that the worse form that it was common in the bank; the fellows he associated with never took the trouble to deny him; they took their own way, and asked no questions. When a man has not the slightest intention that the answer shall influence his conduct, why should he inquire whether there be a God or not? Vavasor cared more about the top of his cane than the God whose being he did not take the trouble to deny. He believed a little less than the maiden aunt with whom he lived; she believed less than her mother, and her mother had believed less than hers; so that for generations the faith, so called, of the family had been dying down, simply because all that time it had sent out no fresh root of obedience. It had in truth been no faith at all, only assent. Miss Vavasor went to church, because it was the right thing

to do; God was one of the heads of society, and his drawing-rooms had to be attended. Certain objections not altogether unreasonable might be urged against doing so : several fictions were more or less countenanced in them—such as equality, love of your neighbour, and forgiveness of your enemy, but then nobody really heeded them : religion had worked its way up to a respectable position, and no longer required the support of the unwashed—that is, those outside the circle whose centre is Mayfair. As to her personal religion, why, God had heard her prayers, and might hear them again : he did show favour occasionally. That she should come out of it all as well as other people when this life of family and incomes and match-making was over, she saw no reason to doubt. Ranters and canters might talk as they pleased, but God knew better than make the existence of thoroughly respectable people quite unendurable! —She was kind-hearted, and treated her maid like an equal up to the moment of offence—then like a dog of the east up to that of atonement. She had the power of keeping her temper even in family differences, and hence was regarded as a very model of wisdom, prudence, and *tact*, the last far the first in the consideration of her judges. The young of her acquaintance fled to her for help in need, and she gave them no hard words, but generally more counsel than comfort—always, however, the best she had, which was of Polonius's kind, an essence of wise selfishness, so far as selfishness can be wise, with a strong dash of self-respect, not the more sparing that it was independent of desert. The good man would find it rather difficult to respect himself were he to try; his gaze is upward to the one good; but had it been possible for such a distinction to enter Miss Vavasor's house, it would have been only to be straightway dismissed. She was devoted to her nephew, as she counted devotion, but would see that he made a correspondent return.

When Vavasor reached their encampment in the Imperial Hotel, he went to his own room, got out his Russia-leather despatch-box, half-filled with songs and occasional verses, which he never travelled without, and set himself to see what he could do with the dog-fish—in what kind of poetic jelly, that is, he could enclose his shark-like mouth and evil look. But prejudiced as he always was in favour of whatever issued from his own brain—as yet nothing had come from his heart—he was anything but satisfied with the result of his endeavour. It was in fact an utter failure so far as the dog-fish was

concerned, for he was there unnamed, a mere indistinguishable presence among many monsters. But notwithstanding the gravity of this defect, and the distance between his idea and its outcome, he yet concluded the homage to Hester which it embodied of a value to justify the presentation of the verses. And poor as they were they were nearly as good as anything he had done hitherto. Here they are :

To H. R.

Lo! Beauty climbs the watery steep,
  Sets foot on many a slimy stair ;
Treads on the monsters of the deep,
  And rising seeks the earth and air.

On every form she sets her foot ;
  She lifts it straight and passes on ;
With flowers and trees she takes no root,
  This, that caresses, and is gone.

Imperfect, poorly lovely things
  On all sides round she sighing sees ;
She flies, nor for her flying wings
  Finds any refuge, rest, or ease!

At last, at last, on Burcliff's shore
  She spies a thoughtful wanderer ;
She speeds—she lights for evermore,
  Incorporated, one with her!

CHAPTER VII.

AMY AMBER.

SOME gentle crisis must have arrived in the history of Hester, for in these days her heart was more sensitive and more sympathetic than ever before. The circumvolent troubles of humanity caught upon it as if it had been a thorn-bush, and hung there. It was not greatly troubled, neither was its air murky, but its very repose was like a mother's sleep, which is no obstacle between the cries of her children and her sheltering soul : it was ready to wake at every moan of the human sea around her. Unlike most women, she had not needed marriage and motherhood to open the great gate of her heart to her kind : I do not mean there are not many like her in this. Why the tide of

human affection should have begun to rise so rapidly in her just at this time, there is no need for conjecturing: much of every history must for the long present remain inexplicable. No man creates his history any more than he creates himself; he only modifies it—sometimes awfully; gathers to him swift help, or makes intervention necessary. But the tide of which I speak flowed yet more swiftly from the night of the magic-lantern. That experience had been as a mirror in which she saw the misery of the low of her kind, including, alas! her brother Cornelius. He had never before so plainly revealed to her his heartlessness, and the painful consequence of the revelation was, that now, with all her swelling love for human beings, she felt her heart shrink from him as if he were of another nature. She could never indeed have loved him as she did but that, being several years his elder, she had had a good deal to do with him as baby and child: the infant motherhood of her heart had gathered about him, and not an eternity of difference could after that destroy the relation between them. But as he grew up, the boy had undermined and weakened her affection, though hardly her devotion; and now the youth had given it a rude shock. So far was she, however, from yielding to this decay of feeling that it did not merely cause her much pain, but gave rise in her to much useless endeavour, while every day she grew more anxious and careful to carry herself towards him as a sister ought.

The Raymounts could not afford one of the best lodgings in Burcliff, and were well contented with a floor in an old house in an unfashionable part of the town, looking across the red roofs of the port, and out over the flocks of Neptune's white sheep on the blue-gray German Ocean. It was kept by two old maids whose hearts had got flattened under the pressure of poverty—no, I am wrong, it was not poverty, but *care;* pure poverty never flattened any heart; it is the care which poverty is supposed to justify that does the mischief; it gets inside it and burrows, as well as lies on the top of it; of mere outside poverty a heart can bear a mountainous weight without the smallest injury, yea with inestimable result of the only riches. Our Lord never mentions poverty as one of the obstructions to his kingdom, neither has it ever proved such; riches, cares, and desires he does mention. The sisters Witherspin had never yet suffered from the lack of a single necessary; not the less they frayed their mornings, wore out their afternoons, scorched their evenings, and consumed their nights, in scraping together

provision for an old age they were destined never to see. They were a small meagre pair, with hardly a smile between them. One waited and the other cooked. The one that waited had generally her chin tied up with a silk handkerchief, as if she had come to life again, but not quite, and could not do without the handkerchief. The other was rarely seen, but her existence was all day testified by the odours that ascended from the Tartarus of her ever recurrent labours. It was a marvel how from a region of such fumes could ascend the good dinners she provided. The poor things of course had their weight on the mind of Hester, for, had they tried, they could not have hidden the fact that they lived to save; every movement almost, and certainly every tone betrayed it. And yet, unlike so many lodging-house keepers, resembling more the lion-ant than any other of the symbolic world of insects, they were strictly honest. Had they not been, I doubt if Hester would have been able, though they would then have needed more, to give them so much pity as she did, for she had a great scorn of dishonesty. Her heart, which was full of compassion for the yielding, the weak, the erring, was not yet able to spend much on the actively vicious—the dishonest and lying and traitorous. The honour she paid the honesty of these women helped her much to pity the sunlessness of their existence, and the poor end for which they lived. It looked as if God had forgotten them—toiling for so little all day long, while the fact was they forgot God, and were thus miserable and oppressed because they would not have him interfere as he would so gladly have done. Instead of seeking the kingdom of heaven, and trusting him for old age while they did their work with their might, they exhausted their spiritual resources in sending out armies of ravens with hardly a dove among them, to find and secure a future still submerged in the waves of a friendly deluge. Nor was Hester's own faith in God so vital yet as to propagate itself by division in the minds she came in contact with. She could only be sorry for them and kind to them.

The morning after the visit to the aquarium, woeful Miss Witherspin, as Mark had epitheted her, entered to remove the ruins of breakfast with a more sad and injured expression of countenance than usual. It was a glorious day, and she was like a live shadow in the sunshine. Most of the Raymounts were already in the open air, and Hester was the only one in the room. The small round-shouldered, cadaverous creature went

moving about the table with a motion that suggested bed as fitter than labour, though she was strong enough to get through her work without more than occasional suffering: if she could only have left pitying herself and let God love her she would have got on well enough. Hester, who had her own share of the same kind of fault, was rather moodily trimming her mother's bonnet with a new ribbon, glancing up from which she at once perceived that something in particular must have exceeded in wrongness the general wrongness of things in the poor little gnome's world. Her appearance was usually that of one with a headache; her expression this morning suggested a mild indeed but all-pervading toothache.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Witherspin?" asked Hester.

"Indeed, miss, there never come nothing to sister and me but it's matter, and now it's a sore matter. But it's the Lord's will and we can't help it; and what are we here for but to have patience? That's what I keep saying to my sister, but it don't seem to do her much good."

She ended with a great sigh; and Hester thought, if the unseen sister required the comfort of the one before her, whose evangel just uttered was as gloomy as herself, how very unhappy she must be!

"No doubt we are here to learn patience," said Hester; "but I can hardly think patience is what we are made for. Is there any fresh trouble—if you will excuse me?"

"Well, I don't know, miss, as trouble can anyhow be called fresh—leastways to us it's stale enough; we're that sick of it! I declare to you, miss, I'm clean worn out with havin' patience! An' now there's my sister gone after her husband an' left her girl, brought up in her own way an' every other luxury, an' there she's come on our hands, an' us to take the charge of her! It's a responsibility will be the death of *me*."

"Is there no provision for her?"

"Oh, yes, there's provision! Her mother kep' a shop for fancy goods at Keswick—after John's death, that is—an' scraped together a good bit o' money, they do say; but that's under trustees—not a penny to be touched till the girl come of age."

"But the trustees must make you a proper allowance for bringing her up! And anyhow you can refuse the charge."

"No, miss, that we can't. It was always John's wish when he lay a dyin', that if anything was to happen to Sarah, the child

should come to us. It's the trouble of the young thing, the responsibility—havin' to keep your eyes upon her every blessed moment for fear she do the thing she ought not to—that's what weighs upon *me*.—Oh, yes, they'll pay so much a quarter for her! it's not that. But to be always at the heels of a young sly puss after mischief—it's more'n I'm equal to, I do assure you, Miss Raymount."

"When did you see her last?" inquired Hester.

"Not once have I set eyes on her since she was three years old!" answered Miss Witherspin, and her tone seemed to imply in the fact yet additional wrong.

"Then perhaps she may be wiser by this time," Hester suggested. "How old is she now?"

"Sixteen out. It's awful to think of!"

"But how do you know she will be so troublesome? She mayn't want the looking after you dread. You haven't seen her for thirteen years!"

"I'm sure of it. I know the breed, miss! She's took after her mother, you may take your mortal oath! The sly way she got round our John!—an' all to take him right away from his own family as bore and bred him! You wouldn't believe it, miss!"

"Girls are not always like their mothers," said Hester. "I'm not half as good as my mother."

"Bless you, miss! if she ain't half as bad as hers—the Lord have mercy upon us! How I'm to attend to my lodgers and look after her, it's more than I know how to think of it with patience."

"When is she coming?"

"She'll be here this blessed day as I'm speakin' to you, miss!"

"Perhaps, your house being full, you may find her a help instead of a trouble. It won't be as if she had nothing to employ her!"

"There's no good to mortal creature i' the bones or blood of her!" sighed Miss Witherspin, as she put the tablecloth on the top of the breakfast things.

That blessed day the girl did arrive—sprang into the house like a rather loud sunbeam—loud for a sunbeam, not for a young woman of sixteen. She was small and bright and gay, with large black eyes which sparkled like little ones as well as gleamed like great ones, and a miniature Greek face, containing a neat nose and a mouth the most changeable ever seen—now

a mere negation in red, and now long enough for sorrow to couch on at her ease—only there was no sorrow near it, nor in its motions and changes much of any other expression than mere life. Her hair was a dead brown, mistakable for black, with a burnt quality in it, and so curly, in parts so obstinately crinkly, as to suggest wool—and negro blood from some far fount of tropic ardour. Her figure was, if not essentially graceful, yet thoroughly symmetrical, and her head, hands, and feet were small and well shaped. Almost brought up in her mother's shop, one much haunted by holiday-makers in the town, she had as little shyness as forwardness, being at once fearless and modest, gentle and merry, noiseless and swift—a pleasure to eyes, nerves, and mind. The sudden apparition of her in a rose-bud print, to wait upon the Raymounts the next morning at breakfast, startled them all with a sweet surprise. Every time she left the room the talk about her broke out afresh, and Hester's information concerning her was a welcome sop to the Cerberus of their astonishment. A more striking contrast than that between her and her two aunts could hardly have been found in the whole island. She was like a star between two gray clouds of twilight. But she had not so much share in her own cheerfulness as her poor aunts had in their misery. She so lived because she was so made. She was a joy to others as well as to herself, but as yet she had no merit in her own peace or its rippling gladness. So strong was the life in her that, although she cried every night over the loss of her mother, she was fresh as a daisy in the morning, opening like that to the sun of life, and ready not merely to give smile for smile, but to give smile for frown. In a word she was one of those lovely natures that need but to recognize the eternal to fly to it straight; but on the other hand such natures are in general very hard to wake to a recognition of the unseen. They assent to everything good, but for a long time seem unaware of the need of a perfect Father. To have their minds opened to *the* truth, they must suffer like other mortals less amiable. Suffering alone can develop in such any spiritual insight, or cause them to care that there should be a live God caring about them.

She was soon a favourite with every one of the family. Mrs. Raymount often talked to her. And on her side Amy Amber, which name, being neither crisp nor sparkling, but soft and mellow, did not seem quite to suit her, was so much drawn to Hester that she never lost an opportunity of waiting on her,

and never once missed going to her room, to see if she wanted anything, last of all before she went to bed. The only one of the family that professed not to "think much of her," was the contemptuous Cornelius. Even Vavasor, who soon became a frequent caller, if he chanced to utter some admiring word concerning the pretty deft creature that had just flitted from the room like a dark butterfly, would not in reply draw from him more than a grunt and a half-sneer. Yet now and then he might have been caught *glowering* at her, and would sometimes, seemingly in spite of himself, smile on her sudden appearance.

CHAPTER VIII.

CORNELIUS AND VAVASOR.

FROM what I have written of him it may well seem as if such a cub as Cornelius were hardly worth writing about; but if my reader had chanced to meet him first in other company than that of his own family, on every one of whom he looked down with a contempt which although slight was not altogether mild, he would have taken him for at least an agreeable young man. He would then have perceived little or nothing of the look of doggedness and opposition he wore at home; that would have been, all unconsciously, masked in a just unblown smile of general complaisance, ready to burst into full blossom for any one who should address him; while the rubbish he would then talk to ladies had a certain grace about it—such as absolutely astonished Hester once she happened to overhear some of it, and set her wondering how the phenomenon was to be accounted for of the home-cactus blossoming into such a sweet company-flower—wondering also which was the real Cornelius, he of the seamy side turned always to his own people, or he of the silken flowers and arabesques presented to strangers. Analysis of anything he said would have certified little or nothing in it; but that little or nothing was pleasantly uttered, and served perhaps as well as something cleverer to pass a faint electric flash between common mind and mind. The slouch, the hands-in-pockets mood, the toe-and-heel oscillation upon the hearthrug—these flying signals that self was at home to nobody but himself, had for the time vanished; desire to please had tied up the black dog in his kennel, and let the white one out. By keeping close in the

protective shadow of the fashion, he always managed to be well dressed. Ever since he went to the same tailor as Vavasor his coats had been irreproachable; and why should not any youth pay just twice as much for his coats as his father does for his? His shirt-studs were simplicity itself—single pearls; and he was very particular about both the quantity and the quality of the linen showing beyond his coat-cuffs. Altogether he was nicely got up and pleasant to look upon. Stupid as the conventional European dress is, its trimness and clear contrast of white and black tends to level up all to the appearance of gentlemen, and I suspect this may be the real cause of its popularity.

But I beg my reader to reflect before he sets Cornelius down as an exceptionally disagreeable young man because of the difference between his behaviour at home and abroad. I admit that his was a bad case, but in how many a family, the members of which are far from despising each other, does it not seem judged unnecessary to cultivate courtesy! Surely this could not be if a tender conscience of the persons and spiritual rights of others were not wanting. If there be any real significance in politeness, if it be not a mere empty and therefore altogether hypocritical congeries of customs, it ought to have its birth, cultivation, and chief exercise at home. Of course there are the manners suitable to strangers and those suitable to intimates, but politeness is the one essential of both. I would not let the smallest child stroke his father's beard *roughly*. Watch a child, and when he begins to grow rough you will see an evil spirit looking out of his eyes. It is a mean and bad thing to be ungentle with our own. Politeness is either a true face or a mask. If worn at one place and not at another, which of them is it? And there were no mask if there ought not to be a face. Neither is politeness at all inconsistent with thorough familiarity. I will go farther and say, that no true, or certainly no profound familiarity, is attainable without it. The soul will not come forth to be roughly used. And where truth reigns familiarity only makes the manners strike deeper root in the being, and take a larger share in its regeneration.

Amongst the other small gifts over which Cornelius was too tender to exhibit them at home, was a certain very small one of song. How he had developed it would have been to the home-circle a mystery, but they did not even know that he possessed it, and the thought that they did not was a pleasant one to him. For all his life he had loved vulgar mystery—mystery that is,

without any mystery in it except what appearance of it may come of barren concealment. He never came out with anything at home as to where he had been or what he was going to do or had done. And he gloried specially in the thought that he could and did this or that of which neither "the governor, the mater," nor Hester knew his capability. He felt large and powerful and wise in consequence! and if he was only the more of a fool, what did it matter so long as he did not know it? Rather let me ask what better was he, either for the accomplishment or the concealment of it, so long as it did nothing to uncover to him the one important fact, that its possessor was neither more nor less than a fool?

He had been now some eighteen months in the bank, and from the first Mr. Vavasor, himself not the profoundest of men, had been taken with the easy manners of the youth combined with his evident worship of himself, and having no small proclivity towards patronage, had allowed the aspirant to his favour to enter by degrees its charmed circle. Gathering a certain liking for him, he began to make him an occasional companion for the evening, and at length would sometimes take him home with him. There Cornelius at once laid himself out to please Miss Vavasor, and flattery went a long way with that lady, because she had begun to suspect herself no longer young or so beautiful. Her house was a dingy little hut in Mayfair, full of worthless pictures and fine old-fashioned furniture. Any piece of this she would for a long time gladly have exchanged for a new one in the fashion, but as soon as she found such things themselves the fashion, her appreciation of them rose to such fervour that she professed an unchangeable preference for them over things of any modern style whatever. Cornelius soon learned what he must admire and what despise if he would be in tune with Miss Vavasor, to the false importance of being one of whose courtiers he was so much alive that he counted it one of the most precious of his secrets: none of his family had heard of Mr. Vavasor even, before the encounter at the aquarium.

From Miss Vavasor's Cornelius had been invited to several other houses, and the consequence was that he looked from an ever growing height upon his own people, judging not one of them fit for the grand company to which his merits, unappreciated at home, had introduced him. He began to take private lessons in dancing and singing, and as he possessed a certain

natural grace, invisible when he was out of humour, but always appearing when he wanted to please, and a certain facility of imitation as well, he was soon able to dance excellently, and sing with more or less dullness a few songs of the sort fashionable at the time. But he took so little delight in music or singing for its own sake that in any allusion to his sister's practising he would call it *an infernal row.*

He was not a little astonished, was perhaps a little annoyed at the impression made by his family in general, and Hester in particular, upon one in whose judgment he had placed unquestioning confidence. Nor did he conceal from Vavasor his dissent from his opinion of them, for he felt that his friend's admiration gave him an advantage—not as member of such a family, but as the pooh-pooher of what his friend admired. For did not his superiority to the admiration to which his friend yielded, stamp him in that one thing at least the superior of him who was his superior in so many other things? To be able to look down where he looked up—what was it but superiority?

"My mother's the best of the lot," he said: "—she's the best woman in the world, I do believe; but she's nobody except at home—don't you know? Look at her and your aunt together! Pooh! Because she's my mother, that's no reason why I should think royalty of her!"

"What a cub it is!" said Vavasor to himself, and straightway proceeded, with the gravity of a middle-aged Mentor, to read him a lecture, well meant and shallow, on what was good form in a woman. According to him, not the cub's mother only, but Hester also possessed the qualities that went to the composition of this strange virtue in eminent degrees. Cornelius continued his opposition, but modified it, for he could not help feeling flattered, and began to think a little more of his mother and of Hester too.

"She's a very good girl—of her sort—is Hester," he said; "I don't require to be taught that, Mr. Vavasor. But she's so awfully serious! She's in such earnest about everything—you haven't an idea! One half-hour of her in one of her awful moods is enough to destroy a poor beggar's peace of mind for ever. And there's no saying when the fit may take her."

Vavasor laughed. But he said to himself there was stuff in her: "what a woman might be made of her!" To him she seemed fit—with a little developing aid—to grace the best

society in the world. It was not polish she needed but experience and insight, thought Vavasor, who would have her learn to look on the world and its affairs as they saw them who by long practice had disqualified themselves for seeing them in any other than the artificial light of fashion. Thus early did Vavasor conceive the ambition of having a hand in the worldly education of this young woman, such a hand that by his means she should come to shine as she deserved in the only circle in which he thought shining worth any one's while: his reward should be to see her so shine. Through his aunt he could gain her entrance where he pleased! In relation to her and her people he seemed to himself a man of power and influence.

I wonder how Jesus Christ would carry himself in Mayfair. Perhaps he would not enter it. Perhaps he would only call to his own to come out of it, and turn away to go down among the money-lenders and sinners of the east end. I am only wondering.

Hester took to Vavasor from the first, in an external, meet-and-part sort of fashion. His bearing was so dignified yet his manner so pleasing, that she, whose instinct was a little repellent, showed him nothing of that phase of her nature. He roused none of that inclination to oppose which poor foolish Corney always roused in her. He could talk well about music and pictures and novels and plays, and she not only let him talk freely, but was inclined to put a favourable interpretation upon things he said which she did not altogether like, trying to see only humour where another might have found heartlessness or cynicism. For Vavasor, being in his own eyes the model of an honourable and well-behaved gentleman, had of course only the world's way of regarding and judging things. Had he been a man of fortune he would have given to charities with some freedom; but, his salary being very moderate, and his aunt just a little stingy as he thought, he would not have denied himself the smallest luxury his means could compass, for the highest betterment of a human soul. He would give a half-worn pair of gloves to a poor woman in the street, but not the price of the new pair he was on his way to buy to get her a pair of shoes.

It would have enlightened Hester a little about him to watch him for half an hour where he stood behind the counter of the bank: there he was the least courteous of proverbially discourteous bank-clerks, whose manners are about of the same breed with those of hotel-clerks in America. It ought to be

mentioned, however, that he treated those of his own social position in precisely the same way as less distinguished callers. But he never forgot to take up his manners with his umbrella as he left the bank, and his airy, cheerful way of talking, which was more natural to him than his rudeness, coming from the same source that afforded the rimes he delighted in, sparkled pleasantly against the more sombre texture of Hester's consciousness. She suspected he was not profound, but that was no reason why she should not be pleasant to him, and allow him to be pleasant to her. So by the time Vavasor had spent three evenings with the Raymounts, Hester and he were on a standing of external intimacy, if there be such a relation.

CHAPTER IX.

SONGS AND SINGERS.

THE evening before the return of Cornelius to London and the durance vile of the bank, Vavasor presented himself at the hour of family-tea. Mr. Raymount's work admitting of no late dinner, the evening of the rest of the family was the freer. They occupied a tolerably large drawing-room, and as they had hired for the time a tolerably good piano, to it, when tea was over, Hester generally betook herself. But this time Cornelius, walking up to it with his hands in his pockets, dropped on the piano-stool as if he had taken a fancy to it for a seat, and began to let his hands run over the keys as if to give the idea he could play if he would. Amy Amber was taking away the tea-things, and the rest were here and there about the room, Mr. Raymount and Vavasor talking on the hearthrug—for a moment ere the former withdrew to his study.

"What a rose-diamond you have to wait on you, Mr. Raymount!" said Vavasor. "If I were a painter, I should have her sit to me."

"And ruin the poor thing for any life-setting!" remarked Mr. Raymount rather gruffly, for he found that the easier way of speaking the truth. He had thus gained a character for uncompromising severity, whereas it was but that a certain sort of cowardice made him creep into spiky armour. He was a good man, who saw some truths clearly, and used them blunderingly.

"I don't see why that should follow," said Vavasor, in a softly drawling tone, the very reverse of his host's. Its calmness gave the impression of a wisdom behind it that had no existence. "If the girl is handsome, why shouldn't she derive some advantage from it—and the rest of the world as well?"

"Because, I say, she at least would derive only ruin. She would immediately assume to herself the credit of what was offered only to her beauty. It takes a lifetime, Mr. Vavasor, to learn where to pay our taxes. If the penny with the image and superscription of Cæsar has to be paid to Cæsar, where has a face and figure like that of Amy Amber to be paid?"

Vavasor did not reply; Mr. Raymount's utterance may perhaps seem obscure to a better thinker. He concluded merely that his host was talking for talk's sake, so talking rubbish. The girl came in again, and the conversation dropped. Mr. Raymount went to his writing, Vavasor towards the piano. Willing to please Cornelius, whom he almost regarded with a little respect now that he had turned out brother to such a sister,

"Sing the song you gave us the other night at our house," he said carelessly.

Hester could hardly credit her hearing. Still more astonished was she when Cornelius actually struck a few chords and began to sing. The song was one of those common drawing-room ones more like the remnants of a trifle the day after a party than any other dish for human use. But there was one mercy in it: the words and the music went together in a perfect concord of weak worthlessness; and Hester had not to listen, with the miserable feeling that rude hands were pulling at the modest garments of her soul, to a true poem set to the music of a "scrannel pipe of wretched straw," whose every tone and phrase choked the divine bird caged in the verse.

Cornelius sung like a would-be singer, a song written by a would-be poet, and set by a would-be musician. Verve was there none in the whole ephemeral embodiment. When it died a natural death, if that be possible where never had been any life, Vavasor said, "Thank you, Raymount." But Hester, who had been standing with her teeth clenched under the fiery rain of discords, wrong notes, and dislocated rhythm, rushed to the piano with glowing cheeks and tear-filled eyes, and pushed Cornelius off the stool. The poor weak fellow thought

she was acting the sentimental over the sudden outburst of his unsuspected talent, and recovering himself stood smiling at her with affected protest.

"Corney!" she cried—and the faces of the two were a contrast worth seeing—"you disgrace yourself! Any one who can sing at all, should be ashamed to sing no better than that!"

Then feeling that she ought not to be thus carried away, or quench with such a fierce lack of sympathy the smoking flax of any endowment, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. He received her embrace like the bear he was: the sole recognition he showed was a comically appealing look to Vavasor, intended to say, "You see how the women use me! They trouble me, but I submit!"

"You naughty boy!" Hester went on, much excited, and speaking with great rapidity, "you never let me suspect you could sing any more than a frog—a toad I mean, for a frog does sing after his own rather monotonous fashion, and you don't sing much better! Listen to me, and I will show you how the song ought to have been sung. It's not worth a straw, and it's a shame to sing it, but if it be sung at all, it might as well be sung as well as it might!"

So saying she seated herself at the piano.

This convulsion was in Hester's being a phenomenon altogether new, for never before had she been beside herself in the presence of another.

She gazed for a moment at the song on the rest before her, then summoned as with a command the chords which Corney had seemed to pick up from among his feet, and began. The effect of her singing upon the song was as if the few poor shivering plants in a garden of March had every one blossomed at once. The words and music both were in truth as worthless as she had said; but they were words, and it was music, and words have always some meaning, and tones have always some sweetness: all the meaning and all the sweetness in the song Hester laid hold of, drew out, made the best of; while all the feeble element of the dramatic in it she forced, giving it an expression far beyond what could have been in the mind of the writer capable of such inadequate utterance—with the result that it was a different song altogether from that which Cornelius had sung. She gave the song such a second birth, indeed, that a tolerable judge might have taken it, so hearing it for the first

time, for what it was not—a song with some existence of its own, some distinction from a thousand other wax flowers dipped in sugar-water for the humming birds of society. The moment she ended, she rose ashamed, and going to the window looked out over the darkening sea.

Vavasor had not heard her sing before. He did not even know she cared for music; for Hester, who did not regard her faculty as an accomplishment but as a gift, treated it as a treasure to be hidden for the day of the Lord rather than a flag to be flaunted in a civil procession—was jealously shy over it, as a thing it would be profanation to show to any but loving eyes. To utter herself in song to any but the right persons, except indeed it was for some further and higher end justifying the sacrifice, appeared to her a kind of immodesty, a taking of her heart from its case and holding it out at arm's length. He was astonished and yet more delighted. He was in the presence of a power! But all he knew of power was in society-relations. It was not a spirit of might he recognized, for the opening of minds and the strengthening of hearts, but an influence of pleasing for self-aggrandizement. Feeling it upon himself, he thought of it in its operation upon others, and was filled with a respect rising almost to the height of what reverence he was capable of. He followed her swiftly to the window, and through the gathering shadows of the evening she saw his eyes shine as he addressed her.

"I hardly know what I am about, Miss Raymount," he said, "except that I hear my own voice daring to address the finest non-professional singer I have ever yet heard."

Hester, to her own disgust and annoyance, felt her head give itself a toss she had never intended; but it was a true toss nevertheless, for she neither liked having attracted his admiration by such a song, nor the stress he laid on the word *non-professional*: did it not imply that she was not songstress enough for the profession of song?

"Excuse me, Mr. Vavasor, but how do you know I am not a professional singer?" she said with some haughtiness.

"Had you been," answered Vavasor with concealed caution, "I should have learned the fact from your brother."

"Had you learned from him that I could sing at all?"

"To confess the strange truth, he never told me you were musical."

"Very well?"

"I beg your pardon."

"I mean, how then do you know I am not a professional singer?"

"All London would have known it."

This second reply, better conceived, soothed Hester's vanity —of which she had more than was good for her, seeing the least speck of it in the noblest is a fly in the cream.

"What would you say," she rejoined, "if Corney were to tell to you that the reason of his silence was that, while I was in training, we judged it more prudent, with possible failure ahead, to be silent?"

"I should say you cherished a grand ambition, and one in which you could not fail of success," replied Vavasor, who began to think she was leading him gently to the truth.

But Hester was in a wayward mood, and inclined to *prospect.*

"Suppose such was not really Corney's reason," she resumed, "but that he thought it degraded him to be the brother of an intended professional—what would you say to that?"

"I should tell him he was a fool.—He cannot know his Burke," he added laughingly, "to be ignorant of the not inconsiderable proportion of professional blood mixed with the blue of our country."

It was not in Vavasor's usual taste: he had forgot his best manners. But in truth he never had any best manners; comparatively few have anything but second-best, as the court of the universe will one day reveal. Hester did not like the remark, and he fancied from her look she had misunderstood him.

"Many a singer and actress too has married a duke or a marquis," he supplemented in explanation.

"What sort of duke or marquis?" asked Hester, in a studiedly wooden way. "It was the more shame to them," she added.

"Pardon me. I cannot allow that it would be any shame to the best of our nobility—"

"I beg your pardon—I meant to the professionals," interrupted Hester.

Vavasor was posed. To her other eccentricities it seemed Miss Raymount added radicalism—and that not of the palest pink! But happily for him, Cornelius, who had been all the

time making noises on the piano, at this point appeared at the window.

"Come, Hessy," he said, "sing that again. I shall sing it ever so much better after! Come, I will play the accompaniment."

"It's not worth singing. It would choke me—poor, vapid, vulgar thing!"

"Hullo, sis;" cried Cornelius; "it's hardly civil to use such words about any song a fellow cares to sing!"

Hester's sole answer was a smile, in which, and I am afraid it was really there, Vavasor read contempt, and liked her none the worse for it. Cornelius turned in offence, went back to the piano, and sang the song again—not one hair better—in just the same nerveless, indifferent fashion as before; for how shall one who has no soul, put soul into a song?

Mrs. Raymount was sitting at the fireside with her embroidery. She had not spoken since tea, but now she called Hester, and said to her quietly—

"Don't provoke him, Hester. I am more than delighted to find he has begun to take an interest in music. It is a taste that will grow upon him. Coax him to let you teach him—and bear with him if he should sing out of tune,—It is nothing wicked!" she added with a mother-smile.

Hester was silent. Her conscience rebuked her more than her heart. She went up to him and said—

"Corney, dear, let me find you a song worth singing."

"A girl can't choose for a man. You're sure to fix on some sentimental stuff or other not fit to sing!"

"My goodness, Corney!" cried Hester; "what do you call the song you've just been singing?

In the days when my heart was aching
Like the shell of an overtuned lyre!

Ha! ha! ha!"

She laughed prettily, not scornfully; then, striking an attitude of the mock heroic, added, on the spur of the moment—

"And the oven was burning, not baking,
The tarts of my soul's desire!"

—for at the moment one of those fumes the kitchen was constantly firing at the drawing-room, came storming up as if a door had been suddenly opened in yet lower regions.

Cornelius was too much offended and self-occupied to be amused, but both Mrs. Raymount and Vavasor laughed, the latter recognizing in Hester's extemporization a vein similar to his own. But Hester was already searching, and presently found a song to her mind—one, that was, fit for Cornelius.

"Come now, Corney," she said; "here is a song I should like you to be able to sing!"

With that she turned to the keys, and sang a spirited ballad, of which the following was the first stanza:—

> This blow is for my brother:
> You lied away his life;
> This for his weeping mother,
> This for your own sweet wife;
> For you told that lie of another
> To pierce her heart with its knife.

And now indeed the singer was manifest: genius was plainly the soul of her art, and her art the obedient body to the informing genius. Vavasor was utterly enchanted, but too world-eaten to recognize the soul she almost waked in him for any other than the old one. Her mother thought she had never heard her sing so splendidly before.

The ballad was of a battle between two knights, a good and a bad—something like Browning's *Count Gismond:* the last two verses of it were—

> So the lie went up in the face of heaven
> And melted in the sun.

When Hester had sung these, she rose at once, her face white, her mouth set, and her eyes gleaming. Vavasor felt *almost* as if he were no longer master of himself, *almost* as if he would have fallen down to kiss the hem of her garment, had he but dared go near her. But she walked from the room, vexed with the emotion she was unable to control, and did not again appear.

The best thing in Vavasor was his love of music. He had cultivated not a little what gift he had, but it was only a small power, not of production, but of mere reproduction, like that of Cornelius, though both finer and stronger in quality. He did not really believe in music—he did not really believe in anything except himself. He professed to adore it, and imagined

he did, because his greatest pleasure lay in hearing his own verses well sung by a pretty girl who would now and then steal, or try to steal, a glance at the poet from under her eyelids as she sang. On his way home he brooded over the delight of having his best songs sung by such a singer as Hester; and from that night fancied he had received a new revelation of what music was and could do, confessing to himself that a similar experience within the next fortnight would send him over head and ears in love with Hester—which must not be! Cornelius went half-way with him, and to his questions arising from what Miss Raymount had said about the professional, assured him on his honour, that that was all Hester's nonsense!

"*She* in training for a public singer!—But there's nothing she likes better than taking a rise out of a fellow," said Cornelius. "She would as soon think of singing in public as of taking a barmaid's place in a public-house!"

"But why did you never tell me your sister was such an awful swell of a singer?" asked Vavasor.

"Do you think so? She ought to feel very much flattered! Why I didn't tell you?—Oh, I don't know! I never heard her sing like that before. Upon my word I never did. I suppose it was because you were there. A brother's nobody, don't you know?"

This flattered Vavasor, as how should it not? and without the least idea of whither the spirit in the feet of his spirit was leading him, he went as often to the Raymounts' lodging as for very shame of intrusion he dared—that is, all but every night. But having, as he thought, discovered and learned thoroughly to understand her special vein, as he called it, he was careful not to bring any of his own slight windy things of leaf-blowing songs under Hester's notice—not, alas! that he thought them such, but that he judged it prudent to postpone the pleasure: she would require no small amount of training before she could quite enter into the spirit and special merit of them!

In the meantime as he knew a good song sometimes when he saw it, always when he heard her sing it, never actually displeased her with any he did bring under her notice, had himself a very tolerable voice, and was capable of managing it with taste and judgment, also of climbing upon the note itself to its summit, and of setting right with facility any fault explained to him, it came about by a scale of very natural

degrees, that he found himself by and by, not a little to his satisfaction, in the relation to her of a pupil to a teacher. Hester in truth gave herself a good deal of trouble with him, in the endeavour, by no means an unsuccessful one, to improve the quality of his singing—his style, his expression, and even his way of modelling his tones. The relation between them became therefore one which, had it then lasted, might have soon led to something like genuine intimacy—at least to some truer notion on the part of each of the kind of being the other was. But the day of separation arrived first; and it was only on his way back to London that Vavasor began to discover what a hold the sister of his fellow-clerk had taken of his thoughts and indeed of his heart—of the existence of which organ he had never before had any very convincing proof.

All the time he had not once brought his aunt and the Raymounts together.

CHAPTER X.

HESTER AND AMY.

HESTER did not miss Vavasor quite so much as he hoped she might, or as perhaps he believed she did. She had been interested in him mainly because she found him both receptive and capable of development in the matter of music—ready to understand, that is, and willing to be taught. To have such a man listen with respect to every word she said, never denying, defending, or justifying what she might point out as a fault, but setting himself at once to the correction of the same, and in general with some measure of immediate success, could not fail to be not merely pleasant but flattering to her. Brothers, I suspect, have a good deal to answer for in the estimation of men by their sisters: their behaviour at home leads them to prize the civilities of other men more highly than they deserve; brothers, I imagine, have therefore more to do than they will like to learn, with the making of those inferior men acceptable to their sisters, whose very presence is to themselves an annoyance. Women so seldom see a noble style of behaviour at home?—so few are capable of distinguishing between ceremony and courtesy, between familiarity and rudeness—of dismissing ceremony and retaining courtesy, of using familiarity and

banishing rudeness! The nearer persons come to each other, the greater is the room and the more are the occasions for courtesy; but just in proportion to their approach the gentleness, of most men diminishes. Some will make the poor defence that it is unmanly to show one's feelings: it is unmanly, because conceited and cowardly, to hide them, if, indeed, such persons have anything precious to hide. Other some will say, "Must I weigh my words with my familiar friend as if I had been but that moment presented to him?" I answer, It were small labour well spent to see that your coarse-grained evil self doomed to perdition, shall not come between your friend and your true, noble, humble self, fore-ordained to eternal life. The Father cannot bear rudeness in his children any more than wrong:—my comparison is unfit, for rudeness is a great and profound wrong, and that to the noblest part of the human being, while a mere show of indifference is sometimes almost as bad as the rudest words. And these are of those faults of which the more guilty a man is, the less is he conscious of the same.

Vavasor did not move the deepest in Hester. How should he? With that deepest he had no developed relation. There were worlds of thought and feeling already in motion in Hester's universe, while the vaporous mass in him had hardly yet begun to stir. To use another simile, he was living on the surface of his being, the more exposed to earthquake and volcanic eruption that he had never yet suspected the existence of the depths profound whence they rise, while she was already a discoverer in the abysses of the nature gradually yet swiftly unfolding in her—every discovery attended with fresh light for the will, and a new sense of power in the consciousness. When Vavasor was gone she turned with the greater diligence to her musical studies.

Amy Amber continued devoted to her, and when she was practising would hover about her as often and as long as she could. Her singing especially seemed to enchant and fascinate the girl. But a change had already begun to show itself in her. The shadow of an unseen cloud was occasionally visible on her forehead, and unmistakable pools were left in her eyes by the ebb-tide of tears. In her service, notwithstanding, she was nowise less willing, scarcely less cheerful. The signs of her discomfort grew deeper, and showed themselves oftener as the days went on. She moved about her work with less elasticity,

and her smile did not come so quickly. Both Hester and her mother saw the change, and marked even an occasional frown. In the morning, when she was always the first up, she was generally cheerful, but as the day passed the clouds came. Happily, however, her diligence did not relax. Sound in health, and by nature as active as cheerful, she took a positive delight in work. Doing was to her as natural as singing to the birds. In a household with truth at the heart of it she would have been invaluable, and happy as the day was long. As it was, she was growing daily less and less happy.

One night she appeared in Hester's room as usual before going to bed. The small neat face had lost for the time a great part of its beauty, and was dark as a little thunder-cloud. Its black shadowy brows were drawn together over its luminous black eyes; its red lips were large and pouting, and their likeness to a rosebud gone. Its cheeks were swollen, and its whole aspect revealed the spirit of wrath roused at last, and the fire alight in the furnace of the bosom. She tried to smile, but what came was the smile of a wound rather than a mouth.

"My poor Amy! what is the matter?" cried Hester, sorry, but hardly surprised; for plainly things had been going from bad to worse.

The girl burst into a passionate fit of weeping. She threw herself in wild abandonment on the floor, and sobbed; then, as if to keep herself from screaming aloud, stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, kicked with her little feet, and beat her little hands on the floor. She was like a child in a paroxysm of rage —only that with her its extravagance came of the effort to overcome it.

"Amy dear, you mustn't be naughty!" said Hester, kneeling down beside her and taking hold of her arm.

"I'm not naughty, miss—at least I am doing all I can to get over it," she sobbed.

Thereupon she ceased suddenly, and sitting up on the floor, her legs doubled under her in eastern fashion, looked straight at Hester, and said thoughtfully, as if the question had just come, with force to make her forget the suffering she was in,—

"I *should* like to know how you would do in my place—that I should miss!"

The words spoken, her eyes fell, and she sat still as a statue, seeming steadfastly to regard her own lap.

"I am afraid, if I were in your place, I should do nothing so well as you, Amy," said Hester. "But, come, tell me what is the matter. What puts you in such a misery?"

"Oh, it's not one thing nor two things nor twenty things!" answered Amy, looking sullen with the feeling of heaped-up wrong. What *would* my mother say to see me served so! *She* used to trust me everywhere and always! I don't understand how those two prying suspicious old maids *can* be *my* mother's sisters!"

She spoke slowly and sadly, without raising her eyes.

"Don't they behave well to you, my poor child?" said Hester.

"It's not," returned Amy, "that they watch every bit I put in my mouth—I don't complain of that, for they're poor—at least they're always saying so, and of course they want to make the most of me; but not to be trusted one moment out of their sight except they know exactly where I am—to be always suspected and followed and watched, and me working my hardest—that's what drives me wild, Miss Raymount. I'm afraid they'll make me hate them out and out—and them my own flesh and blood too, which can't but be wicked! I bore it very well for a while, for at first it only amused me. I said to myself, 'They'll soon know me better!' But when I found they only got worse, I got tired of it altogether; and when I got tired of it I got cross, and grew more and more cross, till now I can't *bear* it. I'm not used to be cross, and my own crossness is much harder to bear than theirs. If I could have kept the good temper people used to praise me for to my mother, I shouldn't mind; but it *is* hard to lose it this way! I don't know how to get on without it! If there don't come a change somehow soon, I shall run away—I shall indeed, Miss Raymount. There are many would be glad enough to have me for the work I can get through."

She jumped to her feet, gave a little laugh, merry-sad, and before Hester could answer her, said,—

"You're going away so soon, miss! Let me do your hair to-night. I want to brush it every night till you go."

"But you are tired, my poor child!" said Hester compassionately.

"Not too tired for that: it will rest me, and bring back my good temper. It will come to me again through your hair, miss."

"No, no, Amy," said Hester, a little conscience-stricken,

"you can't have any of mine. I have none to spare. You will rather brush some into me, Amy. But do what you like with my hair."

As Amy lovingly combed and brushed the long wavy overflow of Hester's beauty, Hester tried to make her understand that she must not think of good-temper and crossness merely as things that could be put into her and taken out of her. She tried to make her see that nothing really our own can ever be taken from us by any will or behaviour of another; that Amy had had a large supply of good-temper laid ready to her hand, but that it was not hers until she had made it her own by choosing and willing to be good-tempered when she was disinclined—holding it fast with the hand of determination when the hand of wrong would snatch it from her.

"Because I have a book on my shelves," she said, "it is not therefore mine; when I have read and understood it, then it is a little mine; when I love it and do what it tells me, then it is altogether mine: it is like that with a good temper: if you have it sometimes, and other times not, then it is not yours; it lies in you like that book on my table—a thing priceless were it your own, but as it is, a thing you can't keep even against your poor weak old aunts."

As she said all this, Hester felt like a hypocrite, remembering her own sins. Amy Amber listened quietly, brushing steadily all the time, but scarcely a shadow of Hester's meaning crossed her mind. If she was in a good temper, she was in a good temper; if she was in a bad temper, why there she was, she and her temper! She had not a notion of the possibility of having a hand in the making of her own temper—not a notion that she was in any manner or measure accountable in regard to the temper she might find herself in. Could she have been persuaded to attempt to overcome it, the moment she failed, as of course every one will many times, Amy would have concluded the thing required an impossibility. Yet the effort she made, and with success, to restrain the show of her anger, was far from slight. But for this, there would, long ere now, have been rain and wind, thunder and lightning between her and her aunts. She was alive without the law, not knowing what mental conflict was; the moment she recognized that she was bound to conquer herself, she would die in conscious helplessness, until strength and hope were given her from the well of the one pure will.

Hester kissed her, and though she had not understood, she went to bed a little comforted. When the Raymounts departed, two or three days after, they left her at the top of the cliff-stair, weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER XI.

AT HOME.

WHEN the Raymounts reached London, hardly taking time to unpack her box, Hester went to see her music-mistress, and make arrangement for recommencing study with her.

Miss Dasomma was one of God's angels; for if he makes his angels winds and his ministers a flaming fire, much more are those live fountains which carry his gifts to their thirsting fellows his angels. Meeting not very rarely with vulgar behaviour in such as regarded her from the heights of rank or money, she was the more devoted to a pupil who looked up to her as she deserved, recognizing in her a power of creation. Of Italian descent, of English birth, and of German training, she had lived in intimacy with some of the greatest composers of her day, but the enthusiasm for her art which possessed her was mainly the outcome of her own genius. Hence it was natural that she should exercise a forming influence on every pupil at all worthy of her, and without her Hester could never have become what she was. For not merely had she opened her eyes to a vision of Music in something of her essential glory, but, herself capable of the hardest and truest work, had taught her the absolute necessity of labour to one who would genuinely enjoy, not to say cause others to enjoy, what the masters in the art had brought out of the infinite. Hester had doubtless heard and accepted the commonplaces so common concerning the dignity and duty of labour—as if labour mere were anything irrespective of its character, its object and end! but without Miss Dasomma she would not have learned that Labour is grand officer in the palace of Art; that at the root of all ease lies slow, and, for long, profitless-seeming labour, as at the root of all grace lies strength; that ease is the lovely result of forgotten toil, sunk into the spirit, and making it strong and ready; that never worthy improvisation flowed from brain of poet or musician unused to perfect his work

with honest labour; that the very disappearance of toil is by the immolating hand of toil itself. He only who bears his own burden can bear the burden of another; he only who has laboured shall dwell at ease, or help others from the mire to the rock.

Miss Dasomma was ready to begin at once, and Hester gradually increased her hours of practice, till her mother interfered lest she should injure her health. But there was in truth little danger, for Hester was forcing nothing—only indulging to the full her inclination, eager to perfect her own delight, and the more eager that she was preparing delight for others.

They had not been home more than a week, when one Sunday morning, that is at four o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Vavasor called—which was not quite agreeable to Mrs. Raymount, who liked their Sundays kept quiet. He was shown to Mr. Raymount's study.

"I am sorry," he said, "to call on a Sunday, but I am not so enviably situated as you, Mr. Raymount; I have not my time at my command. When other people make their calls, I am a prisoner."

He spoke as if his were an exceptional case, and the whole happy world beside revelled in morning calls.

Mr. Raymount was pleased with him afresh, for he spoke modestly, with implicit acknowledgment of the superior position of the elder man. They fell to talking of the prominent question of the day, and Mr. Raymount was yet more pleased when he found the young aristocrat ready to receive enlightenment upon it. But the fact was that Vavasor cared very little about the matter, and had a facility for following where he was led; and, always preferring to make himself agreeable where there was no restraining reason, why should he not gratify the writer of articles by falling in with what he advanced? He had a light, easy way of touching on things, as if all his concessions, conclusions, and concurrences were merest matter of course; and thus making himself appear master of the situation over which he merely skimmed on insect-wing, Mr. Raymount took him not merely for a man of thought but one of some originality even—capable at least of forming an opinion of his own, as is, he was, in the habit of averring, not one in ten thousand.

In relation to the wider circle of the country, Mr. Vavasor was so entirely a nobody, that the acquaintance of a writer

even so partially known as Mr. Raymount was something to him. There is a tinselly halo about the writer of books that affects many minds the most *practical*, so called: they take it to indicate power, which, with most, means ability in the direction of one's own way, or his party's and so his own in the end. Since his return he had instituted inquiries concerning Mr. Raymount, and finding both him and his family in good repute, complained of indeed as exclusive, he had told his aunt as much concerning them as he judged prudent, hinting it would give him pleasure if she should see fit to call upon Mrs. Raymount. Miss Vavasor being, however, naturally jealous of the judgment of young men, pledged herself to nothing, and made inquiries for herself. Learning thereby at length, after much resultless questioning—for her world but just touched in its course the orbit of that of the Raymounts—that there was a rather distinguished-looking girl in the family, and having her own ideas for the nephew whose interests she had, for the sake of the impending title, made her own, she delayed and put off and talked the thing over, and at last let it rest; while he went the oftener to see the people she thus declined calling upon.

On this his first visit he stayed the evening, and was afresh installed as a friend of the family. Although it was Sunday, and her ideas also a little strict as to religious proprieties, Hester received him cordially where her mother received him but kindly, and falling into the old ways, he took his part in the hymns, anthems, and what other forms of sacred music followed the family-tea; and so the evening passed without irksomeness—nor the less enjoyably that Cornelius was spending it with a friend.

The tone, expression, and power of Hester's voice astonished Vavasor afresh. He was convinced, and told her so, that even in the short time since he heard it last, it had improved in all directions. And when, after they had enough of singing, she sat down and extemporized in a sacred strain, turning the piano almost into an organ with the sympathy of her touch, and weaving holy airs without end into the unrolling web of her own thought, Vavasor was so moved as to feel more kindly disposed towards religion—by which he meant "going to church, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"—than ever in his life before. He did not call the next Sunday, but came on the Saturday; and the only one present

who was not pleased with him was Miss Dasomma, who happened also to spend the evening there.

I have already represented Hester's indebtedness to her teacher as such that therein she would be making discoveries all her life. Devout as well as enthusiastic, human as well as artistic, she was not an angel of music only, but had for many years been a power in the family for good—as indeed in every family in which she counted herself doing anything worth doing. Much too generous and helpful to have saved money, she was now, in middle age, working as hard as she had ever worked in her youth. Not a little experienced in the ways of the world, and possessing a high ideal in the memories of a precious friendship, against which to compare the ways of smaller mortals, she did not find her atmosphere gladdened by the presence of Mr. Vavasor's. With tact enough to take his cue from the family, he treated her with studious politeness; but Miss Dasomma did not like Mr. Vavasor. She had to think before she could tell why, for there is a spiritual instinct also, which often takes the lead of the understanding, and has to search and analyze itself for its own explanation. But the question once roused, she prosecuted it, and in the shadow of a curtain, while Hester was playing, watched his countenance, trying to read it—to read, that is, what the owner of the face never meant to write, but could no more help writing there than he could help having a face. What a man is lies as certainly upon his countenance as in his heart, though none of his acquaintance may be able to read it. Their very intercourse with him may have rendered it more difficult.

Miss Dasomma's conclusion was, that Vavasor was a man of good instincts—as perhaps who is not?—but without moral development, pleased with himself, and not undesirous of pleasing others consistently with his idea of dignity—at present more than moderately desirous of pleasing Hester Raymount, therefore showing to the best possible advantage. "But," thought Miss Dasomma, "if this be his best, what may not his worst be?" That he had no small capacity for music was plain, but if, as she judged, the faculty was unassociated in him with truth of nature, that was so much to the other side of his account, inasmuch as it rendered him the more dangerous. For, at Hester's feet in the rare atmosphere and faint twilight of music, how could he fail to impress her with an opinion of himself more favourable than just? To interfere,

however, where was no solid ground, would be to waste the power that might be of use; but she was confident that if for a moment Hester saw him as she did, she could no more look on him with favour. At the same time she did not think he could be meaning more than the mere passing of his time agreeably: she knew well the character of his aunt, and the relation in which he stood to her. In any case she could for the present only keep a gentle watch over the mind of her pupil! But that pupil had a better protection in the sacred ambition stirring in her. Concerning that she had not as yet held communication even with the one best able to understand it. For Hester had already had sufficient experience to know that it is a killing thing to talk about what one means to do. It is to let the wind in upon a delicate plant, requiring a long childhood under glass, open to sun and air, closed to wind and frost.

CHAPTER XII.

A BEGINNING.

THE Raymounts lived in no fashionable or pseudo-fashionable part of London, but in a somewhat peculiar house, though by no means such outwardly, in an old square in the dingy, smoky, convenient, healthy district of Bloomsbury. One of the advantages of this position to a family with soul in it, that strange essence which *will* go out after its kind, was, that on two sides at least it was closely pressed by poor neighbours. Artisans, small tradespeople, outdoor servants, poor actors and actresses lived in the narrow streets thickly branching away in certain directions. Hence, most happily for her, Hester had grown up with none of that uncomfortable feeling so many have when brought even into such mere contact with the poor as comes of passing through their streets on foot—a feeling often in part composed of fear, often in part of a false sense of natural superiority, engendered of being better dressed, better housed, and better educated. It was in a measure owing to her having been from childhood used to the sight of such, that her sympathies were so soon and so thoroughly waked on the side of suffering humanity. With parents like hers she had never been in danger of having her feelings or her insight blunted by the assumption of such a relation to the poor as

that of spiritual police-agent, one who arrogates the right of walking into their houses without introduction, and with at best but faint apology: to show respect, if you have it, is the quickest way to teach reverence; if you do not show respect, do not at least complain should the recoil of your own behaviour be more powerful than pleasant: if you will shout on the mountain-side in spring, look out for avalanches.

Those who would do good to the poor must attempt it in the way in which best they could do good to people of their own standing. They must make their acquaintance first. They must know something of the kind of the person they would help, to learn if help be possible from their hands. Only man can help man; money without man can do little or nothing, most likely less than nothing. As our Lord redeemed the world by being a man, the true Son of the true Father, so the only way for a man to help men is to be a true man to this neighbour and that. But to seek acquaintance with design is a perilous thing, nor unlikely to result in disappointment, and the widening of the gulf both between the individuals, and the classes to which they belong. It seems to me that, in humble acceptance of common ways, we must follow the leadings of providence, and make acquaintance in the so-called lower classes by the natural working of the social laws that bring men together. What is the divine intent in the many needs of humanity, and the consequent dependence of the rich on the poor, even greater than that of the poor on the rich, but to bring men together, that in far-off ways at first they may be compelled to know each other? The man who treats his fellow as a mere mean for the supply of his wants, and not as a human being with whom he has to do, is an obstructing clot in the human circulation.

Does any one ask for rules of procedure? I answer, there are none to be had; such must be discovered by each for himself. The only way to learn the rules of anything practical is to begin to do the thing. We have enough of knowledge in us—call it insight, call it instinct, call it inspiration, call it natural law—to begin anything required of us. The sole way to deal with the profoundest mystery that is yet not too profound to draw us, is to begin to do some duty revealed by the light from the golden fringe of its cloudy vast. If it reveal nothing to be done, there is nothing there for us. No man can turn his attention in the mere direction of a thing,

without already knowing enough of that thing to carry him further in the knowledge of it by the performance of what it involves of natural action. Let every simplest relation towards human being, if it be embodied but in the act of buying a reel of cotton or a knife, be recognized as a relation with, a meeting of that human soul. In its poor degree let its outcome be in truth and friendliness. Allow nature her course, and next time let the relation go farther. To follow such a path is the way to find both the persons to help and the real modes of helping them. In fact, to be true to a man in any way is to help him. He who goes out of common paths to look for opportunity, leaves his own door and misses that of his neighbour. It is by following the path we are in that we shall first reach somewhere. He who does as I say will find his acquaintance widen and widen with growing rapidity; his heart will fill with the care of humanity, and his hands with its help. Such care will be death to one's own cares, such help balm to one's own wounds. In a word, he must cultivate, after a simple human manner, the acquaintance of his neighbours, who would be a neighbour where a neighbour may be wanted. So shall he fulfil the part left behind of the work of the Master, which He desires to finish through him.

Of course I do not imagine that Hester understood this. She had no theory of carriage towards the poor, neither confined her hope of helping to them. There are as many in every other class needing help as among the poor, and the need, although it wear different dresses, is essentially the same in all. To make the light go up in the heart of a rich man, if a more difficult task, is just as good a deed as to make it go up in the heart of a poor man. But with her strong desire to carry help where it was needed, with her genuine feeling of the blood-relationship of all human beings, with her instinctive sense that one could never begin too soon to do that which had to be done, she was in the right position to begin; and from such a one opportunity will not be withheld.

She went one morning into a small shop in Steeven's Road, to buy a few sheets of music paper. The woman who kept it had been an acquaintance almost from the first day of their abode in the neighbourhood. In the course of their talk Mrs. Baldwin mentioned that she was in some anxiety about a woman in the house who was far from well, and in whom she thought Mrs. Raymount would be interested.

"Mamma is always ready," said Hester, "to help where she can. Tell me about her."

"Well, you see, miss," replied Mrs. Baldwin, "we're not in the way of having to do with such people, for my husband's rather particular about who he lets the top-rooms to; only let them we must to one or another, for times is hard, an' children is many, an' it's all as we can do to pay our way an' nothing over; only thank God we've done it up to this present; an' the man looked so decent, as well as the woman, an' that pitiful-like—more than she did—that I couldn't have the heart to send them away such a night as it was, bein' a sort o' drizzly an' as cold as charity, an' the poor woman plainly not in a state to go wanderin' about seekin' a place to lay her head; though to be sure there's plenty o' places for such like, only, as the poor man said himself, they did want to get into a decent place, which it wasn't easy to get e'er a one as would take them in. They had three children with them, the smallest o' them pickaback on the biggest; an' it's strange, miss—I never could compass it, though I atten' chapel reg'lar—how it goes to yer heart, I mean, to see one human bein' looking arter another! But my husban', as was natural, he bein' a householder, an' so many of his own, was shy o' children: for children, you know, miss, 'cep' they be yer own, ain't nice things about a house; an' them poor things wouldn't be a credit nowheres, for they're ragged enough—an' a good deal more than enough—only they were pretty clean, as poor children go, an' there was nothing, as I said to him, in the top-rooms, as they could do much harm to. The man said theirs weren't like other children, for they had been brought up to do the thing as they were told, an' to remember that things that belonged to other people was to be handled as sich; an' said he, they were always too busy earnin' their bread to be up to tricks, an' in fact were always too tired to have much spare powder to let off; so the long an' the short on it was, we took 'em in, an' they've turned out as quiet an' well behaved a family as you could desire; an' if they 'ain't got jest the most respectable way o' earnin' their livelihood, that may be as much their misfortin as their fault, as my husban' he said. An' I'm sure it's not lettin' lodgin's to sich I ever thought I should come to—though, for the matter o' that, I never could rightly understand what made one thing respectable an' another not."

"What is their employment then?" asked Hester.

"Something or other in the circus-way, as far as I can make out from what they tell me. Anyway they didn't seem to have no engagement when they come to the door, but they paid the first week down afore they entered. You see, miss, the poor woman she give me a kind of a look up into the face that reminded me of my Susie, as I lost, you know, miss, a year ago—it was that as made me feel to hate the thought of sendin' of her away. Oh, miss, ain't it a mercy everybody ain't so like your own! We'd have to ruin ourselves for them—we couldn't help it!"

"It will come to that one day, though," said Hester to herself, "—and then we sha'n't be ruined either!"

"So then," Mrs. Baldwin went on, "the very next day as was, the doctor had to be sent for, an' there was a babby! The doctor he come from the 'ospital, as nice a gentleman as you'd wish to see, miss, an' waited on her as if she'd been the first duchess in the land. 'I'm sure' said my good husban' to me, 'it's a lesson to all of us to see how he do look after her as'll never pay him a penny for the care as he's a takin' of her!' But my husban' he's that soft-hearted, miss, where anything i' the baby-line's a goin' on! An' now the poor thing's not at all strong, an' ain't a gettin' back of her stren'th, though we do what we can with her, an' send her up what we can spare.—You see they pay for their house-room, an' then 'ain't got much over!" added the good woman in excuse for her goodness. "But I fancy it's more from anxiety as to what's to come to them, than that anything's gone wrong with her. They're not out o' money yet quite, I'm glad to say, though he don't seem to ha' got nothing to do yet, so far as I can make out: they're rayther close like. That sort o' trade, ye see, miss, the demand's not steady in it. It's not like skilled labour, as my husban' says; though to see what them young ones has to go through, it's labour enough an' to spare; an' if it ain't just what they call skilled, it's what no one out o' the trade can make a mark at. Would you mind goin' up an' havin' a look at her, miss?"

Hester begged Mrs. Baldwin to lead the way, and followed her up the stairs.

The top rooms were two poor enough garret ones, nowise too good, it seemed to Hester, for the poorest of human kind. In the largest, the ceiling sloped to the floor till there was but just height enough left for the small chest of drawers of painted

deal to stand back to the wall. A similar washstand and a low bed completed the furniture. The last was immediately behind the door, and there lay the woman, with a bolster heightened by a thin petticoat and threadbare cloak, under her head. Hester saw a pale, patient, worn face, with eyes large, thoughtful, and troubled.

"Here's a kind lady come to see you, Mrs. !" said her landlady.

The speech annoyed Hester. She hated to be called kind, and perhaps spoke the more kindly to the poor woman that she was displeased with Mrs. Baldwin's patronizing of her.

"It's dreary for you to lie here alone, I'm afraid," she said, and stroked the thin hand on the coverlid. "May I sit a few minutes beside you? I was once in bed for a whole month, and found it very wearisome. I was at school then. I don't mind being ill when I have my mother.

The woman gazed up at her with eyes that looked like the dry wells of tears.

"It's very kind of you, miss!" she said. "It's a long stair to come up!"

She lay and gazed, and said nothing more. Her life was of a negative sort just at present. Her child lay asleep on her arm, a poor little washed out rag of humanity, but evidently dear from the way she now and then tried to look at it, which was not easy to her.

Hester sat down and tried to talk, but partly from the fear of tiring one too weak to answer more than a word now and then she found it hard to get on. Religion she could not talk offhand. Once in her life she had, from a notion of duty, made the attempt—with the consequence of feeling like a hypocrite. For she found herself speaking so of the things she fed on in her heart, as to make them look to herself the merest commonplaces in the world! Could she believe in them, and speak of them with such dull dogmatic stupidity? She came to the conclusion that she had spoken without a message, and since then she had taken care not to commit the offence again.

A dead silence came.

"What can be the good of a common creature like me going to visit people?" she said to herself. "I have nothing to say —feel nothing in me—but a dull love that would bless if it could! And what would words be if I had them!"

For a few moments she sat thus silent, growing more and

more uncomfortable. But just ere the silence became unendurable, a thought appeared in the void.

"What a fool I am!" she said again to herself. "I am like little Mark when he cried because he had only a shilling and saw a boy spend a penny on a lovely spotted horse! Here have I been all my life wanting to give my fellow-creatures a large share of my big cake, and the first time I have an opportunity, I forget all about it! Here it lies locked in my chest, like a dead bird in its cage!"

A few more moments she sat silent but no longer embarrassed, thinking how to begin. The baby woke and began to whimper. The mother, who rarely let him off her arm, because then she was not able to take him till help came, drew him to her, and began to nurse him; and the heart of the young, strong woman was pierced to the quick at sight of how ill fitted was the mother for what she had to do. "Can God be love?" she said to herself. "If I could help her,—! It will go on like this for weeks and months, I suppose!"

She had yet to learn that the love of God is so deep he can be satisfied with nothing less than getting as near as it is possible for the Father to draw nigh to his children—and that is into absolute contact of heart with heart, love with love, being with being. And as that must be wrought out from the deepest inside, divine law working itself up through our nature into our consciousness and will, and claiming us as divine, who can tell by what slow certainties of approach God is drawing nigh to the most suffering of his creatures? Only, if we so comfort ourselves with such thoughts as to do nothing, we, when God and they meet, shall find ourselves out in the cold—a cold infinitely worse than any trouble this world has to show. The baby made no complaint against the feeble fountain of his life, but made the best he could of it, while his mother every now and then peered down on him as lovingly as ever happy mother on her first born. The same God is at the heart of all mothers, and all sins against children are against the one Father of children, against the Life itself.

—A few moments only, and Hester began to sing—low and soft. Having no song sought out for the occasion, she took a common hymn, sung in all churches and chapels, with little thought or feeling in it, the only one she could think of. I need not say she put into it as much of sweetness and soothing strength as she could make the sounds hold, and so perhaps

made up a little for its lack. It is a curious question why sacred song should so often be dull and commonplace. With a trembling voice she sang, and with more anxiety and shyness than she remembered having ever felt. It was neither a well instructed nor critically disposed audience she had, but the reason was that never before had she been so anxious for some measure of success. Not daring to look up, she sat like one rebuked, with the music flowing over her lips like the slow water from the urn of some naiad of stone at a fountain.

She had her reward; for, when the hymn was done, and she at length ventured to raise her eyes, she saw both mother and babe fast asleep. Her heart ascended on a wave of thanks to the Giver of song. She rose softly, crept from the house, and hastened home to tell her mother what she had heard and seen. The same afternoon a basket of nice things arrived at the shop for the poor lodger in the top-room.

The care of the Raymounts did not relax till she was fairly on her feet again; neither till then did a day pass on which Hester did not see her, and scarcely one on which she did not sing to her and her baby. Several times she dressed the child, singing to him all the time. It was generally in the morning she went, because then she was almost sure to find them alone. Of the father she had seen next to nothing. On the few occasions when he happened to be at home, the moment she entered he crept out, with a shy, humble salutation, as if ashamed of himself. All she had ever had time to see was that he was a man of middle height, with a strong face and frame, dressed like a workman. The moment he rose to go, his three boys rose also, and following him from the room seemed to imitate his salutation as they passed her—all but the youngest, who made her a profound bow accompanied by a wonderful smile. The eldest was about the age of twelve, the youngest about seven. They were rather sickly looking, but had intelligent faces and inoffensive expressions.

Mrs. Baldwin continued to bear the family good witness. She confessed they never seem to have much to eat, but said they paid their lodgings regularly, and she had nothing to complain of. The place had indeed been untidy, not to say dirty, at first, but as soon as the mother was about again, it began to amend, and now really, for people in their position, it was wonderfully well.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PRIVATE EXHIBITION.

HESTER had not been near them for two or three days. It was getting dusk, but she would just run across the square and down the street, and look in upon them for a moment. She had not been brought up to fear putting her foot out of doors unaccompanied. It was but a few steps, and she knew almost every house she had to pass. To-morrow was Sunday, and she felt as if she could not go to church without having once more seen the little flock committed in a measure to her humble charge. Not that she imagined anything sole in her relation towards them; for she had already begun to see that we have to take care of *parts* of each other, those parts, namely, which we can best help. From the ambition both of men and women to lord it over individuals have arisen worse evils perhaps than from a wider love of empery. When a man desires personal influence or power over any one, he is of the thieves and robbers who enter not in by the door. But the right and privilege of ministering belongs to every one who has the grace to claim it and be a fellow-worker with God.

Hester found Mrs. Baldwin busy in the shop, and with a nod passed her, and went up the stair. But when she opened the door, she stood for a moment hesitating whether to enter, or close it again with an apology and return, for it seemed as if preparations for a party had been made. The bed was pushed to the back of the room, and the floor was empty, except for a cushion or two, like those of an easy chair lying in the middle of it. The father and the three boys were standing together near the fire, like gentlemen on the hearthrug expecting visitors. She glanced round in search of the mother. Some one was bending over the bed in the farther corner; the place was lighted with but a single candle, and she thought it was she, stooping over her baby; but a moment's gaze made it plain that the back was that of a man: could it be the doctor again? Was the poor woman worse? She entered and approached the father, who then first seeing who it was that had knocked and looked in, pulled off the cap he invariably wore, and came forward with a bashful yet eager courtesy.

"I hope your wife is not worse," said Hester.

"No, miss, I hope not. She's took a bit bad. We can't always awoid it in our profession, miss."

"I don't understand you," she answered, feeling a little uneasy.—Were there horrors to be revealed of which she had surmised nothing?

"If you will do us the honour to take a seat, miss, we shall be only too happy to show you as much as you may please to look upon with favour."

Hester shuddered involuntarily, but mastered herself. The man saw her hesitate, and resumed.

"You see, miss, this is how it was. Dr. Christopher—that's the gentleman there, a lookin' after mother—he's been that kind to her an' me an' all on us in our trouble, an' never a crown-piece to offer him—which I'm sure no lady in the land could ha' been better attended to than she've been—twixt him an' you, miss—so we thought as how we'd do our best for him, an' try an' see whether amongst us we couldn't give him a pleasant evenin' as it were, just to show as we was grateful. So we axed him to tea, an' he come, like the gen'leman he be, an' so we shoved the bed aside an' was showin' him a bit on our craft, just a trick or two, miss—me an' the b'ys here—stand forward, Robert an' the rest of you, an' make your bows to the distinguished company as honours you with their presence to cast an eye on you an' see what you can show yourselves capable of."

Here Mr. Christopher—Hester had not now heard his name for the first time, though she had never seen him before—turned and approached them.

"She'll be all right in a minute or two, Franks," he said.

"You told her, doctor, the boy 'ain't got the smallest hurt? It 'ud break my heart nigh as soon as hers to see the Sarpint come to grief."

"She knows that well enough; only, you see, we can't always help letting the looks of things get a hold of us in spite of the facts. That's how so many people come to go out of their wits. But I think for the present it will be better to drop it."

Franks turned to Hester to explain.

"One of the b'ys, miss—that's him—not much of him—the Young Sarpint of the Prairie, we call him in the trade—he don't seem to ha' much amiss with him, do he now, miss?—he had a bit of a fall—only on them pads—a few minutes ago, the

more shame to the Sarpint, the rascal!" Here he pretended to hit the Sarpint, who never moved a coil in consequence, only smiled. "But he ain't the worse, never a hair—or a scale I should rather say, to be kensistent. Bless you, we all knows how to fall equally as well's how to get up again! Only it's the most remarkable thing, an' you would hardly believe it of any woman, miss, though she's been married fourteen year come next Candlemas, an' use they say's a second natur', it's never proved no second nor no third natur' with her, for she's got no more used to seein' the children, if it's nothin' but standin' on their 'eads, than if it was the first time she'd ever heard o' sich a thing. An' for standin' on my 'ead—I don't mean me standin' on my own 'ead, that she don't mind no more'n if it was a pin standin' on its 'ead, which it's less the natur' of a pin to do, as that's the way she first made acquaintance with me, seein' me for the first time in her life upside down, which I think sometimes it would be the better way for women to choose their husbands in general, miss, for it's a bad lot we are! But as to seein' of her own flesh an' blood, that's them b'ys, all on 'em, miss, a standin' on my 'ead, or it might be one on my 'ead an' the other two on my shoulders, that she never come to look at fair. She can't abide it, miss. By some strange okylar delusion she takes me somehow for somewheres about the height of St. Paul's, which if you was to fall off the ball, or even the dome of the same, you *might* break your neck an' a few bones besides, miss. But bless you, there ain't no danger, an' she knows too there ain't, only, as the doctor says, she can't abide the look o' the thing. You see, miss, we're all too much taken wi' the appearance o' things—the doctor's right there!—an' if it warn't for that, there's never a juggler could get on with his tricks, for it's when you're so taken up with what he wants you to see, that he dooes the thing he wants you not to see. But as the doctor thinks it better to drop it, it's drop it we will, an' wait till a more convenient time—that is, when mother'll be a bit stronger. For I hope neither you, miss, nor the doctor, won't give us up quite, seein' as how we have a kind of a claim upon you—an' no offence, miss, to you, or Mr. Christopher, sir!"

Hester, from whose presence the man had hitherto always hastened to disappear, was astonished at this outpouring; but Franks was emboldened by the presence of the doctor. The moment, however, that his wife heard him give up thus their

little private exhibition in honour of the doctor, she raised herself on her elbow.

"Now you'll do no such thing, John Franks!" she said with effort. "It's ill it would become me, for my whims, as I can't help no more nor the child there, to perwent you from showin' sich a small attention to the gentleman as helped me through my trouble—God bless him, for it can't be no pleasure! So I'm not a goin' to put on no airs as if I was a fine lady. I've got to get used to't—that's the short an' the long of it!—Only I'm slow at it!" she added with a sigh. "Up you go, Moxy!"

