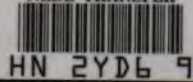


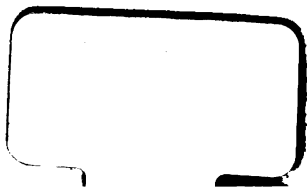
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Ella G. Whitman  
Dec. 11th. 1861

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE:

A STORY FROM "TEMPLE BAR," AND  
"TALES OF THE DAY."

COMPLETE.

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## FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

### CHAPTER I.

THE time was evening ; the scene a small quiet garden, ivy-covered walls shutting out every thing belonging to the old city but the gray weather-stained tower of the cathedral close beside it ; the persons, a young man twenty-five years old, and a girl about a year younger, tall and slight, with pale oval face, dark hair, and deep earnest gray eyes.

They were in earnest conversation.

"It seems very hypocritical of me to talk of despising riches when so much happiness or misery apparently depends on their possession."

"Perhaps, Ralph, it is the temptation against which we are appointed to struggle. Every heart has its own es-

pecial trial to pass through. We are poor, and so are always sighing for riches, in a vague belief they would give us the one thing wanting to make us happy ; and yet with riches how often comes the closing up of the heart against all its better and holier impulses !"

"I dare say, if the truth were told, poverty is not so great an evil as we are often led to believe. If we are obliged to calculate ways and means so narrowly, and debar ourselves from the pleasures and luxuries others indulge in, it is very good discipline for the heart ; it calls out energies we might not know we possessed, had no motive arisen for exerting them."

"I do not think I should feel so dispirited if I alone had to suffer ; but there

is mamma, who has seldom had a wish ungratified, if it were in papa's power to grant it, at however great the cost to himself, and Grace, and Ethie, and poor Frank —”

“And yourself, Margaret. Why do you exclude yourself? If comparative poverty is hard for them, it is equally so for you.”

“If I only felt certain they could live comfortably on what my father was able to save, I could trust confidently to my own future; I should at once seek some employment which would make me independent.”

“You would go out as a governess, you mean, my dear Margaret.”

“There are many worse lots than a governess's, Ralph; but I have few qualifications for such an office. Too much stress is laid on accomplishments nowadays, for me, with my matter-of-fact education, to be successful in such a calling. When I start in the world on my own behalf, I must take a very sober course. The education of the heart and hands would be all I could attempt.”

“A village schoolmistress, for instance,” Ralph Atherton said; and he laughed out in spite of the grave, serious face turned to his. “O Maggie,” he added, “you little calculate on all the clever things you would be expected to teach in even the humble sphere your modesty has made you fix upon. There will be no end of government certificates, and abstruse studies, enough to daunt a braver heart than yours, my little sister.”

Margaret smiled as she looked up into his handsome face. “You should not despise my choice; you do not know how useful a one it may be: and even without a government certificate, *you* will think of me for *your* school when you get your curacy, Ralph?”

“I will think of you as my housekeeper: you must live with me, wherever my home may be, remember.”

“Once I used to dream of such a thing, and the idea always came fraught with a thousand bright suggestions; but, like many other dreams, that is over now. You must get a curacy and a wife. I

have my mother and sisters and Frank to care for.”

There was a silence for a few minutes, and then Ralph said, “I cannot quite see what is to be done about my mother and the girls. What do you propose, Margaret? or have you not yet thought seriously about it?”

“O, indeed, it seems the one thought never absent from my mind since our father's death. I think I told you the long conversation I had with him the night before he died. I was alone with him, and it seemed a relief to him to be able to tell me what he most wished us to do.”

“You mentioned that much, but you never told me more.”

“It has all been so hurried and sad,” Margaret said, passing her hand wearily across her brow, “I can hardly think of any thing beyond the present moment. But he told me how greatly it had tried him that he could save so little for his wife and children. Our mother's money has remained untouched, and accumulating; and that, he hoped, with a curacy, would give you a fair start in life, and where, if needs be, you might, for a time, share your home with Grace and Ethie. His insurances, he hoped, with great care, would support my mother in such a way as should make her regret least the comforts of the home she must now quit. His books and furniture would, he hoped, more than pay off his few debts; and he would trust to me to do my best for Frank until his pay in the navy was sufficient for him to live on it, without the assistance he had hitherto given him. You know, Ralph,” she added, “how little my mother has been accustomed to struggle with difficulties; and seeing how anxious my dear father seemed about her, I promised him, so far as I could, that she, my sisters, and Frank should henceforth be my first consideration.”

“My father, I know, always had the greatest confidence in you, Margaret, but I am sure he never meant that you should entirely forget yourself in your anxiety for them and me.”

“I have no anxiety for you, Ralph;

you are sure to get a curacy somewhere before long; and that will be a home for Grace and Ethie, if need be. Frank will soon be able to shift for himself. You need not be unhappy about me; a life of activity is the only one I could endure at present: had it been left to choice, I should have chosen it."

"And once it might have been so different for you!" This was said as if Ralph were rather thinking aloud than addressing his sister, round whose waist he fondly passed his arm and drew her close to his side. Margaret looked up into his face. "Hush, Ralph; do not say so; it is better as it is now," she said in a low tone. They had reached the little door in the wall, half hidden by the ivy which trailed over it. A narrow lane divided the garden from the cathedral cloisters. Margaret slipped back the bolt, closed the door behind them, and the next minute the brother and sister were standing in the centre of the small plot of grass round which the cloisters ran, looking down with tearful eyes and saddened hearts on the small square stone at their feet, with the simple initials "R. A." engraved upon it. Neither of them spoke. Each was trying to realize the bright exchange the purified spirit of their father had made in those last awful moments which had separated parent and child; while they, in all the bitterness of their own great loss, were striving to say from their hearts, and not their lips only, "Thy will be done."

## CHAPTER II.

Few people had better performed their duty in this world, or had gone to the grave more honored or respected, than Dean Atherton. Simple and unostentatious in his manners, and yet earnest and energetic in his office, the cares of his deanery, together with his struggle to maintain his family in the position they filled on an income barely sufficient to cover his limited expenditure, told severely on a constitution never strong, and weakened by the effects of a hot climate. Never entirely recovered

from an illness engendered during the previous winter, a sudden attack of influenza, with its attendant prostration and debility, had overpowered his enfeebled constitution, and carried him off almost before the absent members of his family were fully aware of his danger.

Many years before our story begins, Mr. Atherton was a curate in a small village on the sea coast of H—shire, where, during the summer months, an old gentleman and his daughter occupied a little cottage opening on the shore. Mr. Waldron was a Quaker, but his daughter had for some years joined the Church of England; and here, in their bright summer home, Margaret Waldron cultivated her kindly charities among the poor, and entered warmly into every scheme for their improvement. The young curate often found his way into their cottage, at first for the sake of the arguments he was fond of holding with the venerable disciple of George Fox, but afterwards for the love which insensibly grew up between himself and the old man's daughter. Ralph Atherton's prospects were fair. He had few relations of his own—none near enough to be consulted on such a step. His little patrimony had well nigh been expended in his school and college life; but he hoped, as all young curates do hope in the first blush of their career, to win his way to something better than the small curacy he then held. Mr. Waldron frankly told him that Margaret's property would be settled on herself and children. At his own death she would inherit all he had, which was no great deal; but that, until that event occurred, she could only have the little he could spare from his own income. The old man was too fond of his child to deny her any thing it was in his power to grant; and though in a worldly point of view he thought she might have done better, he liked the young curate too well to make any serious objections to the match. As he could not bear to be parted from his child, he took up his permanent abode at Sandham. For some years they continued to reside close to each other; but soon after the



birth of their second child, a chaplaincy in the East India Company's service was offered to Ralph Atherton; and with the increasing necessity for some effort on his part, while health and vigor were his, to enable him to make provision for his family, neither he nor Margaret thought it right to refuse it. This decision, however, was not arrived at without painful thought and anxiety. The separation it entailed on Margaret from father and children called forth all her Christian zeal and fortitude to sustain her in this overwhelming necessity; but the sacrifice was for their sakes, and that feeling nerved her to its endurance.

Long and fondly the young mother lingered over the last embraces of her father and children. Some doubts had arisen in the mind of Ralph about their religious training during their tender years; but to have made any other house their home than that tenanted by their grandfather would have utterly crushed the heart of the old man; and as Margaret trustfully dwelt on the same good Providence which had brought her through the narrow views of Quakerism to the place found in the fulness and truth of the Church's teaching, she could not doubt that He who never fails those who really trust in him would so order the future for her young lambs as should eventually bring them at last into his fold. The discipline of Quakerism Margaret did not fear for them; and before they were old enough to feel the want of the sustaining helps and guides, which only can be truly experienced in the sacraments appointed by the Church for her believing people, she trusted either she or her husband would have them again under their care. This hope, however, in her own case, was never to be realized. In less than two years after quitting England, a premature confinement, followed by fever, laid Margaret Atherton in an Indian grave. The intelligence reached her father when he was slowly recovering from an attack of illness, and so great was the shock to his already weakened frame that a few weeks only intervened before he also succumbed.

In the cathedral town of Wylminstre resided the younger brother and sister of Mr. Waldron. Formerly the brothers had been in partnership in a small country bank; but having amassed enough money to satisfy their moderate wishes, they had given up the firm to the two clerks, who had saved capital sufficient during their servitude under generous and considerate masters. With his sister, the youngest brother still resided in the old red-brick house they had inhabited so many years. It was a tall unsightly edifice in one of the back streets of Wylminstre; but its pleasant garden front opened on a lawn, intersected by straight gravel walks and gay flower borders, with such an abundance of fruit, flowers, and vegetables as would have astonished a modern gardener. Miss Waldron's favorite parlor looked out on this bit of bright floral beauty; and sitting in the bow-window, in her arm-chair, with her little old-fashioned round table beside her, dressed in her dove-colored silk gown, the thick folds of her clear muslin handkerchief crossed on her ample bosom, the little silk shawl pinned so exactly over her shoulders, the closely crimped border of her clear muslin mob-cap softening and blending with the narrow bands of her soft brown hair, still only here and there streaked with silver threads, — she imparted an air of purity and quiet simplicity you hardly expected to encounter, under a roof apparently so destitute of all the luxurious adjuncts of modern taste and refinement. The greatest simplicity pervaded their small establishment both in furniture and dress; but in this contrast to the world neither she nor her brother exercised any self-denial. If his coat or her gown were the self-same pattern as those worn by their parents before them, it was no act of self-denial in them to wear them, even when mixing with the gayest votaries of fashion; but had the shape or shade varied in ever so small a degree from their own self-established model of right or wrong, it is doubtful whether their peace of mind would not have been seriously disturbed; exemplifying, even in the case of the most

rigid followers of George Fox, an evil he in his leathern doublet could hardly have foreseen, and which Quakers, in their great anxiety to avoid, have most unwittingly rushed into — that of allowing their minds to be unduly influenced by trifles in matters of no real importance.

Naturally shrewd, intelligent, and full of that kindness of heart so characteristic of the sect, they could not see their little grand-nephew and niece homeless without at once bringing them to the old place their mother had filled years ago. Margaret was too young to have more than a confused remembrance of her first entrance into her uncle's house. She and her brother, ever kept studiously neat and plain in their dress, were allowed to range at will over the roomy old-fashioned house and large garden. And well could they remember the old pony they were allowed, as they grew older, to scamper up and down the orchard, and the pleasant rides they took in the quiet country lanes in their uncle's old-fashioned, roomy gig; and the long walks beyond the old city walls with their active aunt Sarah, and their visits with her to the poor families crowded into the narrow back streets behind their own house. It was these visits which first awakened in Margaret's young heart an intense love for the poor, and an earnest desire to do her part towards ameliorating and improving their condition.

The only recollection the children had of their father or mother was connected with two drawings, which an artist of little celebrity had taken of them many years ago, and which now hung in Margaret's bedroom. But the strong imagination of the little girl needed few outward aids to developing bright pictures of her own future, in which her father invariably held a prominent part. Sunday after Sunday, she sat by her aunt's side in those dull silent meetings, at first striving hard to compose her rebellious hands and feet into the same statue-like stillness, which seemed to fall like a spell upon the grave motionless figures around her; then dreamily

wondering why people should punish themselves so severely when they were old enough to do as they pleased; listening to the cheerful chimes of the various church bells as they broke on her ear; following the loud hum of some large restless fly, whose very freedom as it flitted by her she felt tempted to envy. Or tracing by the aid of her quick imagination, in the large flaws and cracks in the whitewashed walls of the sombre meeting house, all sorts of quaint faces and odd pictures. Or her active mind would rove away into her own world of thought, and visions of her dear papa would flash across her, toiling away in a distant land. Or she would draw airy pictures of some pretty home in this country, to which he would return; and of her being to him all that a daughter could be — housekeeper, companion, friend. Or she would go to him, and amid the splendors of a dazzling Indian home, such as she delighted to picture, she would rival the princesses of her own fairy tales. These day-dreams she never confided to her aunt. Young as she was, she soon acquired an intuitive knowledge of her aunt's practical and very unromantic mind, and she felt she would not only meet with no sympathy, but would most probably get rebuked for indulging in such idle and enervating speculations. At ten years old, Ralph was sent to Eton; a piece of parental extravagance his uncle and aunt could neither comprehend nor approve. Why so much money should be lavished on a boy, whose education elsewhere for a quarter of the sum, they believed, could have been carried on equally well, was a wastefulness in their nephew they could never understand. Unwillingly enough they sent him, and under the firm conviction they were assisting to lay the foundation for all sorts of future extravagance. When her brother left, a craving came over little Margaret for the companionship of younger people. Her aunt, therefore, who had hitherto been her only instructress, sent her, with the sanction of her father, as a daily pupil to two amiable and intelligent Quaker ladies, who were educat-

ing a few young girls a little older than herself. This opened a new field to Margaret's young, ardent mind; and she eagerly set herself to acquire all the knowledge she had longed for, that Ralph and her father might find in her a companion and friend, when the vision of her future home should be realized. If none of the accomplishments of female education were included in her studies, if music and singing and dancing were considered only as a sinful waste of time, and snares set to catch young unwary hearts by our great enemy—Margaret yielded them without any visible regret, consoling herself that it left her more time for other things; and these, when her father returned, might be acquired under his sanction.

Deeply as Mr. Atherton had mourned the loss of his beloved Margaret, he had not long remained a widower. His second marriage was less one of love than expediency.

His own residence was far away from any other station, up the country, and here chance threw on his hands the orphan daughter of an officer, to whose aid he ministered during a sudden and fatal illness. Utterly unprovided for, with no relative or connection in India, and none to whom she could be sent in England, committed to his charge by the dying lips of her father,—there seemed no way open to him of fulfilling his trust short of offering to make her his wife. Pretty, half-educated, weak-minded, and indolent, the match was too much a matter of convenience to be rejected; and though nothing more than a feeling of gratitude for the shelter and home offered her animated the bosom of the new Mrs. Atherton, it was impossible to live with Ralph Atherton and not learn to love him. The news of her father's marriage startled poor little Margaret, and broke in rudely on her sunny pictures of the future; but her fertile imagination quickly recovered the shock, and set her off with a new train of ideas, in which the little brother and sisters she after a while heard of, formed a prominent part in the grouping round the happy Eng-

lish home to which she hoped to welcome them before very long; for Mr. Atherton's health was failing under a warm climate, and his physicians agreed in the necessity for his return, so soon as a successor could be appointed to his important sphere of duties.

Mr. Atherton lost considerably in the estimation of John and Sarah Waldron by his second marriage. The chivalrous feeling which prompted it they could not at all appreciate. But while they looked forward with anxious fears to the new mother who would claim their darling Margaret, they wisely forbore showing before her the doubts they entertained of the wisdom of her father's choice. "We must make her a useful woman, fit to fill her own mother's place in her father's family," was the constant thought of Miss Waldron; and well and laudably she carried out her intentions.

Nothing pleased the little girl better than assisting her aunt in her preparations for the annual gatherings of "friends" from the neighboring towns, when they transact the business of the Society, and by the interchange of their religious feelings and experience, strengthen the faith and stability of the sect. The airing of spare beds and snow-white linen; the dusting of rooms already guiltless of such disfiguring ugliness; the cookery of spiced meats and savory dishes; the tender chickens, large hams, and portly rounds of beef, with all the delicate fabrications of sweet dishes and rich cakes, in which Sarah Waldron prided herself,—these and a thousand other things, under the skilful superintendence of her aunt, in her clean brown holland apron and sleeves, Margaret delighted to join in; but she never could take kindly to the quiet, grave, old people, in their sombre dresses, who flocked round her uncle's hospitable table.

Perhaps Margaret inherited her father's prejudices; and though it often raised a sigh in her aunt's bosom for the want of religious zeal she feared it augured, she never could resist that niece's pleading to spend the greater part of those days in her own room.

Sometimes a young girl would come with her parents, and then Margaret would draw her away into her own room, or down into the sunny garden, and astonish her young guest no less by her own amusements than the deep thought and often wild speculations she loved to pour out into some more enthusiastic and youthful mind than her aunt's. The visits which most distressed Margaret were, when Quakers (often perfect strangers) came from all parts of the world, on purely religious errands — "Household Missionaries," if one may so style them, having what they called "family sittings" with the different members of each household. The deep gloomy awe, which seemed mysteriously to pervade both visitor and visited, was so utterly repugnant to her own bright cheerful spirit; the oracular tone, giving to any human ministry the air of an inspired address, revolted so against the best feelings of the child's heart, that she longed for an angel's tongue to frame her reasons into burning words against such self-constituted authority.

Her uncle, seeing how she despised and rejected all attempts to overcome her repugnance, wisely forbore to press it upon her; and though he encountered much opposition from those in authority over him, who accused him of not acting up to the "light of his inward monitor," in suffering an earthly love to mislead his judgment, they could not shake his resolve. "She is not a member of our Society," he said; "I have given her shelter until her father claims her of me. Her mother quitted friends for conscience' sake; if I did not agree in her reasons, I have no right to betray her confidence by taking advantage of my power over her child." And from that time Maggie was sheltered from those grim awful personages, whose very rebukes and denunciations were treasured up by her uncle and aunt as if they had really contained something of a mystic spell from Heaven.

Margaret's chief recreation was wandering up and down the nave of the old cathedral with her maid; watching the

shadows and sunlight as they fell across the massive pillars, and checkered the stone pavement with the reflected colors from the stained glass windows; poring over the old carved monuments on the gray walls, and sitting on the steps of the choir during service — her aunt would have forbidden her joining in it; listening in rapt attention to the deep tones of the organ, or the heart-stirring voices of the young choristers, whose places she often envied, as day by day she watched them trooping along to join their young voices in God's praise in his own beautiful temple.

Never did Margaret forget the moment when she was first folded in her father's arms, — that unknown but still loved father, with whom it had been her greatest pleasure to correspond, and who now gazed down upon her with eyes filled with tears, as she so vividly recalled to him the image of the Margaret of his heart's first love; her own timid anxious glance at the pretty delicate-looking lady they told her was her new mamma; and better still, when she found herself hugged and kissed by the curly-headed little Grace and Frank, and crept softly to the heap of shawls and cushions, over which a strange black ayah presided, and saw nestled up in them the tiny face of the little Ethelind. It seemed at that moment as if Margaret had found all she most longed to possess; and to be in the love of them all, and to nurse and care for little Ethie, to guide her tottering steps, and teach her lisping tongue, — to love her with her whole heart and soul, — soon became Margaret's great ambition. Neither John nor Sarah Waldron could part with Margaret without very great regret; it seemed to them as if the light of their home had been extinguished; neither did they easily reconcile themselves to her father's second wife. Mrs. Atherton's natural indolence and inactivity had been increased by delicate health; believing she really could not exert herself, the care of the family soon devolved on Mr. Atherton and his daughter; and by the time Margaret had reached her twentieth year,

the management of all household affairs had insensibly lapsed into her hands. Influenced by the stronger mind of her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Atherton, as well as Grace and Ethie, owed much of their education and formation of character to Margaret's careful superintendence, who, while her brother was pursuing his career at Eton and Cambridge, was brightening her father's home by her industry, energy, and never-failing good sense.

Mr. Atherton had made many friends in India, and through the interest of one of them he obtained, shortly after his return home, a small living in a little country village.

As livings go, it was a pretty good one; the stipend moderate, the population small, and the duties no more than could be readily performed without the aid of a curate. It possessed the advantage also of a good neighborhood; no slight one to a clever intelligent man, who liked the relaxation afforded him by intercourse with educated friends. Mrs. Atherton, who could never understand the reasons for any economy, would gladly have availed herself of any pretext for a gayer life; but this neither suited the wishes nor limited means of her more studious and retiring husband. Some years passed away, and then the deanery of Wylminstre becoming vacant, the inhabitants of Fairfield were startled by the unexpected offer of it made to Mr. Atherton. Various were the motives assigned for this strange freak of government, contrary to the hopes of a host of expectant candidates. Whatever they might really have been, it mattered little. Ralph Atherton shut himself up in his study, to ponder over his own fitness for such an office; and when he returned to his family, the letter accepting the deanery was already on its way to Downing Street.

Mr. Atherton knew well the load of responsibility he was heaping on his own head; but it was in his Master's service, and never having sought it, neither could he think it right to refuse it. Mrs. Atherton felt that it placed

them on a better footing with the world. She would live in the deanery house at Wylminstre, and have an establishment more after her heart; and her children would appear under many advantages they could never possess as only the pretty daughters of the rector of Fairfield.

Margaret's face brightened as she remembered it would take them back to dear old Wylminstre; that she should again live under the shadow of the glorious old cathedral walls, within sound of its deep, silvery bells, its pealing organ, its heart-stirring anthems; and that she should again be near her uncle and aunt Waldron, whose places in her warm heart had never been rivalled by her new mother. For six years only did Dean Atherton fulfil his duties, or Mrs. Atherton occupy the deanery. A cold taken in the cathedral, ending in influenza, with its prostrating effects, told on a constitution already weakened by hard work in a hot climate. His medical attendants became alarmed. Further advice was called in, but hope faded; and Margaret summoned Ralph from Cambridge, and Ethelind, who was visiting their old neighbors, Sir John and Lady Repworth; while she herself never for a moment left her father's bedside. Mrs. Atherton, who never commanded her feelings, distressed her husband by her lamentation and tears so much, that his medical attendants almost forbade her his presence; and while she sat weeping in her own room, on Margaret devolved the care of her father's few remaining hours. For worlds she would not have exchanged her place by his dying bed, where hour by hour she watched the fleeting breath, and anxiously listened to the few directions and wishes his weakness permitted him to express. Of that little there was more of anxious thought for the survivors than doubt or anxiety for himself; and Margaret tried to soothe his dying moments by the assurance that her mother and sisters should become her chief care, and all she would ever have done for him should now, for his sake, be equally performed for them.

## CHAPTER III.

RALPH ATHERTON, Margaret, and Grace were sitting in the old-fashioned wainscoted low-roofed library at the deanery; Mrs. Atherton and Ethelind had gone early to bed.

"Well, I have written my letter to Frank," Margaret said, as she closed up the envelope before her, and directed it; "so it will be ready for the China mail to-morrow."

"Poor fellow, what a blow it will be to him! and he will have no one to sympathize with him or to tell his trouble to," Grace added, as she put down her book, and began stirring up the half-expiring coals in the grate.

"I should imagine there was about as much sympathy in a gun room as one used to find in the long room at Eton," Ralph added, as he began tying up the various papers and bills he had been looking over and arranging.

"For which reason he will require all the more from home," Margaret replied, and added anxiously, "Don't you think Ethelind is looking very ill? Whenever one speaks to her, tears start into her eyes, and she never joins in conversation, or appears interested in any thing about her; and she looks so pale and thin, I cannot bear to look at her."

"I don't understand Ethelind," Grace said quickly; "I meant to have asked you about her several times, but we are seldom alone. I know she has felt papa's death very much; but it is time now to be a little recovered from the first shock, and yet I find her, if left alone for a few minutes, drowned in tears, and it is so unlike her to be out of spirits long."

"A first grief is very hard to bear; and she is very young," Margaret said with a sigh.

Ralph came and sat down by his sister. "Maggie," he said, "you will spoil Ethie; you have always a reason or an excuse for her."

"No, Ralph, I won't spoil her. I know well we should try and keep our feelings in our own control as much as possible; but she is very young, and

was a great darling of papa's, and it all came upon her so suddenly, with no time for preparation, and in the midst of her first gayety."

"Are you sure the gayety has had nothing to do with it?" Grace asked anxiously. "I don't mean to doubt her sorrow at our great loss, but it has struck me, from one or two things she has let fall,—her nervousness whenever the post comes in, and the anxiety she expresses to see Lady Repworth's letters to you,—that perhaps there is some other key to her altered looks."

"I hope in her eagerness to show off Ethelind's beauty Lady Repworth has not been leading her into trouble. She is not a person one can place much dependence upon," Ralph said quickly.

"She held papa in great dread," Grace replied; "she would scarcely have done any thing that would have displeased him."

"I would not trust to her dread of any body when her own interest was to be served," Ralph said sternly. "Her fear of my father was only her inability to understand him; his straightforward honesty of purpose and simplicity of heart always baffled her more worldly cunning, in a way she could never comprehend. With so many idle fellows hanging about her, I wonder almost how Ethie obtained leave to go there."

"Lady Repworth pleaded so hard, and Ethie wished it, and every body was so full of the Repworth ball, and mamma urged it, I know. Had Ethie been at all aware that even then papa was not feeling well, I am sure she would not have gone. Poor child," Margaret added, "I shall never forget her white face and terrified look when she reached home; or her sobbing so bitterly when she told me she had been so happy,—happier than she had ever been in her life,—and that this trial seemed as if it were a judgment upon her for having left dear papa."

"Well, if it proves to be only prostration of mind under a first acquaintance with sorrow and death, it will wear away with time and more active employment. We shall all experience before

long the excitement of finding a new home. In another fortnight the deanery must be given up."

"It seems hopeless consulting mamma," Margaret said. "What we do must be done by ourselves. She will consent to any thing we propose, and the sooner it is off our hands the better."

"I have arranged with the auctioneer so far, that as soon as you can take mamma and yourselves away, there will be a sale of the furniture."

"And where are we to go?" Grace asked sadly. "O Ralph!" she added, "if you had got a curacy, we might still all be together."

"It is better as it is, Gracie; mamma will prefer her own home, and Ralph must be left free and unshackled. Mamma is so fond of Cheltenham, and there are many of her old friends residing there, I have been thinking, if we could get lodgings at a moderate rate, she and Grace and Ethie could go there until our affairs are settled. There will be time enough then to consider our next step."

"But you would go with us, Margaret? you surely do not mean to leave us."

"You will be my first care, Grace; I promised my father that."

"But you will live with us?" Grace said anxiously. "We could never get on without you, Margaret."

"You have never tried yet, Grace; it is almost time you did. I will settle you in your new home, wherever it may be, but I cannot promise to be always with you. Remember, there is Frank to be considered; it is impossible he can yet live on his pay."

"I know that; but mamma will do what she can for Frank; his allowance must not fall upon you."

"Mamma will not have much to spare; and even as it is, so little is she accustomed to economize, I must trust to you, Grace, to make the most of her small income. I promised papa to take Frank off her hands, and in the mean time I must not be idle. Work is necessary to my peace of mind; in what way I have not fully determined."

Grace started up. "Margaret," she

said, "you mean to be a governess, I know you do; there is no other way in which you can earn money."

"You will see Margaret's advertisement in the paper before long, Grace," Ralph said, in a tone which drove all the blood into Grace's face and neck.

"O Ralph," she said pleadingly, "it is no subject for joking; Margaret will break mamma's heart if she does."

"Neither mamma's or yours, I hope, Grace, dear," Margaret replied with a smile. "You will soon learn to think I am right, though it seems strange to you now. It will be strange to myself also to give you up, and go amongst people I don't know; but we are not sent into the world to be idlers, and while you are filling my place at home, I shall try and make my way in the 'outer world.' We shall both have the consolation of at least endeavoring to do our duty. We have been dreamers hitherto; we must be workers now."

"You don't know how you will be despised and condemned; people will not understand you, and you will be miserable."

"I don't think so, and you *must* not. I have no intention of leaving you until I see you comfortably settled in your new home. This is a present duty, and must not be put aside for what as yet are only intentions. To-morrow I shall go to my uncle John; I don't think he or my aunt will discourage me, as you try to do, Gracie."

"Then the case is hopeless," Grace said shortly. "I cannot bear those people; they know nothing of the world: how can they judge what is right and proper for a dean's daughter?"

"They will acknowledge no exemption from her duties in a dean's daughter, I dare say; but they know what a Christian should do, and what Margaret Atherton ought to do in her present circumstances, and they will, I think, try and strengthen her in its performance."

The tears were running down Grace's cheeks; Margaret looked distressed. "O Gracie, dear, I had hoped better things of you," she said. "You are tired now, and your feelings overcome your

judgment. I don't know what I shall do; I have decided on nothing beyond this, that while I have health I must exert the powers God has given me for the good of my fellow-creatures. I shall look to you to help and assist me by reconciling mamma to plans which, let them be what they may, she will oppose."

Margaret lit a candle, and putting it into her sister's hand, hurried her to bed. It seemed the beginning of her difficulties; for she had yet her mother and Ethelind to contend with; and, if they had nothing else, they possessed an immense amount of pride and a dread of the world's laugh, which counteracts such an amount of good among many who would otherwise be useful members of society. But Margaret had resolved not to shrink lightly from her plans, sustained by Ralph's sanction and the approval of her uncle and aunt Waldron, who, however they might fail in estimating her object, would, she knew, fully appreciate her motives, and support her in carrying them into execution.

"You must not expect to give up your place at home without opposition," Ralph said, as Grace closed the door. "You will have endless difficulties to contend with, real and imaginary; you must be prepared to justify yourself with the assurance that your own judgment is right."

"I think I am prepared," Margaret said, quietly. "Poor Grace will be the first to follow my example, if need be. It takes her by surprise now. She is very resolute when once stirred up. I don't know how she will manage mamma alone, but it will not hurt her to try."

"When I get a curacy, if Grace finds she has too much on her hands, I must come to the rescue," Ralph said, as he drew his chair to the fire; and the two sat on, far into the night, arranging the proceedings for the next week, during which time Margaret was to take the family away to Cheltenham, and Ralph was to arrange for the sale of the dean's furniture and the breaking up of his small establishment.

As Margaret stole softly to her room, she could not resist her desire of going

into Ethie's room. The thought of any unshared sorrow through which her young sister might be struggling gave her pain, and she longed to ask her if in any way she could help her, or give her counsel or consolation.

Ethelind was awake, the bright moon shining full upon her as she lay watching it through the undrawn curtains of her window. Margaret fancied she saw traces of tears on her face, which she was hurriedly wiping away when her sister came to her bedside. Margaret extinguished the candle, and sitting down beside her, gradually drew from the full little heart the story of Ethie's sorrow, who, blushing scarlet at her own confession, poured it all out into the ear of that fond elder sister, between whom and herself no shadow of reserve had ever yet fallen.

#### CHAPTER IV.

ST. PETER'S clock struck eight as a hack cab drove up to the door in Eaton Place. A small drizzling rain fell, and the lamps flickered feebly in the gusty wind, which swept round the corners of the quiet street, disturbed only by the cabman's loud knock, which reverberated from wall to wall.

The driver shook the raindrops from his glazed hat and water-proof cape, as he opened the door of his crazy vehicle, and held out his moist hand for his fare. A muffled figure dropped the jingling coin into the extended palm, and with a spring rushed up the wet steps and through the open door before him. Standing in the warm, well-lighted hall, and divesting himself of his wrappings, the traveller asked a few hurried questions of the gray-headed old servant who had let him in, and telling him he need not announce his arrival, he bounded up the stairs to the drawing-room door. A tall and rather stately lady occupied a large arm-chair by the fire. Wax lights were burning on the table, on which lay a book with a pair of gold spectacles on its open pages. Two long needles and a large ball of colored wool were lying idly in her lap. She started up as her eyes



fell on the tall figure of her son, and the worsted rolled away to the other side of the room. Sir Philip Leigh stooped and kissed her cheek, and then quietly picked up the truant ball.

"I am afraid I startled you, mother," he said, "by my unexpected appearance. You seem alone: what has become of Di and Barbara?"

"My dear child, what can have brought you to town so suddenly? I thought you were dining at Repworth to-day."

"I left Repworth this morning, and came up by the express after luncheon. But where are my sisters? are they out?"

"Dining at the Mertons. Mrs. Merton takes them to the Opera to-night. But you must want some dinner;" and she put her hand to the bell-pull.

"Don't ring, mother; I have had all the dinner I shall take. I will wait, and have my tea with you by and by."

"But you have not answered my question, Philip. What brought you so suddenly to town?"

"I am in a difficulty, mother; and I have come to you to help me."

"I don't know what difficulty I can help you out of, I am sure; nevertheless let me hear what it is."

"You don't wish me to behave dishonorably, mother, do you?"

"Dishonorably, child! no Leigh ever did behave dishonorably that I ever heard of, and you are scarcely the one to begin."

Sir Philip smiled at his mother's family pride.

"It is well, perhaps, that Di and Barbara are out. I have a long story to tell you, and I may as well out with it all at once. Mother, I have at last lost my heart; and, like a good child, I am come to you for advice in my difficulties." Mrs. Leigh started. The color rose into her cheeks, and as suddenly faded away again. Her love for her tall, handsome son was something very like idolatry. She had seen him for the last ten years admired and courted by the first and fairest, and yet he had lived on without once losing his heart. She had almost taught herself to believe she

should never live to see a rival in his love and devotion to herself. And though an heir to his large estates would have gratified her pride, she was not prepared for this sudden and abrupt announcement of a rival to the possession of what hitherto she had looked on as peculiarly her own.

"You are old enough to judge for yourself," she said, recovering her self-possession. "If your choice is a prudent one, no one will rejoice to see you married more than I shall do."

"That is just the rub, mother. You, my sisters, the world, may not think it a prudent one. So before you congratulate yourself on the prospect of a daughter-in-law, you must listen to a long story."

"There are always excuses for a boy committing himself. I should be sorry, and I think you would too, Philip, if, at your age, the world had cause to laugh at you. But come, let me hear all about it."

Sir Philip rose up out of his chair; a bright color came into his face. Something in his mother's tone jarred on his feelings; but he recovered himself, and sat down.

"You know," he said, "Foley asked me to run down to Repworth, and join him at his quarters during the week the officers gave their ball to the neighborhood, by way of return for civilities shown them since they have been quartered there. Under Foley's care, it was sure to be a first-rate affair; and though abominating such things, I could not very graciously refuse Foley, who is such a capital fellow, besides being an old schoolfellow. Well, the night I reached Repworth he told me I must go with him and some of the rest of the fellows to Anton: some annual Easter ball was to be given there—a dull affair enough generally; but Lady Repworth had undertaken it this year, and had petitioned Foley to bring as many red-coats as he could muster, to try and inspire it with a little life and spirit. You know, mother, how I hate such things, but this, in a quiet country town, where I did not know a soul, was perfectly ab-

surd. But Foley, in his good nature, would hear of no excuse. Well, we dressed and dined at the hotel; and I sat sipping my wine and reading the papers until long after the dancing had commenced. At last, with some difficulty I threaded my way to the top of the room, where I could see Sir John Repworth standing by the fire. We chatted for some time, watching the dancers, when he left me to speak to some one else; and just at that moment a couple took their places opposite me. Who the fellow was I don't know; but the girl was the loveliest creature I had ever seen. I account myself a tolerably good judge of beauty, mother, as you know; and I think I have seen some good specimens of what is thought beauty in my time; but any thing approaching the surpassing loveliness of that girl's face, as she stood blushing and confused at the uncontrolled admiration she excited, I certainly never witnessed."

"What style of beauty was it, Philip?"

"I can't describe her, mother. I could give you no conception of her, if I did. Of course I tried to find out who she was; but I learned little beyond her being one of the Repworth Park party, and her ladyship's star of the evening,—the beauty, in fact, whom every body was striving to see and be introduced to. At last I learned she was a daughter of the dean of Wylminstre, that this was her first ball, and that she had been terribly annoyed at finding herself the subject of such undisguised admiration. You will laugh at me, mother, I dare say, when I tell you I never rested until I got an introduction. However, it was in vain to think of dancing. She was engaged for every quadrille; and she seemed so nervous and frightened at the sensation she created, it was a kindness to keep her away from the confusion which so bewildered her."

"Were you as pleased with her in conversation? Pretty faces often disappoint you when you are near to them. A girl may be very pretty and very stupid at the same time."

"She was too timid to say much; but

she appeared quite sensible, and as natural and artless as a child. Indeed, her simplicity, her refinement, and her sweet face fairly took me by storm; she was so fresh and unspoiled by the world, so unlike the beauties one sees every day. I felt quite angry and annoyed when her hand was claimed by some young fellow, who looked all sorts of triumph at me as he led her into the dancing room. I had, however, secured her for the first dance at Repworth; and I contrived to see her to her carriage, when Lady Repworth broke up the party by her return home. You may be sure I got well quizzed by Foley as we drove back; but I felt too serious myself to care much for him. The next morning he asked me to leave cards at the Park. He was too busy to go. You may be sure I was not slow in accepting the offer of his horses and groom, and any excuse for a further interview with Miss Atherton; besides, a brisk canter across the downs was no bad thing after the late hours the night before. Lady Repworth was at home; Miss Atherton had not returned from the village, which had formerly been her father's parish, and whither she had gone to see some of the cottagers. Of course I tried to learn all I could of her family. Lady Repworth spoke well of the dean, though she wondered what had influenced the government in selecting him for the deanery. She called him a zealous, well-meaning parish priest, whose place had never been satisfactorily filled at Fairfield since he gave up the living; hinted at some peculiar views he held, which I thought she did not approve; said his wife was a poor, pretty, empty-headed woman, who seemed of very little use to her husband; that he had educated and brought up three as pretty girls, and two as handsome sons, as you would find in any family. It was a kindness to the neighborhood, she added, to introduce a pretty face, especially one so fresh and bright as Ethelind Atherton's; and she took great credit to herself for having, with great difficulty, persuaded the dean to let the youngest accompany them to the officers' ball at Repworth."

"Ethelind did you call her, Philip? My goodness, what a name!"

"Well, mother, it is an odd one I own, sounding something after the Clarissa and Evelina style of Madame D'Arblay's days; but we are not responsible for our names, you know; and shortened into Ethel or Ethie, as she says they call her at home, it does not sound so much out of the way."

His mother smiled. "Names go for very little, after all, when the heart is touched, — and yours must be, Philip, for you to have learned already Miss Atherton's pet name."

Sir Philip's color deepened at his mother's sarcasm.

"Dear mother," he said, "be merciful to your son's weakness. Remember, I am laying bare my heart to you without reserve. In my difficulty I come to you for advice. You cannot give it unless you hear all my story — a very stupid one to you, I dare say; but to me it involves consequences which may influence my whole life."

"Forgive me, Philip; I did not mean to hurt your feelings," Mrs. Leigh said. "But remember, you are taking me quite by surprise; I cannot all at once realize the truth of what you tell me."

"I can hardly do that myself yet, mother," Sir Philip answered, in a tone which sounded not unlike a sigh. He went on: "I chatted with Lady Repworth until Miss Atherton's return; and if I had thought her lovely the night before, I was not a whit disappointed in her in broad sunshine. I wish I could show her to you. She has large soft violet eyes, with clear cut white lids, and dark lashes throwing a shadow upon her cheeks. Her hair is a bright brown, with a golden tinge where the light falls upon it. Her eyebrows straight on her broad low forehead, and some shades darker than her hair. Her complexion bright and clear, with a soft pearly hue on it, like a young rose. Her dress was simplicity itself, and she seemed quite free and unrestrained, and looked pleased at my unexpected appearance. Lady Repworth asked me to take luncheon with them; and I sat on, until

I thought all, even Miss Atherton herself, would guess my secret; so I first secured her for the opening quadrille, and as many more as I dared ask for, and then resolutely ordered my horse and rode back to Repworth. How I passed the time I don't know; I tried to think — to realize the true state of my feelings, and to ask myself what I meant to do next. I could decide on nothing; so I determined to let things take their course until after the ball. It was a capital affair. Foley spared no time or expense in getting it well up; and I must own it did him and his brother officers great credit. There was no end of pink and white calico, green wreaths, gas-lights, flags, military devices, refreshments, and a band and supper which no London affair could have exceeded. Every thing, in short, was brilliant, and the whole thing went off admirably. All my youthful ardor returned, and I found myself dancing away with my lovely partner, who welcomed me with a glad smile of recognition as I received her at the door. It was well for me I had secured my partner, for I could see how, down to the youngest ensign in the room, they watched and wondered at my good fortune; and I heard more than one envious fellow exclaim, 'Well, no one can say Leigh is not in for it now.' At last it all came to an end. Lady Repworth declared she must go. Sir John asked Foley and myself to dine and sleep at the Park next day. I heard Miss Atherton tell a lady near her she was to return to Wylminster the day but one following. My brain was in a whirl; I thought, if I miss her now, I may lose her entirely. The bare suggestion alarmed me. I asked her why she was to return home so soon. She replied, her papa was not well, and now this ball was over, it would be unkind to stop away longer. I asked if she would be at Repworth when Foley and I dined there. She said she hoped so; and something in her look and tone convinced me her words meant more than they expressed. As I wrapped her cloak round her, I could not resist saying, as we stood a little apart from the rest,

waiting for the carriage to draw up, 'Miss Atherton, if I ride over to the Park to-morrow by twelve o'clock, should I find you alone and disengaged? I am anxious for a little private conversation with you; I may not get the opportunity in the evening.' She looked up into my face, her large eyes full of inquiry, as if she did not quite comprehend what I meant. 'I shall be at the school at Fairfield, most likely, about that time,' she said very gravely; 'if you call there as you pass through the village, we can walk across the Park together home.' I could not help adding, 'I want to see you on a subject of little interest to you, perhaps, but to me of the deepest importance. You may depend upon my being there.' I believe, for the first time, a glimmering of the truth flashed across her. She started; her eyes fell, and a bright color, and then as sudden a paleness, spread over her face, and I could feel her hand tremble as it rested against my arm; but she did not turn away her eyes when I finally shook hands with her, after they were in the carriage, and I am sure I saw tears in them as the lights flashed across her face when they drove away."