Franks looked at the doctor. The doctor nodded his head as much as to say, "You had better do as she wishes;" but Hester saw that the eyes of the young man were all the time more watchful of the woman than of the performance.

Immediately Franks, with a stage-bow, offered Hester a chair. She hesitated a moment, for she felt shy of Mr. Christopher; but as she had more fear of not behaving as she ought to the people she was visiting, she sat down, and became for the first time in her life a spectator of the feats of a family of acrobats.

There might have seemed little remarkable in the display to one in the occasional habit of seeing such things, and no doubt to Mr. Christopher it had not much that was new; but to Hester what each and all of them were capable of was astonishing—more astonishing than pleasant, for she was haunted for some time after with a vague idea of prevailing distortion and dislocation. It was satisfactory nevertheless to know that much labour of a very thorough and persevering sort must have been expended upon their training before they could have come within sight of the proficiency they had gained. She believed this proficiency bore strong witness to some kind of moral excellence in them, and that theirs might well be a nobler way of life than many in which money is made more rapidly, and which are regarded as more respectable. There were but two things in the performance she found really painful; one, that the youngest seemed hardly equal to the physical effort required in those tricks especially which he had as yet mastered but imperfectly; and it was very plain this was the chief source of trial to the nerves of the mother. He was a sweet-looking boy, with a pale interesting face, bent on learning his part, but finding it difficult. The other thing that pained Hester was, that,

the moment they began to perform, the manner of the father towards his children changed; his appearance also, and the very quality of his voice changed, so that he seemed hardly the same man. Just as some men alter their tone and speak roughly when they address a horse, so the moment Franks assumed the teacher he assumed the tyrant, and spoke in a voice between the bark of a dog and the growl of a brown bear. But the roughness had in it nothing cruel, coming in part of his having had to teach other boys than his own, whom he found this mode of utterance assist him in compelling to give heed to his commands; in part from his idea of the natural embodiment of authority. He ordered his boys about with sternness, sometimes even fiercely, swore at them indeed occasionally, and made Hester feel very uncomfortable.

"Come, come, Franks!" said Mr. Christopher, on one of these outbreaks.

The man stood silent for a moment "like one forbid," then turning to Miss Raymount first, and next to his wife, said, taking off his cap—

"I humbly beg your pardon, ladies. I forgot what company I was in. But, bless you, I mean nothing by it! It's only my way. Ain't it now, mates—you as knows the old man?"

"Yes, father; 't ain't nothin' more'n a way you got," responded the boys all, the little one loudest.

"You don't mind it, do you—knowin' as it's only to make you mind what you're about?"

"No, father, *we* don't mind it. Go ahead, father," said the eldest.

"But," said Franks, and here interjected an imprecation, vulgarly called an oath, "if ever I hear one o' you a usin' of sich improper words, I'll break every bone in his carcase."

"Yes, father," answered the boys with one accord.

"It's all very well for fathers," he went on; "an' when you're fathers yourselves, an' able to thrash me—not as I think you'd want to, kids—I sha'n't ha' no call to meddle with you. So here goes!"

Casting a timid glance at Hester, in the assurance that he had set himself thoroughly right with her, showing himself as regardful of his boys' manners as could justly be expected of any parent, he proceeded with his lesson from the point where he had left off.

As to breaking the boys' bones, there hardly seemed any

bones in them to break: gelatine at best seemed to be what was inside their muscles, so wonderful were their feats, and their pranks so strange. But their evident anxiety to please, their glances full of question as to their success in making their offering acceptable, their unconscious efforts to supply the lacking excitement of the public gaze, and, more than all, the occasional appearance amidst the marvels of their performance, in which their bodies seemed mere india-rubber in response to their wills, of a strangely mingled touch of pathos, prevailed chiefly to interest Hester in their endeavour. This last would appear in the occasional suffering it caused Moxy, the youngest, to do as his father required, but oftener in the incongruity between the lovely expression of the boy's face, and the oddity of it when it became the field of certain comicalities required of him—especially when, stuck through between his feet, it had to grin like a demon carved on the folding seat of a choir-stall. Its sweet innocence, and the veil of suffering cast over its best grin, suggesting one of Raphael's cherubs attempting to play the imp, Hester found almost discordantly pathetic. She could have caught the child to her bosom, but alas! she had no right. She was already beginning to become aware of the difficulty of the question as to when or how much you may interfere with the outward conditions of men, or help them save through the channels of the circumstances in which you find them. The gentle suffering face seemed far from its own sphere, that of a stray boy-angel, come to give her a lesson in the heavenly patience. His mother, whose yellow hair and clear gray eyes were just like his, covered her eyes with her hand, though she could not well see him from where she lay, every time he had to do anything by himself.

All at once the master of the ceremonies drew himself up and wiping his forehead, gave a deep sigh, as much as to say, "I have done my best, and if I have not pleased you, the more is my loss, for I have tried hard," and the performance was over.

The doctor rose, and in a manly voice, whose tones were more pleasing to Hester than the look of the man, which she did not find attractive, proceeded to point out to Franks one or two precautions which his knowledge of anatomy enabled him to suggest, with regard to the training especially of the little Moxy. At the same time he expressed himself greatly pleased with what his host had been so kind as show him,

remarking that the power to do such things implied labour more continuous and severe than would have sufficed to the learning of two or three trades. In reply, Franks, mistaking the drift of the remark, and supposing it a gentle remonstrance with what the doctor counted a waste of labour, said, in a tone that sounded sad in the ears of Hester,

"What's a fellow to do, sir, when he 'ain't got no dinner? He must take to the work as takes to him. There was no other trade handy for me. My father he was a poor labourer, an' died early o' hard work an' many mouths. My mother lived but a year after him, an' I had to do for the kids whatever came first to hand. There was two on 'em dead 'atwixt me an' the next alive, so I was a long way ahead o' the rest, an' I couldn't ha' seen them goin' to the dogs for want o' bread while I was learnin' a trade, even if I had had one in my mind more than another, which I never had. I always was a lively lad, an' for want of anything better to do, for my father wouldn't have us go to work till we was strong enough, he said—an' for that matter it turned out well when the hard time came—I used to amuse myself an' the rest by standin' on my head an' twistin' of my body into all sorts o' shapes—more'n it could well ha' been meant for to take. An' when the circus come round, I would make friends wi' the men, helpin' of 'em to look after their horses, an' they would sometimes, jest to amuse theirselves, teach me tricks I was glad enough to learn; an' they did say for a clod-hopper I got on very well. But that, you see, sir, set my monkey up, an' I took a hoath to myself I would do what none o' them could do afore I died—an' some thinks, sir," he added modestly, "as how I've done it—but that's neither here nor there. The p'int is, that, when my mother followed my father, an' the rest come upon my hands, I was able at once, goin' about an' showin' off to gather a few coppers for 'em. But I soon found it was precious little I could get, no matter what I could do, so long as my clothes warn't the right thing. So long as I didn't look my trade, they regarded my best as nothing but a clumsy imitation of my betters, and laughed at what circus Joe said he couldn't do no better hisself. So I plucks up heart an' goes to Longstreet, as was the next market-town, an' into a draper's shop, an' tells 'em what I wanted, an' what it was for, promisin' to pay part out o' the first money I got, an' the rest as soon after as I could. The chaps in the shop, all but one on

'em, larfed at me: there's always one, or two p'raps, leastways sech 'as been my expearence, sir an' miss, as is, better'n most o' the rest, though it's a good thing everybody's not so soft-hearted as my wife there, or the world would soon be turned topsy turvy, an' the rogues have all the money out o' the good folks' pockets, an' them turned beggars in their turn, an' then the rogues wouldn't give them nothink, an' so the good ones would die out, an' the world be full o' nothing but damned rascals—I beg your par'n, miss. But, as I was sayin', though I fared no better at the next shop nor the next, there was one good woman I come to in a little shop in a back street, an' she was a resemblin' of yourself, miss, an' she took an' set me up in my trade, a givin' of me a few remnants o' coloured calico, God bless her! I set to with my needle, an' I dressed myself as like a proper clown as I could, an' painted my face beautiful, an' from that time till they was able to do some'at for theirselves, I managed to keep the kids in life. It wasn't much more, you see, but life's life though it bean't tiptop style. An' if they're none o' them doin' jest so well as they might, there's none o' them been in pris'n yet, an' that's a comfort as long as it lasts. An' when folk tells me I'm a doin' o' nothink o' no good, an' my trade's o' no use to nobody, I say, to them, says I, 'Beggin your pardon, sir, or ma'am, but do ye call it nothink to fill—leastways to *nigh* fill four hungry little bellies at home afore I wur fifteen?' An' after that, they 'ain't in general said nothink; an' one gen'leman he give me 'alf-a-crown."

"The best possible answer you could have given, Franks," rejoined Mr. Christopher. "But I think perhaps you hardly understood what such objectors meant to say. They might have gone on to explain, only they hadn't the heart after what you told them, that most trades did something on both sides—not only fed the little ones at home, but did good to the persons for whom the work was done; that the man, for instance, who cobbled shoes, gave a pair of dry feet to some old man at the same time that he filled his own child's hungry little stomach."

Franks was silent for a moment, thinking.

"I understand you, sir," he said. "But I think I knows trades as makes a deal o' money, an' them they makes it out on's the worse and not the better. It's better to stand on a fellow's own head than to sell gin; an' I 'most think its as good as the fire-work trade."

"You are quite right; there's not a doubt of it," answered Mr. Christopher. "But mind you," he went on, "I don't for a moment agree with those who tell you your trade is of no use. I was only explaining to you what they meant; for it's always best to know what people mean, even where they are wrong."

"Surely, sir, and I thank you kindly. Everybody's not so fair."

Here he broke into a quiet laugh, so pleased was he to have the doctor take his part.

"I think," Mr. Christopher went on, "to amuse people innocently is often the only good you can do them. When done lovingly and honestly, it is a Christian service."

This rather shocked Hester:—acrobatics a Christian service With her grand dawning idea mingled yet some foolish notional remnants. She still felt as if going to church and there fixing your thoughts on the prayers and the lessons and the hymns and the sermon was the *serving* of God. She turned rather sharply towards the doctor, with a feeling that honesty called on her to speak; but not a word came to her lips, for the best of reasons—that not a thought had arisen in answer to his bold assertion. She was one of the few who know when they have nothing to say. But Christopher had observed the movement of dissent.

"Suppose," he went on, but without addressing her more than before, still turning himself almost exclusively to Franks —"Suppose somebody walking along Oxford street, brooding over an injury, and thinking how to serve the man out that had done it to him. All the numberless persons and things pass him on both sides, and he sees none of them—takes no notice of anything. But he spies a man in Berners street, in the middle of a small crowd, showing them some tricks—we won't say so good as yours, Mr. Franks, but he stops, and stares, and forgets for a moment or two that there is one brother-man he hates, and would kill if he could."

Here Hester found words, and said, though all but inaudibly,

"He would only go away as soon as he had had enough of it, and hate him all the same!"

"I know very well," answered Christopher, turning now to her, "it would not make a good man of him; but, except the ways of the world, its best ways and all, are to go for nothing in God's plans, it must be something to have the bad mood in a man stopped for a moment, just as it is something to a life to check a fever. It gives the godlike in the man, feeble,

perhaps nearly exhausted, a fresh opportunity of revival. For the moment at least, the man is open to influences from another source than his hate. If the devil may catch a man at unawares when he is in an evil or unthinking mood, why should not the good Power take his opportunity when the evil spirit is asleep through the harping of a David or the feats of a Franks? I sometimes find, as I come from a theatre where I have been occupied with the interests of a stirring play, that, with a sudden rush of intelligence, I understand the things best worth understanding better than before."

The illustration would have pleased Hester much had he said "coming out of a concert-room," for she was not able to think of God being in a theatre: perhaps that had some relation to her inability to tell Saffy why God made the animals: she could have found her a reason why he made the dogs, but not why he made the monkeys. We are surrounded with things difficult to understand, and the way most people take is not to look at them lest they should find out they have to understand them. Hester suspected scepticism under the remarks of the doctor: most doctors, she believed, had more than a leaning in that direction. But she had herself begun to have a true notion of serving *man* at least; therefore there was no fear of her not coming to see by and by what serving God meant. She did serve him, therefore she could not fail of finding out the word that belonged to the act: no one who does not serve him, ever can find out what serving him means. Some people are constantly rubbing at their skylights, but if they do not keep their other windows clean also, there will not be much light in the house: God, like his body, the light, is all about us, and prefers to shine in upon us sideways: we could not endure the power of his vertical glory; no mortal man can see God and live; and he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, shall not love his God whom he hath not seen. He will come to us in the morning through the eyes of a child, when we have been gazing all night at the stars in vain.

Hester rose. She was a little frightened at the very peculiar man and his talk. She had made several attempts in the dull light, but without much success, to see him as he watched the contortions of the acrobats, which apparently he enjoyed more than to her seemed reasonable. But, as with herself, it was the boy Moxy that chiefly attracted him, though the show of

physical prowess was far from uninteresting to him; and although what she saw through the smoky illumination of the dip was not attractive to her, the question remains whether it was really the man himself she saw, or only an appearance made up of candle gleam and gloom, complemented by her imagination. I will write what she saw, or thought she saw:—

A rather thick-set man about thirty, in a rough shooting-coat of a brownish gray with many pockets, a striped shirt, and a black necktie—if tie it could be called that had so little tie in it; a big head, with rather thick and long straggling hair; a large forehead, and large gray eyes; the remaining features well formed—but rather fat, like the rest of his not elegant person; and a complexion rather pale. She thought he had quite a careless, if not a slightly rakish look; but I believe a man, even in that light, would have seen in him something manly and far from unattractive. He had a rather gruff but not unmusical voice, with what some might have thought a thread of pathos in it. He always reminded certain of his friends of the portrait of Jean Paul in the Paris edition of his works. He was hardly above the middle height, and, I am sorry to say, wore his hat on the back of his head, which would have given Solon or Socrates himself a foolish look. Hester however, as she declined his offer to see her home, did not then become aware of this peculiarity, which, to say the least, would have made her like him no better.

The next time she went to see the Frankses, which was not for four or five days, she found they were gone. They had told Mrs. Baldwin that they were sorry to leave, but they must look for a cheaper lodging—a better they could not hope to find; and as the Baldwins had just had an application for the rooms, they felt they must let them go.

Hester was disappointed not to have seen them once more, and made them a little present as she had intended; and in after times the memory of them was naturally the more interesting that on Mrs. Franks she had first made experiment in the hope of her calling, and in virtue of her special gift had not once nor twice given sleep and rest to her and her babe. And if it is a fine thing to thrill with delight the audience of a concert-room—well-dined, well-dressed people, surely it was not a little thing to hand God's gift of sleep to a poor woman weary with the lot of women, and having so little, as Hester thought, to make life a pleasure to her!

Mrs. Franks would doubtless have differed from Hester in this judgment of her worldly condition, on the ground that she had a good husband, and good children. Some are always thinking others better off than themselves; others feel as if the lot of many about them must be absolutely unbearable, because they themselves could never bear it, they think. But things are unbearable just until we have them to bear; their possibility comes with them. For we are not the roots of our own being.

CHAPTER XIV.

DRIFTING.

THE visits of Vasasor, in reality to Hester, continued. For a time they were more frequent, and he stayed longer. Hester's more immediate friends, namely her mother and Miss Dasomma, noted also, and with some increase of anxiety, that he began to appear at the church they attended, a dull enough place, without any possible attraction of its own for a man like Vavasor: they could but believe he went thither for the sake of seeing Hester. Two or three Sundays and he began to join them as they came out, and walk part of the way home with them. Next he went all the way, was asked to go in, and invited to stay to lunch.

It may well seem strange that Mrs. Raymount, anxious as to the result, should allow things to go on thus; but, in the first place, she had such thorough confidence in Hester as not to think it possible she should fall in love with such a man as Vasasor; and, in the second place, it is wonderful what weakness may co-exist with what strength, what worldliness stand side by side with what spirituality—for a time, that is, till the one, for one must, overcome the other: Mrs. Raymount was pleased with the idea of a possible marriage of such distinction for her daughter, which would give her just the position she counted her fit for. These mutually destructive considerations were, with whatever logical inconsistency, both certainly operative in her. Then again, they knew nothing against the young man! He made himself agreeable to every one in the house. In Addison square he showed scarce the faintest shadow of the manner which made him at the bank almost hated. In the square not only was he on his good behaviour

as in a private house, but his heart, and his self-respect, as he would have called his self-admiration, were equally concerned in his looking his best—which always means looking better than one's best. Then in Hester's company his best was always uppermost, and humility being no part of this best, he not merely felt comfortable and kindly disposed—which he was—but good in himself and considerate of others—which he was not. There was that in Hester and his feeling towards her which had upon him what elevating influence he was yet capable of receiving, and this fact said more for him than anything else. She seemed gaining a power over him that could not be for other than good with any man who submitted to it. It had begun to bring out and cherish what was best in a disposition far from unamiable, although nearly ruined by evil influences on all sides. Both glad and proud to see her daughter thus potent, how, thought Mrs. Raymount, could she interfere? It was plain he was improving! Not once now did they ever hear him jest on anything belonging to church! —As to anything belonging to religion, he scarcely knew enough in that province to have any material for jesting.—If Vavasor was falling in love with Hester, the danger was for him—lest she, who to her mother appeared colder than any lady she knew, should not respond with like affection.

Miss Dasomma was more awake. She knew better than Mrs. Raymount the kind of soil in which this human plant had been reared, and saw more danger ahead. She feared the young man was but amusing himself, or at best but enjoying Hester's company as some wary winged thing enjoys the flame, courting a few singes, not quite avoiding even a slight plumous conflagration, but careful not to turn a delightful imagination into a consuming reality, beyond retreat and self-recovery. She could not believe him as careless of himself as of her, but judged he was what he would to himself call flirting with her—which had the more danger for Hester that there was not in her mind the idea corresponding to the phrase. I believe he declined asking himself whither the enjoyment of the hour was leading; and I fancy he found it more easy to set aside the question because of the difference between his social position and that of the lady. Possibly he regarded himself as honouring the low neighbourhood of Addison square by the frequency of his shining presence; but I think he was at the same time feeling the good influences of which I have spoken more than

he knew, or would have liked to acknowledge to himself; for he had never turned his mind in the direction of good; and it was far more from circumstance than refusal that he was not yet the more hurtful member of society which his no-principles were working to make him.

Hester was of course greatly interested in him. She had been but little in society, had not in the least studied men, and could not help being pleased with the power she plainly had over him, and which as plainly went on increasing. Even Corney, not very observant or penetrating, remarked on the gentleness of his behaviour in their house. He followed every word of Hester's about his singing, and showed himself even anxious to win her approbation by the pains he took and the amount of practice he went through to approach her idea of song. He had not only ceased to bring forward his heathenish notions as to human helplessness and fate, but allowed what at first she let fall as mere hints concerning the individual mission of every human being to blossom in little outbursts concerning duty without show of opposition, listening with a manner almost humble, and seeming on the way to allow there might be some reality in such things. Whether any desire of betterment was now awake in him through the power of her spiritual presence, I cannot tell; but had Mrs. Raymount seen as much of him as Hester, she would have been yet better justified in her hope of him. For Hester, she thought first, and for some time, only of doing him good, nor until she imagined some success, did the danger to her begin. After that, with every fresh encouragement the danger grew—for just so much grew the danger of self coming in and getting the upper hand.

I do not suppose that Vavasor once consciously laid himself out to deceive her, or make her think him better than he thought himself. With a woman of Hester's instincts, there might have been less danger if he had: she also would then perhaps have been aware of the present untruth, and have recoiled. But if he had any he had but the most rudimentary notion of truth in the inward parts, and could deceive the better that he did not know he was deceiving. As little notion had he of the nature of the person he was dealing with, or the reality to her of the things of which she spoke;—belief was to him at most the mere difference between decided and undecided opinion. Nay, she spoke the language of a world whose exist-

ence he was incapable at present of recognizing, for he had never obeyed one of its demands, which language therefore meant to him nothing like what it meant to her. His natural inborn proclivities to the light had, through his so seldom doing the deeds of the light, become so weak, that he hardly knew such a thing as reform was required of, possible to, or desirable in him. Nothing seemed to him to matter except "good form." To see and hear him for a few minutes after leaving her and entering his club, would have been safety to Hester. I do not mean that he was of the baser sort there, but whatever came up there, he would meet on its own grounds, and respond to in its own kind.

He was certainly falling more and more into what most people call *love*. How little regard there may be in that for the other apart from the self I will not now inquire, but what I may call the passionate side of the spiritual was more affected in him than ever previously. As to what he meant, he did not himself know. When intoxicated with the idea of her, that is when thinking what a sensation she would make in his grand little circle, he felt it impossible to live without her: some way must be found! it could not be his fate to see another triumph in her!—He called his world a circle rightly enough: it was no globe, nothing but surface.—Whether or not she would accept him he never asked himself: almost awed in her presence, he never when alone doubted she would. Had he had anything worthy the name of property coming with the title, he would have proposed to her at once, he said to himself. But who with only the most beautiful wife in the world, would encounter a naked earldom! The thing would be raging madness—as unjust to Hester as to himself! How just, how love-careful he was not to ask her—considerate for her more than himself! But perhaps *she* might have expectations! That could hardly be: no one with anything would slave as her governor did, morning, noon, and night! True his own governor was her uncle—there was money in the family; but people never left their money to their poor relations! To marry her would be to live on his salary, in a small house in St. John's Wood, or Park Village—perhaps even in Camden Town, ride home in the omnibus every night like one of a tin of sardines, wear half-crown gloves, cotton socks, and ten-and-sixpenny hats: the prospect was too hideous to be ludicrous even! Would the sweetness of the hand that darned the socks make his over-filled

shoe comfortable? And when the awful family began to come on, she would begin to go off! A woman like her, living in ease and able to dress well—by Jove, she might keep her best points till she was fifty. If there was such a providence as Hester so dutifully referred to, it certainly did not make the best things the easiest to get! How could it care for a fellow's happiness, or even for his leading a correct life! Would he not be a much better man if allowed to have Hester!—whereas in all probability she would fall to the lot of some quill-driver like her father—a man that made a livelihood by drumming his notions into the ears of people that did not care a brass farthing about them!—Thus would Vavasor's love-fits work themselves off—declining from a cold noon to a drizzly mephitic twilight.

It was not soon that he risked an attempt to please her with a song of his own. There was just enough unconscious truth in him to make him a little afraid of Hester. Commonplace as were in the most thorough sense the channels in which his thoughts ran, he would not for less than a fortune have risked encountering her scorn. For he believed, and therein he was right, that she was capable of scorn, and that of no ordinarily withering quality: Hester had not yet gathered the sweet gentleness that comes of long breathing the air of the high countries. It is generally many years before a strong character learns to think of itself as it ought to think. While there is left in us the possibility of scorn we know not quite the spirit we are of—still less if we imagine we may keep this or that little shadow of a fault. But Hester was far less ready to scorn on her own account than on the part of another. And if she had fairly seen into the mind interesting her so much, seen how poverty-stricken it was, and with how little motion towards the better, she would indeed have felt a great rush of scorn, but chiefly against herself for being taken in after such a fool's-fashion.

But he had come to understand Hester's taste so far as to know certain qualities she would not like in a song; he could even be sure she would like this one or that; and although of many he could not be certain, having never reached the grounds of her judgment, he had not yet offended her with any he brought her—and so by degrees he had generated the resolve to venture something himself in the hope of pleasing her: he flattered himself he knew her *style!* He was very fond of the word, and had an idea that all writers, to be of

any account, must fashion their style after that of this or the other master. How the master got it, or whether it might not be well to go back to the seed and propagate no more by cuttings, it never occurred to him to ask. In the prospect of one day reaching the bloom of humanity in the conservatory of the upper house, he already at odd moments cultivated his style by reading aloud the speeches of parliamentary orators; but the thought never came to him that there was no such thing *per se* as *speaking well*, that there was no cause of its existence except *thinking well* were the grandfather, and *something to say* the father of it—something so well worth saying that it gave natural utterance to its own shape. If you had told him this, and he had, as he thought, perceived the truth of it, he would immediately have desired some fine thing to say, in order that he might say it well! He could not have been persuaded that, if one has nothing worth saying, the best possible style for him is just the most halting utterance that ever issued from empty skull. To make a good speech was the grand thing! what side it was on, the right or the wrong, was a point unthinkable with him. Even whether the speaker believed what he said was of no consequence—except that, if he did not, his speech would be the more admirable, as the greater *tour de force*, and himself the more admirable as the cleverer fellow.

Knowing that Hester was fond of a good ballad, he thought at first to try his hand on one: it could not be difficult, he thought! But he soon found that, like everything else, a ballad was easy enough if you could do it, and more than difficult enough if you could not: after several attempts he wisely yielded the ambition; his gift did not lie in that direction! He had, however, been so long in the habit of writing drawing-room verses that he had better ground for hoping he might produce something in that kind which the too severe taste of Hester could yet admire! It would be a great stroke towards placing him in a right position in regard to her—one, namely, in which his intellectual faculty would be more manifest! It should be a love song, and he would present it as one he had written long ago: as such it would say the more for him while it would not commit him.

So one evening as he stood by her piano, he said all at once, "By the bye, Miss Raymount, last night, as I was turning over some songs I wrote many years ago, I came upon one I

thought I should like you just to look at—not the music—that is worth nothing, though I was proud enough of it then and thought it an achievement; but the words I still think not so bad—considering. They are so far from me now that I am able to speak of them as if they were not mine at all!"

"Do let me see them!" said Hester, hiding none of the interest she felt, though fearing a little she might not have to praise them so much as she would like.

He took the song from his pocket, and smoothed it out before her on the piano.

"Read it to me, please," said Hester.

"No; excuse me," he answered with a little shyness, the rarest of phenomena in his spiritual atmosphere; "I *could* not read it aloud. But do not let it bore you if——"

He did not finish his sentence, and Hester was already busy with his manuscript.

Here is the song.

If thou lov'st I dare not ask thee,
  Lest thou say, "Not thee;"
Prythee, then, in coldness mask thee,
  That it *may* be me.

If thou lov'st me do not tell me,
  Joy would make me rave,
And the bells of gladness knell me
  To the silent grave.

If thou lovest not thy lover,
  Neither veil thine eyes,
Nor to his poor heart discover,
  What behind them lies.

Be not cruel, be not tender;
  Grant me twilight hope;
Neither would I die of splendour,
  Nor in darkness mope.

I entreat thee for no favour,
  Smallest nothingness;
I will hoard thy dropt glove's savour,
  Wafture of thy dress.

So my love shall daring linger
  Moth-like round thy flame;
Move not, pray, forbidding finger—
  Death to me thy blame.

Vavasor had gone half-way towards Mrs. Raymount, then turned, and now stood watching Hester. So long was her head bent over his paper that he grew uncomfortably anxious. At length, without lifting her eyes, she placed it on the stand before her, and began to try its music. Then Vavasor went to her hurriedly, for he felt convinced that if she was not quite pleased with the verses, it would fare worse with the music, and begged she would not trouble herself with anything so childish. Even now he knew less about music than poetry, he said.

"I wanted you to see the verses, and the manuscript being almost illegible I had to copy it; so, in a mechanical mood, I copied the music also. Please let me have them again. I feared they were not worth your notice! I know it now."

Hester, however, would not yield the paper, but began again to read it: Vavasor's writing, out of the bank, was one of those irritating hands that wrong not only with the absence of legibility but with the show of its presence, and she had not yet got so clear a notion of his verses as a mere glance of them in print would have given her. Why she did not quite like them she did not yet know, and was anxious not to be unfair. That they were clever she did not doubt; they had for one thing his own air of unassumed ease, and she could not but feel they had some claim to literary art. This added a little to her hesitation, not in pronouncing on them—she was far from that yet—but in recognizing what she felt about them. Had she had a suspicion of the lie he had told her, and that they were the work of yesterday, it would at once have put leagues between them, and made the verses hateful to her. As it was, the more she read and thought, the farther she seemed from a conclusion, and the time Vavasor stood there waiting, appeared to both of them three times as long as it really was. At last he felt he was pounded and must try back.

"You have discovered," he said, "that the song is an imitation of Sir John Suckling!"

He had never thought of the man while writing it.

"I don't know anything of him," answered Hester, looking up.

Vavasor knew nothing was more unlikely than that she should know anything of him.

"When did he write?" she asked.

"In the reign of Charles I., I believe," he answered.

"But tell me," said Hester, "where is the good of imitating anyone—even the best of writers? Our own original, however

poor, must be the thing for us! To imitate is to repudiate our own being."

"That I admit," answered Vavasor, who never did anything original except when he followed his instincts; "but for a mere trial of skill an imitation is admissible—don't you think?"

"Oh, surely," replied Hester; "only it seems to me a waste of time—especially with such a gift as you have of your own!"

"At all events," said Vavasor, hiding his gratification with false humility, "there was no great presumption in a shy at Suckling!"

"There may have been the more waste," returned Hester. "I would sooner imitate Bach or even Händel than Verdi."

Vavasor could stand a good deal of censure if mingled with some praise—which he called appreciation. Of this Hester had given him enough to restore his spirits, and had also suggested a subject on which he found he could talk.

"But," he said, "how can it be worse for me to imitate this or that writer, than for you to play over and over music you could easily excel?"

"I never practise music," answered Hester, "not infinitely better than I could write myself. But playing is a different thing altogether from writing. I play as I eat my dinner—because I am hungry. My hunger I could never satisfy with any amount of composition or extemporization of my own. My land would not grow corn enough or good enough for my necessity. My playing merely corresponds to your reading of your favourite poets—especially if you have the habit of reading aloud like my father."

"They do not seem to me quite parallel," rejoined Vavasor, who had learned that he lost nothing with Hester by opposing her—so long as no moral difference was involved. In questions of right and wrong he always agreed with her so far as he dared expression where he understood so little, and for that very reason, in dread of seeming to have no opinion of his own, made a point of differing from her where he had a safe chance. "One may read both poetry and music at sight, but you would never count such reading of music a reproduction of it! That requires study and labour, as well as a genius and an art *like* those which produced it."

"I am equally sure you can never read anything worth reading," returned Hester, "as it ought to be read, until you understand it at least as well as the poet himself. To do a

poem justice, the reader must so have pondered phrase and word as to reproduce meaning and music in all the inextricable play of their lights and shades. I never came near doing the kind of thing I mean with any music till I had first learned it thoroughly by heart. And that too is the only way in which I can get to understand some poetry!"

"But is it not one of the excellences of poetry to be easy?"

"Yes, surely, when what the poet has to say is easy. But what if the thoughts themselves be of a kind hard to put into shape? There's Browning!"

Of Browning Vavasor knew only that in his circle he was laughed at—for in it a man who had made a feeble attempt or two to understand him, and had failed as he deserved, was the sole representative of his readers. That he was hard to understand Hester knew, for she understood enough of him to believe that where she did not understand him he was perhaps only the better worth understanding. She knew how, lover of music as she was, she did not at first care for Bach; and how in the process of learning to play what he wrote she came to understand him.

To her reference to Browning then, Vavasor did not venture a reply. None of the poetry indeed by him cultivated was of any sort requiring study. The difficulty Hester found in his song came of her trying to see more than was there: her eyes made holes in it, and so saw the less. Vavasor's mental condition was much like that of one living in a vacuum or sphere of nothing, in which the sole objects must be such as he was creator enough to project from himself. He had no feeling that he was in the heart of a crowded universe, between all whose great verities moved countless small and smaller truths. Little notion had he that to learn these after the measure of their importance, was his business, with eternity to do it in! He made of himself but a cock, set for a while on the world's heap to scratch and pick.

When he was gone, leaving his manuscript behind him, Hester set to it again, and trying the music over, was by it so far enlightened that she despaired of finding anything in it, and felt a good deal disappointed.

For she was continuing to gather interest in Vavasor, though slowly, as was natural with a girl of her character. But she had no suspicion *how* empty he was, for it was scarcely possible for her to imagine a person indifferent to the truth of things,

or without interest in his own character and its growth. Being all of a piece herself, she had no conception of a nature all in pieces—with no unity but that of selfishness. Her nature did now and then receive from his a jar and shock, but she generally succeeded in accounting for such as arising from his lack of development—a development which her influence over him would favour. If she felt some special pleasure in the possession of that influence, who will blame her for the weakness?

Women are being constantly misled by the fancy and hope of being the saviours of men! It is natural to goodness and innocence, but not the less is the error a disastrous one. There ought surely at least to be of success some probability as well founded as rare, to justify the sacrifices involved. Is it well that a life of supreme suffering should be gone through for nothing but an increase of guilt? It will be said that patience reaps its reward; but I fear too many patiences fail, and the number of resultant saints is small. The thing once done, the step no longer retrievable, fresh duty is born, and divine good will result from what suffering may arise in the fulfilment of the same. The conceit or ambition itself which led to the fault, may have to be cured by its consequences. But it may well be that a woman does more to redeem a man by declining than by encouraging his attentions. I dare not say how much a woman is not to do for the redemption of a man; but I think one who obeys God will scarcely imagine herself free to lay her person in the arms, and her happiness in the bosom of a man whose being is a denial of him. Good Christians not Christians enough to understand this, may have to be taught by the change of what they took for love into what they know to be disgust. It is very hard for the woman to know whether her influence has any real *power* over the man. It is very hard for the man himself to know; for the passion having in itself a betterment, may deceive him as well as her. It might be well that a woman asked herself whether moral laxity or genuine self-devotion was the more persuasive in her to the sacrifice. If her best hope be to restrain the man within certain bounds, she is not one to imagine capable of any noble anxiety. God cares nothing about keeping a man respectable; he will give his very self to make of him a true man. But that needs God; a woman is not enough for it. This cannot be God's way of saving bad men.

CHAPTER XV.

A SMALL FAILURE.

VAVASOR at length found he must not continue to visit Hester so often, while not ready to go further; and that, much as he was in love—proportionately, that is, to his faculty for loving—he dared not do. But for the unconventionality of the Raymounts, he would have reached the point long before. He began, therefore, to lessen the number, and shorten the length of his appearances in Addison square.

But so doing he became the more aware of the influence she had been exercising upon him—found that he had come to feel differently about certain things—that her opinion was a power on his consciousness. He had nowise begun to change his way; he had but been inoculated, and was therefore a little infected, with her goodness. In his ignorance he took the alteration for one of great moral significance, and was wonderfully pleased with himself. His natural kindness, for instance, towards the poor and suffering—such at least as were not offensive—was quickened. He took no additional jot of trouble about them, only gave a more frequent penny to such as begged of him, and had more than a pennorth of relief in return. It was a good thing, and rooted in a better, that his heart should require such relief, but it did not indicate any advanced stage of goodness, or one inconsistent with profoundest selfishness. He prided himself on one occasion that he had walked home to give his last shilling to a poor woman, whereas in truth he walked home because he found he had given her his last. Yet there was a little more movement of the sap of his nature, as even his behaviour in the bank would have testified, had there been there any one interested in observing him.

Hester was annoyed to find herself disappointed when he did not appear, and betook herself to a yet more diligent exercise of her growing vocation. The question suggested itself whether it might not further her plans to be associated with a sisterhood, but her family relations made it undesirable, and she felt that the angel of her calling could ill consent to be under foreign rule. She began, however, to widen her sphere a little by going about with a friend belonging to a sisterhood—not in her own quarter, for she did not wish her special work to be crossed

by any prejudices. There she always went alone, and seldom entered a house without singing in several of its rooms before she came away—often having to sing some old song before her audience would listen to anything new, and finding the old song generally counted the best thing in her visit—except by the children, to whom she would frequently tell a fairy tale, singing the little rhymes she made come into it. She had of course to encounter rudeness, but she set herself to get used to it, and learn not to resent it but let it pass. One coming upon her surrounded by a child audience, might have concluded her insensible of what was owing to herself; but the feeling of what was owing to her fellows, who had to go such a long unknown way to get back to the image of God, made her strive to forget herself. It is well that so many who lightly try this kind of work meet with so little encouragement; if it had the result they desire, they would be ruined themselves by it, whatever became of their poor.

Hester's chief difficulty was in getting the kind of song fit for her purpose; and from it she gained the advantage of reading, or at least looking into with more or less of reading, as many of the religious poets recognized in our history as she could lay her hands upon; where she failed in finding the thing she wanted, she yet often found what was welcome. She would stop at nearly every bookstall she passed, and bookstalls were plentiful in her neighbourhood, searching for old hymn-books and collections of poetry, every one of which is sure to have something the searcher never saw before.

About this time, in connection with a fresh and noble endeavour after bettering the homes of the poor, originated, I had almost said *of course*, by a woman, the experiment was in several places made of gathering small assemblies of the poor in the neighbourhood of their own dwellings, that the ladies in charge of the houses in which they lived might, with the help of friends, give them an unambitious but honestly attempted concert. At one of these concerts Hester was invited to assist, and went gladly, prepared to do her best. It had, however, been arranged that any of the audience who would like to sing, should be allowed to make their contributions also to the enjoyment of the evening; and it soon became evident that the company cared for no singing but that of their own acquaintances; and they, for their part, were so bent on singing and so supported and called for each other, that it

seemed at length the better way to abandon the platform to them. There was nothing very objectionable in the character of any of the songs sung—their substance in the main was flaunting sentiment—but the singing was for the most part atrociously bad, and the resulting influence hardly what the projectors of the entertainment had had in view. It might be well that they should so enjoy themselves; it might be well that they should have provided for them something better than they could produce; but, to judge from the experiment, it seemed useless to attempt the combination of the two. Hester, having listened through a half hour of their singing, was not a little relieved to learn that she would not be called upon to fulfil her engagement; and the company of benefactors went home foiled, but not too much disappointed for a good laugh over their fiasco before they parted.

The affair set Hester thinking; and before morning she was ready with a scheme to which she begged her mother to gain her father's consent.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONCERT-ROOM.

THE house in which they lived, and which was their own, was a somewhat remarkable one—I do not mean because it retained almost all the old-fashionedness of a hundred and fifty years, but for other reasons. Besides the ordinary accommodation of a good-sized London house with three drawing-rooms on the first floor, it had a quite unusual provision for the receiving of guests. At the top of the first landing, rather more than half-way up the stair, that is, there was a door through the original wall of the house to a long gallery, which led to a large and lofty room, apparently, from the little orchestra half-way up one of the walls, intended for dancing. Since they had owned the house it had been used only as a play-room for the children; Mr. Raymount always intended to furnish it, but had not yet done so. The house itself was indeed a larger one than they required, but he had a great love of room. It had been in the market for some time when, hearing it was to be had at a low price, he stretched more than a point to secure it. Beneath the concert-room was another of

the same area, but so low, being but the height of the first landing of the stairs, that it was difficult to discover any use that could be made of it, and it continued even more neglected than the other. Below this again were cellars of alarming extent and obscurity, reached by a long vaulted passage. What they could have been intended for beyond ministering to the dryness of the rooms above, I cannot imagine; they would have held coal and wood and wine, everything natural to a cellar, enough for one generation at least. The history of the house was unknown. There was a nailed-up door in the second of the rooms I have mentioned which was said to lead into the next house; but as the widow who lived there took every opportunity of making herself disagreeable, they had not ventured to propose an investigation. There was no garden, for the whole of the space corresponding to the gardens on each side was occupied with this addition to the original house. The great room was now haunting Hester's brain and heart: if only her father would allow her to give in it a concert to her lowly friends and acquaintance!

Questions concerning the condition of the poor in our large towns had, from the distance of speculation and the press, been of late occupying a good deal of Mr. Raymount's attention, and he believed that he was enlightening the world on those most important perhaps of all the social questions of our day, their wrongs and their rights. He little suspected that his daughter was doing more for the poor, almost without knowing it, than he with his conscious wisdom. She could not, however, have made her request at a more auspicious moment, for he was just then feeling specially benignant towards them, an article in which he had, as he believed, uttered himself with power on their behalf, having come forth to the light of eyes that very day. Besides, though far from unprejudiced, he had a horror of prejudice, and the moment he suspected a prejudice, hunted it almost as uncompromisingly in himself as in another: most people surmising a fault in themselves rouse every individual bristle of their nature to defend and retain the thing that degrades them! He therefore speedily overcame his first reluctance, and agreed to his daughter's strange proposal. He was willing to make so much of an attempt towards the establishment of relations with the class he befriended. It was an approach which if not quite clear of condescension, was not therefore less than kindly meant; and had his guests

behaved as well as he, they would from that day have found him a friend as progressive as steady. Hester was greatly delighted at his compliance with her request.

From that day for nearly a fortnight there were busy doings in the house. At once a couple of charwomen were turned loose in the great room for a thorough cleaning, but they had made little progress with what might have been done, ere Mr. Raymount perceived that no amount of their cleaning could take away its dirty look, and countermanding and postponing their proceedings, committed the dingy place to painters and paperhangers, under whose hands it was wonderful to see how gradually it put on a gracious look fit to welcome the human race withal. Although no white was left about it except in the ceiling for the sake of the light, scarce in that atmosphere, it looked as if twice the number of windows had been opened in its walls. The place also looked larger, for in its new harmonies of colour, one part led to another, introducing it, and by division the eye was enabled to measure and appreciate the space. To Saffy and Mark their play-room seemed transformed into a temple; they were almost afraid to enter it. Every noise in it sounded twice as loud as before, and every muddy shoe made a print.

The day for the concert was at length fixed a week off, and Hester began to invite her poorer friends and neighbours to spend its evening at her father's house, when her mother would give them tea, and she would sing to them. The married women were to bring their husbands if they would come, and each young woman might bring a friend. Most of the men, as a matter of course, turned up their noses at the invitation, but were nevertheless from curiosity inclined to go. Some declared it impossible any house in that square should hold the number invited. Some spoke doubtfully; they *might* be able to go! they were not sure! and seemed to regard consent as a favour, if not a condescension. Of these, however, two or three were hampered by uncertainty as to the redemption of their best clothes from the pawnbroker.

In requesting the presence of some of the small tradespeople, Hester asked it as a favour; she begged their assistance to entertain their poorer neighbours; and so put, the invitation was heartily accepted. In one case at least, however, she forgot this precaution; and the consequence was that the wife of a certain small furniture-broker began to fume on recognition

of some in her presence. While she was drinking her second cup of tea her eyes kept roving. As she set it down, she caught sight of Long Tim, but a fortnight out of prison, rose at once, made her way out fanning herself vigorously, and hurried home boiling over with wrath—severely scalding her poor husband who had staid from his burial-club that she might leave the shop. The woman was not at all of a bad sort, neither was it unreasonable that her dignity should feel hurt.

The hall and gallery were brilliantly lighted, and the room itself looked charming—at least in the eyes of those who had been so long watching the process of its resurrection. Tea was ready before the company began to arrive—in great cans with taps, and was handed round by ladies and gentlemen. The meal went off well, with a good buzz of conversation. The only unpleasant thing was, that several of the guests, mindful like other dams of their cubs at home, slipped large pieces of cake into their pockets for their behoof; but this must not be judged without a just regard to their ways of thinking, and was not a tenth part so bad as many of the ways in which well-bred persons appropriate slices of other people's cakes without once suspecting the category in which they are doomed to find themselves.

When the huge urns and the remnants of food were at length removed, and the windows had been opened for a minute to change the air, a curtain rose suddenly at the end of the room, and revealed a small stage decorated with green branches and artificial flowers, in the centre of it a piano, on the piano music, and at the piano Hester, now first seen, having reserved her strength for her special duty.

When the assembly caught sight of her turning over the leaves of her music, a great silence fell. The moment she began to play, all began to talk. With the first tone of her voice, every other ceased. She had chosen a ballad with a sudden and powerfully dramatic opening, and, a little anxious, a little irritated also with their talking while she played, began in a style that would have compelled attention from a herd of cattle. But the ballad was a little too long for them, and by the time it was half sung they had begun to talk again, and exchange opinions concerning it. All agreed that Miss Raymount had a splendid voice, but several of those who were there by second-hand invitation could find a woman to beat her easily! Their criticisms were, nevertheless, not unfriendly—

in general condescending and patronizing. I believe most of this class regarded their presence as a favour granted her. Had they not come that she might show off to them, and receive their approbation! Amongst the poor the most refined and the coarsest-grained natures are to be met side by side—egg-china and drain-tubing in the same shop—just as in *respectable* circles. The rudeness of the cream of society is more like that of the unwashed than that of any intermediate class; while often the manners of the well behaved poor are equalled by those only of the best bred in the country.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

VAVASOR had not heard of the gathering. In part from doubt of his sympathy, in part from dislike of talking about doing, Hester had not mentioned it. When she lifted her eyes at the close of her ballad, not a little depressed at having failed to secure the interest of her audience, it was with a great gush of pleasure that she saw near the door the face of her friend. She concluded that he had heard of her purpose, and had come to help her. Even at that distance she could see that he was looking very uncomfortable, annoyed, she did not doubt, by the behaviour of her guests. A rush of new strength and courage went from heart to brain. She rose, and advancing to the front of the little stage, called out, in a clear voice that rang across the buzz and stilled it,

"Mr. Vavasor, will you come and help me?"

Now Vavasor was in reality not a little disgusted at what he beheld. He had called without a notion of what was going on, and seeing the row of lights along the gallery as he was making for the drawing-room, had changed his direction and followed it, knowing nothing of the room to which it led. Blinded by the glare, and a little bewildered by the unexpectedness of the sight, he did not at first discern the kind of company he had entered; but the state of the atmosphere was unaccountable, and for a moment it seemed as if, thinking to enter Paradise, he had mistaken and opened the left-hand door. Presently his eyes, coming to themselves, confirmed the fact that he was in the midst of a notable number of the unwashed. He had often talked with Hester about the poor, and could not help knowing

that she had great sympathy with them. He was ready indeed, as they were now a not unfashionable subject in some of the minor circles of the world's elect, to talk about them with any one he might meet. But in the poor themselves he could hardly be said to have the most rudimentary interest; and that a lady should degrade herself by sending her voice into such ears, and coming into actual contact with such persons and their attendant disgusts—except indeed it were for electioneering purposes—exposing both voice and person to their abominable remarks, was to him a thing simply incomprehensible. The admission of such people to a respectable house, and the entertainment of them as at a music-hall, could have its origin only in some wild semi-political scheme of the old fellow, who had more crotchets in his head than brain could well hold! It was a proceeding as disgraceful as extraordinary! Puh! Could the tenth part of the air present be oxygen? To think of the woman he worshipped being in such a hell!

But the woman he could honour little by any worship he gave her, was far more secure from evil eyes and evil thoughts in that company than she would have been in any drawing-room of his world. Her angel would rather see her where she was.

The glorious tones ceased, the ballad was at an end, and the next moment, to his dismay, the voice which in its poetry he had delighted to imagine thrilling the listeners in a great Belgravian drawing-room, came to him in prose across the fumes of that Bloomsbury music-hall, clear and brave and quiet, asking him, the future earl of Gartley, to come and help the singer! Was she in trouble? Had her father forced her into the false position in which she found herself? And did she seek refuge with *him* the moment he made his appearance? Certainly such was not the tone of her appeal! But these reflections, flashing through his brain, caused not a moment's delay in Vavasor's response. With the perfect command of that portion of his being turned towards the public on which every man like him prides himself, and with no shadow of expression on his countenance beyond that of a perfect equanimity, he was instantly on his way to her, shouldering a path in the gentlest manner through the malodorous air.

"This comes," he said to himself as he went, "of her foolish parents' receiving so little company that for the free exercise of her great talent she is driven to such as this! For song must have audience, however unfit! There was Orpheus with his!

Genius was always eccentric! If he could but be her protection against that political father, that Puritan mother, and that idiotic brother of hers, and put an end to this sort of thing before it came to be talked about!" He grew bitter as with smiling face but shrinking soul he made his way through that crowd of his fellow creatures whose contact was defilement. He would have lost them all rather than a song of Hester's—and yet that he would on occasion have lost for a good rubber of whist with certain players!

He sprang on the stage, and made her a rather low bow.

"Come and sing a duet with me," she said, and indicated one on the piano before her which they had several times sung together.

He smiled what he meant to look his sweetest smile, and almost immediately their duet began. They sang well, and the assembly, from whatever reason—I fancy simply because there were two singing instead of one, was a little more of an audience than hitherto. But it was plain that, had there been another rondo of the duet, most would have been talking again.

Hester next requested Vavasor to sing a certain ballad which she knew was a great favourite with him. Inwardly protesting and that with vehemence against the profanation, he obeyed, rendering it so as could not have failed to please any one with a true notion of song. His singing was, I confess, a little wooden, as was everything Vavasor did: being such himself, how could he help his work being wooden? but it was true, his mode good, his expression in the right direction. They were nevertheless all talking before he had ended.

After a brief pause, Hester invited a gentleman prepared for the occasion to sing them something patriotic. He responded with Campbell's magnificent song, "Ye Mariners of England!" which was received with hearty cheers.

He was followed by another who, well acquainted with the predilections of his audience, gave them a specially sentimental song about a chair, which was not only heard in silence but followed by tremendous cheering. Possibly it was a luxury to some who had no longer any grandfather to kick, to cry over his chair; but, like the most part of their brethren, the poor greatly enjoy having their feelings gently troubled.

Thus the muse of the occasion was gradually sinking to the intellectual level of the company—with a consequence unforeseen, therefore not provided against.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CATASTROPHE.

For the tail of the music-kite--the car of the music-balloon rather, having thus descended near enough to the earth to be a temptation to some of the walkers afoot, they must catch at it! The moment the last mentioned song was ended, almost before its death-note had left the lips of the singer, one of the friends' friends was on his feet. Without a word of apology, without the shadow of a request for permission, he called out in a loud voice, knocking with his chair on the floor,

"Ladies an' gen'lemen, Mr. William Blaney will now favour the company with a song."

Thereupon immediately a pale pock-marked man, of diminutive height, with high retreating forehead, and long thin hair, rose, and at once proceeded to make his way through the crowd: he would sing from the stage of course! Hester and Vavasor looked at each other, and one whisper passed between them, after which they waited the result in silence. The countenance approaching, kindled by conscious power and anticipated triumph, showed a white glow through its unblushing paleness. After the singing one sometimes hears in drawing-rooms, there is little space for surprise that some of less education should think themselves more capable of fine things than they are.

Scrambling with knee and hand upon the stage, for the poor fellow was feeble, the moment he got himself erect with his face to the audience, he plunged into his song, if song it could be called, executed in a cracked and strained falsetto. The result, enhanced by the nature of the song, which was extremely pathetic and dubiously moral, must have been excruciation to every good ear and every sensitive nature. Long before the relief of its close arrived Hester had made up her mind that it was her part to protect her guests from such. It was compensation no doubt to some present to watch the grotesque contortions of the singer squeezing out of him the precious pathos of his song—in which he screwed his eyes together like the man in Browning's "Christmas Eve," and opened his mouth in a long ellipse in the middle of one cheek; but neither was that the kind of entertainment she had purposed. She sat ready, against the moment when he should end, to let loose the most thunderous

music in her mental *répertoire*, annoyed that she had but her small piano on the stage. Vanity, however, is as suspicious of vanity as hate is of hate, and Mr. Blaney, stopping abruptly in the middle of the long last note, and in doing so changing the word with ludicrous result, from a sung to a spoken one, screeched aloud ere she could strike the first chord,

"I will now favour the company with a song of my own composure."

But ere he had got his mouth into its singing place in his left cheek, Hester had risen and begun to speak: when she knew what had to be done, she never hesitated. Mr. Blaney started, and his mouth, after a moment of elliptic suspense, slowly closed, and returned, as he listened, to a more symmetrical position in his face.

"I am sorry to have to interfere," said Hester, "but my friends are in my house, and I am accountable for their entertainment. Mr. Blaney must excuse me if I insist on keeping the management of the evening in my own hands."

The vanity of the would-be singer was sorely hurt. As he was too selfish for the briefest comparison of himself with others, it had outgrown all ordinary human proportion, and was the more unendurable that no social considerations had ever suggested its concealment. Equal arrogance is rarely met save in a madhouse: there conceit reigns universal and rampant.

"The friends as knows me, and what I can do," returned Mr. Blaney with calmness, the moment Hester had ended, "will back me up. I have no right to be treated as if I didn't know what I was about. I can warrant the song home-made, and of the best quality. So here goes!"

Vavasor made a stride towards him, but scarcely again was the ugly mouth half screwed into its singing place, when Mr. Raymount spoke from somewhere near the door.

"Come out of that," he shouted, and made his way through the company as fast as he could.

Vavasor drew back, and stood like a sentinel on guard. Hester resumed her seat at the piano. Blaney, fancying he had gained his point, and that, if he began before Mr. Raymount reached him, he would be allowed to end in peace, once more got his mouth into position, and began to howl. But his host, jumping on the stage from behind, reached him at his third note, took him by the back of the neck, shoved him down, and walked him through the crowd and out of the room before him like a

naughty boy. Propelling him thus to the door of the house, he pushed him out, closed it behind him, and re-entering the concert-room, was greeted by a great clapping of hands, as if he had performed a deed of valour. But, notwithstanding the miserable vanity and impudence of the man, it had gone to Hester's heart to see him, with his low visage and puny form, in the mighty clutch of her father. That which would have made most despise the poor creature the more, his physical inferiority, made her pity him even to pain.

The moment silence was restored, up rose a burly, honest-looking bricklayer, and said,

"I beg your pardon, miss, but will you allow me to make one remark?"

"Certainly, Mr. Jones," answered Hester.

"It seems to me, miss," said Jones, "as it's only fair play on my part as brought Blaney here, as I'm sorry to find behave himself so improper, to say for him that I know he never would ha' done it, if he hadn't have had a drop as we come along to this 'ere tea-party. That was the cause, miss, an' I hope as it'll be taken into account, an' considered a lucidation of his conduct It takes but very little, I'm sorry to say, miss, to upset his behaviour—not mor'n a pint at the outside.—But it don't last! bless you, it don't last!" he added, in a tone of extreme deprecation; "there's not a mossel of harm in him, poor fellow,—though I says it as shouldn't! Not as the gov'nor do anything more'n his duty in puttin' of him out—nowise! I know him well, bein' my wife's brother—leastways half-brother—for I don't want to take more o' the blame nor by rights belong to me. When he've got a drop in his nob it's always for singin' he is—an' that's the worst of *him*. Thank you kindly, miss,"

"Thank *you*, Mr. Jones," returned Hester. "We'll think no more of it."

Loud applause followed, and Jones sat down, well satisfied: he had done what he ought in acknowledging the culprit for his wife's sake, and the act had been appreciated.

The order of the evening was resumed, but the harmony of the assembly once disturbed, all hope of quiet was gone. They had now something to talk about! Everyone that knew Blaney felt himself of importance: had he not a superior right of opinion upon his behaviour? Nor was he without a few sympathizers. Was he not the same flesh and blood? they said. After the swells had had it all their own way so long, why

shouldn't poor Blaney have his turn? But those who knew Hester, especially the women of them, were indignant with him.

Hester sang again and again, but no song would go quite to her mind. Vavasor also sung several times—as often, that is, as Hester asked him; but inwardly he was disgusted with the whole affair—as was natural, for could any fish have found itself more out of the water than he? Everything annoyed him—most of all that the lady of his thoughts should have addressed herself to such an assembly. Why did she not leave it to him or her father! If it was not degrading enough to appear before such a canaille, surely to sing to them was! How could a woman of refinement, justifiable as was her desire for appreciation, seek it from such a repulsive assemblage! But Vavasor would have been better able to understand Hester, and would have met the distastes of the evening with far less discomposure, if he had never been in worse company. One main test of our dealing in the world is whether the men and women we associate with are the better or the worse for it: Vavasor had often been where at least he was the worse, and no one the better for his presence. For days a cloud hung over the fair image of Hester in his mind.

He called on the first possible opportunity to inquire how she was after her exertions, but avoided farther allusion to the events of the evening. She thanked him for the help he had given her, but was so far from satisfied with her experiment, that she too let the subject rest.

Mr. Raymount was so disgusted, that he said nothing of the kind should ever again take place in his house: he had not bought it to make a music-hall of it!

If any change was about to appear in Vavasor, a change in the fortunes of the Raymounts prevented it.

What the common judgment calls *luck* seems to have odd predilections and prejudices with regard to families as well as individuals. Some seem invariably successful, whatever they take in hand; others go on, generation after generation, struggling without a ray of success; while on the surface appears no reason for the inequality. But there is one thing in which pre-eminently I do not believe—that same luck, namely, or chance, or fortune. The Father of families looks after his families—and his children too.

CHAPTER XIX.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

LIGHT and shade, sunshine and shadow pursue each other over the moral as over the material world. Every soul has a landscape that changes with the wind that sweeps its sky, with the clouds that return after its rain.

It was now the month of March. The middle day of it had been dreary all over England, dreariest of all, perhaps, in London. Great blasts had gone careering under a sky whose miles-thick vault of clouds they never touched, but instead hunted and drove and dashed earth-clouds of dust into all unwelcoming places, throats and eyes included. Now and then a few drops would fall on the stones as if the day's fierce misery were about to yield to sadness; but it did not so yield; up rose again a great blundering gust, and repentance was lost in rage. The sun went down on its wrath, and its night was tempestuous.

But the next morning rose bright and glad, looking as if it would make up for its father's wildness by a gentler treatment of the world. The wind was still high, but the hate seemed to have gone out of it, and given place to a laborious jollity. It swept huge clouds over the sky, granting never a pause, never a respite of motion; but the sky was blue and the clouds were white, and the dungeon-vault of the world was broken up and being carted away.

Everything in the room where the Raymounts were one by one assembling to break their fast, was discoloured and dark, whether with age or smoke it would have needed more than a glance to say. The reds had grown brown, and the blues a dirty slate-colour, while an impression of drab was prevalent. But the fire was burning as if it had been at it all night and was glorying in having at length routed the darkness; and in the middle of the table on the white cloth stood a shallow piece of red pottery full of crocuses, the earnest of the spring. People think these creatures come out of the earth, but there are a few in every place, and in this house Mark was one of such, who are aware that they come out of the world of thought, the spirit-land, in order to manifest themselves to those that are of that land.

Mr. Raymount was very silent, seemed almost a little gloomy, and the face of his wife was a shade less peaceful in conse-

quence. There was nothing the matter, only he had not yet learned to radiate. It is hard for some natures to let their light shine. Mr. Raymount had some light: he let it shine mostly in reviews, not much in the house. He did not lift up the light of his countenance on any.

The children were rosy, fresh from their baths, and ready to eat like breakfast-loving English. Cornelius was half his breakfast ahead of the rest, for he had daily to endure the hardship of being at the bank by nine o'clock, and made the best of it by claiming in consequence an utter immunity from the *petite morale* of the breakfast-table. Never did he lose a moment in helping anybody. Even the little Saffy he allowed with perfect frigidity to stretch out a very long arm after the butter—except indeed it happened to cross his plate when he would sharply rebuke her breach of manners. It would have been all the same if he had not been going till noon, but now he had hurry and business to rampart his laziness and selfishness withal.

Mark would sooner have gone without salt to his egg than ask Corney to pass it.

This morning the pale boy sat staring at the crocuses—things like them peeping out of the spring-mould of his spirit to greet them.

"Why don't you eat your breakfast, Mark, dear?" said his mother.

"I'm not hungry, mamma," he answered.

The mother looked at him a little anxiously. He was not a very vigorous boy in corporeal matters; but, unlike his father's, his light was almost always shining, and making the faces about him shine.

After a few minutes, he said, as if unconsciously, his eyes fixed on the crocuses,

"I can't think how they come!"

"They grow!" said Saffy.

Said her father, willing to set them thinking,

"Didn't you see Hester make the paper flowers for her party?"

"Yes," replied Saffy, "but it would take such a time to make all the flowers in the world that way!"

"So it would; but if a great many angels took it in hand, I suppose they could do it."

"That can't be how!" said Saffy, laughing; "for you know they come up out of the earth, and there ain't room to cut them out there!"

"I think they must be cut out and put together before they are made!" said Mark, very slowly and thoughtfully.

The supposition was greeted with a great burst of laughter from Cornelius. In the midst of a refined family he was the one vulgar, and behaved as the blind and stupid generally behave to those who see what they cannot see. Mockery is the share they choose in the motions of the life eternal!

"Stop, stop, Cornelius!" said his father. "I suspect we have a young philosopher where you see only a silly little brother. He has, I fancy, got a glimpse of something he does not yet know how to say."

"In that case, don't you think, sir," said Cornelius, "he had better hold his tongue till he does know how to say it?"

It was not often he dared speak so to his father, but he was growing less afraid of him, though not through increase of love.

His father looked at him a moment ere he replied, and his mother looked anxiously at her husband.

"It *would* be better," he answered quietly, "were he not among *friends*."

The emphasis with which he spoke was lost on Cornelius.

"They take everything for clever the little idiot says!" he remarked to himself. "Nobody made anything of *me* when *I* was his age!"

The letters were brought in. Amongst them was one for Mr Raymount with a broad black border. He looked at the post-mark.

"This must be the announcement of cousin Stafford's death!" he said. "Some one told me she was not expected to live. I wonder how she has left the property!"

"You did not tell me she was ill!" said his wife.

"It went out of my head. It is so many years since I had the least communication with her, or heard anything of her! She was a strange old soul!"

"You used to be intimate with her—did you not, papa?" said Hester.

"Yes, at one time. But we differed so entirely it was impossible it should last. She would take up the oddest notions as to what I thought, and meant, and wanted to do, and then fall out upon me as advocating things I hated quite as much as she did. But that is much the way generally. People seldom know what they mean themselves, and can hardly be expected

to know what other people mean. Only the amount of mental and moral force wasted on hating and talking down the non-existent is a pity."

"I can't understand why people should quarrel so about their opinions," said Mrs. Raymount.

"A great part of it comes of indignation at not being understood, and another great part from despair of being understood—and that while all the time the person thus indignant and despairing takes not the smallest pains to understand the neighbour, whose misunderstanding of himself makes him so sick and sore."

"What is to be done then?" asked Hester.

"Nothing," answered her father with something of a cynical smile, born of this same frustrated anxiety to impress his opinions on others.

He took up his letter, slowly broke the large black seal which adorned it, and began to read it. His wife sat looking at him, and waiting, in expectation sufficiently mild, to hear its contents.

He had scarcely read half the first page when she saw his countenance change a little, then flush a little, then grow a little fixed and quite inscrutable. He folded the letter, laid it down by the side of his plate, and began to eat again.

"Well, dear?" said his wife.

"It is not quite what I thought," he answered, with a curious smile, and said nothing more, but ate his toast in a brooding silence. Never in the habit of *making* secrets, like his puny son, he had a strong dislike to showing his feelings, and from his wife even was inclined to veil them. He was besides too proud to manifest his interest in the special contents of this letter.

The poor, but, because of its hopelessness, hardly indulged ambition of Mr. Raymount's life, was to possess a portion, however small, of the earth's surface—if only an acre or two. He came of families both possessing such property, but none of it had come near him except that belonging to the cousin mentioned. He was her nearest relation, but had never had much hope of inheriting from her, and after a final quarrel put an end to their quarrelling, had had none. Even for Mammon's sake Mr. Raymount was not the man to hide or mask his opinions. He worshipped his opinions indeed as most men do Mammon. For many years in consequence there had not been the slightest communication between the cousins. But in the course of those years all the other relatives of the old lady had

died, and, as the letter he now held informed him, he was after all heir to her property, a small estate in a lovely spot among the roots of the Cumberland hills. It was attended by not a few thousands in government-securities.

But while Mr. Raymount was not a money-lover in any notable sense—the men are rare indeed of whom it might be said absolutely they do not love money—his delight in having land of his own was almost beyond utterance. This delight had nothing to do with the money-value of the property; he scarcely thought of that; it came in large part of a new sense of room and freedom; the estate was an extension of his body and limbs—and such an extension as any lover of the picturesque would have delighted in. It made him so glad he could hardly get his toast down.

Mrs. Raymount was by this time tolerably familiar with her husband's moods, but she had never before seen him look just so, and was puzzled. The fact was he had never before had such a pleasant surprise, and sat absorbed in a foretaste of bliss, of which the ray of March sun that lighted up the delicate transparencies of the veined crocuses purple and golden, might seem the announcing angel.

Presently he rose and left the room. His wife followed him. The moment she entered his study behind him he turned and took her in his arms.

"Here's news, wifie!" he said. "You'll be just as glad of it as I am. Yrndale is ours after all!—at least so my old friend Heron says, and he ought to know! Cousin Strafford left no will. He is certain there is none. She persistently put off making one, with the full intention, he believes, that the property should come to me, her heir at law and next of kin.

He thinks she had not the heart to leave it away from her old friend. Thank God! It is a lovely place. Nothing could have happened to give me more pleasure."

"I am indeed glad, Raymount," said his wife—who called him by his family name on important occasions. "You always had a fancy for playing the squire, you know."

"A great fancy for a little room, rather," replied her husband, "—not much, I fear, for the duties of a squire. I know little of them; and happily we shall not be dependent on the result of my management. There is money as well, I am glad to say —enough to keep the place up anyhow."

"It would be a poor property," replied his wife with a smile,

"that could not keep itself up. I have no doubt you will develop into a model farmer and landlord."

"You must take the business part—at least until Corney is fit to look after it," he returned.

But his wife's main thought was what influence would the change have on the prospects of Hester. In her heart she abjured the notion of property having anything to do with marriage —yet this was almost her first thought! Inside us are played more fantastic tricks than any we play in the face of the world.

"Are the children to be told?" she asked.

"I suppose so. It would be a shame not to let them share in our gladness. And yet one hates to think of their talking about it as children will."

"I am not afraid of the children," returned his wife. "I have but to tell them not. I am as sure of Mark as if he were fifty. Saffy might forget but Mark will keep her in mind."

When she returned to the dining-room Cornelius was gone, but the rest were still at the table. She told them that God had given them a beautiful house in the country, with hills and woods and a swift flowing river. Saffy clapped her hands, cried "Oh, mam*mah!*" and could hardly sit on her chair till she had done speaking. Mark was perfectly still, his eyes looking like ears. The moment her mother ceased, Saffy jumped down and made a rush for the door.

"Saffy, Saffy, where are you going?" cried her mother.

"To tell Sarah," answered Saffy.

"Come back, my child."

"Oh, do let me run and tell Sarah! I will come back *instantly*."

"Come here," insisted the mother. "Your papa and I wish you to say nothing whatever about it to *any* one."

"O-oh!" returned Saffy; and both her look and her tone said, "Where is the good of it then?" as she stood by her mother's side in momentary check.

Not a word did Mark utter, but his face shone as if it had been heaven he was going to. No colour, only light came to the surface of it, and broke in the loveliest smile. When Mark smiled, his whole body and being smiled. He turned and kissed Saffy, but still said nothing.

Hester's face flushed a "celestial rosy red." Her first thought was of the lovely things of the country and the joy of them. Like Moses on Mount Pisgah, she looked back on the desert

of a London winter, and forth from the heart of a blustering spring into a land of promise. Her next thought was of her poor: "Now I shall be able to do something for them!" Alas! too swiftly followed the conviction that now she would be able to do less than ever for them. Yrndale was far from London! They could not come to her, and she could not go to them, except for an occasional visit, perhaps too short even to see them all. If only her father and mother would let her stay behind! but that she dared hardly hope—ought not perhaps to wish! It might be God's will to remove her because she was doing more harm than good! She had never been allowed to succeed in anything! And now her endeavour would be at an end! So her pleasure was speedily damped. The celestial red yielded to earthly pale, and the tears came in her eyes.

"You don't like the thought of leaving London, Hester!" said her mother with concern: she thought it was because of Vavasor.

"I am very glad for you and papa, mother dear," answered Hester. "I was thinking of my poor people, and what they would do without me."

"Wait, my child," returned her mother. "I have sometimes found the very things I dreaded most serve me best. I don't mean because I got used to them, or because they did me good. I mean they furthered what I thought they would ruin."

"Thank you, dear mother; you can always comfort me," rejoined Hester. "For myself I could not imagine anything more pleasant. If only it were near London:—or," she added, smiling through her tears, "if one hadn't a troublesome heart and conscience playing into each other's hands!"

She was still thinking of her poor, but her mother was in doubt.

"I suppose, father," said Cornelius, "there will be no occasion for me to go to the bank any more?"

"There will be more occasion than ever," answered his father: "will there not be the more to look after when I am gone? What do you imagine you could employ yourself with down there? You have never taken to study, else, as you know, I would have sent you to Oxford. When you leave the bank it will be to learn farming and the management of an estate—after which you will be welcome to Yrndale."

Cornelius made no reply. His father's words deeply offended

him. He was hardly good at anything except taking offence, and he looked on the estate as his nearly as much as his father's. True, the father had not spoken so kindly as he might, but had he known his son, he would often have spoken severely. From the habit of seeking clear and forcible expression in writing, he had got into a way of using stronger vocal utterance than was necessary, and what would have been but a blow from another, was a stab from him. But the feelings of Cornelius in no case *deserved* consideration—they were so selfish. And now he considered that mighty self of his insulted as well as wronged. What right had his father to keep from him—from him alone, who had the first right—a share in the good fortunes of the family? He left the study almost hating his father because of what he counted his injustice! and, notwithstanding his request that he would say nothing of the matter until things were riper, made not even an effort to obey him, but, too sore for silence, and filled with what seemed to him righteous indignation, took the first opportunity of pouring out everything to Vavasor, in a torrent of complaint against the fresh wrong. His friend responded to the communication very sensibly, trying, without exactly saying it, and without a shadow of success, to make him see what a fool he was, and congratulating him all the more warmly on his good fortune that a vague hope went up in him of a share in the same. For Cornelius had not failed to use large words in making mention of the estate and the fortune accompanying it; and in the higher position, as Vavasor considered it, which Mr. Raymount would henceforth occupy as one of the proprietors of England, therefore as a man of influence in his county and its politics, he saw something like an approximative movement in the edges of the gulf that divided him from Hester: she would not unlikely come in for a personal share in this large fortune; and if he could but see a possibility of existence without his aunt's money, he would, he *almost* said to himself, marry Hester, and take the risk of his aunt's displeasure. At the same time she would doubtless now look with more favour on his preference—he must not yet say *choice!* There could be nothing insuperably offensive to her pride at least in his proposing to marry the daughter of a country squire. If she were the heiress of a rich brewer, that is, of a brewer rich enough, his aunt would, like the rest of them, get over it fast enough! In the meantime he would, as Cornelius, after the first burst

of his rage was over, had begged him, be careful to make no allusion to the matter!

Mr. Raymount went to look at his property, and returned more delighted with house, land, and landscape, than he had expected. He seldom spoke of his good fortune, however, except to his wife, or betrayed his pleasure except by a glistening of the eyes. As soon as the warm weather came they would migrate, and immediately began their preparations—the young ones by packing and unpacking several times a day a most heterogeneous assemblage of things. The house was to be left in charge of old Sarah, who would also wait on Cornelius.

CHAPTER XX.

THE JOURNEY.

It was a lovely morning when they left London. The trains did not then travel so fast as now, and it was late in the afternoon when they reached the station at which they must leave the railway for the road. Before that the weather had changed, or they had changed their weather, for the sky was one mass of cloud, and rain was falling persistently. They had been for some time in the abode of the hills, but those they were passing through, though not without wonder and strange interest, were but an inferior clan, neither lofty nor lovely. Through the rain and the mist they looked lost and drear. They were mostly bare, save of a little grass, and broken with huge brown and yellow gulleys—worn by such little torrents as were now rushing along them straight from the clouded heavens. It was a vague sorrowful region of tears, whence the streams in the valleys below were for ever fed.

This last part of the journey Saffy had been sound asleep, but Mark had been standing at the window of the railway-carriage, gazing out on an awful world. What would he do, he thought, if he were lost there? Would he be able to sit still all night without being frightened, waiting for God to come and take him? As they rushed along, it was not through the brain alone of the child the panorama flitted, but through his mind and heart as well, and there, like a glacier it scored its passage. Or rather, it left its ghosts behind it, ever shifting forms and shadows, each atmosphered in its own ethereal mood. Hardly

thoughts were they, but strange other consciousnesses of life and being. Hills and woods and valleys and plains and rivers and seas, entering by the gates of sight into the live mirror of the human, are transformed to another nature, to a living wonder, a joy, a pain, a breathless marvel as they pass. Nothing can receive another thing, not even a glass can take into its depth a face without altering it. In the mirror of man, things become thoughts, feelings life, and send their streams down the cheeks, or their sunshine over the countenance.

Before Mark reached the end of that journey, there was gathered in the bottom of his heart a great mass of fuel, there stored for the future consumption of thinking, and for reproduction in forms of power. He knew nothing of it. He took nothing consciously. The things kept sinking into him. The sole sign of his reception was an occasional sigh—of which he could not have told either the cause or the meaning.