Sir Philip paused; his voice had grown husky and low. His mother, though she kept her eyes fixed on him, did not speak. When he had recovered himself, he went on. "I had little or no sleep that night, and the next morning, leaving Foley to follow at his leisure, I made the excuse of calling somewhere on the road, and galloped on to Fairfield. I could neither see nor hear any thing of Miss Atherton; and, fearing I had made some egregious blunder, I slowly made my way up to the house. In the Park I encountered Sir John and his bailiff, making a tour of the farm buildings. He joined me, and before I had time to ask, informed me a telegraphic despatch awaited their return the night before, summoning Miss Atherton home to her father's death-bed; that there was not a shadow of hope; indeed, it only appeared doubtful whether she would find him alive on her return. Both he and Lady Repworth la-

mented the sudden death of the dean, and they spoke of it as a complete break up to the family. Sir John even thought it would compel them to earn their own bread. He regretted that Mr. Atherton had ever been persuaded into accepting the deanery, as it had entailed heavy expenses on him, which were unavoidable; and it would, of course, be now much harder for his children to go out into the world, after filling a higher station, than if they had simply been the orphan daughters of a poor clergyman. Lady Repworth wondered what they could possibly do. They had been educated in such a strange mixture of Quakerism and High-Church notions, as to render them quite unfit for governesses, of whom nowadays so much was expected; besides which, beauty in a governess was rather to be avoided than desired, especially when the governess was young and the family growing up. The dean's odd views on religious subjects she attributed to the Quaker blood which in some way—she could not exactly tell how—was mixed up in the family. Sir John lamented they had not married earlier; there had been some report of the eldest being engaged a long while ago, but he forgot how it ended—in some strange way, he thought, but he was not sure. The mother would be a serious drawback to any matrimonial speculations; and, really, beauty without money went a little way in tempting men to marry. In short, I saw at once the tables at Repworth were turned. As the dean's daughter, Miss Atherton was a beauty, and Lady Repworth could afford to patronize her and bring her out; but simply as the pretty Miss Atherton, without money, station, or connections, it was a totally different matter, and there was nothing to be done for it but quietly let the poor girl down. For once I saw the intense hollowness of the world in its true light, and how people cheat themselves into a belief in their virtue, when they set up, and lament in full pathos, the hard destiny of some luckless mortal, without stretching out a finger to save the poor victim a single throb of pain."

"You forget, my dear Philip, in your present excited feelings," Mrs. Leigh said, "that Sir John's view of the matter was the one which every body else would naturally take."

"No: I made allowance for it, mother, and concluded I ought perhaps to be thankful I have had time to pause and consider before committing myself further. Such, I know, was Foley's opinion of the matter; for he strenuously opposed my thinking any more of the connection. The Repworths, he said, told him privately they thought I had had a very lucky escape; and that I had no business, with my good family and large property, to marry a girl beneath me, when I could choose a wife from the aristocracy of England. I waited until news came of the dean's death, which of itself precludes my taking any further steps at present, and then I hurried up to town to ask your advice."

"I think Colonel Foley was quite right, Philip," Mrs. Leigh said. "Your position, your wealth, your connections, all entitle you to choose a wife from the upper ranks of society. I should bitterly grieve, after your waiting so many years, if you allied yourself to some low family whom you could not recognize, though you might choose to make one of them your wife. You have been caught by a pretty face. This love-fit you acknowledge to be a sudden one. You know nothing of her temper or disposition. A little time may make a great change in your feelings. You have not yet committed yourself, and on no pretext could you see the girl for some time. Think it all calmly over; reason with yourself; look at it in every light; go into society; try change—"

Sir Philip got up out of his chair, and stood leaning on the mantel-shelf, opposite his mother. He fixed his eyes on her face.

"Mother," he said, "listen to me. You know that no one, not even yourself, is more keenly sensitive to the world's sneers than I am. You know how little hitherto I have cared about female attractions. I have now met the loveliest girl I ever saw, and she has

carried away my heart captive at once: No one, not even yourself, values more highly than I do the privileges of birth and connection: of wealth I have enough and to spare; my marriage need never be a mercenary one. I have not, I acknowledge, actually proposed to her, but I have given her just cause to believe I shall do so. Ask yourself if you do not think I should be acting like a coward and a villain, if I let this fact of her father's death prevent my doing it at the proper time."

"If you take it in that light, Philip, there is no help for it; it was hardly worth while asking my advice at all. But how many girls there are who are danced and flirted with in a ball room, and perhaps never in their lives see their admirers again! How many men single out some pretty girl, and fancy themselves in love with her, and then find, on cooler reflection, that a pleasant partner in a ball room is not always exactly the person you would choose for a partner for life!"

"And the poor girl is left to die of a broken heart."

"Girls don't die of broken hearts any more than men do; such things are imaginary, not real, you may depend on it."

"If they don't die of broken hearts, they marry the first scamp who offers himself; and that is worse, perhaps."

"But her family—her Quakerism. I don't exactly know what Quakerism is, except that one sees occasionally some strange, demure-looking man or woman in a horrid brown dress, making perfect guys of themselves; who belong, I believe, to a sect who are in reality only half Christians. I am sure I would far rather you married a Roman Catholic at once."

"I know no more about Quakerism, mother, than you do; and I have only Lady Repworth's word for it that she is such: but, as I said before, the girl is young, and may be formed into any thing. If her father's principles had been so very singular, it is hardly likely he would have got his deanery. As to her family, I know nothing of them, and

never need do so, after Ethel is really mine."

"But would she have you, do you think, under such conditions? And a refusal from such a quarter would be very, very mortifying, to say the least of it."

"It would shock her to tell her so, no doubt; therefore I should avoid doing so: but I could soon contrive to wean her away from them; and once mine, she would soon learn to forget them. We shall be a nine days' wonder, I suppose," he added, "but there is no help for it. I must try my chance. If I get refused, well and good; you will have me with you, mother, to the end of your days. If I am accepted, I will take her abroad directly. By the time we return we shall have shaken into our right places, and the world will have quite forgotten we were ever talked about."

Andrew's entrance with the tea tray broke in abruptly on the conversation. Neither Mrs. Leigh nor her son could enter fully into common topics; they each found themselves relapsing into long reveries; so, without waiting the return of the carriage from the Opera, the mother and son wished each other good night, and retired to their own rooms.

#### CHAPTER V.

THREE months had passed; Mrs. Atherton and her daughters had quitted the deanery. Every body pitied them, and wondered how they would exist on the little the dean had contrived, by large insurances, to save for them.

Curiosity tempted half Wylminster to the sale at the deanery. The dean's simplicity of taste and mode of life were visible enough to the thoughtless crowd of idle people who loitered over the low-roofed wainscoted rooms, where the furniture was lotted out for the auctioneer's hammer. Many bid for some little article, to preserve as a slight memorial of a man whom all alike loved and revered. Every bidder, however, paused as John Waldron, in his plain coat and broad-brimmed hat, offered a startling sum for a small, well-used, old-fash-

ioned writing table, at which the dean had for many years penned his sermons, and the large easy leathern chair which accompanied it. Even the brokers themselves, a very relentless set of people, ceased when they saw how resolutely the old gentleman stood his ground. Gaining courage by his success, Mr. Waldron bid again boldly for the small finger-organ, which always stood in the dean's study, and on which Margaret had so resolutely overcome the neglect of her youth, less to gratify her own natural taste than her father's intense enthusiasm for sacred music. A smile broke out on the faces of the crowd at the incongruity of the old Quaker's purchase; but even this did not deter him from his purpose, or prevent his adding a curiously antique silver tea service, which was so small as to be contained in a small oak box, and whose delicate workmanship was the admiration of the keen-eyed Israelites, who never fail to flock to all gatherings of such a nature as this sale at the deanery. John Waldron looked triumphant when he returned home to his dinner in Acre Lane, in spite of the unmoved face he had displayed during the excitement of the auction room. "Thou wilt find room for them, Sarah," he said to his sister, "until our Maggie comes back to us. I could not bear to see those things passing into other hands; but it cost me a sharp morning's work to secure them, I can tell thee."

"It will indeed be a pleasant surprise for her, poor child," Miss Waldron replied. "Susannah told our Betsy it had grieved the poor thing sadly to leave them; but she feared it would be a selfish waste of money, so she said no more about it. I am glad Betty thought to tell me." And the kind-hearted old lady trotted off into her bright airy kitchen, — bright from the reflection of its brilliant dish-covers and saucepans, and the clean and spotless stone floor, — to give orders to the no less pleased old servant for the careful stowing away of the furniture until such times as Margaret should claim them.

Ralph had staid at his uncle's until

the sale was over, and all the affairs of his father duly arranged; and then he had once more returned to Cambridge, where he was now tutor and fellow of his college.

The evening sun was shining brightly, and sending long shadows on the pavement of the old city, when Margaret Atherton, giving her portmanteau and carpet-bag to a porter at the station, and pulling down her thick crape veil, walked down the long street with her wrapping-shawl across her arm. She was commencing her new life, and accommodating herself to independence. Thankful for not meeting a single face she recognized, she tripped lightly across the well-kept court, and up the clean steps of the stiff little portico. Old Betty gave her a joyful recognition; and only stopping to divest herself of her shawl, and throwing back her veil, she stood unannounced in the pleasant back parlor, where her uncle and aunt were seated at their cheerful tea. To be pressed fondly to the warm bosom of her aunt Sarah, and to feel the kind kiss of her uncle on her forehead, was but the work of a moment; the next, Margaret had thrown off her bonnet and cloak, and was sitting in her old place by her aunt's side, enjoying a cup of refreshing tea, and doing full justice to Betty's buttered toast,—such toast as Margaret well knew could be fabricated nowhere as it always issued out of Betty's hands.

“So thou hast ventured on this long journey alone, Margaret, and walked all the way from the station. Why not have sent us a line, and my brother would have met thee?”

“The opportunity for trying my power of independence was too good to be missed, aunt Sarah; but I got on very well.”

“Thou art right, my dear; a woman who cannot help herself is a useless thing, and of no service to others. How will thy mother and sisters get on without thee?”

“There is no reason why they should not, aunt; they are in very comfortable lodgings. Mamma can sit at her win-

dow, and see all the gayety going on without the trouble of going out.”

“And who will take care of them? Thy mother will never make two ends meet if the household economy is trusted to her; we shall soon hear of thy being summoned back to look after it.”

“I hope not, uncle John,” Margaret replied, with a smile. “I have left Gracie in trust, and Susannah promises to help her; and though Grace is a little nervous over her responsibilities, she is very anxious to do her best.”

“And so Ralph means to try and get a curacy?—at least, so he told me before he left. I don't quite understand it all; but I should have thought he was doing better where he is.”

“Ralph would prefer parish work; and though it would hardly be so remunerative, it is what papa always hoped for him,” Margaret said thoughtfully.

“If Ralph has a curacy, he will want a housekeeper;—does he mean to take in all the family? I would have him beware of that young thing Ethie, if he takes pupils, which of course he will try to do, if he can get them. She will turn all their heads with her pretty face. Ralph must keep clear of thy mother and the girls;—but it is his place to look after thy comforts, child.”

“Ralph won't forget me, uncle; nor do I think,” she added, with a smile, “that he will be very long without a housekeeper. But however that may be, I too have found work to do. Frank cannot possibly live on his pay for the next three or four years; and during that time I hope, by a little exertion, not only to make myself a useful, active member of society, but to be able to continue his allowance the same as when dear papa was alive.”

“I have no opinion of the navy,—or the army either, for that matter,—teaching young fellows all sorts of idleness and extravagance; especially if a boy like Frank cannot keep himself out of his pay, but must depend on a sister's earnings to keep him going. Another argument, if any were wanted, in favor of my peace principles,” Mr. Waldron added, rather testily.

"We won't fight that battle over again, uncle John," Margaret replied, with a laugh; "I shall leave Frank to attack you himself, when he comes back. I want to tell you what I propose doing myself; and I hope you will approve of that, at all events.

"A clergyman and his sister occupied the lower part of the house in which my mother has the drawing-room floor. Finding that the lady was a great invalid, I introduced myself, and offered any help I could render them during my stay. I found them particularly nice people. The brother had not long come into possession of a living in a country parish, which has for years been sadly neglected, and he was anxiously inquiring about for some active person, beyond a mere schoolmistress, who would assist him in bringing the school and parish into something like working order. All the schoolmistresses he had hitherto had had either thrown it up in despair, or had given him more trouble than they did good; and his sister was precluded from rendering him any help. Well, it seemed just the opportunity I wished for, as it would perhaps enable me to put in practice several little schemes which papa and I often talked over, and also give me employment at once. So I offered him my services, frankly stating my reasons for doing so, naming the salary I should require, and making him fully understand I should only undertake it for a few months, which should be terminable by either party, if desired."

"And pray how old may this said clergyman be?" her uncle asked, with a comical look at Margaret, which made the blood rise into her usually pale face. "If thou art not quite so pretty as thy sisters, thou art a fair sample of what a man would choose in a young wife; and it's my place now to look after thee, and see that thou dost not fall into rough hands."

"Too old to be caught by a pretty face, uncle," Margaret replied. "His sister looks fifty at least, and I heard her say her brother was her senior in age. They know too as much of my belong-

ings as it was needful to explain to them in making my agreement with them. If I like the work, and they like me and my ways, I am to remain as long as I please; but I am also free to give it up whenever I feel inclined."

"Well, thou art setting a good example to others of doing what thou thinkest right. I am sure I for one shall wish thee all success, child."

"Dear uncle John, I am so glad to hear you say so; a little sympathy and encouragement I stand sadly in need of, after all the hard battles I have had to fight with mamma and Gracie ever since I left Wylminstre. Grace, I know, has reasoned against her better judgment; yet still it seems hard to be always struggling against the wishes of those we love best."

Miss Waldron took Margaret's hand. "Never fear, child," she said kindly. "They will see it all clearly enough by and by. If they knew thee as well as I do, they would be more willing to trust thy judgment than their own. Now come with me; I have something here to show thee." And the kind old lady unlocked the little carved oak chest, and displayed, to her niece's great delight, her own mother's silver tea service, which had been her uncle John's wedding present to his niece on her wedding day.

"I could not let it go away out of the family," she said, with a pleasant smile. "It was my mother's before it was thine; and now I give it to thee. Thy uncle's gifts are in the store room above. Neither thy father's writing-table and chair, nor thy own organ, would he suffer any one to outbid him for at the sale. He knew how thou wouldst value them; and now they are all thine."

"My dear kind uncle and aunt!" was all Margaret could trust herself to utter. But they did not need thanks; Margaret's tearful eyes and grateful smiles were an ample return for their gifts.

Miss Waldron led Margaret away to her own old room, to rest herself after her long journey; and the following week was spent in making the few arrangements her plans required,—visit-



ing her old friends, and settling the few matters connected with the deanery which now remained to be done; and then, bidding her uncle and aunt a reluctant good by, she left them for her yet untried life at Deighton.

#### CHAPTER VI.

It was a long day's journey by railway, and an omnibus put Margaret down at her own door. Miss Weldon had earnestly pressed her to go to the rectory for a week or two, even if she would not consent to reside there entirely, as she and her brother were anxious she should do; but this Margaret as resolutely declined. She would begin her life as she meant to continue it. She wished no one to know it was not such as she had been accustomed to. She desired above all things to avoid becoming a heroine.

The village consisted principally of one long straggling street, composed of a number of detached cottages, varying in tidiness and respectability. Here and there a shop broke the uniformity of the line, and the carpenter's and blacksmith's workshops projected out into the road. The roofs of two or three farm houses were seen above the low chimneys of the cottages; and close to the church and the school house, which almost joined the churchyard, and at the extremity of the village, rose the picturesque, though neglected looking rectory.

Margaret's heart beat quicker as the driver of the omnibus lifted down her boxes, and carried them through the wicket-gate and up to the door of her new home. A respectable though poor woman was in the pleasant, low-roofed, airy sitting room, into which the door opened, engaged in blowing away, with an immense pair of bellows, at the bright wood fire on the hearth.

"Lawk-a-daisy!" she exclaimed, starting up as Margaret lifted the latch, "why, if here ain't the new governess come a'ready, I declare, and I didn't expect to see 'e for the next half hour!" and seizing hold of the straps of the

portmanteau, she helped vigorously to get it within the door of the bright, cheerful-looking room.

She had spread on the deal table a clean white cloth, on which was placed a blue and white cup and saucer, a black china teapot, and a huge loaf of bread. It was, at all events, a more cheerful welcome than she had expected. Every thing looked scrupulously clean and neat, and a warm "homish" feeling took instant possession of the heart of the new tenant.

Margaret stood chatting for a few minutes with the old woman, and then walked into the opposite door, where, in the small comfortable room, which her attendant told her was her own dormitory, a neat white bed, a strip of carpet, a few painted chairs, and a chest of deal drawers and washstand, formed the chief articles of furniture.

While Margaret took off her bonnet and cloak, and refreshed herself with a good wash after her long dusty journey, the old woman was busy making her a cup of tea; and hungry and tired, Margaret thought she had never tasted any bread so sweet as this from the large brown loaf, which, with an egg and a rasher of bacon, constituted her dinner and tea.

She was in the midst of her unpacking when a gentle tap at the door arrested her; and with the summons from the old woman to "come in," a young girl, about twenty, with a pleasant rosy face and bright laughing eyes, stood within the threshold. She started a little at the tall figure in black which met her view. No one could look in Margaret's soft violet eyes and colorless cheeks, — the bands of her glossy brown hair drawn back from her broad, white, and rather low forehead, and twisted simply round her small classical head; her dress of black stuff, with no relief save the plain white collar and cuffs; and her small, delicately-formed hands, which showed at a glance how little they had been used to work, — without being struck with the contrast she presented to the common class of school-mistresses.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Atherton," she said, with a heightened color, and pausing as if uncertain how to address the stranger; "but Miss Weldon is a great invalid, and cannot get out, as I believe you know; and she has deputed me to see that your rooms are comfortable, and that you have all you require after your journey. I hope you have found it as you like?"

"I am quite charmed with my new home; and to prove it, you see," Margaret replied, "I have not only taken possession, but have commenced unpacking my few valuables."

"Do let me help you; you do not look as if you were strong enough to move that trunk;" and she started forward to relieve Margaret, who was going to assist the old woman in carrying it into the inner room.

The young girl seemed irresistibly taken with the appearance of the new governess. "I ought to tell you, Miss Atherton, who I am," she said. "My father is one of the largest farmers in Deighton. He holds the Church Farm, as we call it; and I am his eldest daughter. My name is Annie Morley. My mother likes me to be useful, and I often go to the rectory to execute little errands or messages for poor Miss Weldon, who is seldom off her sofa. She has sent me now to see to your comforts; for she is anxious you should have all you require. You do not look as if you had ever done any thing for yourself before," she added.

"Indeed I am not quite so useless as you think," Margaret said, with a smile; "and though the place and the people, and their ways, may be a little strange to me at first, I am already learning very fast, and do not doubt I shall get on very well."

"I am sure my mother would not like you should sleep here alone, if she only saw you, Miss Atherton. The last schoolmistress preferred it; so we did not like to engage any one until we had seen you."

"Perhaps this good woman will stay with me to-night; to-morrow I may be able to find some girl in the parish who

can do all I shall require. Do you think you could find one for me, Miss Morley?"

"I could bring you a dozen in five minutes; but they are all so wild and uncouth, I fear they would not help you. Will you let me assist you to unpack those books and put them on the shelves; and then, while you call with me on Miss Weldon, who cannot come to you, I will send round our little maid, with orders for her to stay and sleep at the school house to-night. This will give you time to make your own arrangements to-morrow."

There was too much simple kindness in all this for Margaret to spoil it by disputing the point; and having arranged her few things in her drawers, and filled her book shelves with the volumes she had brought with her, she put on her bonnet and shawl, and walked with her new friend to the rectory.

She found Miss Weldon stretched on her sofa, looking as pale and attenuated as she had seen her in Cheltenham. Her brother, a middle-aged man, with gray hair, and deep lines across his broad, open forehead, was putting on his hat in the hall, preparatory to making Margaret a call in her new home.

They both welcomed her most kindly, and entered so heartily into all her plans for the future, that Margaret already felt her heart lightened of half its load; and instead of feeling desolate and lonely, she seemed really to have fallen amongst kind friends, who would support and strengthen her in the work she had undertaken. So great a stimulus was this to her mind, that she herself soon learned to wonder at how much a resolute spirit and a hopeful disposition might achieve in the midst of those provoking little difficulties and annoyances which are often far more trying to bear than greater obstacles.

By the time the few treasures had reached her which her uncle had rescued from the deanery sale, she had succeeded not only in obtaining a little servant maid from among the village girls, but had also collected in the school room a very respectable class of eager, earnest

little faces, who, though resolutely bent on rebelling against the authority of a governess, now vied anxiously with each other as to who should win the reward of a kind word, and a smile of approbation, from the beautiful lady in black, who not only taught them to read and write, but to work in her garden, make her clothes, wash and iron them, cook her small dinners, and then reward them by telling them some delightful story, or playing to them a hymn or a carol on her own organ.

Margaret soon learned the value of every moment of the day. Her mornings were those of an infant schoolmistress, when the little "toddling wee things" came about her; some of them hardly able to do without a sister to nurse and care for them. This she felt was the hardest part of her day's work; but it came when she was fresh and bright, and better able to cope with bodily fatigue than she would have been at the end of the day, when her mental powers had been taxed and tried. It gave the elder children an opportunity of assisting their parents, either by their help at home or in the fields. In the afternoons the mothers had their little ones at home, and Margaret the boys and girls from eight to twelve years old. It was not much she attempted to teach them, but that little was well and properly done. To read and write, and master the three first rules in arithmetic, with needlework, which included the cutting out, making, and mending their own clothes, was the regular employment of the school; reserving to those who showed any desire for further improvement as much history and geography as should stimulate them to work for their own sakes, rather than from any exclusive wish to please her. But the favorite class,—that one which every well-disposed boy or girl longed for,—that one which Annie Morley and her sisters, and the other farmers' daughters, soon learned to try and help her in,—was Margaret's evening class, which was open four nights in every week, for those boys and girls who, busy in their day's labors, could only attend when

their other work was done. The reading, the ciphering, the history, the singing,—the long, quiet chats upon any abstruse point,—the impromptu stories to illustrate some moral or home truth,—who but the very bad,—and, alas! in every village some such are to be found,—did not strive hard for the privilege of entering into that class!