They got into their own carriage at the station. The drive was a long and a tedious one, for the roads were rough and muddy and often steep, and Mr. Raymount repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction that they had not put four horses to. For some time they drove along the side of a hill, and could see next to nothing except in one direction; and when at length the road ran into a valley, and along the course of a swollen river, it was getting so dark, and the rain was coming down so fast, that they could see next to nothing at all. Long before they reached their new home, Saffy and Mark were sound asleep, Hester was sunk in her own thoughts, and the father and mother sat in unbroken silence, hand in hand. It was pitch-dark ere they arrived; and save what she learned from the thousand musics of the swollen river along which they had been driving for the last hour, Hester knew nothing of the country for which she had left the man-swarming city. Ah, that city! so full of fellow creatures! so many of them her friends! and struggling in the toils of so many foes! Many sorrows had entered in at Hester's ears; tongues that had never known how to give trouble shape, had grown eloquent in pouring the tale—of oppression oftener than want, into the bosom of her sympathy. I do not say many tongues—only many sorrows; she knew from the spray that reached her on its borders, how that human sea tossed and raged afar. Reading and interpreting the looks of faces and the meanings of actions around her by what she had heard, she could not

doubt she had received but a too true sample of experiences innumerable. One result was, that, young as was Hester, she no longer shrank from the thought of that invisible, intangible solvent in which the generations of men vanish from the eyes of their fellows. She said to herself what a blessed thing was death for countless human myriads—yea doubtless for the whole race! It looked sad enough for an end; but then it was not the end; while but for the thought of the change to some other mode of life, the idea of this world would have been unendurable to her. "Surely they are now receiving their evil things!" she said. Alas, but even now she felt as if the gulf of death separated her from those to whom it had been her painful delight to minister! The weeping wind and the moaning rush of the river, through which they were slowly moving towards their earthly Paradise, were an orchestral part as of hautboys in the wailing harmony of her mood.

They turned and went through a gate, then passed through trees and trees that made yet darker pieces of the night. By and by appeared the faint lights of the house, with blotchy pallors thinning the mist and darkness. Presently the carriage stopped.

Both the children continued dead asleep, and were carried off to bed. The father and mother knew the house of old time, and revived for each other old memories. But to Hester all was strange, and what with the long journey, the weariness, the sadness, and the strangeness, it was as if walking in a dream that she entered the old hall. It had a quiet, dull, dignified look, as if it expected nobody; as if it was here itself because it could not help it, and would rather not be here; as if it had seen so many generations come and go that it had ceased to care much about new faces. Everything in the house looked sombre and solemn, as if it had not forgotten its old mistress, who had been so many years in it, and was such a little while gone out of it. They had supper in a long, low room, with furniture almost black, against whose windows heavy roses every now and then softly patted, caught in the fringes of the rain-gusts. The dusky room, the perfect stillness within, the low mingled sounds of swaying trees and pattering rain without, the sense of the great darkness folding in its bosom the beauty so near and the moaning city miles upon miles away,—all grew together into one possessing mood, which rose and sank, like the water in a sea-cave, in the mind of Hester. But who by words can fix the mood that comes and goes unbidden, like a ghost

whose acquaintance is lost with his vanishing, whom we know not when we do not see? A single happy phrase, the sound of a wind, the odour of the mere earth may avail to send us into some lonely, dusky realm of being; but how shall we take our brother with us, or send him thither when we would? I doubt if even the poet ever works just what he means on the mind of his fellow. Sisters, brothers, we cannot meet save in God.

But the nearest mediator of feeling, the most potent, the most delicate, the most general, the least articulate, the farthest from thought, yet perhaps the likest to the breath moving upon the face of the waters of chaos, is music. It rose like a soft irrepressible tide in the heart of Hester; it mingled and became one with her mood; together swelling they beat at the gates of silence; for life's sake they must rush, embodied and born in sound, into the outer world where utterance meets utterance! She looked around her for such an instrument as hitherto had been always within her reach—rose and walked round the shadowy room searching. But there was no creature amongst the aged furniture—nothing with a brain to it which her soul might briefly inhabit. She returned and sat again at the table, and the mood vanished in weariness.

But they did not linger there long. Fatigue made the ladies glad to be shown to the rooms prepared for them. The housekeeper, the ancient authority of the place, in every motion and tone expressing herself wronged by their intrusion, conducted them. Every spot they passed was plainly far more hers than theirs; only law was a tyrant, and she dared not assert her rights! But she had allotted their rooms well, and they approved her judgment.

Weary as she was, Hester was charmed with hers, and the more charmed the more she surveyed it. I will not spend time or space in describing it, but remember how wearisome and useless descriptions often are. I will but say it was old-fashioned to her heart's content; that it seemed full of shadowy histories, as if each succeeding occupant had left behind an ethereal phantasmic record, a memorial imprint of presence on walls and furniture—to which she now was to add hers. But the old sleep must have the precedence of all the new things. In weary haste she undressed, and ascending with some difficulty the high four-post bed which stood waiting for her like an altar of sleep for its sacrifice, was presently as still and straight and white as alabaster lady lying upon ancient tomb.

CHAPTER XXI.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN she woke it was to a blaze of sunlight, but caught in the net of her closed curtains. The night had passed and carried the tears of the day with it. Ah, how much is done in the night when we sleep and know nothing! Things never stop. The sun was shining as if he too had wept and repented. All the earth beneath him was like the face of a child who has ceased to weep and begun to smile, but has not yet wiped away his tears.

Raindrops everywhere! millions upon millions of them! every one of them with a sun in it! For Hester had sprung from her bed, and opened the eyes of her room. How different was the sight from what she saw when she looked out in Addison square! If heaven be as different from this earth, and as much better than it, we shall be happy children—except indeed we be but fit to stand in a corner, with our backs to the blessedness. On each side she saw green, undulating lawn, with trees and meadows beyond; but just in front the ground sloped rapidly, still in grass, grew steep, and fell into the swift river—which swollen almost to unwieldiness, went rolling and sliding brown and heavy towards the far off sea: when its swelling and tumult were over it would sing; now it tumbled along with a roaring muffled in sullenness. Beyond the river the bank rose into a wooded hill. She could see walks winding through the wood, here appearing, there vanishing, and, a little way up the valley, the rails of a rustic bridge that led to them. It was a paradise! For the roar of London along Oxford street, there was the sound of the river; for the cries of rough human voices, the soprano of birds, and the soft mellow bass of the cattle in the meadows. The only harsh sound in this new world was the cry of the peacock, but that had somehow got the colour of his tail in it, and was not unpleasant. The sky was a shining blue. Not a cloud was to be seen upon it. Quietly it looked down, as if saying to the world over which it stood vaulted, "Yes, you are welcome to it all!"

She thanked God for the country, but soon was praying to him for the town. The neighbourly offer of the country to console her for the loss of the town she received with alarm, hastening to bethink herself that God cared more for one miser-

able, selfish, wife-and-donkey-beating costermonger of unsavoury Shoreditch, than for all the hills and dales of Cumberland, yea and all the starry things of his heavens. She would care as God cared, and from beauty gather strength to give to sorrow.

She dressed quickly, and went to her mother's room. Her father was already out of doors, but her mother was having breakfast in bed. They greeted each other with such smiles as made words almost unnecessary.

"What a *lovely* place it is, mamma! You did not say half enough about it!" exclaimed Hester.

"Wasn't it better to let you discover for yourself, my child?" answered her mother. "You were so sorry to leave London, that I would not praise Yrndale for fear of prejudicing you against it."

"Mother," said Hester, with something in her throat, "I did not want to change; I was content, and had my work to do! I never was one to turn easily to new things. And perhaps I need hardly tell you that the conviction has been growing upon me for years and years that my calling is among my fellow-creatures in London!"

She had never yet, even to her mother, spoken out plainly concerning the things most occupying her heart and mind. Every one of the family, except Saffy, found it difficult to communicate—and perhaps to Saffy it might become so as she grew. Hester trembled as if confessing a fault. What if to her mother the mere idea of having a calling should seem a presumption!

"Two things must go, I think, to make up a call," said her mother, greatly to Hester's relief. "You must not imagine, my child, that because you have never opened your mind to me, I have not known what you were thinking, or have left you to think alone about it. Mother and daughter are too near not to hear each other without words. There is between you and me a constant undercurrent of communion, and occasionally a passing of almost definite thought I believe. We may not be aware of it at the time, but none the less it has its result."

"Oh mother!" cried Hester, overjoyed to find she thought them thus near to each other, "I am *so* glad! Please tell me the two things you mean."

"To make up a *call*, I think both impulse and possibility are wanted," replied Mrs. Raymount. "The first you know well; but have you sufficiently considered the second? One whose impulse or desire was continually thwarted could scarcely go on believing herself called. The half that lies in an open door

is wanting. If a call come to a man in prison it will be by an angel who can let him out. Neither does inclination always determine fitness. When your father was an editor, he was astonished at the bad verse he received from some who had a genuine delight in good verse."

"I can't believe, mamma," returned Hester, "that God gives any special gift, particularly when accompanied by a special desire to use it, and that for a special purpose, without intending it should be so used. That would be to mock his creature in the very act of making her."

"You must allow there are some who never find a use for their special gifts."

"Yes; but may not that be that they have not sufficiently cultivated their gifts, or that they have not done their best to bring them into use? Or may they not have wanted to use them for ends of their own and not of God's? I feel as if I must stand up against every difficulty lest God should be disappointed in me. Surely any frustration of the ends to which their very being points must be the persons' own fault? May it not be because they have not yielded to the calling voice that they are all their life a prey to unsatisfied longings? They may have gone picking and choosing, instead of obeying."

"There must be truth in what you say, Hester, but I am pretty sure it does not reach every case. At what point would you pronounce a calling frustrated? You think yours is to help your poor friends: you are not with them now: is your calling frustrated? Surely there may be delay without frustration! Or is it for you to say when you are *ready?* Willingness is not everything. Might not one fancy her hour come when it was not come? May not part of the preparation for work be the mental discipline of imagined postponements?—And then, Hester—now I think I have found my answer—you do not surely imagine such a breach in the continuity of our existence, that our gifts and training here have nothing to do with our life beyond the grave. All good old people will tell you they feel this life but a beginning. Cultivating your gift, and waiting the indubitable call, you may be in active preparation for the work in the coming life for which God intended you when he made you."

Hester gave a great sigh. Postponement indefinite is terrible to the young and eager.

"That is a dreary thought, mother," she said.

"Is it, my child?" returned her mother. "Painful the will

of God may be—that I well know, as who that cares anything about it does not! but *dreary*, no! Have patience, my love. Your heart's deepest desire must be the will of God, for he cannot have made you so that your heart should run counter to his will: let him but have his own way with you, and your desire he will give you. To that goes his path. He delights in his children; so soon as they can be indulged without ruin, he will heap upon them their desires; they are his too."

I confess I have, chiefly by compression, put the utterance both of mother and of daughter into rather better logical form than they gave it; but the substance of it is thus only the more correctly rendered. Hester was astonished at the grasp and power of her mother. The child may for many years have but little idea of the thought and life within the form and face he knows and loves better than any; but at last the predestined moment arrives, the two minds meet, and the child understands the parent. Hester threw herself on the bed, and buried her face in her mother's lap. The same moment she began to discover that she had been proud, imagining herself more awake to duty than the rest around her. She began, too, to understand that if God has called, he will also open the door. She kissed her mother as she had never kissed her before, and went to her own room.

CHAPTER XXII.

GLADNESS.

SCARCELY had she reached it, however, when the voices of the children came shouting along some corridor, on their way to find their breakfast; she must go and minister, postponing meditation on the large and distant for action in the small and present. But the sight of the exuberance, the foaming overflow of life and gladness in Saffy, and of the quieter, deeper joy of Mark, were an immediate reward. They could hardly be prevented from bolting their breakfast like puppies, in their eagerness to rush into the new creation, the garden of Eden around them. But Hester thought of the river flowing turbid and swift at the foot of the lawn: she must not let them go loose! She told them they must not go without her. Their faces fell, and even Mark began a gentle expostulation,

A conscientious elder sister has to bear a good many hard thoughts from the younger ones on whom, without a parent's authority and reverence, she has to exercise a parent's restraint. Well for her if she come out of the trial without having gathered some needless severity, some seeming hardness, some tendency to peevishness! These weak evils are so apt to gather around a sense at once of the need and of the lack of power!

"No, Mark," she said, "I cannot let you go alone. You are like two kittens, and might be in mischief or danger before you knew. But I won't keep you waiting; I will get my parasol at once."

I will attempt no description of the beauties that met them at every turn. But the joy of those three may well have a word or two. I doubt if some of the children in heaven are always happier than Saffy and Mark were that day. Hester had thoughts which kept her from being so happy as they, but she was more blessed. Glorious as is the child's delight, the child-heart in the grown woman is capable of tenfold the bliss. Saffy pounced on a flower like a wild beast on its prey; she never stood and gazed at one, like Mark. Hester would gaze till the tears came in her eyes. There are consciousnesses of lack which carry more bliss than any possession.

Mark was in many things an exception—a curious mixture of child and youth. He had never been strong, and had always been thoughtful. When very small he used to have a sacred rite of his own—I would not have called it a rite but that he made a temple for it. Many children like to play at church, but I doubt if that be good: Mark's rite was neither play nor church. He would set two chairs in the recess of a window,—"one for Mark and one for God,"—then draw the window-curtains around, and sit in silence for a space.

When a little child sets a chair for God, does God take the chair or does he not? God is the God of little children, and is at home with them.

For Saffy, she was a thing of smiles and tears just as they chose to come. She had not a suspicion yet that the exercise of any operative power on herself was possible to her—not to say required of her. Many men and women are in the same condition who have grown cold and hard in it; she was soft and warm, on the way to awake and distinguish and act. Even now when a good thought came she would give it a stranger's welcome; but the first appeal to her senses would drive it out of doors again.

Before their ramble was over, what with the sweet twilight gladness of Mark, the merry noonday brightness of Saffy, and the loveliness all around, the heart of Hester was quiet and hopeful as a still mere that waits in the blue night the rising of the moon. She had some things to trouble her, but none of them had touched the quick of her being. Thoughtful, therefore in a measure troubled, by nature, she did not know what heart sickness was. Nor would she ever know it as many must, for her heart went up to the heart of her heart, and there unconsciously laid up store against the evil hours that might be on their way to her. And this day her thoughts kept rising to him whose thought was the meaning of all she saw, the centre and citadel of its loveliness.

For if once the suspicion wake that God never meant the things that go to and fro in us as we gaze on the world, that moment is the universe worthless as a doll to a childless mother. If God be not, then steam-engine and flower are in the same category. No; the steam-engine is the better thing, for it has the soul of a man in it, and the flower has no soul at all. It cannot mean if it is not meant. It is God that means everything as we read it, however poor or mingled with mistake our reading may be. And the soothing of his presence in what we call nature, was beginning to work on Hester, helping her towards that quietness of spirit without which the will of God can scarce be perceived.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOWN THE HILL.

When Franks, the acrobat, and his family left Mrs. Baldwin's garret to go to another yet poorer lodging, it was with heavy hearts; they crept silent away, to go down yet a step of the world's stair. I have read somewhere in Jean Paul of a curiously contrived stair, on which while you thought you were going down you were really ascending: I think it was so with the Frankses and the stair they were upon. But to many the world is but a tread-mill, on which while they seem to be going up and up, they are only serving to keep things going round and round.

I think God has more to do with the fortunes of the poor a thousand fold than with those of the rich. In the fortunes of

the poor there are many more changes, and they are of greater import as coming closer to the heart of their condition. To careless and purblind eyes these fortunes appear on an almost dead level of toil and privation; but they have more variations of weather, more chequers of sunshine and shade, more storms and calms, than lives passed on airier slopes. Who could think of God as a God like Christ—and other than such he were not God—and imagine he would not care as much for the family of John Franks as for the family of Gerald Raymount? It is impossible to believe that he loves such as Cornelius or Vavasor as he loves a Christopher. There must be a difference! The God of truth cannot love the unlovely in the same way as he loves the lovely. The one he loves for what he is and what he has begun to be; the other he loves because he sorely needs love—as sorely as the other, and must begin to grow lovely one day. Nor dare we forget that the essential human thing is in itself lovely as made by God, and pitiably lovely as spoiled by man. That is the Christ-thing which is the root of every man, created in his image—that which, when he enters the man, he possesses. The true earthly father must always love those children more who are obedient and loving—but he will not neglect one bad one for twenty good ones. "The Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me;" but "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine that need no repentance." The great joy is the first rush of love in the new-opened channel for its issue and entrance.

The Frankses were on the down-going side of the hill Difficulty, and down they must go, unable to help themselves. They had found a cheaper lodging, but entered it with misgiving: their gains had been very moderate since their arrival in London, and their expenses greater than in the country. Also Franks was beginning to feel or to fancy his strength and elasticity not quite what they had been. The first suspicion of the approach of old age and the beginning of that weakness whose end is sure, may well be a startling one. The man has begun to be a nobody in the world's race—is henceforth himself but the cousre of the race between age and death —a race in which the victor is known ere the start. Life with its self-discipline with draws itself thenceforth more to the inside, and goes on with greater vigour. The man has now to trust and yield constantly. He is coming to know the fact that he was never his own strength, had never the smallest

power in himself at his strongest. But he is learning also that he is as safe as ever in the time when he gloried in his might —yea, as safe as then he imagined himself on his false foundation. He lays hold of the true strength, makes it his by laying hold of it. He trusts in the unchangeable thing at the root of all his strength, which gave it all the truth it had—a truth far deeper than he knew, a reality unfathomable, though not of the nature he then fancied. Strength has ever to be made perfect in weakness, and old age is one of the weaknesses in which it is perfected.

Poor Franks had not got so far yet as to see this, and the feeling of the approach of old age helped to relax the springs of his hopefulness. Also his wife had not yet got over her last confinement. The baby, too, was sickly. And there was not much popular receptivity for acrobatics in the streets; coppers came in slowly; the outlay was heavy; and the outlook altogether was of the gray without the gold. But his wife's words were always cheerful, though the tone of them had not a little of the mournful. Their tone came of temperament, the words themselves of love and its courage. The daughter of a gamekeeper, the neighbours regarded her as throwing herself away when she married Franks; but she had got an honest and brave husband, and never when life was hardest repented giving herself to him.

For a few weeks they did pretty well in their new lodging. They managed to pay their way, and had food enough—though not quite so good as husband and wife wished each for the other, and both for their children. The boys had a good enough time of it. They had not yet in London exhausted their own wonder. The constant changes around made of their lives a continuous novel—nay, a romance; and being happy they could eat anything and thrive on it.

The lives of the father and mother overvault the lives of the children, shutting out all care if not all sorrow, and every change is welcomed as a new delight. Their parents, where positive cruelty has not installed fear and cast out love, are the divinities of even the most neglected. They feel towards them much the same, I fancy, as the children of ordinary parents in the middle class—love them more than children given over to nurses and governesses love theirs. Nor do I feel certain that the position of the children of the poor, in all its oppression, is not more favourable to the development of the higher qualities of the human mind, such as make the least

show, than many of those more pleasant places for which some religious moralists would have us give the thanks of the specially favoured. I suspect, for instance, that imagination, fancy, perception, insight into character, the faculty of fitting means to ends, the sense of adventure, and many other powers and feelings are more likely to be active in the children of the poor, to the greater joy of their existence, than in others. These Frankses, too, had a strict rule over them, and that increases much the capacity for enjoyment. The father, according to his lights, was, as we have seen, a careful and conscientious parent, and his boys were strongly attached to him, never thought of shirking their work, and endured a good deal of hardness and fatigue without grumbling: their mother had opened their eyes to the fact that their father took his full share in all he required of them, and did his best for them. They were greatly proud of their father, one and all believing him not only the first man in his profession, but the best man that ever was in the world; and to believe so of one's parent is a stronger aid to righteousness than all things else whatever, until the day-star of the knowledge of the great Father goes up in the heart, to know whom, in like but better fashion, as the best more than man and the perfect Father of men, is the only thing to redeem us from misery and wrong, and lift us into the glorious liberty of the sons and daughters of God.

They were now reduced to one room, and the boys slept on the floor. This was no hardship, now that summer was nigh, only the parents found it interfere a little with their freedom of speech. Nor did it mend the matter to send them early to bed, for the earlier they went the longer were they in going to sleep. At the same time they had few things to talk of which they minded their hearing, and to the mother at least it was a pleasure to have all her chickens in the nest with her.

One evening after the boys were in bed, the father and mother sat talking. They had a pint of beer on the table between them, of which the woman tasted now and then that the man might imagine himself sharing it with her. Silence had lasted for some time. The mother was busy rough-patching a garment of Moxy's. The man's work for the day was over, but not the woman's!

"Well, I dunnow!" he said at last, and there ceased.

"What don ye know, John?" asked his wife, in a tone she

would have tried to make cheerful had she but suspected it half as mournful as it was.

"There's that Mr. Christopher as was such a friend!" he said: "—you don't disremember what he used to say about the Almighty and that? You remember as how he used to say a man could no more get out o' the sight o' them eyes o' hisn than a child could get out o' sight o' the eyes on his mother as was a watchin' of him!"

"Yes, John, I do remember all that very well, and a great comfort it was to me at the time to hear him say so, an' has been many's the time since, when I had no other—leastways none but you an' the childern. I often think over what he said to you an' me then when I was down, an' not able to hold my head up, nor feelin' as if I should ever lift it no more!"

"Well, I dunnow!" said Franks, and paused again. But this time he resumed. "What troubles me is this:—if that there mother as was a lookin' arter her child, was to see him doin' no better 'n you an' me, an' day by day gettin' furder on the wrong way, I should say she warn't much of a mother to let us go on in that 'ere way as I speak on."

"She might ha' got her reasons for it, John," returned his wife, in some fear lest the hope she cherished was going to give way in her husband. P'r'aps she might see, you know, that the child might go a little farther and fare none the worse. When the children want their dinner very bad, I ha' heerd you say to them sometimes, 'Now kids, ha' patience. Patience is a fine thing. What if ye do be hungry, you ain't a dyin' o' hunger. You'll wear a bit longer yet!' 'Ain't I heerd you say that, John—more 'n once, or twice, or thrice?"

"There ain't no need to put me to my oath like that, old woman! I ain't a goin' for to deny it! You needn't go to put it to me as if I was the pris'ner at the bar, or a witness as wanted to speak up for him!—But you must allow this is a drivin' of it jest a *leetle* too far! Here we be come up to Lon'on a thinkin' to better ourselves—not wantin' no great things—sich we don't look for to get—but jest thinkin' as how it wur time—as th' parson is allus a tellin' his p'rishioners, to lay by a shill'n' or two to keep us out o' th' workus, when 't come on to rain, an' let us die i' the open like, where a poor body can breathe!—that's all as we was after; an' here, sin ever we come, fust one shillin' goes, an' then another shillin' goes as we brought with us, till we 'ain't got one, as I may

almost say, left! An' there ain't no luck! I'stead o' gittin' more we git less, an' that wi' harder work, as is a wearin' out me an' the b'ys; an'——"

Here he was interrupted by a cry from the bed on the floor. It was the voice of little Moxy, "the Sarpint o' the Prairie."

"I ain't wore out, father! I'm good for another go."

"I ain't neither, gov'nor. I got a lot more work in me!"

"No, nor me," cried the third. "I likes London. I can stand on my head twice as long as Tommy Blake, an' he's a year older 'n I am."

"Hold your tongue, you rascals, an' go to sleep," growled the father, pretending to be angry with them. "What right have you to be awake at this time o' the night—an' i' Lon'on too? It's not like the country, as you very well know. I' the country you can do much as you like, but not in the town! There's police, an' them's there for b'ys to mind what they're about. You've no call to be awake when your father an' mother want to be by theirselves—a listenin' to what they got to say to one another! Us two was man an' wife 'afore you was born!"

"We wasn't a listenin', father. We was only hearin' 'cause we wasn't asleep. An' you didn't speak down as if it was secrets!"

"Well, you know, b'ys, there's things as fathers an' mothers can understand an' talk about, as no b'y 's fit to see to the end on, an' so they better go to sleep, an' wait till their turn comes to be fathers an' mothers theirselves.—Go to sleep direc'ly, or I'll break every bone in your bodies!"

"Yes, father, yes!" they answered together, nowise terrified by the awful threat—which was not a little weakened by the fact that they had heard it every day of their lives, and not yet known it carried into execution.

But having been thus advised that his children were awake, the father, without the least hypocrisy, conscious or unconscious, changed his tone: in the presence of his children he preferred looking at the other side of the argument. After a few moments' silence he began again thus:—

"Yes, as you was sayin', wife, an' I knows as you're always in the right, if the right be anyhows to be got at—as you was sayin', I say, there's no sayin' when that same as we was a speakin' of—the Almighty is the man I mean—no sayin', I say, when he may come to see as we have, as I may say, had

enough on it, an' turn an' let us have a taste o' luck again! Luck's sweet; an' some likes, an' it may be as he likes to give his childer a taste o' sweets; now an' again, jest as you an' me, that is when we can afford it, an' that's not often, likes to give ourn a bull's-eye or a suck of toffy. I don't doubt *he* likes to see us enj'yin' of ourselves jest as well as we like to see our little uns enj'yin' o' *theirselves!*—It stands to reason, wife—don't it?"

"So it do seem to me, John!" answered the mother.

"Well," said Franks, apparently, now that he had taken up the defence of the ways of the Supreme with men, warming to his subject, "I dessay he do the best he can, an' give us as much luck as is good for us. Leastways that's how the rest of us do, wife! We can't allus do as well as we would like for to do for our little uns, but we *always*, in general, does the best we can. It may take time—it may take time even with all the infl'ence *he* has, to get the better o' things as stands in *his* way! We'll suppose yet a while, anyhow, as how he's a lookin' arter us. It can't be for nothink as he counts the hairs on our heads—as the sayin' is!—though for my part I never could see what good there was in it. But if it ain't for somethink, why it's no more good than the census, which is a countin' o' the heads theirselves."

There are, or there used to be when I was a boy, who, in their reverence for the name of the Most High, would have shown horror at the idea that he could not do anything or everything in a moment as it pleased him, but would not have been shocked at all at the idea that he might not please to give this or that man any help. In their eyes power was a grander thing than love, though it is nowhere said in the Book that God is omnipotence. Such, because they are told that he is omnipotent, call him Omnipotence; when told that he is Love, do not care to argue that he must then be loving! But as to doing what he wills with a word—see what it cost him to redeem the world! He did not find that easy, or to be done in a moment without pain or toil. Yea, awfully omnipotent is God. For he wills, effects, and perfects the thing which, because of the bad in us, he has to carry out in suffering and sorrow, his own and his Son's. Evil is a hard thing for God himself to overcome. Yet thoroughly and altogether and triumphantly will he overcome it; and that not by crushing it under foot—any god of man's idea could do that!—but by conquest of heart over heart, of life in life, of life over death. Nothing shall be too

hard for the God that fears not pain, but will deliver and make true and blessed at his own severest cost.

For a time, then, the Frankses went on, with food to eat and money to pay their way, but going slowly down the hill, and finding it harder and harder to keep their footing. By and by the baby grew worse, pining visibly. They sought help at the hospital, but saw no Mr. Christopher, and the baby did not improve. Still they kept on, and every day the husband brought home a little money. Several times they seemed on the point of an engagement, but as often something came between. At length Franks almost ceased to hope, and grew more and more silent, until at last he might well have appeared morose. The wonder to me is that any such as do not hope in a Power loving to perfection, should escape moroseness. Under the poisonous influences of anxiety, a loving man may become unkind, even cruel to the very persons for whose sake he is anxious. In good sooth what we too often count righteous care, but our Lord calls the care of the world, consumes the life of the heart as surely as the love of money. At the root they are the same. Yet evil thing as anxiety is, it were a more evil thing to be delivered from it by anything but the faith of the Son of God—that is, faith in his Father and our Father; it would be but another and worse, because more comfortable form of the same slavery.

Poor Franks, however, with but a little philosophy, had much affection, which is indeed the present God in a man—and so did not go far in the evil direction. The worst sign of his degenerating temper was the more frequently muttered oath of impatience with his boys—never with his wife; and not one of them was a moment uneasy in consequence — only when the *gov'nor* wasn't jolly, neither were they.

The mind of Franks, as it appears to me, was mainly a slow sullen stream of sub-thought, a something neither thought nor feeling but partaking of the character of both, a something more than either, namely, the substance of which both are formed—the undeveloped elemental life, risen a little way, and but a little way, towards consciousness. The swifter flow of this stream is passion, the gleams of it where it ripples into the light, are thoughts. This sort of nature can endure much without being unhappy. What would crush a swift-thinking man is upborne by the denser tide. Its conditions are gloomier, and it consorts more easily with gloom. But light and motion and a grand

future are waiting for such as he. All their sluggish half-slumberous being will be roused and wrought into conscious life — nor the unconscious whence it arises be therein exhausted, for that will be ever supplied and upheld by the indwelling Deity. In his own way Franks was in conflict with the problems of life; neither was he very able to encounter them; but on the other hand he was one to whom wonders might safely be shown, for he would use them not speculatively but practically. "Nothing almost sees miracles but misery," perhaps because to misery alone, save it be to the great unselfish joy, is it safe to show miracles. Those who must see ere they will believe, may have to be brought to the verge of the infinite grave that a condition fit for seeing may be effected in them. "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed."

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN.

THERE is another person in my narrative whom the tide of her destiny seemed now to have caught and to be bearing more swiftly somewhither. Unable, as she concluded, any longer to endure a life bounded by the espionage, distrust, and ill-tempered rebuke of the two wretched dragons whose misery was their best friend—saving them from foreboded want by killing them while yet they had something to live upon—Amy Amber did at last as she had threatened, and one morning when, in amazement that she was so late, they called her, they received no answer, neither could find her in or out of the house. She had applied to a friend in London, and following her advice, had taken the cheap train overnight, and gone to her. She met her, took her home, and helped her in seeking a situation—with the result that, before many days were over, her appearance and manners being altogether in her favour, she obtained her desire—a place behind the counter in one of the largest shops. There she was kept hard at work, and the hours of business were long; but the labour was by no means too much for the fine health and spirits which now blossomed in her threefold.

Her aunts raised an outcry, of horror and dismay first, then of reprobation, accusing her of many things, and amongst the

rest of those faults of which they were in reality themselves guilty towards her; for as to the gratitude and affection we are so ready to claim and so slow to pay, the debt was great on their part, and very small indeed on hers. They wrote to her guardians of course to acquaint them with the shocking fact of her flight, but dwelt far more upon the badness of her behaviour to them from the first, the rapidity with which she had deteriorated, and the ghastliness of their conviction as to the depth of the degradation she had preferred to the shelter of their—very moth-eaten—wings.

The younger of the two guardians was a man of business, and at once took proper measures for discovering her. It was not, however, before the lapse of several months that he succeeded. By that time her employers were so well satisfied with her, that after an interview with them, followed by one with the girl herself, he was convinced that she was much better where she was than with her aunts, whose dispositions were not unknown to him. So he left her in peace.

Knowing nothing of London, interested in all she saw, and much occupied with her new way of life, Amy did not at once go to find her friend Miss Raymount. She often recalled her kindness, often dreamed of the beautiful lady who had let her brush her hair, and always intended to seek her as soon as she could feel at some leisure. But the time wore away, and still she had not gone.

She continued a well-behaved girl, went regularly to church on Sundays, had many friends but few intimates, and lived with the girl who had been her friend before her mother's death. Her new way of life was, no doubt, from its lack of home-ties, and of the restraining, if not always elevating influences of older people, dangerous: no kite can soar without the pull of the string; but danger is less often ruin than some people think; and the propt house is not the safest in the row. He who can walk without falling will learn to walk the better that his road is not always of the smoothest; and, as Sir Philip Sidney says, "The journey of high honour lies not in plain ways."

Such were the respective conditions of Amy Amber and the Frankses, when the Raymounts left London. The shades were gathering around the family; the girl had passed from the shadow into the shine. Hester knew nothing of the state of either, nor had they ever belonged to her flock. It was not

at all for them she was troubled in the midst of the peace and rest of her new life when she felt like a shepherd compelled to leave his sheep in the wilderness. Amid the sweet delights of sunshine, room, air, grass, trees, flowers, music, and the precious stores of an old library, every now and then she would all at once imagine herself a herald that had turned aside into the garden of the enchantress. Were not her poor friends the more sorely tried that she was dwelling at ease? Could it be right? Yet for the present she could see no way of reaching them. All she could do for them was to cultivate her gifts, in the hope of one day returning to them the more valuable for the separation.

One good thing that came of the change was that she and her father were drawn in the quiet of this country life closer together. When Mr. Raymount's hours of writing were over, he missed the more busy life into which he had been able to turn at will, and needed a companion. His wife not being able to go with him, he naturally turned to his daughter, and they often took their walks abroad together. In these Hester learned much. Her father was not chiefly occupied with the best things, but he was both of a learning and a teaching nature. There are few that in any true sense can be said to be alive: of Mr. Raymount it might be said that he was coming alive; and it was no small consolation to Hester to get thus nearer to him. Like the rest of his children she had been a little afraid of him, and fear, though it may dig deeper the foundations of love, chokes its passages: she was astonished to find, before a month was over, how much of companions as well as friends they had become to each other.

Most fathers know little of their sons, and less of their daughters. Because familiar with every feature of their faces, every movement of their bodies, and the character of their every habitual pose, they take it for granted they know them. Doubtless knowledge of the person does through the body pass into the beholder, but there are few parents who might not make discoveries in their children which would surprise them. Some such discoveries Mr. Raymount began to make in Hester.

She kept up a steady correspondence with Miss Dasomma, and that also was a great help to her. She had a note now and then from Mr. Vavasor, and that was no help. A little present of music was generally its pretext. He dared not trust

himself to write to her about anything else—not from the fear of saying more than was prudent, but because, not even yet feeling to know what she would think about this or that, he was afraid of encountering her disapprobation. In music he thought he did understand her, but was in truth far from understanding her. For to understand a person in any one thing, we must at least be capable of understanding him in everything. Even the bits of news he ventured to send her, all concerned the musical world—except when he referred now and then to Cornelius: he never omitted to mention his having been to *his aunt's.* Hester was always glad when she saw his writing, and always disappointed with the letter—she could hardly have said why, for she never expected it to go beyond the surfaces of things: he was not yet sufficiently at home with her, she thought, to lay open the stores of his heart and mind—as he would doubtless have been able to do more readily had he had a sister to draw him out!

Vavasor found himself in her absence haunted with her face, her form, her voice, her song, her music—sometimes with the peace and power of her presence, and the uplifting influence she exercised upon him. It is possible for a man to fall in love with a woman he is centuries from being able to understand. But how the form of such a woman must be dwarfed in the camera of such a man's mind! It is the falsehood of the silliest poetry to say he deifies the image of his beloved. He is but a telescope turned wrong end upon her. If such a man could see such a woman after her true proportions, and not as the puppet he imagines her, thinking his own small great-things of her, he would not be able to love her at all. To see how he sees her—to get a glimpse of the shrunken creature he has to make of her ere, through his proud door, he can get her into the straitened cellar of his poor, pinched heart, would be enough to secure any such woman from the possibility of falling in love with such a man. Hester knew that in some directions he was much undeveloped; but she thought she could help him; and had he thoroughly believed in and loved her, which he was not capable of doing, she could have helped him. But a vision of the kind of creature he was capable of loving—therefore the kind of creature he imagined her in loving her, would have been—to use a low but expressive phrase—*a sickener to her.*

At length, in one of his brief communications, he mentioned

that his yearly resurrection was at hand—his butterfly-month he called it—when he ceased for the time to be a caterpillar, and became a creature of the upper world, revelling in the light and air of summer. He must go northward, he said; he wanted not a little bracing for the heats of the autumnal city. The memories of Burcliff drew him potently thither, but would be too sadly met by its realities. He had an invitation to the opposite coast which he thought he would accept. He did not know exactly where Paradise lay, but if he found it within accessible distance, he hoped her parents would allow him to call some morning and be happy for an hour or two.

Hester answered that her father and mother would be glad to see him, and if he were inclined to spend a day or two, there was a beautiful country to show him. If his holiday happened again to coincide with Corney's, perhaps they would come down together. If he cared for sketching, there was no end of picturesque spots as well as fine landscapes.

Of music or singing she said not a word.

By return of post came a grateful acceptance. About a week after, they heard from Cornelius that his holiday was not to make its appearance before vile November. He did not inform them that he had sought an exchange with a clerk whose holiday fell in the said undesirable month.

CHAPTER XXV.

WAS IT INTO THE FIRE?

ONE lovely evening in the beginning of June, when her turn had come to get away a little earlier, Amy Amber thought with herself she would at last make an effort to find Miss Raymount. In the hurry of escaping from Burcliff she left her address behind, but had long since learned it from a directory, and was now sufficiently acquainted with London to know how to reach Addison square. Having dressed herself therefore in becoming style, for dress was one of the instincts of the girl—an unacquirable gift, not necessarily associated with anything noble—in the daintiest, brightest little bonnet, a well-made, rather gay print, boots just a little too *auffallend*, and gloves that clung closer to the small short hand than they had clung to the

bodies of the rodents from which they came, she set out for her visit.

In every motion and feeling, Amy Amber was a little lady. She had not much experience. She could not fail to show ignorance of some of the small ways and customs of the next higher of the social strata. But such knowledge is not essential to ladyhood, though half-ladies think themselves whole ladies because they have it. To become ladies indeed they have to learn what those things and the knowledge of them are really worth. And there was another thing in which Amy was unlike many who would on the ground of mere social position have counted themselves immeasurably her superiors: she was incapable of being disagreeable, and from the thing in itself ill-bred recoiled instinctively. Without knowing it, she held the main secret of all good manners: she was simple. Many a one imitates simplicity, but Amy was simple—*one-fold.* She never put anything on, never wished to appear anything, never tried to look pleasant. When cross, which she was sometimes, though very rarely, she tried to *be* pleasant. If I could convey the idea of her, with her peaceful temperament and her sunshiny summer-atmosphere, most of my readers would allow she must have been an engaging and lovable little lady.

She got into an omnibus, and all the way distinguished herself by readiness to make room. Can it be that the rarity of this virtue in England has to do with our living in a straitened island? It *ought* to work in the contrary direction! The British lady, the British gentleman too, seems to cultivate a natural repellence. Amy's hospitable nature welcomed a fellow-creature even into an omnibus.

She found Addison square, and the house she sought. It looked dingy and dull, for many of its shutters were closed, and there was an indescribable air of departure about it. She knocked nevertheless, and the door was opened. She asked if Miss Raymount was at home.

Now Sarah, with most of the good qualities of an old trustworthy family-servant, had all the faults as well, and one or two besides. She had not been to Burcliff, consequently did not know Amy, else certainly she would not have behaved to her as she ought. Many householders have not an idea how abominably the servants they count patterns of excellence comport themselves to those even to whom special attention is owing.

"They are all out of town, miss," replied Sarah, "—except Mr. Cornelius, of course."

At the moment Mr. Cornelius, on his way to go out, stepped on the landing of the stair, and stood for an instant looking down into the hall, wondering who it might be at the door. From his position he could not see Amy's face, and had he seen it, I doubt if he would have recognized her, but the moment he heard her voice he knew it, and hurried down, his face in a glow of pleasure. But as he drew near, the change in her seemed to him so great that he could hardly believe with his eyes what his ears had told him.

From the first, Corney, like every one else of the family, was taken with Amy, and Amy was not less than a little taken with him. The former fact is not wonderful, the latter not altogether inexplicable. No man needs flatter his *vanity* much on the ground of being liked by women, for there never yet was man but some woman was pleased with him. Corney was good-looking, and, except with his own people, ready enough to make himself agreeable. Troubled with no modesty and very little false shame, and having a perfect persuasion of the power of his intellect and the felicity of his utterance, he never lost the chance of saying a good thing from the fear of saying a foolish one; neither, having said a foolish one, did he ever perceive that such it was. With a few of his own kind he had the repute of one who said very good things. Amy, on her side, was ready to be pleased with whatever could be regarded as pleasant—most of all with things intended to please, and was prejudiced in Corney's favour through knowing less of him and more of his family. Her face beamed with pleasure at sight of him, and almost involuntarily she stepped within the door to meet him.

"Amy! Who would have thought of seeing you here? When did you come to town?" he said, and shook hands with her.

"I have been in London a long time," she answered.

Corney thought she looked as if she had. "How deuced pretty she is!" he said to himself. "Quite lady-like, by Jove!"

"Come up stairs," he said, "and tell me all about it."

He turned and led the way. Without a second thought Amy followed him. Sarah stood for a moment with a stare, wondering who the young lady could be: Mr. Cornelius was so much at home with her! and she had never been to the house

before! "A cousin from Australia," she concluded: they had cousins there.

Cornelius went into the drawing-room, Amy after him, and opened the shutters of a window, congratulating himself on his good luck. Not often did anything so pleasant enter the stupid old place! He made her sit on the sofa in the half-dark, sat down beside her, and in a few minutes had all her story. Moved by her sweet bright face and pretty manners, pleased with the deference, amounting to respect, which she showed him, he began to think her the nicest girl he had ever known. For her behaviour made him feel a large person with power over her, in which power she seemed pleased to find herself. After a conversation of about half an hour, she rose.

"What!" said Corney, "you're not going already, Amy?"

"Yes, sir," replied Amy, "I think I had better go. I am so sorry not to see Miss Raymount! She was very kind to me!"

"You mustn't go yet," said Corney. "Sit down and rest a little.—Come—you used to like music: I will sing to you, and you shall tell me whether I have improved since you heard me last."

He went to the piano, and Amy sat down again. He sang with his usual inferiority—which was not so inferior that he failed of pleasing simple Amy. She expressed herself delighted. He sang half a dozen songs, then showed her a book of photographs, chiefly portraits of the more famous actresses of the day, and told her about them. With one thing and another he kept her—until Sarah grew fidgety, and was on the point of stalking up from the kitchen to the drawing-room, when she heard them coming down. Cornelius took his hat and stick, and said he would walk with her. Amy made no objection; she was pleased to have his company; he went with her all the way to the lodging she shared with her friend in a quiet little street in Kensington. Before they parted, her manner and behaviour, her sweetness, and the prettiness which would have been beauty had it been on a larger scale, had begun to fill what little there was of Corney's imagination; and he left her with the feeling that he knew where a treasure lay. He walked with an enlargement of strut as he went home through the park, and swung his cane with the air of a man who had made a conquest of which he had reason to be proud.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VAVASOR IN THE COUNTRY.

THE hot dreamy days rose and sank in Yrndale. Hester would wake in the morning oppressed with the feeling that there was something she ought to have begun long ago and must positively set about this new day. Then as her inner day cleared, she would afresh recognize her duty as that of those who stand and wait: she had no great work to do—only to heed the common family duties of the hour, and her own education for what might be the will of him who, having made her for something, would see that the possibility of that something should not be wanting. In the heat of the day she would seek a shady spot with a book for her companion—generally some favourite book, for she was not one of those who say of one book as of another—"Oh, I've read that!" It was some time before she came to have a favourite spot—so many drew her, and the spirit of exploration was so strong. Under the shadow of some rock, the tent-roof of umbrageous beech, or the solemn gloom of some pine-grove, the brooding spirit of the summer would day after day find her when the sun was on the height of his great bridge, and fill her with the sense of that repose in which alone she herself can work. Then would such a quiescence pervade Hester's spirit, such a sweet content come down upon her, that nothing seemed necessary for life but to live: mere existence was conscious well-being. But this feeling never lasted long; all at once would start awake in her the dread that she was out of the way, inasmuch as she was willing to be idle, and could rest inactive. Then to meet it would faith rouse herself and say: "But God will take care of you in this thing too. You have not to watch lest he should forget, but to listen, and be ready when he gives you the lightest call." And the ever faithful corrective to the noonday mood came in its turn; for invariably from the tea-table she went to her piano, and there, through the sweet evening movements and atmospheric changes of the brain—for the brain has its morning and evening, its summer and winter as well as the day and the year—would meditate aloud, or awake and brood over the meditation of some master in harmony. Oftener than she knew, especially when the days

had grown shorter, and his mother feared for him the falling dew, would Mark be somewhere near, in the dusky twilight, a lurking cherub feeding on her music—sometimes ascending on its upward torrent to a solitude where only God could find him.

At such time would come to Hester the thought of Vavasor, and for a while remain; but it was chiefly as a helper in her work she thought of him. When for the time she had had music enough, softly as she would have covered a child she would close her piano, glide out into the night, and wander hither and thither through the gloom about the house. Then yet more would she think what it would be to have a man for her friend—one who would strengthen her heart and make her bold in what was needful and right. And if at such time the thoughts of the maiden would fall to the natural architecture of maidens, and build one or two of those airy castles into which no man has looked or can look, and if through them went flitting the form of Vavasor, who will wonder! It is not the building of castles in steepest heights of air that is to be blamed, but the building of such as inspector Conscience is not invited to enter. To cherish the ideal of a man with whom to walk on her way through the world, is as right for a woman as it was for God to make man male and female; and to the wise virgin love will ever be a solemn thought, nor mockingly when most playfully handled. But there is a poor ambition to be married which is, I fear, the thought most present with too many women. Such a woman feels her worth unacknowledged, no place her own in society, until a man takes her under his wing. She degrades womanhood who thinks thus of herself. It says ill for the relation of father and mother if the young women of a family recoil from the idea of marriage, but it says ill for the relation of parents and children if they long to realize it.

One evening towards the end of July, when summer is at its heat, and makes the world feel as if there never had been, and never ought to be anything but summer; but the wind of its nights comes to us from the land where the sun is not, to tell human souls that, dear as is the sunlight to their eyes, there are sweeter things far with which the sun has little to do—Hester was sitting in a fir-wood, under a fir-tree, on the fallen leaves of numberless years. Late in the day a man had come to tune her piano, and she had wandered up the hill in the last of the sun-

light. Pine-odours filled the air around her, as if they, too, stole out with the things of the night when the sun was gone.—Dusky gray in the forest brown, pine-scent, and silence!—All at once the wind woke, and began to sing the strange, thin, monotonous Elysian ghost-song of the pine-wood, embodying to her spirit the sweet melancholy of the hour. A sad contentment filled her soul. So close was her heart to nature's that, when alone with her, she seldom or never longed for her piano; she *had* the music, and did not need to hear it. When we are very near to God, we do not desire the Bible.

As she sat thus in music-haunted reverie, she heard a slight rustle in the dry needles on the ground, and the next moment saw dark in the gloom the form of a man. She was startled But he spoke instantly. It was Vavasor.

"I am so sorry I frightened you!" he said.

"It is nothing," she returned. "Why can't one help being silly? I don't see why ladies should be more easily frightened than gentlemen!"

"Men are quite as easily startled as ladies," he answered. "And nothing is more startling than to find some one near when you thought yourself alone."

"Except," said Hester, "finding yourself alone when you thought some one was near.—But how did you find me?"

"Mark told me you were somewhere in this direction. In blind faith I ventured to follow, and—and something led me right, though all the time I seemed losing myself instead of finding you."

"It may have been both," returned Hester; "for I can't say I know my way home. We are on the eastern side of the hill, and that is the dark one at night.

"Who would not be happy to lose himself and find you!" rejoined Vavasor—and ventured no farther.

"It is time we were moving anyhow," said Hester, holding out her hand to him. "Who knows when we may get home!"

"Do let us risk it a few minutes longer," said Vavasor, taking her hand, but instead of raising her, slipping down beside her. "Just think: my first burst from the dungeon-vault of London for a whole year—and here I am in paradise—in fairyland! You are getting used to it, of course: it is such an age since you left London!—but for me!"

"It is the fairyland of the fancy, not that of the imagination," replied Hester, "that we get tired of. None but the false are

ever weary of the true, and the true are always weary of the false."

Then she asked him about his journey, and about Cornelius, and told him how she came to be there instead of at her piano.

"But the tuning must be over by this time!" she said: "let us go and try it."

She sprang lightly to her feet before Vavasor could offer his hand, and led the way. It seemed to open itself before her, and they were soon at home.

A whole fortnight Vavasor spent at Yrndale. In those days Nature had a better chance with him, so to speak, than once yet since he came into her dominions.

Circe—I mean Society, substituting herself for God and Nature, may have had such success with a man that he sees no beast-faces in her rout; yet is he potentially a man, and who knows what may not some time be awakened in him! Profoundly unaware of approaches or preparation, the heartless may be surprised by emotion, the scoffer by admiration. Vavasor began to develop elements of which he had not merely had no consciousness, but in whose existence he had not really believed—had in fact believed the less that he had affected their presence in himself, and thought he possessed what there was of them to be possessed. The most remarkable event of his history during the fortnight—his history both real and phenomenal, was, that one morning he got up in time to see, and *for the purpose of seeing* the sun rise. I hardly expect to be believed when I tell the fact! I am not much surprised that he formed the resolution: something Hester had said accounts sufficiently for that; but that such a man should in the sleepiness of the morning keep the resolve come to in the wide-a-wakeness of the foregone evening, fills me with astonishment. It was a great stride forward. And he enjoyed it too—enjoyed the victory over himself, the clear invigorating air of the morning, and the glory of the sunrise. He had poetry enough to receive some hint of the indwelling grandeur of the vision itself—for a vision it still is, as when first it rose on the wondering gaze of man, and a prophecy it must for ever be to the soul that through its eyes can see what those eyes cannot see. A power of some kind was present to him in the sight; he called it poetic feeling, which he never imagined as having a jot to do with fact; but it was, in the so-called Christian,

the rudiment of the worship developed in the Guebers; it was the drawing of the eternal nature in him towards the naturing Eternal, whom he was made for understanding, but of whom he knew so little.

In the evening, after almost a surfeit of music, if one dare employ such a word concerning a holy thing, they went out into the twilight.

"In such a still soft negative of life," said Vavasor, "as an evening like this gives us, one almost doubts whether there can indeed be such a constantly recurring phenomenon of nature as I saw this morning!"

"What did you see this morning?" asked Hester wondering.

"I saw the sun rise," he answered.

"Did you really? I am so glad! That is a sight rarely seen in London—at least if I may judge by my own experience!"

"One goes to bed so late and so tired!" he returned simply.

"True! and even if you were up in time, where could you see it from?"

"Coming home from a dance, I have seen it; but then somehow you don't seem to have anything to do with it. I have often smelt the fresh-mown hay in London of a morning."

Hester was checked by this mention of the hay—as if the sun was something that belonged to the country, like the grass he withered; but, ere she had time to explain to herself her own feeling, the next thing he said got her over it.

"I felt this morning as if I had never seen the sun before; and his way of getting up was a new thing to me altogether. He seemed to mean shining—and somehow I felt he did. In London he always looks indifferent—as if he had got it to do, and couldn't help it, like everybody else in the swarming place. Who is it that says God made the country, and man made the town?"

"I think it is Cowper, but I am not sure," answered Hester. "It can't be properly true though. I suspect man has more to do with the unmaking than the making of either. I am glad the mines and factories have not come near enough to us yet to destroy air and water."

"They are creeping on though. And the quarries are not far from you now. I saw them as I came along."

"Quarries do no harm. There are many things man does that only bring out nature's beauty. It is the rubbish does

all the mischief—the refuse of the mills and the pits and the iron-works and the potteries."

"True! And worst of all is the human rubbish of our great cities!"

"What do you mean by the human rubbish, Mr. Vavasor?" asked Hester.

He saw he must be careful, and would fence a little.

"Don't you think," he said, slowly choosing his words, "that in the body politic there is something analogous to the waste in matter?"

"Certainly," she answered; "only we might differ as to the degree of the analogy, and as to the persons to be classed in the moral waste. I fancy the one thing the human faculty is least able to cope with is judgment. None but God can read in a man what he really is. It can't be a safe thing to call any of our own kith and kin *rubbish*."

"I see what you mean," answered Vavasor. But to himself he said, "Good heavens!"

They were walking in the dark dusk, in a narrow path among the trees, and Hester was able to think and speak more freely than if they had been looking in each other's face in the broad daylight.

"You see," she went on, "rubbish with life in it is an awkward thing to deal with. Rubbish proper is that out of which the life has gone, rendering it useless. But suppose this rubbish—that which lies about the mouth of a coal-pit, say—could by some process be made to produce the most lovely flowers; or that, if neglected, it would bring out horrible poison weeds, or creeping things, then the word *rubbish* would mean either too much or too little to be applied to it. You see, Mr. Vavasor, I have been thinking a great deal about this kind of thing. It is my business."

"But are there not some for whom nothing can be done?"

"I cannot allow it of any I have had to do with. And who would dare to say it before he had himself done all he could! And then another might be able to do more. Who shall say when God can do no more—God who takes no care of himself, and is at work for his children!"

"I confess," said Vavasor, "the condition of the poor in our large towns is the question of the day which—"

"—which every one is waking up to talk about," supplemented Hester.

What she thought was, that, if all who found the question interesting, would, instead of talking about it, do what they might, not towards its solution, but towards its removal, they would at least make some mark on the *rubbish*-heap, of which not all the world's wind of words would in ten thousand years blow a single spadeful away. And yet is talk far less to be complained of than the mischief of dabbling deed. Perhaps it may even serve to turn some aside from harmful experiment.

It is not those who, regarding the horrors around them as a nuisance, are bent upon their destruction, who will work any salvation in the earth, but those who see the wrongs of the poor, and strive to give them their own. It is neither those who desire a good report among men, nor those who seek an antidote against the tedium of a selfish existence, who will ever cause the light to rise upon such as sit in darkness and the shadow of death; but those who, loving their own flesh and blood, and willing not merely to spend but to be spent for them, draw nigh them, being to being, and sit down in the darkness with them. Love, and love alone, as from the first it is the source of life, love alone, wise at once and simple as a child, can redeem life. It is life drawing nigh to life, person to person, the human to the human, that conquers death.

This the enemy knows—therefore urges to large combination. The strength of men takes the place of the strength of God. The unfit, admitted or drawn in, are weakness and corruption. They destroy the work of honest hands by the sound of false tongues. Combination is strength only between such as can each do good work alone, and will do it if there be no combination. Whoever depends on his company is a weakness to that association, society, or church of which he may imagine himself a pillar. Combination should be only for this or that passing necessity, and the more easily it can be dissolved the better. The most dangerous quality in anything of human origin would be the durability which is so often one of its aims. Where the body outlasts the spirit, there is the moral atmosphere infected with strangest forms of evil, death generated.

It is always by single individual communication that the truth passes in power from soul to soul. Love alone is the one eternal unbreakable bond. It is only where love is not that law must go. Law is indeed necessary, but woe to that community where love is not on its way to cast out law by

rendering it needless, by fulfilling all its demands, and tenfold more. Not all the laws in the universe can save a man from poverty, not to say from sin, not to say from conscious misery. Work on, you who do not see this. Work your best. You will be rewarded according to your honesty. You will be saved by the fire that destroys your work. You will be compelled to see that the same faith Christ had in his Father, and nothing else, will redeem your life, or render the condition of the poorest or the richest wretch such as would justify his creation. If the mere passing of this or that more or less wise law, did, in the person of his descendant of the third or fourth generation, make a *well-to-do* man of him, that descendant would probably be a great deal farther from the kingdom of heaven than the ancestral beggar or thief over whom you now lament. The criminal classes, to use your phrase, are not in the eyes of the Supreme and in yours made up of quite the same persons.

Vavasor began to think that if ever the day should come when he might approach Hester, "a suitor for her hand," he must be very careful over "her philanthropic craze;" not but that, if ever he should in earnest set about winning her, he had full confidence in the artillery he could bring to the siege: he had not yet made any real effort to gain her affections! Neither had he a doubt that, having succeeded, all would be his own, and he might do with her much as he pleased. Hester once secured, he had no anxiety concerning the philanthropic craze. His wife, once in the society whose opinion determined the way things ought to be regarded, would of necessity yield any enthusiasm!

Under the influence of the lovely place, of the lovely weather, and of his admiration for Hester, the latent poetry of Vavasor's nature developed itself rapidly; and, this reacting, he grew more and more rapidly in love with Hester. Ere long, to use the phrase in which he confessed the fact to himself, he was "over head and ears in love with her," and nearer knowing what bliss may be than he had ever been before. Most men have the gates of paradise thus once opened to them a little way, and by their closing again they may have some poor sense of what it is to be shut out. "Very hard!" Is it? Then why, in the name of God, will you not go up to them and enter? You do not like the conditions? But the conditions are nothing more than the mere natural possibilities of entrance. Enter as you are and you

would but re-enter the desert you think to leave behind you, see no glimpse of a promised land. The false cannot inherit the true, nor the unclean the lovely.

It began to grow plain to him that his aunt could no longer look upon the idea of an alliance with the Raymounts as she must *naturally* have regarded it before. Hester in such grounds and such a house, with old-accumulated comforts and luxuries around her, was a very different Hester from the child of a toiling *littérateur* in the dingy region of Bloomsbury, where everything was—of course respectable in a way, but that way a very inferior and—well—snuffy kind of way! where, in fact, he had himself found it almost impossible to dissociate the idea of brokers' shops and the newest bonnet on Hester's queenly head! It was well his aunt had not seen her in those old surroundings: if he could but get her presented in this new setting, her beauty, tuned here to its "right praise and true perfection," would have a chance of working its natural effect! His aunt was not a jealous woman, but ready to admire where prudence permitted: here, if prudence were not reduced to absolute silence, he would at least stand amid no small amount of justification.

By degrees, and without any transition marked of Hester, emboldened mainly by the influences of the soft twilight, penetrating at once and shielding, he came to speak with more warmth and nearer approach. His heart was tuned above its ordinary pitch, and he was borne a captive slave in the triumph of Nature's hour.

"How strangely all this loveliness seems to sink into the soul!" he said one evening, when the bats were coming and going like thoughts that refuse to take shape and be shared, and when with intensest listening you could not be sure whether it was a general murmur of nature you heard, low in her sleep, or only the strained nerves of your own being imitating that which now was not.

"For the moment," he went on, "you seem to be the soul of that which is around you, yet oppressed with its vastness, and unable to account for what is going on in it."

"I think I understand you," returned Hester. "It is strange to feel at once so large and so small!"

"That is it!" responded Vavasor. "When one loves, how it exalts his whole being, yet in the presence of the woman he worships, how small he feels, and how unworthy!"

Humility and greatness are not merely correlative—they are one and the same condition. This, however, was beyond Vavasor.

For the first time in her life Hester felt, nor knew what it was, a vague pang of jealousy. Whatever certain others may think, there are women who, having had their minds constantly, actively, and nobly occupied, have come to woman's full dignity without having even speculated on love. Such a one therefore may well be somewhat in the dark when first it begins to show itself; and that it should be there without having been invited perhaps adds to her perplexity. She was silent, and Vavasor judged he might venture a little farther. But with all his experience in the manufacture of compliments and high-flown poetry, he was at a loss: he had no theories or meditations of love to talk from. Love was with him, *at its best*, the something that preceded marriage—after which, whatever boys and girls might think, and although, of course, to a beautiful wife like Hester he could never imagine himself false, it must take its chance! Yet as he sat thus, with his soul bare to the mightiest enchantment of life, though little imagining it an essential decree for the redemption of men, he saw, for broken moments and with half-dazed glimpses, into the eternal, and spoke as in a gracious dream:

"If one might sit for ever thus!" he said, almost in a whisper, "—for ever and ever, needing nothing, desiring nothing! lost in perfect, in absolute bliss! so peacefully glad as not to want to know what other joy may lie behind! so content as, if told there was no other bliss, only to say, 'I am the more glad; I want no other! I refuse all else! Let the universe hear, and trouble me with none! This and only this ought ever to be—on and on—to the far-away end! The very soul of me is music, and needs not the softest sound of earth to keep it alive!'"

At that moment came a sigh of the night-wind, and fanned into their ears the moan of the stream away in the hollow, as it broke its being into voice over the pebbly troubles of its course. It came with a swell, and a faint through the pines, which woke and answered it with yet more ethereal voice.

"Still! still!" said Vavasor, as if the river were a live thing and understood him; "do not speak to me. I cannot attend even to your watery murmur. A sweeter music, born of the motions of my own spirit, fills my hearing. Be content with

thy flowing, as I am content with my being. Would that God in the mercy of a God would make this moment eternal!"

He ceased, and was silent.

Hester could not help being thrilled by the rhythm, moved by the poetic phrase, and penetrated by the air of poetic thought that pervaded the utterance—which would doubtless indeed have entranced many a less woman than herself—yet was not altogether pleased. Never yet had she touched a moment as to which, even in transient mood, she might have prayed, "Let it last for ever!" nor did the present hold for her any reason why it should not pass, and make way for a better behind it. Still the show of such feeling was the unveiling of a soul of song, the revealing of a nature that must one day come to love the highest, come to know a bliss beyond all that imagination can anticipate! She must not be captious and contrary with him, she thought, any more than with her poor friends: was he not afflicted with the same poverty that gave the sting to theirs! To be true, she must help all she could help—rich or poor, nor show favour! "Thou shalt not countenance a poor man in his cause."

"I do not *quite* understand you," she said. "I cannot imagine the moment I should wish to last for ever."

"Have you had so little happiness?" he asked sympathetically.

"I do not mean that," she replied. "Indeed I have had much—more than all but a very few, I should imagine. But I do not think much of happiness. Perhaps that is a sign—I daresay it is—that I have not had much of the other thing! But no amount of happiness could make me wish the time to stand still. I want to be growing—and while one is growing Time cannot stand if he would: you drag him on with you! I want—perhaps you will prefer it put that way—to be constantly becoming more and more capable of happiness. Whether I have it or not, I must be and ought to be capable of it."

"Ah!" returned Vavasor, "you are as usual out of sight beyond me. You must have pity, else you will leave me miles behind, and I shall never see you more; and what eternity would be to me without you God only knows. Other punishment will hardly be necessary than to know that there is a gulf between us."

"It must not be so," answered Hester almost tenderly.

"Our fate is in our own hands. It is ours to determine the direction in which we shall go. I don't want to preach to you, Mr. Vavasor, but surely so much one friend may say to another! If every one were reasonable enough to go the right way, there would be no parting; and all the love and friendship in the world will not keep people together if they are inwardly parted by such difference as you imply."

Vavasor's heart was touched in two ways by this utterance—first, in the best way in which it was at the moment capable of being touched; for he could not help thinking what a blessed thing it must be to feel good and have no weight upon you, as this lovely girl plainly did, and live like her in perfect fearlessness of whatever might be going to happen to you: religion would be better than endurable in the society of such an embodiment of it! he might even qualify for some distinction in it with such a teacher!—second, in the way of self-satisfaction; for clearly Hester was not disinclined to enter on a closer intimacy with him! He would certainly accept, if not the help, yet the offer of the help she had *almost* made! that would bind him to nothing! He understood her at least so far as to have not the slightest suspicion of such coquetry as a fool like Cornelius would have imagined. He was nevertheless a fool also, of another and deeper sort. It needs brains to be a real fool.

From that night he placed himself yet more in the position of a pupil towards her, hoping in the influence of the relation. To sustain and deepen it, he went on imagining and presenting himself as in this and that difficulty he was never really in, or even quite knew he was not in. He was no conscious hypocrite in the matter—only his intellect alone was concerned, and not even much interested, where he talked as if his being was troubled. No answer he could have had would have had the smallest effect on the man Vavasor—could only have determined what he would say next. Hester kept trying to meet him as simply and directly as she could; but in the endeavour to encounter his difficulties she unconsciously transformed them into something very different from anything in Vavasor's thoughts. What she said, however, or indeed whether she spoke to his point or not, made no difference to him, so long as she talked to him. Talk she did, sometimes with an affectionate fervour of whose possibility he had had no idea; and her growing desire to wake in him the better life,

brought her into relations with him which had an earthly side, as everything heavenly of necessity has, for this life also is God's.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

ONE afternoon, when Vavasor was in the library—writing a letter to his aunt, in which he described in not too glowing terms, for he knew exaggeration would only give her a handle, the loveliness of the retreat among the hills where he was spending his holiday—when her father was in his study, her mother in her own room, and the children out of doors, a servant entered where Hester sat at her piano, announcing a visitor, and she had scarcely time to throw a glance on the card brought her ere the visitor was in the room. The name she had read was *Major H. G. Marvel*, and she vaguely thought she had heard it, but in the suddenness of the meeting was unable to recall a single idea concerning its owner. She saw before her a man whose tall yet pudgy figure bore a military air, and was not without a certain grace of confidence, while his bearing was *marked* by the total absence of even that air of apology which one individuality seems almost to owe to another. At the same time there was not a suspicion of truculence or even repulse in his carriage. There was self-assertion, but not of the antagonistic—solely of the inviting sort: his whole person beamed with friendliness. Notably above the middle height, the impression of his stature was reduced by a disproportionate valour in the central front, which for years must have always met the enemy in considerable advance of the rest of him. On the top of rather asthmatic shoulders was perched a head that looked small for the base from which it rose, and the smaller that it was an evident proof of the derivation of the word *bald*, by Chaucer spelt *balled*: it was round and smooth and shining like ivory, and the face upon it brought by the help of the razor into as close a resemblance with the rest of the bald as possible. The said face was a pleasant one to look at—of features altogether irregular—a retreating forehead over keen gray eyes that sparkled with intelligence and fun, prominent cheek-bones, a nose thick in the base and considerably elevated at the point, a large mouth

always ready to show a set of white, serviceable teeth—the only symmetrical arrangement in the facial economy—and a chin whose original character was rendered doubtful by its physical *duplicity.*

"Cousin Hester!" he said, holding out his hand as he advanced.

Mechanically she gave him hers. The voice that addressed her was at once a little husky and very cheery; the hand that took hers was small and soft and kind and firm. A merry, friendly smile illuminated eyes and face as he spoke. Hester could not help liking him—yet felt a little shy of him. She thought she had heard her mother speak of a cousin somewhere abroad: this must be he!

"You don't remember me!" he said. "Well, it would be rather too much to expect, seeing you were not in this world, wherever else you may have been, for a year or two after I left the country; and, to tell the truth, had I been asked, I should have objected to your appearance on any terms."

As this speech did not seem to carry much enlightenment with it, he went on to explain.

"The fact is, my dear young lady, that I forsook England because your mother and I were too much of one mind."

"Of one mind?" repeated Hester, bewildered.

"Ah, you don't comprehend!" said the major, whose bearing as he stood before her was as polite as confident. "The thing, you see, was this: I liked your mother better than myself, and so did she; and, without any jealousy of one another, it was not an arrangement for my happiness. I had but one alternative—stopping at home and breaking my heart, or going away, and getting over it as I best might. So you see I am by nature your sworn enemy—only it's of no use, for I've fallen in love with you at first sight; and if you will ask me to sit down, I will swear to forgive you, let bygones be bygones, and be your true knight and devoted servant as long as I live. How you do remind me of your mother!—only, by Jove, you're twice as handsome!"

"Do, pray, sit down, Mr. Marly."

"*Marvel* if you please," corrected the major; "—and I'm sure it's a great marvel if not a great man I am, after what I've come through! But don't you marvel at me too much, for I'm not a bad sort of fellow when you come to know me. And if you would let me have a glass of water, with a little sherry just

to take the taste off it, I would show my gratitude on the first safe opportunity. I have walked farther for the sight of you than on such a day I find altogether refreshing: it's as hot as the tropics, by George! But I have seen you and am well repaid—even without the sherry!"

As he spoke, he was carefully wiping his round head with a red silk handkerchief.

"I will send it at once, and let my mother know you are here," said Hester, turning to the door.

"No, no, never mind your mother; I dare say she is busy, or lying down. She always went to lie down at this time of the day: she was never very strong you know—though I don't doubt it was quite as much to get rid of me: she thought me troublesome in those days. But I bear no malice, and I hope she don't either. Tell her I say so. It's more than five and twenty years now! God bless me, it don't seem more than so many weeks! Don't disturb your mother, my dear. But if you insist on doing so, tell her old Harry is come to see her—much improved since she turned him about his business."

Hester, much amused, ran to find her mother.

"There's the oddest man down stairs, mamma, calling himself old Harry!" she said. "He's having some sherry and water in the drawing-room!"

Her mother laughed—a pleased little laugh.

"You don't say so!—Go to him, Hester dear, and tell him I shall be down directly."

"Is he really a cousin, mamma?"

"To be sure—my second cousin! He was very fond of me once."

"Oh, I know that! He has told me all the story already. He says you sent him about his business."

"If that means that I wouldn't marry him, it is true enough. But he doesn't know what I went through for taking his part! I always stood up for him, though I never could bear him near me. He was such an odd, good-natured bear! such a rough, merry creature! always saying the thing he ought not, and making everybody, ladies especially, uncomfortable! He never meant any harm, but never saw where fun should stop. You wouldn't believe the things Harry would say out of pure fun!—especially if he got a very proper old maid in his power: he would tease and tease her till she was in a passion. Only if she began to cry, then Harry had the worst of it, and was

penitent as a child.—He must be a good deal changed by this time!"

"He told me to tell you he was much improved. But if he is—well! I like him though, mamma—I suppose because you liked him. So take care you are not too hard upon him; *I* am going to take him up now."

"I make over to you my interest in him—only I must warn you, as he seems to have made a conquest of you already, that in India he married a black—or at least a brown woman."

"That's nothing to his discredit, mamma! Has he brought her home with him, I wonder!"

"She has been dead now some ten years. I believe he had a large fortune with her, which he has considerably increased. He is a good-hearted fellow, and was kind to every one of his relations, so long as there was one left to be kind to."

"Well, I shall go to him, mamma, and tell him you are coming as soon as you have got your wig and your newest lace-cap on, and your cheeks rouged and pearl-powdered, to look as like the lady that would none of him as you can."

Her mother laughed merrily, and pretended to box her daughter's ears. It was not often a mood playful as this arose between them; for not only were they both serious in heart, but from temperament and history, from modes and direction of thought, serious in their ways also. Yet who may so well break out in childlike merriment as those whose life has in it no moth-eaten Mammon pits—who have no fear, no greed, and live with a will—rising like the sun to fill the day with the work given them to do?

"See what I have brought you, cousin!" said major Marvel when Hester re-entered the room, holding out to her a small necklace. "You needn't mind taking it from an old fellow like me," he went on, seeing her hesitate. "I don't want to marry you off-hand. I must know first what sort of a temper you've got, and one or two things besides. There—take it.

Hester drew near, and looked at the necklace.

"Take it," said the major again.

"How strangely beautiful it is!—red, pear-shaped, dull-scratched stones, hung from a savage-looking gold chain! What are they, Mr. Marvel?"

"You describe it like a book!" returned the major. "It is a barbarous native necklace. But the stones are oriental rubies—only rough—not cut or polished."

"It is beautiful!" repeated Hester. "Did you really intend it for me?"

"Of course I did!"

"I will ask mamma if I may have it."

"Where's the need of that? I hope you don't think I stole it?—though faith there's a good deal very like stealing goes on where that came from!—But here comes the mother!—Helen, I'm so glad to see you once more!"

Hester glided away with the necklace in her hand, leaving her mother to welcome her old admirer: till that was over she would not trouble her about his offered gift.

They met like trusting friends whom years had done nothing to separate; and while they were yet talking of bygone times, Mr. Raymount entered, received the major cordially, and insisted on his remaining with them as long as he could: they were old friends as well as rivals, and there never had been any ground of bitterness between them. The major agreed: Mr. Raymount sent for his luggage, and showed him to a room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MAJOR MARVEL.

As major Marvel, notwithstanding such rebuffs as he had met with, had never learned to entertain doubt of his acceptability, so was he on his part most catholic in receptivity. Yet there were persons whom he disliked, and then his dislike was strong. I suspect they were such as found the heel of his all but invulnerable vanity, and wounded it: unused to be hurt, his vanity resented hurt the more sorely. He was in one sense, and that not a slight one, a true man: there was no discrepancy, no unfittingness between his mental conditions and his human presentation: his words, looks, manners, tones, everything that goes to express man to man, expressed him truly. What he felt that he showed. I almost think he was unaware of the possibility of doing otherwise. At the same time he had very little insight into the feelings of others, and almost no sense of the possibility that what he was saying might affect his listeners otherwise than it affected him. If he boasted, he meant to boast, and would have scorned to look as if he did not know it was a good thing he was telling of himself

—why not of himself as well as of another?—and had no idea of thus proving offensive. Neither had he ready sympathy with another in any suffering he had never himself experienced. But he was scrupulously fair in what he said and did; nothing was so apt to make him angry as any appearance of injustice or show of deception. He would have *said* that a man's first business was to take care of himself, but his conduct went far to cast contempt upon his opinion.

During dinner he occupied the greater part of the conversation, and evidently expected to be listened to. But that was nearly all he wanted. Let him talk, and hear you laugh when he was funny, and he was satisfied. He had no inordinate desire for admiration, or even for approbation. He told tales of adventure, some wonderful, some absurd, some having nothing in them but his own presence, while occasionally, the detail being good, the point would be missing; but he was just as willing to tell one whose joke was against himself, as one amusing at the expense of another. Like many of his day who had been long in India, he was full of the amusements and sports in which so much otherwise idle time is passed by Englishmen in the east, and seemed to think nothing connected with the habits of their countrymen there could fail of interest to those at home. Every now and then throughout the dinner he would say, "Oh! that reminds me of what happened when I was at"—such or such a place, or "when" so and so "of our regiment was out tiger-shooting," or "pig-sticking," or whatever the sport might be; "—and if Mr. Raymount will take a glass of wine with me, I will tell him the story."

When he and Vavasor were introduced, he glanced at him, drew his eyebrows together, made his military bow, and included him in his audience.

Vavasor was annoyed with him—not that he much minded a little boring by Hester's side, or forgot that everything to another's disadvantage was so much in his own favour, but that he could not help thinking what his aunt would say to such a relative. Retaining the blandest expression, and ready to drink as many glasses of wine with him as he wished, he set the major down not merely as an ill-bred man and a boaster, which he was, but as a liar and a vulgar-minded man, which he was not.

Now although major Marvel had not much habitual insight into character, the defect arose mainly from lack of interest; if

suspicion or antagonism was roused, he was just as likely to arrive at a correct judgment concerning a neighbour as any man ever is who does not love him.

One of his narratives—of the hunt of a man-eating tiger—was a specially thrilling one. He saw the eyes of Mark and little Saffy almost surpass the use of eyes, as they listened, and become ears as well. He saw Hester, who was still child enough to prefer a story of adventure to a love-tale, gaze as if, but for the way it was bound over to sobriety, her hair would have stood on end. But at one moment he surprised an expression on the face of Vavasor which that experienced man of the world never intended to be seen, and betrayed only through annoyance at the absorption of Hester's listening: she seemed to have eyes for no one but the man who shot tigers as Vavasor would have shot grouse! Upon fitting occasion and sufficient cause, the major was quarrelsome as any turkey-cock. He swallowed something that was neither good nor food, and said, but not quite so carelessly as he intended,

"I see by your eyes, Mr. Passover, you think I am drawing the long bow!"

"Upon my life!" answered Vavasor, nothing was farther from my thoughts! I was merely admiring the coolness of creeping into the mouth of a—a—jungle after a—a—what-you-call-him—man-eating tiger."

"Well, you see! what was a fellow to do?" returned the major suspiciously. "The fellow wouldn't come out! and by George, there was a fellow wanted him out! Besides, I didn't creep in; I only looked in to see whether he was really there. That any one could tell by the eyes of him."

"But ain't a man-eating tiger something tremendous, you know? When once he takes to that kind of diet, don't you know? he likes nothing else half so well, does he? Good beef and mutton won't any longer serve his turn—at least so I've been told at the club. A man must be a very Munchausen to venture into a hole after him!"

"I don't know the gentleman—never heard of him," said the major—for Vavasor to cover it had pronounced the name German-fashion; "but you are quite mistaken as to the character of the man-eating tiger. It is true he does not care much for butcher-meat after once forming an attachment to human flesh; but it does not follow that it makes him fiercer. The fact is, it ruins his moral nature. He seldom surprises an

Englishman; and the flesh of women and children and poor villagers takes its revenge upon him by destroying his courage. The brute is known for a sneak. He knows himself for a Thug, and the murderer of his master. The man-eating tiger is the devil of his kind. The others leave you alone except you attack them; he attacks you—but on the sly—and runs when you go after him. From the top of your elephant, while the Bheels are beating up his quarters, you may catch sight of him, with his tail tucked between his legs, sneaking from cover to cover of the jungle. You can never get any sport out of him. *He* will never fly at your elephant, or climb a tree, or take to the water after you! If there's a creature on earth I hate, it's a coward!" concluded the major.

Thereupon Vavasor said to himself, "The man is a coward!"

"But why should you hate a coward?" asked Hester, feeling at the moment, with the vision of a man-eating tiger before her, she must herself come under the category. "How can a poor creature made without courage help being a coward? You can neither learn courage nor buy courage!"

"I am not so sure about the learning," returned the major. "But such as you mean, I don't call cowards. Nobody thinks worse of the hare, or even the fox, for going away before the hounds. Men whose business it is to fight, go away before the enemy when they haven't a chance. To be killed when you ought not is to give in. There is a time to run and a time to stand. The man will run like a man, and the coward like a coward."

"Ten to one you know how to run!" said Vavasor to himself.

"What can harmless creatures do but run?" resumed the major, filling his glass. "But when the tyrant turns tail he is a coward. Man or beast, I would set my foot on him. That's what sent me to the hole after the brute."

"But he might have killed you though he was a coward," said Hester, "when you did not leave either him or yourself any room to run.

"Of course he might, my dear! Where else would be the fun of it? Without that, tiger-hunting would be no better than shooting pigeons or pheasants. I *had* to kill him, you know! —By George! there's a first cousin of his—a woman-eating tiger, rather common in London, I believe; only he marries her, and eats her slowly up at his ease in his den!"

"How about the black wife!" thought Mr. Raymount, who had been little more than listening.

But Mr. Raymount did not really know anything of that part of his old friend's history: it was not to his discredit. "The black wife" was the daughter of an English merchant by a Hindoo lady. When first he made her acquaintance, she was a young helpless creature, kept almost in slavery by the relatives of her deceased father, who had left her all his property. The major had become interested in her from an attempt to lay the death of her father at her door: the shine of her gold had blinded her relations into imagining, almost *believing* her guilty. He had taken her part, and been of the greatest service to her. She was entirely acquitted, but, although nobody believed her guilty, *society* looked askance upon her. True, she was rich, but was she not black? and had she not been accused of a crime? and who saw her father and mother married? Then thought the major: "Here am I a useless old fellow, living for nobody but myself! it would make one life at least happier if I took the little dark thing home! She's rather too old, and I'm rather too young to adopt her; but I dare say she would marry me! The trifle she has would eke out my pay and help us to live decently!" He did not imagine she had more than a very moderate income, but it turned out she had a very large fortune. That he rejoiced over it I do not doubt; but that he would have been other than an honourable husband had he on the contrary found she had nothing, I am far indeed from suspecting. When she left him a widowed father, he mourned sincerely over his loss; and when the child followed her mother he was for some time a truly saddened man. Then, as if her money was all he had left, he went into speculation with it, and having at least doubled it, had now returned to his country to find but few of his old friends alive, and those few much changed. Little as one would have imagined it from his conversation or manner, it was with a kind of heart-despair that he had sought Mrs. Raymount.

With his first glance on the daughter of his old love he saw in her a grand creature, gracious as grand, and altogether new to him. His heart immediately claimed her: to have loved the mother seemed to give him a right in the daughter. And that right there might be a mode of making good! But this was only feeling yet, not thinking.

In proportion as he was taken with the daughter of the

house, he disliked the look of the fine-gentleman visitor that seemed to be dangling after her. Who he was, or how there present, he did not know, but from the first sight of him he disliked him, and the more as he saw more of his attention to Hester. He was doubtless a woman-eater—after her money!

"But," said Hester, fearing the conversation about to take a perilous turn, "I should like to understand the thing a little better. I am not willing to set myself down as a coward; I do not see that a woman has any right to be a coward more than a man. Tell me, major Marvel—when you know a beast may have you down and begin eating you any moment, what is it keeps you up? What do you fall back upon? Is it principle, or faith, or duty, or what is it?"

"Ho, ho!" returned the major laughing, "a metaphysician in the very bosom of my family!—I had not reckoned on that! —Well, no, my dear, I cannot say it is principle, and I am sure it is not faith. Fact is, you don't think about falling back upon anything. It's partly your elephant, and partly your rifle—and partly, perhaps—well, there I dare say does come in something of principle!—partly that you are an Englishman, and have to kill their big vermin for them, poor things! But you don't think of that at the time. You've got to kill the brute—that's it—and that's all. When you catch sight of him, your rifle jumps to your shoulder of itself."

"Do you make up your mind beforehand that if the animal should kill you, it is all right?" asked Hester.

"By no means, I give you my word of honour," answered the major.

"Well, now," rejoined Hester, "except I had made up my mind that if I was killed it was all right, I couldn't meet the tiger."

"But you see, my dear," said the major, "you do not know yet what it is to have confidence in your eye and your rifle. It is a form of power you soon come to feel—the power to destroy."

Hester fell a thinking. She could not bear the idea of feeling as her own a power that was not her own. The talk went on without her. She did not hear the end of the story. Her attention was roused by the laughter that followed it.

"That was the joke of the thing!" said the major. "It was no tiger at all! What a roar of laughter there was when the

brute—a great lumbering loundering hyena, rushed into the daylight! But the barrel of my rifle was bitten together as a schoolboy bites a pen—a quill-pen, I mean. They have horribly powerful jaws, those hyenas!"

"And what became of the man-eater?" asked Mark, with a disappointed look.

"She stopped in the hole till it was dark, no doubt, and then went prowling after her next delicate meal."

"Just imagine the low rumbling growl at your back, as if it came out of a mine of teeth!" said Hester, with a shudder, and her eyes, like Hamlet's, bent on vacancy.

"By George! for a young lady," said the major, "you have an imagination! Much of that won't go to make you a good hunter of tigers!"

"Then you owe your coolness to want of imagination?" suggested Hester.

"Perhaps so—Perhaps, after all," returned the major, with a merry twinkle in his eye, "tiger-hunters are a set of stupid fellows—too stupid to be reasonably frightened!"

"I don't mean that exactly. But I do think you don't know so well as you might where your courage comes from. For my part I would rather be courageous to help the good than to destroy the bad."

"Ah, but we're not all good enough ourselves for that!" remarked the major, with a serious expression, looking at her full out of his clear gray eyes, whence their habitual twinkle of fun had for the moment vanished. "Some of us are only fit to destroy what is worse than ourselves."

"To be sure we can't *make* anything," said Hester thoughtfully, "but we can help to make some things.—To destroy evil things is good," she went on after a pause, "but the worst things can be destroyed only by being good—and that is so hard!"

"It *is* hard!" responded the major, "—so hard that most people never try it!" he added, with a sigh, and a gulp of his wine.

Mrs. Raymount rose, and accompanied by Hester and the children, withdrew. The major rattled on, and his host now and then put in a word; but Vavasor sat silent, with an expression that seemed to say, "I am amused, but I don't eat all that is put on my plate."

CHAPTER XXIX.

ADVENTURES.

After breakfast the next day, all but Mr. Raymount went for a walk together.

The major kept as near Hester as he could, much to the annoyance of Vavasor, who judged him a most objectionable, indeed low fellow, full of brag and vulgarity, while the major judged him a supercilious idiot. It is curious, but not hard to explain, how differently a man's character will be read by two people in the same company: his carriage to each affects only the object of it, and is unobserved by the other. Like a man, and you will judge him with more or less fairness; dislike him, fairly or unfairly, and you cannot fail to judge him unfairly. Each, ignorant of the other's pursuits, and nearly incapable of sympathy with him upon any point would gladly have shown him the fool he counted him. Only the major, being the truer man, was able to judge the man of the world with a better gauge than he could apply in return. The major was annoyed with Vavasor's silent pretension, and disgusted with his indifference to everything in which he took an interest; Vavasor regarded the major as a narrow-minded over-grown schoolboy —though, in fact, his horizon was very much wider than his own; and he looked down from afar on the vulgarity which made those who knew his worth more or less anxious every time he opened his mouth. But the major did not often seriously offend, only one never knew when he might not! Neither did the offence ever hurt—only rendered the sensitive, and others for their sakes, uncomfortable.

It seemed destined to be a morning of adventures. As they passed the gate of the home farm, out rushed all of a sudden a half-grown pig, and took his way right between the well parted legs of the major—with the awkward result that he was thrown down in a place which, to say the least, if he had had a choice, he would not have chosen. With stony countenance Vavasor offered his assistance, but, heavy as he was, the major did not require it. He got cleverly on his feet again, with a cheerfulness which discomfited discomfiture, and showed either a sweetness or command of temper, or both together, which gave him a great lift in the estimation of Hester.

"Confound the brute!" he said, laughing. "He can't know

how many of his wild relatives I have stuck, else I should set it down to revenge. What a mess he has made of me! I shall have to throw myself in the river like an Hindoo, for purification!"

Saffy laughed right merrily over his fall and the fun he made of it, but Mark looked concerned. He ran and pulled two handfulls of grass, with which he proceeded to rub the major down.

"Let us go to the farmhouse," said Mrs. Raymount. "Mrs. Stokes will give us water and a sponge."

"No, no," returned the major. "Better let it dry. The mud will come off much easier then. An Indian pig once served me much the same. Why shouldn't piggy have his turn? Come along, Mark."

"The pig didn't mean it, sir," said Mark, with serious justice. "He only wanted to get out."

A spirit of liberty was abroad. Mark and Saffy went rushing away like wild rabbits every now and then, taking a round and returning. It was one of those cooler of warm mornings that rouse the life in heart, brain, and nerves, making every breath a pleasure, and every movement an agreeable consciousness. It was no wonder there should be creatures about the place that wanted to get out.

They had not gone much farther, when, as they approached the paling of a paddock, a horse came blundering over the fence, hoping, perhaps, to range the world hencefoth. Unaccustomed to horses except when equipped and attended, most of the party drew back a little startled. But as he lighted, bringing with him the top bar of the fence, he stumbled, and almost fell; and ere he had quite recovered himself, the major had him by nose and ear. He led him to the gap, made him jump in again, and replaced the bar.

"Mind we mention it as we come back, Mark," he said.

"Thank you! How brave of you, major Marvel!" said Mrs. Raymount.

The major laughed with his usual merriment.

"If it had been the man-eating horse, as they called him, of the rajah of Rumtool now," he said, "I should have been brave indeed! only by this time there would have been nothing left of me to thank. It would have wanted some courage to take *him* by the head, Mark, I can tell you! but a quiet good-tempered carriage-horse none but a cockney would be frightened at!"

Therewith he began, and to the awful delight of the children, told them the most amazing and indeed horrible tales about the said horse. Whether they were all true or not, I cannot say; but besides what he had seen, he told only what he had heard and believed. Vavasor's opinion was that in every word he said about the rajah of Rumtool's horse the major was romancing.

They were following the course of the river, and had gradually descended from the higher grounds to the immediate bank, which here spread out into a small meadow. There were not many flowers, but Saffy ran about pulling stalks of feathery-headed grasses. Mark went walking by himself along the river's brink, stopping every now and then to look into the water. The bank was covered with long grass, here and there a bush of rushes amongst it, and in parts was a little undermined. On the opposite side lower down was a meal-mill, and nearer was the head of the mill-lade, whose weir made the river deeper—some seven feet deep at least, and on the surface as still to the eye as a lake.

The two ladies and two gentlemen were walking along the meadow, some distance behind the children, and a little way from the bank, when they were startled by a scream of agony from Saffy. She was running towards them shrieking. Mark was not to be seen. All started at speed to meet her, but presently Mrs. Raymount sank on the grass. Hester would have stayed with her, but she motioned her on.

Vavasor outran the major, and reached Saffy first. But to his anxious questions—"Where is Mark? Where did you leave him? Where did you see him last?" she answered only by shrieking with her every available particle of breath. As the major came up he heard enough to know that he must use his wits, and not lose time in trying to draw information from a creature whom terror had made for the moment insane. He ran on, keeping close to the bank, and looking for some sign of the spot where the boy must have fallen in.

He had overrun the place, and was following a fruitless intent when he heard a cry behind him. It was the voice of Hester. "Across! Across!" she was crying.

He looked across, and, half-way over, slowly drifting in the direction of the mill-lade, towards which there was an undercurrent, saw a something dark, now appearing a little above the water, now sinking out of sight. The major, with experienced eye, perceived at once it must be the boy. He threw off his

coat, plunged in, found the water deep enough for swimming, and made for the object. But it showed so little that, fearing to miss it, he changed his direction, and swam straight for the mouth of the mill-lade, anxious of all things to prevent him from getting down to the undershot water-wheel.

In the meantime, Hester, followed by Vavasor, sped along the bank to the weir, over which hardly any water was running. When Vavasor saw her turn sharp round to it, he was alarmed, and laid his hand on her; but she turned on him with eyes that flashed, and lips white notwithstanding her speed, and he withdrew it, and submissively followed. The footing was uncertain, with deep water on one side up to a level with the stones, and a steep descent to deep water on the other. In two or three spots the water ran over, and those were slippery. But, rendered absolutely fearless by her fear, Hester flew across without a slip, leaving Vavasor yards behind, for he was neither very sure-footed nor very sure-headed.

When they landed, they were on the slip between the lade and the river, the lade between them and the other bank, on to which they saw the major trying with wearily repeated effort to heave the unconscious form of Mark. The poor man had not swum for many years, and was almost spent.

"Bring him here," cried Vavasor. "The stream is too strong for me to get to you; it will bring you here in a moment."

The major muttered an oath, made a great wrathful effort, got the body half on the shore, and was then just able to scramble out, and draw it up.

When Vavasor turned, he found Hester had left him, and saw her already almost at the mill. There she crossed the lade, and running up the other side, was soon at the spot where the major was doing what he could to bring the boy back to life. But there was little hope without further help. She caught him up in her arms.

"Come; come!" she cried, and ran with him to the mill. The major followed, panting and dripping. When she met Vavasor, he would have taken her burden from her, but she would not give him up.

"Go to my mother," she said. "Tell her we have got him, and he is at the mill. Then go to my father, and ask him to send for the doctor."

Vavasor obeyed, feeling a little small. But Hester had never

thought that he might have acted differently; she never even recalled his essay to prevent her from crossing to the major's help: she thought only of Mark and her mother.

In a few minutes they had him in the miller's blankets, with hot water about him, while the major, who knew well what ought to be done, for he had been tried in almost every emergency under the sun, went through the various prescribed movements of the arms, inflated the chest again and again with his own breath, and did all he could to excite the action of the breathing-muscles.

Vavasor took upon him to assure Mrs. Raymount that Mark was safe and would be all right in a little while, and ran on to the house. She rose then, and with what help Saffy could give her, managed to walk home.

Mr. Raymount crossed the river by the bridge, and arrived as the first signs of returning animation appeared. His presence and calmness were a great relief to Hester. The major was more anxious as to the results of such a shock to a delicate child than he had been apprehensive of failure in restoring him. After about half-an-hour, the boy opened his eyes, looked at his father, smiled in his own heavenly way, and closed them again with a deep sigh. They covered him up warm, and he fell asleep.

That same night, as Hester was sitting by his bed, she heard him talking in a dream:

"When may I go and play with the rest by the river?" he said. "Oh, how it talks! and it runs through me and through me! It was such a nice way, God, of fetching me home!—on a water-horse!"

It sent a pang to her heart. What if after all he was going to leave them! The child had always seemed fitter for home than abroad, and he might now be sent for!

He recovered by degrees, but continued sleepy and tired. When he was taken home he begged to go to bed. He never fretted or complained, received every attention with a smile, and told his mother not to mind, for he was not going away yet. He had been told that under the water, he said.

Before winter, he was able to go about the house and grounds, and was reading his favourite books again, especially the Pilgrim's Progress, which he had read five times.

CHAPTER XXX.

POOR GENTLEMAN, POOR EARL!

THE major left Yrndale the next morning, saying now there was Mark to attend to, his room was better than his company. Vavasor said he would stop a day or two longer; he could not go until he saw Mark fairly on the road to recovery.

In reality the major went because he could no longer endure the sight of "that idiot," as he called Vavasor.

"The poltroon!" he said. "A fellow like that to marry a girl like cousin Helen's Hester! A grand creature, by George! —the grandest creature I ever saw in my life!—Rather than wet his clothes the sneak would have seen us both drown!"

He was not quite fair to Vavasor, who did not love his neighbour enough to grasp the facts of the case, and so did not see the necessity for swimming.

He told Mark he was going to fetch some tiger-skins, a little idol with diamond eyes, and a lot of queer things he had brought home. When he came back he would tell him all about them, and let him have any of them to keep that he liked.

He told Mr. Raymount he had no end of business to look after, but now he knew the way to Yrndale, he might return any day. As soon as Mark was well enough to be handed over to a male nurse he would come directly. He told Mrs. Raymount he had got some pearls for her—he knew she was fond of pearls —and was going to fetch them.

Having made Hester promise to write to him at the Army and Navy Club every day till Mark was well, he departed, much blessed for the saving of the precious boy.

When he reached London he hunted up some old friends through whom to make inquiry concerning Vavasor; and did learn some things about him—nothing very bad as things went where everything was more or less bad, and nothing to his special credit. That he was heir to an earldom specially annoyed him, for that made it the more likely he would please his beautiful cousin.

Vavasor was relieved to find that Hester, while full of gratitude to the major, had received no unfavourable impression concerning himself in connection with the late sad affair—not that he was dissatisfied with his own behaviour: it was reason-

able! but what might not the other fellow have said to his prejudice? As the days went on, however, and enthusiasm might have been expected to tone down, he was annoyed to find her apparently quite heedless of the objectionable character of the man who, by mere good luck, had got the start of him in the rescue! He styled him "A beastly fellow, a lying braggart, a disgusting rascal." He would have called him an army-cad, only the word *cad* was not then invented. If any more such relations were likely to turn up, the sooner he cut the connection the better! That Hester should not be shocked with him was more than he could bear to think of. He did not know that, as to the pure all things are pure, so the common mind is far more annoyed with vulgarity in others than the mind of genuine refinement. The latter understands, therefore forgives, and disregards. Hester, able to look deeper than Vavasor, saw much that was good and honourable in the major, however much too loose the bridle of his tongue might be for safe riding in the crowded paths of society. "But," thought Vavasor, "where is the use of quarrelling about a man I am not likely to set eyes on again!"

A day or two before the natural end of his visit, as Mrs. Raymount, Hester, and he were sitting together in the old-fashioned garden, their letters were brought them: one for Vavasor had a great black seal. He read it through and said, quietly,

"I am sorry I must leave you to-morrow—or to-night if there is a train. I must be present at the funeral of my uncle, lord Gartley. He died yesterday, from what I can make out. What a bore it is to succeed to a title with hardly property enough to pay one's servants!"

"It is tiresome!" assented Mrs. Raymount. "But a title is not like a fever: if you can live without one, you can live with one."

"True; very true! But society—don't you know! So much is expected of a man in my position!—What do *you* think, Miss Raymount?"

He turned to her with a look that seemed to say her judgment was his law.

"I think with mamma," replied Hester. "I do not see why a mere name should have any power to alter one's mode of life. The change may of course bring new duties, but in other respects why should you not go on as you are doing?"

"I must go a good deal by what my aunt thinks. Her one fixed idea has been the rehabilitation of the earldom. All her life she has been saving for that."

"Then she is going to make you her heir?" said Hester, who, having been asked her opinion, simply desired the grounds on which to give it.

"My dear Hester!" said her mother.

"I am only too much delighted Miss Raymount should care to ask me *any*-thing!" said Vavasor. "My aunt does mean to make me her heir, I believe. I must not depend upon that, however, because, if I were to displease her, she might change her mind any moment. But she has been like a mother to me, and I do not think, for any small provocation such as I am likely to give her, she would yield the dream of her life. She is a kind-hearted woman—a little peculiar, but true as steel where she has taken a fancy. I wish you knew my aunt, Mrs. Raymount."

"I should be much pleased to know her."

"She would be delighted with this lovely place of yours. It is a perfect paradise! I feel its loveliness the more the nigher I come to hearing its gates close behind me. Happily there is no flaming sword ready to mount guard against re-entrance!"

"You must bring your aunt, Mr. Vavasor. We shall make her very welcome," said Mrs. Raymount.

"Unfortunately, with all her good qualities, my aunt, as I have said, is a little peculiar. She shrinks from making acquaintances."

He should have said—"out of her own world." People beyond that existed for her only on the sufferance of remotion.

But by this time Vavasor had resolved to make an attempt to gain his aunt, and so Hester. He was confident she could not fail to be more than pleased with Hester if only she saw her in fit surrounding: with her the frame was more than half the picture. Therefore he was glad, as I have told, that she had not called on her in Addison square: she would look to her so much more satisfactory in the setting of Yrndale. He had, besides, the advantage of being himself now of greater importance—the title no longer in prospect but in possession: he was that earl of Gartley for whom she had been saving all the time he was merely the heir, subject to death, or waiting indefinite! She must either be of one mind with him now, or lose the cherished purpose of so many years! If he stood out

for the woman of his choice, his aunt would be compelled to give in!

He left them in high spirits, with no pretence of regret for one whom he had never seen, or of sympathy for the daughter he had left behind him.

Hester was more interested in Vavasor's succession than she would herself have expected. They had been so much together of late, and in circumstances so favourable to the manifestation of what of lovable was in him, and to the revelation of how much her image possessed him, that she could hardly be a woman and not care about what befell him. Neither, although her life lay, and she felt that it lay, in far other regions, was she, any more than her mother, so absorbed in the best as to be indifferent to the pleasure of wearing a distinguished historical name, and occupying a somewhat exalted position in the eyes of the world. Her nature was not yet so thoroughly possessed with the things that *are*, as distinguished from the things that only appear, as not to feel some satisfaction in the thought of being a countess of this world, while waiting the inheritance of the saints in light. This was of course just as unworthy of her as it is of every one who has seen the hidden treasure not to sell *all* that he has and buy the field—as it is of every one who has had a true glimpse of Christ not to count, with Paul, everything but dross to the winning of him—not even worth picking up on the way as he presses towards the mark of the calling up. I must, however, say this much for her, that she thought of the rank first of all as a buttressing help to the labours which it continued her chief hope to follow again among her poor friends. To be a countess would make some things easier, she thought. Little she knew how immeasurably more difficult it would make everything worth doing!—that at once she would have to fight for her freedom with hidden crafts of slavery potent in a region more than any other under the prince of the power of the air! She had the notion that, uplifted among the shows of rule, she would be able to lighten the load of injustice pressing her people earthwards! She had not yet sufficiently learned that, until a man begins to throw off the weights that seem to hold him down, it may even be a wrong to him to attempt to lighten those weights. We must do justice, but it may not be the best thing we can do for our neighbour to interfere with the injustice of another. Why should I seek better wages for the

man who will only spend them in the public-house? His master may be unjust in giving him so little, but is it worth my while to get him more? For the master it might be good, but not for the man. The primary claims of justice are of course imperative: its claims upon a mediator may be none. The claim may stand against man, but not therefore against God. God may be bound in his own nature—I speak after the manner of men—to make his creature just, but he is not bound to give to every man the special justice for which he has a claim on his neighbour. For the sake of a point of abstract justice, he will not injure his child, who has, upon God himself direct, far higher and juster claims, with which that point would interfere.

Again the days passed quietly on. Mark grew a little better, Hester wrote regularly, but the briefest bulletins, to the major, seldom receiving an acknowledgment. The new earl wrote that he had been to the funeral, and described in a humorous way the house and lands to which he had fallen heir. The house might, he said, be made fit to live in, but what was left of the estate was a mere savage mountain.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.

MR. RAYMOUNT went now and then to London, but never stayed long. In the autumn he had his books removed to Yrndale, saying in London he could always get what books he wanted, but must have his own about him in the country. When they were accommodated and arranged to his mind, all on the same floor, and partly in the room next to the old library of the house, he began, for the first time in his life, to feel he had an abiding place, and talked of selling the house in Addison square.

It would have been greater progress to feel that there is no abiding in place or among things.

In the month of October, when the forsaken spider-webs were filled no more with flies, but in the morning now with dew-drops, now with hoarfrost, and the fine stimulus and gentle of the cold roused the vital spirit in every fibre to

meet it; when the sun shone a little sadly, and the wraith of the coming winter might be felt hovering in the air, major Marvel again made his appearance at Yrndale, but not quite the man he was: he had a troubled manner, and an expression on his face such as Mrs. Raymount had never before seen there: it was the look of one who had an unpleasant duty to discharge—a thing to do he would rather not do—a thing it would cost him far more to leave undone. He had brought the things he promised, every one, and at sight of them Mark brightened up amazingly.

At dinner he tried to be merry as before, but failed rather conspicuously, drank more wine than was his custom, and laid the blame on the climate. His chamber was over that of his host and hostess, and they heard him walking about for hours in the night. There was something on his mind that would not let him sleep! In the morning he appeared at the usual hour, but showed plain marks of a sleepless night. When condoled with, he answered he must seek a warmer climate, for if it was like this already, what would it be in January?

It was in reality a perfect autumn morning, of which every one except the major felt the enlivening influence—the morning of all mornings for a walk! Just as Hester was leaving the room to get ready to go with Saffy—Mark was not able for a walk—the major rose, and overtaking her in the anteroom, humbly whispered the request that she would walk with him alone, as he much wished a private conversation with her. Hester, though with a little surprise, also a little undefined anxiety, at once consented, but ran then to her mother.

"What can he want to talk to me about, mamma?" she concluded.

"How can I tell, my dear?" answered her mother with a smile. "Perhaps he will dare the daughter's refusal too."

"Oh, mamma! how can you joke about such a thing!"

"I am not quite joking, my child. There is no knowing what altogether unsuitable things men will do!—Who can blame them when they see to how many unsuitable things women consent!"

"But, mamma, he is old enough to be my father!"

"Of course he is! Poor man! it would be a hard fate to have fallen in love with both mother and daughter in vain!"

"I won't go with him, mamma!"

"You had better go, my dear. You need not be much

afraid. He is really a gentleman, however easily mistaken for something else. You must not forget how much we owe him for Mark!"

"Do you mean, mamma," said Hester, with a strange look out of her eyes, "that I ought to marry him if he asks me?"

Her mother laughed heartily. Hester was sometimes oddly stupid for a moment as to the intent of those she knew best.

"What a goose you are, my darling! Don't you know your mother from a miscreant yet?"

But in truth her mother so rarely jested that there was some excuse for her.

Relieved from the passing pang of a sudden dread, Hester went without more words and put on her bonnet. But she did not at all like going, for no one could be certain what absurd thing the major might not do.

They set out together, but, until they were some distance from the house, walked in absolute silence, which seemed to Hester to bode no good. How changed the poor man was, she thought. It would be sad indeed to have to make him still more miserable!

Steadily the major marched along, his stick under his arm like a sword, and his eyes looking straight before him.

"Cousin Hester," he said at length, "I am about to talk to you very strangely—to conduct myself indeed in a very peculiar manner. Can you imagine a man rendering himself intensely, unpardonably disagreeable, from the very best of motives?"

It was a speech very different from any to be expected of him. That he should behave oddly was natural—not that he should know he was going to do so.

"I think I could," answered Hester, wishing neither to lead him on nor deter him: whatever he had to say, the sooner it was said the better!

"Tell me," he said suddenly, after a pause just beginning to be awkward—then paused again. "—Let me ask you first," he resumed, "whether you are able to trust me a little. I am old enough to be your father—let me say your grandfather;—fancy I am your grandfather: in my soul I believe neither could wish you well more truly than myself. Tell me—trust me and tell me: what is there between you and Mr. Vavasor?"

Hester was silent. The silence would have lasted but a moment had she not had to ask herself, not what answer she

should give to his question, but what answer there was to give to it. Whether one be bound, whether one please, to answer it or not, every question has its answer: what was the answer to this one?

Before she could find it, the major resumed.

"I know," he said, "ladies think such things are not to be talked about with gentlemen; but there are exceptions to every rule—or, to put it more properly, there may be a good reason for breaking a good rule. Tell me—are you engaged to Mr. Vavasor?"

"No," answered Hester promptly.

"What is it then? Are you going to be?"

"If I answered that in the affirmative," said Hester, "would it not be much the same as acknowledging myself already engaged?"

"No! no!" cried the major vehemently. "So long as your word is not passed you remain free. The two are as far asunder as the pole from the equator. I thank God that you are not engaged to him!"

"But why?" asked Hester, with a pang of something like dread. "Why should you be so anxious about it?"

"Then he has never said he loved you?" persisted the major eagerly.

"No," replied Hester hurriedly.

She vaguely felt it best to answer directly where was no obligation to silence. What he might be wrong to ask she was not therefore wrong to answer. But her *No* trembled a little, for the doubt came with it whether, though literally, it was strictly true.

"We are friends," she added. "We trust each other a good deal."

"Trust him with nothing, least of all with your heart, my dear," said the major earnestly. "Or if you must trust him, trust him with anything, with everything, except that. He is not worthy of you."

"Do you say so to flatter me or to disparage him?"

"Entirely to disparage him. I never flatter."

"You did not surely bring me out, major Marvel, to listen to evil of one of my best friends!" said Hester, now angry.

"I certainly did—if the truth be evil—but only for your sake. The man I do not feel interest enough in even to abuse. He is a nobody."

"That merely proves you do not know him: you would not speak so of him if you did!" said Hester, widening the space between her and the major, and ready to choke with what in utterance took such gentle form.

"I am confident I should have worse to say if I knew him better. It is you who do not know him. It astonishes me that sensible people like your father and mother should let a fellow like that come prowling after you!"

"Major Marvel, if you are going to abuse my father and mother as well as lord Gartley,—" cried Hester, but he interrupted her.

"Ah, there it is!" exclaimed he bitterly. "Lord Gartley! —I have no business to interfere— no more than your gardener or coachman! but to think of an angel like you in the arms of a——"

"Major Marvel!"

"I beg ten thousand pardons, Cousin Hester! but I am so damnably in earnest I can't pick and choose my phrases. Believe me the man is not worthy of you."

"What have you got against him?—I do hate backbiting! As his friend I ask you what you have against him."

"That's the pity of it! I can't tell you anything very bad of him. But a man of whom no one has anything good to say— one of whom never a warm word is uttered——"

"I have called him my friend!" said Hester.

"That's the worst of it! If it were not for that he might go unchallenged of me!—I daresay you think it a fine thing he should have stuck to business so long! He was put to that before there was much chance of his succeeding; his aunt would not have him on her hands consuming the money she meant for the earldom. His elder brother would have had it, but he killed himself before it fell due: there are things that must not be spoken of to young ladies. I don't say your *friend* has disgraced himself; he has not: by George, it takes a good deal for that in his set! but not a soul out of his own family cares twopence for him!"

"There are some who are better liked everywhere than at home, and they're not the better sort," said Hester. "That goes for less than nothing. I know the part of him chance acquaintances cannot know. He does not bear his heart on his sleeve. I assure you, major Marvel, he is a man of uncommon gifts and——"

"Great attractions no doubt—to me invisible," blurted the major.

Hester turned from him.

"I am going home," she said. "—Luncheon is at the usual hour."

"Just one word," he cried, hurrying after her. "I swear by the living God I have no purpose or hope in interfering but to save you from a miserable future! Promise me not to marry this man, and I will settle on you a thousand a year—safe. You shall have the principal down if you prefer it."

Hester walked the faster.

"Hear me," he went on, in an agony of entreaty mingled with something like anger. "I mean it. Why should I not for Helen's child!"

He was a yard or two behind her. She turned on him with a glance of contempt. But the tears were in his eyes, and her heart smote her. He had abused her friend, but was plainly honest himself. Her countenance changed as she looked at him. He came up to her. She laid her hand on his arm, and said—

"Dear major Marvel, I will speak to you without anger. What would you think of one who took money to do the thing she ought to do? I will not ask you what you would think of one who took money to do the thing she ought not to do! I would not *promise* not to marry a beggar from the street. It *might* be disgraceful to marry the beggar; it *must* be disgraceful to promise not."

"Yes, yes, my dear! you are quite right—absolutely right," said the major humbly. "I only wanted to make you independent. You don't think half enough of yourself.—But I will dare one more question before I give you up: is he going to ask you to marry him?"

"Perhaps. I do not know."

"One more question yet: can you secure any liberty? Will your father settle anything upon you?"

"I don't know. I have never thought about anything of the kind."

"How could they let you go about with him so much and never ask him what he meant by it?"

"They could easier have asked me what I meant by it!"

"If I had such a jewel I would look after it!"

"Have me shut up like an eastern lady, I suppose!" said

Hester, laughing; "make my life miserable to make it safe! If a woman has any sense, major Marvel, she can take care of herself; if she has not, she must learn the need of it."

"Ah!" said the major sadly, "but the thousand pangs and aches and heart-sickenings! I would sooner see my child on the funeral pyre of a husband she loved, than living a merry life with one she despised!"

Hester began to feel she had not been doing the major justice.

"So would I!" she said heartily. "—You mean me well, and I shall not forget how kind you have been. Now let us go back."

"Just one thing more: if ever I can help you, you *will* let me know?"

"That I promise with all my heart," she answered. "I mean," she added, "if it be a thing I count it right to trouble you about."

The major's face fell.

"I see!" he said; "you won't promise anything! Well, stick to that, and *don't* promise."

"You wouldn't have me come to you for a new bonnet, would you?"

"By George! shouldn't I be proud to fetch you the best in Regent street by the next train!"

"Or saddle the pony for me?"

"Try me.—But I won't have any more chaff. I throw myself on your generosity, and trust you to remember there is an old man that loves you, and has more money than he knows what to do with."

"I think," said Hester, "the day is sure to come when I shall ask your help. In the meantime, if it be any pleasure to you to know it, I trust you heartily. You are all wrong about lord Gartley though. He is not what you think him."

She gave him her hand. The major took it in his own soft small one—small enough almost for the hilt of an Indian tulwar—and pressed it devoutly to his lips. She did not draw it away, and he felt she trusted him.

Now that the hard duty was done, and if not much good yet no harm had resulted, he went home a different man. A pang of fear for Hester in the power of "that ape Gartley" would now and then pass through him; but he had now a right to look after her, and who could tell what might not turn up!

His host congratulated him on looking so much better for his walk. Hester hastened to her mother, and recounted their strange conversation.

"Only think, mamma!" she said; "he offered me a thousand a year not to marry lord Gartley!"

"Hester!"

"He does not like the earl, and he does like me; so he wants me not to marry him. That is all!"

"I thought I could have believed anything of him, but this goes almost beyond belief!"

"Why should it, mamma? There is an odder thing still: instead of hating him for it, I like him better than before."

"Are you sure he has no notion of making room for himself?"

"Quite sure. He would have it he was old enough to be my grandfather. But you know he is not that!"

"Perhaps," said her mother merrily, "as he is too young to be your grandfather, you wouldn't mind if he were a little younger yet!"

"I suppose you had a presentiment I should like him, and left him for me, mamma!" returned Hester in like vein.

"But seriously, Hester, is it not time we knew what lord Gartley means?"

"Oh, mamma! please don't talk like that!"

"It does sound disagreeable—vulgar, if you like, my child; but I cannot help being anxious about you. If he does not love you he has no right to court your company so much."

"I encourage it, mamma. I like him."

"That is what makes me afraid."

"It will be time enough to think about it if he comes again now he has got the earldom."

"Would you like to be a countess, Hester?"

"I would rather not think about it. It may never make any difference whether I should like it or not."

"I can't help thinking it strange he should be so much with you and never say a word!"

"Might you not just as well say it was strange of me to be so much with him, or of you, mammy dear, to let him come so much to the house?"

"It was neither your part nor mine to say anything. Your father even has always said he would scorn to ask a man his *intentions*: either he was fit to be in his daughter's company,

or he was not. Either he must get rid of him, or leave his daughter to manage her own affairs. He is quite American in his way of looking at those matters."

"Don't you think he is right, mother? If I let lord Gartley come, surely he is not to blame for coming!"

"Only if you should have got fond of him, and it were to come to nothing?"

"It can't come to nothing, and neither of us will be the worse for it, I trust. As to what I think about him, I don't feel as if I quite knew; and I don't think at present I need ask myself. I am afraid you think me very cool; and in truth I don't quite understand myself; but perhaps if one tries to do right as things come up, one may get on without understanding one's self. I don't think, so far as I can make out, St. Paul understood himself always. Miss Dasomma says a great part of music is the agony of the musician after the understanding of himself. I will try to do what is right—you may be sure of that, mother."

"I am sure of that, my dear—quite sure; and I won't trouble you more about it. You may imagine I should not like to see my Hester a love-sick maiden, pining and wasting away!"

"Depend upon it, mamma, if I found myself in that state no one else should discover it," said Hester, partly in play, but thoroughly in earnest.

"That only reveals how little you know about such things, my love! You could no more hide it from the eyes of your mother than you could a husband."

"Such things have been hid before now, mamma! And yet why should a woman ever hide anything? I must think about that! From one's own mother? No; when I am dying of love, you shall know, mammy. But it won't be to-morrow or the next day."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MAJOR AND COUSIN HELEN'S BOYS.

THE major was in no haste to leave, but he spent most of his time with Mark, and was in nobody's way. Mark was very happy with the major. The nature of the man was so childlike

that, although he knew little of the deep things in which Mark was at home, his presence was never an interruption to the child's thoughts; and when the boy made a remark in the upward direction, he would look so grave, and hold such a peace that the child never missed the lacking words of reponse. Who knows what the man may not have gained even from silent communion with the child!

One day he was telling the boy how he had been out alone on a desolate hill all night; how he heard the beasts roaring round him, and not one of them came near him.

"Did you *see him?*" asked Mark.

"See who, sonny?" returned the major.

"The one between you and them," answered Mark in a subdued tone; and from the tone the major understood.

"No," he answered; and taking into his the spirit of the child, went on: "I don't think any one sees him now-a-days."

"Isn't it a pity?" said Mark. Then after a thoughtful pause, he resumed: "Well, not see him just with your eyes, you know! But old Jonathan at the cottage—he has got no eyes—at least none to speak of, for they're no good to see with—he always speaks of seeing the people he has been talking with—and in a way he does see them, don't you think? But I sometimes fancy I must have seen *him* with my very eyes when I was young; and that's why I keep always expecting to see him again—some day, you know—some day. Don't you think I shall, majie?"

"I hope so, indeed, Mark!—It would be a bad job if we were never to see him!" he added, suddenly struck with a feeling he had never had before.

"Yes, indeed; that it would!" responded the child. "Why, where would be the good of it all, you know! That's what we came here for—ain't it? God calls children—I know he calls some, for he said, "Samuel! Samuel!'—I wish he would call me!"

"What would you say?" asked the major.

"I would say—'Here I am, God! What is it?' We mustn't keep God waiting, you know!"

The major felt, like Wordsworth with the leech-gatherer, that the child was there to give him "apt admonishment." Could God have ever called him and he not have listened? Of course it was all a fancy! And yet, as he looked at the child, and met his simple believing eyes, he felt he had been a great sinner,

and the best things he had done were not fit to be looked at. Happily there were no conventional religious phrases in the mouth of the child to repel him; his father and mother had a horror of pharisaic Christianity: I use the word *pharisaic* in its true sense—as *formal*, not as *hypocritical*. They had both in their youth seen too many religious prigs to endure temple-white-wash on their children. Except what they heard at church, hardly a special religious phrase ever entered their ears. Those of the New Testament were avoided from reverence, lest they should grow common, and fail of their purpose when the children read them for themselves. "But if this succeeded with Hester and Mark, how with Cornelius?" I answer, if to that youth's education had been added the common *forms* of a religious one, he would have been—not perhaps a worse fellow, but a far more offensive one, and harder to influence for good. Inclined to scoff, he would have had the religious material for jest and ribaldry ready to his hand; while if he had wanted to start as a hypocrite, it would have been specially easy. The true teaching for children is persons, history, and doctrine in the old sense of the New Testament—instruction in righteousness, that is—not human theory about divine facts.

The major was still at Yrndale when, in the gloomy month to which for reasons he had shifted his holiday, Cornelius arrived. The major could hardly accept him as one of the family, so utterly inferior did he show. There was a kind of mean beauty about his face and person, and an evident varnish on his manners which revolted him. "That lad will bring grief on them!" he said to himself. Cornelius was more than usually polite to the major: he was in the army, the goal of his aspiration! but he laughed in private at what he called his vulgarity, and delighted to annoy Hester with remarks upon her "ancient adorer." Because he prized nothing of the kind, he could see nothing of his essential worth, and took note merely of his blunders, personal ways, and oddities. The major was not properly vulgar, only ill-bred: he had not had a sharp enough mother, jealous for the good manners as well as good behaviour of her boy. There are many ladylike mothers—ladylike because their mothers were ladies and taught them to behave like ladies—whose children do not turn out ladies and gentlemen because they do not teach them as they were taught themselves. Cornelius had been taught—and had learned nothing but manners. He was vulgar with a vulgarity that

went miles deeper than that of the major. The major would have been sorry to find he had hurt the feelings of a dog; Cornelius would have whistled on learning that he had hurt the feelings of a woman. If the major was a clown, Cornelius was a cad. The one was capable of genuine sympathy; the other not yet of any. The latter loved his own paltry self, counting it the most precious thing in creation; the former was conceited, it is true, but had no lofty opinion of himself. Hence it was that he thought so much of his small successes. His boasting of them was mainly an uneasy effort at establishing himself comfortably in his own eyes and the eyes of friends. It was little more than a dog's turning of himself round and round before he lies down. He knew they were small things of which he boasted, but he had no other, and scorned to invent: his great things, those in which he had shown himself a true and generous man, he looked on as matters of course, nor recognized anything in them worth thinking of. He was not a great man but had elements of greatness; he had no vision of truth, but obeyed his moral instincts: when those should blossom into true intents, as one day they must, he would be a great man. As yet he was not safe. But how blessed a thing that God will judge us and man shall not! Where we see no difference, he sees ages of difference. The very thing that looks to us for condemnation may to the eyes of God show in its heart ground of excuse, yea of partial justification. Only God's excuse is, I suspect, seldom coincident with the excuse a man makes for himself. If any one thinks that God will not search closely into things, I say there could not be such a God. He will see the uttermost farthing paid. His excuses are as just as his condemnations.

In respect of Cornelius, the major was more careful than usual not to make himself disagreeable, for his feelings put him on his guard: there are not a few who behave better to those they do not like than to those they do. He thus flattered, without intending it, the vanity of the youth, who did not therefore spare his criticism behind his back. Hester usually answered in his defence, but sometimes would not condescend to justify him to such an accuser. One day she lost her temper with her beam-eyed brother.

"Cornelius, the major may have his faults," she said, "but you are not the man to find them out. He is ten times the gentleman you are."

As she began the speech the major entered the room, but she did not see him. He asked Cornelius to go with him for a walk. Hoping he had but just come in, and a little anxious, Cornelius agreed. As they walked he behaved better than he had ever done before—until he had persuaded himself that the major had heard nothing, when he speedily relapsed into his former manner—one of condescension and thin offence to nearly every one about him. But all the time the major was studying him, and saw into him deeper than his mother or Hester. He descried a certain furtive anxiety in the youth's eyes when he was silent, an unrest as of trouble he would not show. "The rascal has been doing something wrong," he said to himself; "he is afraid of being found out! And found out he is sure to be; he has not the brains to hide a thing It's not murder—he ain't got the pluck for that; but it may be petty larceny!"

The weeks went on. Cornelius's month wore out, but he seemed restless for it to be gone, making no response to the lamentations of the children that Christmas was so near, and their new home such a grand one for keeping it in, and Corney not to be with them! He did not show them much kindness, but a little went a great way with them, and they loved him.

"Mind you're well before I come again, Markie," he said as he took his leave; "you're not a pleasant sight moping about the house!"

The tears came in the child's eyes. He was not moping—only weakly, and, even when looking a little sad, was quite happy.

"I don't think I mope, Hessy—do I?" he said. "What does Corney mean? I don't want to do what ain't nice. I want to be pleasant!"

"Never mind, Markie dear," answered Hester "it's only that you are not very strong—not up to a game of romps as you used to be. You will be merry again one day."

"I am merry enough," replied Mark; "only somehow the merry goes all about inside me, and don't want to come out—like the little bird, you know, that wouldn't go out of its cage though I left the door open for it. I suppose it felt just like me. I shouldn't care if I were never to go out of the house again."

He was indeed happy enough—more than happy when *Majie* was there. They would be together most days all day

long. And the amount of stories Mark, with all his contemplativeness, could swallow, was amazing. That may be good food which cannot give life.

But the family-party was soon to be broken up—not by subtraction but by addition. The presence of the major had done nothing to spoil the homeness of home, but that was now for a time to be set aside.

There is something wrong with anyone who, entering a house of any kind, makes it less of a home. The angel-stranger makes the children of a house more aware of their home; they delight in showing it to him, for he takes interest in all that belongs to the family-life—the only blessed life in heaven or upon earth, and sees the things as the children see them. But the stranger of this world, not of the angel-sort, makes the very home by his presence feel out of doors.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MISS VAVASOR.

A LETTER came from lord Gartley, begging Mrs. Raymount to excuse the liberty he took, and allow him to ask whether he might presume upon her kind wish, casually expressed, to welcome his aunt to the hospitality of Yrndale. London was empty, therefore her engagements, although Parliament was sitting, were few, and he believed if Mrs. Raymount would take the trouble to invite her, she might be persuaded to avail herself of the courtesy. "I am well aware," he wrote, "of the seeming rudeness of this suggestion, but you, dear Mrs. Raymount, can read between lines, and understand that it is no presumptuous desire to boast my friends to my relatives that makes me venture what to other eyes than yours might well seem an arrogance. If you have not room for us, or if our presence would spoil your Christmas party, do not hesitate to put us off, I beg. I shall understand you, and say nothing to my rather peculiar but most worthy aunt, waiting a more convenient season."

The desired invitation was immediately dispatched—with some wry faces on the part of the head of the house, who, however, would not oppose what his wife wished.

Notwithstanding his knowledge of men, that is, of fundamental human nature, Mr. Raymount was not good at reading a man who made himself agreeable, and did not tread on the toes of any of his theories—of which, though mostly good, he made too much, as every man of theory does. I would not have him supposed a man of theory only: such a man is hardly man at all; but while he thought of the practice, he too sparingly practised the thought. He laid too much upon words altogether, especially words in print, attributing more power to them for the regeneration of the world than was reasonable. If he had known how few cared a pin's-point for those in which he poured out his mind, just flavoured a little with his heart, he would have lost hope altogether. If he had known how his arguments were sometimes used against the very principles he used them for, it would have enraged him. Perhaps the knowledge of how few of those who admired his words acted upon them, would have made him think how little he struggled himself to do the things which by persuasion and argument he drove home upon the consciences of others. He had not yet believed that to do right is to do more for the regeneration of the world than any quality or amount of teaching can do. "*The Press*" no doubt has a great power for good, but every man possesses, involved in the very fact of his consciousness, a greater power than any verbal utterance of truth whatever. It is righteousness—not of words, not of theories, but in being, that is in vital action, which alone is the prince of the power of the spirit. Where that is, everything has its perfect work; where that is not, the man is not a power—is but a walker in a vain show.

He did not see through or even into Gartley, who was by no means a profound or intentional hypocrite. But he never started on a new relation with any suspicions. Men of the world called him too good, therefore a fool. It was not however any over-exalted idea of human nature that led him astray in his judgment of the individual; it was merely that he was too much occupied with what he counted his work—with his theories first, then his writing of them, then the endless defending of them, to care to see beyond the focus of his short-sighted eyes. Vavasor was a gentlemanly fellow, and that went a long way with him. He did not oppose him, and that went another long way: of all things he could not bear to be opposed in what he so plainly saw to be true, nor could think why every

other honest man should not at once also see it true. He forgot that the difficulty is not so much in recognizing the truth of a proposition, as in recognizing what the proposition is. In the higher regions of thought the recognition of what a proposition is, and the recognition of its truth are more than homologous—they are the same thing. The ruin of a man's teaching comes of his followers, such as having never touched the foundation he has laid, build upon it wood, hay, and stubble, fit only to be burnt. Therefore, if only to avoid his worst foes, his admirers, a man should avoid system. The more correct a system the worse will it be misunderstood; its professed admirers will take both its errors and their misconceptions of its truths and hold them forth as its essence.

Mr. Raymount, then, was not the man to take that care of his daughter which people of the world think necessary. But, on the whole, even with the poor education they have, women, if let alone, would take better care of themselves than father or brother will for them. I say *on the whole;* there may well be some exceptions The only thing making men more fit to take care of women than the women themselves, is their greater opportunity of knowing the character of men concerned—which knowledge, alas! they generally use against those they claim to protect, concealing facts from the woman to whom they ought to be conveyed—sometimes indeed having already deluded her with the persuasion that that is of no consequence in the man which is essential in herself!

The day before Christmas-eve the expected visitors arrived—just in time to dress for dinner.

The family was assembled in the large old drawing-room of dingy white and tarnished gold when Miss Vavasor entered. She was tall and handsome and had been handsomer, for she was not one of those who, growing within, grow more beautiful without as they grow older. She was dressed in the plainest, handsomest fashion—in black velvet, fitting well her fine figure, and half covered with point lace of a very thick texture—Venetian probably. The only stones she wore were diamonds. Her features were regular; her complexion was sallow, but not too sallow for the sunset of beauty; her eyes were rather large, and of a clear grey; her expression was very still, self-contained and self-dependent, without being self-satisfied; her hair was more than half grey, but very plentiful. Altogether she was one with an evident claim to distinction, never asserted, be-

cause always yielded. To the merest glance she showed herself well born, well nurtured, well trained, and well kept, hence well preserved. At an age when a poor woman must have been old and wrinkled, and half undressed for the tomb, she was enough to make any company look distinguished by her mere presence.

Her manner was as simple as her dress—without a trace of the vulgarity of condescension, or the least more stiffness than was becoming with persons towards whose acquaintance, the rather that she was their guest, it was but decent to advance gently, while it was also prudent to protect her line of retreat, lest it should prove desirable to draw back. She spoke with the utmost readiness and simplicity, looked with interest at Hester but without curiosity, had the sweetest smile at hand for use as often as wanted—a modest smile which gleamed but a moment and was gone. There was nothing in her behaviour to indicate a consciousness of error from her sphere. The world had given her the appearance of much of which Christ gives the reality. For the world very oddly prizes the form whose informing reality it despises.

Lord Gartley was in fine humour. He had not before appeared to so great advantage. Vavasor had never put off his company-manner with Hester's family, but Gartley was almost merry, quite graciously familiar—as if set on bringing out the best points of his friends, and preventing his aunt's greatness from making them abashed, or their own too much modesty from showing a lack of breeding. But how shall I describe his face when major Marvel entered! he had not even feared his presence. A blank dismay, such as could seldom have been visible there, a strange mingling of annoyance, contempt, and fear, clouded it with an inharmonious expression, which made him look much like a discomfited commoner. In a moment he had overcome the unworthy sensation, and was again impassive and seemingly cool. The major did not choose to see him at first, but was presented to Miss Vavasor by their hostess as her cousin. He appeared a little awed by the fine woman, and comported himself with the dignity which awe gives, behaving like any gentleman used to society. Seated next her at dinner, he did not once allude to pig-sticking or tiger-shooting, to elephants or niggers, or even to his regiment or India, but talked about the last opera and the last play, with some good criticisms on the acting he had last seen, conducting himself in such a manner as would have made lord Gartley quite grateful to

him, had he not put it down to the imperial presence of his high-born aunt, cowing his inferior nature. But while indeed the major was naturally checked by a self-sufficing feminine presence, the cause that mainly operated to his suppression was of another kind and from an opposite source.

He had been strongly tempted all that day to a very different behaviour. Remembering what he had heard of the character of the lady, and of the relation between her and her nephew, he knew at once, when told she was coming, that lord Gartley was bringing her down with the hope of gaining her consent to his asking Hester to marry him. "The rascal knows," said the major to himself, "that nothing human could stand out against her! There is only her inferior position to urge from any point of view!" And therewith arose his temptation: might he not so comport himself before the aunt as to disgust her with the family, and save his lovely cousin from being sacrificed to a heartless noodle? To the extent of his means he would do what money could to console her! It was at least better than the empty title! He recalled the ways of his youth, remembered with what delightful success he had annoyed aunts and cousins and lady friends, chuckled to think that some of them had for months passed him without even looking at him: "I'll settle the young ape's hash for him!" he said to himself. "It only wants a little free-and-easiness with my lady to do the deed. It can cost me nothing except her good opinion, which I can afford. But I'll lay you anything to nothing, if she knew the weight of my four quarters, she would have me herself after all! I don't quite think myself a lady-killer: by George, my—hum!—*entourage* is against that, but where money is money can! Only I don't want her, and my money is for her betters! What damned jolly fun it will be to send her out of the house in a rage!—and a good deed done too!—By George I'll do it! See if I don't!"

He might possibly have found it not quite so easy to shock Miss Vavasor as some of his late country cousins.

In this resolution he had begun to dress, but before he had finished had begun to have his doubts. Would it not be dishonourable? Would it not bring such indignation upon him that even Mark would turn away? And Hester would never accept so much as a postage-stamp from him if he brought disgrace on her family, and drove away her suitor! Besides, he might fail! They might come to an understanding and leave him out in the cold! By the time he was dressed

he had resolved to leave the fancy alone, and behave like a gentleman.

But now with every sip of his wine the temptation came stronger and stronger. The spirit of fun kept stirring in him. Not merely for the sake of Hester, but for the joke of the thing, he was tempted, and had to keep fighting the impulse till the struggle was almost more than he could endure. And just from this came the subdued character of his demeanour! What had threatened to destroy his manners for the evening, turned out the corrective of his usual behaviour: as an escape from the strife within him, he tried to make himself agreeable. Miss Vavasor being good-natured was soon interested, and by and by pleased with him. This reacted; he began to be pleased with her, and was more at his ease. Therewith came the danger not unforeseen of some at the table: he began to tell one of his stories. But he saw Hester look anxious; and that was enough to put him on his careful honour. Ere dinner was over he had said to himself that if only the nephew were half as good a fellow as the aunt, he would have been happy to give the young people his blessing and a handsome present.

"By Jove!" said lord Gartley, "the scoundrel is not such a low fellow after all! I think I will try to forgive him!"

Now and then he would listen across the table to their talk, and everything the major said that pleased his aunt pleased him amazingly. At one little witticism of hers in answer to one of the major's, he burst into such a hearty laugh that his aunt looked up.

"You are amused, Gartley!" she said.

"You are so clever aunt!" he returned.

"Major Marvel has all the merit of my wit," she answered.

This gave the *coup de grâce* to the major's temptation to do evil that good might come, and sacrifice himself that Hester might not be sacrificed.

After dinner, they sat down to whist, of which Miss Vavasor was very fond. When however she found they did not play for money, though she praised the asceticism of the manner, she plainly took little interest in the game. The major therefore, who had no scruples either of conscience or of pocket in the matter, suggested that his lordship and Hester should take their places, and proposed cribbage to her—for what points she pleased. To this she acceded at once. The major was the best player in his regiment, but Miss Vavasor had much the

better of him, and regretted she had not set the points higher. All her life she had had money in the one eye and the poor earldom in the other. The major laid down his half-crowns so cheerfully, with such a look of satisfaction even, that she came quite to like the man, and to hope he would be there for some time, and prove as fond of cribbage as she was. The fear of lord Gartley as to the malign influence of the major vanished entirely.

And now that he was more at his ease, and saw that his aunt was at least far from displeased with Hester, lord Gartley began to radiate his fascinations. All his finer nature appeared. He grew playful, even teasing; gave again and again a quick repartee; and sang as his aunt had hever heard him sing before. But when Hester sang, the thing was done, and the aunt won; she perceived at once what a sensation such a singer would make in her heavenly circle! She had, to be sure, a little *too* much expression, and sang well enough for a professional, which was too well for a lady with no object in her singing except to please! But in manner and style, to mention neither beauty nor accomplishment, she would be a decided gain to the family, possessing even in herself a not inconsiderable counterpoise to the title. Then who could tell but this cousin—who seemed to have plenty of money, he parted with it so easily—might be moved by like noble feelings with her own to make a poor countess a rich one. The thing, I say, was settled, so far as the chief family-worshipper was concerned.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

COURTSHIP IN EARNEST.

I DO not care to dwell upon what followed. Christmas was a merry day to all but the major, who did not like the engagement any better than before. He found refuge and consolation with Mark. The boy was merry in a mild, reflected way, because the rest were merry, but preferred his own room with "dear majie," to the drawing-room with the grand lady. He would steal from it, assured that in a moment the major would be after him, to keep him company, and tell him *such* stories!

Lord Gartley now began to make love with full intent and purpose. "How could she listen to him!" says this and that

reader? I can but echo the exclamation, "How could she!" To explain the thing is more than I am bound to undertake. As I may have said twenty times before, how this woman will have this man is one of the deeper mysteries of the world—yea, of the maker of the world, perhaps. One thing I may fairly suggest—that, where men see no reason why a woman should love this or that man, she may see something in him which they do not see, or do not value as she does. Alas for her if she only imagines it! Another thing we may be sure of—that in few cases does the woman see what the men know: much of that which is manifest to the eyes of the male world, is by that male world scrupulously hidden from the female. One thing more I would touch upon, which men are more likely never to have thought of than to have forgotten: that the love which a beautiful woman gives a man, is in itself not an atom more precious than that which a plain woman gives. In the two hearts they are the same, if the hearts be like; if not, the advantage may well be with the plain woman. The love of a beautiful woman is no more thrown away than the love of the plainest. The same holds with regard to women of differing intellectual development or endowment. But when a woman of high hopes and aims—a woman filled with eternal aspirations after life, and unity with her divine original, gives herself to such a one as lord Gartley, I cannot help thinking she must have seriously mistaken some things both in him and in herself, the consequence, probably, of some self-sufficiency, ambition, or other fault in her which requires the correction of suffering.

Hester found her lover now very pleasant. If sometimes he struck a jarring chord, she was always able to find some way of accounting for it, or explaining it away—if not entirely to her satisfaction, yet so far that she was able to go on hoping everything, and for the present to put off any further consideration of the particular phenomenon to the time when, like most self-deceiving women, she *scarcely* doubted she would have greater influence over him—the time, namely, when, man and wife, they would be one flesh. But where there is not already a far deeper unity than marriage can give, marriage itself can do little to bring two souls together—may do much to drive them asunder.

She began to put him in training, as she thought, for the help he was to give her with her loved poor. "What a silly!" exclaims a common-minded girl-reader? "That was not the

way to land her fish!" But let those who are content to have fishy husbands, net or hook and land them as they can; a woman has more in herself than any husband can give her, though he may take much from her. Lord Gartley had no real conception of Hester's outlook on life, and regarded all her endeavour as born of the desire to perfect his voice and singing. With such teaching he must soon, he imagined, become her worthy equal. He had no notion of the sort of thing genius is. Few have. They think of it as something supreme in itself, whereas it is altogether dependent on truth in the inward parts. It may last for a time separated from truth, but it dies its life, not lives it. Its utterance depends on enthusiasm; all enthusiasm depends on love and nobility of purpose; and love and nobility depend upon truth—that is live truth. Not millions of years, without an utter regeneration of nature, could make such a man as Gartley sing like Hester. His faculties were in the power of decay, therefore of the things that pass; Hester was of the powers that give life, and keep things going and growing. She sang because of the song that was in her soul. Her music came out of her being, not out of her brain and her throat. If such a one as Gartley can sing, there is no reason why he should be kept singing. In all the arts the man who does not reach to higher things, falls away from the things he has. The love of money will ruin poet, painter, or musician.

For Hester the days now passed in pleasure. I fear the closer contact with lord Gartley, however different he was in her thought from what he was in his own fact, influenced at least the *rate* of her growth towards the upper regions. We cannot be heart and soul and self in the company of the evil—and the untrue is the evil, however beheld as an angel of light in the mirage of our loving eyes, without sad loss. Her prayers were not so fervent, her aspirations not so strong. I see again the curl on the lip of a certain kind of girl-reader! Her judgment here is but foolishness: she is much too low in the creation yet, be she as high-born and beautiful as a heathen goddess, to understand the things of which I am writing. But she has got to understand them—they are not mine—and the understanding may come in dread pain, and dire dismay. Hester was one of those who in their chambers are not alone, but with him who seeth in secret; and not to get so near to God in her chamber—I can but speak in human figure—did not augur well for the new relationship. But the Lord is

mindful of his own. He does not forget because we forget. Horror and pain may come, but not because he forgets—nay, just because he does not forget. That is a thing God never does.

There are many women who would have bewitched Gartley more, yet great was his delight in the presence and converse of Hester, and he yielded himself with pleasing grace. Inclined to rebel at times when wearied with her demands on his attention and endeavour, he yet condescended to them with something of the playfulness with which one would humour a child; he would have a sweet revenge by and by! His turn would come soon, and he would have to instruct her in many things she was now ignorant of! She had never moved in his great world: he must teach her its laws, instruct her how to shine, how to make the most of herself, how to do honour to his choice! He had but the vaguest idea of the *folly* that possessed her. He thought of her relation to the poor but as a passing—indeed a past phase of a hitherto objectless life. Anything beyond a little easy benevolence would be impossible to the wife of lord Gartley! That she should be contemplating the pursuit of her former objects with even greater freedom and devotion than before, would have seemed to him a thing utterly incredible. And Hester would have been equally staggered to find he had so failed to understand her after the way she had opened her heart to him. To imagine that for anything she would forsake the work she had been sent to do! So things went on *upon a mutual misunderstanding*—to make a bull for my purpose—each in the common meaning of the phrase getting more and more in love with the other every day, while in reality they were separating farther and farther, in as much as each was revelling in thoughts that were alien to the other. An occasional blasting doubt would cross the mind of Hester, but she banished it like an evil spectre.

Miss Vavasor continued the most pleasant and unexacting of guests. Her perfect breeding, sustained by a quiet temper and kindly disposition, was easily, by simple hearts, taken for the sweetness it only simulated. To people like Miss Vavasor does the thought never occur—what if the thing they find it so necessary to simulate should actually in itself be indispensable? What if their necessity of simulating it comes of its absolute necessity?

She found the company of the major agreeable in the slow time she had for her nephew's sake to pass with such primitive

people, and was glad of what she might otherwise have counted barely endurable. For Mr. Raymount, he would not leave what he counted his work for any goddess in creation: Hester had got her fixedness of purpose through him, and its direction through her mother. But it was well he did not give Miss Vavasor much of his company: if they had been alone together for a quarter of an hour, they would have parted sworn foes, hating each other almost as much as is possible without having loved. So the major, instead of putting a stop to the unworthy alliance, found himself actually furthering the affair, doing his part with the lady on whom the success of the enemy depended. He was still now and then tempted to break through and have a hideous revenge; but, with no great sense of personal dignity to restrain him, he was really a man of honour and behaved like one, curbing himself with no little severity.

So the time went on till after twelfth night, when Miss Vavasor took her leave for a round of visits, and lord Gartley went up to town, with intention thereafter to pay a visit to his property, such as it was. He would return to Yrndale in three weeks or a month, when final arrangements for the marriage would be made.

A correspondence naturally commenced, and Hester, unwarned by former experience, received his first letter joyfully. But, the letter read, lo, there was the same disappointment as of old! And as the first letter so the last and all between. In Hester's presence, she suggesting and leading, he would utter things that seemed to indicate the presence of what she would have in him; but alone in his room, without guide to his thoughts, without the stimulus of her presence or the sense of her moral atmosphere, the best things he could write were poor enough; they had no bones in them, and no other fire than that which the thought of Hester's loveliness could supply. So his letters were not inspiriting. They absorbed her atmosphere, and after each followed a period of mental asphyxy. Had they been those of a person indifferent to her, she would have called them stupid, thrown them down, and thought no more of them. As it was, I doubt if she read many of them twice over. But all would be well, she said to herself, when they met again. It was her absence that oppressed him, poor fellow! He was out of spirits, and could not write! He had not the faculty for writing that some had! Her father had told her of men that were excellent talkers, but set them down pen in hand and not

a thought would come! Was it not to his praise rather than blame? Was not the presence of a man's own kind the best inspirer of his speech? It was his loving human nature—she would have persuaded herself, but never quite succeeded—that made utterance in a letter impossible to him! Yet she *would* have liked a little genuine, definite response to the things she wrote! He seemed to have nothing to say from himself! He would assent and echo, but any response he gave was always such as made her doubt whether she had written plainly, invariably suggesting things of this world and not of the unseen, the world of thought and being. And when she mentioned work, he always replied as if she meant an undefined something called *doing good*. He never doubted the failure of that foolish concert given by ladies and gentlemen to the riff-raff of London had taught her that whether men be equal in the sight of God or not, any attempt on the part of their natural superiors to treat them as equals can be only disastrous.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CALAMITY.

ONE afternoon the post brought, side by side with a letter from lord Gartley, one in a strange-looking, cramped hand, which Mrs. Raymount recognized.

"What can Sarah be writing about?" she said, a sudden bodement of evil crossing her mind.

"The water-rate, perhaps," answered Hester, opening her own letter as she withdrew to read it. For she did not like to read Gartley's letters before her mother—not from shyness, but from shame: she would have liked ill to have her learn how poor her Gartley's utterances were upon paper. But ere she was six slow steps away, she turned at a cry from her mother.

"Good heavens! what can it be? Something has happened to him!" said Mrs. Raymount.

Her face was white almost as the paper she held. Hester put her arms round her.

"Mother! mother! what is it?" she cried. "Anything about Corney?"

"I thought something would come to stop it all! We were too happy!" she moaned, and began to tremble.

"Come to papa, mammy dear," said Hester, frightened.

She stood as if fixed to the ground.

Mr. Raymount's letters had been carried to him in the study, and one of them had put him into like perturbation. He was pacing up and down the room almost as white as his wife, but his pallor was that of rage.

"The scoundrel!" he groaned, and seizing a chair hurled it against the wall. "I had the suspicion he was a mean dog—now all the world will know it—and that he is my son! What have I done—what has my wife done, that we should give being to a vile hound like this? What is there in her or in me——?"

There he paused, for he remembered: far back in the family some five generations or so, one had been hanged for forgery.

He threw himself in a chair, and wept with rage and shame. He had for years been writing of family and social duties; here was his illustration! His books were his words; here was his deed! How should he ever show himself again! He would leave the country! Damn the property! But the rascal should never succeed to it! Mark should have it—if he lived! But he hoped he would die! He would like to poison them all, and go with them out of the disgrace—all but the dog that had brought it on them! Hester marry an earl! Not if the truth would prevent it! Her engagement must at once be broken! Lord Gartley marry the sister of a thief!

While he was thus raging a knock came to the door, and a maid entered.

"Please, sir," she said, "Miss Raymount says will you come to mis'ess: she's taken bad!"

This brought him to himself. The horrible fate was hers too! He must go to her. How could she have heard the vile news? She must have heard it! what else could make her ill! He followed the maid to the lawn. It was a cold morning of January sunshine. There stood his wife in his daughter's arms, trembling from head to food, and apparently without power of motion! He asked no question, took her in his arms, bore her to her room, laid her on the bed, and sat down beside her, hardly caring if she died, for the sooner they were all dead the better! She lay like one dead, and do what she could, Hester was unable to bring her to herself. But by and by the doctor came.

She had caught up the letter, and as her father sat there, she handed it to him. The substance and manner of it were these:

"Dear mistress, it is time to let you know of the goings on here. I never held with bearing of tales against my fellow-servants, and perhaps it's worse to bring tales against Master Cornelius, as is your own flesh and blood, but what am I to do as was left in charge, and to keep the house respectable? He's not been home this three nights; and you ought to know as there's a young lady, his cousin from New Zealand, as is come to the house a three or four times since you went away, and stayed a long time with him, though it is some time now that I 'ain't seen her. She is a pretty, modest-looking young lady; though I must say I was ill pleased when Mr. Cornelius would have her stay all night; and I up and told him if she was his cousin it wasn't as if she was his sister, and it wouldn't do, and I would walk out of the house if he insisted on me making up a bed for her. Then he laughed in my face, and told me I was an old fool, and he was only making game of me. But that was after he done his best to persuade me, and I wouldn't be persuaded. I told him if neither he nor the young lady had a character to keep, I had one to lose, and I wouldn't. But I don't think he said anything to her about staying all night; for she come down the stair as innocent-like as any dove, and bid me good night smiling, and they walked away together. And I wouldn't by no means have took upon me to be a spy, nor I wouldn't have mentioned the thing, for it's none o' my business so long as nobody doesn't abuse the house as is my charge; but he 'ain't been home for three nights, and there's the feelings of a mother! and it's my part to let her know as her son 'ain't slept in his own bed for three nights, and that's a fact. So no more at present, and I hope, dear mistress, it won't kill you to hear on it. O why did his father leave him alone in London, with none but an old woman like me, as he always did look down upon, to look after him! Your humble servant for twenty years to command, Sarah Holdich."

Mrs. Raymount had not read the half of this. It was enough to learn he had not been home for three nights. Parents with no reasonable ground for believing their children good, nay with considerable ground for believing them worse than many, are yet seized as by the awfully incredible when they hear they are going wrong! Helen Raymount concluded that her boy had

turned into bad ways because left alone in London, although she knew he had never taken to good ways while they were all with him. If he had never gone right, why should she wonder he had gone wrong?

The doctor was sitting by the bedside, watching the effect of something he had given her. Mr. Raymount rose and led Hester from the room—sternly, as if she were to blame for it all.