Mr. Weldon maintained no garden in Deignton was half so gay as Margaret's. No one in the village could compete with her young gardeners for early vegetables, or full ripe fruit; and not an apple or a pear, or a tempting bunch of cherries, ever disappeared from her trees. They were "their own lady's trees," and an angel's presence would hardly have rendered them more sacred.

"I can't tell what you have done to us all, Miss Atherton," Annie Morley would say; "but you have won all our hearts. Even the very cottages look cleaner, and the mothers of the children are more civil and more obliging than they ever were before. My father, who always maintained that teaching poor children was only one way of making them saucy and good for nothing, has quite come round, and declares it will be a shame to the rate payers if your salary is not raised at once."

Miss Weldon, too, had learned to look out for the visits of her kind friend, who so constantly found some little advice to ask, or pleasant victory to relate; and Mr. Weldon would take his seat on one of the benches of the school room, and listen to Margaret lecturing her eager little audience, and watch the expression of genuine love which gleamed out of the little upturned faces, and wonder what secret influence it was working such marvels in the long-neglected parish, which even to his untiring energies had hitherto presented such disheartening obstacles.

However sanguine Margaret's natural temperament might have been, she was not elated now. She could not mark as others did the progress she was making, or the daily improving aspect of the younger population of Deignton. Still she had set herself the task; and if not

very hopeful, neither was she very readily turned from her purpose when she had once decided in her own mind that that purpose was a good one. What she most longed for was the companionship of her young sisters, from whom she had never before been separated. Often when her shutters were closed, and her little servant asleep in bed, she would draw her chair to the fire, and sit thinking of those dearest to her, from whom she had separated herself; going over in her mind the scenes of her past life, and the limited prospects the future held out to her view. Sometimes Mr. Weldon would sit chatting with her until long after the summer sun had set, and the moon had risen on the clear evening sky. She always had some fresh scheme to discuss, a hope of remedying some evil or encouraging some good, which made him come and lay his plans before Margaret, of whose judgment he had the highest opinion. His sister's invalid health precluded her entering fully into all his schemes; while Margaret's more intimate acquaintance with the people, and sound practical sense, exactly fitted her to enter into and understand all the difficulties which opposed themselves to the rector's anxious endeavors to repair the evil of many years' neglect. Besides this, he and Margaret were organizing a village choir, and he often came to listen to the young voices practising their hymns and chants to the pealing strains of that organ which, in her isolated home, had now become the only recreation in which she freely indulged.

"If I did not fancy you had more color on your cheeks, Miss Atherton, than when you first came to us, I should fear my curacy was too hard work for you." Mr. Weldon liked always to call Margaret his curate. "I do not believe any schoolmistress, at twice your stipend, would work half as hard as you do."

"Perhaps she would not take the same interest in her work. You forget there is a little pride mixed up with my efforts. I have struck out my own path, and it would be a terrible mortification to feel I had overrated my own powers. Time

has slipped away faster than I ever knew it go before, which, I suppose, I must attribute to my busy life. I already begin to look on Deignton as my home."

"Wait until the harvest comes, and you close up your shutters and go off for your six weeks' grace. I fear, when you get among old faces and fond hearts, Deignton will stand a poor chance of being thought your home."

"We will not anticipate, Mr. Weldon; it is a bad plan. I always find I can do my work best when I have faith enough to leave the future entirely in God's hands."

"While you can do that you are safe; but I fear there are not many of us who attain it. The world sticks too tightly to us."

Mr. Weldon walked to the window, and looked out on the broad landscape. Presently he turned round to Margaret. "Do you know," he said, "I have been thinking that if we could take one of the bigger girls in the parish entirely away from her home, and teach her to be your assistant, it would very much relieve you from your duties. Neither my sister nor myself like to see you slaving away as you do from morning till night, without time for rest or recreation."

"I think myself, Mr. Weldon, it would be as well to bear in mind that my stay at Deignton is necessarily very uncertain; and I have long thought Rachel Gray, who already assists me so well, would, with care and teaching, make a very good schoolmistress; she is so steady and persevering, and so fond of children, besides being my very best scholar. Perhaps you would consult her mother about it when you see her next."

"There will be no difficulty in that quarter now, Miss Atherton; all the horror of a schoolmistress died away with your presence. To be any thing belonging to you seems just now the great prize for which all Deignton is striving. We shall some of us get at last to envying your popularity."

Margaret laughed. "Mine is a very innocent one, Mr. Weldon, and need not cause you much uneasiness. My

schemes, perhaps, are more to be dreaded by you ; for I warned you the other day I was very full of them. If I venture to broach one or two of them now, you must promise to nip them in the bud if they seem to your judgment too absurd to be retained."

"I will undertake to do that, depend upon it. Now let us have scheme the first."

"Well, then, I have been thinking that if I had two or three of the biggest girls entirely with me, I could better fit them for service than I can do in their mothers' homes. I do not want many, and only such as are really anxious to get on."

"And how do you propose accommodating them in your present establishment?" And Mr. Weldon's eye ran round the limits of Margaret's own room. "You will be driven to the necessity of turning the school room into a man-of-war, and slinging up hammocks for your crew."

"Do you not think the shed adjoining the school room might be converted into two or three decent little dormitories? I don't care how small they are; and then, by making the wash house into a kitchen, I think I should have full scope for my energies."

"Well done, Miss Atherton! I declare, you quite outstrip me in scheming. But come, let us hear the whole of it:—how do you propose employing them?"

"That may prove a difficulty; but I think, if you can trust me, I can accomplish it. They must assist me in the school and in my own domestic requirements, of course. I may also call in your aid, and Miss Weldon's."

"Miss Weldon's! Poor soul, I only wish she could aid you, Miss Atherton."

"She will not object to an occasional waiting maid; nor Hester to a little assistance in the kitchen, I think."

"No; we will gladly do our best in that way; and so would the Morleys and the Gilberts. Yes; Hester could teach the girls to make butter and bread. She offered to do so once before, I believe; but the girls laughed, and the

mothers tossed their heads, and intimated they could do that as well or better themselves; and Hester's philanthropy vanished almost as soon as it saw the light. Do you think yours is stout enough to stand the rubs it is sure to encounter?" he asked, with a sly look at Margaret.

"I must take care and not needlessly expose it," Margaret said, in her bright way. "I have been obliged to consult you about all these matters one by one, but my alterations can be made with no other pretext than my convenience. It will add to my importance to have a larger house and establishment; and as my servants—"

"You will have all Deighton besieging your door for situations. I am sure I for one wish you well of your schemes."

"There is one thing we have not taken into account yet, Mr. Weldon. All this will be at the cost of some money. I have no right to come on you entirely for means to carry out my schemes, and I know but little of the sources from whence the school fund is already raised. If I have the help of so many domestics, I must add my quota to the general stock. I think I can safely promise to find half the funds necessary to the support of three girls for one year. Do you not think the farmers would help us? Once fairly afloat, I think we should be almost a self-supporting body. Our requirements would not be great."

"My dear Miss Atherton," Mr. Weldon said, earnestly, "it will surely be enough for you to give us your time and talents, as you are now doing. God forbid I should either suffer you to do what of right belongs to us, or that I should allow the offer you make of your help and assistance to be lost for lack of funds to make the experiment, at all events. God has given me the means; I ought only to feel thankful that he has, through you, put it in my power to use them in his service."

The next morning Margaret was surprised to see workmen dismantling her little shed; and before a month had passed away, half a dozen comfortable little dormitories had been added to the

school house. To furnish them as economically as possible was now Margaret's aim. Paper and whitewash were cheap enough, and there were plenty of willing little hands to assist her in putting it up. Mrs. Morley and Miss Weldon each contributed some old pieces of furniture which had found refuge in lumber rooms and store closets. The village carpenter and a little paint made it all available to Margaret's ingenious contrivances; and a tidy, respectable woman, who had once worked as an upholstress, and was now a widow and lame, gladly took up her abode with Miss Atherton, to superintend the busy little fingers engaged in making up the dimity furniture and picking over the hair and flock for beds. Even the mothers grew interested in the busy scene, and many a curious face peered in at the open windows, watching the clusters of merry little people round Margaret, and wondering what possible use Miss Atherton could make of so large a house. Miss Weldon and the Morleys kept their own counsel, and Margaret was to divulge her schemes as it best suited her purpose to do so.

#### CHAPTER VII.

FROM all this excitement,—for where head and hands are perpetually at work it is excitement,—Margaret gladly turned of an evening,—the only time she could really call her own,—to the letters she regularly received from Grace or Ethelind. Poor Grace, in her new responsibilities, was always needing some advice or encouragement.

"You do not know how envious we all are of your Deignton people," Grace wrote; "and a hundred times a day I have to recall the way you used to persuade mamma into doing just what you knew was best; especially when she begins on that never-ending topic—your preferring Deignton to ourselves. I really think mamma likes Cheltenham. She has already been visited by two or three old Indian friends she had lost sight of for years; and though she seldom ventures out, and fancies herself a

great invalid, I think she is now quite as well as she ever was before the shock of dear papa's death.

"I wish Ethie looked better. She is grown very thin and pale; and I do believe has almost given up the delusion,—for such it surely must be,—that the gay cavallero who so won her heart at the Repworth ball ever thought seriously about her. I wish she could think of it all with more spirit. I often try to persuade her he never could have meant any thing beyond his own amusement; but what I should scorn to acknowledge, even to myself, poor little Ethie cannot hide from any of us, she is still so child-like and simple in all her thoughts and feelings. I am growing very spiteful towards the Repworths for taking so little care of our sister; but you would scold me, Maggie, for my confession, and bid me reform myself before offering an opinion on such clever people as Sir John and his stately dame.

"If Sir Philip did really intend to be serious, as Ethie persists in believing he did, I will wager my Sunday bonnet it has been the cautious Lady Repworth who has dissuaded him. There is all the difference in the world between the daughter of the dean of Wymlinstre and the penniless Ethie Atherton, with only her pretty face to recommend her.

"I wish I had your resolution, and could defy the world and its galling bitterness. When I think of it all, the fire of my wrath scorches up the good precepts your example instilled into my proud spirit. Don't scold me for my confession, Margaret; I must pour out my troubles to some one; and who in the world but yourself would ever listen to them?"

And Margaret did not scold. She only encouraged Grace to write oftener, and persevere in all her good resolves. She knew that the discipline she felt so burdensome was the best for her proud, indolent nature; besides, it would, she hoped, draw nearer together the love of parent and children, who, while each depended on Margaret, had almost forgotten their relative duties to each other.

Few days passed without a letter or note from some of the Cheltenham party. Ethelind's were of a very sad and sober cast. She believed she never should get over the shock of her father's death. Margaret smiled at the self-delusion of the fair young thing, who tried so earnestly to deceive herself. How completely had the absorbing dream of her "first love" changed the current of her thoughts and feelings! The world about her had grown suddenly old, and instead of the bright, joyous child, shedding her sunny influence on all around her, she was striving hard to blind her mother and sisters, — even her own self, — to the cause of her tearful eyes, pale cheeks, and listless, aching heart.

Margaret was seated one evening by her fireside; it had been a busy day with them all. Her girls and Mrs. James, who now formed one of her household, had gone to bed. Margaret drew out of her pocket two letters, which the postman had left two or three hours before, and which she had thrust away out of sight until she had leisure for their quiet perusal. Her cup of coffee — the only indulgence she allowed herself — stood by her side. She took up her brother's first letter, and broke the seal.

"You will be glad to hear, Margaret, that at last I have got a curacy. It is a place called 'Leigh-Moss,' in a beautiful part of Yorkshire. The rector is in ill health, and ordered abroad for two or three years, — it may be longer. He gives me a liberal stipend, as times go, and his own house, comfortably furnished. We agreed well in our views on most matters; and, altogether, I ought to consider myself a lucky fellow. The question now is about the home I can offer my mother and sisters. I have always looked forward to your sharing my curacy with me, let it be where it might; but I conclude any arguments I could offer would be unavailing while Deighton holds so high a place in your esteem. I really fear, Maggie, you must be working there like a galley slave. Mr. Weldon ought to double your salary at the least, and be very grateful for what you are doing for him into the bargain. He

never could have guessed what a treasure he had found, when he agreed with you for his schoolmistress. If he were not on the shady side of fifty, I should have some doubts about the propriety of your undertakings; and as soon as I can be spared a day or two from my own work, I mean to run down and reconnoitre your new home. In the mean time, what am I to do about Mrs. Atherton and my sisters? If they will accept the accommodation I can give them, I shall rejoice to have Grace and Ethel to assist me in my parish work. But whether my mother will approve of the quiet country life I shall lead, I cannot tell; and you must impress it on her, Margaret, if she accepts my offer, that such it will necessarily be."

Margaret turned to the other letter; it was from Grace; and the first lines riveted her attention.

"O Margaret," Grace wrote, "why are you not here? Do you know, Ethie's 'cavallero' is no myth after all. He has actually turned up at last, and Ethie's smiles have returned; the cloud has dispersed, and her looks, barring her still pale cheeks, are as radiant and beautiful as our old Ethie's used to be. As to mamma, she is half beside herself with joy and wonderment, and feels quite sure the world never saw so handsome looking a couple before. But I must tell you how it all came about. Ethel and I had been executing some commissions for mamma, and were returning up the promenade, when a tall, handsome man suddenly met us, with dark hair and mustache, clear gray eyes, and a pale complexion. He was striking in his appearance, and so good looking he instantly caught my eye; and at the same moment I saw Ethie's color fly into her face, and then as suddenly leave it deadly pale; and she trembled so, I had to draw her arm into mine to support her. I knew in a moment it could be no other than Sir Philip Leigh. He recognized Ethel instantly, and held out his hand and took hers in both his own. But he introduced himself to me, to cover her confusion, for I do not think she could have spoken had she tried. He looked

at her very keenly; indeed, his glance penetrated every where. His manners are certainly very fascinating, when he chooses; but he can also be very cold and reserved when it best suits his purpose. Well, he walked back with us; and how it came about I can hardly tell, but he called on mamma, contrived to see Ethel alone, explained — I suppose to her entire satisfaction — the reason for his being here, and why he had not come before; obtained mamma's by no means reluctant consent, and the promise from her, that in a fortnight from that day, — think, dear Margaret, how short a time it seems! — the wedding is to take place. Ethelind is such a child, and she is so completely in a delightful dream, that I believe she would consent to any thing Sir Philip proposed. But, Margaret, dear, can mamma be right to give her up so soon? The reasons Sir Philip gives are these: their minds are made up, therefore time can make no difference to them; and he has an insuperable objection to having his affairs canvassed, as they are sure to be, he says, if it is known he is likely to be married. He acknowledged it was soon after dear papa's death; but when both mamma and I urged their waiting until we had left off our deepest mourning, he said he must go abroad; urgent business called him to Paris, and he could not consent to leave Ethel behind. They should go on to Germany and Italy, and probably not return to England for many months. Then mamma took fright at the short time for preparation, but this he maintained was not needful. As to trousseau, and all that sort of thing, he said it was quite useless. Ethelind's dress must be entirely Parisian taste. He would get all that for her himself. He was too fastidious to intrust his wife's toilet to any but the first artistes. He should make large settlements on her; and her allowance for such matters as were deemed by ladies indispensable would be too liberal to require any additions from mamma. Sir Philip goes to town at once, to get the marriage settlements drawn up, and all legal matters duly arranged; and then he comes down

to us, and they are to be married as soon as possible. Mamma is in the third heaven. Ethie is in a perfect dream of bliss; I do not believe a single cloud obscures her sun. And I! — I can hardly tell you where I am, except in a very uncomfortable state of hope and fear; — charmed with the man, yet angry to a degree at the cool way in which he quietly plans every thing, and then puts it all in such a way to mamma that he is quite sure of her and Ethelind's acquiescence; mortified at the manner in which he quietly ignores us all, while at the same time he gives us no fair pretext for complaint. I wish Ralph had been here; but we have heard nothing of him for a long time, nor do we know whether he is still at Cambridge. Cannot you come to us, Margaret? And yet what can you do, even then? You can hardly imagine the change which has come over our little sister; she is as bright and blooming as ever. I do believe Sir Philip is very proud of her. I am sure I sincerely trust he will be gentle and kind to her when he has her entirely in his power; she has never been used to any thing but the fondest love. If mamma only fancied I was doubting him, what a scolding would fall to the lot of your loving and bewildered sister,

GRACE ATHERTON."

The letter fell into Margaret's lap; a stupor of astonishment seized her. She rubbed her eyes, got up out of her chair, and then sat down again. It seemed to her as if some troubled dream was upon her, which she could not shake off. Her next impulse was to start off by the early train for Cheltenham; but second thoughts suggested the uselessness of such a journey. It seemed clear from Grace's letter that every thing was arranged. Mrs. Atherton would only see the connection in its brightest lights. Ethelind's heart was in it, perhaps her peace of mind, her very life itself. Sir Philip must be sincere, or why should he voluntarily have followed them to Cheltenham? In a worldly point of view, the connection was no doubt a very good one for her sister. Sir Philip knew they were poor; and if his love had survived



that piece of intelligence, Margaret felt that neither her mother nor Ethel would thank her for suggesting other difficulties. If in the arrangements she had not implicit faith in her mother's judgment, Ethelind was entirely under her mother's control; and Margaret felt neither she nor Ralph had any legitimate grounds for interference.

Before the morning Margaret had worked herself into a fever of doubt and perplexity. She wrote a long letter to Grace, and one also to Ethelind;—comforting and assuring the first, and congratulating the latter, and giving her the same gentle and loving advice she would have done had they been together. Margaret's whole mind seemed swallowed up in home thoughts.

"I really am ashamed of myself," she said to Miss Weldon, to whom she had imparted as many of her doubts and perplexities as she felt she had a right to do to those unconnected with her family. "I find myself in the midst of my mother and sisters, planning and contriving, and looking on for them; and then I am suddenly aroused by seeing a whole class of puzzled little faces staring eagerly at me, and wondering what can be the matter with Miss Atherton, who has let them say their lesson wrong from beginning to end, and never once found it out."

"I wish, my dear, you would go off at once to your sisters; I know we can manage very well for a week or two, and it seems so natural and proper you should do so," Miss Weldon replied. "Depend on it, my brother will contrive it all very nicely."

"Don't tempt me, Miss Weldon," Margaret exclaimed, with a smile on her lips and tears in her eyes. "My right place is here; I can do no good there; the whole thing is settled: and I dare say I ought to rejoice that my sister is making so apparently good a match. It would have been a satisfaction, I own, to have learned something of the character and principles of my future brother-in-law. As it is, I shall see Sir Philip when they return from abroad, and I shall do mamma and

Grace more good by and by, when the excitement is over, and they have nothing to think of but Ethie's loss."

#### CHAPTER VIII.

COLD and discouraging as was Mrs. Leigh's advice to her son, and unfeeling and selfish as he was often tempted, in the heat of his own passion, to think the unsparing raillery of his sisters, Philip Leigh felt he must wait patiently till such time as etiquette would allow his again seeing Ethelind, and learning from her own lips the fate which awaited him.

If he did sometimes try to shake off the remembrance of the soft eyes which had so bewitched him, or give ear for a moment to the perpetually-urged arguments of his family against unequal marriages, his conscience stung him with the conviction that he would be sacrificing every spark of that honor which the Leighs always vaunted as immaculate.

A man seldom lives till thirty without, if he has hitherto escaped the influence of the softer passion, becoming entirely absorbed in it, when once it takes possession of his heart; and it is then as earnest and intense as his nature is powerful and strong. Having allowed some months to pass after the death of the dean of Wylminster, Sir Philip started for Cheltenham, where he learned Mrs. Atherton and her daughter were residing.

The day of his arrival he was fortunate in meeting Grace and Ethelind, and the successful result of that encounter Grace has already communicated to Margaret. In less than a fortnight Sir Philip had not only gone to London to inform his mother and sisters, but also to have all necessary documents drawn up and signed, which should secure handsome settlements and an ample dowry on his wife, in case of his death. Orders were sent down to Redenham for the alterations to be instantly commenced, which he should require to be completed before his return from the Continent; and then he returned to

Cheltenham, bent on taking away Ethelind at once from her mother's care.

Grace hardly knew whether to be pleased or angry at the quiet, decisive way in which Sir Philip contrived to do every thing as he pleased; and it annoyed her beyond measure when she saw her mother so readily yielding up every thing to his wishes.

Ethelind herself was too much a child, and too little accustomed to think or act for herself, to have much voice in any of the arrangements; and while Philip felt conscious that Grace had penetration enough to read his secret intention of removing Ethelind entirely from her own family, it only rendered him more anxious to effect his object before Ethel herself should become aware of it through her sister, and either fetter him with promises he would feel bound in honor to fulfil, or, worse still perhaps, break off the match entirely.

"Philip tells me I must have a maid," Ethelind said, in a tone of greater distress than Grace had heard from her since her engagement. "What shall I ever do with a fine dressed-out lady's lady, obsequiously ordering me to do whatever it pleases her to bid me do? It terrifies me only to think of it."

"Of course you will have a maid, child; no one in your position in life is without her own servant," Mrs. Atherton said.

"But, mamma, I don't want a servant now; I have always done quite well for myself hitherto; and while we are abroad Philip says we shall keep quite to ourselves, and go out nowhere; and by the time we return, and I have got a little used to my dignities, and better able to sustain them, it will surely be time enough for me to have such a disagreeable appendage."

"What nonsense you talk, child! It would not be at all proper that Lady Leigh should travel without a female attendant. I have been talking it over with Susannah, and I think our old housemaid, Ann, would be able to fill the place. We could soon write to Wylminstre, and tell her to come to us."