Some people, when they are angry, speak as if they were angry with the person to whom they are in fact looking for comfort. When in trouble few of us are masters enough of ourselves, because few of us are children enough of our Father in heaven, to behave like gentlemen—after the fashion of "the first stock-father of gentleness." But Hester understood, and did not resent.

"Is this all your mother knows, Hester?" said her father, pointing to the letter in his hand.

She told him her mother had read but the first sentence or two.

He was silent—returned to the bedside, and stood silent.

The life of his dearest had been suddenly withered at the root, like the gourd of Jonah, and she had not learned nearly the worst!

His letter was from his wife's brother, in whose bank Cornelius was a clerk. A considerable deficit had been discovered in his accounts. He had not been to the bank for two days before, and no trace of him was to be found. His uncle, from regard to the feelings of his sister, had not allowed the thing to transpire, but had requested the head of his office to be silent: he would wait his brother-in-law's reply before taking any steps. He feared the misguided youth had reckoned on the forbearance of an uncle; but for the sake of his own future, if for no other reason, the thing could not be passed over!

"Passed over!" Had Gerald Raymount been a Roman with the power of life and death over his children, he would in his present mood have put his son to death with his own hands. But for his wife's illness he would have been already on the way to London to repay the missing money; for his son's sake he would not cross his threshold! So at least he said to himself.

But something must be done. He must send some one! Who was there to send? There was Hester! With her uncle

she was a favourite! nor would she dread the interview, which, as the heat of his rage yielded to a cold despair, he felt would be to him an unendurable humiliation. For he had had many arguments, not always quite friendly, with this same brother-in-law concerning the way he brought up his children: they had all turned out well, and here was his miserable son a felon, disgracing both families! Yes; let Hester go! There were things a woman could do better than a man! Hester was no child now, but a capable woman! While she was gone he could be making up his mind what to do with the wretched boy!

He led Hester again from her mother's room to his, and gave her her uncle's letter to read. Tell her its content he could not. He watched her as she read—watched his own heart, as it were, in her bosom—saw her grow pale, then flush, then turn pale again. At length her face settled into a look of determination. She laid the letter on the table, and rose with a steady troubled light in her eyes. What she was thinking of he could not tell, but he made at once the proposal.

"Hester," he said, "I cannot leave your mother; you must go for me to your uncle and do the best you can. If it were not for your mother, I would have the rascal prosecuted: but it would break her heart."

Hester wasted no words of reply: she had often heard him say there ought to be no interference with public justice for private ends.

"Yes, papa," she answered. "I shall be ready in a moment. If I ride Hotspur I shall catch the evening train."

"There is time to take the brougham."

"Am I to say anything to Corney, papa?" she asked, her voice trembling over the name.

"You have nothing to do with him," he answered sternly. "Where is the good of keeping a villain from being as much of a villain as he has got it in him to be? I will sign you a blank cheque, which your uncle can fill up with the amount he has stolen. Come for it as soon as you are ready."

Hester thought as she went whether, if it had not been for the possibility of repentance, the world would have been made at all.

On her way to her room she met the major, looking for herself to tell him about her mother, of whose attack, as he had been out for a long walk, he had but just heard.

"But what did it, Hester?" he said. "I can smell in

the air something has gone wrong: what the deuce is it? There's always something getting out of gear in this best of worlds!"

She would have passed him with a word in her haste, but he turned and walked with her.

"The individual, any individual, all the individuals," he went on, "may come to smash, but the world is all right notwithstanding, and a good serviceable machine!—by George, without a sound pinion in all the carcase of it, or an engineer that cares there should be!"

They had met in a dark part of the corridor, and had now, at a turn in it, come opposite a window. Then first the major saw Hester's face: he had never seen her look like that!

"Is your mother in danger?" he asked, his tone changing to the gentlest, for his heart was in reality a most tender one.

"She is very ill," answered Hester. "The doctor has been with her now three hours.—I am going up to London for papa. He can't leave her."

"Going up to London—and by the night-train!" said the major to himself. "Then there has been bad news! What can they be? Money matters? No; cousin Helen is not the one to send health after money! It's something worse than that! I have it! That scoundrel Corney has been about some mischief—damn him! I shouldn't be surprised to hear anything bad of him!—But what can you do, my dear?" he said aloud. "It's not fit——"

He looked up. Hester was gone.

She put a few things together, drank a cup of tea brought to her room, went to her father and received the cheque, and was ready by the time the brougham came to the door with a pair of horses. She would not look at her mother again lest she might be sufficiently revived to wonder where she was going, but hastened down, and saw no one on the way. One of the servants was in the hall, and opened the carriage-door for her. The moment it closed she was in movement through the gathering dusk towards the railway-station.

While the lodge-gate was being opened, she thought she saw someone get up on the box beside the coachman, and fancied it must be a groom going with them. The drive was a long and anxious one; it seemed to her all the time as if the horses could not get on. In spots the road was slippery, and as the horses were not roughed they had to go slowly, and parts were

very heavy. What might not be happening to Corney, she thought, while she was on the way to his rescue! She kept fancying one dreadful thing after another. It was like a terrible dream, only with the assurance of reality in it.

The carriage stopped, the door opened, and there was the major in a huge fur coat, holding out his hand to help her down. It was as great a pleasure as surprise, and she showed both.

"You didn't think I was going to let you travel alone?" he said. "Who knows what wolf might be after my Red-riding-hood! I'll go in another carriage of course if you wish it; but in this train I'm going to London."

Hester told him she was only too glad of his escort. Careful not to show himself in the least curious as to the cause of her journey, he seated himself in the farthest corner, for there was no one else in the carriage, and pretended to go to sleep.

And now first began Hester's private share in the general misery of the family. In the presence of her suffering father and mother, she put off looking into the mist that kept gathering deeper and deeper, filled with forms undefined, about herself. Now these forms began to reveal themselves in shifting yet recognizable reality. If this miserable affair should be successfully hushed up, there was yet one must know it: she must immediately acquaint lord Gartley with what had taken place! And therewith one of the shapes in the mist settled into solidity: if the love between them had been of an ideal character, would she have had a moment's anxiety as to how her lover would receive the painful news? But therewith her own mind was made up: if he but hesitated, that would be enough! Nothing could make her marry a man who had once hesitated whether to draw back or not. It was impossible.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN LONDON.

It was much too early to do anything when they arrived. Nor could Hester go to her uncle's house: it was in one of the suburbs, and she would reach it before the household was stirring. They went therefore to Addison square. When they

had roused Sarah, the major took his leave of Hester, promising to be with her in a few hours, and betook himself to his hotel.

As she would not be seen at the bank, with the risk of being recognized as the sister of Cornelius and rousing speculation, she begged the major when he came to be her messenger to her uncle, and tell him that she had come from her father, asking him where it would be convenient for him to see her. The major undertook the commission at once, and went without asking a question.

Early in the afternoon her uncle came, and behaved to her very kindly. He was chiefly a man of business, and showing neither by look nor tone that he had sympathy with the trouble she and her parents were in, by his very reticence revealed it. His manner was the colder that he was studiously avoiding the least approximation to remark on the conduct or character of the youth—an abstinence which, however, had a chilling and hopeless effect upon the ardent mind of the sister. At last, when she had given him her father's cheque, with the request that he would himself fill it up with the amount of which he had been robbed, and he with a slight deprecatory smile and shrug had taken it, she ventured to ask what he was going to do in regard to her brother.

"When I take this cheque," answered her uncle, "it indicates that I treat the matter as a debt discharged, and leave him entirely in your father's hands. He must do as he sees fit. I am sorry for you all, and for you especially that you should have had to take an active part in the business. I wish your father could have come up himself. My poor sister!"

"I cannot be glad my father could not come," said Hester, "but I am glad he did not come, for he is so angry with Cornelius that I could almost believe he would have insisted on your prosecuting him. You never saw such indignation as my father's at any wrong done by one man to another—not to say by one like Cornelius to one like you, uncle, who have always been so kind to him! It is a terrible blow! He will never get over it—never! never!"

She broke down, and wept bitterly—the more bitterly that they were her first tears since learning the terrible fact, for she was not one who readily found such relief. To think of their family, of which she was too ready to feel proud, being thus disgraced, with one for its future representative who had not

even the commonest honesty, and who, but that his crime had been committed against an indulgent relative, would assuredly, for the sake of the business morals of his associates, if for no other reason, have been prosecuted for felony, was hard to bear! But to one of Hester's deep nature and loyalty to the truth, there were considerations far more sad. How was ever such a child of the darkness to come to love the light? How was one who cared so little for righteousness, one who, in all probability, would only excuse or even justify his crime—if indeed he would trouble himself to do so much—how was one like him to be brought to contrition and rectitude? There was a hope, though a poor one, in the shame he must feel at the disgrace he had brought upon himself. But alas! if the whole thing was to be kept quiet, and the semblance allowed that he had got tired of business and left it, how would even what regenerating power might lie in shame be brought to bear upon him? If not brought to *open* shame, he would hold his head as high as ever—be arrogant under the protection of the fact that the disgrace of his family would follow upon the exposure of himself.

When her uncle left her, she sat motionless a long time, thinking much but hoping little. The darkness gathered deeper and deeper around her. The ruin of her own promised history seemed imminent upon that of her family. What sun of earthly joy could ever break through such clouds! There was indeed a sun that nothing could cloud, but it seemed to shine far away. Some sorrows seem beyond the reach of consolation, in as much as their causes seem beyond setting right. They can at best, *as it seems*, only be covered over! Forgetfulness alone seems capable of removing their sting, and from that cure every noble mind turns away as unworthy both of itself, and of its Father in heaven. But the human heart has to go through much before it is able to house even a suspicion of the superabounding riches of the creating and saving God. The foolish child thinks there can be nothing where he sees nothing; the human heart feels as if where it cannot devise help, there is none possible to God; as if God like the heart must be content to botch the thing up, and make, as we say, the best of it. But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.

"But what *can* be done when—" so and so? says my reader;

for, whatever generalities I utter, his hurt seems not the less unapproachable of any help. You think, I answer, that you see all round your own sorrow; whereas much the greater part of the very being you call yours, is as unknown to you as the other side of the moon. It is as impossible you should understand it, therefore its sorrow, as that you should understand God, who alone understands you. Be developed into the divine idea of you; for your grief's sake let God have his way with you, and not only will all be well, but you shall say, "It is well."

It was a sore and dreary time for Hester, alone in the room where she had spent so many happy hours. She sat in a window, looking out upon the leafless trees and the cold gloomy old statue in the midst of them. Frost was upon every twig. A thin sad fog filled the comfortless air. There might be warm happy homes many, but such no more belonged to her world! The fire was burning cheerfully behind her, but her eyes were fixed on the dreary square. She was hardly thinking—only letting thoughts and feelings come and go. What a thing is life and being, when a soul has become but the room in which ghosts hold their revel; when the man is no longer master of himself, can no more say to this or that thought, thou shalt come, and thou shalt go, but is a slave to his own existence, can neither cease to be, nor order his being—able only in fruitless rebellion to entangle himself yet more in the net he has knotted around him! Such is every one parted from the essential life, who has not the Power by which he lives one with him, holding pure and free and true the soul he sent forth from the depths of his being. I repent me of the ignorance wherein I ever said that God made man out of nothing: there is no nothing out of which to make anything; God is all in all, and he made us out of himself. He who is parted from God has no original nothingness with which to take refuge. He is a live discord, an anti-truth. He is a death fighting against life, and doomed to endless vanity; an opposition to the very power by whose strength yet in him he opposes; a world of contradictions, not greedy after harmony, but greedy for lack of harmony—his being an abyss of positive negation. Not such was Hester, and although her thoughts now came and went without her, they did not come and go without God; and a truth from the depths of her own true being was on its way to console her.

How would her lover receive the news?—that was the agitating question; what would he thereupon do?

She would not at once write to acquaint him with the grief and disgrace that had fallen upon them, for she did not know where precisely he was: his movements were not fixed; and she dreaded the falling of such a letter as she would have to write into any hands except his own.

But another, and far stronger reason against writing to him, made itself presently clear to her mind: if she wrote, she could not know how he received her sad story; and if his mind required making up, which was what she feared, he would have time for it! This would not do! She must communicate the dread defiling fact with her own lips! She must see how he took it! Like Hamlet with the king at the play, "If he but blench, I know my course!" she said. If he showed the slightest change towards her, the least tendency to regard his relation to her as an entanglement, to regret that he had involved himself with the sister of a thief, marry her he should not! That was settled as the earth's course! If he was not to be her earthly refuge in this trouble as in any other, she would none of him! If it should break her heart she would none of him! But break her heart it would not! There were worse evils than losing a lover! There was losing a true man—and that he would not be if she lost him! The behaviour of Cornelius had perhaps made her more capable of doubt; possibly her righteous anger with him inclined her to imagine grounds of anger with another; but probably this feeling of uncertainty with regard to her lover had been prepared for by things that had passed between them since their engagement, but upon which, regarding herself as his wife, she had not allowed herself to dwell, turning her thought to the time when, as she imagined, she would be able to do so much more for and with him. And now she was almost in a mood to quarrel with him! Brought to moral bay, she stood with her head high, her soul roused, and every nerve strung to defence. She had not yet cast herself for defence on the care of her Father in heaven, who is jealous for the righteousness of those who love righteousness. But he was not far from her.

Yet deeper into the brooding fit she sank. Weary with her journey and the sleepless night, her brain seemed to work of itself; when suddenly came the thought that, after so long a separation, she was at last in the midst of her poor. But how

was she to face them now! how hold up her head amongst them! how utter a word of gentlest remonstrance! Who was she to have dared speak to them of the evil of their ways, and the bad influence of an ill-behaved family! But how lightly they bore such ills as that which was now breaking her down with trouble and shame! Even such of them as were honest people, would have this cousin or that uncle, or even a son or the husband *in* for so many months, and think only of when they would have him out again! Misfortune had overtaken them! and they loved them no less. The man or the woman was still man or woman, mother or husband to them. Nothing could degrade them beyond the reach of their sympathies! They had no thought of priding themselves against them because they themselves had not transgressed the law, neither of drawing back from them with disgust. And were there not a thousand wrong things done in business and society which had no depressing effect either on those who did them or those whose friends did them—only because these wrongs not having yet come under the cognizance of law had not yet come to be considered disgraceful? Therewith she felt nearer to her poor than ever before, and it comforted her. The bare soul of humanity comforted her. She was not merely of the same flesh and blood with them—not even of the same soul and spirit only, but of the same failing, sinning, blundering breed; and that not alone in the general way of sin, ever and again forsaking the fountain of living water, and betaking herself to some cistern, but in their individual sins was she not their near relative? Their shame was hers: the son of her mother, the son of her father was a thief! She was and would be more one with them than ever before! If they made less of crime in another, they also made less of innocence from it in themselves! Was it not even better to do wrong, she asked herself, than to think it a very grand thing not to do it? What merit was there in being what it would be contemptible not to be? The Lord Christ could get nearer to the publican than the Pharisee, to the woman that was a sinner than the self-righteous honest woman! The Pharisee was a good man, but he thought it such a fine thing to be good that God did not like him nearly so well as the other who thought it a sad thing to be bad! Let her but get among her nice, honest, wicked, poor ones, out of this atmosphere of pretence and appearance, and she would breathe again! She dropped

upon her knees, and cried to her Father in heaven to make her heart clean altogether, to deliver her from everything mean and faithless, to make her turn from any shadow of ill as thoroughly as she would have her brother repent of the stealing that made them all so ashamed. Like a woman in the wrong she drew nigh the feet of her master; she too was a sinner; her heart needed his cleansing as much as any!

And with that came another God-given thought of self-accusing. For suddenly she perceived that self had been leading her astray: she was tender towards those farther from her, hard towards the one nearer to her! It was easy to be indulgent towards those whose evil did not touch herself: to the son of her own mother she was severe and indignant! If she condemned him, who would help his mother to give him the love of which he stood in the sorer need that he was unworthy of it? Corney whom she had nursed as a baby—who used to crow when she appeared—could it be that she who had then loved him so dearly had ceased and was loving him no more? True, he had grown to be teasing and trying in every way, seeming to despise her and all women together; but was not that part of the evil disease that clung fast to him? If God were to do like her, how many would be giving honour to his Son? But God knew all the difficulties that beset men, and gave them fair play when sisters did not: he would redeem Corney yet! But was it possible he should ever wake to see how ugly his conduct had been? It *seemed* impossible; but surely there were powers in God's heart that had not yet been brought to bear upon him! Perhaps this was one of them—letting him disgrace himself! If he could but be made ashamed of himself there would be hope! And in the meantime she must get the beam out of her own eye, that she might see to take the mote or the beam, whichever it might be, out of Corney's! Again she fell upon her knees, and prayed God to enable her. Corney was her brother, and must for ever be her brother, were he the worst thief under the sun! God would see to their honour or disgrace; what she had to do was to be a sister! She rose determined that she would not go home till she had done all she could to find him; that the judgment of God should henceforth alone be hers, and the judgment of the world nothing to her for evermore.

Presently the fact, which had at various times cast a dim presence up her horizon without thoroughly attracting her

attention, became plain to her—that she had in part been drawn towards her lover because of his social position. Certainly without loving him she would never have consented to marry him for that, but had she not come the more readily to love him because of that? Had it not passed him within certain defences which would otherwise have held out? Had he not been an earl in prospect, were there not some things in him which would have more repelled her, as not manifesting the highest order of humanity? Would she, for instance, but for that, have tried so much to like his verses? Clearly she must take her place with the sinners!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A TALK WITH THE MAJOR.

WHILE she meditated thus, major Marvel made his appearance.

He had been watching outside, saw her uncle go, and an hour after was shown to the room where she still sat, staring out on the frosty trees of the square.

"Why, my child," he said, with almost paternal tenderness, "your hand is as cold as ice! Why do you sit so far from the fire?"

She rose and went to the fire with him. He put her in an easy-chair, and sat down beside her. Common, pudgy, red-faced, bald-headed as he was, she came to him, and that out of regions of deepest thought, with a sense of refuge. He could scarcely have understood one of her difficulties, would doubtless have judged not a few of her scruples nonsensical and over-driven; yet knowing this, it was a comfort to her to come from those regions back to a mere, honest, human heart—to feel a human soul in a human body nigh her. For the mere human is divine, though not *the* divine, and to the mere human essential comfort. Should relations be broken between her and lord Gartley, she knew it would delight the major; yet she was able to look upon him as a friend in whom she could trust. Unity of *opinion* is not necessary to confident friendship and warm love.

As they talked, the major, seeing she was much depressed, and thinking to draw her from troubled thought, began to tell her some of the more personal parts of his history, and in these

she soon became so interested that she began to ask him questions and drew from him much that he would never have thought of volunteering. Before their talk was over, she had come to regard the man as she could not have imagined it possible she should. She had looked upon him as a man of so many and such redeeming qualities, that his faults must be overlooked and himself defended from any overweighing of them; but now she felt him a man to be looked up to—almost revered. It was true that every now and then some remark would reveal in him a less than attractive commonness of thinking, and that his notions in religion were of the crudest, for he regarded it as a set of doctrines—not a few of them very dishonouring to God; yet was the man in a high sense a true man. There is nothing shows more how hard it has been for God to redeem the world than the opinions still uttered concerning him and his so-called *plans* by many who love him and try to obey him: a man may be in possession of the most precious jewels, and yet know so little about them that his description of them would never induce a jeweller to purchase them, but on the contrary make him regard the man as a fool, taking bits of coloured glass for rubies and sapphires. Major Marvel was not of such. He knew nothing of the slang of the Pharisees, knew little of the language of either the saints or the prophets, had, like most Christians, many worldly ways of looking at things, and yet I think our Lord would have said there was no guile in him.

With her new insight into the man's character came to Hester the question whether she would not be justified in taking him into her confidence with regard to Cornelius. She had received no injunctions to secrecy from her father: neither he nor her mother ever thought of such a thing with her; they knew she was to be trusted as they were themselves to be trusted. Her father had taken no step towards any effort for the rescue of his son, and she would sorely need help in what she must herself try to do. She could say nothing to the major about lord Gartley, or the influence her brother's behaviour might have on her future: that would not be fair either to Gartley or to the major; but might she not ask him to help her to find Corney? She was certain he would be prudent and keep quiet whatever ought to be kept quiet; while on the other hand her father had spoken as if he would have nothing of it all concealed. She told him the whole

story, hiding nothing that she knew. Hardly could she restrain her tears as she spoke, but she ended without having shed one. The major had said nothing, betrayed nothing, only listened intently.

"My dear Hester," he said solemnly, after a few moments' pause, "the mysteries of creation are beyond me!"

Hester thought the remark irrelevant, but waited.

"It's such a mixture!" he went on. "There is your mother, the loveliest woman except yourself God ever made! Then comes Cornelius—a—well!—Then comes yourself! and then little Mark! a child—I will not say too good to live—God forbid!—but too good for any of the common uses of this world! I declare to you I am terrified when left alone with him, and keep wishing for somebody to come into the room!"

"What about him terrifies you?" asked Hester, amused at the idea, in spite of the gnawing unrest at her heart.

"To answer you," replied the major, "I must think a bit! Let me see! Let me see!—yes! it must be that! I am ashamed to confess it, but to a saint one must speak the truth: I believe in my heart it is simply fear lest I should find I must give up everything and do as I know he is thinking I ought."

"And what is that?"

"Turn a saint like him."

"And why should you be afraid of that?"

"Well, you see, I'm not the stuff that saints—good saints I mean—are made of; and rather than not be a good one, if I once set about it, I would, saving your presence, be the devil himself."

Hester laughed, yet with some self-accusation

"I think," she said softly, "one day you will be as good a saint as love can wish you to be."

"Give me time; give me time, I beg," cried the major, wiping his forehead, and evidently in some perturbation. "I would not willingly begin anything I should disgrace, for that would be to disgrace myself, and I never had any will to that, though the old ladies of our village used to say I was born without any shame. But the main cause of my unpopularity was that I hated humbug—and I do hate humbug, cousin Hester, and shall hate it till I die—and so want to steer clear of it."

"I hate it, I hope, as much as you do, major Marvel," responded Hester. "But, whatever it may be mixed up with,

what is true, you know, cannot be humbug, and what is not true cannot be anything else than humbug."

"Yes, yes! but how is one to know what is true, my dear? There are so many differing claims to the quality!"

"I have been told, and I believe it with all my heart," replied Hester, "that the only way to know what is true is to do what is true."

"But you must know what is true before you can begin to do what is true."

"Everybody knows something that is true to do—that is, something he ought to lose no time in setting about. The true thing to any man is the thing that must not be left alone but done. It is much easier to know what is true to do than what is true to think. But those who do the one will come to know the other—and none else, I believe."

The major was silent, and sat looking very thoughtful. At last he rose.

"Is there anything you want me to do in this sad affair, cousin Hester?" he said.

"I want your help to find my brother."

"Why should you want to find him? You cannot do him any good!"

"Who can tell that? If Christ came to seek and save his lost, we ought to seek and save our lost."

"Young men don't go wrong for the mere sake of going wrong: you may find him in such a position as will make it impossible for you to have anything to do with him."

"You know that line of Spenser's,—

'Entire affection hateth nicer hands'?"

asked Hester.

"No, I don't know it; and I don't know that I understand it now you tell it me!" replied the major, just a little crossly. for he did not like poetry: it was one of his bugbear humbugs.

"But one thing is plain: you must not expose yourself to what in such a search would be unavoidable."

The care of men over some women would not seldom be ludicrous but for the sad suggested contrast of their carelessness over others.

"Answer me one question, dear major Marvel," said Hester: "Which is in most danger from disease—the healthy or the sickly?"

"That's a question for the doctor," he answered cautiously; "and I don't believe he knows anything about it either. What it has to do with the matter in hand I cannot think."

Hester saw it was not for her now to pursue the argument. And one would almost imagine it scarce needed pursuing! For who shall walk safe in the haunts of evil but those upon whom, being pure, evil has no hold? The world's notions of purity are simply childish—because it is not itself pure. You might well suppose its cherished ones on the brink of all corruption, so much afraid does it seem of having them tainted *before their time.* Sorry would one be, but for the sake of those for whom Christ died, that any woman should be pained with the sight of evil; but the true woman may, even like God himself, know all evil and remain just as lovely, as clean, as angelic and worshipful as any child in the simplest country home. The idea of a woman like Hester being *in any sense* defiled by knowing what her Lord knows while she fills up what is left behind of the sufferings of Christ for her to suffer for the sake of his world, is contemptible. As wrong melts away and vanishes in the heart of Christ, so does the impurity she encounters vanish in the heart of the pure woman: it is there burned up.

"I hardly see what is to be done," said the major, after a moment's silence. "What do you say to an advertisement in *The Times*, to the effect that, if C. R. will return to his family, all will be forgiven?"

"That I must not, dare not do. There is surely some other way of finding persons without going to the police!"

"What do you think your father would like done?"

"I do not know; but as I am Corney's sister, I will venture as a sister may. I think my father will be pleased in the end, but I will risk his displeasure for the sake of my brother. If my father were to cast him off, would you say I was bound to cast him off?"

"I dare say nothing where you are sure, Hester. My only anxiety would be whether you thoroughly knew what you were about."

"If one were able to look upon the question of life or death as a mere candle-flame in the sun of duty, would she not at least be more likely to do right than wrong?"

"If the question were put about a soldier I should feel surer how to answer you," replied the major. "But you are so much better than I—you go upon such different tactics, that

we can hardly, I fear, bring our troops right in front of each other.—I will do what I can for you—though I greatly fear your brother will never prove worth the trouble."

"People have repented who have gone as far wrong as Corney," said Hester, with the tears in her voice if not in her eyes.

"True!" responded the major; "but I don't believe he has character enough to repent of anything. He will be fertile enough in excuse! But I will do what I can to find out where he is."

Hester heartily thanked him, and he took his leave.

Her very estrangement from him, the thought of her mother's misery and the self-condemnation that must overtake her father if he did nothing, urged her to find Cornelius. But if she found him, what would come of it? Was he likely to go home with her? Would he be received if he did go home? and if not, what was she to do with or for him? Was he to keep the money so vilely appropriated? And what was he to do when it was spent? If want would drive him home, the sooner he came to it the better! We pity the prodigal with his swine, but then first a ray of hope begins to break through the darkness of his fate.

To do nothing was nearly unendurable, and she saw nothing to do. She could only wait, and it took all the patience and submission she could find. She wrote to her father, told him what there was to tell, and ended her letter with a message to her mother:—"Tell darling mother," she said, "that what a sister can do, up to the strength God gives her, shall be done for my brother. Major Marvel is doing his best to find him."

Next day she heard from her father that her mother was slowly recovering; and on the following day that her letter was a great comfort to her; but beyond this he made no remark. Even his silence however was something of a relief to Hester.

In the mean time she was not idle. Hers was not the nature even in grief to sit still. The moment she had dispatched her letter, she set out to visit her poor friends. On her way she went into Mrs. Baldwin's shop and had a little talk with her, in the course of which she asked if she had ever heard anything more of the Frankses. Mrs. Baldwin replied that she had once or twice heard of their being seen in the way of their pro-

fession; but feared they were not getting on. Hester was sorry, but had many more she knew better to think of.

There was much rejoicing at her return. But there were changes—new faces where she had left friends, and not the best news of some who remained. One or two were in prison of whom when she left she was in good hope. One or two were getting on better in the sense of this world, but she could see nothing in themselves to make her glad of their "good luck." One who had signed the pledge some time before she went, had broken out fearfully, and all but killed his wife. One of whom she had been hopeful, had disappeared—it was supposed with another man's wife. In spite of their sufferings the evil one seemed as busy among them as among the world's elect.

The little ones came about her again, but with less confidence, both because she had been away, and because they had grown more than they had improved. But soon things were nearly on the old footing with them.

Every day she went among her people. Certain of the women—chiefly those who had suffered most with least fault—were as warmly her friends as before. Amongst them was just one who had some experience of the Christian life, and she had begun to learn long before Hester came to know her: she did not seem, however, to have gained any influence even with those who lived in the same house; only who can trace the slow working of leaven?

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

RENCONTRES.

THERE was no news of Cornelius. In vain the detective to whom the major had made liberal promises continued his inquiries. There was a rumour of a young woman in whose company he had lately been seen, but she too had disappeared from public sight.

Sarah did her best to make Hester comfortable, and behaved the better that she was humbled by the consciousness of having made a bad job of her caretaking with Cornelius.

One afternoon—it had rained, but the sun was now shining,

and Hester's heart felt lighter as she took deep breaths of the clean-washed air—she turned into a passage to visit the wife of a bookbinder who had been long laid up with rheumatism so severe as to render him quite unable to work. They had therefore been on the borders of want, and for Hester it was one of those happy cases in which she felt at full liberty to help with money. The part of the house occupied by them was pretty decent, but the rest of it was in bad repair and occupied by yet poorer people, of none of whom she knew much. It was in fact a little way beyond what she had come to count her limit.

She knocked at the door. It was opened by the parish doctor.

"You cannot come in, Miss Raymount," he said. "We have a very bad case of small-pox here. You good ladies must make up your minds to keep away from these parts for a while. Their bodies are in more danger than their souls now."

"That may very well be," replied Hester. "My foot may be in more danger than my head, but I can better afford to lose the one than the other."

The doctor did not see the point, and thought there was none.

"You will only carry the infection," he said.

"I will take every precaution," answered Hester. "I always take more, I am certain, than it can be possible for you to take. Why should not I also do my part to help them through?"

"While the parish is in my care," answered the doctor, "I must object to whatever increases the risk of infection. It is hard, while we are doing all we can to stamp out the disease, to have you, with the best of motives I admit, carrying it from one house to another. How are we to keep it out of the West End, if you ladies carry the seeds of it?"

The hard-worked man spoke with some heat.

"So the poor brothers are to be left for fear of hurting the rich ones?"

"That's not fair—you know it is not!" said the doctor. "We are set here to fight the disease, and fight it we must."

"And I am set here to fight something worse," returned Hester with a smile.

The doctor came out and shut the door.

"I must beg of you to go away," he said. "I shall be compelled to mention in my report how you and other ladies add to our difficulties."

He slipped in again and closed the door. Hester turned and went down the stair, now on her part a little angry. She knew it was no use thinking when she was angry, for when the anger was gone she almost always thought otherwise. The first thing was to get rid of the anger. Instinctively she sat down and began to sing; it was not the first time she had sat and sung in a dirty staircase. It was not a right or wise thing to do, but her anger prevented her from thinking of its impropriety.

In great cities the children are like flies, gathering swiftly as from out of the unseen: in a moment the stair below was half-filled with them. The tenants above opened their doors and came down. Others came in from the street and were pushed up by those who came behind them. The stair and entrance were presently filled with people, all shabby, and almost all dirty—men and women, young and old, good and bad, listening to the voice of the singing lady, as she was called in the neighbourhood.

By this time the doctor had finished his visit at the book-binder's, and appeared on the stair above. He had heard the singing, and thought it was in the street; now he learnt it was actually in the house, and had filled it with people! It was no wonder, especially when he saw who the singer was, that he should lose his temper. Through the few women and children above where Hester sat, he made his way towards the crowd of faces below. When he reached her he seized her arm from behind, and began to raise at once and push her down the stair. He, too, was an enthusiast in his way. Some of the faces below grew red with anger, and their eyes flamed at the doctor. A loud murmur arose, and several began to force their way up to rescue her, as they would one of their own from the police. But Hester, the moment she saw who it was that had laid hold of her, rose and began to descend the stair, closely followed by the doctor. It was not easy; and the annoyance of a good many in the crowd, of some because Hester was their friend, of others because the doctor had stopped the singing, gave a disorderly and indeed rather threatening look to the assemblage.

As she reached the door she saw, on the opposite side of the crowded passage, the pale face and glittering eyes of Mr. Blaney looking at her over the heads between. The little man was mounted on a box at the door of a shop whose trade seemed to be in withered vegetables and salt fish, and had

already had the pint which, according to his brother-in-law, was more than he could stand.

"Sarves you right, miss," he cried, when he saw who was the centre of the commotion; "sarves you right! You turned me out o' your house for singin', an' I don't see why you should come a singin' an' a misbehavin' of yourself in ourn! Jest you bring her out here, pleeceman, an' let me give her a bit o' my mind. Oh, don't you be afeared, I won't hurt her! Not in all my life did I ever once hurt a woman —bless 'em! But it's time the gentry swells knowed as how we're yuman bein's as well as theirselves. We don't like, no more'n they would theirselves, havin' our feelin's hurt for the sake o' what they calls bein' done good to. Come you along down over here, miss!"

The crowd had been gathering from both ends of the passage, for high words draw yet faster than sweet singing, and the place was so full that it was hardly possible to get out of it. The doctor was almost wishing he had let ill alone, for he was now anxious about Hester. Some of the rougher ones began pushing. The vindictive little man kept bawling, his mouth screwed into the middle of his cheek. From one of the cross entrances of the passage came the pulse of a fresh tide of would-be spectators, causing the crowd to sway hither and thither. All at once Hester spied a face she knew, considerably changed as it was since last she had seen it.

"Now we shall have help!" she said to her companion, making common cause with him notwithstanding his antagonism. "—Mr. Franks!"

The athlete was not so far off that she needed to call very loud. He heard and started with eager interest. He knew the voice, sent his eyes looking, and presently found her who called him. With his great lean muscular arms he sent the crowd right and left like water, and reached her in a moment.

"Come! come! don't you hurt her!" shouted Mr. Blaney from the top of his box. "She ain't nothing to you. She's a old friend o' mine, an' I ain't a goin' to see her hurt!"

"You shut up!" bawled Franks, "or I'll finish the pancake you was meant for."

Then turning to Hester, who had begun to be a little afraid he too had been drinking, he pulled off his fur cap, and making the lowest and politest of stage bows, said briefly,

"Miss Raymount—at your service, miss!"

"I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Franks," said Hester. "Do you think you could get us out of the crowd?"

"Easy, miss. I'll *carry* you out of it like a baby, miss, if you'll let me."

"No, no; that will hardly be necessary," returned Hester, with a smile.

"Go on before, and make a way for us," said the doctor with an authority he had no right to assume.

"There is not the least occasion for you to trouble yourself about me farther," said Hester. "I am perfectly safe with this man. I know him very well. I am sorry to have vexed you."

Franks looked up sharply at the doctor, as if to see whether he dared acknowledge a claim to the apology; then turning to Hester,—

"Nobody 'ain't ha' been finding fault with you, miss?" he said—a little ominously.

"Not more than I deserved," replied Hester. "But come, Franks! lead the way, or all Bloomsbury will be here, and then the police! I shouldn't like to be shut up for offending Mr. Blaney!"

Those near them heard and laughed. She took Franks's arm. Room was speedily made before them, and in a minute they were out of the crowd, and in one of the main thoroughfares.

But as if everybody she knew was going to appear, who should meet them face to face as they turned into Steevens's road, with a fringe of the crowd still at their heels, but lord Gartley! He had written from town, and Mrs. Raymount had let him know that Hester was in London, for she saw that the sooner she had an opportunity of telling him what had happened the better. His lordship went at once to Addison square, and had just left the house disappointed when he met Hester leaning on Franks's arm.

"Miss Raymount!" he exclaimed, almost haughtily.

"My lord!" she returned, with unmistakable haughtiness, drawing herself up and looking him in the face, hers glowing.

"Who would have expected to see you here?" he said.

"Apparently yourself, my lord!"

He tried to laugh.

"Come then; I will see you home," he said.

"Thank you, my lord.—Come, Franks."

As she spoke she looked round, but Franks was gone.

Finding she had met one of her own family, as he supposed, he had quietly withdrawn: the moment he was no longer wanted, he grew ashamed, and felt shabby. But he lingered round a corner near, to be certain she was going to be taken care of, till seeing them walk away together he was satisfied and went with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN THE HOUSE.

THE two were silent on their way, but from different causes. Lord Gartley was uneasy at finding Hester in such a position—led into it by her unreflecting sympathies, no doubt, so unbefitting the present century of the world's history! He had gathered from the looks and words of the following remnants of the crowd that she had been involved in some street-quarrel—trying to atone it no doubt, or to separate the combatants. For a woman of her refinement, she had the strangest proclivity for low company!

Hester was silent, thinking how to begin her communication about Cornelius. Uncomfortable from the *contretemps*, as well as from what she had now to do, and irritated at the tone in which his lordship had expressed the surprise he could not help feeling at sight of her so accompanied and attended, she had felt for a moment as if the best thing would be to break with him at once. But she was too just, had she not had too much regard for him, to do so. She felt, however, for that one moment, very plainly, that the relation between them was far from the ideal. Another thing was yet clearer: if he could feel such surprise and annoyance at the circumstances in which he had just met her, it would be well to come to a clearer understanding at once concerning her life-ideal and projects. But she would make up her mind to nothing till she saw how he was going to carry himself now his surprise had had time to pass off: perhaps it would not be necessary to tell him anything about Corney! they might part upon other grounds! In the one case it would be she, in the other it would be he that broke the engagement: she would rather it were his doing than hers! No doubt she would stand better in the eyes of the world if she dismissed him; but that was an aspect of the

affair she would never have deigned to heed had it presented itself.

These thoughts, with what of ratiocination was in them, hardly passed through her mind; it was filled, rather, with a confused mass of tangled thought and feeling, which tossed about in it like the nets of a fishing fleet rolled together by a storm.

Not before they reached the house did lord Gartley speak, and Hester began to wonder if he might not already have heard of Cornelius. It was plain he was troubled; plain too he was only waiting for the coverture of the house to speak. It should be easy, oh, very easy for him to get rid of her! He need not be anxious about that!

It was doubtless shock upon shock to the sensitive nature of his lordship to find, when they reached the house, that, instead of ringing the bell, she took a latch-key from her pocket, opened the door herself, and herself closed it behind them. It was just as a bachelor might enter his chambers! It did not occur to him that it was just such as his bachelor that ought not to have the key, and such as Hester that ought to have it, to let them come and go as the angels. She led the way up the stair. Not movement of life was audible in the house! The stillness was painful.

"Did no one come up with you?" he asked.

"No one but major Marvel," she answered, and opened the door of the drawing-room.

As she opened it, she woke to the consciousness that she was very cross, and in a mood to make her unfair to Gartley: the moment she had closed it, she turned to him and said,

"Forgive me, Gartley; I am in trouble; we are all in trouble. When I have told you about it, I shall be more at ease."

Without preamble, or any attempt to influence the impression of the dreadful news, she began her story, softening the communication only by making it as the knowledge had come to her—telling first her mother's distress at Sarah's letter, then the contents of that letter, and then those of her uncle's. She could not have done it with greater fairness to her friend: his practised self-control had opportunity for perfect operation. But the result was more to her satisfaction than she could have dared to hope. He held out his hand with a smile, and said,

"I am very sorry. What is there I can do?"

She looked up in his eyes. They were looking down kindly and lovingly.

"Then—then—," she said, "you don't—I mean there's no —I mean, you don't feel differently towards me?"

"Towards you, my angel!" exclaimed Gartley, and held out his arms.

She threw herself into them, and clung to him. It was the first time either of them had shown anything approaching to *abandon.* Gartley's heart swelled with delight, translating her confidence into his power. He was no longer the second person in the compact, but had taken the place belonging to the male contracting party! For he had been painfully conscious now and then that he played but second fiddle.

They sat down and talked the whole thing over.

Now that Hester was at peace she began to look at it from Gartley's point of view.

"I am so sorry for you!" she said. "It is very sad you should have to marry into a family so disgraced. What *will* your aunt say?"

"My aunt will treat the affair like the sensible woman she is," replied the earl. "But there is no fear of disgrace; the thing will never be known. Besides, where is the family that has'nt one or more such loose fishes about in its pond? The fault was committed inside the family too, and that makes a great difference. It is not as if he'd been betting and couldn't pay up!"

From the heaven of her delight Hester fell prone. Was this the way her almost husband looked at these things? But, poor fellow! how could he help looking at them so? Was it not thus he had been from earliest childhood taught to look at them? The greater was his need of all she could do for him! He was so easy to teach anything! What she saw clear as day it could not be hard to communicate to one who loved as he loved! She would say nothing now—would let him see no sign of disappointment in her!

"If he don't improve," continued his lordship, "we must get him out of the country. In the meantime he will go home, and not a suspicion will be roused. What else should he do, with such a property to look after?"

"My father will not see it so," answered Hester. "I doubt if he will ever speak to him again. Certainly he will not except he show some repentance."

"Has your father refused to have him home?"

"He has not had the chance. Nobody knows what has become of him."

"He'll have to condone, or compromise, or compound, or what do they call it, for the sake of his family—for your sake, and my sake, my darling! He can't be so vindictive as expose his own son! We won't think more about it! Let us talk of ourselves!"

"If only we could find him!" returned Hester.

"Depend upon it he is not where you would like to find him. Men don't come to grief without help! We must wait till he turns up."

Far as this was from her purpose, Hester was not inclined to argue the point: she could not expect him or any one out of their own family to be much interested in the fate of Cornelius. They began to talk about other things; and if they were not the things Hester would most readily have talked about, neither were they the things lord Gartley had entered the house intending to talk about. He too had been almost angry, only by nature he was cool and even good-tempered. To find Hester, the moment she came back to London, and now in the near prospect of marriage with himself, yielding afresh to a diseased fancy of doing good; to come upon her in the street of a low neighbourhood, followed by a low crowd, supported and championed by a low fellow—well, it was not agreeable! His high breeding made him mind it less than a middle-class man of like character would have done; but with his cold dislike to all that was poor and miserable, he could not fail to find it annoying, and had entered the house intending to exact a promise for the future—not the future after marriage, for a change then went without saying.

But when he had heard her trouble, and saw how deeply it affected her, he knew this was not the time to say what he had meant; and there was the less occasion now that he was near to take care of her!

He had risen to go, and was about to take a loving farewell, when Hester, suddenly remembering, drew back, with almost a guilty look.

"Oh, Gartley!" she said, "I ought not to have let you come near me! Not that *I* am afraid of anything! But you came upon me so unexpectedly! It is all very well for one's self, but one ought to heed what other people may think!"

"What *can* you mean, Hester?" exclaimed Gartley, and would have laid his hand on her arm, but again she drew back.

"There was small-pox in the house I had just left when you met me," she said.

He started back and stood speechless—manifesting therein no more cowardice than everyone in his circle would have justified: was it not reasonable and right he should be afraid? was it not a humiliation to be created subject to such a loathsome disease? The disgrace of fearing anything except doing wrong, few human beings are capable of conceiving, fewer still of actually believing.

"Has it never occurred to you what you are doing in going to such places, Hester?" he faltered. "It is a treachery against every social claim. I am sorry to use such hard words, but—really—I——I—cannot help being a little surprised at you! I thought you had more—more—sense!"

"I am sorry to have frightened you."

"Frightened!" repeated Gartley, with an attempt at a smile which closed in a yet more anxious look, "—you do indeed frighten me! The whole world would agree you give me good cause to be frightened. I should never have thought *you* capable of showing such a lack of principle. Don't imagine I am thinking of myself; *you* are in most danger! Still, you may carry the infection without taking it yourself."

"I didn't know it was there when I went to the house—only I should have gone all the same," said Hester. "But if seeing you so suddenly had not made me forget, I should have had a bath as soon as I got home. I *am* sorry I let you come near me!"

"One has no right either to take or carry infection," insisted lord Gartley, perhaps a little glad of the height upon which an opportunity of finding fault set him for the first time above her. "But there is no time to talk about it now. I hope you will use what preventives you can. It is very wrong to trifle with such things!"

"Indeed it is!" answered Hester; "and I say again I am sorry I forgot. You see how it was—don't you? It was you made me forget!"

But his lordship was by no means now in a smiling mood. He bade her a somewhat severe good night, then hesitated, and thinking it hardly signified now, and he must not look too much afraid, held out his hand. But Hester drew back a third time, saying, "No, no; you must not," and with solemn bow he turned and went, his mind full of conflicting feelings and perplexing thoughts:—What a glorious creature she was—and what a dangerous! He recalled the story of the young

woman brought up on poisons, whom no man could come near but at the risk of his life. What a spirit she had! but what a pity it was so ill-directed! It was horrible to think of her going into such abominable places—and all alone too! How ill she had been trained!—in such utter disregard of social obligation and the laws of nature! It was preposterous! He little thought what risks he ran when he fell in love with *her!* If he got off now without an attack he would be lucky! But —good heavens! if she were to take it herself! "I wonder when she was last vaccinated!" he said. "I was last year; I dare say I'm all right! But if she were to die, or lose her complexion, I should kill myself! I know I should!" Would honour compel him to marry her if she were horribly pock-marked? Those dens ought to be rooted out! Philanthropy was gone mad! It was strict repression that was wanted! To sympathize with people like that was only to encourage them! Vice was like hysterics—the more kindness you showed the worse grew the patient! They took it all as their right! And the more you gave, the more they demanded—never showing any gratitude so far as he knew.

CHAPTER XL.

THE MAJOR AND THE SMALL-POX.

His lordship was scarcely gone when the major came. So closely did the appearance of the one follow on the disappearance of the other, that there was ground for suspecting the major had seen his lordship enter the house, and had been waiting and watching till he was gone. But she was not yet to be seen: she had no fear of the worst small-pox could do to her, yet was taking what measures appeared advisable for her protection. Her fearlessness came from no fancied absence of danger, but from an utter disbelief in chance. The same and only faith that would have enabled her to face the man-eating tiger, enabled her to face the small-pox: if she did die by going into such places, it was all right.

For aught I know there may be a region whose dwellers are so little capable of being individually cared for, that they are left to the action of mere general laws as sufficient for what for

the time can be done for them. Such may well to themselves seem to be blown about by all the winds of chaos and the limbo—which winds they call chance! Even then and there it is God who has ordered all the generals of their condition, and when they are sick of it, will help them out of it. One thing is sure—that God is doing his best for *every* man.

The major sat down and waited.

"I am at my wits' end!" he said, when she entered the room. "I can't find the fellow! That detective's a muff! He ain't gŏt a trace of him yet! I must put on another!—Don't you think you had better go home? I will do what can be done, you may be sure!"

"I *am* sure," answered Hester. "But mamma is better; so long as I am away papa will not leave her; and she would rather have papa than a dozen of me."

"But it must be so dreary for you—here alone all day!" he said, with a touch of malice.

"I go about among my people," she answered.

"Ah! ah!" he returned. "Then I hope you will be careful what houses you go into, for I hear the small-pox is in the neighbourhood.

"I have just come from a house where it is now," she answered. The major rose in haste. "—But," she went on, "I have changed all my clothes, and had a bath since."

The major sat down again.

"My dear young lady!" he said, the roses a little ashy on his cheek-bones, "do you know what you are about?"

"I hope I do—I *think* I do," she answered.

"Hope! Think!" repeated the major indignantly.

"Well, *believe*," said Hester.

"Come, come!" he rejoined with rudeness; "you may hope or think or believe what you like, but you have no business to act but on what you *know*."

"I suppose you never act where you do not know?" returned Hester. "You always *know* you will win the battle, kill the tiger, take the small-pox and be the worse for it?"

"It's all very well for you to laugh!" returned the major; "but what is to become of us if you take the small-pox? Why my dear cousin, you might lose every scrap of your good looks."

"And then who on earth would care for me any more!" said Hester, with mock mournfulness, which brought a glimmer of the merry light back to the major's face.

"But really, Hester," he persisted, "this is most imprudent. It is your life, not your beauty only you are periling!"

"Perhaps," she answered.

"And the lives of us all!" added the major.

"Is the small-pox worse than a man-eating tiger?" she asked.

"Ten times worse," he answered. "You can fight the tiger, but you can't fight the small-pox! You really ought *not* to run such fearful risks."

"How are they to be avoided? Every time you send for the doctor you run a risk! You can't order a clean doctor every time!"

"A joke's all very well! but it is our duty to take care of ourselves."

"In reason, yes," replied Hester.

"You may think," said the major, "that God takes special care of you because you are about his business—and far be it from me to say you are not about his business or that he does not take care of you; but what is to become of me and the like of me if we take the small-pox from you?"

Hester had it on her lips to say that if he was meant to die of the small-pox, he might as well take it of her as of another; but she said instead that she was sure God took care of her, but not sure she should not die of the small-pox.

"How can you say God takes care of you, if he lets you die of the small-pox!"

"No doubt people would die if God forgot them, but do you think people die because God forgets them?"

"My dear cousin Hester, if there is one thing I have a *penchant* for, it is common sense! A paradox I detest with my whole soul!"

"One word, dear major Marvel: Did God take care of Jesus?"

"Of course! of course! But he wasn't like other men, you know."

"I don't want to fare better, that is, I don't want to have more of God's care than he had."

"I don't understand you. I should think if we were sure God took as good care of us as of him,———"

But there he stopped, for he began to have a glimmer of where she was leading him.

"Did he keep him what you call safe?" said Hester. "Did

he not allow the worst man could do to overtake him? Was it not the very consequence of his obedience?"

"Then you have made up your mind to die of the small-pox? —In that case———"

"Only if it be God's will," interrupted Hester. "To that, and that alone, have I made up my mind. If I die of the small-pox, it will not be because it could not be helped, or because I caught it by chance; it will be because God allowed it as best for me and for us all. It will not be a punishment for breaking his laws; he loves none better, I believe, than those who break the laws of nature to fulfil the laws of the spirit—which is the deeper nature, 'the nature naturing nature,' as I read the other day: of course it sounds nonsense to any-one who does not understand it."

"That's your humble servant," said the major. "I haven't a notion what you or the author you quote means, though I don't doubt both of you mean well, and that you are a most courageous and indeed heroic young woman. For all that, it is time your friends interfered; and I am going to write by the next post to let your father know how you are misbehaving yourself."

"They will not believe me quite so bad as I fear you will represent me."

"I don't know. I must write anyhow."

"That they may order me home to give them the small-pox? Wouldn't it be better to wait and be sure I had not taken it already? Your letter too might carry the infection. I think you had better not write."

"You persist in making fun of it! I say again it is not a thing to be joked about," remarked the major, looking red.

"I think," returned Hester, "whoever lives in terror of infection had better take it and have done with it. I know I would rather die than live in the fear of death. It is the meanest of slaveries. At least, to live a slave to one's fears is next worst to living a slave to one's likings. Do as you please, major Marvel, but I give you warning that if you interpose—I will not say *interfere*, because you do it all for kindness—but if you interpose, I will never ask you to help me again; I will never let you know what I am doing, or come to you for advice, lest, instead of assisting me, you should set about preventing me from doing what I may have to do."

She held out her hand to him, adding with a smile,

"Is it for good-bye, or a compact?"

"But just look at it from my point of view," said the major, disturbed by the appeal. "What will your father say if he finds me aiding and abetting?"

"You did not come up at my father's request, or from the least desire on his part to have me looked after. You were not put in charge of me, and have no right to suppose me doing anything my parents would not like. They never objected to my going among my friends as I thought fit. Possibly they had more faith in my good sense, knowing me better than major Marvel."

"But when one sees you doing the thing that is plainly wrong,———"

"If it be so plainly wrong, how is it that I, who am really anxious to do right, should not see it wrong? Why should you think me less likely to know what is right than you, major Marvel?"

"I give in," said the major, "and will abide by the consequences."

"But you shall not needlessly put yourself in danger. You must not come to me except I send for you. If you hear anything of Corney, write, please."

"You don't imagine," cried the major, firing up, "that I am going to turn tail where you advance? I'm not going to run from the small-pox any more than you. So long as he don't get on my back to hunt other people, I don't care. By George! you women have more courage ten times than we men!"

"What we've got to do we just go and do, without thinking about danger. I believe it is often the best wisdom to be blind and let God be our eyes as well as our shield. But would it be right of you, not called to the work, to put yourself in danger because you would not be out where I am in? I could admire of course, but never quite justify sir Philip Sidney in putting off his cuisses because his general had not got his on."

"You're fit for a field-marshal, my dear!" said the major enthusiastically—adding as he kissed her hand, "I will think over what you have said, and at least not betray you without warning."

"That is enough for the present," returned Hester, shaking hands with him warmly.

The major went away hardly knowing whither, so filled was he with admiration of "cousin Helen's girl."

"By George!" he said to himself, "it's a confounded good thing I didn't marry Helen: she would never have had a girl like that if I had! Things are always best. The world needs a few such in it—even if they be fools—though I suspect they will turn out the wise ones, and we the fools for taking such care of our precious selves!"

But the major was by no means a selfish man. He was pretty much mixed, like the rest of us. Only, if we do not make up our minds not to be mixed with the one thing, we shall by and by be but little mixed with the other.

That same evening he sent her word that one answering the description of Cornelius had been descried in the neighbourhood of Addison square.

CHAPTER XLI.

DOWN AND DOWN.

Down the hill, and down!—to the shores of the salt sea, where the flowing life is dammed into a stagnant lake, a dead sea, growing more and more bitter with separation and lack of outlet. Mrs. Franks had come to feel the comforting of her husband a hopeless thing, and had all but ceased to attempt it. He grew more hopeless for the lack of what she thought moved him no more; and when she ceased to comfort him, the fountain of her own hope began to fail: in comforting him she had comforted herself! The boys, whose merriment even was always of a sombre kind got more gloomy, but had not begun to quarrel; for that evil, as interfering with their profession, the father had so sternly crushed that they had less than the usual tendency to it.

They had reached at last the point of being unable to pay for their lodging. They were indeed a fortnight's rent behind. Their landlady was not willing to be hard upon them, but what could a poor woman do, she said. The day was come when they must go forth like Abraham without a home, but not like Abraham with a tent and the world before them to set it up in, not like Abraham with camels and asses to help them along.

The weakly wife had to carry the sickly baby, who, with many ups and downs, had been slowly pining away. The father went laden with the larger portion of the goods yet remaining to them, and led the Serpent of the Prairie, with the drum hanging from his neck, by the hand. The other boys followed bearing the small stock of implements belonging to their art.

They had delayed their departure till it was more than dusk, for Franks could not help a vague feeling of blame for the condition of his family, and shrank from being seen of men's eyes: every one they met must know they had not a place to lay their heads! The world was like a sea before them—a prospect of ceaseless motion through the night, with the hope of an occasional rest on a doorstep or the edge of the curb-stone when the policeman's back was turned. They set out to go nowhither—to tramp on and on. Is it any wonder—does it imply wickedness beyond that lack of trust in God which is at the root of all wickedness, if the thought of ending their troubles by death crossed his mind, and from very tenderness kept returning? At the last gasp, as it seemed, in the close and ever closer siege of misfortune, he was almost ready, like the Jews of Masada, to conquer by self-destruction. But ever and again the sad eyes of his wife turned him from the thought, and he would plod on, thinking, as near as possible, about nothing.

At length as they wandered they came to a part where seemed to be only small houses and mews. Presently they found themselves in a little lane with no thoroughfare, at the back of some stables, and had to return along the rough-paved, neglected way. Such was the quiet and apparent seclusion of the spot, that it struck Franks they had better find its most sheltered corner, in which to sit down and rest awhile, possibly sleep. Scarcely would policeman, he thought, enter such a forsaken place! The same moment they heard the measured tread of the enemy on the other side of the stables. Instinctively, hurriedly they looked around for some place of concealment, and spied, at the end of a blank wall, belonging apparently to some kind of warehouse, a narrow path between that and the wall of the next property. Careless to what it led, anxious only to escape the annoyance of the policeman, they turned quickly into it. Scarcely had they done so when the Serpent, whose hand his father had let go, disappeared with a little cry. A whimper ascended through the darkness.

"Hold your n'ise, you rascal!" said his father sharply but under his breath; "the bobby will hear you, and have us all to the lock-up!"

Not a sound more was heard. Neither did the boy reappear.

"Good heavens, John!" cried the mother in an agonized whisper, "the child has fallen down a sewer! Oh, my God! he is gone for ever!"

"Hold your n'ise," said Franks again, "an' let's all go down a'ter him! It's better down anywheres than up where there ain't nothing to eat an' nowheres to lie down in."

"'Tain't a bad place," cried a little voice in a whisper broken with repressed sobs. "'Tain't a bad place, I don't think, only I broken one o' my two legs; it won't move to fetch of me up again."

"Thank God in heaven, the child's alive!" cried the mother. "—You ain't much hurt, are you, Moxy?"

"Rather, mother!"

By this time the steps of the policeman, to which the father had been listening with more anxiety than to the words of wife or child, were almost beyond hearing. Franks turned, and going down a few steps found his child, where he half lay, half sat upon them. But when he lifted him, he gave a low cry of pain. It was impossible to see where or how much he was hurt. The father sat down, and took him on his knees.

"You'd better come an' sit here, wife," he said, in a low dull voice. "There ain't no one a sittin' up for us. The b'y's a bit hurt, an' here you'll be out o' the wind at least."

They all got as far down the stair as its room would permit —the elder boys with their heads hardly below the level of the wind. But by and by one of them crept down past his mother feebly soothing the whimpering baby, and began to feel what sort of place they were in.

"Here's a door, father!" he said.

"Well, what o' that?" returned his father. "'Tain't no door open to us or the likes on us. There ain't no open door for the likes of us but the door o' the grave."

"Perhaps this is it, father," said Moxy.

"If it be," answered his father with bitterness, "we'll find it open, I'll be bound."

The boy's hand had come upon a latch; he lifted it and pushed.

"Father," he cried with a gasp, "*it is open!*"

"Get in then," said his father roughly, giving him a push with his foot.

"I daren't. It's so dark!" he answered.

"Here, you come an' take the Sarpint," returned the father, with faintly reviving hope, "an' I'll see what sort of a place it is. If it's any place at all, it's better than bein' i' the air all night at this freezin' time!"

So saying, he gave Moxy to his bigger brother, and went to learn what kind of a place they had got to. Ready as he had been a moment before for the grave, he was careful in stepping into the unknown dark. Feeling with foot and hand, he went in. He trod upon an earthen floor, and the place had a musty smell: it might be a church-vault he thought. In and in he went, with sliding foot on the soundless floor, and sliding hand along the cold wall—on and on, round two corners, past a closed door, and back to that by which he had entered, where, as at the grave's mouth, sat his family in sad silence, waiting his return.

"Wife," he said, "we can't do better than take the only thing that's offered. The floor's firm an' it's out o' the air. It's some sort of a cellar—p'r'aps at the bottom of a church. It do look as it wur left open jest for us!—You *used* to talk about *him* above, wife!"

He took her by the hand and led the way into the darkness, the boys following, one of them with a hold of his mother, and his arm round the other, who was carrying Moxy. Frank closed the door behind them, and they had gained a refuge. Feeling about, one of the boys came upon a large packing-case; having laid it down against the inner wall, Franks sat, and made his wife lie upon it, with her head on his knees, and took Moxy again in his arms, wrapt in one of their three thin blankets. The boys stretched themselves on the ground, and were soon fast asleep. The baby moaned by fits all the night long.

In about an hour Franks, who for long did not sleep, heard the door open softly and stealthily, and seemed aware of a presence besides themselves in the place. He concluded some other poor creature had discovered the same shelter; or, if they had got into a church-vault, it might be some wandering ghost; he was too weary for further speculation, or any uneasiness. When the slow light crept through the chinks of the door, he found they were quite alone.

It was a large dry cellar, empty save for the old packing-case.

They must use great caution, and do their best to keep their hold of this last retreat! Misfortune had driven them into the earth; it would be fortune to stay there.

When his wife woke, he told her what he had been thinking. He and the boys would creep out before it was light, and return after dark. She must not put even a finger out of the cellar-door all day. He laid Moxy down beside her, woke the two elder boys, and went out with them.

They were so careful that for many days they continued undiscovered. Franks and the boys went and returned, and gained bread enough to keep them alive, but it may well seem a wonder they did not perish with cold. It is amazing what even the delicate sometimes go through without more than a little hastening on the road the healthiest are going as well.

CHAPTER XLII.

DIFFERENCE.

ABOUT noon the next day, lord Gartley called. Whether he had got over his fright, or thought the danger now less imminent, or was vexed that he had *appeared* to be afraid, I do not know. Hester was very glad to see him again.

"I think I am a safe companion to-day," she said. "I have not been out of the house yet. But till the bad time is over among my people, we had better be content not to meet, I think."

Lord Gartley mentally gasped. He stood for a moment speechless, gathering his thoughts, which almost refused to be gathered.

"Do I understand you, Hester?" he said. "It would trouble me more than I can tell to find I do."

"I fear I understand you, Gartley!" said Hester. "Is it possible you would have me abandon my friends to the small-pox, as a hireling his sheep to the wolf?"

"There are those whose business it is to look after them."

"I am one of those," returned Hester.

"Well," answered his lordship, "for the sake of argument we will allow it *has* been your business; but how can you imagine it your business any longer?"

Indignation, a fire always ready "laid" in Hester's bosom,

but seldom yet lighted by lord Gartley, burst into flame, and she spoke as he had never heard her speak before.

"I am aware, my lord," she said, "that I must by and by have new duties to perform, but I have yet to learn that they must annihilate the old. The claims of love cannot surely obliterate those of friendship! The new should make the old better, not sweep it away."

"But, my dear girl, the thing is preposterous!" exclaimed his lordship. "Don't you see you will enter on a new life! In the most ordinary cases even, the duties of a wife are distinct from those of an unmarried woman."

"But the duties of neither can supersede those of a human being. If the position of a wife is higher than that of an unmarried woman, it must enable her to do yet better the things that were her duty as a human being before."

"But if it be impossible she should do the same things?"

"Whatever is impossible settles its own question. I trust I shall never desire to attempt the impossible."

"You have begun to attempt it now."

"I do not understand you."

"It is impossible you should perform the duties of the station you are about to occupy and continue to do as you are doing now. The attempt would be absurd."

"I have not tried it yet."

"But I know what your duties will be, and I assure you, my dear Hester, you will find the thing cannot be done."

"You set me thinking of more things than I can manage all at once," she replied in a troubled way. "I must think."

"The more you think, the better satisfied you will be of what I say. All I want of you is to think; for I am certain if you do, your good sense will convince you I am right."

He paused a moment. Hester did not speak He resumed.

"Just think," he said, "what it would be to have you coming home to go out again straight from one of these kennels of the small-pox! The idea is horrible! Wherever you were suspected of being present, the house would be shunned like the gates of death."

"In such circumstances I should not go out."

"The suspicion of it would be enough. And in your absence, as certainly as in your presence, though not so fatally, you would be neglecting your duty to society."

"Then," said Hester, "the portion of society that is healthy, wealthy, and—merry, has stronger claims than the portion that is poor and sick and in prison!"

Lord Gartley was for a moment bewildered—not from any feeling of the force of what she said, but from inability to take it in. He had to turn himself about two or three times mentally before he could bring himself to believe she actually meant that those to whom she alluded were to be regarded as a portion of the same society that ruled his life. He thought another moment, then said,

"There are the sick in every class: you would have those of your own to visit; why not leave others to visit those of theirs?"

"Then of course you would have no objection to my visiting a duchess in the small-pox?"

Lord Gartley was on the point of saying that duchesses never took the small-pox, but he did not, afraid Hester might know to the contrary.

"There could be no occasion for that," he said. "She would have everything she could want."

"And the others are in lack of everything! To desert them would be to desert the Lord. He will count it so."

"Well, certainly," said his lordship, returning on the track, "there would be less objection in the case of the duchess inasmuch as every possible precaution would in her house be taken against the spread of the disease. It would be horribly selfish to think only of the person affected!"

"You show the more need that the poor should not be deserted of the rich in their bitter necessity! Who among them is able to take the right precautions against the spread of the disease? And if it spread among them, there is no security against its reaching those at last who take every possible care of themselves, and none of their neighbours. You do not imagine, because I trust in God, and do not fear what the small-pox can do to me, I would therefore neglect any necessary preventive! That would be to tempt God: means as well as results are his. They are a way of giving us a share in his work."

"If I should have imagined such neglect possible, would not yesterday go far to justify me?" said lord Gartley.

"You are ungenerous," returned Hester. "You know I was then taken unprepared! The small-pox had but just appeared—at least I had not heard of it before."

"Then you mean to give up society for the sake of nursing the poor?"

"Only upon occasion, when there should be a necessity—such as an outbreak of infectious disease."

"And how, pray, should I account for your absence—not to mention the impossibility of doing my part without you? I should have to be continually telling stories; for if people came to know the fact, they would avoid me too as if I were the pest itself!"

It was to Hester as if a wall rose suddenly across the path hitherto stretching before her in long perspective. It became all but clear to her that he and she had been going on without any real understanding of each other's views in life. Her expectations tumbled about her like a house of cards. If he wanted to marry her, full of designs and aims in which she did not share, and she was going to marry him, expecting sympathies and helps which he had not the slightest inclination to give her, where was the hope for either of anything worth calling success? She sat silent. She wanted to be alone that she might think. It would be easier to write than talk further! But she must have more certainty as to what was in his mind.

"Do you mean then, Gartley," she said, "that when I am your wife, if ever I am, I shall have to give up all the friendships to which I have hitherto devoted so much of my life?"

Her tone was dominated by the desire to be calm, and get at his real feeling. Gartley mistook it, and supposed her at length betraying the weakness hitherto so successfully concealed. He concluded he had only to be firm now to render future discussion of the matter unnecessary.

"I would not for a moment act the tyrant, or say you must never go into such houses again. Your own good sense, the innumerable engagements you will have, the endless calls upon your time and accomplishments, will guide you—and I am certain guide you right, as to what attention you can spare to the claims of benevolence. But just please allow me one remark: in the circle to which you will in future belong, nothing is considered more out of place than any affectation of enthusiasm. I do not care to determine whether your way or theirs is the right one; all I want to say is, that, as the one thing to be avoided is peculiarity, you would do better, not to speak of these persons, whatever regard you may have for their spiritual welfare, as *your*

friends. One cannot have so many friends—not to mention that a unity of taste and feeling is necessary to that much abused word *friendship.* You know well enough such persons cannot be your friends."

This was more than Hester could bear. She broke out with a vehemence for which she was afterwards sorry, though nowise ashamed of it.

"They *are* my friends. There are twenty of them would do more for me than you would."

Lord Gartley rose. He was hurt.

"Hester," he said, "you think so little of me or my anxiety about your best interests, that I cannot but suppose it will be a relief to you if I go."

She answered not a word—did not even look up, and his lordship walked gently but unhesitatingly from the room.

"It will bring her to her senses!" he said to himself. "—How grand she looked!"

Long after he was gone, Hester sat motionless, thinking, thinking. What she had vaguely foreboded—she knew now she had foreboded it all the time—at least she thought she knew it—was come! They were not, never had been, never could be at one about anything! He was a mere man of this world, without relation to the world of truth! To be tied to him for life would be to be tied indeed! And yet she loved him—would gladly die for him—not to give him his own way—for that she would not even marry him; but to save him from it—to save him from himself, and give him God instead—that would be worth dying for, even if it were the annihilation unbelievers took it for! To marry him, swell his worldly triumphs, help gild the chains of his slavery, was not to be thought of! It was one thing to die that a fellow-creature might have all things good! another to live a living death that he might persist in the pride of life! She could not throw God's life to the service of the stupid Satan! It was a sad break-down to the hopes that had clustered about Gartley!

But did she not deserve it?

Therewith began a self-searching which did not cease until it had prostrated her in sorrow and shame before him whose charity is the only pledge of ours.

Was it then all over between them? Might he not bethink himself, and come again, and say he was sorry he had so left her? He might indeed; but would that make any difference

to her? Had he not beyond a doubt disclosed his real way of thinking and feeling? If he could speak thus now, after they had talked so much, what spark of hope was there in marriage?

To forget her friends that she might go into *society* a countess! The thought was as contemptible as poverty-stricken. She would leave such ambition to women that devoured novels and studied the peerage! One loving look from human eyes was more to her than the admiration of the world! She would go back to her mother as soon as she had found her poor Corney, and seen her people through the small-pox! If only the house was her own, that she might turn it into a hospital! She would make it a home to which any one sick or sad, any cast out of the world, any betrayed by seeming friends, might flee for shelter! She would be more than ever the sister and helper of her own—cling faster than ever to the skirts of the Lord's garment, that the virtue going out of him might flow through her to them! She would be like Christ, a gulf into which wrong should flow and vanish—a sun radiating an uncompromising love!

How easy is the thought, in certain moods, of the loveliest, most unselfish devotion! How hard is the doing of the thought in the face of a thousand unlovely difficulties! Hester knew this, but, God helping, was determined not to withdraw hand or foot or heart. She rose, and having prepared herself, set out to visit her people. First of all she would go to the book-binder's, and see how his wife was attended to!

The doctor not being there, she was readily admitted. The poor husband, unable to help, sat a picture of misery by the scanty fire. A neighbour, not yet quite recovered from the disease herself, had taken on her the duties of nurse. Having given her what instructions she thought it least improbable she might carry out, and told her to send for anything she wanted, she rose to take her leave.

"Won't you sing to her a bit, miss, before you go?" said the husband beseechingly. "It'll do her more good than all the doctor's stuff."

"I don't think she's well enough," said Hester

"Not to get all the good on it, I daresay, miss," rejoined the man; "but she'll hear it like in a dream, an' she'll think it's the angels a singin'; an' that'll do her good, for she do like all them creaturs!"

Hester yielded and sang, thinking all the time how the ways

of the open-eyed God look to us like things in a dream, because we are only in the night of his great day, asleep before the brightness of his great waking thoughts. The woman had been tossing and moaning in undefined discomfort, but as she sang she grew still, and when she ceased lay as if asleep.

"Thank you, miss," said the man. "You can do more than the doctor, as I told you! When he comes, he always wakes her up; you make her sleep true!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

DEEP CALLETH UNTO DEEP.

In the meantime yet worse trouble had come upon the poor Frankses. About a week after they had taken possession of the cellar, little Moxy, the Serpent of the Prairie, who had been weakly ever since his fall down the steps, by which he had hurt his head and been sadly shaken, became seriously ill, and grew worse and worse. For some days they were not much alarmed, for the child had often been ailing—oftener of late since they had not been faring so well; and even when they were they dared not get a doctor to him for fear of being turned out, and having to go to the workhouse.

By this time they had contrived to make the cellar a little more comfortable. They managed to get some straw, and with two or three old sacks made a bed for the mother and the baby and Moxy on the packing-case. They got also some pieces of matting, and contrived to put up a screen betwixt it and the rickety door. By the exercise of their art they had gained enough to keep them in food, but never enough to pay for the poorest lodging. They counted themselves, however, better off by much than if they had been crowded with all sorts in such lodging as a little more might have enabled them to procure.

The parents loved Moxy more tenderly than either of his brothers, and it was with sore hearts they saw him getting worse. The sickness was a mild small-pox—so mild that they did not recognize it, yet more than Moxy could bear, and he was gradually sinking. When this became clear to the mother, then indeed she felt the hand of God heavy upon her.

Religiously brought up, she had through the ordinary troubles of a married life sought help from the God in whom her mother

had believed:—we do not worship our fathers and mothers like the Chinese—though I do not envy the man who can scorn them for it—but they are, if at all decent parents, our first mediators with the great father, whom we can worse spare than any baby his mother;—but with every fresh attack of misery, every step further down on the stair of life, she thought she had lost her last remnant of hope, and knew that up to that time she had hoped, while past seasons of failure looked like times of blessed prosperity. No man, however little he may recognize the hope in him, knows what it would be to be altogether hopeless. Now Moxy was about to be taken from them, and no deeper misery seemed, to their imagination, possible! Nothing seemed left them—not even the desire of deliverance. How little hope there is in the commoner phases of religion! The message grounded on the uprising of the crucified man, has as yet yielded but little victory over the sorrows of the grave, but small anticipation of the world to come; not a little hope of deliverance from a hell, but scarce a foretaste of a blessed time at hand when the heart shall exult and the flesh be glad. In general there is at best but a sad looking forward to a region scarcely less shadowy and far more dreary than the elysium of the pagan poets. When Christ cometh, shall he find faith in the earth—even among those who think they believe that he is risen indeed? Margaret Franks, in the cellar of her poverty, the grave yawning below it for her Moxy, felt as if there was no heaven at all, only a sky.

But a strange necessity was at hand to compel the mother to rouse afresh all the latent hope and faith and prayer that were in her.

By an inexplicable insight the child seemed to know that he was dying. For, one morning, after having tossed about all the night long, he suddenly cried out in a tone most pitiful,

"Mother, don't put me in a hole."

As far as any of them knew, he had never seen a funeral—at least to know what it was—had never heard anything about death or burial: his father had a horror of the subject.

The words went like a knife to the heart of the mother. She sat silent, neither able to speak, nor knowing what to answer.

Again came the pitiful cry.

"Mother, don't put me in a hole."

Most mothers would have sought to soothe the child, their own hearts breaking the while, with the assurance that no one

should put him into any hole, or anywhere he did not want to go. But this mother could not lie in the face of death, nor had it ever occurred to her that no *person* is ever put into a hole, though many a body.