Grace could not help laughing at the

idea of old Ann undertaking the charge of Ethel and all her finery; putting up with all the miseries of a foreign tour; or domesticating herself happily in a household of servants, such as, no doubt, Sir Philip's would be: it sounded almost too ludicrous for her mother to have even suggested it. "Dear mamma," she said, "you don't suppose Sir Philip will suffer us to engage a servant for his wife?"

"But I am not his wife yet, Gracie," Ethel broke in, drawing up her head proudly, and trying to look dignified.

"No, not yet, darling; but you are Sir Philip Leigh's betrothed; and even that is sufficient to give him a tolerably fair amount of authority, considering our short acquaintance."

"O Gracie, you mean about my dress; you don't know how very particular Philip is; and he is sure the people here are not so good as those employed by his mother and sisters; and as he wished it so much, what could I do? though I am sure I would much rather have ordered my own wedding dress."

"And when a bridegroom takes it on himself to order the wedding dress, it is but right he should engage the maid to put it on. Don't be angry with me, Ethie; he and I have already discussed the matter pretty warmly. His mother or sisters know of some paragon of a waiting woman, and she will come from town with the finery the day before the wedding."

"And I shall die of fright!" Ethelind exclaimed, in a tone so pitiful, that Grace could only kiss her soft flushed cheek, and assure her she had no cause to fear any lady's maid in the world. "Keep a brave heart, Ethie," she added, "and you will hold your own yet, my little sister."

Sir Philip was pacing up and down the hall, impatiently waiting for Ethelind, who had gone up to put on her bonnet and mantle for a walk.

"There, run down now," Grace said, arranging her sister's things, as she hastily put them on; "I can hear the footsteps of your impatient lover. He

might be a little less monopolizing," she said, as Ethel disappeared, "especially when he remembers how soon he will take her entirely away from us."

"You are very severe on Philip, Grace," Mrs. Atherton said; "I often wonder how Ethel bears so well all the rude things you say of him. I wish you would try and show him more respect. You seem entirely to forget what a very capital match it is for Ethelind."

"I should be very sorry to hurt Ethelind's feelings," Grace replied; "but as to Sir Philip, depend upon it, it matters little what I, or any of our family, think about him."

"My dear Grace, I don't understand what you mean."

"I mean, mamma, that Sir Philip Leigh has seen our Ethie, and fallen as much in love with her as such people ever do. I believe he would, if he could, have shaken it all off; but finding that impossible, he is doing the only thing that remained to be done. He has secured her; and the moment he gets her absolutely into his own keeping, he will ignore us altogether."

"I am sure I don't see why he should. Both your father's family and mine were very respectable; and as the daughter of the dean of Wylminster—"

"Had the dean of Wylminster been alive," Grace broke in, "it would not be as it is. Now we are only the poor orphans of a poor clergyman; respectable enough in a way, but by no means a fit match for the proud blood of the Leighs. I wish Ralph or Margaret had been here; they might have done what I cannot;" and Grace tried in vain to keep back the bitter tears which were blinding her eyes.

"You are a very strange girl, Grace," her mother replied, in a vexed, nervous tone. "I don't see what Ralph or Margaret could have done more than I already have. Ethelind likes Philip very much, and I am sure his love for her no one can deny. Just see all he has done for her; such settlements as he has made! so regardless as he is of expense! Then, too, he does not care about her being penniless. I am sure it is a far

better match than I ever expected her to make; and it seems to me, we cannot be too grateful to him for giving her such brilliant prospects."

Grace knew her mother's weakness too well to attempt reasoning the point with her; she only turned away, and tried to stifle the burning pain at her heart, by busying herself in the many little preparations which even the quietest wedding makes needful. It would be but cruelty, she felt, to try to deceive her sister, who, young and trustful as a child, could see nothing in all the arrangements Philip made but the lavish abundance of a loving heart. How often had they both longed for riches! Ethelind would possess them now, and Grace had already learned to wonder if they would bring with them all the happiness their young imaginations had pictured.

Beautiful as Ethel Atherton really was, she never had looked more so than on her bridal morning. Even the grim Mrs. Frippery condescended to acknowledge to Susannah, "she certainly was the loveliest young lady she ever did set eyes on"—not even excepting Sir Philip's own sisters, who, from her account, were quite paragons of female beauty.

Poor Grace, as she quietly stood by, envied the cross old woman every pin she put into Ethel's dress. Could she have had her own way, no hand but her own should have touched a fold of her darling's dress on her bridal day. Ethie's eyes looked more deeply violet than ever, amid the snowy folds of her soft white silk and rich point-lace, as it floated round her slight, graceful figure. Mrs. Frippery turned up her nose at the little lace bonnet. "What bride, she would like to know, of any pretensions at all, such as became the choice of Sir Philip Leigh, would dream of appearing at the 'halter' in any thing less becoming than a veil and wreath?" But when the despised little bonnet was put on, and its gracefully drooping feather and its light wreath of orange blossom, mingling with the golden hue of her bright glossy curls, and forming a soft halo round her

sweet young face, and when Sir Philip himself was said to have declared, that what every body did, from the tradesman's bride upwards, was no rule for what his wife chose to do, — even the sour visage relaxed, and she declared, much to Susannah's triumph, "she would never have believed that a bonnet could have been so very becoming."

Colonel Foley and the lawyer had come down the night before; the former to be with his friend and give away the bride. Grace longed for Margaret as she stood by the altar at St. Mary's, by the side of Ethelind; it seemed so strange that she alone of all her family should be there. She watched the flushed, anxious face of Sir Philip, and the calm, motionless features of the young creature beside him. Ethel's responses were audibly made, without a quiver of the soft, full notes. Grace gazed on her sister in mute astonishment. She could neither comprehend nor do justice, if she had done so, in her own nervous excitement, to the entire trust Ethelind reposed in the heart of him to whom she was yielding up her young life's love and obedience. She had, from the moment he had asked her for her love, and told her how great his own was for her, given herself to him with the confidence a young child reposes in the fulness and truth of its father's affection.

The ceremony was soon over, and the two carriages returned with the small wedding party to Mrs. Atherton's.

A breakfast was waiting for them, which Mrs. Atherton and Susannah, too nervous and fidgety to sit still, had been superintending in their absence. A merry peal from St. Mary's bells greeted the mother's quick ears before the carriages appeared; and a feeling of mingled joy and pride fluttered at her heart as she pressed her child warmly in her arms. Grace nervously poured out a cup of coffee, and insisted on Ethel's taking it; and then, scarcely waiting for her to refuse the offer of more, hurried her up into her own room, under pretext of changing her dress before the return of the carriage which was to take them away from her home.

Frippery was too full of the finery, which had to be so hastily disposed of in the large imperial, to interrupt the sisters in their last fond embrace; but a cloud gathered on Sir Philip's brow when his quick eye caught traces of emotion in Ethel's bright eyes and heightened color, as they came down stairs with their arms tightly linked round each other.

"You need not envy us this one half hour, Sir Philip," Grace said, in a subdued voice, as she overheard him give an impatient order to Colonel Foley about sending round to hasten the carriage. The color mounted into his face, and his eye glittered. "This agitation is not good for her or for you," he said quickly. "You will thank me for not prolonging the parting, when it is fairly over." Grace did not reply; she only turned away her head with one of her contemptuous smiles, which convinced her brother-in-law, on whom no look or gesture of hers was wasted, that, with all his caution, she was no stranger to his intentions. Indeed, he was scarcely sure that she did not doubt the truth and honesty of his very love itself. The thought stung him to the quick, and for some minutes he stood at the window biting his lips till he almost made them bleed. Presently he heard his name called; he turned round; Grace was standing beside him. "Sir Philip," she said, in a calm, low voice, as if she did not wish any one else to hear, and yet she spoke so distinctly he did not lose a syllable, "you must be very kind to and careful of our darling Ethie. Remember she is very young, indeed still quite a child; and she has never known any thing but petting and spoiling from us all. She has unbounded faith in your love, and she goes as trustfully into your care as if she had known you all her life. You will think I have no right to say all this to you; but you must remember our father has left us, and Ralph is not here to speak to you, and I could not let her go without telling you what I feel *ought* to be spoken by some of us."

"Grace," he said, "I see by your manner you distrust my love for your sister; God knows how you wrong me!

He knows too how entirely my heart is hers."

"Real, pure love is not monopolizing," Grace replied. "You need not grudge us a small share in what, until she knew you, was all our own. In making Ethie your wife, you have placed her, I know, in a sphere far above our present one. We have all some sacrifices to pay to ambition. Ethel is too young to have rightly calculated the price of hers. Soften it to her as much as you can, when she makes the discovery of what it costs her. You have feared that I should forestall you in the information. You might have trusted me better. There is time enough yet for her to learn the truth; and I, for one, would gladly spare her the pang its knowledge will inflict, even up to the last moment that it becomes inevitable."

Sir Philip looked at the pale, earnest face beside him; and had he followed the first impulse of the moment, he would have renounced all the schemes which had cost him so much pain and caution to execute, taking Grace as a witness against the influence his mother and sisters still exercised over him; but the struggle was momentary; pride, his besetting sin, triumphed. He would pledge himself to nothing; there was plenty of time yet to form plans for his

future conduct. He took her hand in his. "Miss Atherton," he said, "I should be sorry you should misunderstand me; my conduct may not always be clearer to your comprehension than it has been now; but rest assured,—and I here give you my honor as a man and a gentleman,—that however arbitrary and strange it may appear to you, nothing but the fondest love and affection shall influence me in regard to Ethel's welfare. Do you trust me?"

"I will try to do so," was Grace's short reply; and the next minute she was standing by Ethelind's side, waiting the announcement of the carriage, which, under Sir Philip's servants' care and Frippery's superintendence, was being packed for their journey.

Colonel Foley returned to town by the next train. Mrs. Atherton, divided between her tears and her smiles, betook herself to her own room, to talk over with Susannah the events of the last fortnight; and Grace, in a state of mind she would have been puzzled to have explained, after assuming her mourning dress, which for the hour had been laid aside, shut herself into her own room, to pour out her doubts and perplexities into the never-failing ear of her dear Margaret.



## FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

### CHAPTER IX.

**ETHEL ATHERTON.**—Ethel Leigh now, — with a child's trust and confidence, threw herself on her husband's love without a single doubt shadowing the future she pictured stretching out before her. And Philip Leigh looked into the bright eyes of his young bride, and pressed her soft, warm cheek to his, and felt for the first time for many weeks that a load was taken off his heart, and that he could breathe freer for the knowledge that she was now entirely his own.

The hurry of their journey to Folkestone, the novelty of the voyage, and their rapid transit to Paris, kept Ethel in a constant state of excitement. Every thing was new and bright; the air clear,

er, the sky bluer, the buildings whiter; and the first fortnight was passed in visiting every thing in Paris which Philip thought likely to amuse and interest his companion.

One morning he returned later than usual to his hotel. He had left Ethelind busily engaged in writing, while he had gone out to his bankers. "You must put on your bonnet," he said; "it is a lovely day, and I do not like you to spend it entirely within doors. I will wait here while you dress."

Ethel ran up stairs; she had already learned that patience was not one of her husband's cardinal virtues. Frippery was not there; and Ethel had to summon her several times before she made her appearance. Unwilling to keep Phil-

*For Better, for Worse.*

ip waiting, and having already more than once experienced the full force of her maid's determination to do as she pleased, Ethel commenced her own toilet; and when the operation was nearly completed, Frippery walked into the room.

"You are late in answering the bell," Ethel said, in her soft, silvery tones; "I must thank you to be more punctual another day, as Sir Philip objects very much to be kept waiting."

The sour face grew sourer; and turning round on her heel, and busying herself with something she held in her hand, ready for Ethelind to put on, she said, in a tone Lady Leigh had never heard used by the domestics in her father's house, "I should please to wish you to understand, my lady, that in all the families I have lived in, — and, 'eaven be praised, they are neither few nor wanting in the best quality, — I have always been accustomed, like my betters, to my full 'our undisturbed for my own luncheon. Your ladyship, maybe, ain't acquainted with the regulation as goes on in good families; and I was wrong, perhaps, in not having a full statement in writing from Sir Philip's mother as to the agreement as is generally considered binding in such particular cases, especially as I wasn't aware at the time, but what Sir Philip was about to marry into some noble family. However, my lady, I must beg, nevertheless, for that matter, that for the future, in my case, my rules can't be broken through."

Completely astounded at this tirade, and for the moment scarcely knowing whether to laugh or to cry at her state of thralldom to so insolent and overbearing a servant, Ethel did not reply; while the angry old woman tossed her head, and never offered to assist her either in buttoning the cuffs at her wrists, or pulling on her walking-boots. But when Frippery, taking advantage of her lady's sweet temper, and determined to get the upperhand of one so young, and so evidently unacquainted with the management of servants, said, it was "quite unbecoming a lady, any ways, now to do any thing for herself, not to mention

putting on her own boots, the like of which had never come within her experience," the tears fairly started into Ethelind's eyes; and though she lingered about in the vain hope of clearing away their traces, her hot cheeks and red eyes instantly struck Philip, as she flew down stairs, and he asked, in a hurried voice, what had alarmed her.

Poor Ethel, who could never disguise any thing, again burst into tears, and drawing her husband into the sitting room, begged, earnestly, that, for the present at least, she might be relieved of her attendant; and then, between laughing and crying, explained to Philip the indignities she had been subjected to by the ill-tempered, unprincipled woman his mother had provided for her.

A dark cloud gathered on his brow as he listened. "You don't know, Ethelind, what you are asking," he replied. "It is neither right nor proper you should be without a servant. What you did as Miss Atherton, has nothing to do with the case now you are Lady Leigh. A lady's maid is as indispensable for you as the clothes you wear. And you must show your servant that you have a will of your own. If you do not, your servants—every body, in fact—will take advantage of your sweet temper. It was very wrong of my mother," he added, pacing up and down the room, and looking sterner than Ethelind had ever seen him do before, "to have sent you such a woman. But I suppose she left it to Barbara, or Di, instead of doing what I so particularly desired her to do herself. Well, never mind! I will pack her off out of the house, and she may go back to them. They are better able to keep a servant in her right place than you are; a few of Barbara's lessons will do the old woman no harm. In the mean time, we must see what can be done for you in Paris."

He sat down, and taking out a roll of napoleons from his desk, rang the bell for his servant.

"Here, Godfrey," he said, "pay Frippery a quarter's wages, and her fare to London. Get a passport for her, and yourself see her off by the train which

## *For Better, for Worse.*

starts to-night in time for the mail-pack-  
et from Calais; and tell her, also, when  
next she wants a character, she had bet-  
ter not trust to the one she will get from  
me, if she is in earnest in getting a place.  
Now, Ethelind," he said, as Godfrey  
closed the door, "run up stairs and  
bathe your face, and then we will take  
our walk and forget your annoyance."

As Ethel came down she met her hus-  
band in the hall, from which Frippery,  
in a flood of tears, was making her ex-  
it. She only heard the whining voice of  
the old woman, muttering something  
about "Poor young thing! she meant  
no offence; it was only to try and teach  
her the ways of the world." But she could  
not mistake the stern, angry voice of  
Philip, as he bade her "never show her-  
self again in his presence at her peril."

The following day a neat, civil, and  
rather pretty-looking Frenchwoman  
took Frippery's place, recommended by  
the first milliner in Paris, to whom Philip  
had delegated, with an unlimited order,  
the fitting out of his wife's trousseau.

They went on from place to place  
very quietly, visiting every thing worth  
the notice of travellers; often turning  
out of their way to embrace some beau-  
tiful point of view, less known than the  
common route, (for Sir Philip Leigh had  
gone over every inch of the ground many  
times before,) or lingering amid sights  
which were often rapidly passed over by  
the flocks of tourists who annually flood  
the Continent.

They carefully avoided mixing in so-  
ciety, either in the hotels or large towns  
through which they passed. A nervous  
dread still haunted Philip as to any com-  
ments passed on his young wife, until  
she had grown more into her right po-  
sition, and was better able to take her  
place in society, as he intended her to do  
on their return to England. Apart from  
this feverish anxiety, he had never be-  
fore so thoroughly enjoyed a tour abroad.  
Ethel's admiration was so fresh and gen-  
uine, her natural taste for the beautiful,  
both in art and nature, so good, and her  
enthusiasm so childlike, it had given  
quite a zest to his own interest, and  
awakened in him feelings which he had

fancied had died out in his youth. It  
was only now and then, when they nar-  
rowly escaped falling in with some party  
of English sight-seers, or some taunting  
letter from Barbara, inquiring how the  
education of his pretty wife was pro-  
ceeding, that his old doubts and fears  
harassed him. When they were on  
him, though quite unaware of their  
cause, Ethel instinctively shrank from  
him. The sudden dismissal of Frippery,  
though it had proved an inexpressible re-  
lief from the thralldom exercised by the  
old woman over her, had also given her  
her first insight into the darker shades  
of his character. She had watched the  
stern, cold, unyielding brow; she had  
heard the quick, decided order given;  
she had seen how relentlessly he had  
carried it out, — and from that moment  
fear mingled with her love. It was as  
yet but a cloud, small, thin as a vapor,  
seen only at intervals, but still there,  
overshadowing the bright vision of that  
future which she had once thought could  
never have been dimmed. Shy and re-  
tiring, and free from every shade of con-  
ceit, and kept (as Margaret had ever kept  
her) away from every change of temper  
in those about her, — she could not com-  
prehend the rapid changes which came  
over her husband's brow, producing such  
a chilling effect on herself, checking the  
very pulses of her veins, and driving her  
blood back to her heart. It was not often  
any thing untoward occurred to Philip  
during their sojourn abroad; but it was  
often enough to convince the young wife  
she labored under no delusion, and that  
Margaret was right when she assured  
her, that "in every state in life, be it  
what it may, each will have his or her  
especial trial to bear."

Ethel found little time for letter-writ-  
ing while perpetually moving about from  
place to place. Philip never liked to see  
her with her writing-desk before her. He  
always proposed a walk, or sat and chat-  
ted by her side, or read aloud, whenever  
she hinted that they would be wonder-  
ing at her long silence at home. At first  
the thought of the disappointment her  
short, hurried notes, and those so far  
apart, would create in her mother and



### *For Better, for Worse.*

sisters' mind, made her quite unhappy; but as she could seldom or never tell them where to direct to her, and consequently heard only once or twice from Grace or Margaret, and as she had such good reasons to give for her own short letters, she began to look on it as one of the necessary evils of an itinerant life. She often pictured to herself the pleasure she should experience, when, on her return home, she would be able to describe to them more fully than she could do in her hurried letters, the many beautiful scenes through which they had passed, and the wonders which had made the most vivid impression on her during her sojourn abroad. They spent several weeks in the south of Italy, and then took up their abode in Rome, when the season had passed, and there were fewer English tourists to disturb them in their quiet survey of every thing most worthy of inspection in that vast old city.

"Here is a commission from Barbara," Philip said, throwing down a letter he had been reading from England. "She wants a set of cameos at L——'s. You must come with me, Ethe, and choose them. It will be a good opportunity for you to inspect his collection of mosaics and cameos, and choose one for yourself as well, if there is anything there which takes your fancy."

Ethelind was quickly dressed; and, as they wandered about, examining and admiring the beautiful specimens of art so temptingly displayed, a sudden thought struck Ethelind. Why should she not purchase some little memorials of her visit to Rome, and take them home to her mother and sisters? Hitherto she had spent nothing on herself. Philip's love had supplied her with every thing, and more than every thing, she required. Her own riches still remained untouched in the little casket in which Philip had placed it. What need could she have for money, with a husband who lavished on her every thing she could possibly require?—so freely, indeed, that Ethel had almost learned to restrain the expression of her admiration in the dread of finding the object of it in her own possession. Placing her purchases in her bosom, she joined Philip

at the other end of the room. He had been so engrossed in some learned discussion, in Italian, on the different stages and improvements in the art, from the earliest ages, that he had hardly missed Ethel from his side; but supposing she had simply grown weary of a subject, in a language she had not sufficiently mastered to be able readily to follow the liquid tones of the eloquent and enthusiastic Italian, he took up the set they had chosen for Barbara, and asking Ethel if she were ready, prepared to return home.

"I hope your sister will like your choice, Philip," Ethe said, as they sat over their dessert by the open window of their pallazzo. "Will you let me look at them again? They will show better here than they did in that close, dark room, where there were so many beautiful things to divide your attention."

Philip unfastened the packet, and turning the key of the little casket, disclosed the splendid ornaments resting on their soft, velvet beds.

"Barbara ought to be very proud of them," he said. "The fellow assured me they were the first of their kind in Europe; and only yesterday the Marchese de D—— declared she must have them. Of course that is the story they always tell you, when they are particularly anxious to find an English purchaser. But these certainly are very good; and if you would like to keep them for yourself, Ethel, I will go and secure the others for Barbara."

"O, no, Philip, thank you; they would not suit my light hair half as well as they would do your sister's, which you say is as dark as your own."

"But was there nothing there, in the way of bracelet or brooch, you would have liked? Or, perhaps," Philip continued, "one of those pretty little mosaic tables for your boudoir would please you better?"

"You were so engrossed in your conversation with Signor L——, you did not see me making my own purchases. You shall see them now," she said; "though, by the way, I ought to have done so before you brought out Barbara's."

Philip just took them up, and laid them down again by Ethelind's side.

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*For Better, for Worse.*

"They are very pretty and good of their kind," he said; "but I can hardly imagine of what use they will be to you. You could get as good ones as these at any jeweller's in London."

"I dare say I could," Ethel replied; "but then, you know, they would not have been chosen by myself in Rome; and my mother and sisters will value them more on that account even than for their beauty; and they really are *very* beautiful, though you won't acknowledge it."