Before she could answer, a third time came the cry, this time in despairing though suppressed agony,—

"Mother, don't let them put me in a hole."

The mother gave a cry like the child's, and her heart within her became like water.

"Oh God!" she gasped, and could say no more.

But with the prayer—for what is a prayer but a calling on the name of the Lord?—came to her a little calm, and she was able to speak. She bent over him and kissed his forehead.

"My darling Moxy, mother loves you," she said.

What that had to do with it she did not ask herself. The child looked up in her face with dim eyes.

"Pray to the heavenly father, Moxy," she went on—and there stopped, thinking what she should tell him to ask for.

"Tell him," she resumed, "that you don't want to be put in a hole, and tell him that mother does not want you to be put in a hole, for she loves you with all her heart."

"Don't put me in the hole," said Moxy, now using the definite article.

"Jesus Christ was put in the hole," said the voice of the next elder boy from behind his mother. He had come in softly, and she had neither seen nor heard him. It was Sunday, and he had strolled into a church or meeting-house—does it matter which?—and had heard the wonderful story of hope. It was remarkable though that he had taken it up as he did, for he went on to add, "but he didn't mind it much, and soon got out again."

"Ah, yes, Moxy!" said the poor mother, "Jesus died for our sins, and you must ask him to take you up to heaven."

But Moxy did not know anything about sins, and just as little about heaven. What he wanted was an assurance that he would not be put in the hole. And the mother, now a little calmer, thought she saw what she ought to say.

"It ain't your soul, it's only your body, Moxy, they put in the hole," she said.

"I don't want to be put in the hole," Moxy almost screamed. "I don't want my head cut off."

The poor mother was at her wits' end.

But here the child fell into a troubled sleep, and for some hours a silence as of the grave filled the dreary cellar.

The moment he woke the same cry came from his fevered lips, "Don't put me in the hole," and at intervals, growing longer as he grew weaker, the cry came all the day.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DELIVERANCE.

HESTER had been to church, and had then visited some of her people, carrying them words of comfort and hope. They received them in a way at her hand, but none of them, had they gone, would have found them at church. How seldom is the man in the pulpit able to make people feel that the things he is talking about are things at all! Neither when the heavens are black with clouds and rain, nor when the sun rises glorious in a blue perfection, do many care to sit down and be taught astronomy! But Hester was a live gospel to them—and most when she sang. Even the name of the Saviour, uttered in her singing tone and with the expression she then gave it, came nearer to them than when she spoke it. The very brooding of the voice on a word, seems to hatch something of what is in it. She often felt, however, as if some new, other kind of messengers than she or such as she, must one day be sent them; for there seemed a gulf between their thoughts and hers, such as neither they nor she could pass.

In fact they *could not* think the things she thought, and had no vocabulary or phrases or imagery whereby to express their own thinkings. God does not hurry such: have we enough of hope for them, or patience with them? I suspect their teachers must arise among themselves. They too must have an elect of their own kind, of like passions with themselves, to lift them up, and perhaps shame those that cannot reach them. Our teaching to them is no teaching at all; it does not reach their ignorance: perhaps they require a teaching that to our ignorance would seem no teaching at all, or even bad teaching. How many things are there in the world in which the wisest of us can ill descry the hand of God! Who not knowing could read the lily in its bulb, the great oak in the pebble-like acorn? God's beginnings do not *look* like his endings, but they *are* like;

the oak *is* in the acorn, though we cannot see it. The ranting preacher, uttering huge untruths, may yet wake vital verities in chaotic minds—convey to a heart some saving fact, rudely wrapped in husks of lies even against God himself.

Mr. Christopher, thrown at one time into daily relations with a good sort of man, had tried all he could to rouse him to a sense of his higher duties and spiritual privileges, but entirely without success. A preacher came round, whose gospel was largely composed of hell-fire and malediction, with frequent allusion to the love of a most unlovely God, as represented by him. This preacher woke up the man. "And then," said Christopher, "I was able to be of service to him, and get him on. He speedily outgrew the lies his prophet had taught him, and became a devout Christian; while the man who had been the means of rousing him was tried for bigamy, convicted, and punished."

This Sunday Hester, in her dejection and sadness about Gartley, over whom—not her loss of him—she mourned deeply, felt more than ever, if not that she could not reach her people, yet how little she was able to touch them; and there came upon her a hopelessness that was heavy, sinking into the very roots of her life, and making existence itself appear a dull and undesirable thing. Hitherto life had seemed a good thing, worth holding up as a heave-offering to him who made it; now she had to learn to take life itself from the hand of God as his will, in faith that he would prove it a good gift. She had to learn that in *all* drearinesses, of the flesh or spirit, even in those that seem to come of having nothing to do, or from being unable to do what we think we have to do, the refuge is the same—he who is the root and crown of life. Who would receive comfort from anything but love? Who would build on anything but the eternal? Who would lean on that which has in itself no persistence? Even the closest human loves have their only endurance, only hope of perfection, in the eternal perfect love of which they are the rainbow-refractions. I cannot love son or daughter as I would, save loving them as the children of the eternal God, in whom his spirit dwells and works, making them altogether lovely, and me more and more love-capable. That they are mine is not enough ground for enough love—will not serve as operative reason to the height of the love my own soul demands from itself for them. But they are mine because they are his, and he is the demander and enabler of love.

The day was a close, foggy, cold, dreary, day. The service at

church had not seemed interesting. She laid the blame on herself, and neither on prayers nor lessons nor psalms nor preacher, though in truth some of these might have been better; the heart seemed to have gone out of the world—as if not Baal but God had gone to sleep, and his children had waked before him and found the dismal grey of the world's morning full of discomfortable ghosts. She tried her New Testament; but Jesus too seemed far away—nothing left but the story about him—as if he had forgotten his promise, and was no longer in the world. She tried some of her favourite poems: each and all were infected with the same disease—with common-place nothingness. They seemed all made up—words! words! words! Nothing was left her in the valley but the shadow, and the last weapon, All-prayer. She fell upon her knees and cried to God for life. "My heart is dead within me," she said, and poured out her lack into the hearing of him from whom she had come that she might have himself, and so be. She did not dwell upon her sorrows; even they had sunk and all but vanished in the grey mass of lost interest.

The modern representatives of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar would comfort us with the assurance that all such depression has physical causes: right or wrong, what does their comfort profit? Consolation in being told that we are slaves! What noble nature would be content to be cured of sadness by a dose of medicine? There is in the heart a conviction that the soul ought to be supreme over the body and its laws; that there must be a faith which conquers the body with all its tyrants; and that no soul is right until it has that faith—until it is in closest, most immediate understanding with its own unchangeable root, God himself. Such faith may not at once remove the physical cause, if such there be, but it will be more potent still; in the presence of both the cause and the effect, its very atmosphere will be a peace tremulous with unborn gladness. This gained, the medicine, the regimen, or the change of air may be resorted to without sense of degradation, with cheerful hope and some indifference. Such is perhaps the final victory of faith. Faith, in such circumstances, must be of the purest, and may be of the strongest. In few other circumstances can it have such an opportunity—can it rise to equal height. It may be its final lesson, and deepest. God is in it just in his seeming to be not in it—that we may choose him in the darkness of the feeling, stretch out the hand to him when we cannot see him, verify him

in the vagueness of the dream, call to him in the absence of impulse, obey him in the weakness of the will.

Even in her prayers Hester could not get near him. It seemed as if his ear were turned away from her cry. She sank into a kind of lethargic stupor.

I think in order to convey to us the spiritual help we need, it is sometimes necessary—just as, according to the psalmist, "he giveth to his beloved in their sleep"—to cast us into a sort of mental quiescence, that the noise of the winds and waters of the questioning intellect and roused feelings may not interfere with the impression the master would make upon our beings. But Hester's lethargy lasted long, and was not so removed. She rose from her knees in a kind of despair, almost ready to think that either there was no God, or he would not hear her. An inaccessible God was worse than no God at all! In either case she would rather cease!

It had been dark for hours, but she had lighted no candle, and sat in bodily as in spiritual darkness. She was in her bedroom, which was on the second floor, at the back of the house, looking out on the top of the gallery that led to the great room. She had no fire. One was burning away unheeded in the drawing-room below. She was too miserable to care whether she was cold or warm. When she had got some light in her body, then she would go and get warm!

What time it was she did not know. She had been summoned to the last meal of the day, but had forgotten the summons. It must have been about ten o'clock. The streets were silent, the square deserted—as usual. The evening was raw and cold, one to drive everybody in-doors that had doors to go in at.

Through the cold and darkness came a shriek that chilled her with horror. Yet it seemed as if she had been expecting it—as if the cloud of misery that had all day been gathering deeper and deeper above and around her, had at length reached its fulness, and burst in the lightning of that shriek. It was followed by another and yet another. Whence did they come? Not from the street, for all beside was still; even the roar of London was hushed! And there was a certain something in the sound of them that assured her they rose in the house. Was Sarah being murdered? She was half-way down the stairs before the thought that sent her was plain to herself.

The house seemed unnaturally still. At the top of the kitchen stairs she called aloud to Sarah—as loud, that is, as a certain tremor in her throat would permit. There came no reply. Down she went to face the worst: she was a woman of true courage—that is, a woman whom no amount of apprehension could deter when she knew she ought to seek the danger.

In the kitchen stood Sarah, motionless, frozen with fear. A candle was in her hand, just lighted. Hester's voice seemed to break her trance. She started, stared, and fell a trembling. She made her drink some water, and then she came to herself.

"It's in the coal-cellar, miss!" she gasped. "I was that minute going to fetch a scuttle-full! There's something buried in them coals as sure as my name's Sarah!"

"Nonsense!" returned Hester "Who could scream like that from under the coals? Come; we'll go and see what it is."

"Laws, miss! don't you go near it now. It's too late to do anything. Either it's the woman's sperrit as they say was murdered there, or it's a new one."

"And you would let her be killed without interfering?"

"Oh, miss, all's over by this time!" persisted Sarah, with white lips trembling.

"Then you are ready to go to bed with a murderer in the house?" said Hester.

"He's done his business now, an' 'll go away."

"Give me the candle. I will go alone."

"You'll be murdered, miss—as sure's you're alive!"

Hester took the light from her, and went towards the coal-cellar. The old woman sank on a chair.

I have already alluded to the subterranean portion of the house, which extended under the great room. A long vault, corresponding to the gallery above, led to these cellars. It was rather a frightful place to go into in search of the source of a shriek. Its darkness was scarcely affected by the candle she carried; it seemed only to blind herself. She tried holding it above her head, and then she could see a little. The black tunnel stretched on and on, like a tunnel in a feverish dream, a long way before the cellars began to open from it. She advanced, I cannot say fearless, but therefore only the more brave. She felt as if leaving life and safety behind, but her imagination was not much awake, and her mental condition made her almost

inclined to welcome death. She reached at last the coal-cellar, the first that opened from the passage, and looked in. The coal-heap was low, and the place looked large and very black. She sent her keenest gaze through the darkness, but could see nothing; went in and moved about until she had thrown light into every corner: no one was there. She was on the point of returning when she bethought herself there were other cellars—one the wine-cellar, which was locked: she would go and see if Sarah knew anything about the key of it. But just as she left the coal-cellar, she heard a moan, followed by a succession of low sobs. Her heart began to beat violently, but she stopped to listen. The light of her candle fell upon another door, a pace or two from where she stood. She went to it, laid her ear against it, and listened. The sobs continued a while, ceased, and left all silent. Then clear and sweet, but strange and wild, as if from some region unearthly, came the voice of a child: she could hear distinctly what it said.

"Mother," it rang out, "you *may* put me in the hole."

And the silence fell deep as before.

Hester stood for a moment horrified. Her excited imagination suggested some deed of superstitious cruelty in the garden of the house adjoining. Nor were the sobs and cries altogether against such supposition. She recovered herself instantly, and ran back to the kitchen.

"You have the keys of the cellars—have you not, Sarah?" she said.

"Yes, miss, I fancy so."

"Where does the door beyond the coal-cellar lead out to?"

"Not out to nowhere, miss. That's a large cellar as we never use. I ain't been into it since the first day, when they put some of the packing-cases there."

"Give me the key," said Hester. "Something is going on there we ought to know about."

"Then pray send for the police, miss!" answered Sarah, trembling. "It ain't for you to go into such places—on no account!"

"What! not in our own house?"

"It's the police's business, miss!"

"Then the police are their brothers' keepers, and not you and me, Sarah?"

"It's the wicked as is in it, I fear, miss."

"It's those that weep anyhow, and they're our business, if it's only to weep with them. Quick! show me which is the key."

Sarah sought the key in the bunch, and noting the coolness with which her young mistress took it, gathered courage from hers to follow, a little way behind.

When Hester reached the door, she carefully examined it that she might do what she had to do as quickly as possible. There were bolts and bars upon it, but not one of them was fastened; it was secured only by the bolt of the lock. She set the candle on the floor, and put in the key as quietly as she could. It turned without much difficulty, and the door fell partly open with a groan of the rusted hinge. She caught up her light, and went in.

It was a large, dark, empty place. For a few moments she could see nothing. But presently she spied, somewhere in the dark, a group of faces, looking white through the circumfluent blackness, the eyes of them fixed in amaze, if not in terror, upon herself. She advanced towards them, and almost immediately recognized one of them—then another; but what with the dimness, the ghostliness, and the strangeness of it all, felt as if surrounded by the veiling shadows of a dream. But whose was that pallid little face whose eyes were not upon her with the rest? It stared straight on into the dark, as if it had no more to do with the light! She drew nearer to it. The eyes of the other faces followed her.

When the eyes of the mother saw the face of her Moxy who died in the dark, she threw herself in a passion of tears and cries upon her dead. But the man knelt upon his knees, and when Hester turned in pain from the agony of the mother, she saw him with lifted hands of supplication at her feet. A torrent of divine love and passionate pity filled her heart, breaking from its deepest God-haunted caves. She stooped and kissed the man upon his upturned forehead.

Many are called but few chosen. Hester was the disciple of him who could have cured the leper with a word, but for reasons of his own, not far to seek by such souls as Hester's, laid his hands upon him, sorely defiling himself in the eyes of the self-respecting bystanders. The leper himself would never have dreamed of his touching him.

Franks burst out crying like the veriest child. All at once in the depths of hell the wings of a great angel were spread out over him and his! No more starvation and cold for his

poor wife and the baby! The boys would have plenty now! If only Moxy—but he was gone where the angels came from—and theirs was a hard life! Surely the God his wife talked about must have sent her to them! Did he think they had borne enough now? Only he had borne it so ill! Thus thought Franks, in dislocated fashion, and remained kneeling.

Hester was now kneeling also, with her arms round her whose arms were about the body of her child. She did not speak to her, did not attempt a word of comfort, but wept with her: she too had loved little Moxy! she too had heard his dying words—glowing with reproof to her faithlessness who cried out like a baby when her father left her for a moment in the dark! In the midst of her loneliness and seeming desertion, God had these people already in the house for her help! The back door of every tomb opens on a hill-top.

With awe-struck faces the boys looked on. They too could now see Moxy's face. They had loved Moxy—loved him more than they knew yet.

The woman at length raised her head, and looked at Hester.

"Oh, miss, it's Moxy!" she said, and burst into a fresh passion of grief.

"The dear child!" said Hester.

"Oh, miss! who's to look after him now?"

"There will be plenty to look after him. You don't think he who provided a woman like you for his mother before he sent him here, would send him there without having somebody ready to look after him?"

"Well, miss, it wouldn't be like him—I don't think!"

"It would *not* be like him," responded Hester, with self-accusation.

Then she asked them a few questions about their history since last she saw them, and how it was they had sunk so low, receiving answers more satisfactory than her knowledge had allowed her to hope.

"But oh, miss!" exclaimed Mrs. Franks, bethinking herself, "you ought not to ha' been here so long: the little angel there died o' the small-pox, as I know too well, an' it's no end o'catching!"

"Never mind me," replied Hester; "I'm not afraid. But," she added, rising, "we must get you out of this immediately."

"Oh, miss!" where would you send us?" said Mrs. Franks, in alarm. "There's nobody as 'll take us in! An' it would

break both our two hearts—Franks's an' mine—to be parted at such a moment, when us two's the father an' mother o' Moxy. An' they'd take Moxy from us, an' put him in the hole he was so afear'd of!"

"You don't think I would leave my own flesh and blood in the cellar!" answered Hester. "I will go and make arrangement for you above, and be back presently.

"Oh, thank you, miss!" said the woman, as Hester set down the candle beside them. "I do want to look on the face of my blessed boy as long as I can! He will be taken from me altogether soon!"

"Mrs. Franks," rejoined Hester, "you mustn't talk like a heathen."

"I didn't know as I was saying anything wrong, miss!"

"Don't you know," said Hester, smiling through tears, "that Jesus died and rose again that we might be delivered from death? Don't you know it's he and not Death has got your Moxy? He will take care of him for you till you are ready to have him again. If you love Moxy more than Jesus loves him, then you are more like God than Jesus was!"

"Oh, miss, don't talk to me like that! The child was born of my own body!"

"And both you and he were born of God's own soul: if you know how to love, he loves ten times better."

"You know how to love anyhow, miss! the Lord love you! An angel o' mercy you've been to me an' mine.

"Good-bye then for a few minutes," said Hester. "I am only going to prepare a place for you."

Only as she said the words did she remember who had said them before her. And as she went through the dark tunnel she sang with a voice that seemed to beat at the gates of heaven "Thou didst not leave his soul in hell."

Mrs. Franks threw herself again beside her child, but her tears were not so bitter now; she and hers were no longer forsaken! She also read her New Testament, and the last words of Hester had struck her as well as the speaker of them:

"And she'll come again and receive us to herself!" she said. "—An' Christ 'll receive my poor Moxy to himself! If he wasn't, as they say, a Christian, it was only as he hadn't time—so young, an' all the hard work he had to do—with his precious face a grinnin' like an angel between the feet of him, a helpin' of his father to make a livin' for us all! That would be no

reason why he as did the will o' *his* father shouldn't take to him. If ever there was a child o' God's makin' it was that child! I feel as if God must ha' made him right off, like!"

Thoughts like these kept flowing through the mind of the bereaved mother as she lay with her arm over the body of her child—ever lovely to her, now more lovely than ever. The small-pox had not been severe—only severe enough to take a feeble life from the midst of privation, and the expression of his face was lovely. He lay like the sacrifice that sealed a new covenant between his mother and her father in heaven. We have yet learned but little of the blessed power of death. We call it an evil! It is a holy, friendly thing. We are not left shivering all the world's night in a stately portico with no house behind it: death is the door to the temple-house, whose God is not seated aloft in motionless state, but walks about among his children, receiving his pilgrim sons in his arms, and washing the sore feet of the weary ones. Either God is altogether such as Christ, or the Christian religion is a lie.

Not a word passed between husband and wife. Their hearts were too full for speech, but their hands found and held each the other. It was the strangest concurrence of sorrow and relief! The two boys sat on the ground with their arms about each other. So they waited.

CHAPTER XLV.

ON THE WAY UP.

HEARING only the sounds of peaceful talk, Sarah had ventured near enough to the door to hear something of what was said, and set at rest by finding that the cause of her terror was but a poor family that had sought refuge in the cellar, she woke up to better, and was ready to help. More than sufficiently afraid of robbers and murderers, she was not afraid of infection: "What should an old woman like me do taking the small-pox! I've had it bad enough once already!" She was rather staggered, however, when she found what Hester's plan for the intruders was.

Nothing more, since the night of the concert, had been done to make the great room habitable by the family. It had been

well cleaned out and that was all. Now and then a fire was lighted in it, and the children played in it as before, but it had never been really in use. What better place, thought Hester, could there be for a small-pox ward! Thither she would convey her friends rescued from the slimy embrace of London poverty!

She told Sarah to light a great fire as speedily as possible, while she settled what could be done about beds. Almost all in the house were old-fashioned wooden ones, hard to take down, heavy to move, and hard to put up again: with only herself and Sarah it would take a long time! For safety too it would be better to hire iron beds which would be easily purified —only it was Sunday night, and late! But she knew the little broker in Steeven's road: she would go to him and see if he had any beds, and if he would help her to put them up at once!

The raw night made her rejoice the more that she had got hold of the poor creatures drowning in the social swamp. It was a consolation, strong even against such heavy sorrows and disappointments as housed in her heart, to know that virtue was going out of her for rescue and redemption.

She had to ring the bell a good many times before the door opened, for the broker and his small household had retired for the night: it was now eleven o'clock. He was not well pleased at being taken from his warm bed to go out and work—on such a night too! He grounded what objection he made, however, on its being Sunday, and more than hinted his surprise that Hester should ask him to do such a thing. She told him it was for some who had nowhere to lay their heads, and in her turn more than hinted that he could hardly know what Sunday meant if he did not think it right to do any number of good deeds on it. The man assented to her argument, and went to look out the two beds she wanted. But what in reality influenced him was dislike to offending a customer: customers are the divinities of tradesmen, as Society is the divinity of society: in her, men and women worship themselves. Having got the two bedsteads extracted piecemeal from the disorganized heaps in his back shop, he and Hester together proceeded to carry them home—and I cannot help wishing lord Gartley had come upon her at the work—no very light job, for she went three times, and bore good weights. It was long after midnight before the beds were ready—and a meal of coffee, and toast,

and bread and butter, spread in the great room. Then at last Hester went back to the cellar.

"Now, come," she said, and taking up the baby, which had just weight enough to lie and let her know how light he was, led the way.

Franks rose from the edge of the packing-case, on which lay the body of Moxy, with his mother yet kneeling beside it, and put his arm round his wife to raise her. She yielded, and he led her away after their hostess, the boys following hand in hand. But when they reached the cellar door, the mother gave a heart-broken cry, and turning ran and threw herself again beside her child. They all followed her.

"I can't! I can't!" she said. "I can't leave my Moxy lyin' here all alone! He ain't used to it. He's never once slep alone since he was born. I can't abear to think o' that lovely look o' his lost on the dark night—not a soul to look down an' see it! Oh, Moxy! was your mother a leavin' of you all alone!"

"What makes you think there will not be a soul to see it?" said Hester. "The darkness may be full of eyes! And the night itself is only the black pupil of the Father's eye.—But we're not going to leave the darling here. We'll take him too, of course, and find him a good place to lie in."

The mother was satisfied, and the little procession passed through the dark way, and up the stair.

The boys looked pleased at sight of the comforts that waited them, but a little awed with the great lofty room. Over the face of Franks, notwithstanding his little Serpent of the Prairie had crept away through the long tangled grass of the universe, passed a gleam of joy mingled with gratitude: much was now begun to be set to rights between him and the high government. But the mother was with the little body lying alone in the cellar.

Suddenly with a wild gesture she made for the door.

"Oh, miss!" she cried, "the rats! the rats!" and would have darted from the room.

"Stop, stop, dear Mrs. Franks!" cried Hester. "Here! take the baby; Sarah and I are going immediately to bring him away, and lay him where you can see him when you please."

Again she was satisfied. She took the baby, and sat down beside her husband.

I have mentioned a low pitched room under the great one: in this Hester had told Sarah to place a table covered with white: they would lay the body there in such fashion as would be a sweet remembrance to the mother: she went now to see whether this was done. But on the way she met Sarah coming up with ashy face.

"Oh, miss!" she said, "the body mustn't be left a minute: there's a whole army of rats in the house already! As I was covering the table with a blanket before I put on the sheet, there got up all at once behind the wainscot the most uprageous hurry-scurry o' them horrid creaturs. They'll be in wherever it is—you may take your bible-oath! Once when I was——"

Hester interrupted her.

"Come," she said, and led the way.

She looked first into the low room to see that it was properly prepared, and was leaving it again, when she heard a strange sound behind the wainscot as it seemed.

"There, miss!" said Sarah.

Hester made up her mind at once that little Moxy should not be left alone. Her heart trembled a little at the thought, but she comforted herself that Sarah would not be far off, and that the father and mother of the child would be immediately over her head. The same instant she was ashamed of having found this comfort first, for was he not infinitely nearer to her who is lord of life and death?

They went to the cellar.

"But how," said Hester on the way, "can the Frankses have got into the place?"

"There is a back door to it, of course!" answered Sarah. "The first load of coals came in that way, but master wouldn't have it used: he didn't like a door to his house he never set eyes on, he said."

"But how could it have been open to let them in?" said Hester.

When they reached the cellar, she took the candle and went to look at the door. It was pushed to, but not locked, and had no fastening upon it except the lock, in which was the key. She turned the key, and taking it out, put it in her pocket.

Then they carried up the little body, washed it, dressed it in white, and laid it straight in its beauty—symbol—passing like all symbols—of a peace divinely more profound—the little hands folded on the breast under the well-contented face, repeating

the calm expression of that conquest over the fear of death, that submission to be "put in the hole," with which the child-spirit passed into wide spaces. They lighted six candles, three at the head and three at the feet, that the mother might see the face of her child, and because light not darkness befits death. To Hester they symbolized the forms of light that sat, one at the head and one at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they went to fetch the mother.

She was washing the things they had used for supper. The boys were already in bed. Franks was staring into the fire: the poor fellow had not even looked at one for some time. Hester asked them to go and see where she had laid Moxy, and and they went with her. The beauty of death's courtly state comforted them.

"But I can't leave him alone!" said the mother; "—all night too!—he wouldn't like it! I know he won't wake up no more; only, you know, miss,—"

"Yes, I know very well," replied Hester.

"I'm ready," said Franks.

"No, no!" returned Hester. "You are worn out and must go to bed, both of you: I will stay with the beautiful thing, and see that no harm comes to it."

After some persuasion the mother consented, and in a little while the house was quiet. Hester threw a fur cloak round her, and sat down in the chair Sarah had placed for her beside the dead.

CHAPTER XLVI.

BY THE DEAD.

WHEN she had sat some time, the exceeding stillness of the form beside her began to fill her heart with a gentle awe. The stillness was so persistent that the awe gradually grew to dismay; and fear, inexplicable, unreasonable fear, of which she was ashamed, began to invade her. She knew at once that she must betake her to the Truth for refuge. It is little use telling one's self that one's fear is silly. It comes upon no pretence of wisdom or logic; proved devoid of both, it will not therefore budge a jot. She prayed to the Father, awake with her in the stillness; and then began to think about the dead

Christ. Would the women who waited for the dawn because they had no light by which to minister, have been afraid to watch by that body all the night long? Oh, to have seen it come to life! move and wake and rise with the informing God! Every dead thing belonged to Christ, not to something called Death! This dead thing was his. It was dead as he had been dead, and no otherwise! There was nothing dreadful in watching by it, any more than in sitting beside the cradle of a child yet unborn! In the name of Christ she would fear nothing! He had abolished death!

Thus thinking, she lay back in her chair, closed her eyes, and thanking God for having sent her relief in these his children to help, fell fast asleep.

She started suddenly awake, seeming to have been roused by the opening of a door. The fringe of a departing dream lay yet upon her eyes: was the door of the tomb in which she had lain so long burst from its hinges? was the day of the great resurrection come? Swiftly her senses settled themselves, and she saw plainly and remembered clearly. Yet could she be really awake? for in the wall opposite stood the form of a man! She neither cried out nor fainted, but sat gazing. She was not even afraid, only dumb with wonder. The man did not look fearful. A smile she seemed to have seen before broke gradually from his lips and spread over his face. The next moment he stepped from the wall and came towards her.

Then sight and memory came together: in that wall was a door, said to lead into the next house: for the first time she saw it open!

The man came nearer and nearer: it was Christopher! She rose, and held out her hand.

"You are surprised to see me!" he said, "—and well you may be! Am I in your house?—And this watch! what does it mean? I seem to recognize the sweet face! I must have seen you and it together before!—Yes! it is Moxy!"

"You are right, Mr. Christopher," she answered. "Dear little Moxy died of the small-pox in our cellar. He was just gone when I found them there."

"Is it wise of you to expose yourself so much to the infection?" said the doctor.

"Is it worthy of you to ask such a question?" returned Hester. "We have our work to do; life or death is the care of him who sets the work."

The doctor bent his head low, lower, and lower still, before her. Nothing moves a man more than to recognize in another the principles which are to himself a necessity of his being and history.

"I put the question to know on what grounds you based your action," he replied, "and I am answered."

"Tell me then," said Hester, "how you come to be here. It seemed to my sleepy eyes as if an angel had melted his own door through the wall! Are you free of ordinary hindrances?"

She asked almost in seriousness; for, with the lovely dead before her, in the middle of the night, roused suddenly from a sleep into which she had fallen with her thoughts full of the shining resurrection of the Lord, she would have believed him at once if he had told her that for the service of the Lord's poor he was enabled to pass where he pleased. He smiled with a wonderful sweetness as he made answer:

"I hope you are not one of those who so little believe that the world and its ways belong to God, that they want to have his presence proved by something out of the usual way—something not so good; for surely the way he chooses to work almost always, must be a better way than that in which he only works now and then because of a special necessity!"

By these words Hester perceived she was in the presence of one who understood the things of which he spoke.

"I came here in the simplest way in the world," he went on, "though I am no less surprised than you to find myself in your presence."

"The thing is to me a marvel," said Hester.

"It shall not be such a moment longer. I was called to see a patient. When I went to return as I came, I found the door by which I had entered locked. I then remembered that I had passed a door on the stair, and went back to try it. It was bolted on the side to the stair. I withdrew the bolts, opened the door gently, and beheld one of the most impressive sights I ever saw. Shall I tell you what I saw?"

"Do," answered Hester."

"I saw," said Christopher with solemnity, "the light shining in the darkness, and the darkness comprehending it not—six candles, and only the upturned face of the dead, and the down-turned face of the sleeping! I seemed to look into the heart of things, and see the whole waste universe waiting for the sonship, for the redemption of the body, the visible life of men!

I saw that love, trying to watch by death, had failed, because the thing that is not needs not to be watched. I saw all this and more. I think I must have unconsciously pushed the door against the wall, for somehow I made a noise with it, and you woke."

Hester's face alone showed that she understood him. She turned and looked at Moxy to calm the emotion to which she would not give scope.

Christopher stood silent, as if brooding on what he had seen. She could not ask him to sit down, but she must understand how he had got into the house. Where was his patient? "In the next house, of course!" she concluded. But the thing wanted looking into! That door must be secured on their side! Their next midnight visitor might not be so welcome as this, whose heart burned to the same labour as her own! "But what we really want," she thought, "is to have more not fewer of our doors open, if they be but the right ones for the angels to come and go!"

"I never saw that door open before," she said, "and none of us knew with what it made communication. We took it for granted it was the next house. But the old lady was so cross,——"

Here she checked herself; for if Mr. Christopher had just come from that house, he might be a friend of the old lady's!

"It goes into no lady's house, so far as I understand," said Christopher. "The stair leads to a garret—I should fancy over our heads here—much higher up, though."

"Would you show me how you came in?" said Hester.

"With pleasure," he answered, and taking one of the candles, led the way. "I would not let the young woman leave her husband to show me out," he went on. "When I found myself a prisoner, I thought I would try this door before periling the sleep of a patient in the small-pox. You seem to have it all round you here!"

Through the door so long mysterious Hester stepped on a narrow, steep stair. Christopher turned downward, and trod softly. At the bottom he passed through a door admitting them to a small cellar, a mere recess. Thence they issued into that so lately occupied by the Frankses. Christopher went to the door Hester had locked, and said,

"This is where I came in. I suppose one of your people must have locked it."

"I locked it myself," replied Hester, and told him in brief the story of the evening.

"I see!" said Christopher; "we must have passed through just after you had taken them away."

"And now the question remains," said Hester, "—who can it be in our house without our knowledge? The stair is plainly in our house."

"Beyond a doubt," said Christopher. "But how strange it is you should know your own house so imperfectly! I fancy the young couple, having got into some difficulty, found entrance the same way the Frankses did; only they went farther and fared better!—to the top of the house, I mean. They've managed to make themselves pretty comfortable too! There is something peculiar about them—I can hardly say what in a word."

"Could I not go up with you to-morrow and see them?" said Hester.

"That would hardly do, I fear. I could be of no farther use to them were they to suppose I had betrayed them. You have a perfect right to know what is going on in your house, but I would rather not appear in the discovery. One thing is plain. you must either go to them, or unlock the cellar-door. You will be taken with the young woman. She is a capable creature —an excellent nurse. Shall I go out this way?"

"Will you come to-morrow?" said Hester. "I am alone, and cannot ask anybody to help me because of the small-pox, and I shall want help for the funeral. You do not think me troublesome?"

"Not in the least. It is all in the way of my business. I will manage for you."

"Come then; I will show you the way out. This is no. 18, Adddison square. You need not come in the cellar-way next time."

"If I were you," said Christopher, stopping at the foot of the kitchen stair, "I would leave the key in that cellar-door. The poor young woman would be terrified to find they were prisoners."

She turned immediately and went back, he following, and replaced the key.

"Now let us fasten up the door I came in by," said Christopher. "I have got a screw in my pocket, and I never go without my tool-knife."

This was soon done, and he went.

What a strange night it had been for Hester—more like some unbelievable romance! For the time she had forgotten her own troubles! Ah, if she had been of one mind with lord Gartley, those poor creatures would be now moaning in darkness by the dead body of their child, or out with it in their arms in the streets, or parted asunder in the casual wards of some workhouse! Certainly God could have sent them other help than hers, but where would *she* be then—a fellow-worker with his lordship, and not with God—one who did it not to *him!* Woe for the wife whose husband has no regard to her deepest desires, her highest aspirations!—who loves her so that he would be the god of her idolatry, not the friend and helper of her heart, soul, and mind! Many of Hester's own thoughts were revealed to her that night by the side of the dead Moxy. It became clear to her that she had been led astray, in part by the desire to rescue one to whom God had not sent her, in part by the pleasure of being loved and worshipped, and in part by worldly ambition. Surer sign would God have sent her had he intended she should give herself to Gartley! Would God have her give herself to one who would render it impossible for her to make life more abundant to others? Marriage might be the absorbing duty of some women, but was it necessarily hers? Certainly not with such a man! Might not the duties of some callings be incompatible with marriage? Did not the providence of the world ordain that not a few should go unmarried? The children of the married would be but ill cared for were there only the married to care for them! It was one thing to die for a man—another to enslave God's child to the will of one who did not know him! Was a husband to take the place of Christ, and order her life for her? Was man enough for woman? Did she not need God? It came to that! Was he or God to be her master? It grew clearer and clearer as she watched by the dead. There was, there could be no relation of life over which the Lord of life was not supreme! That this or that good woman could do this or that faithless or mean thing, was nothing to her! What might be unavoidable to one less instructed, would be sin in her! The other might need the sufferings and confusions that resulted; but for her must remain a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!

When the morning came and she heard Sarah stirring, she sent her to take her place, and went to get a little rest.

CHAPTER XLVII.

MORE YET.

BUT she could not sleep. She rose, went back to the room where the dead Moxy lay, and sent Sarah to get breakfast ready. Then came upon her an urgent desire to know the people who had come, like swallows, to tenant, without leave asked, the space overhead. She undid the screw, opened the door, and stole gently up the stair, steep, narrow, and straight, which ran the height of the two rooms between two walls. A long way up she came to another door, and peeping through a chink in it, saw that it admitted to the small orchestra high in the end-wall of the great room. Probably then the stair and the room below had been an arrangement for the musicians.

Going higher yet, till she all but reached the roof, the stair brought her to a third door. She knocked. No sound of approaching foot followed, but after some little delay it was opened by a young woman, with her finger on her lip, and something of a scared look in her eye. She had expected to see the doctor, and started and trembled at sight of Hester. There was little light where she stood, but Hester could not help feeling as if she had not merely seen her somewhere before. She came out on the landing, and shut the door behind her.

"He is very ill," she said; "and he hears a strange voice even in his sleep. A strange voice is dreadful to him."

Her voice was not strange, and the moment she spoke it seemed to light up her face! Hester, with a pang she could scarcely have accounted for, recognized Amy Amber.

"Amy!" she said.

"Oh, Miss Raymount!" cried Amy joyfully, "is it indeed you? Are you come at last? I thought I was never to see you any more!"

"You bewilder me," said Hester. "How do you come to be here? I don't understand."

"*He* brought me here."

"*Who* brought you here?"

"Why, miss!" exclaimed Amy, as if hearing the most unexpected of questions, "who should it be?"

"I have not the slightest idea," returned Hester.

But the same instant a feeling strangely mingled of alarm, discomfort, indignation, and relief crossed her mind.

Through her whiteness Amy turned whiter still, and she turned a little away, like a person offended.

"There is but one, miss!" she said coldly. "Who should it be but him?"

"Speak his name," said Hester almost sternly. "There is no time for hide-and-seek. Tell me whom you mean."

"Are you angry with me?" faltered Amy. "Oh, Miss Raymount, I don't think I deserve it!"

"Speak out, child! Why should I be angry with you?"

"Do you know what it is?—Oh, I hardly know what I am saying! He is dying! he is dying!"

She sank on the floor, and covered her face with her hands. Hester stood a moment and looked at her weeping, her heart filled with sad dismay, mingled with a kind of wan hope. Then softly and quickly she opened the door of the room and went in.

Amy started to her feet, but too late to prevent her, and followed trembling, afraid to speak, but relieved to find that Hester moved so noiselessly.

It was a great room, but the roof came down to the floor nearly all round. It was lighted only with a skylight. In the farthest corner was a screen. Hester crept gently towards it, and Amy after her, not attempting to stop her. She came to the screen and peeped behind it. There lay a young man in a troubled sleep, his face swollen and red and blotched with the small-pox; but through the disfigurement she recognized her brother. Her eyes filled with tears; she turned away, and stole out again as softly as she came in. Amy had been looking up at her anxiously; when she saw the tenderness of her look, she gathered courage and followed her. Outside, Hester stopped, and Amy again closed the door.

"You *will* forgive him, won't you, miss?" she said pitifully.

"What do you want me to forgive him for, Amy?" asked Hester, suppressing her tears.

"I don't know, miss. You seemed angry with him. I don't know what to make of it. Sometimes I feel certain it must have been his illness coming on that made him weak in his head and talk foolishness; and sometimes I wonder whether he has really been doing anything wrong."

"He must have been doing something wrong, else how should *you* be here, Amy?" said Hester with hasty judgment.

"He never told me, miss; or of course I would have done what I could to prevent it," answered Amy, bewildered. "We were so happy, miss, till then! and we've never had a moment's peace since! That's why we came here—to be where nobody would find us. I wonder how he came to know the place!"

"Do *you* not know where you are then, Amy?"

"No, miss; not in the least. I only know where to buy the things we need. He has not been out once since we came."

"You are in our house, Amy. What will my father say!—How long have you—have you been——"

Something in her heart or her throat prevented Hester from finishing the sentence.

"How long have I been married to him, miss? You surely know that as well as I do, miss?"

"My poor Amy! Did he make you believe we knew about it?"

Amy gave a cry, but after her old way instantly crammed her handkerchief into her mouth, and uttered no further smallest sound.

"Alas!" said Hester, "I fear he has been more wicked than we knew!"

Amy covered her face with her apron, through which Hester could see her soundless sobs.

"I have been doing what I could to find him," continued Hester, "and here he was close to me all the time! But it adds greatly to my misery to find you with him, Amy!"

"Indeed, miss, I may have been silly; but how was I to suspect he was not telling me the truth? I loved him too much for that! I told him I would not marry him without he had his father's leave. And he pretended he had got it, and read me such a beautiful letter from his mother! Oh, miss, it breaks my heart to think of it!"

A new fear came upon Hester: had he deceived the poor girl with a pretended marriage? Was he bad through and through? What her father would say to a marriage, was hard to think! what he would say to a deception, she knew! That he would like such a marriage, she could ill imagine; but might not the sense of escape from an alternative reconcile him to it?

Such thoughts passed swiftly through her mind as she stood

half turned from Amy, looking down the deep stair that sank like a precipice before her. She heard nothing, but Amy started and turned to the door. She was following her, when Amy said in a voice almost of terror,

"Please, miss, do not let him see you till I have told him you are here."

"Certainly not," answered Hester, and drew back, "—if you think the sight of me would hurt him!"

"Thank you, miss; I am sure it would," whispered Amy. "He is frightened of you."

"Frightened of me!" said Hester to herself, repeating Amy's phrase, when she had gone in, leaving her at the head of the stair. "I should have thought he only disliked me! I wonder if he would have loved me a little, if he had not been afraid of me! Perhaps I could have made him if I had tried. It is easier then to wake fear than love!"

It may be very well for a nature like Corney's to fear a father; fear may come in for some good where love is wanting; but I doubt if fear of a sister can be of any good.

"If he couldn't love me," thought Hester, "it would have been better he hadn't been afraid of me. Now comes the time when it renders me unable to help him!"

Then first it began to dawn upon Hester that there was in her a certain hardness of character distinct in its nature from that unbending devotion to the right which is imperative—belonging in truth to the region of her weakness—that self which fears for itself, and is of death not of life. But she was one of those who, when they discover a thing in them that is wrong, take refuge in the immediate endeavour to set it right—with the conviction that God is on their side to help them; for wherein, if not therein, is he God our Saviour?

She went down to the house, to get everything she could think of to make the place more comfortable: it would be long before the patient could be moved. In particular she sought out a warm fur cloak for Amy. Poor Amy! she was but the shadow of her former self, but a shadow very pretty and pleasant to look on. Hester's heart was sore to think of such a bright, good, honest creature married to a man like her brother. But she was sure, however credulous she might have been, she had done nothing to be ashamed of. Where there was blame it must all be Corney's!

It was with feelings still strangely mingled of hope and dismay,

that, having carried everything she could at the time up the stair, she gave herself to the comfort of her other guests.

Left alone in London, Corney had gone idly ranging about the house when another man would have been reading, or doing something with his hands. Curious in correspondent proportion to his secrecy, for the qualities go together, the moment he happened to cast his eyes on the door in the wainscot of the low room, no one being in the house to interfere with him, he proceeded to open it. He little thought then what his discovery would be to him, for at that time he had done nothing to make him fear his fellow-man. But he kept the secret after his kind.

Contriving often to meet Amy, he had grown rapidly more and more fond of her—became indeed as much in love with her as was possible to him; and though the love of such a man can never be of a lofty kind, it may yet be the best thing in him, and the most redemptive power upon him. Without a notion of denying himself anything he desired and could possibly have, he determined she should be his, but from fear as well as tortuosity, avoided the direct way of gaining her: the straight line would not, he judged, be the shortest: his father would never, or only after unendurable delay, consent to his marriage with a girl like Amy! How things might have gone had he not found her even unable to receive a thought that would have been dishonourable to him, and had he not come to pride himself on her simplicity and purity, I cannot say; but he contrived to persuade her to a private marriage—contrived also to prevent her from communicating with his sister.

His desire to please her, his passion for showing off, and the preparations his design seemed to render necessary, soon brought him into straits for money. He could not ask his father, who would have insisted on knowing how it was that he found his salary insufficient, seeing he was at no expense for maintenance, having only to buy his clothes. He went on and on, hiding his eyes from the approach of the "armed man," till he was in his grasp, and positively in want of a shilling. Then he borrowed, and went on borrowing small sums from those about him, till he was ashamed to borrow more. The next thing was to *borrow* a trifle of what was passing through his hands. He was merely borrowing, and of his own uncle! It was a shame his uncle should have so much and leave him in such straits! —be rolling in wealth and pay him such a contemptible salary! It was the height of injustice! Of course he would replace it

long before any one knew! Thus by degrees the poor weak creature, deluding himself with excuses, slipped into the consciousness of being a rogue. There are some, I suspect, who fall into vice from being so satisfied with themselves that they scorn to think it possible they should ever do wrong.

He went on taking and taking until at last he was obliged to confess to himself that there was no possibility of making restoration before the time when his *borrowing* must be embezzlement. Then in a kind of cold despair he laid hands upon a large sum and left the bank an unconvicted felon. What story he told Amy, to whom he was by this time married, I do not know; but once convinced of the necessity for concealment, she was as careful as himself. He brought her to their refuge by the back way. She went and came only through the cellar, and knew no other entrance. When they found that, through Amy's leaving the door unfastened when she went to buy, there being no way of securing it from the outside, others had taken refuge in the cellar, they dared not, for fear of attracting attention to themselves, warn them off the premises.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AMY AND CORNEY.

THE Frankses remained at rest until the funeral was over, and then Hester would have father and sons go out to follow their calling, while the mother and she did what could be done for the ailing baby, who could not linger long behind Moxy.

Hester had a little money of her own—not much, but enough to restore to decency, with the help of the wife's fingers, the wardrobe of the family. For the present she would not let them leave the house; she must have them in better condition first, and with a little money in their pockets of their own earning. And the very first day, though they went out with heavy hearts, and could hardly have played with much spirit, they brought home more money than any day for weeks before. And Franks, as he walked home weary, took some comfort that his Moxy was not with him to trouble his mother with his white face and drawn look.

The same day lord Gartley called, but was informed by Sarah, who opened the door but a chink, that the small-pox

was in the house, and that she could admit no one but the doctor. To his exclamation she made answer that her young mistress was perfectly well, but could and would see nobody—was in attendance upon the sick. So his lordship was compelled to go without seeing her, not without a haunting doubt that he was being played upon, and she did not want to see him.

As had happened more than once before, soon after he was gone the major made his appearance. To him Sarah gave the same answer, adding by her mistress's direction, that in the meantime there was no occasion to prosecute inquiry about Mr. Cornelius, for it was all—as Sarah put it—explained, and her mistress would write to him.

But what was Hester to tell her father and mother? Until she knew with certainty the fact of her marriage, she shrunk from mentioning Amy; and at present it was impossible to find out anything from Cornelius. She merely wrote, therefore, that she had found him, but very ill; that she would take the best care of him she could, and as soon as he was able to be moved bring him home to be nursed by his mother.

The great room was for the meantime given over to the Frankses. The wife kept everything tidy, and they managed things their own way. Hester made inquiry now and then, to be sure they were having everything they wanted, but left them to provide for themselves.

She did her best to help Amy without letting her brother suspect her presence, and by degrees she got the room more comfortable for them. Corney had indeed taken a good many things from the house to make habitable the waste expanse, but had been careful not to take anything Sarah would miss.

He was covered with the terrible eruption, and if he survived, which again and again seemed doubtful, would probably be much changed, for Amy could not keep his hands from his face: in trifles the lack of self-restraint is manifested, and its consequences are sometimes grievous.

Hitherto Hester had not let her parents quite know how ill he was—for what may seem a far-fetched reason—not to save them from anxiety, but to save her mother from hearing his father say, the best thing he could do would be to die. Nor was she mistaken: many a time had her father said so to himself. It was simply impossible, he said, that he should ever again speak to him, or in any way treat him as a son. He had

by his vile conduct ceased to be a son, and he was nowise bound to do anything more for him; though, from mere compassion, he would keep him from starving till he got some employment to which no character was necessary.

He began at last to recover, but it was long before he could be treated otherwise than as a child—so feeble was he, and so unreasonable. The first time he saw and knew Hester, he closed his eyes and turned away his head as if he would have no more of that apparition. She retired; but, watching, presently saw him, in his own sly way, looking through half-closed lids to know whether she was gone. When he saw Amy where Hester had stood, his face beamed up. "Amy!" he said, "come here;" and when she went, he took her hand and laid it on his cheek, little knowing what a disfigured cheek it was.

"Thank God!" said Hester to herself: she had never seen him look so sweet or loving or lovable, despite the disfigurement.

She took care not to show herself again till he should be a little accustomed to the idea of her presence.

The more she saw of Amy the better she liked her. She treated her patient with so much good sense, showed such a readiness to subordinate her ignorance to the wisdom of others, and such a careful obedience to the directions of the doctor, that she rose every day in Hester's opinion, as well as found a yet deeper place in her heart.

His lordship wrote, making an apology for anything he had said, from anxiety about one whom he loved to distraction, in which he might have presumed on the closeness of their relation to each other. He would gladly talk the whole matter over with her as soon as she gave him leave. For his part he had not a moment's doubt that her good sense, relieved from the immediate pressure of her feelings, which were in themselves but too divine for the needs of this world, would convince her of the reasonableness of all he had sought to urge upon her. As soon as she was able, and judged it safe to admit a visitor, his aunt would be happy to call upon her. For the present, as he knew she would not admit him, he would content himself with frequent and most anxious inquiries after her, reserving argument and expostulation for a happier, and, he hoped, not very distant time.

Hester smiled a curious smile at the prospect of a call from Miss Vavasor: was she actually going to plead her nephew's cause?

As her brother grew better, and things became easier, the thought of lord Gartley came oftener with something of the old feeling for the man himself, but mingled with sadness and a strange pity. She would never have been able to do anything for him! It had been spiritual presumption to think she could save him by the preciousness of her self-gift to him and the strength of her power over him.

If God cannot save a man by all his good gifts, not even by the gift of a woman offered to his higher nature, but by that refused, the woman's giving of herself a slave to his lower nature can only make him the more unredeemable; while the withholding of herself *may* do something—may at least, as the years go on, wake in him some sense of what a fool he has been. The man who would go to the dogs for lack of the woman he fancies, will go to the dogs when he has her—may possibly drag her to the dogs with him.

Hester began to see something of this. She recalled how she had never once gained from him a satisfactory reply to anything she said worth saying; she had in her foolishness supplied from her own imagination the defective echoes of his response! Love had made her apt and able to do this; but now that she had yielded entrance to doubt, she saw many things otherwise than before. She loved the man enough to die for him, she would not have one moment hesitated about that; but it was quite another thing to marry him! It was her brother now she had to save! His dear, good little wife was doing all she could for him, but it would take sister and mother and all to save him! She could not do so much for him as Amy now, but by and by there would be his father to mediate with: to that she would give her energy!

But his poor mother! would she recognize him—so terribly scarred and changed? He might in time, being young, grow more like himself, but now he was not pleasant to look upon. Some men are as vain as any women, and Corney was one of those some. While pretending to despise the kindest word concerning his good looks, he had taken the greatest pleasure in them; and the first time he saw himself in a mirror, the look of dismay, of despairing horror that came over his face was as pitiful as it was ludicrous. He had been accustomed to regard himself as one superior on most grounds, on that of good looks in particular, to any one he knew—and now! He could not but admit that he was nothing less than unpleasant to behold

—must be so even to those who loved him! It was a pain that in itself could do little to cast out the evil spirit that possessed him, but it was something that that evil spirit, while it remained in him, should be deprived of one source of its nourishment. It was a good thing that from any cause the transgressor should find his ways hard. He dashed the glass from him, and burst into tears which he did not even try to conceal.

It was notable that from that time he was more dejected, and less peevish; and this latter might not be only from returning health, for he had always been more or less peevish at home, where he never thought of cultivating the same conception or idea of himself as before the eyes of the world. Much of supposed goodness is merely a looking of the thing men would like to be considered—originating doubtless sometimes in an admiration of, perhaps in a vague wish to be that thing, but unaccompanied of desire or strength enough to rouse the smallest endeavour after being it. Still Hester found it difficult to bear with his remaining peevishness and bad temper, knowing what he had made of himself, and that he knew she must know it; but at such hard moments she had the good sense to leave him to the soothing ministrations of his wife. Amy never set herself against him; first of all she would show him that she understood what was troubling him; then would say something sympathetic, or petting, or coaxing, and always had her way with him. She had the great advantage that not yet had he once quarrelled with her. That gave a ground of hope for her influence with him that his sister had long lost. God had made Amy so that she had less trouble from selfishness than all but a few people. Hester, more than Amy, felt her own rights, and was ready to be indignant. She would have far more trouble than Amy in getting rid of the self-asserting self in her, which closes the door against heaven's divinest gifts. In Hester it was no doubt associated with a loftier nature, and the harder victory would have its greater reward, but until finally conquered it must continue to obstruct her walk in the true way. So Hester learned from the sweetness of Amy, as Amy from the unbending principle of Hester.

She at last made up her mind that she would take Cornelius home without giving her father the opportunity of saying he should not come. She would presume that he must go home after such an illness: the result she would wait! The meeting could in no case be a happy one, but if he were not altogether

repulsed, if the mean devil in him was not thoroughly roused by the harshness of his father, she would think much had been gained!

With gentle watchfulness she regarded Amy, and was more and more satisfied that, whatever might be wrong, she had had a share in it not as one who did, but as one who endured wrong. The sweetness and devotion with which she seemed to live only for her husband was to Hester, who found it impossible to take such a position even in imagination towards Gartley, in her tenderer moments almost a rebuke. But she could not believe that had Amy known before she married him what kind of person Cornelius was, she would have given herself to him. She did not think how nearly the man she had once accepted stood on the same level of manhood. But Amy was the wife of Cornelius, and that made an eternal difference. Her duty was as plain as Hester's—and the same—to do the best for him!

When he was able to be moved, Hester brought them into the house, and placed them in a comfortable room. She then moved the Frankses into the room they had left, making it over to them, subject to her father's pleasure, for a time at least. With their own entrance through the cellar, they were to live there after their own fashion, and follow their own calling, only they were to let Hester know if they found themselves in any difficulty. And now for the first time in her life she wished she had some means of her own, that she might act with freedom. She had seen hope of freedom in marriage, but now she wished it in independence.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MISS VAVASOR.

About three weeks after lord Gartley's call, during which he had left a good many cards in Addison square, Hester received the following letter from Miss Vavasor:

"My dear Miss Raymount, I am very anxious to see you, but fear it is hardly safe to go to you yet. You with your heavenly spirit do not regard such things, but I am not so much in love with the future as to risk my poor present for it. Neither would I willingly be the bearer of infection into my

own circle: I am not so selfish as to be careless about that. But communicate with you somehow I must, and that for your own sake as well as Gartley's, who is pining away for lack of the sunlight of your eyes. I throw myself entirely on your judgment. If you tell me you consider yourself out of quarantine, I will come to you at once; if you do not, will you propose something, for meet we must."

Hester pondered well before returning an answer. She could hardly say, she replied, that there was no danger, for her brother, who had been ill, was yet in the house, too weak for the journey to Yrndale. She would rather suggest, therefore, that they should meet in some quiet corner of one of the parks. She need hardly add she would take every precaution against carrying infection.

The proposal proved acceptable to Miss Vavasor. She wrote suggesting time and place. Hester agreed, and they met.

Hester appeared on foot, having had to dismiss her cab at the gate; Miss Vavasor, who had remained seated in her carriage, got down as soon as she saw her, and having sent it away, advanced to meet her with a smile: she was perfect in skin-hospitality.

"How long is it now," she began, "since you saw Gartley?"

"Three weeks or a month," replied Hester.

"I am afraid, sadly afraid, you cannot be much of a lover, not to have seen him for so long and look so fresh!" smiled Miss Vavasor, with gently implied reproach, and followed the words with a sigh, as if *she* had memories of a different complexion.

"When one has one's work to do,—" said Hester.

"Ah, yes!" returned Miss Vavasor, not waiting for the sentence, "I understand you have some peculiar ideas about work. That kind of thing is spreading very much in our circle too. I know many ladies who visit the poor. They complain there are so few unobjectionable tracts to give them. The custom came in with these Woman's-rights. I fear they will upset everything before long. But I hope the world will last my time. No one can tell where such things will end."

"No," replied Hester. "Nothing has ever stopped yet."

"Is that as much as to say that nothing ever will stop?"

"I think it is something like it," said Hester. "We know nothing about the ends of things—only the beginnings."

There had been an air of gentle raillery in Miss Vavasor's

tone, and Hester used the same, for she had no hope of coming to an understanding with her about anything.

"Then the sooner we do the better! I don't see else how things are to go on at all!" said Miss Vavasor, revealing the drop of Irish blood in her.

"When the master comes he will stop a good deal," thought Hester, but she did not say it. She could not allude to such things without at least a possibility of response.

"You and Gartley had a small misunderstanding, he tells me, the last time you met," continued Miss Vavasor, after a short pause.

"I think not," answered Hester; "at least I fancy I understood him very well."

"My dear Miss Raymount, you must not be offended with me. I am an old woman, and have had to compose differences that had got in the way of their happiness between goodness knows how many couples. I am not boasting when I say I have had considerable experience in that sort of thing."

"I do not doubt it," said Hester. "What I do doubt is, that you have had any experience of the sort necessary to set things right between lord Gartley and myself. The fact is, for I will be perfectly open with you, that I saw then—for the first time plainly, that to marry him would be to lose my liberty."

"Not more, my dear, than every woman does who marries at all. I presume you will allow marriage and its duties to be the natural calling of a woman?"

"Certainly."

"Then she ought not to complain of the loss of her liberty."

"Not of so much as is naturally involved in marriage, I allow."

"Then why draw back from your engagement to Gartley?"

"Because he requires me to turn away at once, and before any necessity shows itself, from the exercise of a higher calling yet."

"I am not aware of any higher calling."

"I am. God has given me gifts to use for my fellows, and use them I must till he, not man, stops me. That is my calling."

"But you know that of necessity a woman must give up many things when she accepts the position of a wife, and possibly the duties of a mother."

"The natural claims upon a wife or mother I would heartily acknowledge."

"Then of course to the duties of a wife belong the claims Society has upon her as a wife."

"So far as I yet know what is meant in your circle by such claims, I count them the merest usurpations: I will never subject myself to such—never put myself in a position where I should be expected to obey a code of laws not merely opposed to the work for which I was made, but to all the laws of the relations to each other of human beings as human beings."

"I do not quite understand you," said Miss Vavasor.

"Well, for instance," returned Hester, willing to give the question a general bearing, "a mother in your class, according at least to much that I have heard, considers the duties she owes to society, duties that consist in what looks to me the merest dissipation and killing of time, as paramount even to those of a mother. Because of those 'traditions of men,' or fancies of fashionable women rather, she justifies herself in leaving her children in the nursery to the care of other women —the vulgarest sometimes."

"Not knowingly," said Miss Vavasor. "We are all liable to mistakes."

"But certainly," insisted Hester, "without taking the pains necessary to know for themselves the characters of those to whom they trust the children God has given to their charge; whereas to abandon them to the care of angels themselves would be to go against the laws of nature and the calling of God."

Miss Vavasor began to think it scarcely desirable to bring a woman of such levelling opinions into their quiet circle: she would be preaching next that women were wicked who did not nurse their own brats! But she would be faithful to Gartley!

"To set up as reformers would be to have the whole hive about our ears," she said.

"That may be," replied Hester, "but it does not apply to me. I keep the beam out of my own eye which I have no hope of pulling out of my neighbour's. I do not belong to your set."

"But you are about to belong to it, I hope."

"I hope not."

"You are engaged to marry my nephew."

"Not irrevocably, I trust."

"You should have thought of all that before you gave your consent. Gartley thought you understood. Certainly our circle is not one for saints."

"Honest women would be good enough for me. But I thought I had done and said more than was necessary to make Gartley understand my ideas of what was required of me in life, and I thought he sympathized with me so far at least that he would be what help to me he could. Now I find instead of this, that he never believed I meant what I said, but all the time intended to put a stop to the aspiration of my life the moment he had it in his power to do so."

"Ah, my dear young lady, you do not know what love is!" said Miss Vavasor, and sighed again as if *she* knew what love was. And in truth she had been in love at least once in her youth, but had yielded without word of remonstrance when her parents objected to her marrying three hundred a year, and a curacy of fifty. She saw it was reasonable: what fellowship can light have with darkness, or love with starvation? "A woman really in love," she went on, "is ready to give up everything—yes, my dear, *everything* for the man she loves. She who is not equal to that, does not know what love is."

"Suppose he should have proved unworthy of her?"

"That would be nothing, positively nothing. If she had once learned to love him she would see no fault in him."

"*Whatever* faults he might have?"

"Whatever faults: love has no second thoughts."

"Suppose he were to show himself regardless of her best welfare—caring for her only as an adjunct to his display?"

"If she loved him, I only say *if she loved him*, she would be proud to follow in his triumph. His glory is hers."

"Whether it be real or not?"

"If he counts it so. A woman who loves gives herself to her husband to be moulded by him."

"I fear that is the way men think of us," said Hester sadly; "and no doubt there are women whose behaviour would justify them in it. With all my heart I say that a woman ought to be ready to die for the man she loves; that is a matter of course; she cannot really love him if she would not; but that she should fall in with all his thoughts, feelings and judgments whatever, even such as in others she would most heartily despise; that she should act as if her husband and not God

made her, and his whims, instead of the lovely will of him who created man and woman, were to be to her the bonds of her being—that surely no woman could grant who had not first lost her reason."

"You won't lose yours for love at least," concluded Miss Vavasor, who could not help admiring her ability, though she despised the direction it took. "I see," she said to herself, "she is one of the strong-minded who think themselves superior to any man. Gartley will be well rid of her—that is my conviction! I think I have done nearly all he could require of me."

"I tell you honestly," continued Hester, "I love lord Gartley so well that I would gladly yield my life to do him any worthy good."—"It is easy to talk!" said Miss Vavasor to herself.—"Not that that is saying much," Hester went on, "for I would do that to redeem any human creature from the misery of living without God. I would even marry lord Gartley—I think I would, after what has passed—if only I knew that he would not try to prevent me from being the woman I ought to be and have to be;—perhaps I would—I am not clear about it just at this moment: never, if I were married to him, would I be so governed by him that he should do that! But who would knowingly marry for strife and debate? Who would deliberately add to the difficulties of being what she ought to be—what she desired, and was determined, with God's help, to be! I for one will not take an enemy into the house of my life. I will not make it a hypocrisy to say, 'Lead us not into temptation.' I grant you a wife must love her husband grandly—passionately, if you like the word: but there is one to be loved immeasurably more grandly, yea *passionately*, if the word means anything true and good in love—he whose love creates love. Can you for a moment imagine, when the question came between my lord and my husband, I would hesitate?"

"'Tis a pity you were not born in the middle ages," said Miss Vavasor smiling, but with a touch of gentle scorn in the superiority of her tone; "you would certainly have been canonized!"

"But now I am sadly out of date—am I not?" returned Hester, trying to smile also. "I could no more consent to live in God's world without minding what he told me, than I would marry a man merely because he admired me."

"Heavens," exclaimed Miss Vavasor to what she called

herself, "what an extravagant young woman! She won't do for us! You'll have to let her fly, my dear boy!"

What she said to Hester was,

"Don't you think, my dear, all that sounds a little—just a little extravagant? You know as well as I do—you have just confessed it—that the kind of thing is out of date—does not belong to the world of to-day. And when a thing is once of the past, it cannot be called back, do what you will. Nothing will ever bring in that kind of thing again. It is all very well to go to church and that sort of thing; I should be the last to encourage the atheism that is getting so frightfully common, but really it seems to me such extravagant notions about religion as you have been brought up in must have not a little to do with the present sad state of affairs—must in fact go far to make atheists. Civilization will never endure to be priest-ridden."

"It is my turn now," said Hester, "to say that I scarcely understand you. Do you take God for a priest? Do you object to atheism, and yet regard obedience to God as an invention of the priests? Was Jesus Christ a priest? or did he say what was not true when he said that whoever loved any one else more than him was not worthy of him? Or do you confess it true, yet say it is of no consequence? If you do not care about what he wants of you, I simply tell you that I care about nothing else; and if ever I should change, I hope he will soon teach me better—whatever sorrow may be necessary for me to that end. I desire not to care a straw about anything he does not care about."

"It is very plain, at least," said Miss Vavasor, "that you do not love my nephew as he deserves to be loved—or as any woman ought to love the man to whom she has given her consent to be his wife! You have very different ideas from such as were taught in my girlhood concerning the duties of wives! A woman, I used to be told, was to fashion herself upon her husband, fit her life to his life, her thoughts to his thoughts, her tastes to his tastes."

Absurd indeed would have seemed, to any one really knowing the two, the idea of a woman like Hester fitting herself into the mould of such a man as lord Gartley!—for what must be done with the quantity of her that would be left over after his lordship's mould was filled! The notion of squeezing a large, divine being, like Hester, into the shape of such a poor

small, mean, worldly, time-serving fellow, would have been so convincingly ludicrous as to show at once the theory on which it was founded for the absurdity it was. Instead of walking on together in simple equality, in mutual honour and devotion, each helping the other to be better still, to have the woman, large and noble, come cowering after her pigmy lord, as if he were the god of her life, instead of a Satan doing his best to damn her to his own meanness!—it is a contrast that needs no argument! Not the less if the woman be married to such a man, will it be her highest glory, by the patience of Christ, by the sacrifice of self, yea of everything save the will of God, to win the man, if he may by any means be won, from the misery of his self-seeking to a noble shame of what he now delights in.

"You are right," said Hester; "I do not love lord Gartley sufficiently for that! Thank you, Miss Vavasor, you have helped me to the thorough conviction that there could never have been any real union between us. Can a woman love with truest wifely love a man who has no care that she should attain to the perfect growth of her nature? *He* would have been quite content I should remain for ever the poor creature I am —would never by word, or wish, or prayer, have sought to raise me above myself! The man I shall love as I could love must be a greater man than lord Gartley! He is not fit to make any woman love him so. If she were so much less than he as to have to look up to him, she would be too small to have any devotion in her. No! I will be a woman and not a countess!—I wish you good morning, Miss Vavasor."

"If I am not to help him," she said to herself, "what is there in reason why I should marry him? His love, no doubt, is the best thing he has to give, but a poor thing is his best, and save as an advantage for serving him, not worth the having."

What her love to him would have been three months after marrying him, I am glad to have no occasion to imagine.

She held out her hand. Miss Vavasor drew herself up, and looked a cold annihilation into her eyes. The warm blood rose from Hester's heart to her brain. Quietly she returned her gaze nor blenched a moment. She felt as if she were looking a far off idea in the face—as if she were telling her what a poor miserable creature of money and manners, ambitions and expediencies she thought her. Miss Vavasor, unused

to having such a full strong virgin look fixed fearless, without defiance, but with utter disapproval, upon her, quailed—only a little, but as she had never in her life quailed before. She forced her gaze, and Hester felt that to withdraw her eyes would give her a false sense of victory. She therefore continued her look, but had no need to force it, for she knew she was the stronger. It seemed minutes where only seconds passed. She smiled at last and said,

"I am glad you are not going to be my aunt, Miss Vavasor."

"Thank goodness, no!" cried Miss Vavasor, with a slightly hysterical laugh.

Notwithstanding her educated self-command, she felt cowed before the majesty of Hester, for woman was face to face with woman, and the truth was stronger than the lie. Had she then yielded to the motions within her, she would, and it would have been but the second time in her life, have broken into undignified objurgation. She had to go back to her nephew and confess that she had utterly failed where she had expected, if not an easy victory, yet the more a triumphant one! She had to tell him that his lady was the most peculiar, most unreasonable young woman she had ever had to deal with; and that she was not only unsuited to him, but quite unworthy of him! He would conclude she had managed the matter ill, and said things she ought not to have said! It was very hard that she, who desired only to set things right, looking for no advantage to herself—she who was recognized as a power in her own circle, should have been so ignominiously foiled in the noble endeavour, having sacrificed herself, to sacrifice also another upon the altar of her beloved earldom! She could not reconcile herself to the thought. It did not occur to her that there was a power here concerned altogether different from any she had before encountered—namely a soul possessed by truth and clad in the armour of righteousness. Of conscience that dealt with the qualities of things, nor cared what had been decreed concerning them by a class claiming for itself the apex of the world, she had scarce even a shadowy idea; for never in her life had she herself acted from any insight into primary quality. When therefore she had to do with a girl who did not acknowledge the jurisdiction of the law to which she bowed as supreme, she was out of her element—had got, as it seemed to her, into water

too shoal to swim in; whereas, in fact, she had got into water too deep to wade in, and did not know how to swim.

She turned and walked away, attempting a show of dignity, but showing only that Brummagem thing, haughtiness—an adornment the possessor alone does not recognize as a counterfeit. Then Hester turned too, and walked in the opposite direction, feeling that one supposed portion of her history was but an episode, and at an end.

She did not know that, both coming and going, she was attended at a near distance by a tall, portly gentleman of ruddy complexion and military bearing. He had beheld her interview—by no means overheard her conversation—with Miss Vavasor, and had seen with delight the unmistakable symptoms of serious difference which at last appeared, and culminated in their parting. He did not venture to approach her, but when she got into a cab, took a Hansom and followed her to the entrance of the square, where he got down, his heart beating with exultant hope that "the rascal ass of a nobleman" had been dismissed.

All the time since he came to London with Hester, he had, as far as possible to him, kept guard over her, and had known a good deal more of her goings and comings than she was aware of—this with an unselfishness of devotion that took from him the least suspicion of its being a thing unwarrantable. He was like the dog which, not allowed to accompany his master, follows him at a distance, ready to interfere at any moment when such interference may be desirable. She had let him know that she had found her brother, that he was very ill, and that she was helping to nurse him; but she had not yet summoned him. In severe obedience to orders, therefore, he did not even now call. Next day, however, he found a summons awaiting him at his club, and made haste to obey it.

She had thought it better to prepare him for what she was about to ask of him, therefore mentioned in her note that in a day or two she was going to Yrndale with her brother and his wife.

"Whew!" exclaimed the major when he read it, "wife! this complicates matters! I was sure he had not gone to the dogs—no dog but a cur would receive him—without help!—Marriage and embezzlement! Poor devil! if he were not such a confounded ape I should pity him! But the small-pox and a wife may perhaps do something for him!"

When he reached the house, Hester received him warmly, and at once made her request that he would go down with them. It would be such a relief to her if he would, she said. He expressed entire readiness, but thought she had better not say he was coming, as in the circumstances he could hardly be welcome. They soon made their arrangements, and he left her yet more confirmed in a respect such as he had never till now felt. And this was the major's share in the good that flowed from Hester's sufferings: the one most deficient thing in him was reverence, and in this he was now having a strong lesson.

CHAPTER L.

MR. CHRISTOPHER.

ON the Sunday evening, the last before she was to leave for Yrndale, Hester had gone to see a poor woman in a house she had not been in before, and was walking up the dismal stair, dark and dirty, when she heard a moaning from a room the door of which was a little open. She peeped in, and saw on a low bed a poor woman, old, yellow, and wrinkled, apparently at the point of death. Her throat was bare, and she saw the muscles of it knotted in the struggle for life.—Is not death the victorious struggle for life?—She was not alone; a man knelt by her bedside, his arm under the pillow to hold her head higher, and his other hand clasping hers.

"The darkness! the darkness!" moaned the woman.

"You feel lonely?" said the voice of the man, low, and broken with sympathy.

"All, all alone," sighed the woman.

"I can do nothing for you. I can only love you."

"Yes, yes," said the woman hopelessly.

"You are slipping away from me, but my master is stronger than me, and can help you yet. He is not far from you though you can't see him. He loves you too, and only wants you to ask him to help you. He can cure death as easy as any other disease."

No reply came for a moment. Then, moulded of all-but dying breath, came the cry,

"O Christ, save me!"

Then Hester was seized with a sudden impulse: she thought afterwards the feeling of it might be like what men and women

of old had when the Spirit of God came upon them: it seemed she had not intended song when the sounds issuing from her mouth entered her ears. The words she uttered were those and no more, over and over again, which the poor dying woman had just spoken: "O Christ, save me!" But the song-sounds in which they were lapt and with which they came winged from her lips, seemed the veriest outpouring of her whole soul. They seemed to rise from some eternal deep within her, yet not to be of her making. She was as in the immediate presence of Christ, pleading with him for the consolation and strength which his poor dying creature so sorely needed. The holy possession lasted but a minute or so, and left her dumb. She turned away, and passed up the stair.

"The angels! the angels! I'm going now!" said the woman feebly.

"The angel was praying to Christ for you," said Christopher. "—Oh living brother, save our dying sister!"

"O Christ, save me!" she murmured again, and they were her last words.

Christopher laid the body gently back on the pillow. A sigh of relief passed from his lips, and he went from the room to give notice of the death. The dead or who would might bury the dead; he must go to the living!

Inflated sentiment all this looks to the man of this world. But when the inevitable Death has him by the throat; when he lies like that poor woman, lonely in the shadow, though his room be crowded with friends, whatever his theories about future or no future, it may be an awful hour in which less than Christ will hardly comfort him.

Hester's heart was full when she found the woman she went to see, and she was able to speak as she had never spoken before. She never troubled her poor with any of the theories of salvation, which, right or wrong, are *not* the things to be presented for men's reception—now any more than in the days of the first teachers who knew nothing of them: they serve but to obscure the vision of the live brother in whom men must believe to be lifted out of their evil and brought into the air of truth and the room for growing deliverance. Hester spoke of Christ, the friend of men, who came to save every one by giving him back to God, as one gives back to a mother the stray child who has run from her to escape obeying her.

The woman at least listened; and then she sang to her.

But she could not sing as she had sung a little while before. One cannot have or give the best always—not at least until the soul shall be always in its highest and best moods—a condition which may perhaps be on the way to us, though I am doubtful whether the created will ever stand continuously on the apex of conscious existence. I think part of the joy will be to contemplate the conditions in which we are at our best: I delight to think of twilights in heaven—the brooding on the best. Perhaps we may be full of God always and yet not always full of the ecstasy of good, or always able to make it pass in sweet splendours from heart to heart.