"O, I see now what you mean; I did not understand at first that you intended them for presents. But, Ethie, could you not have chosen something better worth their acceptance? I do not like my wife to be niggardly in her gifts."

A bloom spread over Ethelind's cheeks. "I knew you would tell me so," she replied; "but I think I have made a very judicious choice. This pretty little mosaic will just suit mamma in her mourning, and Grace will be charmed with her Hebe. As to Margaret, she will admire my pretty allegory, and keep it for my sake; but I very much doubt if she ever wears it. Margaret never wears ornaments."

"Quakers never do, I believe; and, if I remember rightly, Lady Repworth said something about your sister being half a Quaker."

"Lady Repworth had no business to say so, to you or to any one else," Ethel said, quickly. "She knows quite well that Margaret is a far better Churchwoman than herself."

Philip put his arm round Ethelind's waist. "Why, I could have fancied it was your sister Grace who was speaking," he said, "and not my gentle little wife. And Lady Repworth is a friend of yours, Ethie!"

Ethelind smiled. "Thank you, Philip, for your hint; I do get warm when Lady Repworth says a word about Margaret. Why she should be so severe in her strictures on my sister, — or on any of us, — I do not know; but it is not the first time I have heard her attributing motives which she knew quite well were not the correct ones."

"She was a neighbor of your father's, I think she told me, if not a parishioner; was she not?"

"Yes, both; but it does not necessarily follow that we were friends. Papa never disagreed with any one. I do not think he could have done it; and, as far as I remember, a fair share of civility was kept up between us; but no two people could have been more opposite in opinions or actions. Besides, when you hear people so unsparing in their strictures on every body else, you may feel quite sure your time will come as soon as you have turned your back."

"I must say, though, your sister's employments at Deignton are, to say the least of it, very singular," Philip said; "and people who do singular things must expect to be occasionally misrepresented. If there was any necessity for her teaching at all, surely some pleasanter and more profitable employment might be found than that of schoolmistress to a set of ragged village children."

"That was what mamma said; but then, as Margaret urged, what employment can a woman undertake which is not open to some objections? At all events, I will answer for it, if the children at Deignton were ever ragged and dirty, they are not so now Margaret has the care of them."

"You are a capital advocate for your sister, Ethie; but you have not yet made it clear to me that Lady Repworth had no foundation for her charge against her that she was half a Quaker."

"We are none of us accountable for the accident of our birth, you know, Philip; and it so happened that Margaret's mother was born a 'Friend.' However, she became a Churchwoman before she ever saw my father. As to Margaret herself, you have but to know her to value her strong mind and right principles as much as every one else does. Whatever good qualities Grace or I possess, we owe them entirely to Margaret."

"But Lady Repworth, I am sure, said something about your sister having been brought up with Quakers. How could that be if she were not one of them?"

"She was thrown entirely on the care

## For Better, for Worse.

of her mother's relatives during the time my father was in India. She herself says it was her residence with them which taught her to value, as she does, her Church privileges, when papa returned home, and she came back to him."

"Your brother and sister have still some Quaker connections, I think Lady Repworth told me."

"O, yes; a funny old uncle and aunt, who brought them up, and still take a great interest in all that concerns Margaret, whom, I believe, they look upon as their own child; but mamma never took to them, or they to her,—so we saw very little of them. Papa always thought very highly of them, I know; and they are very much respected at Wylminstre."

"Then you never lived with them?—they do not belong to you?"

Ethel laughed. "Make your mind quite easy on that score, Philip," she said; "except calling on them occasionally with Margaret, or meeting them in the street, I know nothing at all about them. All I do know is, that they are very charitable, good people, who spend the greater part of their time and money in doing good deeds which few know any thing at all about."

Philip was quiet for a few minutes, and then he said, rather suddenly, "Ethelind, you will move in a very different sphere from any you have yet occupied. You will be in quite a new world. You will have to give up many of your old friends and acquaintance, and form new ones. A great deal will be expected of Lady Leigh. I should not like my wife to disappoint people. I should not like them to say I had made a mistake."

"O Philip, if you love me, do not hint at such a thing; do not say so, I pray you," Ethel exclaimed, in a startled, nervous voice, between a laugh and a cry. "You cannot think how very frightened I am growing at the thought of meeting your own family; and how I shall ever do as I ought in my own house, is becoming already quite a burden to me. I have felt many times lately what, perhaps, I ought to have taken more into account before," she added, meekly, "that, after all, who knows but

you will be disappointed in the wife you have chosen; and if you should, O Philip, what on earth will become of your little wife?"

Philip put his arm round her waist, and drew her to his side; he was startled at her alarm, and half vexed with himself for having yet ventured to hint at the course he was intending to pursue. "You are a foolish little thing," he said, as he kissed away her fast-falling tears. "Do you think I would have ventured to make you my wife if I had doubted your fitness? You must learn to look bravely on to the duties which every wife has to learn, and which of necessity devolve on you; but depend on it, you will get on very well. As to my mother and sisters, when you once get accustomed to their reserved manner,—which makes people who do not know them call them proud and cold, when it is manner only after all,—I have no doubt you will learn to like them quite as much as your own relations. Come, put away these presents of yours and mine. I will tell Valerie to bring down your bonnet and mantle, and we will take a moonlight stroll this warm evening in the gardens of the Pallazzo."

### CHAPTER X.

THE Leighs' absence from England had now extended over many months. Letters and papers were daily admonishing Sir Philip that it was time for him to set his face homewards. Parliament had met, and his constituents might not long remain so satisfied that their interests should be entirely overlooked when many important bills were pending.

Hitherto he had said little to Ethelind of his own family. It was time now to give her some insight into the characters of her new connections. Ethelind had grown considerably in both height and beauty since her marriage; and, but for the anxiety at her heart, at the thought of meeting her husband's family, had acquired much more self-reliance than when she quitted England. Philip, however little he would have acknowledged the feeling, was still nerv-

*For Better, for Worse.*

ously fidgety at the impression his young wife would make, not only on the fastidious tastes of his mother and sisters, but on the world also, whose opinions hitherto had exercised such a very arbitrary power over his mind.

They had landed at Folkestone that morning, and taken the train to town. Both travellers at first were silent and abstracted. At last Philip drew out his watch. "I wish my mother had been alone," he said; "the train will be late to-night, and we are sure to keep them waiting for dinner; and you will be hurried in your dressing. It was very foolish of me not to fix the day of our arrival; but I thought, with Anne Leigh in the house, there would be no dinner parties."

"Are Barbara and Diana both at home with your mother now?" Ethel asked, rather nervously.

"Yes, both, I suppose. My mother does not mention them in her last letter. You will think Barbara very handsome; you will know her from Di by her being shorter and dark, with good, well-defined features, and bright dark hair and eyes. Diana is more reserved and shy — not so easily got on with at first, but possessed of very sterling qualities, and a great favorite with poor Anne Leigh, I know."

"How is it neither of your sisters is married? You say they are good looking, and I suppose they are well portioned."

"Di might have been long ago; but she contrives to avoid all chances of matrimony. She lost her heart some three or four years ago, to a very clever, nice fellow, a curate, living not far from Leigh Court; but the match was beneath her in every way. He was unobjectionable enough; but his origin was low, and his connections totally out of her own sphere in life. Neither my mother nor Barbara would listen to it; and Diana herself, led very much by Barbara, arrived at last at the conclusion that the only plan was to throw the poor fellow overboard; and to this day she has remained single. As to Barbara, nothing but a coronet will, I think, satisfy her ambition; and as she rather enjoys the fun of flirting, she plays off endless tricks

on any luckless fellow who chances to be caught by her handsome face or very independent manners."

"You often speak of your cousin Anne. How long has she been such an invalid?" Ethelind asked, feeling all the time very nervous at meeting this cousin Anne, who, as far as she could gather from Philip's allusions to her, exercised a considerable influence on the whole family.

"Ever since she was twenty," Philip replied. "Poor Anne!" he added; "hers has been a very changed life from what it might have been. She and her brother Arthur were twins, and the only children of the uncle from whom the baronetcy and estates passed to me. I was almost brought up at Redenham, and was at school and college with Arthur, who was as handsome and open-hearted a fellow as one would meet with in a whole life. I was staying with them when the dreadful accident occurred which sent him to an early grave. The horses behind which he was driving his sister ran away, and upset the carriage against a high wall, Arthur was killed on the spot, and Anne so injured in the spine, she has never been any thing but a confirmed invalid since. It was the death-blow to my uncle, who scarcely lived a year afterwards."

"And your cousin lost her home and every thing? How very sad!"

"She bore it very nobly. We comforted her as well as we could; and my mother would have had her and her mother live with us, but they would not consent to such an arrangement. You must like her, Ethel; I shall be sadly disappointed if you do not. She was my earliest and best friend, and I have the very highest opinion of her judgment." Philip was silent for some minutes; and when he spoke again it was on some indifferent topic.

A blaze of light almost bewildered Ethelind, as she sprung out of the carriage and up the steps into the hall in Eaton Place. Andrew's smiling face was her first greeting. The next moment she found herself in the stately embrace of a tall, dignified lady, envel-

*For Better, for Worse.*

oped in black velvet and lace, who had descended to the first landing to receive her son and welcome her new daughter. Ethel hardly dared raise her eyes to those of her new mother, whose cordial smile and kind kiss were warm on her cheek.

Diana and Barbara were in the drawing room, Mrs. Leigh said. They did not yet know of Philip's arrival. She herself led Ethelind up stairs into her own room, assuring Philip "there were only a few of his old friends dining with them, and that there would be plenty of time for them to dress for dinner, if Lady Leigh did not take a long time in making her toilet."

Ethel started and blushed. It sounded strange to be called Lady Leigh by Philip's mother, of whose stately manners, and cold, critical eye, she was already half disposed to be afraid.

There was, however, no time for fears; the dinner had already been delayed for them. Luckily, Valerie was both active and energetic; and it never took Ethel long to get through her dressing when once she set about it; and when Philip tapped at her door to see if she were ready to descend with him, he found his trembling wife standing before the cheval-glass, receiving the finishing touches from Valerie's light fingers. During the whole of their journey Ethel had never quite thrown aside her mourning; but, with a quick appreciation of what was due to her husband's feelings, she had put on this evening a white moire silk, made as a Frenchwoman only can make a dress, — its only ornament a white lace *berthé* nearly covering the bodice.

Valerie, whose especial pride it was to dress her young mistress's luxuriant hair in the simplest and most becoming taste, had just twisted up the thick, wavy masses of coil and curl with a simple bandeau of pearls; and as she stood there, drawing on her white gloves, and clasping above them the cameo and pearl bracelets she had hastily chosen from their total absence of color, Philip was as much startled by her loveliness as when he first saw her at the Repworth ball.

"O Philip! I am so frightened!" Ethelind said; and the tears were ready to brim over in her large eyes. "I did not think I should have found it half so bad, though I have dreaded it so from the first."

"Diana and Barbara ought to have met you with my mother, and so have had it all over at once. At all events, they could have come up here to you," he said, in a short, abrupt, dissatisfied tone. "But come," he added, "you look remarkably well; don't spoil it all by tears; we will go down at once and get it over."

He drew her arm into his, and in a minute she found herself in the centre of a large, well-lighted room, receiving the cold, formal kisses which her two sisters-in-law proffered, — and then the stately introduction of "Lady Leigh," by her mother-in-law, to the numerous guests who had been so long and anxiously waiting her arrival. The announcement of dinner followed directly.

"Philip, you will take your own place at the foot of the table, and Lady Leigh, as our greatest stranger, in to dinner," his mother said; and Ethelind felt she could have blessed her for those few considerate words.

It is strange what small matters influence us sometimes. Those cold kisses from Philip's sisters had acted like ice on the burning forehead of the fever-stricken. It had nerved Ethelind instantly to self-possession; though beyond her husband and the gentleman on the other side of her, whose generous heart was touched with pity for the lovely young creature, thrown for the first time among a set of new connections, never much famed for their sympathy in the feelings of others, she scarcely entered into conversation with any one.

She did not care to eat; her appetite had fled before the excitement of this family introduction; but she sat with a heightened color and bright eyes, talking to her pleasant, gray-haired companion, until recalled to herself by Philip's saying, in an undertone, "Ethel, my mother waits for you to make the move into the drawing room."

*For Better, for Worse.*

She started, colored, and hastily drew on her gloves. It had escaped her that she was some one of importance now.

Philip looked after her, as he stood with the open door in his hand to let the ladies pass. He did not know how she would get on when left entirely to the tender mercy of his sisters; but his confidence had considerably increased since they had sat down to dinner.

Ethelind moved on to the fire, for she felt chilly after her long journey, and the guests gathered about her to take a closer view of her beautiful face. Mrs. Leigh was kind and almost motherly, as she wheeled up a large easy chair, and begged her to take it with a stately grace, observing, "she was sure she must feel tired after her stormy passage and long railroad journey."

"You forget I am so used to traveling now," Ethelind said; "and Philip is very careful not to let me go too far at a time."

Barbara, who was busying herself at the table, came forward from where she had been standing. "I am very curious to see Philip in his new character," she said. "I hope he does not try to make you believe that his laws are those of the 'Medes and Persians.' He always persisted so manfully in the theory of implicit obedience in a wife as her first and supreme duty, that I feel rather curious to see how he carries it out."

"Hitherto his laws have been very easy to obey," Ethelind replied, with a smile at Barbara's abrupt address.

"His sisters have seen him so long a bachelor, they had almost learned to believe he would never be anything else," Mrs. Leigh said. "You forget, Barbara, that a good son could scarcely make other than a good husband, and no wife who loves her husband but would readily yield to his wishes."

"You should add, when they are not unreasonable," Barbara broke in.

"I am sure Philip's never could be," Mrs. Leigh said, in her own peculiarly stately way.

"Ah, Philip is your son, mamma, *sans peur, sans reproche*, we all know. I don't think I possess the same faith in

him, though, that you profess. By the by, Lady Leigh, you have had one sample already of the Leigh spirit when roused; how came you to submit so quietly to Frippery's sudden dismissal? Now, had I been in your place, I should have felt in duty bound to have exerted my own power, and so have convinced my liege lord at one stroke that I meant 'to be judge in my own little court.'"

"Not if you had felt as much relieved by her dismissal as I did," Ethel said, timidly.

"Well, tastes differ, I know, in the matter of ladies' maids, as in other things. We used to think her a capital servant, cross and ill-tempered as she could be, I freely acknowledge; but then, when one insisted on one's independence, and treated her as she deserved, she soon grew as meek and tractable as a lamb."

"But she never gave me the opportunity," Ethelind replied. "She started with the idea that I was a child, and such she seemed determined to keep me. I was really afraid of her, and very thankful to Philip for ridding me of her."

"I own I felt doubtful about her myself," Mrs. Leigh said; "but Barbara was so sure she would manage so well for you, in your moving about, — that she so well understood how to pack, and to get on in foreign hotels, which nine out of ten English servants blunder over dreadfully, — that I gave way. Did you succeed readily in supplying her place?"

"Philip managed it all for me. I had no trouble, — and a very nice servant he met with, I assure you."

"Just fancy Philip hunting for a lady's maid in Paris!" Barbara broke in. "What strange changes come over people when they are absorbed in *la grande passion*!" — and her sharp, satirical laugh brought up a painful color on Ethel's cheeks. It did not escape the quick eye of Mrs. Leigh, any more than the nervous, hurried glances she kept bending on the door every time it opened, as if she longed for her husband's presence to reassure her, and keep Barbara at a distance.

All this time Diana was in the inner

## *For Better, for Worse.*

drawing room, with a knot of people about her, talking very quietly, as if no new sister in whom she took the slightest interest was there. It was an inexpressible relief to Ethelind when some of the gentlemen, and Philip among the number, joined the ladies. He went quietly to where she was sitting, said a few reassuring words, and then, seeing her flushed face and nervous look, asked her to go with him to the other end of the room, to look at a picture he would try and show her of Redenham. He had to hunt for it in a portfolio of engravings and water-color sketches. Here they were joined by Mr. Malcome, the gentleman who had sat beside her at dinner, who, in his own pleasant way, soon drew off Ethel's attention into some pleasanter channel, — showed her some nicely-done sketches of many of the scenes through which she had so lately lingered, — discoursed eloquently about Italian architecture, and pointed out its peculiar attributes in the pictures before them, — until Ethel forgot that Philip was no longer beside her, but standing by the fireplace in the inner room, talking, very earnestly, with his sister Diana. Now there was something in Diana Leigh's face which pleased Ethelind infinitely more than her handsome sister Barbara's; but Diana had made no single advance towards her brother's wife. She had almost turned away from her, and kept now among their other guests, as if to avoid a collision, though Ethelind felt rather than saw that her eyes were continually upon her. She would have given something to have been standing by Philip's side; but she felt she was unreasonable, and she strove very hard to overcome her timidity, and try to forget herself.

Presently she missed them both; they had quitted the room, and it was not until coffee had long disappeared she again recognized them, — first Diana and then Philip, — talking very earnestly together, a little apart from every one else.

Two or three others had joined Mr. Malcome and herself; and Ethelind, who was really weary and tired with her

day's excitement, and her long journey, sat back in her large easy chair, leaving the conversation to those who stood round the table. Presently she heard some one ask Barbara for a song. She watched her go towards her harp and commence tuning its strings. Philip came to Ethel. "You look perfectly worn out," he said in a low voice. "You are overdone, Ethie; — come with me;" and he opened a side door near them, and led her out into the lobby. He took up a candle and lit it.

"Can you find your way, do you think, to your own room, or shall I ring for Valerie? I had intended proposing that you should have paid Anne a visit. She is very anxious to see you; but you look so tired and weary, you will be far better in bed."

"Is that where you went just now when I missed you?" she asked; "I wish you had taken me with you."

"I could not do that. I did not know whether Anne wished it," he replied, quickly. "You know I have not seen her since I even thought of a wife, and it might have startled her to have taken you to her unexpectedly. However, she seems very anxious to see you, and to-morrow early you must go to her."

"I will go now if you will only take me," Ethelind said; "I am not tired or sleepy, now I am out of that hot room, and I do not feel as if there were so many pairs of eyes upon me."

"You need not fear the eyes, — you did remarkably well; and if Di had been here, she should have taken you up to Anne. O, there is Anne's maid coming along the corridor. She will take you. I must go back to my mother; I have hardly spoken to her yet;" and then, hastily placing her in the care of Mrs. Berry, a nice, respectable-looking person, above the common class of servants, Philip hurried back to the drawing room, leaving his wife to follow her conductor up stairs.

"My mistress will be very pleased to see you, my lady," Mrs. Berry said, with a smile of evident pleasure, as she opened the door, and ushered her into

*For Better, for Worse.*

Miss Leigh's room. Ethelind was a little startled at the figure she saw reclining at full length in the far end of the half-lighted room. A quilted satin coverlet and a large Indian shawl nearly enveloped her figure; while from a small white pillow frilled with lace gleamed out a pair of brilliant black eyes, real Leigh eyes, fringed by blacker eyelashes and clearly-defined eyebrows. Her hollow, sunken cheeks wore that sallow, sickly hue, a sure sign of long-continued illness and suffering; her features were too prominent for beauty, but had her cheeks been fuller and rounder, the outline of her delicate and slightly aquiline nose would have been considered decidedly handsome. There was a look of sorrow, or rather sadness, lingering about the mouth; but it was redeemed by the sweetness of the smile which now and then flitted across it, lighting up the bright eyes also, as they gleamed out like watch-fires between the mass of wavy hair which, untinged by a single thread of silver, had fallen on each side of her face upon the white pillow on which she rested. Nothing could have formed a greater contrast than the two who met there for the first time. "Dear Lady Leigh! this is indeed kind," Anne exclaimed, as she took Ethel's hands in both her own, and, drawing down her face, imprinted a warm, lingering kiss upon her brow.

"Philip told me you would like me to come," Ethel said, as if apologizing for her sudden appearance.

"Philip knew how very anxious I have felt to know and welcome his wife. And so lovely as you are too!" she said, still holding her hands and gazing with riveted eyes upon the fair vision before her, as if she could not withdraw them from any thing so beautiful. "I am sure of one thing," she added, as Mrs. Berry placed a chair for Ethelind close beside her mistress's couch,—"you will be Philip's good angel."

"Dear Miss Leigh, you are very kind!" Ethelind replied, and tears rose up into her eyes; "but you do not know what a terrible day this has been to me! I fear I am far too dependent

on Philip ever to be of any use to him."

"Poor child! I can understand it all; but it will look brighter and pleasanter to-morrow, when you know them, and are used to my aunt and cousins."

Ethel sighed. "Do you think I ever shall know them, Miss Leigh?" she asked, in a grave, sad voice. "You cannot tell how immeasurably far apart I have felt to-night; so unlike what it would have been at home with my own mother and sisters!" Tears would come into her eyes, though she tried hastily to wipe them away. "Abroad I did not want any one but Philip; but here I am so frightened at all I have to do, that I feel I shall need a friend to tell me when I do wrong."

"But Philip will do that. I think you need scarcely alarm yourself on that point."

"Philip will expect me to do what is right, but he will not direct me; and then I shall be stupid and nervous; and that I know will annoy him, and that will make me worse."

Miss Leigh smiled at the artless confession of the young wife. "We all have something to learn, and a great deal to do," she replied; "but I don't think with such a husband as Philip you need feel over-anxious. Do every thing which you feel he would wish you to do, and try, for his sake, to be brave,—it will very much lessen your difficulties. Above all, try and love Philip's mother and sisters; they have warm hearts, I assure you; but they have an easy, independent manner, which sometimes disconcerts timid people. If they occasionally say sharp things, remember it is manner only, and you will soon learn not to regard it."