Hester was walking homewards when, passing through a court on her way, she heard the voice of a man, which again she recognized as that of Mr. Christopher. Glancing about her she discovered that it came from a room half under ground. She went to the door. There was a little crowd of dirty children making a noise round it, and she could not well hear what was going on, but what she did hear was enough to let her know it was the voice of one pleading with his fellows not to be miserable and die, but to live and rejoice. Now for all the true liberality of Hester's heart and brain both, she had never entered any place of worship that did not belong to the established church, thinking all the rest only and altogether sectarian, and she would not be a sectary. She had not yet learned that therein she just was a sectary—from Christ the head. But here was something meant only for the poor, she thought, and seeing they would not go to church, a layman like Mr. Christopher might surely give them of the good things he had! So she went in: she would sit near the door, and come out again presently!

It was a low room, and though not many were present, the air was stifling. The doctor stood at the farther end. Some of his congregation were decently dressed, some but sparingly washed; many wore the same clothes they wore through the week, though probably most of these had a better gown or suit, if that could be called *having* which was represented by a pawn-ticket. Hester could hardly say she saw among them much sign of listening. Most of the faces were just as vacant as those to be seen in the most fashionable churches, but there were one or two which seemed to show their owners in some kind of sympathetic relation with the speaker, and that was a far larger proportion than was found in Sodom that was

destroyed, or in Nineveh that was spared. That the speaker was in earnest there could be no manner of question. His eyes were glowing, his face was gleaming with a light of its own; his hands were often clenched hard and his motions broken by very earnestness: it was the bearing of one that pleaded with men, saying, "Why will ye die?" The whole rough appearance of the man was elevated into dignity. Simplicity and self-forgetfulness were manifest in carriage and utterance. He was not self-possessed — but he was God-possessed. He kept saying the simplest things to them. One thing she heard him tell them was, that they were like orphan children, hungry in the street, raking the gutter for what they could get, while behind them stood a grand, beautiful house to which they never so much as lifted up their eyes—and there their father lived! There he sat in a beautiful room, waiting, waiting, waiting for any one of them all who would but turn round, run in, and up the stairs to him.

"But you will say," something as thus he went on, "—Why does he not send out a message to them, to tell them he is waiting there for them? How can they know without being told?—you say. But that is just what he does do. He is constantly sending out messagers to them to tell them to come in. But they mostly laugh and make faces at them. *They* won't be at the trouble to go up those stairs! 'It's not likely,' they say, 'a man like that would trouble his head about such as us, even if we were his children!' That makes me wonder how such people treat their own children! But some do listen and hear and go in; and some of them come out again, and say they find it all true. Very few believe them a bit, or mind in the least what they say. They are not miserable enough yet to go back to the father that loves them, and would be as good to them as the bird that covers her young ones all over with her wings, or the mother you see wrapping her shawl round her child in her arms.

"Some of you are thinking with yourselves now, '*We* wouldn't do like that! *we* should be only too glad to get somebody that would make us comfortable without any trouble on our parts!' Ah, there's the rub! These children that won't go in, they're just like you; they won't take any trouble about it. Why now here I am, sent to you with the very message! and you fancy I am only talking, as you do so often, without meaning anything! I am one of those who have been into the house,

and have found my father—oh, so grand! and so good to me! And I am come out again to tell you it is so, and that if you will go in, you will have the same kindness I have had. All the servants of the house even will rejoice over you with music and dancing—so glad that you are come home. Is it possible you will not take the trouble to go! There are certain things required of you when you go: perhaps you are too lazy, or too dirty in your habits, to like doing them! I have known some decline to scrape their shoes, or rub them on the door-mat when they went in, and then complain loudly that they were refused admittance. A fine house would such make to their father, were they allowed to run in and out as they pleased!—such a house, in fact, as would very soon drive their father himself out of it! for they would make it unfit for any decent person to live in. A few months and they would have the grand beautiful house as wretched and mean and dirty as the houses they live in now. Such persons are those that keep grumbling that they are not rich. They want to loaf about and drink and be a nuisance to everybody, like some of the rich ones. They think it hard they should not be able to do just as they please with everything that takes their fancy, when they would do nothing but break and spoil it, and make it no good to anybody. Their father, who can do whatever he sees fit, is not one to let such disagreeable children work what mischief they like! He is a better father than that would come to! A father who lets them be dirty and rude just as they like, is one of the worst enemies of his children. And the day is coming when, if he can't get them to mind him any other way, he will put them where they will be ten times more miserable than ever they were at the worst time of their lives, and make them mind. Out of the same door whence came the messengers to ask them in, he will send dogs and bears and lions and tigers and wild cats out upon them.

"You will, I daresay, some of you, say, 'Ah, we know what you mean; but you see that's not the sort of thing we care for, so you needn't go on about it.' I know it is not the sort of thing you care for, else you might have been in a very different condition by this time. And I know the kind of thing you do care for—low, dirty things: you are like a child, if such there could be, that preferred mud and the gutter to all the beautiful toys in the shop at the corner of Middle Row. But though these things are not the things you want, they are the things

you need; and the time is coming when you will say, 'Ah me! what a fool I was not to look at the precious things, and see how precious they were, and put out my hand for them when they were offered me!'"

It was something in this simple way, but more earnestly yet, and occasionally with an energy that rose to eloquence, that the man freed his soul of the things he had to give. After about twenty minutes, he ceased, saying, "We will now sing a hymn." Then he read a short hymn, repeating each verse before they sang it, for there was no other hymn-book than his own. It was the simplest hymn, Hester thought, she had ever heard. He began the singing himself to a well-known tune, but when he heard the voice of Hester take it up, he left the leading to her, and betaking himself to the bass, did his part there. When they heard her voice the people all turned to look, and some began to whisper, but presently resumed the hymn. When it was ended he prayed for two or three minutes, not more, and sent them away. Hester being near the door went out with the first of them, and walked home full of pleasure in the thought of such preaching: if only her friends could hear such! The great difficulty was to wake in them any vaguest recognition of a Nature from whom they came. She had been driven to conclude that the faculty for things *epouranian* was awake in them not an atom more than in the South-African Bushman, in whom most travellers have failed to discover even the notion of a power above him. But to wake the faculty in them what could be so powerful as the story and the message of Jesus?—and Mr. Christopher had not spoken of him! She did not know that every Sunday he taught them there, and that this sermon, if such it could be called, was but one wave in the flow of a river. The true teacher brings from his treasure things old and things new; at one time tells, at another explains; and ever and anon lets his own well of water flow to everlasting life.

But, as she thought, Hester, like the true soul she was, turned from ways and means to the questioning of herself: what of the faculty was awake in her? Had she been obedient only to that she had been taught, or obedient to the very God? This questioning again she left for better labour; she turned her whole soul towards God in prayer unutterable. Of one thing she could be sure—that she had but the faintest knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal.

She was near the turning that led to the square when she heard a quick footstep behind her, and was presently overtaken by Mr. Christopher.

"I was so glad to see you come in!" he said. "I was able to speak the better, for I was sure then of some sympathy in the spiritual air. It is not easy to go on when you feel all the time a doubt whether to one present your words are more than mere words; or, if they have some meaning to any, whether that meaning be not something very different from your meaning."

"I do not see," said Hester, "how any one could misunderstand, or indeed help understanding what I heard you say."

"Ah!" he returned, "the one incomprehensible thing is ignorance! To understand why another does not understand seems to me beyond the power of humanity. As God only can understand evil, while we only can be evil, so God only can understand ignorance, while we only can be ignorant. I have been trying now for a good many months to teach those people, and I am not sure that a single thought has passed from my mind into one of theirs. I sometimes think I am but beating the air. But I must tell you how your singing comforted the poor woman at whose door you stopped this afternoon! I saw it in her face. She thought it was the angels. And it was one angel, for did not God send you? I trust your fellow-servants were waiting for her: she died a minute or two after."

They walked some distance before either spoke again.

"I was surprised," said Hester at length, "to find you taking the clergyman's part as well as the doctor's."

"By no means," returned Christopher; "I took no clergyman's part. I took but the part of a human being, bound to share with his fellow. What could make you think so? Did I preach like one?"

"Not very," she answered.

"I am glad of that," he returned, "for such a likeness would by no means favour my usefulness with such as those. If you see any reason why a layman, as was our Lord, should not speak to his fellows, I fear it is one I should be unable to comprehend. I do whatever seems to me a desirable action, so long as I see no reason for not doing it. As to the customs of society, my experience of them has resulted in mere and simple contempt—in so far at least as they would hamper my freedom.

I have another master; and they who obey higher rules need not regard lower judgment. If Shakspere liked my acting, should I care if Marlowe did not?"

"But if anybody and everybody be at liberty to preach, how are we to have any assurance what kind of doctrine will be preached?"

"We must go without it.—But it is too late to object, for here are a few of us laymen preaching, and no one to hinder us. There are many uneducated preachers who move the classes the clergy cannot touch. Their preaching has a far more evident effect, I know, than mine."

"Why do you not then preach like them?"

"I would not if I could, and could not if I would: I do not believe one half of the things they say."

"How can they do more good if what they say is not true?"

"I did not say they did more good—about that I cannot tell; that may need centuries to determine. I said they moved their people more. And the fundamental element of what they say is most true, only the forms they express it in contain much that is false."

"Will you then defend a man in speaking things that are not true?"

"If he believes them, what is he to do but speak them? Let him speak them in God's name. I cannot speak them because I do not believe them. If I did believe them they would take from me the heart to preach."

"Can it be," said Hester, "that falsehood is more powerful than truth—and for truth too?"

"By no means. A falsehood has in itself no power but for evil. It is the spiritual truth clothed in the partially false form that is powerful. Clearer truth will follow in the wake of it, and cast the false forms out: they serve but to make a place of seeming understanding in ignorant minds, wherein the truths themselves may lie and work with their own might. But if what I teach be nearer the truth, let it be harder to get in, it will in the end work more truth. In the meantime I say God-speed to every man who honestly teaches what he honestly believes. Paul was grand when he said he would rejoice that Christ was preached from whatever motive he might be preached. If you say those people, though contentious, may have preached good doctrine, I answer—Possibly; for they could not have preached much of what is called doctrine now-a-

days. If they preached theories of their own, they were teachers of lies, for they were not true men, and the theories of an untrue man cannot be true. But they told something about Christ, and of that Paul was glad."

Some may wonder that Hester, having got so far as she had, should need to be told such things; but she had never had occasion to think about them before, though the truth wrought out in her life had rendered her capable of seeing them the moment they were put before her.

"You interest me much," she said. "—Would you mind telling me how you, whose profession has to do with the bodies of men, have come to do more for their souls!"

"I know nothing about less or more," answered Christopher. "—You would find it, I fear, a long story if I were to attempt telling it in full. I studied medicine from guile, not therefore the less carefully, that I might have a good ostensible reason for going about among the poor. I count myself bound to do all I can for their bodies; and pity itself would, I think, when I came to go among them, have driven me to the study, had I been ignorant. No one who has not been among them knows their sufferings—borne by some of them without complaint—for the sad reason that it is of no use. To be to such if only one to whom they can speak, is in some sort to mediate between them and a possible world of relief. But it was not primarily from the desire to alleviate their sufferings that I learned what I could of medicine, but in the hope to start them on the way towards victory over all evil. I saw that the man who brought them physical help had a chance with them such as no clergyman had—an advantage quite as needful with them as with the heathen—to whom we are not so *immediately* debtors. It would have been a sad thing for the world if the Lord of it had not sought first the lost sheep of the house of Israel. One awful consequence of our making haste to pull out the mote out of our heathen brother's eye, while yet the beam is in our own, is that wherever our missionaries go, they are followed by a foul wave of our vices.

"With all my guile I have not done much. But now after nearly two thousand years, such is the amount of faith I find in myself towards my Lord and his Father, that sometimes I ask myself whether in very truth I believe that that man did live and die as the story says: if it has taken all this time for such a poor result I say to myself, perhaps I may have done some-

thing, for it must be too small to be seen; so I will try on, helping God as the children help the father.—You know that grand picture, on the ceiling of the pope's chapel, of the making of Adam?"

"Michael Angelo's?—Yes."

"You must have noticed then how the Father is accompanied by a crowd of young ones—come to help him to make Adam, I always think. The poet has there, consciously or not, hit upon a great truth: it is the majesty of God's great-heartedness, and the majesty of man's destiny, that every man must be a fellow-worker with God, nor can ever in less attain his end, and the conscious satisfaction of being. I want to help God with my poor brothers."

"How well I understand you!" said Hester. "But would you mind telling me what made you think of the thing first? I began because I saw how miserable so many people were, and longed to do something to make life a better thing for them."

"That was not quite the way with me," replied Christopher. "I see I must tell you something of my external, in order to explain my internal history."

"No, no, pray!" returned Hester, fearing she had presumed. "I did not mean to be inquisitive. I ought not to have asked such a question; for these things have to do with the most sacred regions of our nature."

"I was only going to cast the less in with the greater—the outer fact to explain the inner truth," said Christopher. "I should like to tell you about it.—And first,—you may suppose I could not have followed my wishes had I not had some money!"

"A good thing you had, then!"

"I don't know exactly," replied the doctor in a dubious tone. "You shall judge for yourself from my story.—I had money then—a good deal too—left me by my grandfather. My father died when I was a child, I am glad to say."

"Glad to say!" repeated Hester, bewildered.

"Yes: if he had lived, how do I know he might not have done just like my grandfather? But my mother lived, thank God. —Not that my grandfather was what is counted a bad man; on the contrary, he stood high in the world's opinion—was considered indeed the prince of— — —well, I will not say what, for my business is not to expose him. The world had nothing against him.

"When he died and left me his money—I was then at school,

preparing for Oxford—it was necessary that I should look into the affairs of the business, for it was my mother's wish that I should follow the same. In the course of my investigation, I came across things not a few in the books, all fair and square in the judgment of the trade itself, which made me doubtful, and which at last, unblinded by custom, I was confident were unfair, that is dishonest. Thereupon I began to argue with myself: 'What is here?' I said. 'Am I to use the wages of iniquity as if they were a clean God-gift? If there has been wrong done there must be atonement, reparation. I cannot look on this money as mine, for part of it at least, I cannot say how much, ought not to be mine.' The truth flashed upon me; I saw that my business in life must be to send the money out again into the channels of right: I could claim a workman's wages for doing that.

"The history of the business went so far back that it was impossible to make return of more than a small proportion of the sums rightly due; therefore something else, and that a large something, must be done as well.

"To be honest, however, in explaining how I came to choose the life I am now leading, I must here confess the fact that about this time I had a disappointment of a certain kind which set me thinking, for it gave me such a shock that for some months I could not imagine anything to make life worth living. Some day, if you like, I will give you a detailed account of how I came to the truth of the question—came to see what alone does make the value of life. A flash came first, then a darkness, then a long dawn; by and in which it grew clearer and ever clearer, that there could be no real good, in the very nature of things and of good, but oneness with the will of God; that man's good lay in becoming what the inventor of him meant in the inventing of him—to speak after the fashion of man's making. Going on thinking about it all, and reading my New Testament, I came to see that, if the story of Christ was true, the God that made me was just inconceivably lovely, and that the perfection, the very flower of existence must be to live the heir of all things, at home with the Father. Next, mingled inextricably with my resolve about the money, came the perception that my fellow-beings, my brothers and sisters of the same father, must be, next to the father himself, the very atmosphere of life; and that perfect misery must be to care only for one's self. With

that there woke in me such a love and pity for my people, my own race, my human beings, my brothers and sisters, whoever could hear the word of the father of men, that I felt the only thing worth giving the energy of a life to, was the work that Christ gave himself to—the delivery of men out of their lonely and mean devotion to themselves, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, whose joy and rejoicing is the rest of the family. Then I saw that here the claim upon my honesty, and the highest calling of man met. I saw that were I as free to do with my grandfather's money as it was possible for man to be, I could in no other way use it altogether worthily than in aiding to give outcome, shape, and operation to the sonship and brotherhood in me. I have not yet found how best to use it all; and I will do nothing in haste, which is the very opposite of divine, and sure to lead astray; but I keep thinking in order to find out, and it will one day be revealed to me. God who has laid the burden on me will enable me to bear it until he shows me how to unpack and disperse it.

"First I spent a portion in further study, and specially the study of medicine. I could not work miracles; I had not the faith necessary to that, if such is now to be had; but God might be pleased I should heal a little by the doctor's art. So doing I should do yet better, and learn how to spend the money upon humanity itself, repaying to the race what had been wrongfully taken from its individuals to whom it was impossible to restore it; and should while so doing at the same time fill up what was left behind for me of the labours of the Master.

"That is my story. I am now trying to do as I have seen, working steadily, without haste, with much discouragement, and now and then with a great gladness and auroral hope. I have this very day got a new idea that may have in it a true germ!"

"Will you not tell me what it is?" said Hester.

"I don't like talking about things before at least they are begun," answered Christopher. "And I have not much hope from money. If it were not that I have it and cannot help it, and am bound to spend it, I would not trouble myself about any scheme to which it was necessary. I sometimes feel as if it was a devil, restrained a little by being spell-bound in metal discs. I know the feeling is wrong and faithless; for money is God's as certainly as the earth in which the crops grow, though he does not care so much about it."

"I know what I would do if I had money!" said Hester.

"You have given me the right to ask what—the right to ask—not the right to have an answer."

"I would have a house of refuge to which anyone might run for covert or rest or warmth or food or medicine or whatever he needed. It should have no society or subscriptions or committee, but should be my own as my hands and my voice are mine—to use as God enabled me. I would have it like the porch—not of Bethesda, but of heaven itself. It should come into use by the growth of my friendships. It should be a refuge for the needy, from the artisan out of work to the child with a cut finger, or cold-bitten feet. I would take in the weary-brained prophet, the worn curate, or the shadowy needle-woman. I would not take in drunkards or ruined speculators—not at least before they were very miserable indeed. The suffering of such is the only desirable consequence of their doing, and to save from it would be to take from them their last chance."

"It is a lovely idea," said Christopher. "One of my hopes is to build a small hospital for children in some lovely place, near some sad ugly one. But perhaps I cannot do it till I am old, for when I do, I must live among them, and have them and their nurses within a moment's reach."

"Is it not delightful to know that you can start anything when you please?"

"Anybody with leisure can do that who is willing to begin where everything ought to be begun—that is, at the beginning. Nothing worth calling good can or ever will be started full grown. The essential of any good is life, and the very body of created life, and essential to it, being its self operant, is growth. The larger start you make, the less room you leave for life to extend itself. You fill with the dead matter of your construction the places where assimilation ought to have its perfect work, building by a life-process, self-extending and subserving the whole. Small beginnings with slow growings have time to root themselves thoroughly—I do not mean in place nor yet in social regard, but in wisdom. Such even prosper by failures, for their failures are not too great to be rectified without injury to the original idea. God's beginnings are imperceptible, whether in the region of soul or of matter. Besides, I believe in no good done save in person—by personal operative presence of soul, body, and spirit. God is the one

only person, and it is our personality alone, so far as we have any, that can work with God's perfect personality. God can use us as tools, but to be a tool of, is not to be a fellow-worker with. How the devil would have laughed at the idea of a society for saving the world! But when he saw *one* take it in hand, one who was in no haste even to do that, one who would only do the will of God with all his heart and soul, and cared for nothing else, then indeed he might tremble for his kingdom! It is the individual Christians forming the church by their obedient individuality, that have done all the good done since men for the love of Christ began to gather together. It is individual ardour alone that can combine into larger flame. There is no true power but that which has individual roots. Neither custom nor habit nor law nor foundation is a root. The real roots are individual conscience that hates evil, individual faith that loves and obeys God, individual heart with its kiss of charity.

"I think I understand you; I am sure I do in part, at least," said Hester.

They had, almost unconsciously, walked twice round the square, and had now the third time reached the house. He went in with her and saw his patient, then took his leave to go home to his Greek Testament—for the remainder of the evening if he might. Except when some particular case required attention, he never went on trying to teach with his soul weary. He would carry material aid or social comfort, but would not teach. His soul must be shining—with faith or hope or love or repentance or compassion, when he unveiled it. "No man," he would say, "will be lost because I do not this or that; but if I do the unfitting thing, I may block his way for him, and retard his redemption." He would not presume beyond what was given him—as if God were letting things go wrong, and he must come in to prevent them! He would not set blunted or ill tempered tools to the finest work of the universe!

CHAPTER LI.

AN ARRANGEMENT.

HESTER had not yet gone to see Miss Dasomma because of the small-pox.

Second causes are God's as much as first, and Christ made use of them as his father's way. It were a sad world indeed if God's presence were only interference, that is, miracle. The roundabout common ways of things are just as much his as the straight, miraculous ones—I incline to think more his, in the sense that they are plainly the ways he prefers. In all things that are, he is—present even in the evil we bring into the world, to foil it and bring good out of it. We are always disbelieving in him because things do not go as we intend and desire them to go. We forget that God has larger ends, even for us, than we can see, so his plans do not fit ours. If God were not only to hear our prayers, as he does ever and always, but to answer them as we want them answered, he would not be God our Saviour, but the ministering genius of our destruction.

But now Hester thought she might visit her friend. She had much to say to her and ask of her. First she told her of herself and lord Gartley. Miss Dasomma threw her arms about her, and broke into a flood of congratulation. Hester looked a little surprised, and was indeed a little annoyed at the vehemence of her pleasure. Miss Dasomma hastened to excuse herself.

"My dear," she said, "the more I saw of that man, the more I thought and the more I heard about him, his ways, and his surroundings, the more I marvelled you should ever have taken him for other than the most worldly, shallow, stunted creature. It was the very impossibility of your understanding the mode of being of such a man that made it possible for him to gain on you. Believe me, if you had married him, you would have been sick of him—forgive the vulgar phrase—yes, and hopeless of him, in six weeks."

"There was more and better in him than you imagine," returned Hester, hurt that her friend should think so badly of the man she loved, but by no means sure that she was wrong.

"That may be," answered her friend; "but I am certain also that if you had married him, you would have done him no good."

Then Hester went on with her tale of trouble. Her brother Cornelius had been behaving very badly, she said, and had married a young woman without letting them know. Her father and mother were unaware of the fact as yet, and she dreaded having to communicate it to them. He had been

very ill with the small-pox, and she must take him home; but what to do with his wife until she had broken the matter to them, she did not know. She knew her father would be very angry, and until he should have got over it a little she dared not have her home: in a word she was at her wits' end.

"One question, excuse me if I ask," said Miss Dasomma: "*are* they married?"

"I am not sure; but I am sure she believes they are."

Then she told her what she knew of Amy. Miss Dasomma fell a thinking.

"Could I see her?" she said at length.

"Surely; any time," replied Hester, "now that Corney is so much better."

Miss Dasomma called, and was so charmed with Amy that she proposed to Hester she should stay with her.

This was just what Hester wished but had not dared to propose.

Now came the painful necessity not only of breaking to the young wife that she must be parted from her husband for a while, but—which was worse—of showing how sadly he had deceived her.

Had Cornelius not been ill and helpless and characterless, he would probably have refused to go home; but he did not venture a word of opposition to Hester's determination. He knew she had not told Amy anything, but saw that, if he refused, she might judge it necessary to tell her all. And notwithstanding his idiotic pretence of superiority, he had a kind of thorough confidence in Hester. In his sickness something of the old childish feeling about her as a refuge from evil had returned upon him, and he was now nearly ready to do and allow whatever she pleased, trusting to her to get him out of the scrape he was in: she could do more than any one else, he was sure!

"But now tell me, on your word of honour," she said to him that same night, happening to find herself alone with him, "are you really and truly married to Amy?"

She was delighted to see him blaze up in anger.

"Hester, you insult us both!" he said.

"No, Cornelius," returned Hester; "I have a right to distrust you—but I distrust only you. Whatever may be amiss in the affair, I am certain you alone are to blame—not Amy."

Thereupon Cornelius swore a solemn oath that Amy was as much his lawful wife as he knew how to make her.

"Then what is to be done with her when you go home? You cannot expect she will be welcomed. I have not dared tell them of your marriage—only of your illness. The other must be by word of mouth."

"I don't know what's to be done with her! How should *I* know!" answered Cornelius with a return of his old manner. "I thought you would manage it all for me! This cursed illness———"

"Cornelius," said Hester, "this illness is the greatest kindness God could show you."

"Well, we won't argue about that!—Sis, you must get me out of the scrape!"

Hester's heart swelled with delight at the sound of the old loving nursery-word. She turned to him and kissed him.

"I will do what I honestly can, Cornelius," she said.

"All right!" replied Corney. "What do you mean to do?"

"Not to take Amy down with us. She must wait till I have told."

"Then my wife is to be received only on sufferance!" he cried.

"You can hardly expect to be otherwise received yourself. You have put your wife at no end of disadvantage by making her your wife without the knowledge of your family. For yourself, when a man has taken money not his own; when he has torn the hearts of father and mother with anguish such as neither ever knew before—ah, Corney! if you had seen them as I saw them, you would not wonder that I tremble at the thought of your meeting. If you have any love for poor Amy you will not dream of exposing her to the first outbreak of a shocked judgment. I cannot be sure what my mother might think, but my father would take her for your evil genius! It is possible he may refuse to see yourself."

"Then I'm not going. Better stay here and starve!"

"If so, I must at once tell Amy what you have done. I will not have the parents on whom you have brought disgrace and misery, supposed guilty of cruelty. Amy must know all about it some day, but it ought to come from yourself—not from me. You will never be fit for honest company till for very misery you have told your wife."

Hester thought she must not let him fancy things were going back into the old grooves—that his crime would become a thing of no consequence, and pass out of existence, ignored and forgotten. Evil cannot be destroyed without repentance.

He was silent as one who had nothing to answer.

"So now," said Hester, "will you, or must I, tell Amy that she cannot go home?"

He thought for a moment.

"I will," he said.

Hester left him, and sent Amy to him. In a few minutes she returned. She had wept, but was now, though looking very sad, quite self-possessed.

"Please, miss," she said—but Hester interrupted her.

"You must not call me *miss*, Amy," she said. "You must call me *Hester*. Am I not your sister?"

A gleam of joy shot from the girl's eyes like the sun through red clouds.

"Then you have forgiven me!" she cried, and burst into tears.

"No, Amy, not that! I should have had to know something to forgive first. You may have been foolish; everybody can't always be wise, though everybody must try to do right. But now we must have time to set things straighter without doing more mischief, and you mustn't mind staying a little while with Miss Dasomma."

"Does she know all about it, miss—Hester?" asked Amy; and as she called her new sister by her name, the blood rushed over her face.

"She knows enough not to think unfairly of you, Amy."

"And you won't be hard upon him when he hasn't me to comfort him—will you, Hester?"

"I will think of my new sister who loves him," replied Hester. "But you must not think I do not love him too. And oh, Amy! you must be very careful over him. No one can do with him what you can. You must help him to be good, for that is the chief duty of every one towards a neighbour, and particularly of a wife towards a husband."

Amy was crying afresh, and made no answer; but there was not the most shadowy token of resentment in her weeping.

CHAPTER LII.

THINGS AT HOME.

In the meantime things had been going very gloomily at Yrndale. Mrs. Raymount was better in health but hardly more cheerful. How could she be? how get over the sadness that her boy was such? But the thing that most oppressed her was to see the heart of his father so turned from the youth. What would become of them if essential discord invaded their home! Cornelius had not been pleasant, even she was to herself compelled to admit, since first he began to come within sight of manhood; but she had always looked to the time when growing sense would make him cast aside young-mannish ways; and this was the outcome of her cares and hopes and prayers for him!

Her husband went about listless and sullen. He wrote no more. How could one thus disgraced in his family presume to teach the world anything! How could he ever hold up his head as one that had served his generation, when this was the kind of man he was to leave behind him for the life of the next! Cornelius's very being cast doubt on all he had ever said or done!

He had been proud of his children: they were like those of any common stock! and the shame recoiled upon himself. Bitterly he recalled the stain upon his family in generations gone by. He had never forged or stolen himself, yet the possibility had remained latent in him, else how could he have transmitted it? Perhaps there were things in which he might have been more honest, and so have killed the latent germ, and his child not have had it to develop! Far into the distance he saw a continuous succession of dishonest Raymounts, nor succession only but multiplication, till streets and prisons were swarming with them. For hours he would sit with his hands in his pockets, scarcely daring to think, for the misery of the thoughts that came crowding out the moment the smallest chink was opened in their cage. He had become short, I do not say rough, in his speech to his wife. He would break into sudden angry complaints against Hester for not coming home, but stop dead in the middle, as if nothing was worth being angry about now, and turn away with a sigh that was almost a groan.

The sight of the children was a pain to him. Saffy was not one to understand much of grief beyond her own passing troubles; it was a thing for which she seemed to have little reception; and her occasionally unsympathetic ways were, considering her age, more of a grief to her mother than was quite reasonable; she feared she saw in her careless glee the same root which in her brother flowered in sullen disregard. Mark was very different. The father would order Saffy away, but the boy might come and go as he pleased, nor gave him any annoyance, although he never or scarcely ever took any notice of him. He had been told nothing of the cause of his parents' evident misery. When the news came of Corney's illness, his mother told him of that; but he had sympathy and penetration enough to perceive that there must be something amiss more than that: if this were all, they would have told him of it when first they began to be changed! And when the news came that he was getting better, his father did not seem the least happier! He would sometimes stand and gaze at his father, but the solemn, far-off, starry look of the boy's eyes never seemed to disturb him. He loved his father as few boys love, and yet had a certain dread of him and discomfort in his presence, which he could not have accounted for, and which would vanish at once when he spoke to him.

He had never recovered the effects of being so nearly drowned, and in the readier apprehension caused by accumulated troubles his mother began to doubt if ever he would be well again. He had got a good deal thinner; his food did not seem to nourish him; and his being seemed slipping away from the hold of the world. He was full of dreams and fancies, all of the higher order of things where love is the law. He did not read much that was new, for he soon got tired with the effort to understand; but he would spend happy hours alone, seeming to the ordinary eye to be doing nothing, because his doing was with the unseen. So-called religious children are often peculiarly disagreeable, mainly from false notions of the simple thing religion in their parents and teachers; but in truth nowhere may religion be more at home than in a child. A strong conscience and a loving regard to the desires of others were Mark's chief characteristics. When such children as he die, we may well imagine them wanted for special work in the world to which they go. If the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and he said so who knew and is true, our children

do not drop hap-hazard into the near world, neither are they kept out of it by any care or any power of medicine: all goes by heavenliest will and loveliest ordinance. Some of us will have to be ashamed of our outcry after our dead. Beloved, even for your dear faces we can wait a while, seeing it is His father, your father and our father to whom you have gone, leaving us with him still. Our day will come, and your joy and ours, and all shall be well.

The attachment of Mark to the major continued growing.

"When Majie comes," he said one of those days, "he must not go again."

"Why, Markie?" asked his mother, almost without a meaning, for her thought was with her eldest-born, her disgrace.

"Because, if he does," he answered, "I shall not see much of him."

The mother looked at the child, but said nothing. Sorrow was now the element of her soul. Cornelius had destroyed the family-heart: must the family soon be broken up, and vanish in devouring vacancy? Do you ask where was her faith? I answer, Just where yours and mine is when we give thanks trusting in the things for which we give thanks; when we rest in what we have, in what we can do, in what people think of us, in the thought of the friends we have at our back, or in anything whatever but the living, outgoing power of the self-alive—the one causing Potency in the heart of our souls, and in every clothing of those souls, from nerve, muscle, and skin to atmosphere and farthest space. The living life is the one power, the only that can, and he who puts his trust or hope in anything else whatever is a worshipper of idols. He who does not believe in God must be a truster in that which is lower than himself.

Mark seldom talked about his brother. Before he went away the last time he had begun to shrink from him a little, as if with some instinct of an inward separation. He would stand a little way off and look at him as if he were a stranger in whom he was interested, and as if he himself were trying to determine what mental attitude he must assume towards him. When he heard that he was ill, the tears came in his eyes, but he did not speak.

"Are you not sorry for Corney?" said his mother.

"I'm sorry," he answered, "because it must make him unhappy. He does not like being ill."

"*You* don't like being ill, I'm sure, Mark!" returned his mother, apprehending affectation.

"I don't mind it much," answered the boy sweetly, looking far away—as it seemed to his mother, towards a region to which she herself had begun to look with longing.

The way her husband took their grief made them no more a family, but a mere household. He brooded alone and said nothing. They did not share sorrow as they had shared joy.

At last came a letter from Hester saying that in two days she hoped to start with Corney to bring him home. The mother read the letter, and with a faded gleam of joy on her countenance, passed it to her husband. He took it, glanced at it, threw it from him, rose, and left the room. For an hour his wife heard him pacing up and down his study; then he took his hat and stick and went out.

What he might have resolved upon had Corney been returning in tolerable health, I do not know—possibly to kick him out of the house for his impudence in daring to show his face there; but even this wrathful father, who thought he did well to be angry, could not turn from his door his sickly child, let him be the greatest scoundrel under the all-seeing sun! Not therefore would he receive or acknowledge him! Swine were the natural companions of the prodigal, and the sooner he was with them the better! There was truth in the remark, but hell in the spirit of it: for the heart of the father was turned from his son. The Messiah came to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children. Strange it should ever have wanted doing! But it wants doing still. There is scarce a discernible segment of the round of unity between many fathers and their children.

Gerald Raymount went walking through the pine-woods on his hills. Little satisfaction lay in land to which such a son was to succeed! No! the land was his own! not an acre, not as much as would bury him, should the rascal have!

Alas! he had taken honesty as a matter of course in *his* family. Were they not *his* children? He had not thought of God as the bond of life between him and them, nor sought to nourish the life in them. He was their father and was content with them. He had pondered much the laws by which society proceeds and prospers, but had not endeavoured in his own case to carry towards perfection the relation that goes first to the making of society: the relation between himself and his

children had been left to shift for itself. He had never known anything of what was going on in the mind of his son. He had never asked himself if the boy loved the truth—if he cared that things should stand in him on the footing of eternal reason, or if his consciousness was anything better than the wallowing of a happy-go-lucky satisfaction in being. And now he was astonished to find *his* boy no better than the common sort of human animal! My reader may say he was worse, for there is the stealing; but that is just the point in which I see him likest the common run of men, while in his home-relations he was worse. It is my conviction that such an act of open disgrace as he had been guilty of, may be the outcome of evil more easy to cast off than that indicated by home-habits embodying a selfishness regarded as a mere matter of course. There is little hope of the repentance and redemption of certain some until they have committed one or another of the many wrong things of which they are daily, through a course of unrestrained selfishness, becoming more and more capable. Few seem to understand that the true end is not to keep their children from doing what is wrong, though that is on the way to it, but to render them incapable of doing wrong. While one is capable of doing wrong, he is no nearer right than if that wrong were done—not so near as if the wrong were done and repented of. Some minds are never roused to the true nature of their selfishness until, having done some patent wrong, the eyes of the collective human conscience are fixed with the essence of human disapprobation and general repudiation upon them. Doubtless in the disapproving crowd are many just as capable of the wrong as they, but the deeper nature in them, God's and not yet theirs, utters its disapproval, and the culprit feels it. Happy he if then at last he begin to turn from the evil itself, so repenting! This Cornelius had not begun to do yet, but his illness, while perhaps it delayed the time when the thought of turning should present itself, made it more likely the thought would be entertained when it did present itself.

The father came back from his lonely walk, in which his communion with nature had been of the smallest, as determined as before that his son, having unsonned himself, should no more be treated as a son. He could not refuse him shelter in his house for a time, but he should be in it on sufferance—in no right of sonship, and should be made to understand it was so!

But the heart of the mother was longing after her boy, like a

human hen whose chicken had run from under her wing and come to grief. He had sinned, he had suffered, and was in disgrace—good reasons why the mother's heart should cling to the youth, why her arms should long to fold him to her bosom! The things which made his father feel he could not speak to him again, worked in the deeper nature of the mother in opposite fashion. In her they reached a stratum of the divine. Was he unlovely?—she must love him the more! Was he selfish and repellent?—she must get the nearer to him! Everything was reason to her for love and more love. If he were but with her! She would clasp him so close that evil should not touch him! Satan himself could not get at him with her whole mother-being folded round him! She had been feeling of late as if she could not get near him: now that sickness had reduced his strength, and shame his proud spirit, love would have room to enter and minister! The good of all evil is to make a way for love, which is essential good. Therefore evil exists and will exist until love destroy and cast it out. Corney could not keep his mother out of his heart now! she thought. There were ten things she could do for him now to one she could have done for him before! When, oh when would he appear, that her heart might go out to meet him!

CHAPTER LIII.

THE RETURN.

THE day came. It was fine in London. The invalid was carefully wrapt up for the journey. Hester, the major, and Miss Dasomma followed the young couple to the station. There the last received the poor little wife, and when the train was out of sight, took her home with her. The major, who got into the next carriage, at every stop ran to see if anything was wanted; and when they reached the station, got on the box of the carriage the mother had sent to meet them, and so Hester bore her lost sheep home—in little triumph, and much anxiety.

When they stopped at the door no one was on the outlook for them. The hall was not lighted, and the door was locked. The major rang the bell. Ere the door was opened Hester had got down and stood waiting. The major took the youth in his arms and carried him into the dining-room, so weary that he could

scarcely open his eyes. There seemed no light in the house except the candle the man brought when he came to open the door.

Corney begged to be put to bed.

"I wish Amy was here!" he murmured.

Hester and the major were talking together.

Hester hurried from the room and returned in a moment.

"I was sure of it!" she whispered to the major. "There is a glorious fire in his room, and everything ready for him. The house is my father, but the room is my mother, and my mother is God."

The major took him again and carried him up the stair—so thin and light was he.

The moment they were past the door of her room, out came the mother behind them in her dressing-gown, and glided pale and noiseless as the disembodied after them. Hester looked round and saw her, but she laid her finger on her lips, and followed without a word. When they were in the room she came to the door, looked in, and watched them, but did not enter. Cornelius did not open his eyes. The major laid him down on the sofa near the fire. A gleam of it fell on his face. The mother drew a sharp quick breath, and pressed her hands against her heart: there was his sin upon his face, branding him that men might know him! But therewith came a fresh rush from the inexhaustible fount of mother-love. She would have taken him into her anew, with all his sin and pain and sorrow, to clear away in herself brand and pollution, and bear him anew—even as God bears our griefs and carries our sorrows, destroys our wrongs, taking our consequences on himself, and gives us the new birth from above. Her whole wounded heart seemed to go out to him in one trembling sigh as she turned to go back to the room where her husband sat with hopeless gaze fixed on the fire. She had but strength to reach the side of the bed, and fell senseless upon it.

He started up with a sting of self-accusation: he had killed her, exacting from her a promise that by no word would she welcome the wanderer that night. For she would not have the father imagine in his bitterness that she loved the erring son more than the husband whose heart he had all but broken, and had promised. She was in truth nearly as anxious about the one as the other, for was not the unforgivingness of the one as bad—was it not even worse than the theft of the other?

He lifted her, laid her on the bed, and proceeded to administer the restoratives he now knew better than any other how to

employ. In a little while her eyelids began to tremble. "My baby!" she murmured, and tears began to flow.

"Thank God!" he said, and got her to bed.

But for all his stern fulfilment of duty he did not feel fit to lie down by his wife. He would watch: she might have another bad turn!

From the exhaustion that follows excess of feeling, she slept. He sat wakeful by the fire. She was his only friend, he said, and now she and he were no more of one mind! Never until now had they had a difference!

Hester and the major got Corney to bed, and he was instantly fast asleep. The major arranged himself to pass the night by the fire, and Hester went to see what she could do for her mother. Knocking softly at the door and receiving no answer, she peeped in: there sat her father, and there slept her mother: she would not disturb them, but, taking her share in the punishment of him she had brought home, retire without welcome or good-night. She too was presently fast asleep. There was no gnawing worm of duty undone or wrong unpardoned in her bosom to keep her awake. Sorrow is sleepy, pride and remorse are wakeful.

CHAPTER LIV.

A HEAVENLY VISION.

THE night began differently with the two watchers. The major was troubled in his mind at what seemed the hard-heartedness of the mother, for he loved her with a true brotherly affection. He had not seen her looking in at the door; he did not know the cause of her appearing so withdrawn and unmotherly: he forgot his shilling novel and his sherry and water, and brooded over the thing. He could not endure the low-minded cub, he said to himself; he would gladly, if only the wretch were well enough, give him a sound horse-whipping; but to see him so treated by father and mother was more than he could bear: he began to pity a lad born of parents so hard-hearted. What would have become of himself, he thought, if his mother had treated him so! He had never, to be sure, committed any crime against society worse than shocking certain ridiculously proper people; but if she had made much of

his foibles and faults, he might have grown to be capable of—how could he tell what? Who would turn out a mangy dog that was his own dog! If the fellow were his he would know what to do with him! He did not reflect that just because he was not his, he did not feel the wounds that disabled from action. It was easy for him unhurt to think what he would do if he were hurt. Some things seem the harder to forgive the greater the love. It is but a false seeming, thank God, and comes only of selfishness, which makes both the love and the hurt seem greater than they are.

And as the major sat thinking and thinking, the story came back to him which his mother had so often told him and his brothers, all now gone but himself, as they stood or sat or lay gathered round her on the Sunday evenings in the nursery—about the boy that was tired of being at home, and asked his father for money to go away; and how his father gave it him, thinking it better he should go than grumble at the best he could give him; and how he grew very naughty, and spent his money in buying things that were not worth having, and eating and drinking with greedy, coarse, ill behaved people, till at last he had nothing left to buy food with, and had to feed swine to earn something; and how he fell a thinking, and would go home. It all came back to his mind just as his mother used to tell it—how the poor prodigal, ragged and dirty and hungry, set out for home, and how his father spied him coming a great way off, and knew him at once, and set out running to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. This father would not even look at the son that had but just escaped the jaws of death! True, the prodigal came home repentant; but the father did not wait to know that, but ran to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him. Only he had to go home, else how was his father to receive him!

As the major thus reflected, he kept coming nearer and nearer to the individual *I*, lurking at the keyhole of every story.

"I wonder now," he said, "if when a man dies, this is counted for going home! I hardly think it; that is a thing the man can't help at all; he has no hand in the doing of it. Who would come out to meet a fellow because he was flung down dead at his door! I fear I should find myself in no better box than this young rascal when he comes home because he can't help it!"

The end of it was that the major, there in the middle of the night, went down on his knees, and, as he had not now done since the eve of his last battle, tried to say the prayers his mother had taught him. Presently he found himself saying things she had not taught him—speaking from his heart as if one was listening, one who in the dead of the night did not sleep, but kept wide awake lest one of his children should cry.

"It is time," said the major to himself the next day, "that I began to think about going home. I will try again to-night!"

In his wife's room Gerald Raymount sat on into the dead waste and middle of the night. At last, as his wife continued quietly asleep, he thought he would go down to his study, and find something to turn his thoughts from his misery. None such had come to him as to his friend. He had been much more of a religious man than the major—had his theories concerning both the first and the second table of the law; nor had he been merely a talker, though his talk as with all talkers was constantly ahead of his deed: well is it for those whose talk is not ahead of their endeavour! but it was the *idea* of religion, and the thousand ideas its brood, more than religion itself, that was his delight. He philosophized and philosophized well of the relations between man and his maker, of the necessity to human nature of belief in a God, of the disastrous consequences of having none, and such like things; but having such an interest is a very different thing from being in such relation with the father that the thought of him is an immediate and ever returning joy and strength. He did not rejoice in the thought of the inheritance of the saints in light, as the inheriting of the nature of God, the being made partaker of the Father's essential blessedness: he was far yet from that. He was so busy understanding with his intellect, that he missed the better understanding of heart and imagination. He was always so pleased with the thought of a thing, that he missed the thing itself—whose *possession*, and not its thought, is essential. Thus when the trial came, it found him no true parent. The youth of course could not be received either as clean-handed or as repentant; but love is at the heart of every right way, and essential forgiveness at the heart of every true treatment of the sinner, even in the very refusal of external forgiveness. That the father should not have longed above all things for his son's repentance: that he should not have met even a seeming

return; that he should have nourished resentment because the youth had sinned against *his* family in which as his he had gloried; that he should care to devise no measures for generating a sense of the evil he had done, and aiding such repentance as makes forgiveness a necessary consequence; that he should ruminate how to make him feel most poignantly his absolute scorn of him, his loathing of his all but convict son —this made the man a kind of paternal Satan who sat watching by the repose of the most Christian, because most loving, most forgiving, most self-forgetting mother, stirring up in himself fresh whirlwinds of indignation at the incredible thing which had become the fact of facts, heaviest, stinging deeepst, seeming unchangeable. That it might prove a blessing, he would have spurned as a suggestion equally degrading and absurd. "What is done is done," he would have said, in the mingled despair of pride and pride of despair; "and all the power of God cannot make the thing otherwise. We can hold up our heads no more for ever. My own son has not only disgraced but fooled me, giving men good cause to say, "Physician, heal thyself!"

He rose, and treading softly lest he should wake the only being he *felt* love for now, and whom he was loving less than before, for self-love and pride are antagonistic to all loves, left the room and went to his study. The fire was not yet out; he stirred it and made it blaze, lighted his candles, took a book from a shelf, sat down, and tried to read. But it was no use; his thoughts were such that they could hold no company with other thoughts; the world of his kind was shut out; he was a man alone, because a man unforgiving and unforgiven. His soul slid into the old groove of miserable self-reiteration, whose only result was more friction-heat; and so the night slid away.

The nominal morning if not the dawn was near, when, behold a wonder of the night! The door between the study and the old library opened so softly that he heard nothing, and ere he was aware a child in long white gown stood by his side. He started violently. It was Mark—but asleep! He had seen his mother and father even more than usually troubled all day, and their trouble had haunted him in his sleep; he had roused him without waking him from his dreams, and the spirit of love had directed his feet to the presence of his father. He stood a little way from him, his face white, his mouth silent, haunted by a smile of intense quiet, as of one who, being comforted,

would comfort. There was also in the look a slight something like idiocy, for his soul was not precisely with his body; his thoughts, though concerning his father, were elsewhere; the circumstances of his soul and of his body were not the same; and so being twinned, that is divided, *twained*, he was as one beside himself. His eyes, although open, evidently saw nothing; and thus he stood for a little time.

There had never been tender relations between Mark and his father like those between the boy and his mother and sister. His father was always kind to him, but betwixt him and his boys he had let grow a sort of hard skin. He had not come so near to them as to the feminine portion of his family—shrank indeed from close relations with their spirits, thoughts, or intents. It arose, I imagine, from an excess of the masculine element in his nature. Even when as merest children they came to be kissed before going to bed, he did not like the contact of their faces with his. No woman, and perhaps not many men will understand this; but it was always a relief to Mr. Raymount to have the nightly ceremony over. He thought there was nothing he would not do for their good; and I think his heart must in the main have been right towards them: he could hardly love and honour his wife as he did, and not love the children she had given him. But the clothes of his affections somehow did not sit easy on him, and there was a good deal in his behaviour to Cornelius that had operated unfavourably on the mind of the youth. Even Mark, although, as I have said, he loved him as few boys love a father, was yet a little afraid of him—never went to him with confidence—never snuggled close to him—never sat down by his side to read his book in a heaven of twilight peace, as he would by his mother's. He would never have gone to his father's room for refuge from sleeplessness.

Not recognizing his condition his father was surprised and indeed annoyed as well as startled to see him: he was in no mood for such a visit. He felt also strangely afraid of the child, he could not have told why. Wretched about one son, he was dismayed at the nocturnal visit of the other. The cause was of course his wrong condition of mind; lack of truth and its harmony in ourselves alone can make us miserable; there is a cure for everything when that is cured. No ill in our neighbours, if we be right in ourselves, will ever seem hopeless to us; but while we stand wrapped in our own selfishness, our neigh-

bours may well seem incurable; for not only is there nothing in us to help their redemption, but there is that in ourselves, and cherished in us, which cannot be forgiven, but must be utterly destroyed.

There was an unnatural look, at the same time pitiful and lovely, about the boy, and the father sat and stared in gathering dread. He had nearly imagined him an angel of some doom.

Suddenly the child stretched out his hands to him, and with upcast, beseeching face, and eyes that seemed to be seeing far off, came close to his knee. Then the father remembered how once before, when a tiny child, he had walked in his sleep, and how, suddenly wakened from it, he had gone into a kind of fit, and had for a long time ailed from the shock. Instantly anxious that nothing of the kind should occur again, he took the child softly in his arms, lifted him to his knees, and held him gently to his bosom. An expression of supreme delight came over the boy's face—a look of absolute contentment mingled with hope. He put his thin hands together, palm to palm, as if saying his prayers, but lifted his countenance to that of his father. His gaze, however, though not its direction, was still to the infinite. And now his lips began to move, and a murmur came from him, which grew into words audible. He was indeed praying to his father, but a father closer to him than the one upon whose knees he sat.

"Dear God," said the child—and before I blame the familiarity, I must know that God is displeased with such address from the mouth of a child: this was not a taught prayer he neither meant nor felt:—"Dear God!" said the child. "I don't know what to do, for papa and Corney, I am afraid, are both naughty. I would not say so to anybody but you, God, for papa is your little boy as I am his little boy, and you know all about it. I don't know what it is, and I think Corney must be more to blame than my dear papa; but when he came home to-night he did not go to papa, and papa did not go to him. They never said How do you do, or Good-night—and Corney very ill too! and I am always wanting to come to you God, to see you. O God, you are our big papa! please put it all right. I don't know how, or I would tell you; but it doesn't matter—you would only smile at my way, and take a much better one of your own. But please, dear God, make papa and Corney good, and never mind their naughtiness, only make it just nothing at all. You know they must love one another. I

will not pray a word more, for I know you will do just what I want. Good-bye, God; I'm going to bed now—down there. I'll come again soon."

With that he slipped from his father's knee, who did not dare to detain him, and walked from the room with slow stately step.

By this time the heart of the strong hard man was swelling with the love which, in it all along, was now awake. He could not weep, but sobbed dry, torturing sobs, that seemed as if they would kill him. But he must see the boy was safe in bed, and rising he left the room.

In the corridor he breathed more freely. Through an old window the bright moon, shining in peace with nobody to see, threw partly on the wall and partly on the floor, a shadow-cross, the only thing to catch the eye in the thin light. Severe protestant as Gerald Raymount was, he found himself on his knees in the passage before the shadow—not praying, not doing anything he knew, but under some spiritual influence known only to God.

When the something had reached its height and the passion for the time was over—when the rush of the huge tidal wave of eternity had subsided, and his soul was clearing of the storm that had swept through it, he rose from his knees and went up to Mark's room, two stories higher. The reflected moonlight was there too, for the boy had drawn back the window-curtains that from his pillow he might see the stars, and the father saw his child's white bed glimmering like a tomb. He drew near, but through the gray darkness it was some seconds before he could rightly see the face of his boy, and for a moment—I wonder how brief a moment is enough for a deathpang to feel eternal!—for an awful moment he felt as if he had lost him: when he left the study, he had been lifted straight to the bosom of the Father to whom he had prayed! Slow through the dusk dawned his face. He had not then been taken bodily!—not the less was he gone!—that was a dead face! But as he gazed in a fascination of fear, his eyes grew abler to distinguish, and he saw that he breathed. He was astonished to find how weak was the revulsion: we know more about our feelings than about anything else, yet scarcely understand them at all; they play what seem to us the strangest pranks—moving all the time by laws divine.

The boy seemed in his usual health, and was sleeping

peacefully—dreaming pleasantly, for the ghost of a smile glinted about his just parted lips. Then upon the father—who was not, with all his hardness, devoid of imagination—came the wonder of watching a dreamer: what might not be going on within that brain, inaccessible as the most distant star?—yea, far more inaccessible, for what were gravity and distance compared with difficulties unnamed and unnamable! No spirit-shallop has yet been found to float us across the gulf, say rather the invisible line, that separates soul from soul. Splendrous visions might be gliding through the brain of the sleeper—his child, born of his body and his soul—and not one of them was open to him! Not one of the thoughts whose lambent smile-flame flitted about his child's lips would pass from him to him! Could they be more divided if the child were dead, than now when he lay, in his sight indeed, yet remote in regions of separated existence?

But how much nearer was the child to him in reality when awake and about the house? How much more did he know then of the thoughts, the loves, the imaginations, the desires, the aspirations that moved in the heart and brain of the child? For all that his contact with him came to he might as well be dead! A phantom of him moving silent about the house might fill the part as well! The boy was sickly: he might be taken from him ere he had made any true acquaintance with him! He was just the child to die young! He would see him again, it was to be hoped, in the other world, but the boy would have so few memories of him, so few associations with him, that it would be hard to knot the new to the old!

He turned away, and went back to his room. There, with a sense of loneliness deeper than he had ever before felt, he went down on his knees to beg the company of the great being whose existence he had so often defended as if it were in danger from his creatures, but whom he had so little regarded as actually existent that he had not yet sought refuge with him. All the house was asleep—the major had long ended his prayers and was slumbering by the fire—when Raymount knelt before the living love, the source of his life, and of all the love that makes life a good thing, and rose from his knees a humbler man.

CHAPTER LV.

A SAD BEGINNING.

TOWARDS morning he went to bed, and slept late—heavily and unreposefully; and, alas! when he woke, there was all the old feeling returned! How *could* he forgive the son that had so disgraced him!

Instead of betaking himself afresh to the living strength, he began—not directly to fight himself, but to try to argue himself right, persuading himself on philosophical grounds that it was better to forgive his son; that it was the part of a wise man, the part of one who had respect to his own dignity, to abstain from harshness, nor drive the youth to despair: he was his son—he must do what he could for him!—and so on. But he had little success. Anger and pride were too much for him. His breakfast was taken to him, in the study, and there Hester found him an hour after, with it untasted. He submitted to her embrace, but scarcely spoke, and asked nothing about Corney. Hester felt sadly chilled, and very hopeless. But she had begun to learn that one of the principal parts of faith is patience, and that the setting of wrong things right is so far from easy that not even God can do it all at once. But time is nothing to him, who sees the end from the beginning; he does not grudge thousands of years of labour. The things he cares to do for us require our co-operation, and that makes the great difficulty: we are such poor fellow-workers with him! All that seems to deny his presence and labour only necessitates a larger theory of that presence and labour. Yet time lies heavy on the young especially, and Hester left the room with a heavy heart.

The only way in such inward stubbornnesses of the spirit when we cannot feel that we are wrong, is to open our hearts, in silence and loneliness and prayer, to the influences from above—stronger for the right than any for the wrong; to seek the sweet enablings of the living light to see things as they are—as God sees them, who is never wrong, because he has no selfishness, but is the living Love and the living Truth, without whom there would be no love and no truth. To rise humbly glorious above our low self, to choose the yet infant self that is one with Christ, who sought never his own but the things of his father and brother, is the redemption begun, and the inheri-

tance will follow. Mr. Raymount, like most of us, was a long way indeed from this yet. He strove hard to reconcile the memories of the night with the feelings of the morning—strove to realize a state of mind in which a measure of forgiveness to his son blended with a measure of satisfaction to the wounded pride he called paternal dignity. How could he take his son to his bosom as he was? he asked—but did not ask how he was to draw him to repentance. He did not think of the tender entreaty with which, by the mouths of his prophets, God pleads with his people to come back to him. If the father, instead of holding out his arms to the child he would entice to his bosom, folds them on that bosom, and turns his back—expectant it may be, but giving no sign of expectancy, the child will hardly suppose him longing to be reconciled. No doubt there are times when and children with whom any show of affection is not only useless but injurious, tending merely to increase their self-importance, and in such case the child should not see the parent at all; but it was the opposite reason that made it better Cornelius should not yet see his father: he would have treated him so that he would only have hated him.

For a father not to forgive is in truth far worse than for a son to need forgiveness; and such a father will of course go from bad to worse as well as the son except he repent. The shifty, ungenerous spirit of compromise awoke in Raymount. He would be very good, very gentle, very kind to every one else in the house! He would, like Ahab, walk softly; he was not ready to walk uprightly: his forgiveness he would postpone! He knew his feelings towards Corney were wearing out the heart of his wife—but not yet would he yield! There was little Mark, however! he would make more of him, know him better, and let the child know him better! I doubt if to know his father better just then would have been for Mark to love him more.

He went to see how his wife was. Finding that, notwithstanding all she had gone through the day before, she was a trifle better, he felt a little angry and not a little annoyed: what added to his misery was a comfort to her! she was the happier for having her worthless son! In the selfishness of his misery he looked upon this as lack of sympathy with himself. Such weakness vexed him too in the wife to whom he had for so many years looked up with more than respect, with unacknowledged reverence. He did not even allude to

Cornelius, but said he was going for a walk, and went to find Mark—with a vague hope of consolation in the child who had clung to him so confidently in the night. He had forgotten it was not to him *his soul* had clung, but to the father of both.

Mark was in the nursery, as the children's room was still called. The two never quarrelled; had they been two Saffies, they would have quarrelled and made it up twenty times a day. When Mark heard his father's step, he bounded to meet him and when his sweet moonlit rather than sunshiny face appeared at the door, the gloom on his father's yielded a little; the gleam of a momentary smile broke over it, and he said kindly,

"Come, Mark, I want you to go for a walk with me."

"Yes, papa," answered the boy. "—May Saffy come too?"

The father was not equal however to the company of two of his children, and Mark alone proceeded to get ready, while Saffy sulked in a corner.

But he was not doing the right thing in taking him out. He ought to have known that the boy was not able for anything to be called a walk; neither was the weather fit for his going out. But absorbed in his own trouble, the father did not think of his weakness; and Hester not being by to object, they went. Mark was delighted to be his father's companion, never doubted all was right that he wished, and forgot his weakness as entirely as did his father.

With his heart in such a state, the father naturally had next to nothing to say to his boy, and they walked on in silence. The silence did not affect Mark; he was satisfied to be with his father whether he spoke to him or not—too blessed in the long silences between him and God to dislike silence. It was no separation—so long as like speech it was between them. For a long time he was growing tired without knowing it: when weariness became conscious at last, it was thorough, and poor Mark found he could scarcely put one leg past the other.

The sun had been shining when they started—a beautiful, though not very warm spring-sun, but now it was clouded and rain was threatened. They were in the middle of a bare, lonely moor, easily reached from the house, but of considerable extent, and the wind had begun to blow cold. Sunk in his miserable thoughts, the more miserable that he had now yielded even the pretence of struggle and relapsed into unforgiving unforgiven-ness, the father saw nothing of his child's failing strength, but kept trudging on. All at once he became

aware that the boy was not by his side. He looked round: he was nowhere visible. Alarmed, he stopped, and, turning, called his name aloud. The wind was blowing the other way, and that might be the cause of his hearing no reply. He called again, and this time thought he heard a feeble response. He retraced his steps rapidly.

Some four or five hundred yards back, he came to a hollow, where on a tuft of brown heather, sat Mark, looking as white as the vapour-like moon in the daytime.

His anxiety relieved, the father felt annoyed: he was angry with its object, and rated the little fellow for stopping behind.

"I wasn't able to keep up, papa," replied Mark. "So I thought I would rest a while, and meet you as you came back."

"You ought to have told me. I shouldn't have brought you had I known you would behave so. Come, get up; we must go home."

"I'm very sorry, papa, but I think I can't."

"Nonsense!"

"There's something gone wrong in my knee."

"Try," said his father, again frightened: Mark had never shown himself whimsical.

He obeyed and rose, but with a little cry dropped on the ground. He had somehow injured his knee that he could not walk a step.

His father stooped to lift him.

"I'll carry you, Markie," he said.

"Oh, no, no, you must not, papa! It will tire you. Set me on that stone, and send Jacob. He carries a sack of meal, and I'm not so heavy as a sack of meal."

His father was already walking homeward with him. The next moment Mark spied the waving of a dress.

"Oh," he cried, "there's Hessie! She will carry me!"

"You little goose!" said his father tenderly, "can she carry you better than I can?"

"She is not stronger than you, papa, because you are a big man; but I think Hessie has more carry in her. She has such strong arms!"

Hester was running, and when she came near was quite out of breath.

She had feared how it would be when she found his father had taken Mark for a walk, and her first feeling was of anger,

for she had inherited not a little of her father's spirit: indirectly the black sheep had roused evils in the flock unknown before. Never in her life had Hester been aware of such a feeling as that with which she now hurried to meet her father. When, however, she saw the boy's arms round his father's neck, and his cheek laid against his, her anger went from her, and she was sorry and ashamed, notwithstanding that she knew by Mark's face, of which she understood every light and shade, that he was suffering much.

"Let me take him, papa," she said.

The father had no intention of giving up the child. But before he knew, Mark had stretched his arms to Hester, and was out of his into hers. Instinctively trying to retain him, he hurt him, and the boy gave a little cry. Thereupon, with a new pang of pain, and a new sting of resentment, which he knew unreasonable but could not help, he let him go, and followed in distressed humiliation.

Hester's heart was very sore because of this new grief, but she saw some hope in it.

"He is too heavy for you, Hester," said her father. "Surely, as it is my fault, I ought to bear the penalty!"

"It's no penalty—is it, Markie?" said Hester merrily.

"No, Hessie," replied Mark, almost merrily. "—You don't know how strong Hessie is, papa!"

"Yes, I am very strong. And you ain't heavy—are you, Markie?"

"No," answered Mark; "I feel so light sometimes, I think I could fly; only I don't like to try for fear I couldn't. I like to think perhaps I could."

By and by Hester found, with all her good will, that her strength was of the things that can be shaken, and was obliged to yield him to her father. It was much to his relief, for a sense of moral weakness had invaded him as he followed his children: he was rejected of his family, and had become a nobody in it!

When at length they reached home, Mark was put to bed, and the doctor was sent for.

CHAPTER LVI.

MOTHER AND SON.

In the meantime Cornelius kept his bed. The moment her husband was gone, his mother rose and hastened to him. Here again was a discord! for the first time since their marriage, a jarring action: the wife was glad the husband was gone that she might do what was right without annoying him; with all her strength of principle, she felt too weak to go openly against him, though she never dreamt of concealing what she did. She tottered across the floor, threw herself on the bed beside her son, and took him to her bosom.

With his mother, Corney had never pretended to the same degree as with other people, and his behaviour to her was now more genuine than to any but his wife. He clung to her as he had never clung since his infancy; and felt that, let his father behave to him as he might, he had yet a home. All the morning he had been fretting, in the midst of Hester's kindest attentions, that he had not his wife to do things for him as he liked them done;—and in all such things as required for their well-doing a fitting of self to the notions of another, Amy was indeed before Hester—partly, perhaps, in virtue of having been a little while married. But now that Cornelius had his mother, he was more content, or rather less discontented—more agreeable in truth than she had known him since first he went to business. She felt greatly consoled, and he so happy with her that he began to wish that he had not a secret from her—for the first time in his life to be sorry that he was in possession of one. He grew even anxious that she should know it, but none the less anxious that he should not have to tell it.

A great part of the time when her husband supposed her asleep, she had been lying wide awake, thinking of the Corney she had lost, and the Corney that had come home to her instead: she was miserable over the altered looks of her disfigured child. The truest of mothers, with all her love for the real and indifference to outsides, can hardly be expected to reconcile herself with ease to a new face on her child: she had loved him in one shape, and now had to love him in another! It was almost as if she had received again another child—her own indeed, but taken from her the instant he was

born and never seen by her since—whom, now she saw him, she had to learn to love in a shape different from that in which she had been accustomed to imagine him. His sad, pock-marked face had a torturing fascination for her. It was almost pure pain, yet she could not turn her eyes from it. She reproached herself that it gave her pain, yet was almost indignant with the face she saw for usurping the throne of her son's beauty: through that mask she must force her way to the real beneath it! At the same time very pity made her love with a new and deeper tenderness the poor spoilt visage, pathetic in its ugliness. Not a word did she utter of reproach: his father would do—was doing enough for both in that way! Every few minutes she would gaze intently in his face for a moment, and then clasp him to her heart, as if seeking a shorter way to his presence than through the ruined door of his countenance. Hester, who had never received from her half so much show of tenderness, could not help, like the elder brother in the divine tale, a little choking at the sight; but she soon consoled herself that the less poor Corney deserved it the more he needed it. The worst of it to Hester was that she could not with any confidence look on the prodigal as a repentant one; and if he was not, all this tenderness, she feared, and with reason, would do him harm, causing him to think less of his crime, and blinding him to his low moral condition. But she thought also that God would do what he could to keep the love of such a mother from hurting; and it was not long before she was encouraged by a softness in Corney's look, and a humid expression in his eyes, which she had never seen before. Doubtless had he been as in former days, he would have turned from such overflow of love as womanish gush; but disgraced, worn out, and even to his own eyes an unpleasant object, he was not so much inclined to repel the love of the only one knowing his story who did not feel for him more or less contempt. Sometimes in those terrible half-dreams in the dark of early morn when suddenly waked by conscience to hold a *tête-à-tête* with her, he would imagine himself walking into the bank, and encountering the eyes of all the men on his way to his uncle, whom next to his father he feared—then find himself running for refuge to the bosom of his mother. She was true to him yet! he would say: yes, he used the word! he said *true!* Slowly, slowly something was working on him—now in the imagined judgment of

others, now in the thought of his wife, now in the devotion of his mother. Little result was there for earthly eye, but the mother's perceived or imagined a difference in him. If only she could descry something plain to tell her husband! if the ice that froze up the spring of his love would but begin to melt! For to whom are we to go for refuge from ourselves if not to those through whom we were born into the world, and who are to blame for more or less of our unfitness for a true life!—"His father *must* forgive him!" she said to herself. She would go down on her knees to him! Their boy should *not* be left out in the cold! If he had been guilty, what was that to the cruel world so ready to punish, so ready to do worse! The mother still carried in her soul the child born of her body, preparing for him the new and better, the all-lovely birth of repentance unto life.

Hester had not yet said a word about her own affairs. No one but the major knew that her engagement to lord Gartley was broken. She was not willing to add yet an element of perturbance to the overcharged atmosphere: she would not add disappointment to grief.

In the afternoon the major, who had retired to the village, two miles off, the moment his night-watch was relieved, made his appearance, in the hope of being of use. He saw only Hester, who could give him but a few minutes. No sooner did he learn Mark's condition, than he insisted on taking charge of him. He would let her know at once if he wanted to see her or any one; she might trust him to his care!

"I am quite as good at nursing—I don't say as you, cousin Hester, or your mother, but as any ordinary woman. You will see I am! I know most of the newest wrinkles, and will carry them out."

Hester could not be other than pleased with the proposal; for, having both her mother and Corney to look after, and Miss Dasomma or Amy to write to every day, she had feared the patient Mark might run some risk of being neglected. To be sure Saffy had a great notion of nursing, but her ideas were in some respects, to say the least, a little peculiar; and though at times she was a great gain in the sick room, she could hardly be intrusted with entire management of the same. So the major took the position of head-nurse, with Saffy for aid, and one of the servants for orderly.

Hester's mind was almost constantly occupied with think-

ing how she was to let her father and mother know what they must know soon, and ought to know as soon as possible. She would tell her father first; her mother should not know till he did: she must not have the anxiety of how he would take it. But she could not see how to set about it. She had no light, and seemed to have no leading—felt altogether at a standstill, without impulse or energy. She waited, therefore, as she ought; for much harm comes of the impatience that outstrips guidance. People are too ready to think *something* must be done, and forget that the time for action may not have arrived, that there is seldom more than one thing fit to be done, and that the wrong thing must in any case be worse than nothing.

Cornelius grew gradually better, and at last was able to go down stairs. But the weather continued so far unfavourable, that he could not go out. He had not yet seen his father, and his dread of seeing him grew to a terror. He never went down until he knew he was not in the house, and then would in general sit at some window that commanded the door by which he was most likely to enter. He enticed Saffy from attendance on Mark to be his scout, and bring him word in what direction his father went. This did the child incalculable injury. The father was just as anxious to avoid him, fully intending, if he met him, to turn his back upon him. But it was a rambling and roomy old house, and there was plenty of space for both. A whole week passed and they had not met—to the disappointment of Hester, who cherished some hope in a chance encounter.

She had just one consolation: ever since she had Cornelius safe under her wing, the mother had been manifestly improving. But even this continued a source of dissatisfaction to the brooding selfishness of the unhealthy-minded father. He thought with himself—"Here have I been heart and soul nursing her through the illness he caused her, and all in vain till she gets the rascal back, and then she begins at once to improve! She would be perfectly happy with him if she and I never saw each other again!"

The two brothers had not yet met. For one thing, Corney disliked the major, and for another, the major objected to an interview. He felt certain the disfigurement of Corney would distress Mark too much, and retard the possible recovery of which he was already in great doubt.

CHAPTER LVII.

MISS DASOMMA AND AMY.

MISS DASOMMA was quite as much pleased with Amy as she had expected to be, and that was not a little. She found her very ignorant in the regions of what is commonly called education, but very quick in understanding where human relation came in. A point in construction or composition she would forget immediately; but once shown a possibility of misunderstanding avoidable by a certain arrangement, Amy would recall the fact the moment she made again the mistake. Her teachableness, coming largely of her trustfulness, was indeed a remarkable point in her character. It was partly through this that Corney gained his influence over her: superior knowledge was to her a sign of superior goodness.

She began at once to teach her music: the sooner a beginning was made the better! Her fingers were stiff, but so was her will: the way she stuck to her work was pathetic. Here also she understood quickly, but the doing of what she understood she found very hard—the more so that her spirit was but ill at ease. Corney had deceived her; he had done something wrong besides; she was parted from him, and could realize little of his surroundings: all was very different from what she had expected in marrying her Corney! Also, from her weariness and anxiety in nursing him, and from other causes as well, her health was not what it had been. Then Hester's letters were a little stiff! She felt it without knowing what she felt, or why they made her uncomfortable. It was from no pride or want of love they were such, but from her uncertainty —the discomfort of knowing they were no nearer a solution of their difficulty than when they parted at the railway: she did not even know yet what she was going to do in the matter! This prevented all free flow of communication. Unable to say what she would have liked to say, unwilling to tell the uncomfortable condition of things, there rose a hedge, and seemed to sink a gulf between her and her sister. Amy therefrom naturally surmised that the family was not likely to receive her, and that the same unwillingness, though she was too good to yield to it, was in Hester also. It was not in her. How she might have taken this marriage had Corney remained respectable I am not sure; but she knew that

the main hope for her brother lay in his love for Amy and her devotion to him—in her common sense, her true, honest, bright nature. She was only far too good for Corney.

Then again Amy noted, for love and anxiety made her very sharp, that Miss Dasomma did not read to her every word of Hester's letters. Once she stopped suddenly in the middle of a sentence, and after a pause went on with another. Something was there she was not to know! It might have reference to her husband! If so, then something was not going right with him! Was he worse, and were they afraid to tell her, lest she should go to him? Perhaps they were treating him as her aunts treated her—making his life miserable—and she not with him to help him to bear it! All no doubt because she had married him! It explained his deceiving her! If he had told them, as he ought to have done, they would not have let her have him at all, and what would have become of her without her Corney! He ought not certainly to have told her lies, but if anything could excuse him, this would! So that, making the best of things, and excusing her husband all she could, she was in danger of lowering her instinctively high sense of moral obligation.

She brooded over the matter, but not long, she threw herself on her knees, and begged her friend to let her know what the part of her sister's letter she had not read to her was about.

"But, my dear," said Miss Dasomma, "Hester and I have been friends for many years, and we may well have things to say to each other we should not care that even one we loved so much as you should hear!—A lady must not be inquisitive, you know."

"I know that, and I never did pry into other people's affairs. Tell me it was nothing about my husband, and I shall be quite content."

"But think a moment, Amy!" returned Miss Dasomma, who began to find herself in a difficulty; "there might be things between his family and him, who have known him longer than you, which they were not quite prepared to tell you all about before knowing you better. Some people in the way they treated you would have been very different from that angel sister of yours! There is nobody like her—that I know!"

"I love her with my whole heart," replied Amy, sobbing,

"—next to Cornelius. But even she must not come between him and me. If it is anything affecting him, his wife has a right to know about it—a greater right than any one else; and no one has a right to conceal it from her!"

"Why do you think that?" asked Miss Dasomma, entirely agreeing with her that she had a right to know, but thinking also, in spite of logic, that one might have a right to conceal it notwithstanding. She was anxious to temporize, for she did not see how to answer her appeal. She could not tell her a story, and she did not feel at liberty to tell her the truth; and if she declined to answer her question, the poor child might imagine something dreadful.

"Why, miss," answered Amy, "we can't be divided! I must do what I can—all I can for him, and I have a right to know what there is to be done for him."

"But can you not trust his own father and mother?" said Miss Dasomma—and as she said it, her conscience accused her.