It was the first time Ethelind had felt the comfort of a female friend since she had bidden Grace good by on her wedding day. She could hardly have believed that Anne Leigh had been quite unknown to her a short hour ago.

Long after Valerie's dismissal, Ethelind sat by her fire anxiously listening for Philip's step on the stairs. But except first the distant roll of carriages,



*For Better, for Worse.*

and then the slamming of doors, as the guests departed, no sound indicated that the family were retiring to rest. At last, wearied in body and mind, Ethel crept into bed, and fell into a sound sleep.

It was long past midnight when Philip entered her room. The fire had burnt low in the grate, and the soft breathings of his sleeping wife, as he bent over her, were the only sounds of life. A conscious feeling of neglect arose in his heart as he saw the little Bible and Prayer Book which Ethel always used lying open on the table, and the silken slippers and dressing-gown beside them on the sofa, which told of the weary watching she had kept while he, charmed by the novelty of his mother's and sisters' society, had stopped on, chatting to them, forgetful of the young thing he had voluntarily brought into so uncongenial an atmosphere, pining so sadly for her own mother's love.

For a moment he felt half tempted to forego all his schemes, and himself take Ethelind the next day to see her mother and sisters. But Barbara's inquiry of "how he meant to dispose of his wife's mother," — of whom she had gathered enough from Colonel Foley to enable her to torment her brother with all sorts of innuendoes and provoking allusions — crossed his mind, and in an instant dispelled the charm which his love for Ethelind was gaining over his prejudice.

"It shall be made up to her, poor little thing!" he mentally exclaimed, as he bent down and kissed her brow. "It will be a hard trial for her at first, but her love for me will lighten the sacrifice; and she is so young, she will soon learn to feel that the separation, which she now believes temporary, is in reality final." Before the morning's sun awoke Ethelind, Philip had dressed and left the house, leaving only a brief message with Valerie that he hoped to join them all at breakfast.

This was the only solace Ethelind could obtain as she dressed and descended to the breakfast room, with a sort of foreboding presage weighing heavily at her heart that the business of life had indeed commenced, and

henceforth she and Philip would be little better than strangers to each other.

"So Philip is after his old tricks again?" Barbara said, as she held out her hand to welcome her sister-in-law. "We thought you would have schooled him into a pattern husband; but if he gives way to temptation the first time it comes in his way, I fear your labor must have been all in vain."

"I dare say Philip is gone to find his steward," Mrs. Leigh said; "I know he came to town yesterday to meet him. Philip will have plenty of business on his hands after his long absence. Come, my dear," she added, drawing a chair to her side for Ethelind; "we will not wait for him. Gentlemen always like to be able to do as they please."

Ethel sat down, but the good things which covered the table were alike uninviting. Her appetite had deserted her, and she kept nervously watching the door every time it opened, in the vain hope of seeing her husband enter. Diana, too, was late; but she came at last, and began wondering what had taken Philip away so early in the morning.

"Why, my dear Di, one would suppose Philip had never gone out before without leave!" her mother said, in a slightly irritated tone. "Surely it is nothing new for him to suit his own convenience. Lady Leigh will soon learn that gentlemen hate to be tied to time, or asked questions about their own affairs."

Diana made no reply to her mother; but turning to Ethel, she said, as she drew her chair to the table, "So you went into Anne's room last night, Lady Leigh?"

"Yes; Philip wished it, and I wanted very much to see her," Ethelind replied.

"Philip never said he had taken you when I asked him what had become of you," Mrs. Leigh said, turning round quickly on Ethel, with a look which almost took away the poor girl's breath. She felt the color mount into her face.

"I fear I must have done wrong," she said; "but, as Philip wished it, I thought it must be right. I hope I have

## *For Better, for Worse.*

not made Miss Leigh worse by my intrusion. I really am very sorry — !”

“Don’t alarm yourself, Lady Leigh,” Barbara broke in with a laugh, as if rather enjoying poor Ethelind’s look of distress.

“You did Anne no harm, for I saw her this morning myself. She is full of your ladyship’s beauty, and the sensation she predicts you will create in society.”

“I really am very sorry,” Ethel again said, nervously, “at having gone to her with only Philip’s leave; but I thought when he told me she wished it, it was right to do so. I will be more careful for the future.”

“O, I dare say you have done no harm, my dear,” Mrs. Leigh said, in a more soothing tone, as she saw how uncomfortable Ethelind looked; “but we are very careful not to excite Anne at all. She is a sad invalid, poor thing; and any thing connected with Philip makes us afraid for her. The thought of your arrival yesterday kept her entirely to her own room, and we naturally dreaded the effect of seeing you on her weak frame. However, Barbara says she is not the worse for it; so we will think it a difficulty well overcome.”

And why should Anne Leigh so dread meeting Philip or herself? was a question Ethelind longed to ask; but something in her companion’s manner chilled her, and she let the subject drop.

“What are we all going to do to-day?” Diana asked, as she laid down the newspaper she had been turning listlessly over. “Lady Leigh, what are your plans for the day?”

“Mine?” exclaimed Ethelind. “I am sure I do not know; if Philip were here, he would tell me. For myself, I do not care where I go. London is quite new to me; it is my first visit to the great city.”

“More of a Goth than I had given you credit for,” Barbara said, laughing; “I thought, in these days of steam and railroads, no one lived to be twenty without having seen London.”

“But I am not twenty, — I am only just seventeen; so you will find me

behindhand in every thing,” Ethelind replied, meekly.

“And Philip will get the credit of your education, I suppose. Well, it might suit some men, I dare say, to educate and bring a wife up to hand; but I should have doubted Philip’s caring to undertake the task. But this, I imagine, is but another proof of the inconsistencies of men when they are under Cupid’s influence.”

“I wish very often I were older,” Ethelind said; “I quite dread the idea of managing a house, or receiving visits, or going out. And if Philip is much engaged, and leaves any thing to me, and I should disappoint him, I don’t know what I shall do.”

“Why, I, for one, shan’t envy you; that is all the comfort I can give you,” Barbara said, with a light ringing laugh, which shot through Ethelind’s heart, and made it quiver.

“Make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, and take you into her councils, you should have said, Barbara,” Diana interrupted. Mrs. Leigh looked grave. “If you have a proper degree of confidence in yourself, my dear, and refer any serious difficulties to your husband, you will do very well after a time, I dare say; but pray do not adopt the childish notion of carrying every little grievance to your husband. At the same time,” she added, drawing herself up with a stately look, “never forget that his dignity, as well as happiness, is in your keeping. We shall all look to you to uphold the bold step he has taken, in marrying such a young wife as yourself, by your showing the world that, after all, there was more wisdom in his choice than they imagined. Many girls of the best families would have been very proud to have been Philip’s wife.”

Barbara started up and ran to the window. “Look, Di!” she exclaimed; “there are those identical ponies, and that lovely little pony-carriage, we all admired so yesterday in the Park. It must be the turn-out Lord Mordaunt was so eloquent over the other night at the Opera. I declare they are the love-

liest ponies I ever saw in my life," she added, as the whole party went to the windows to look at them.

"And that looks like Manton driving them," Diana said, raising her glass to get a better view of them. "What can he be doing with them, I wonder?"

"Manton driving Lady Gordon's ponies! Impossible, my dear!" Mrs. Leigh said, rising up slowly from her chair, and coming towards the window.

"It is Manton, mamma, I assure you, plainly enough; and O, what would I not give to be able to drive those loves of ponies round the Park myself!"

"And if you are a good girl, I have no doubt Lady Leigh will often let you do so." (It was Philip's voice behind them. They had none of them heard his step until he was close beside them.) "I hope you like them, Ethie; they have cost me an uncommonly hard bargain, I can tell you. And now I want my breakfast, for I am growing very hungry."

"O Philip!" was all Ethelind ventured to utter; but a warm little hand found its way lovingly into his broad palm, and he knew perfectly the love and gratitude it expressed.

Ethel sat down by her husband to help him to all he wanted, and to listen to the story he had to tell of his hearing the gentlemen talking of them the night before; of the number of people who wanted them, and were only withheld from purchasing by the exorbitant price Lord Gordon asked for the turn-out, and his determination not to part with them separately; of Philip's resolve to go, the first thing in the morning, and see them for himself, and secure them for Ethel, if they really were what every one described them.

The only one in the family in whom Ethelind felt the love and sympathy she longed for was Anne Leigh.

"I am to go to Hunt and Roskell's with Philip to-morrow morning," Ethelind said, as she sat by Anne's side on a low ottoman by the fire; "I wish you could go with us. I know nothing at all about such things, and Philip says the family jewels will all require fresh set-

ting. Are you as fond of such things, I wonder, as I am? I think precious stones so very beautiful. Not that I should care to wear them, I think, but I should like to see their flashing beauty, and contrast their different effects, and the taste displayed in their settings."

Since the death of the last baronet, the unusually valuable plate and jewels of the family had been safely deposited in the strong room of their banker in Lombard Street, and never seen daylight. It was needful now that it should be examined, and such alterations and additions made as would be considered requisite. No one, however, had ventured to mention to Anne Leigh that the jewel-case was now in Eaton Place. It was thought that any reference to Redenham must be painful to her, and gradually the place and all its associations had grown to be looked on in the Leigh family as a subject entirely "tabooed" in Anne's presence. Of this Ethel was quite unaware; and as she sat on her low seat, with her head bent down over a volume of plates she was turning over on her lap, she did not observe the looks of consternation which passed between Philip's sisters, nor the cloud which gathered for a moment on Philip's brow, as he sat behind the folds of his newspaper at a table a little beyond them.

The faintest possible tinge of color passed over the invalid's face, and as quickly died away again, and then she said in her own sweet, soft voice, "I wish indeed that I could; but, as that is impossible, I should like very much to see the old ebony casket which was the especial charm of my own childhood. Could it not be brought in here and examined before it is sent to Hunt and Roskell's? I should like to look again at the jewels which I remember so well my dear mother wearing on state occasions, before their settings are altered. Philip, if they are in the house, will you gratify me by letting me see them?"

The newspaper was instantly dropped. Every pair of eyes anxiously turned on the speaker.

"Are you quite sure you wish it,

*For Better, for Worse.*

Anne? You do not really mean it?" both Barbara and Diana exclaimed, in one voice.

But Anne paid no heed to either of them. "Philip knows quite well that I do," she said, in the same steady, low tone; and without a word more of query her cousin rose up from his chair and went out of the room.

Almost before his sisters had recovered their surprise he returned, followed by Andrew, who stood the old black carved ebony casket, with its elaborate silver hinges and lock, on the drawing-room table, and, placing additional lights beside it, withdrew; while Ethelind, conscious of some family mystery which to her inexperienced mind seemed to pervade every topic of conversation on which she ventured, came eagerly to the table, to which she was followed by the not less eager though stately steps of her sisters-in-law. Anne's sofa was carefully pushed up to the table, and her face as thoughtfully thrown into shade by Ethelind's adjustment of a screen, under pretext of the dazzling light being quite too strong for an invalid's eyes.

Anne Leigh had been gazing for some time very intently on a large string of beautiful pearls. She held them up to the light, twisted them across Ethelind's white neck, and then quietly laid them down on their little tray. "These would suit you, Lady Leigh," she said: "I hope Philip will have them made up for you; they sadly need a fresh setting. I remember once wearing them myself. I felt very proud of them then; it was, I recollect, at my first public ball."

Ethelind did not venture to look up; no one answered for a minute, and then Lady Leigh, to break the awkward pause, took up a splendid set of opals intermixed with sapphires and rubies. "I think these would become me best," she said, playfully. "My light hair requires something brighter than pearls."

"O, not those, Lady Leigh, I entreat!" Anne exclaimed, nervously. "You know what opals are said to en-

tail,—the 'pierre de malheur' of the Russians, bringing sorrow and misfortune on all who wear them."

Ethel laughed. "I am not superstitious," she said; "I do not think they can harm me; and do you know they have always been my favorite stone. If Philip is proof against your auguries, I am," she added, gayly.

"Ah, I see how it will be," Anne said, with a smile, as she pressed the little hand laid on hers. "If Philip's love leads you into tempting misfortune, he thinks it is strong enough to bring you safely out of it when it comes upon you."

It took the party some time to go through the contents of the casket; and when it was all over, Anne looked so wearied that Ethelind entreated to be allowed to ring the bell for Mrs. Berry, and then, with the assistance of Diana and the servant, Anne retired to her own room for the night.

With Anne, Ethel's pleasures in Eaton Place seemed to vanish; and excusing herself on the plea of her late hours the night before, Ethelind went off to bed, leaving Philip, as usual, for his chat, undisturbed by her presence, with his mother and sisters.

"You will come and see us at Redenham, I hope?" Ethelind said, the last evening of their stay in town, as she sat on her usual low seat beside Anne Leigh's couch. "I should so like to have you there; and I know quite well Philip would."

A sudden color mounted up into Anne's face, and then left it paler than it usually was. Ethel felt instantly conscious she had made some unfortunate blunder. There was an awkward pause, and then Anne, who was the first to recover herself, said, in a low, hurried voice, "It is very long now since I was at Redenham, and I used to think I could never venture there again. I will make no promises. I will not say I will never go and see you. Redenham is associated with my earliest and tenderest feelings. You must like it for my sake. You will soon learn to do so for its own."

"O, yes! I am sure I shall. I am so fond of the country; and I shall make Philip show me your rooms, and your garden," she added, in a lower tone, trying to appear unconscious of Anne's embarrassment; "and I will have them kept up just as you used to do."

"You are far more hospitable to Anne than towards us, Lady Leigh," Barbara said, looking up from the book she was reading. "You have never once asked Di or myself to visit you, and we shall both be dying with curiosity to find out how you do the honors of your house."

"Because I never thought it needful to assure Philip's sisters they would be welcome wherever Philip might be."

"And you were not so sure of Anne's welcome from your liege lord," she added, with one of those light laughs which always sent the blood tingling (as it did now) through Ethelind's veins, and deepened the faint color on Anne's pale cheeks.

"You have no right to infer any such thing," Ethel replied, in a tone very unlike her usual one, and which entirely forbade Barbara from pursuing her disagreeable topic.

Anne drew Ethelind's hot, flushed cheek down and pressed it to hers; and laid her thin white hand upon her head, and played with her bright curls; and when Philip joined them, Ethelind's smiles had returned, and she was trying hard to like Philip's mother and sisters, for his sake, and wondering very much, in her own mind, why she found it so very difficult to do so.

#### CHAPTER XI.

AUTUMN was beginning to throw its warm, mellow tints over the rich foliage in and around Cheltenham, to which place Margaret, finding that Grace had felt keenly the separation from Ethie, had gone for a short visit; and charmed with the loveliness of the scenery, after the flat, uninteresting country about Deighton, Margaret spent a fortnight in exploring its beauties with Grace, or driving out on to the hills and woods,

with her mother, in search of the lovely views which were beyond their reach on foot. Her bright influence had a magical effect on Grace, whose spirits returned, and with them her good looks.

Grace was to be the first to leave. She and Susannah were to start the following day.

"You have given this place, which used to be so hateful to me, quite a charm, Margaret," Grace said, as she and her sister stood at the drawing-room window, watching the throng of gay, idling people parading up and down the promenade.

"You will find Leigh Moss very different; there will be no pretty faces or gay bonnets to look at. It is a long while since you lived in the country; do you think you will be able to endure it?" Margaret replied.

"It is to be hoped so, for Ralph's sake," Grace answered, with a laugh. "All this is well enough now," she added, in a graver tone; "but when I was alone, fancying a hundred things, longing to go somewhere, to do something, without a soul to sympathize with me, or tell me what to do,—it was perfectly hateful to me, the sight of so much gayety, and not one person who really cared a straw about me."

"Yes, I can understand it quite well; we are never, perhaps, so influenced in our opinion of the exterior world as when the mind is harassed or distressed. But you are too young yet, Grace, to give way to depression. You must strive against it steadily, as a great duty, or it will rob your youth of that enjoyment so peculiarly its own, and which never returns in its own fulness in after years."

"I did try to rise above it all, Margaret; but there seemed nothing to hope for or to do. Mamma did not understand me, and I believe thought me very discontented. Ethel was gone into her own bright world, away from us all, and you doing so much for every body; while I alone seemed useless either to myself or others."

"Well, you will have work to do now with Ralph. It is good for us to work while we are young. You must assist

him in his schools, and leave him some time free to spend with Katie, when she joins you."

"And Ethie!" Grace said doubtfully; "to have the very barest chance of meeting her fills me sometimes full of joy; but then comes all the doubt, and those horrid fancies which have haunted me ever since her wedding, that Ethel will never know us again. I saw it in Philip's manner, in all he said and did; and when he finds that we are actually at his own place, forestalling him as it were in all his plans, I feel sure it will drive him wild."

"I cannot tell why it should be as you seem to fear," Margaret said doubtfully, "unless, indeed, Ethel wished it; and it seems treason against her to suppose for a minute that her being 'Lady Leigh' would make her less loving and affectionate towards her sisters. But we may be worrying ourselves very needlessly, Grace; perhaps, after all, Sir Philip will rejoice to find Ralph at Leigh Moss."

Grace shook her head. "You would not doubt it, Margaret, if you had only seen how completely he ignored us all; — how he ordered every thing his own way; talked mamma over to his own opinions; fixed and arranged every thing; prevented mamma from writing to Ralph to come and marry them; had a quiet reason for all he did, and then turned off the subject as if, after he had decided it, no further doubt could arise. The only thing which made him at all uneasy was myself. He knew that I read his heart; and, O Margaret, I am sure he shrank from me; I felt that he feared me!"

"But why, with such feelings, should he have made a marriage of which even then he was ashamed? Why, despising her family, should he have proposed to Ethel at all?"

"That part of the affair I have never yet unravelled. That he felt desperately in love with Ethel I do not doubt, and do not wonder at, either; but having taken time to consider the matter over, why he should voluntarily follow us here and propose at once baffles my skill to

understand." There was a long pause, and then Grace added, "There is always a doubt in my mind how Ethel will get on with the proud mother and sisters, who could not come to have a look at the poor little bride, though they could choose her dress and her servants, and no doubt teach Sir Philip how to treat those new relatives who were to be seen and heard of no more. Before this, perhaps, Ethie may have needed us; and then what a comfort it will be to be living any where within reach of her!"

"And it may happen, Grace, dear," Margaret said quietly, "that Ethel will not want you. A wife's love and obedience are so wrapped up together, it is hard to try and separate them. If such is her case, — I do not say it will be so, but I cannot help thinking that it may be so, — let us never attempt to throw difficulties in her way; rather let us wait until events render our reunion desirable."

Grace's tears rolled down her cheeks.

"It seems very hard to bear," she said, as she stood wiping them away; "but I will try and do as you wish; I know, Margaret, you are always right."

Susannah took Grace to Birmingham the next day, to meet Ralph; and then Margaret, with Mrs. Atherton and her maid, started off for Deighton. Margaret's heart almost failed her as they drew near their journey's end. She dreaded the shock to her mother when she realized, in all its truth, the strange home and strange work which occupied all her time and attention, and in which, in some measure, she must now share. How thankful the poor girl felt for the dusky evening, which wrapped the village in a veil before they drew up at her own little door! It was a relief to have only the internal accommodations canvassed that night. Many anxious young hands and busy fingers had been at work during her absence, getting it all in apple-pie order before her return. Rachel Gray, in whose charge it had been left, had gone backwards and forwards to Miss Weldon, and had shown so much taste and judgment in her arrangements, that Mr. Weldon had been quite de-

*For Better, for Worse.*

lighted, and predicted all sorts of flattering surprises when Margaret arrived and learned how active and energetic she had been. Both she and Annie Morley stood at the door to welcome the travellers; and the tiny room, with its white muslin curtains, cheerful fire, and moderator-lamp, looked the very picture of neatness and comfort.

Mrs. Atherton looked at it all with a less dissatisfied expression than her daughter-in-law had ventured to hope for; and the "Well, upon my word, Margaret, it is not so bad, after all, as I had expected from your description," sounded like praise to poor Margaret's anxious ears.

Margaret's early breakfast was long over before Mrs. Atherton came down to explore by daylight the ins and outs of her little domain; and it would be difficult to say which party looked the most astonished — Mrs. Atherton and Susannah, when they walked into the school room, and found Margaret surrounded by a roomful of little children from two years old to ten, or the children, as they gazed in mute wonder and awe at the pretty pale lady in such deep black crape and her close widow's cap, always followed about by the smiling-faced black woman, with shining jet hair and white sparkling teeth, wrapped up in endless folds of white muslin, and decked out in such heaps of glittering trinkets.

"My dear Margaret, why, you will be tired to death with nursing that great fat child on your knees, and with all those little things hanging about you! Do let Susannah take the baby and nurse it for you. And why don't you send them all home to their mothers? Surely they are all too young to learn any thing."

"Not quite, mamma, as you will find, if you will hear this little damsel say the new hymn she has learned while I was away." And Margaret slipped the book into her mother's hand, and bade the little awe-struck, wondering thing go through her lesson to "the lady."

"But, my dear, you will take cold! You are sitting in a thorough draught, the worst thing you can possibly do;

and the sun shines full on your face. Do let me pull down the blind." And away Mrs. Atherton trotted to see if she could not make the shade fall where Margaret sat.

"We like plenty of fresh air and sunshine, mamma. These little folks live mostly out of doors, you know;" and a bright smile passed over Margaret's face at her mother's anxiety on her behalf.