"Yes, surely," replied Amy, "if they were loving him, and not angry with him. But I have seen even that angel Hester look very vexed with him sometimes, and that when he was ill too! and I know he will never stand that; he will run away as I did. I know what your own people can do to make you miserable! They say a woman must leave all for her husband, and that's true; but it is the other way in the Bible—I read it this morning! In the Bible it is—'a man shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife;' and after that who will say there ought to be anything between him and his parents she don't know about. It 's *she* that 's got to look after the man given to her like that!"

Miss Dasomma looked with admiration at the little creature—showing fight like a wren for her nest. How rapidly she was growing! how noble she was and free! She was indeed a treasure! The man she had married was little worthy of her, but if she rescued him, not from his parents, but from himself, she might perhaps have done as good a work as helping a noble-hearted man!

"I've got him to look after," she resumed, "and I will. He's mine, miss! If anybody's not doing right by him, I ought to be by and see him through it."

Here Miss Dasomma's prudence for a moment forsook her: who shall explain such *accidents!* It stung her to hear her friends suspected of behaving unjustly.

"That's all you know, Amy!" she blurted out—and bit her lip in vexation with herself.

Amy was upon her like a cat upon a mouse.

"What is it?" she cried, "I *must* know what it is! You shall *not* keep me in the dark! I *must* do my duty by my husband. If you do not tell me, I will go to him."

In terror at what might be the result of her hasty remark, Miss Dasomma faltered, reddened, and betrayed considerable embarrassment. A prudent person, lapsing into a dilemma, is specially discomfited. She had committed no offence against love, had been guilty of no selfishness or meanness, yet was in miserable predicament. Amy saw, and was the more convinced and determined. She persisted, and Miss Dasomma knew that she would persist. Presently, however, she recovered herself a little.

"How can you wonder," she said with confused vagueness, "when you know he deceived you, and never told them he was going to marry you?"

"But they know nothing of it yet—at least from the way Hester writes!"

"Yes; but one who could behave like that would be only too likely to give other grounds of offence!"

"Then there *is* something more—something I know nothing about!" exclaimed Amy. "I suspected it the moment I saw Hester's face at the door!"—She might have said before that.—"I *must* know what it is!" she went on. "I may be young and silly, but I know what a wife owes to her husband; and a wife who cares for nothing but her husband can do more for him than anybody else can. Know all about it I will! It is my business!"

Miss Dasomma was dumb. She had waked a small but active volcano at her feet, which, though without design against vineyards and villages, would go to its ends regardless of them! She must either answer her questions or persuade her not to ask any.

"I beg, Amy," she said with entreaty, "you will do nothing rash. Can you not trust friends who have proved themselves faithful?"

"Yes, for myself," answered Amy; "but it is my *husband!*"—She almost screamed the word.—"And I will trust nobody to take care enough of *him*. They can't know how to treat him or he would love them more, and would not have been

afraid to let them know he was marrying a poor girl.—Miss Dasomma, what have you got against him? I have no fear you will tell me anything but the truth."

"Of course not!" returned Miss Dasomma, offended, but repressing all show of her feeling. "Why then will you not trust me?"

"I will believe whatever you say; but I will not trust you to tell or not tell me as you please where my husband is concerned. Tell me what it is, or——"

She did not finish the sentence: the postman's knock came to the door, and she bounded off to see what he had brought, leaving Miss Dasomma in fear lest she should appropriate a letter not addressed to her. She returned with a look of triumph—a look so wildly exultant that her hostess was momentarily alarmed for her reason.

"Now I shall know the truth!" she said. "This is from himself!"

And with that she flew to her room. Miss Dasomma should not hear a word of it! How dared she keep from her what she knew about her husband!

It was Corney's first letter to her. It was filled not with direct complaints, but a general grumble. Here is a part of it.

"I do wish you were here, Amy, my own dearest! I love nobody like you—I love nobody but you. If I did wrong in telling you a few diddle-daddles, it was because I loved you so I could not do without you. And what comforts me for any wrong I have done is that I have you. That would make up to a man for anything short of being hanged! You little witch, how did you contrive to make a fool of a man like me! I should have been in none of this scrape but for you! My mother is very kind to me, of course—ever so much better company than Hester. She never looks as if a fellow had to be put up with, or forgiven, or anything of that sort, in her high and mighty way. But you do get tired of a mother always keeping on telling you how much she loves you. You can't help thinking there must be something behind it all. Depend upon it she wants something of you—wants you to be good, I daresay—to repent, don't you know, as they call it! They're all right, I suppose, but it ain't nice for all that. And that Hester has never told my father yet!

"I haven't even seen my father. He has not come near me once! Saffy wouldn't look at me for a long time—that's the

last of the litter, you know; she shrieked when they called to her to come to me, and cried, 'That's ugly Corney! I won't have ugly Corney!' So you may see how I am used! But I've got her under my thumb at last, and she's useful. Then there's that prig Mark! I always liked the little wretch, though he is such a precious humbug! He's in bed—put out his knee, or something. He never had any stamina in him! Scrofulous, don't you know! They won't let me go near him—for fear of frightening him! But that's that braggart, major Marvel—and a marvel he is, I can tell you! He comes to me sometimes, and makes me hate him—talks as if I wasn't as good as he—as if I wasn't even a gentleman! Many's the time I long to be back in the garret—horrid place! alone with my little Amy!"

So went the letter.

When Amy next appeared before Miss Dasomma, she was in another mood. Her eyes were red with weeping, and her hair was in disorder. She had been lying now on the bed, now on the floor, tearing her hair, and stuffing her handkerchief in her mouth.

"Well, what is the news?" asked Miss Dasomma, as kindly as she could speak, and as if she saw nothing particular in her appearance.

"You must excuse me," replied Amy, with the stiffness of a woman of the world resenting intrusion. But the next moment she said, "Do not think me unkind, miss; there is nothing, positively nothing, in the letter interesting to any one but myself."

Miss Dasomma said nothing more. Perhaps she was going to escape without further questioning; and though not a little anxious as to what the letter might contain to have put the poor girl in such a state, she would not risk the asking of a single question more.

The solemn fact was, that his letter, in conjunction with the word Miss Dasomma let slip, had at last begun to open Amy's eyes a little to the real character of her husband. She had herself seen a good deal of his family, and found it hard to believe they would treat him unkindly, nor did he exactly say so; but his father had not been once to see him since his return!—Corney had not mentioned that he himself had, all he could, avoided meeting his father.—If then they did not yet know he was married, that other thing—the cause for such treatment of a son, just escaped the jaws of death, must be a very

serious one! It might be very hard, it might be even unfair treatment—she could not tell; but there must be something to explain it—something to show it not altogether the monstrous thing it seemed! I do not say she reasoned thus, but her genius reasoned thus for her.

Of course it must be the same thing that made him take to the garret and hide there! The more she thought of it the more convinced was she that he had done something hideously wrong. It was a sore conviction to her, and would have been a sorer yet had she understood his playful blame of her in the letter. But such was the truth of her devotion that she would only have felt accountable for the wrong, and bent body and soul to make up for it.

From the first glimmer of certainty as to the uncertain fact, she saw with absolute clearness what she must do. There was that in the tone of the letter also which, while it distressed her more than she was willing to allow, strengthened her determination—especially the way in which he spoke of his mother, for she not only remembered her kindness at Burcliff, but loved the memory of her own mother with her whole bright soul. But what troubled her most of all was that he should be so careless about the wrong he had done, whatever it was. "I must know all about it!" she said to herself, "or how am I to help him?" It seemed to her the most natural thing that when one has done wrong, he should confess it, and confess it wrong—so have done with it, disowning and casting away the cursed thing: this, alas, Cornelius did not seem inclined to do! But was she, of all women in the world, to condemn him without knowing what he had to say for himself? She was bound to learn the truth of the thing, if only to give her husband fair play, which she must give him to the uttermost farthing! To wrong him in her thoughts was the greatest wrong woman could do him; no woman could wrong him as she could!

By degrees her mind grew calm in settled resolve. It might, she reasoned, be very well for husband and wife to be apart while they were both happy: they had only to think the more of each other; but when anything was troubling either, still more when it was anything *in* either, then it was horrible and unnatural that they should be parted. What could a heart then do but tear itself to pieces, thinking? It was enough to make one kill one's self!

Should she tell Miss Dasomma what was in her thoughts?

Neither she nor Hester had trusted her: need she trust them? She must take her own way in silence, for they would be certain to oppose it! Could there be a design to keep her and Corney apart?

All the indignant strength and unalterable determination of the little woman rose in arms. She would see who would keep them asunder now she had made up her mind! She had money of her own—and there were the trinkets Corney had given her! They must be valuable, for Corney hated sham things? She would walk her way, work her way, or beg her way, if necessary, but nothing should keep her from Corney!

Not a word more concerning their difference passed between her and Miss Dasomma. They talked cheerfully, and kissed as usual when parting for the night.

The moment she was in her room, Amy began to pack a small carpet-bag. When that was done she made a bundle of her cloak and shawl, and lay down in her clothes. Long before dawn she crept softly down the stairs, and stole out. Thus for the second time was she a fugitive—then *from*, now *to*.

When Miss Dasomma had been down some time, she went up to see why Amy was not making her appearance: one glance around her room satisfied her that she was gone. It caused her terrible anxiety. She did not suspect at first whither she had gone, but concluded that the letter which had rendered her so miserable contained the announcement that their marriage was not a genuine one, and that, in the dignity of her true heart, she had thereupon at once and for ever taken her leave of Cornelius. She wrote to Hester, but the post did not leave before night, and would not arrive till the afternoon of the next day. She had thought of sending a telegram, but saw that that might do mischief.

When Amy got to the station she found she was in time for the first train of the day. There was a third-class to it, of course, and she found she had enough money for her ticket, though the purchase of it left her almost penniless.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE SICK ROOM.

AT Yrndale things went on in the same dull way, anger burrowing like a devil-mole in the bosom of the father, a dreary spiritual fog hanging over all the souls, and the mother wearying for some glimmer of a heavenly dawn. Hester felt as if she could not endure it much longer—as if the place were forgotten of God, and abandoned to chance. But there was one dayspring in the house yet—Mark's room, where the major sat by the bedside of the boy, now reading to him, now telling him stories, and now and then listening to him as he talked childlike wisdom in childish words. Saffy came and went, by no means so merry now that she was more with Corney. In Mark's room she would at times be her old self again, but nowhere else. Infected by Corney, she had begun to be afraid of her father, and like him watched to keep out of his way. What seemed to add to the misery, though in reality it operated the other way, was that the weather had again put on a wintry temper. Sleet and hail, and even snow fell, alternated with rain and wind, day after day for a week.

One afternoon the wind rose almost to a tempest. The rain drove in sheets, and came against the windows of Mark's room nearly at right angles. It was a cheerful room, though low-pitched and very old, with a great beam across the middle of it. There were coloured prints, mostly of Scripture-subjects, on the walls; and the beautiful fire burning in the low-fronted grate shone on them. It was reflected also from the brown polished floor. The major sat by it in his easy-chair: he could endure hardship, but saved strength for work, nursing being none of the lightest. A bedroom had been prepared for him next to the boy's: Mark had a string close to his hand, whose slightest pull of it sufficed to ring a bell which woke the major as instantly as if it had been the opening of a cannonade.

This afternoon, with the rain-charged wind rushing in fierce gusts every now and then against the windows, and the twilight coming on the sooner because the world was wrapt in blanket upon blanket of wet cloud, the major was reading, by no means sure whether his patient waked or slept, and himself very

sleepy, longing indeed for a little nap. A moment and he was far away, following an imaginary tiger, when the voice of Mark woke him with the question:

"What kind of thing do you like best in all the world, majie?—I mean *this* world, you know—and of course I don't mean God or any*body*, but things about you, I mean."

The major sat bolt upright, rubbed his eyes, stretched himself, but quietly that Mark might not know he had waked him, pulled down his waistcoat, gave a hem as if deeply pondering, instead of trying hard to gather wits enough to understand the question put to him, and when he thought his voice sufficiently a waking one not to betray him, answered,

"Well, Mark, I don't think we can beat this same—can we? What do you think?"

"Let's see what makes it so nice!" returned Mark. "First of all, you're there, majie!"

"And you're there, Markie!" said the major.

"Yes, that's all right! Next there's my bed for me, and your easy-chair for you, and the fire for us both! And the sight of your chair is better to me than the feel of my bed! And the fire is *beautiful*, and though I can't *feel* that, because they're not my legs, I know it is making your legs so nice and warm! And then there are the shines of it all about the room. What a beautiful thing a shine is, majie! I wish you would put on your grand uniform, and let me see the fire shining on the gold lace and the buttons and the epaulettes and the hilt of your sword!"

"I will, Markie."

"I've seen your sword, you know, majie! and I think it is the beautifullest thing in the world. I wonder why a thing for killing should be so beautiful! Can you tell me, majie?

The major had to think in order to answer that question, but thinking, he hit upon something like the truth of the thing.

"It must be that it is not made for the sake of the killing, but for the sake of the right that would else be trodden down!" he said. "Whatever is on the side of the right ought to be beautiful."

"But ain't a pirate's sword beautiful? I've read of precious stones in the hilt of a pirate's sword! That's not for the right—is it now, majie?

The boy was gradually educating the man without either of

them knowing it—for the major had to *think* in order to give reasonable answers to not a few of Mark's questions. The boy was an unconscious Socrates to the soldier; for there is a Teacher who, by fitting them right together, can use two ignorances for two teachings. Here the ostensible master, who was really the principal pupil, had to think hard.

"Anything," he said at last, "may be turned from its right use, and then it goes all wrong."

"But a sword looks all right—it shines—even when it is put to a wrong use!"

"For a while," answered the major. "It takes time for anything that has turned bad to lose its good looks."

"But, majie, how can a sword ever grow ugly?"

Again the major had to think.

"When people put things to a bad use, they are not good themselves," he said; "and when they are not good, they are lazy, and neglect things. When a soldier takes to drinking or cruelty, he neglects his weapons, and the rust begins to eat them and at last will eat them up all."

"What is rust, majie?"

"It is the way a sword rots. A sword is a very strong thing, but not taken care of will not last so long as a silk handkerchief."

At this point the major began to fear Mark was about to lead him into depths and contradictions out of which he would hardly emerge:

"Shan't we go on with our reading?" he said.

Mark, however, had not lost sight of the subject they started with, and did not want to leave it yet.

"But, majie, he replied, "we haven't done with what we like best! We hadn't said anything about the thick walls round us—between us and the wide, with the warm fire-sun shining on their smooth side, while the rain is beating and the wind blowing on the rough side. Then there's the wind and the rain all about us, and can't come at us! I fancy sometimes, as I lie awake in the night, that the wind and the rain are huge packs of wolves howling in a Russian forest, but not able to get into the house to hurt us. Then I feel so safe! And that brings me to the best of all. It is in fancying danger that you know what it is to be safe."

"But, Mark, you know some people are really in danger!"

"Yes, I suppose so—I don't quite know! I know that I am

not in danger, because there is the great Think between me and all the danger!"

"How do you know he is between you and *all* danger?" asked his friend, willing to draw him out, and with no fear of making him uneasy.

"I don't know how I know it; I only know that I'm not afraid," he answered. "I feel so safe! For you know if God were to go to sleep and forget his little Mark, then he would forget that he was God, and would not wake again; and that could not be! He can't forget me or you, majie, any more than one of the sparrows. Jesus said so. And what Jesus said, lasts for ever. His words never wear out, or need to be made over again.—Majie, I do wish everybody was as good as Jesus! He won't be pleased till we all are. Isn't it glad! That's why I feel so safe that I like to hear the wind roaring. If I did not know that he knows all about the wind, and that it is not the bad man's wind, but the good man's wind, I should be unhappy, for it might hurt somebody, and now it cannot. If I thought he did not care whether everybody was good or not, it would make me so miserable that I should like to die and never come to life again!—He will make Corney good—won't he, majie?"

"I hope so, Markie," returned the major.

"But don't you think we ought to do something to help to make Corney good? You help me to be good, majie—every day, and all day long! I know mother teaches him, for he's her first-born! He's like Jesus—he's God's first-born! I'm so glad it was Jesus and not me!"

"Why, Mark?"

"Because if it had been me, I shouldn't have had any Jesus to love.—But I don't think we ought to leave Corney to mother all alone: she's not strong enough: it's too hard for her! Corney never was willing to be good! I can't make it out! Why shouldn't he like to be good? It's surely good to be good!"

"Yes, Mark; but some people like their own way when it's ever so nasty, better than God's way when it's ever so nice."

"But God must be able to let them know what foolish creatures they are, majie!"

It was on the major's lips to say, "He has sent you to teach it to me, Mark!" but he thought it better not to say it. And indeed it was better the child should not be set thinking about what he could do so much better by not thinking about it!

The major had grown quite knowing in what was lovely in a soul—could see the same thing lovely in the child and the Ancient of days. Some foolishly object that the Master taught what others had taught before him, as if he should not be the wise householder with his old things as well as new: these recognize the old things—the new they do not understand, therefore do not consider. Who first taught that the mighty God, the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, was like a child? Who first said, "Love one another as I have loved you"? Who first dared to say, "He that overcometh shall sit down with me on my throne even as I overcame and am set down with my father on his throne"? —taught men that the creature who would but be a true creature should share the glory of his creator, sitting with him upon his throne?

"You see, majie," Mark went on, "it won't do for you and me to be so safe from all the storm and wind, wrapped in God's cloak, and poor Corney out in the wind and rain, with the wolves howling after him! You may say it's his own fault—it's because he won't let God take him up and carry him: that's very true, but then that's just the pity of it!—It is so dreadful! I can't understand it!"

The boy could understand good, but was perplexed with evil.

While they talked thus in their nest of comfort, there was one out in the wind and rain, all but spent with their buffeting, who hastened with what poor remaining strength she had to the doing of His will. Amy, left at the station with an empty purse, had set out to walk through mire and darkness and storm, up hill and down dale, to find her husband—the man God had given her "to look after."

CHAPTER LIX.

VENGEANCE IS MINE.

THAT same morning, Mr. Raymount had found it, or chosen to imagine it necessary—from the instinct, I believe, to oppose inner with outer storm, to start pretty early for the county-town, on something he called business, and was not expected home before the next day. Assuming heart in his absence, Cornelius went freely wandering about the house, many parts

of which had not yet lost to him the interest of novelty, and lunched with his mother and Hester and Saffy like one of the family. His mother, wisely or not, did her best to prevent his feeling any difference from old times: where one half of the parental pair erred so much on the side of severity, perhaps it was well that the other should err on that of leniency—I do not know; I doubt if it was right; I think she ought, but am not sure, to have justified her husband's conduct, to the extent to which it would bear justification, by her own. But who shall be sure what would have been right for another, where so much was wrong and beyond her setting right! If what is done be done in faith, some good will come out of our mistakes even; only let no one mistake self-will for that perfect thing faith!

Their converse at table was neither very interesting nor very satisfactory. How could it be? As well might a child of Satan be happy in the house of Satan's maker as the unrepentant Cornelius in the house of his mother, even in the absence of his father. Their talk was poor and intermittent. Well might the youth long for his garret and the company of the wife who had nothing for him but smiles and sweetest attentions!

After dinner he sat for a time at the table alone. He had been ordered wine during his recovery, and was already in some danger of adding a fondness for that to his other weaknesses. He was one of those slight natures to which wine may bring a miserable consolation. But the mother was wise, and, aware of the danger, kept in her own hands the administering of the medicine. To-day, however, called from the room by some accident, she had not put away the decanter, and Cornelius had several times filled his glass before she thought of her neglect. When she reentered he sat as if he were only finishing the glass she had left him with. The decanter revealed what had taken place, but the mother, blaming herself, thought it better to say nothing.

Cornelius, leaving the room in a somewhat excited mood, but concealing it, sauntered into the library, and thence into the study, where was his father's own collection of books. Coming there upon a volume by a certain fashionable poet of the day, he lighted the lamp which no one used but his father, threw himself into his father's chair, and began to read. He never had been able to read long without weariness, and from

the wine he had drunk and his weakness, was presently overcome with sleep. His mother came and went, and would not disturb him, vexed that she failed in her care over him. I fear, poor lady! her satisfaction in having him under her roof was beginning to wane in the continual trouble of a presence that showed no signs of growth any more than one of the dead. But her faith in the over-care of the father of all was strong, and she waited in hope.

The night now was very dark, "with hey, ho, the wind and the rain!" Up above, the major and the boy talked of sweet, heavenly things, and down below the youth lay snoring, where, had his father been at home, he dared not have showed himself. The mother was in her own room, and Hester in the drawing-room—where never now, in the oppression of these latter times, did she open her piano. The house was quiet but for the noise of the wind and the rain, and those Cornelius did not hear.

He started awake and sat up in terror. A hand was on his shoulder, gripping him like a metal instrument, not a thing of flesh and blood. The face of his father was staring at him through the lingering vapours of his stupid sleep.

Mr. Raymount had started with a certain foolish pleasure in the prospect of getting wet through, and being generally ill used by the weather—which he called *atrocious*, and all manner of evil names, while not the less he preferred its accompaniment to his thoughts to the finest blue sky and sunshine a southern summer itself could have given him. Thinking to shorten the way he took a certain cut he knew, but found the road very bad. The mud drew off one of his horse's shoes, but he did not discover the loss for a long way, not until he came to a piece of newly mended road. There the poor animal fell suddenly lame. There was a roadside smithy a mile or two farther on, and dismounting he made for that. The smith, however, not having expected anything to do in such weather, and having been drinking hard the night before, was not easily persuaded to appear. Mr. Raymount, therefore, leaving his horse in the smithy, walked to an inn yet a mile or two farther on, and there dried his clothes and had some refreshment. By the time his horse was brought him and he was again mounted, the weather was much worse; he thought he had had enough of it; and it was so late besides that he could not have reached the town in time to do his business.

He gave up his intended journey therefore, and turning aside to see a friend in the neighbourhood, resolved to go home again the same night.

His feelings when he saw his son asleep in his chair, were not like those of the father in that one story of all the world. He had been giving place to the devil for so long, that the devil was now able to do with him as he would—for a season at least. Nor would the possessed ever be able to recognize the presence of the devil, if he had not a minute or two of his will with them. Or is it that the miserable possessed goes farther than the devil means him to go? I doubt if he cares that we should murder; I fancy he is satisfied if only we hate well. Murder tends a little to repentance, and he does not want that. Anyhow, we cherish the devil like a spoiled child, till he gets too bad and we find him unendurable. Departing then, he takes a piece of the house with him, and the tenant is not so likely to mistake him when he comes again. Must I confess it of this man so much before the multitude of men, that he was annoyed, even angry, to see this unpleasant son of his asleep in *his* chair! "The sneak!" he said; "he dares not show his face when I'm at home, but the minute he thinks me safe, gets into my room, and lies in my chair!—Drunk, too, by Jove!" he added, as a fume from the sleeper's breath reached the nostrils beginning to dilate with wrath. "What can that wife of mine be about, letting the rascal go on like this! She is faultless except in giving me such a son—and then helping him to fool me!" He forgot the old forger of a bygone century! His side of the house had, I should say, a good deal more to do with what was unsatisfactory in the lad's character than his wife's.

The devil saw his chance, sprang up, and mastered the father.

"The snoring idiot!" he growled, and seizing his boy by the shoulder and the neck, roughly shook him awake.

The father too had been drinking, not what would have been by any of the neighbours thought too much, but enough to add to the fierceness of his wrath, and make him yet more capable of injustice. He had come into the study straight from the stable, and when the poor creature looked up half-awake, and saw his father standing over him with a heavy whip in his hand, he was filled with a terror that nearly paralyzed him. He sat and stared, with white trembling lips, red, projecting eyes, and a look that confirmed the belief of

his father that he was drunk, whereas he had only been, like himself, drinking more than was good for him.

"Get out of there, you dog!" cried the father, and with one sweep of his powerful arm, half dragged, half hurled him from the chair. He fell on the floor, and in weakness mixed with cowardice lay where he fell. The devil—I am sorry to have to refer to the person so often, but he played a notable part in the affair, and I should be more sorry to leave him without his part in it duly acknowledged—the devil, I say, finding the house abandoned to him, rushed at once into brain and heart and limbs, and *possessed* them. When Raymount saw the creature who had turned his hitherto happy life into a shame and a misery, lying at his feet thus abject, he became instantly conscious of the whip in his hand, and without a moment's pause, a moment's thought, heaved his arm aloft, and brought it down with a fierce lash on the quivering flesh of his son. He richly deserved the punishment, but God would not have struck him that way. There was the poison of hate in the blow. He raised his arm again; but as it descended, the piercing shriek that broke from the youth startled even the possessing demon, and the violence of the blow was broken. But the lash of the whip found his face, and marked it for a time worse than the small-pox. What the unnatural father would have done next, I do not know. While the cry of his son yet sounded in his ears, another cry, like its echo from another world, rang ghastly through the storm like the cry of the banshee. From far away it seemed to come through the world of wet mist and howling wind. The next instant a spectral face flitted swift as a bird up to the window, and laid itself close to the glass. It was a French window, opening to the ground, and neither shutters nor curtains had been closed. It burst open with a great clang and clash and wild tinkle of shivering and scattering glass, and a small figure leaped into the room with a second cry that sounded like a curse in the ears of the father. She threw herself on the prostrate youth, and covered his body with hers, then turned her head and looked up at the father with indignant defiance in her flashing eye. Cowed with terror and smarting with keenest pain, the youth took his wife in his arms and sobbed like the beaten thing he was. Amy's eye gleamed if possible more indignantly still. Protection grew fierce, and fanned the burning sense of wrong. The father stood over them like a fury rather than a fate—stood

as the shock of Amy's cry, and her stormy entrance, like that of an avenging angel, had fixed him. But presently he began to recover his senses, and not unnaturally sprang to the conclusion that here was the cause of all his misery—some worthless girl that had drawn Cornelius into her toils, and ruined him and his family for ever! The thought set the geyser of his rage roaring and spouting in the face of heaven. He heaved his whip, and the devil having none of the respect of the ordinary well-bred Englishman for even the least adorable of women, the blow fell. But instead of another and shriller shriek following the lash, came nothing but a shudder and a silence and the unquailing eye of the girl fixed like that of a spectre upon her assailant. He struck her again. Again came the shivering shudder, and the silence: the sense that the blows had not fallen upon Corney upheld the brave creature. Cry she would not, if he killed her! She once drew in her breath sharply, but never took her eyes from his face—lay expecting the blow that was to come next. Suddenly the light in them began to fade, and went quickly out; her head dropped like a stone upon the breast of her cowardly husband, and there was not even mute defiance more.

What if he had killed the woman! An inquest! A trial for murder!—In lowest depths Raymount saw a lower deep, and stood looking down on the pair with subsiding passion.

Amy had walked all the long distance from the station and more, for she had lost her way. Again and again she had all but lain down to die on the moorland waste on to which she had wandered, when the thought of Corney and his need of her roused her again. Wet through and through, buffeted by the wind so that she could hardly breathe, having had nothing but a roll to eat since the night before, but aware of the want of food only by its faintness, cold to the very heart, and almost unconscious of her numbed limbs, she struggled on. When at last she got to the lodge-gate, the woman in charge of it took her for a common beggar, and could hardly be persuaded to let her pass. She was just going up to the door when she heard her husband's cry. She saw the lighted window, flew to it, dashed it open, and entered. It was the last expiring effort of the poor remnant of her strength. She had not life enough left to resist the shock of her father-in-law's blows.

While still the father stood looking down on his children,

the door softly opened, and the mother entered. She knew nothing, not even that her husband had returned, came merely to know how her unlovely but beloved child was faring in his heavy sleep. She stood arrested. She saw what looked like a murdered heap on the floor, and her husband standing over it like the murderer beginning to doubt whether the deed was as satisfactory as the doing of it. But behind her came Hester peeping over her shoulder. She understood at once. Almost she pushed her mother aside as she sprang to help. Her father would have prevented her. "No, father!" she said, "it is time to disobey." A pang as of death went through her at the thought that she had not spoken. All was clear! Amy had come, and died defending her husband from his father! She put her strong arms round the dainty little figure, and lifted it like a seaweed hanging limp, its long wet hair continuing the hang of the body and helpless head. Hester gave a great sob. Was this what Amy's lovely, brave womanhood had brought her to! What creatures men were! As the thought passed through her, she saw on Amy's neck a frightful upswollen wale. She looked at her father. There was the whip in his hand! "Oh, papa!" she screamed, and dropped her eyes for shame: she could not look him in the face—not for his shame, but for her shame through him. And as she dropped them she saw the terrified face of Cornelius open its eyes.

"Oh, Corney!" said Hester, in the tone of an accusing angel, and ran with her burden from the room.

The mother darted to her son.

But the wrath of the father rose afresh at sight of her "infatuation."

"Let the hound lie!" he said, and stepped between. "What right has he to walk the earth like a man! He is but fit to go on all fours!—Ha! ha!" he went on, laughing wildly, "I begin to believe in the transmigration of souls! I shall one day see that son of yours running about the place a mangy mongrel."

"You've killed him, Gerald!—your own son!" said the mother, with a cold, still voice.

She saw the dread mark on his face,—felt herself like one of the dead. Staggered, and would have fallen. But the arm that through her son had struck her heart, caught and supported her. The husband bore the wife once more to her chamber, and the foolish son, the heaviness of his mother, was left alone

on the floor, smarting, ashamed, and fearing for his wife, yet in ignorance that his father had hurt her.

A moment and he rose. But, lo, in that shameful time a marvel had been wrought!—The terror of his father which had filled him was gone. They had met; his father had put himself in the wrong; he was no more afraid of him. It was not hate that had cast out fear. I do not say that he felt no resentment: he is a noble creature who, deserving to be beaten, approves, and accepts: there are not a few such children: Cornelius was none of such; but it consoled him that he had been hardly used by his father. He had been accustomed to look vaguely up to his father as a sort of rigid but righteous divinity; and in a disobedient, self-indulgent, poverty-stricken nature like his, reverence could only take the form of fear; and now that he had seen his father in a rage, the feeling of reverence, such as it was, had begun to give way, and with it the fear: they were more upon a level. Then again his father's unmerciful use of the whip to him seemed a sort of settling of scores, thence, in a measure, a breaking down of the wall between them. He seemed thereby to have even some sort of claim upon his father: so cruelly beaten he seemed now near him. A weight as of a rock was lifted from his mind by this violent blowing up of the horrible negation that had been between them so long. He felt—as when punished in boyhood—as if the storm had passed, and the sun had begun to appear. Life seemed a trifle less uninteresting than before. He did not yet know in what a condition his wife was. He knew she was safe with Hester.

He listened, and finding all quiet, stole, smarting and aching, yet cherishing his hurts like a possession, slowly to his room, there tumbled himself into bed, and longed for Amy to come to him. He was an invalid, and could not go about looking for her! it was her part to find him! In a few minutes he was fast asleep once more, and forgot everything in dreams of the garret with Amy.

When Mrs. Raymount came to herself, she looked up at her husband. He stood expecting such reproaches as never yet in their married life had she given him. But she stretched out her arms to him, and drew him to her bosom. Her pity for the misery which could have led him to behave so ill, joined to her sympathy in the distressing repentance which she did not doubt must have already begun, for she knew her husband,

made her treat him much as she treated her wretched Corney. It went deep to the man's heart. In the sense of degradation that had seized him—not for striking his son, who, he said, and said over and over to himself, entirely deserved it, but for striking a woman, be she who she might—his wife's embrace was like balm to a smarting wound. But it was only when, through Hester's behaviour to her and the words that fell from her, he came to know who she was, that the iron, the beneficent spear-head of remorse, entered his soul. Strange that the mere fact of our knowing *who a person is* should make such a difference in the way we think of and behave to that person! A person is a person just the same, whether one of the few of our acquaintance or not, and his claim on us for all kinds of humanities just the same. Our knowledge of any one is a mere accident in the claim, and can at most only make us feel it more. But recognition of Amy showed his crime more heinous. It brought back to Mr. Raymount the vision of the bright girl he used to watch in her deft and cheerful service, and with that vision came the conviction that not she but Corney must be primarily to blame; he had twice struck the woman his son must have grievously wronged! He must make to her whatever atonement was possible—first for having brought the villain into the world to do her such wrong, then for his own cruelty to her in her faithfulness! He pronounced himself the most despicable and wretched of men: he had lifted his hand against a woman that had been but in her right in following his son, and had shown herself ready to die in his defence! His wife's tenderness confirmed the predominance of these feelings, and he lay down in his dressing-room a humbler man than he had ever been in his life before.

CHAPTER LX.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

HESTER carried poor little Amy to her own room, laid her on her own bed, and did for her all one child of God could do for another. With hands tender as a mother's and weeping as she had never wept before, she undressed her, put her in a warm bath, then got her into bed, and used every enticement and persuasion to induce her to take some nourishment—with poor

success: the heart seemed to have gone out of her. But instinctively Amy asked for milk, and that brought her round better than anything else could have done. Still she lay like one dead, seeming to care for nothing. She scarcely answered Hester when she spoke, though she tried to smile to her: the most pitiful thing was that smile Hester had ever seen. Her very brain and blood were haunted with the presence of Corney's father. He seemed ever and always to be standing over her and Corney with that terrible whip. All her thought was how to get him away from the frightful place. Hester did her best to reassure her. She told her Corney was fast asleep and little the worse; did all she could to keep her quiet, and soothe her to sleep; and a little after midnight was successful. Then she lay down herself on the sofa beside her bed, sorely exhausted.

In the gray of the morning Mr. Raymount woke. He was aware of a great hush about him. He looked from the window, and saw in the east the first glimmer of a lovely spring-day. The stillness awed, almost frightened him. It was not around him only, but in him; his very soul seemed hushed, as if in his sleep the Voice had said, "Peace! be still." He felt like a naughty child, who, having slept, seems to have slept away his naughtiness. Yesterday seemed far away—only the shudder of it was left; but he knew if he began to think, it would be back with its agony. Had some angel been by his bedside to soothe him? A demon had surely possessed him! Had it been but hinted as within the bounds of possibility that he should behave to a woman as he had behaved, he would have laughed the idea to scorn! He had always thought himself a chivalrous gentleman! This was the end of his faith in himself! His grand Hester would not feel herself safe from him! Truly a demon had possessed him: might not an angel have been by him as he slept?

What had become of the poor girl? But he needed not be anxious about her: neither his wife nor his daughter would have turned her out into the night! He would still be able to do something for her! He must make atonement for treating her so brutally! Hope dawned feebly on his murky horizon. He would be good to her as he would never have thought of had he not ill-used her so! There was something to be done for everybody—for himself and for poor Amy Amber! If she was gone he would spend every penny he had to find her!

But Cornelius would know! He must see him! He would tell him he was sorry he had struck him!

In the yet dark gray of the morning he went to his son's room.

When he had all but reached the door he saw it was a little open. The next instant he heard a soft voice within speaking persuadingly. He went close and listened. It was Amy's voice!—In his house! In his son's room! And after the lesson he had given them both but the night before! This was too bad!—He pushed the door and looked in! The dainty little figure that had haunted his dreams was half lying on the bed, with an arm thrown round his son. He could not see her face, but he could hear perfectly the words that came through the dusk.

"Corney darling!" she said, "you must get up. You must come away. Here I am to take you from them. I was sure they were not treating you well! That was what made me come. I did not know how cruel they were, or I would have come long ago. But, Corney, you must have done something very wrong! I don't mean to me; I don't care what you do to me; I am your own. But you must have done something very wrong to make your father so angry with you! And you cannot have said you were sorry, or he would have forgiven you! He can't be a bad man—though he does hurt dreadfully!"

"He is a very good man!" muttered Corney from the pillow.

"But I'm afraid," continued Amy, "if he hasn't been able to make you sorry before, he will never be able now! To beat you as he did last night will not make you repent."

"Oh, he didn't hurt me much! You don't think a fellow would mind that sort of thing from his own father—when he was in a passion, don't you know! Besides, Amy—to you I will confess it—I only gave him too good reason."

"Come, come then. We will go somewhere. I want to make you think the right way about the thing; and when you are sorry, we will come back and tell him so. Then perhaps he will forgive me, and we shall be all happy again."

What was this he heard! The cunning creature! This was her trick to entice him from his home! And just as the poor boy was beginning to repent too! She knew her trade! She would fall in with his better mood and pretend goodness! She would help him to do what he ought! she would be his

teacher in righteousness! Deep, deep she was—beyond anything he had dreamed possible! No doubt the fellow was just as bad as she, but not the less must he do what little he yet might for the redemption of his son!

But as he thought thus it smote him that Cornelius could not but prefer going with one who loved him, and talked to him like that, let her be what she might, to staying with a father who treated him as he had been doing ever since he came home! He would behave to him very differently after this! But he must interfere now, cost what it might! What else was he father for!

He pushed the door wide and went in.

Amy heard and raised herself from the bed, stood upright, and faced the comer. There was just light enough to see that it was the father. The horrid idea shot through her mind that it was his custom to come thus to his son's room in the night and lash him. She roused every fevered nerve to do battle with the strong man for his son. Clenching her little hands hard, she stood like a small David between the bed and the coming Goliath.

"Get out of this," he said, with the sternness of wrath suppressed.

"I came to take him away," said Amy, beginning to tremble from head to foot. "It is my business to take care of him."

"Your business to take care of him from his own"—he hesitated, then said—"mother?" which certainly was the more fitting word.

"If," answered Amy, "a man is to leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, it's the least thing the wife can do to take care of him from his father!"

Mr. Raymount stood confounded: what could the hussey mean? Was she going to pretend she was married to him?

Indignation and rage began to rise afresh. But if he gave way, what might he not be guilty of a second time! A rush of shame choked the words that crowded to his lips; and with the self-restraint came wholesome doubt: was it possible he had married her? Was it not possible? Would it not be just worthy of him to have done so and never told one of his family! At least there need be nothing incredible in it! This girl—yes—plainly she had both cunning and fascination enough to make him not only run after her but marry her!

How was he to come at the truth of the thing? The coward would not have the courage to contradict her, but he would know if he were lying!

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that he has married you—without a word to his own father or mother?"

Then out at last spoke Cornelius, rising on his elbow in the bed:

"Yes, father," he said, with slow determination; "I have married her. It is all my fault, not one bit hers. I could never have persuaded her had I not made her believe you knew all about it and had no objection."

"Why did you not let us know then?" cried the father in a voice which ill suited the tameness of the question.

"Because I was a coward," answered Corney, speaking the truth with courage. "I knew you would not like it."

"Little *you* know of what I like or dislike!"

"You can soon prove him wrong, sir!" said Amy, clasping her hands, and looking up in his face through the growing light of the morning. "Forgive us, and take me too. I was so happy to think I was going to belong to you all! I would never have married him, if I had known—without your consent, I mean. It was very wrong of Corney, but I will try to make him sorry for it."

"You never will!" said Corney, again burying his head in the pillow.

Now first the full horror of what he had done broke upon the mind of Mr. Raymount. He stood for a moment appalled.

"You will let me take him away then?" said Amy, thinking he hesitated to receive her.

Now whether it was from an impulse of honesty towards her, or of justification of himself, I cannot tell, but he instantly returned:

"Do you know that his money is stolen?"

"If he stole it," she replied, "he will never steal again."

"He will never get another chance. He cannot get a situation now."

"I can. I will work for both. It will only be me instead of him, and that's no difference; he belongs to me as much as I do to him. If he had only kept nothing from me, nothing of this would have happened.—Do come, Corney, while I am able to walk; I feel as if I were going to die."

"And this is the woman I was such a savage to last night!" said Mr. Raymount to himself.

"Forgive me, Amy!" he cried, stretching out his arms to her. "I have behaved like a brute! To strike my son's wife! I deserve to be hanged for it! I shall never forgive myself! But you must forgive me for Christ's sake."

Long ere he had ended, Amy was in his arms, clinging to him—he holding her fast to his bosom.

The strong man was now the weaker; the father and not the daughter wept. She drew back her head.

"Come, Corney," she cried; "come directly! Out of your bed and down on your knees to your own blessed father, and confess your sins. Tell him you're sorry for them, and you'll never do them again."

Corney obeyed: in some strange, lovely way she had got the mistress-ship of his conscience as well as his heart. He got out of bed at once, went straight down on his knees as she told him, and though he did not speak, was presently weeping like a child. It was a strange group in the gray of the new morning—ah, indeed a new morning for them!—the girl in the arms of the elderly man, and the youth kneeling at their feet, both men weeping, and the girl radiant. Gerald Raymount closed the door on his son and his son's wife, and hastened to his own to tell her all.

"I feel," he concluded, "as if her forgiveness had taken away my disgrace, which seemed eternal!"

"Then surely will the forgiveness of God and his father take away Corney's disgrace!" said the mother.

Forgiveness is life's one destructive power; no sin can stand before it. Love is the one devouring fire. He casts our sins behind his back, and there everything becomes nothing, less than nothing, and vanity.

That morning, the first time for many weeks, Mrs. Raymount got up immediately after breakfast, and in a few days seemed nearly well. When Corney came down, urged by his wife he went straight to the room where his father sat. He rose and received him with the air of one who had thrown the past away, but with the respect due to a guest rather than the affection that belonged to a son. The father was far from a perfect father yet: he received his son only for Amy's sake. But there was this fine thing in it—that he showed him *respect* in spite of his bygone faults because he belonged to a woman

—a woman the father had himself injured: in virtue of her sufferings, she was the mediator between them. That in other circumstances he would have strongly resented the bringing of her into his family scarcely crossed his mind. She was not in the house a day before he felt as much as Hester that the lodging-house girl was immeasurably beyond Corney's deserts.

"She's a great deal too good for him," he said to her. "The rascal!"

"Except she be the means of changing him quite," returned Hester; "then she will only be *good enough* for him; he can't do with less."

"God alone is good enough for anybody," said the mother.

Father and mother and all began a rapid race of loving her. Corney, though delighted with, and not a little self-important because of her reception, looking on sometimes as if he had made, or at the very least discovered her, was occasionally more than a little jealous of the pleasure she showed in their affection, and her care to be worthy of it; he seemed to think her in danger of making less of his supreme and far more precious affection! But he could not be expected to make a great or sudden stride in goodness after the kind of life he had hitherto led. It was enough for the present, that he was somewhat changed from the old Corney. The wonder of it was that his acknowledgment of wrong and request for forgiveness which seemed the turning-point, were not of his own initiation but of his wife's. Two are better than one, and two may run marvellously into one.

The major was so much pleased with "the rascal's little wife," that he conceived a real affection for her; and was for her sake not merely civil but kind to "the rascal."

The arrival of this state of things was much favoured by the severe illness into which Amy fell immediately the strain was off her. She was brought almost to death's door. Corney in his turn became nurse, and improved not a little from his own anxiety, her sweetness, and the sympathy of everyone, his father included, with both of them. But such was her constitution that when she began to recover she recovered rapidly, and was soon ready for the share lovingly allotted her in the duties of the house.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE MESSAGE.

But the precious little Mark did not get better; and it soon became very clear to the major that, although months might elapse ere he left them, go he must before long. It was the sole cloud that now hung over the family. But the parting drew nigh so softly and with so little increase of suffering, also with such a changeless continuance of sweet loving ways, and mild but genuine enjoyment of existence, that of those who would most feel the loss of him he only was thoroughly aware that death was at the door. The rest said the summer would certainly restore him; but the major expected him to die in the first of the warm weather. The child himself believed he was going soon. His patience, resting upon entire satisfaction with what God pleased, was wonderful.

"Isn't it nice, majie," he said more than once, in differing forms, "that I have nothing to do with anything—that there is no preparation, no examination wanted for dying? It's all done for you! You have just to be lifted and taken—and that's so nice! I don't know what it will feel like, but when God is with you, you don't mind anything."

Another time he said,

"I was trying, while you were resting, majie, to tell Saffy a dream I had; and when I had told her, she said, 'But it's all nonsense, you know, Mark! It's only a dream!'—What do you think, majie?"

"Was it a dream, Mark?" asked the major.

"Yes, it was a dream; but do you think a dream is nothing at all? I think, if it is a good dream, it must be God's. For you know every good as well as every perfect gift is from the father of lights! He made the thing that dreams and the things that set it dreaming; so he must be the master of the dreams—at least when he pleases—and surely always of those who mind him!—The father of lights!" he repeated; "what a beautiful name! The father of all the bright things in the world! Hester's eyes, and your teeth, majie! and all the shines of the fire on the things in the room! and the sun and the far-away stars that I shall know more about by and by! and

all the glad things that come and go in my mind, as I lie here and you are sitting quiet in your chair, majie!—and sometimes at night, oh, so many! when you think I am sleeping! Oh, I will love him, and be afraid of nothing! I know he is in it all, and the dark is only the box he keeps his bright things in! Oh, he is such a good father of lights! Do you know, majie, I used to think he came and talked to me in the window-seat when I was a child! What if he really did, and I should be going to be made sure that he did—up there, I mean, you know—I don't know where, but it's where Jesus went when he went back to his papa! Oh, how happy Jesus must have been when he got back to his papa!"

Here he began to cough, and could not talk more; but the major did not blame himself that he had not found the heart to stop him, though he knew it was not what is called *good* for him: the child when moved to talk must be happier talking, and what if he died a few minutes sooner for it!—was born again rather! thought the major to himself—and almost added "I would that my time were come!" For the child's and the soldier's souls had got nearer to each other than were yet any two souls in that house in absolute love.

A great silent change, not the less a development, had been and was passing in the major. Mark not only was an influence on him altogether new, but had stirred up and brought alive in him a thousand influences besides, not merely of things hitherto dormant in him, but of memories never consciously operant—words of his mother; a certain Sunday-evening with her; her last blessing on his careless head; the verse of a well-known hymn she had repeated as she was dying! old scraps of things she had taught him: dying little Mark gave life to these, and many other things. The major had never been properly a child, but now he lived his childness over again with Mark in a better fashion.

"I have had such a curious, such a beautiful dream, majie!" he said, waking in the middle of one night the major was sitting up with him: he was never left alone now.

"What was it, Markie?" the major asked.

"I should like Corney to hear it," returned Mark.

"I will call him, and you can then tell it us together."

"Oh, I don't think it would do to wake Corney up! He would not like that! He must hear it sometime—but it must be at the right time, else he would laugh at it, and I could

not bear that. You know Corney always laughs, without thinking first whether the thing was made for laughing at!"

By this time Corney had been to see Mark often. He always spoke kindly to him now, but always as a little goose; and Mark, the least assuming of mortals, being always in earnest, did not like the things he wanted to go in at Corney's ears to be blown away by Corney's nose! For Corney had a foolish way of laughing through his nose, and it sounded so scornful, that the poor child would not expose to it what he loved. Hence he was not often ready to speak freely to Corney—or to another when he was within hearing distance.

"But, I'll tell you what, majie," he went on, "—I'll tell *you* the dream, and then, if I should go away without having told him, you must tell it to Corney. He won't laugh then—at least I don't think he will. Do you promise to tell him, majie?"

"I will, answered the major, drawing himself up with a mental military salute, and ready to obey to the letter whatever Mark should require of him.

The child began without another word.

"I was somewhere," he said, "—I don't know where, and it don't matter where, for Jesus was there too. And Jesus gave a little laugh, such a beautiful little laugh, when he saw me! And he said, 'Ah, little one, now you see me! I have been getting your eyes open as fast as I could all the time! We're in our father's house together now! But, Markie, where's your brother Corney?' And I answered and said, 'Jesus, I'm very sorry, but I don't know, I know very well that I'm my brother's keeper, but I can't tell where he is.' Then Jesus smiled again, and said, 'Never mind, then. I didn't ask you because I didn't know myself. But we must have Corney here—only we can't get him till he sets himself to be good! You must tell Corney, only not just yet, that I want him. Tell him that he and I have got one father, and I couldn't bear to have him out in the cold, with all the horrid creatures that won't be good! Tell him I love him so that I will be very sharp with him if he don't make haste and come home. Our father is *so* good, and it is dreadful to me that Corney won't mind him! He is *so* patient with him, Markie!' 'I know that, Jesus,' I said; 'I know that he could easily take him to pieces again because he don't go well, but he would much rather make him go right!'—I suppose I was thinking of mamma's beautiful gold watch, with the

wreath of different-coloured gold round the face of it: that wouldn't go right, and papa wanted to change it, but mamma liked the old one best. And I don't know what came next.—Now what am I to do, majie? You see I couldn't bear to have that dream laughed at. Yet I must tell it to Corney because there is a message in it for him!"

Whether the boy plainly believed that the Lord had been with him, and had given him a message to his brother, the major dared not inquire. "Let the boy think what he thinks!" he said to himself. "I dare not look as if I doubted." Therefore he did not speak, but looked at the child with his soul in his eyes.

"I do not think," Mark went on, "that he wanted me to tell Corney the minute I woke, for he said—*only not just yet:* he knows I am afraid of his laughing! I think when the time comes he will let me know it is come. But if I found I was dying, you know, I would try and tell him, whether he laughed or not, rather than go without having done it. But if Corney knew I was going, I don't think he would laugh."

"I don't think he would," returned the major. "Corney is a better boy—a little—I do think, than he used to be. You will be able to speak to him by and by, I fancy."

A feeling had grown upon the household as if there were in the house a strange lovely spot whence was direct communication with heaven—a little piece cut out of the new paradise and set glowing in the heart of the old house of Yrndale—the room where Mark lay shining in his bed, a Christ-child, if ever child might bear the name. As often as the door opened, loving eyes would seek first the spot where the sweet face, the treasure of the house, lay, reflecting already the light of the sunless kingdom.

That same afternoon, as the major, his custom always of an afternoon, dozed in his chair, the boy suddenly called out in a clear voice,

"Oh, majie, there was one bit of my dream I did not tell you! I've just remembered it now for the first time!—After what I told you—do you remember?—"

"I do indeed," answered the major.

"—After that, Jesus looked at me for one minute—no, not a minute, for a minute—on mamma's watch at least—is much longer, but say perhaps for three seconds of a minute, and then

said just one word,—'Our father, Markie!' and I could not see him any more. But it did not seem to matter the least tiny bit. There was a stone near me, and I sat down upon it feeling as if I could sit there without moving to all eternity, so happy was I; and it was because Jesus's father was touching me everywhere; my head felt as if he were counting the hairs of it. And he was not only close to me, but far and far and farther away, and all between. Near and far there was the father! I neither saw nor felt nor heard him, and yet I saw and heard and felt him so near that I could neither see nor hear nor feel him. I am talking very like nonsense, majie, but I can't do it better. It was God, God everywhere, and there was no nowhere anywhere, but all was God, God, God; and my heart was nothing, knew nothing but him; and I felt I could sit there for ever, because I was right in the very middle of God's heart. That was what made everything look so all right that I was anxious about nothing and nobody."

Here he paused a little.

"He had a sleeping draught last night!" said the major to himself. "—But the sleeping draught was God's, and who can tell whether God may not have had it given to him just that he might talk to him! Some people may be better to talk to when they are asleep, and others when they are awake!"

"And then, after a while," the boy resumed, "I seemed to see a black speck somewhere in the all-blessed. And I could not understand it, and I did not like it; but always I kept seeing this black speck—only one; and it made me at last, in spite of my happiness, almost miserable. 'Only,' I said to myself, 'whatever the black speck may be, God will rub it white when he is ready!' for you know he couldn't go on for ever with a black speck going about in his heart. And when I said this, all at once I knew the black speck was Corney, and I gave a cry. But with that the black speck began to grow thin, and it grew thin and thin till all at once I could see it no more, and the same instant Corney stood beside me with a smile on his face, and the tears running down his cheeks. I stretched out my arms to him, and he caught me up in his, and then it was all right; I was Corney's keeper, and Corney was my keeper, and God was all of us's keeper. And it was then I woke, majie, not before."

The days went on. Every new day Mark said, "Now majie, I do think to-day I shall tell Corney my dream and the

message I have for him!" But the day grew old and passed, and the dream was not told. The next and the next and the next passed, and he seemed to the major not likely ever to have the strength to tell Corney. Still even his mother, who was now hardly out of his room during the day, though the major would never yield the active part of the nursing, did not perceive that his time was drawing nigh. Hester also was much with him now, and sometimes his father, occasionally Corney —and Mrs. Corney, as Mark called her with a merry look— very pathetic on his almost transparent face; but none of them seemed to think his end quite near.

One of the marvellous things about the child was his utter lack of favouritism. He had got so used to the major's strong arms and systematic engineering way of doing things as to prefer his nursing to that of any one else; yet he never objected to the substitution of another when occasion might require. He took everything that came to him as in itself right and acceptable. He seemed in his illness to love everybody more than even while he was well. For every one he kept his or her own place. His mother was the queen; but he was nearly as happy with Hester as with her; and the major was great; but he never showed any discomfort, not to say unhappiness, when left alone for a while with Saffy—who was not always so reasonable as he would have liked her to be. When several were in the room, he would lie looking from one to another like a miser contemplating his riches—and well he might! for such riches neither moth nor rust corrupts, and they are the treasures of heaven also.

One evening most of the family were in the room: a vague sense had diffused itself that the end was not far off, and an unconfessed instinct had gathered them. A lamp was burning, but the firelight was stronger.

Mark spoke. In a moment the major was bending over him.

"Majie," he said, "I want Corney. I want to tell him."

The major, on his way to Corney, told the father that the end was nigh. With sorely self-accusing heart, for the vision of the boy on the stone in the middle of the moor haunted him, he repaired to the anteroom of heaven.

Mark kept looking for Corney's coming, his eyes turning every other moment to the door. When his father entered he stretched out his arms to him. The strong man bending over him could not repress a sob. The boy pushed

him gently away far enough to see his face, and looked at him as if he could not quite believe his eyes.

"Father," he said—he had never called him *father* before—"you must be glad, not sorry. I am going to your father and my father—to our great father."

Then seeing Corney come in, he stretched his arms towards him past his father, crying, "Corney! Corney!" just as he used to call him when he was a mere child. Corney bent over him, but the outstretched arms did not close upon him; they fell.

But he was not yet ascended. With a strength seeming wonderful when they thought of it afterwards, he signed to the major.

"Majie," he whispered, with a look and expression into the meaning of which the major all his life long had never done inquiring, "Majie! Corney! you tell!"

Then he went.

I think it was the grief at the grave of Lazarus that made our Lord weep, not his death. One with eyes opening into both worlds could hardly weep over any law of the Father of Lights! I think it was the impossibility of getting them comforted over this thing death, which looked to him so different from what they thought it, that made the fearless weep, and give them in Lazarus a foretaste of his own resurrection.

The major alone did not weep. He stood with his arms folded, like a sentry relieved, and waiting the next order. Even Corney's eyes filled with tears, and he murmured, "Poor Markie!" It should have been "Poor Corney!" He stooped and kissed the insensate face, then drew back and gazed with the rest on the little pilgrim-cloak the small prophet had dropped as he rose to his immortality.

Saffy, who had been seated gazing into the fire, and had no idea of what had taken place, called out in a strange voice, "Markie! Markie!"

Hester turned to her at the cry, and saw her apparently following something with her eyes along the wall from the bed to the window. At the curtained window she gazed for a moment, and then her eyes fell, and she sat like one in a dream. A moment more and she sprang to her feet, and ran to the bed, crying again, "Markie! Markie!" Hester lifted her and held her to kiss the sweet white face. It seemed to

content her; she went back to her stool by the fire; and there sat staring at the curtained window with the look of one gazing into regions unknown.

That same night, ere the solemn impression should pass, the major took Corney to his room, and recalling every individual expression he could of the little prophet-dreamer, executed, not without tears, the commission intrusted to him. And Corney did not laugh. He listened with a grave, even sad face; and when the major ceased, his eyes were full of tears.

"I shall not forget Markie's dream," he said.

Thus came everything in to help the youth who had begun to mend his ways.

And shall we think the boy found God not equal to his dream of him! He made our dreaming: shall it surpass in its making his mighty self? Shall man dream better than God? or God's love be inferior to man's imagination or his own?

CHAPTER LXII.

A BIRTHDAY GIFT.

WHEN Mark's little cloak was laid in the earth, for a while the house felt cold—as if the bit of Paradise had gone out of it, and the sun did not care to shine in any more at its windows. Mark's room was like a temple forsaken of its divinity. But it was not to be drifted up with the sand of forgetfulness! the major put in a petition that it might continue to be called Mark's, but should be considered the major's: he would like to put some of his things in it, and occupy it when he came! Every one was pleased with the idea. They would no longer feel so painfully that Mark was not there when his dear majie occupied the room!

To the major it was thenceforth chamber and chapel and monument. It should not be a tomb save as upon the fourth day the sepulchre in the garden! he would fill it with live memories of the risen child! Very different was his purpose from that sickly haunting of the grave in which some loving hearts indulge. We are bound to be hopeful, nor wrong our great-hearted father.

Mark's books and pictures remained undisturbed. The major dusted them with his own hands. Every day he read in Mark's bible. He never took it away with him, but always when he returned, whatever part of the bible he might have read in the meantime, he resumed his reading where he had left off in it. The sword the boy used so to admire for its brightness that he had placed it unsheathed upon the wall for the firelight to play upon it, he left there, shining still. In Mark's bed the major slept, and to Mark's chamber he went always to shut to the door. In solitude there he learned a thousand things his busy life had prepared him for learning. The master had come to him in the child. In him was fulfilled a phase of the promise that whosoever receives a child in the name of Jesus receives Jesus and his father. Through ministering to the child he had come to know the child's elder brother and master. It was the presence of the master in the child that, without his knowing it, opened his heart to him, and he had thus entertained more than an angel.

Time passed, and their hearts began, not through any healing power in time, but under the holy influences of duty and love and hope, to cover with flowers their furrows of grief. Hester's birthday was at hand. The major went up to London to bring her a present. He was determined to make the occasion, if he could, a cheerful one.

He wrote to his cousin Helen asking if he might bring a friend with him. He did not think, he said, his host or hostess knew him, but Hester did: he was a young doctor, and his name was Christopher. He had met him amongst "Hester's friends," and was much taken with him. He would be a great acquisition to their party. He had been rather ailing for some time, and as there was much less sickness now, he had persuaded him to take a little relaxation.

Hester said for her part she would be most happy to see Mr. Christopher; she had the highest esteem for him; and therewith she told them something of his history. Mr. Raymount had known his grandfather a little in the way of business, and was the more interested in him.

I may mention here that Corney soon began to show a practical interest in the place—first in the look of it—its order and tidiness, and then in its yield, beginning to develop a faculty for looking after property. Next he took to measuring the land. Here the major could give him no end of help; and

having thus found a point of common interest, they began to be drawn a little together and to conceive a mild liking for each other's company: Corney saw by degrees that the major knew much more than he; and the major discovered that Corney had some brains.

Everything was now going on well at Yrndale—thanks to the stormy and sorrowful weather that had of late so troubled its spiritual atmosphere, and killed so many evil worms in its moral soil!

As soon as the distress caused by Corney's offences was soothed by reviving love for the youth and fresh hope in him, Hester informed her parents of the dissolution of her engagement to lord Gartley. The mother was troubled: it is the girl that suffers evil judgment in such a case, and she knew how the tongue of the world would wag. But those who despise the ways of the world need not fret that low minds attribute to them the things of which low minds are capable. The world and its judgments will pass; the poisonous tongue will one day become pure, and make ample apology for its evil speaking. The tongue is a fire, but there is a stronger fire than the tongue. Her father and the major cared little for this aspect of the matter, for they had both come to the conclusion that the public is only a sort of innocent, whose behaviour may be troublesome or pleasant, but whose opinion is worth considerably less than that of a wise hound. The world is a fine thing to save, but a wretch to worship. Neither did the father care much for lord Gartley, though he had liked him; the major, we know, both despised and detested him.

Hester herself was annoyed to find how soon the idea of his lordship came to be altogether a thing of her past, looking there in its natural place, a thing to trouble her no more. At his natural distance from her, she could not fail to see what a small creature her imagination, and the self that had mingled with her noblest feelings concerning him, had chosen as her companion and help in her schemes of good. But she was able to look on the whole blunder with calmness, and a thankfulness that kept growing as the sting of her fault lost its burning, lenified in the humility it brought.

There was nothing left her now, she said to herself, but the best of all—a maiden life devoted to the work of her master. She was not willing any more to run the risk of losing her power to help the Lord's creatures, down-trodden of devils,

well-to-do people, and their own miserable weaknesses and vices. Even remaining constant to duty, she must, in continuous disappointment and the mockery of a false unity, have lost the health and, worse, the spirits necessary to wholesome contact and such work as she was fain to do. In constant opposition to her husband, spending the best part of her strength in resistance ere it could reach the place where it ought to be applied entire, with strife consciously destroying her love and keeping her in a hopeless unrest, how could any light have shone from her upon those whose darkness made her miserable! Now she would hold herself free! What a blessed thing it was to be her own mistress and the slave of the Lord, eternally free! To be the slave of a husband was the worst of all slavery except self-slavery!

Nor was there in this her conclusion anything of chagrin, or pettish self-humiliation. St. Paul abstained from marriage that he might the better do the work given him by the Lord. For his perilous and laborious work it was better, he judged, that he should not be married. It was for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

Her spirits soon returned, more buoyant than before. Her health was better. She found she had been suffering from an oppression she had refused to recognize—already in no small measure yoked, and right unequally. Only a few weeks passed, and, in the prime of health and that glorious thing feminine strength, she looked a yet grander woman than before. There was greater freedom in her carriage, and she seemed to have grown. The humility that comes with the discovery of error had made her yet more dignified; true dignity comes only of humility. Pride is the ruin of dignity, for it is a worshipping of self, and that involves a continuous sinking. Humility, the worship of the Ideal—that is, of the man Christ Jesus, is the only lifter-up of the head.

Everybody felt her more lovable than before. Her mother began to feel an enchantment of peace in her presence. Her father sought her company more than ever in his walks, and not only talked to her about Corney, but talked about his own wrong feelings towards him, and how he had been punished for them by what they wrought in him. He had begun, he told her, to learn many things he had supposed he knew: he had only thought and written and talked about them! Father and daughter were therefore much to each other now. Even

Corney perceived a change in her. For one thing, scarce a shadow remained of that "superiority" which used to irritate him so much, making him rebel against whatever she said. She became more and more Amy's ideal of womanhood; and by degrees she taught her husband to read more justly his beautiful sister. She pointed out to him how few would have tried to protect and deliver him as she had done, how few would have so generously taken herself, a poor uneducated girl, to a sister's heart. So altogether things were going well in the family: it was bidding fair to be a family for evermore.

Miss Dasomma came to spend a few days with Hester, and help celebrate her birthday: she was struck with improvement where she would have been loath to allow it either necessary or possible. Compelled to admit its presence, she loved her yet more—for the one a fact, the other was a necessity.

Her birthday was the sweetest of summer days, and she looked a perfect summer-born woman. She dressed herself in white, but not so much for her own birthday as for Mark's into the heavenly kingdom.

After breakfast all except the mother went out. Hester was little inclined to talk, and the major was in a thoughtful, brooding mood. Miss Dasomma and Mr. Raymount alone conversed. When the rest reached a certain spot whither Mr. Raymount had led them for the sake of the view, Hester had fallen a little behind, and Christopher went back to meet her.

"You are thinking of your brother," he said, in a tone that made her feel grateful.

"Yes," she answered.

"I knew by your eyes," he returned. "I wish I could talk to you about him. The right way of getting used to death is to go nearer the dead. Suppose you tell me something about him! Such children are rare! They are prophets to whose word we have to listen."

He went on like this, drawing her from sadness with gentle speech about children and death, and the look and reality of things; and so they wandered about the moor for a little while before joining the rest.

Mr. Raymount was much pleased with Christopher, and even Corney found himself drawn to his side, feeling, though

he did not know it, a strength in him that offered protection.

The day went on in the simplest, pleasantest intercourse. After lunch, Hester opened her piano, and asked Miss Dasomma, gifted in her art even to the pitch prophetic, to sit down and play—"upon *us*," she said. And in truth she did; for what the hammers were to the strings, such were the sounds she drew from them to the human chords stretched expectant before her. Vibrating souls responded in the music that is unheard. A rosy conscious silence pervaded the summer afternoon and the ancient drawing-room, in which the listeners were one here and one there, all apart—except Corney and "Mrs. Corney," as for love of Mark she liked to be called, on a sofa side by side, and Saffy playing with a white kitten, neither attending to the music, which may have been doing something for both notwithstanding. Mr. Raymount sat in a great sofa chair with a book in his hand, listening more than reading; his wife lay on a couch, and soon passed into dreams of pleasant sounds; the major stood erect by Miss Dasomma, a little behind her, with his arms folded across his chest; and Christopher sat on a low window-seat in an oriel, where the balmiest of perfumed airs freely entered. Between him and all the rest hung the heavy folds of a curtain, which every now and then swelled out like the sail of Cleopatra's barge "upon the river of Cydnus." He sat with the tears rolling down his face, for the music to which he listened seemed such as he had only dreamed of before. It was the music of climes where sorrow is but the memory of that which has been turned into joy. He thought no one saw him, and no one would have seen him but for the traitor wind seeming only to play with the curtain but every now and then blowing it wide out, as if the sheet of the sail had been let go, and revealing him to Hester where she sat on a stool beside her mother and held her sleeping hand. It was to her the revelation of a heart, and she saw with reverence. Lord Gartley could sing, lord Gartley could play, lord Gartley understood the technicalities of music; Christopher could neither play nor sing—at least anything more than a common psalm-tune to lead the groans of his poor—and understood nothing of music; but there was in him a whole sea of musical delight, to be set in motion by the enchantress who knew the spell! Such an enchantress might

float in the bark of her own will across the heaving waves of that sea, moon and wind of its tides and currents! When the music ceased she saw him go softly from the room.

After an early dinner, early that they might have room for a walk in the twilight, the major proposed the health of his cousin Hester, and made a little speech in her honour and praise. Nor did his praise make Hester feel awkward, for praise which is the odour of love neither fevers nor sickens.

"And now, cousin Hester," concluded the major, "you know that I love you like a child of my own! It is a good thing you are not, for if you were then you would not be half so good, or so beautiful, or so wise, or so accomplished as you are! Will you oblige me by accepting this foolscap, which I hope will serve to make this blessed day yet a trifle more pleasant to look back upon when Mark has got his old majie again. It represents a sort of nut, itself too bulky for a railway truck. If my Hester choose to call it an empty nut, I don't mind: the good of it to her will be in the filling of it with many kernels."

With this enigmatical peroration, the major made Hester a low bow, and handed her a sheet of foolscap, twice folded, and tied with a bit of white ribbon. She took it with a sweetly radiant curiosity. It was the title-deed of the house in Addison square. She gave a cry of joy, got up, threw her arms round Majie's neck, and kissed him.

"Aha," said the major; "if I had been a young man now, I should not have had that! But I will not be conceited; I know what she means it for: it is the kiss collective of all the dirty men and women in her dear slums, glorified into that of an angel of God!"

Hester was not a young lady given to weeping, but she did here break down and cry. Her long-cherished dream come true! She had no money, but that did not trouble her: there was always a way of doing when one was willing to begin small.

This is indeed a divine law! There shall be no success to the man who is not willing to begin small. Small is strong, for it only can grow strong. Big at the outset is bloated and weak! There are thousands willing to do great things for one willing to do a small thing; but there never was any truly great thing that did not begin small.

In her delight Hester, having read the endorsement, handed the paper, without opening it, to Christopher, who sat next her

with the unconscious conviction that he would understand the delight it gave her. He took it and, with a look asking if he might, opened it.

The major had known for some time that Mr. Raymount wanted to sell the house, and believed from the way Hester spent herself in London, he could not rejoice her better than by purchasing it for her; so, just as it was, with everything as it stood in it, he made it his birthday-gift to her.

"There is more here than you know," said Christopher, handing her back the paper. She opened it and saw something about a thousand pounds, for which again she gave joyous and loving thanks. But before the evening was over she learned that it was not a thousand pounds the dear majie had given her, but the thousand a year he had offered her if she would give up lord Gartley. Thus a new paradise of God-labour opened on the delighted eyes of Hester.

In the evening, when the sun was down, they went for another walk. I suspect the major, but am not sure:—anyhow, in the middle of a fir-wood, Hester found herself alone with Christopher. The wood rose towards the moor, growing thinner and thinner as it ascended. They were climbing westward full in face of the sunset, which was barred across the trees in gold, blue, rosy pink, and a lovely indescribable green, such as is not able to live except in the after sunset. The west lay like the beautiful dead not yet faded into the brown dark of mother-earth. The fir-trees and bars of sunset made a glorious gate before them.

"Oh, Hester!" said Christopher—he had been hearing her called *Hester* on all sides all day long, and it not only came of itself, but stayed unnoticed of either—"if that were the gate of heaven, and we climbing to it now, to go in and see all the dear people!"

"That would be joy!" responded Hester.

"Come, then: let us imagine it a while. There is no harm in dreaming."

"Sometimes when Mark would tell me one of his dreams, I could not help thinking," said Hester, "how much more of reality there was in it than in most so-called realities."

Then came a silence—full of feeling.

"Suppose," began Christopher again, "one claiming to be a prophet appeared, saying that in the life to come we were to go

on living just such a life as here, with the one difference that we should be no longer deluded with the idea of something better; that all our energies would then be, and ought now to be spent in making the best of what we had, without any foolish indulgence in hope or aspiration:—what would you say to that?"

"I would say," answered Hester, "he must have had his revelation either from God, from a demon, or from his own heart: it could not be from God, because it made the idea of a God an impossibility; it must come from a demon or from himself, and in neither case was worth paying attention to.—I think," she went on, "my own feeling or imagination must be better worth my own heeding than that of another. The essential delight of this world seems to me to lie in the expectation of a better."

They emerged from the wood: the bare moor spread on all sides before them, and, lo, the sunset was countless miles away! Hills, fields, rivers, mountains, lay between!

Christopher stopped, and turning, looked at Hester.

"Is this the reality?" he said. "We catch sight of the gate of heaven, and set out for it. It comes nearer and nearer. All at once a something they call a reality of life comes between, and the shining gate is millions of miles away! Then cry some of its pilgrims, 'Alas, we are fooled! There is no such thing as the gate of heaven! Let us eat and drink and do what good we can, for to-morrow we die!' But is there no gate because we find none on the edge of the wood where it seemed to lie? There it is, before us yet, though a long way farther back! What has space or time to do with being! Can distance destroy fact? What if one day the chain of gravity were to break, and, starting from the edge of the pine-wood, we fared or flew farther and farther towards the bars of gold and rose and green! And what if even then we found them recede and recede as we advanced, until heart was gone out of us, and we could follow no longer, but sat down on some wayside cloud, and fell a thinking! Should we not say—'Justly are we punished, and our punishment was to follow the vain thing we took for heaven-gate'? Heaven-gate is too grand a goal to be reached by foot or wing. High above us, it yet opens inside us; and when it opens, down comes the gate of amber and rose, and we step through both at once!"

He was silent. They were on the top of the ridge. A little beyond stood the dusky group of their companions. And the world lay beneath them.

"Who would live in London who might live here?" said the major.

"No one," answered Hester and Christopher together.

The major turned and looked at them almost in alarm.

"But I *may not*," Hester said. "God chooses that I live in London."

Said Christopher,—

"Christ would surely have liked better to go on living in his father's house than go where so many did not know either him or his father! But he could not go on enjoying his heaven while those many lived only a death in life. He must go and start them for home! Who, in any measure seeing what Christ sees and feeling as Christ feels, would rest in the enjoyment of beauty while so many are unable to desire it! We are not real human beings until we are of the same mind with Christ. There are many who would save the pathetic and interesting, and let the ugly and provoking take care of themselves! Not so Christ, nor those who have learned of him!"

Christopher spoke so quietly there seemed even a contrast between his manner and the fervour of his words.

"I would take as many in with me," he said, turning to Hester, "as I might, should it be after a thousand years I went in at the gate of the sunset—the sunrise rather, of which the sunset is a leaf of the folding door! It would be sorrow to go in alone. My people, my own, my own humans, my men, my women, my little ones, must go in with me!"

Hester laboured, and Christopher laboured. And if one was the heart and the other the head, the major was the right hand. But what they did and how they did it, would require a book, and no small one, to itself.

It is no matter that here I cannot tell their story. No man ever did the best work who copied another. Let every man work out the thing that is in him! Who, according to the means he has, great or small, does the work given him to do, stands by the side of the Saviour, is a fellow-worker with him. Be a brother after thy own fashion, only see it be a brother thou art. The one who, weighed, is found wanting the most, is the one whose tongue and whose life do not match—who

says, "Lord! Lord!" and does not the things the Lord says; the deacon who finds a good seat for the man in goodly apparel, and lets the poor widow stand in the aisle unheeded; the preacher who descants on the love of God in the pulpit, and looks out for a rich wife in his flock; the missionary who would save the heathen, but gives his own soul to merchandize; the woman who spends her strength on the poor, and makes discord at home.

THE END.

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