"Yes, but you don't, child; and if you are not careful of yourself, what in the world is to become of all these labors of yours? Dear me," she added, "I had no idea you kept a nursery. I thought, of course, your school was for big boys and girls, old enough to learn something, after all the trouble you bestow on them; but to be drudging yourself to death just to save the mothers the trouble of taking care of their own children, I do think, is not only a waste of time, but very much beneath you."

"This is only for an hour and a half, and Rachel Grey mostly has the care of them. I am with them this morning for a reward for their having been good children while I was away. But come with me," she added, putting down the fat child on the floor, "and I will show you how industriously my little domestics are at work, preparing to send you up a nicely-dressed cutlet and a small potato-pasty for your dinner. Do you know," she added, "we are getting to be very proud of our capabilities as cooks? and though we do every thing on a very economical scale, we are as careful and nice in our preparations as aunt Sarah herself used to be."

"Cook in such an outhouse as this, my dear!" Mrs. Atherton exclaimed, as her eye ran over the brick floor and rough, whitewashed walls of the little shed, by courtesy styled the kitchen, apparently deficient in any of the most common requisites of modern kitchens. "Why, I declare, it is not better than the Fairfield cellar."

Margaret laughed. "Not much, I grant you," she said; "but that is just what I wish people to understand. Any body may learn to cook in a modern

## *For Better, for Worse.*

Kitchen, where there is no end of steam and gas apparatus, and every contrivance besides which modern ingenuity can invent. But my girls live in cottage homes, where many of them will live and die; and some are to go into service — into families of the middle class, who have few or none of the contrivances for simplifying labor. Now my idea is, that if a girl can cook well and economically in this shed, with a simple fire of wood or coal, as the case may be — if she can be neat and clean, and light-handed and careful, and gets a good knowledge of her work — she will not grumble at her home, if she is destined to remain there; nor give herself airs when she goes out to service, and finds little better accommodation than this for her sphere of action.”

“The world is grown so very good nowadays!” Mrs. Atherton exclaimed, with a heavy sigh. “Every body must be doing something. And a world of mischief they contrive to do, that’s certain. They half of them don’t know it, I suppose, poor things. Now just think how the poor dear dean toiled and slaved for one charitable society and another, and never any good came of it all, that I ever heard of. I hope you won’t do the same, child, and throw away your life as he did, and nobody be a bit the better for your labors after all.”

“I will take good care of myself, mamma, depend upon it; and when you have eaten your dinner, you shall judge if all my labor is wasted, bearing in mind, of course, that only a few months ago neither of these little maidens had attempted cooking in any shape. But here is Dame Price’s granddaughter come for her broth and pudding, and little Willy Simmons waiting for his sick sister’s apple tart;” and she left her mother and Susannah to watch the young things carrying off the tempting looking viands to their invalid relatives at home, while she opened the door of another small room, with no furniture but a long deal table, a little stove, and a clothes horse, where two of the biggest girls were busily employed in ironing and plaiting a basket of clean

clothes, to be sent up that afternoon to the rectory. By this time Rachel Grey was tying on bonnets and tippets, and sending home the younger children; while two or three of the bigger ones, with brooms and brushes in hand, were waiting to sweep and dust the school room, preparatory to the arrival of Margaret’s second batch of scholars, who were to come to her after their own early dinner. Margaret herself put on her bonnet and shawl, and hastened up to the rectory. Mrs. Atherton stood too much on proprieties to accompany her — she would wait until Mr. Weldon had called on her; and though Margaret laughed, and assured her they were a simple people, who never stood on ceremony with their friends, she did not press the matter, but left her mother and Susannah to arrange themselves in their new home, while she sat chatting over the past events of the month with Miss Weldon, and hearing how satisfactorily Rachel Grey and Annie Morley had conducted the school during her absence from Deighton.

## CHAPTER XII.

It was some weeks after Mrs. Atherton’s arrival at Deighton, that Margaret was standing at the window of her sitting room, pulling off the leaves of some geraniums, which formed a screen from the road, and watching the sunlight on the glittering sides of the bright little fish which were darting so merrily from side to side of her pretty aquarium. Suddenly the omnibus pulled up at the gate, and Ralph Atherton himself issued from it. In a moment the brother and sister were silently folded in each other’s arms. “My dearest Ralph, this is indeed delightful!” Margaret exclaimed; “but what can have brought you here?” and she led him into her sunny room, and made him sit down in her large arm-chair, while she stood by his side gazing into his bright, handsome face.

“I thought I should surprise you, Maggie,” he said; “but almost till the last moment I was not sure of coming,



## *For Better, for Worse.*

and I did not like to run the risk of raising your expectations only to disappoint them. What time does your afternoon work begin?—because I must beg a holiday for your scholars. I must have you all to myself while I am here, and my visit will necessarily be a short one. And so this is your domain, where you reign supreme," he said, his eyes running rapidly round the room. "Well, your field of action is not so very bad, after all; it looks sunny and bright. But what do you do with our mother? You surely cannot all live in this room—my mother, Susannah, schoolmistress, and pupils!—do you?"

Margaret laughed. "Not quite so bad as that, either," she said. "This was my undisputed property until my mother came to me. Now I am divided between two homes. I cannot quite give up possession here. It is where I retire to when I want to feel quite free. With mamma, I let as little of my 'profession' appear as possible. I must take you in and surprise her. You would be astonished," Margaret added, "to see how readily she has adapted herself to circumstances, and how well she bears the strange life into which I have brought her. She really gets quite interested in the children, and not only knits socks and comforters for them herself, but is actually teaching a class of girls to do it for themselves."

"But this cannot be all her occupation? She must want some of her old amusements;—the gossip of her friends, for instance; the excitement of morning calls!"

"I am sure she did sadly miss it all, and often fretted for more society; but she has learned to make amusements for herself, by counting how often carriages go past our windows, how many horses are shod at the blacksmith's in the week, and who patronize the new grocer's shop over the way."

Ralph laughed. "O Maggie, and is that the extent of her employment?" he asked. "Surely you cannot congratulate yourself on your achievements, my little sister, if you rise no higher in your intellectual scale than such homely amusements as these."

"This is not all. It is but a part of our daily work," Margaret replied "and though to you it sounds very in significant and trivial, it is not so in reality, if you compare it with the unemployed time or energies of the last few months. O Ralph, dear, you don't know what a dread I had of the weight she would be on my hands; and I ought to have been more trustful."

"I feared you had not counted the cost, Maggie, when you proposed having Mrs. Atherton here. I thought you would find it too heavy a burden to sustain single-handed. I have had many doubts about you, I can tell you, little sister."

"But what could I do, Ralph? Grace could not have borne it longer; so there was really no help for me, you know. I assure you, I do infinitely better than I expected. Poor mamma! I really do not think she would care a bit for her quiet life, if she could but get people to recognize me as the 'dean's daughter,' and not merely as a village schoolmistress."

"And don't you sometimes long to be free of her—to know that your time is your own?"

"I do long for rest and quiet after a hard day's work; but, in spite of this, there is a pleasure in finding, when the work is over, two anxious people waiting for you. While I am thus cared for, who could be otherwise than happy? It would indeed be a spirit hard to please. And you and Grace may congratulate yourselves that, in taking mamma and Susannah, and giving you only Grace to take care of, I have added so much to my own domestic comfort."

Ralph drew Margaret to him, and imprinted a warm, brotherly kiss upon her lips. "If you don't 'extract honey out of every opening flower,' I don't know who does," he said.

"Now, then, I really must take you to mamma," Margaret said; "if she or Susannah saw you getting out of the omnibus, I shall never be forgiven for keeping you all to myself." And she led the way through the garden to the back entrance of Mrs. Atherton's house.

## *For Better, for Worse.*

They had not seen him, however, and a proportionate amount of astonishment and delight followed. Mrs. Atherton had never cared much for Ralph; a mutual indifference had sprung up between them, from the absence of all warmth on her side, which, while it had not much affected his comforts, had made him but barely tolerant of her foibles. Now, however, in her isolated home, her heart had opened and warmed to her husband's children. She was better able to appreciate their worth, and to look on them with more of that pride and affection which she had hitherto lavished solely on her own.

Susannah had gone off hastily, to enlist the services of Margaret's kitchen for an impromptu dinner for the tall, handsome, grave-looking man — no longer the Master Ralph who could not be compared with her own beautiful boy, but a Reverend now, like his poor, dear father, and to be treated with all the honor and respect due to so honored a parent and so honorable a title.

"And you are really going to be married, Ralph?" Margaret said, as she seated herself beside her brother, after seeing her mother to her bedroom.

"Yes, Maggie; really going to do the foolish thing which one always blames others for — going to throw up my fellowship, and marry on a curacy."

"It seems very strange; but I am nevertheless very glad to hear it, for your sake as well as Katie's. It is weary work waiting, perhaps all the best years of your life, for a living, which may disappoint you when it falls vacant; while you and Katie are both unhappy and unsettled, fretting away your tempers and your good looks."

"Yes, all this I have thought over very often, and at last concluded either to marry, or give up Katie entirely. I at last put the alternative in her hands, and we both fully agreed it was best to brave the world, and take our chance of poverty together. She has no home she can rightfully claim, and we are both young enough to work. As we had fully made up our own minds, we determined

not to wait for our plans to be divulged. I go on Saturday to Wylminstre; on Monday we are to be married; and you, Margaret, must go with me. I promised Katie, when I was there a fortnight ago, that I would listen to no excuse."

"Katie knew I should have few to offer where you were so deeply concerned; but the notice is a very short one for so important a matter, and village schoolmistresses keep small wardrobes, remember."

"Little preparation is required," Ralph replied. "Gray stuff, printed calico, white muslin — any thing will do. We don't mean to make guys of ourselves, depend on it. A curate and his bride have little else to do but walk quietly to the early morning service, and get joined together — for better, for worse — in the simplest way such matters can be contrived. But you will come, Margaret?"

"Certainly, dear Ralph. Who should be there if I am not? I only wish I could exercise the power of Cinderella's fairy, and give you a dowry on the happy day that makes Katie yours."

"And Grace, Ralph?"

"Grace has taken wonderfully to her new work, and makes an admirable help to me in my parish."

"I am very glad to hear it," Margaret said fervently. "Poor girl! she only requires a stimulus to bring out her fine character. I feared that at first your place would be dull, after Cheltenham, where Susannah tells me her beauty was getting talked about, and where, had she remained, it would have been almost impossible to have avoided being drawn into a vortex of gayety, very undesirable for young girls. It is a better atmosphere for her under your roof; and she and Katie will be society for each other in your absence. Do not let her think she can ever be any thing more to Ethel."

"Grace knows it as well as we do, but she tries hard to shut her eyes to it. I fear I cannot help her," Ralph replied, as he fondly kissed Margaret's cheek, and wished her good night.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MARGARET, Susannah wants you, to try on your dress. I really could not have believed that a little careful ironing, with a fresh bow here and there, would have made it look so well — almost as good as if it had been new. With my lace shawl and your little chip bonnet, and its blue and white ribbons, I really think you will not look so out of the way after all."

Margaret laughed at her mother's unwilling admiration. "Now, really, mamma, for a village schoolmistress, you must own Susannah has turned me out in very admirable taste."

"You are not a schoolmistress at Wylminstre, remember, whatever you are here. Pray don't learn to look at yourself in that light, child. If you once begin calling yourself so, every body will believe you are one." Margaret only laughed; she did not attempt to argue the point with Mrs. Atherton.

"O Miss Margaret, if you had but seen Miss Ethel on her wedding day! Such a splendid dress as they sent her from London! If ever there was an angel on earth, missie looked like one then!"

"Dear Ethie! she would have looked well in any thing. She did not require the aid of dress to set off her beauty. Having no pretensions to it myself, a little of your judicious aid, Susannah, is a great help to me."

"Not so much as your sister's, may be; but you have got far more than most folks — something that prevents any body from missing it when they look at you. Really, Miss Margaret, dear," Susannah added, as she walked round her, smoothing down the folds of her dress, and carefully inspecting her own handiwork, "I must say, I wish it was your own wedding you were going to, instead of Mr. Ralph's."

"Ralph would not thank you for that wish, Susannah; and I am sure I do not," Margaret replied, laughing.

"Margaret marry! How can she ever be married in such a place as this is? What man would be bold enough to

marry a village schoolmistress, I wonder?" Mrs. Atherton broke in. "I declare, if it were not for the good match Ethelind made, poor child, I should be quite in despair. There is Grace buried alive in an out-of-the-way place, nobody knows where; and Ralph going to throw himself away on a penniless girl, half a Quaker like himself, — when by a good connection he might have made his fortune, and his sisters' too. And then, look at Margaret, settled down in this stupid place, losing caste and connections, and every thing else! Margaret will never marry, depend upon it."

"Dear mamma!" Margaret exclaimed, good humoredly, "how shall I ever make you believe that it is the last thing I look upon as the end and aim of a woman's existence. But I can hear Ralph's step," she added, trying to turn the subject, which she had often to battle with now, and which experience had taught her was a very sore one. "I will run down stairs and see if he approves of my appearance."

The brother looked her over, and finished off by giving her a kiss. "What a pity you are not to be a bride as well as Katie!" he said. "It would be better than teaching naughty children to read and spell. Have you never repented, my little sister?" he asked, as he gazed fondly into her large, soft eyes.

"Never, Ralph!" Margaret replied, with a heightened color, but in a low, steady voice; "I have regretted, but I have never repented. But you are as bad as mamma," she added a minute afterwards. "And she is always regretting that the few good looks I possess will soon fade away; and that no one will dream of venturing on so bold a step as marrying a village schoolmistress."

"She is right, I dare say," Ralph replied. "Here there certainly does seem little chance for you; but you don't mean to spend all your life at Deighton?"

"No, certainly. The opening seemed just what I most wanted, at the time I undertook it. It has enabled me to remit Frank his allowance without draw-

## *For Better, for Worse.*

ing on our income; and has not only given me employment, which I wanted, but the means of testing some of those schemes which before had been but theories, and of course proportionally valueless. I am already leaving it very much in Rachel Grey's hands. Directly I can safely trust her, I feel quite free to go elsewhere."

"I have just been looking over your establishment with Mr. Weldon, and listening to all the good things he has to say in your behalf. I am very glad to find, Maggie, that in your zeal for education you have not made pets of your scholars. You have not pampered them with all sorts of luxuries and comforts, such as poor, honest people never obtain, and which puts children above parents and places, as well as making them saucy to their employers, and extravagant and wasteful of what belongs to others."

"That, Ralph, has been my great aim. I have seen that with schools, reformatories, prisons — no matter what it is (with the exception of workhouses and barracks) which men and women take up — human nature gets the better of discretion. Kind treatment becomes a hobby. We make pets of them, instead of teaching them how to battle with their difficulties, and some fail. It has been my intention to try and bring out their faculties, and leave them to apply them usefully afterwards. If I succeed in making one good servant, one good wife and mother, real honest, industrious, hard-working, and methodical members of a family, I shall have proved I was neither mistaken in my theory nor have wasted my time in the endeavor. I have but one reward, one luxury," she added, "which I freely allow myself; and you must come with me to-night, and see and hear for yourself. I let them exercise their own ingenuity in showing their appreciation of my labors by working for me in any way they please. I keep my singing class entirely for those who deserve it."

Mr. Weldon joined them at tea. He was as pleased with the brother as the sister; and that was saying a great deal,

for he stoutly maintained to every one, the like of Miss Atherton was not to be met with in the three kingdoms. Mr. Weldon pressed Ralph to remain one Sunday, and help him in the services. But Ralph shook his head; he was expected at Wylminstre the next evening, and he could not disappoint them.

"I should have liked very much to have heard you preach a sermon, my dear," Mrs. Atherton said; "just to judge of your style. Preaching is thought so much of nowadays; I really do think there is as much fashion in religion as in a lady's dress. At one time 'prayers' are what every body goes to church for; then comes a sudden change — some wonderful Dissenting preacher makes a sensation with his wild and extraordinary sermons, and then we as suddenly find out that 'sermons' are the great matter, after all, by which we are to make sinners saints; and forthwith prayers are as good as ignored, and sermons are every thing."

Ralph laughed. "I am afraid, mother, you would not think my sermons likely to make many saints of sinners. I hope it may be so, but I assure you I do not feel at all sanguine."

"You will do very well in time, child, I dare say — that is, if you don't fly off into any of those extreme notions young men always think it necessary to start with when they first become curates — to give the world an idea of their great zeal, I always fancy. I am sure I used often to wonder how the poor, dear dean bore all the nonsensical opinions he used to listen to so patiently from one young curate and another. High Church, Low Church, Broad Church! it was all pretty much the same — all speaking with just as much authority and confidence as if they had been the 'Fathers of the Church,' instead of being nothing but children just out of leading-strings."

A smile played round the corners of Mr. Weldon's mouth. "My dear madam," he said, "it is another sign of the times. We live in a 'fast age,' and it is hard for some of us who belong to the past one to keep up with the rapid strides the young people make to our

*For Better, for Worse.*

own harder-won wisdom and experience. However, it would certainly have been more satisfactory to us all—even Miss Atherton yonder,” he added, significantly; “though she seems too busy over her tea-making to say so—if Mr. Atherton had put a sermon in his pocket, and given us an opportunity of passing judgment upon him ourselves.”

Margaret was busy presiding at her little tea table, spread out with all the little dainties her band of young cooks could devise to gratify her guests' appetites. The rector thought he had seldom seen so pleasant a family party: Mrs. Atherton, with the soft, full folds of her widow's cap, forming a misty halo round her still pretty face; Margaret, in her plain gray merino, her little lace collar and cuffs her only ornament, and her hair, in its own glossy brightness, braided in full, rich bands round her low, broad forehead; and Ralph, standing on the hearth-rug, in his tall, manly beauty, with his straightforward, steady gaze, and his kind, genial smile, the very type of an English gentleman.

When their tea was over, Margaret rose up and invited her guests to follow her across the garden to the well-lighted and warmed school house. As she lifted the latch, and ushered in her guests, it presented a very animated scene. Round three or four tables groups of boys and girls—young men and young women some of them, for there was no limit as to age—were congregated. At one, six or seven boys might be seen poring over some interesting books, with maps and pictures upon the table. At another, four or five young women were industriously making a set of new bed furniture for Miss Weldon. At a table in a corner several boys were writing copies, or working out sums upon their slates. Some were cutting and carving wood with their knives—all sorts of little household comforts, spoons, stands, platters, many pretty and artistic; and little girls were covering books, and making carpet slippers for their fathers' and brothers' wear at home. Rachel Grey and three or four of the most advanced pupils were su-

perintending it all. Every one looked comfortable and contented. They all rose up when Margaret's warm, well-wadded red cloak and hood appeared within the door; but almost before she had hung it on its own peg, they had again quietly resumed their work. The rector and Ralph passed about from group to group, making remarks and asking funny questions, which sent many a light, low laugh round the table. Margaret, with the folding doors of her own room thrown back, stood watching the expression of pleasure in her brother's face. It was ample payment for the many hours of weary working and discouragement which she had passed through.

Presently one or two old people quietly lifted the latch, and walked in. “They had come to hear the music,” they said, “and they thought 'twere about the right time for it to begin.” So Margaret opened her organ, while books and slates and work were carefully put away; and then those who could sing joined her in some of the choice though simplest hymns and choruses from Handel, Mozart, and Mendelssohn.

Ralph stood by the fireplace with Mr. Weldon, listening to the steady swell of the young voices round his sister. She watched their own earnest expression, as if their hearts entered into their work; and a dim though scarcely understood appreciation of the wonderful power of the composers was beginning to steal over and illuminate their uncultivated intellects, like a ray of light glimmering through a darkened window. She saw the pleasant smiles and gratified faces of the parents, who dropped softly in from time to time, at the ever-opening door, sitting quietly down in the far-off corners, or standing bareheaded and respectful, to enjoy a treat which it was evident every one appreciated and approved.

Ralph was deeply moved. And these rough agriculturists, apparently no higher in the scale of intellectual society than any other set of villagers, had been thus trained and taught by the

## *For Better, for Worse.*

gentle kindness and skill of one pure-hearted, energetic girl, with few means beyond the rector's cordial help and sympathy, and her own untiring zeal.

"This is the reward we give them," Mr. Weldon said, "to belong to these evening classes, which are open four nights in every week. Sometimes Miss Atherton reads to them, sometimes I do, books of travels, or works on natural history. Or we give them little lectures on aquariums, drawing, manufactures, or whatever it may be; but we never go beyond the simple subjects, which all can follow and comprehend. The school room yonder we throw open every night, lighted and warmed, for those who, having no snug fireside at home, can come here and read the books we lend them, and the magazines and newspapers we contrive to supply them with. They can also practise their lessons better for these particular nights than they could possibly do at home."

"And with no supervision?" Ralph asked.

"Only such as my dropping in at all times and seasons, Miss Atherton doing the same — often, indeed, sitting here, in her own room; and our appointing the clerk's son, a very respectable, steady young man, curator and caretaker of the books and papers. Of course, if one irreverent word is uttered, it takes away the privilege at once; but while Miss Atherton is with us there is no fear of such a thing occurring."

"And when my sister leaves you?"

"Don't mention it!" Mr. Weldon said hastily, interrupting him. "We can none of us bear to think of that part of the affair. It must come, we know, — and we trust we shall go on as she has started us; but we are not sanguine, neither can we bear to anticipate. But I must go," he added; "my sister will be wondering what has become of me." And then, wishing Margaret and Ralph good night, he turned away to the door.

The following morning, after placing her mother under the especial supervision of Annie Morley and Rachel Grey, Margaret started with Ralph for

Wylminstre. It was nearly six o'clock in the evening before they arrived at Dr. Harford's door. Margaret was to be the Harfords' guest until after her brother's wedding; she was then to spend two days with her uncle and aunt Waldron before her return to Deighton.

There were lights shining cheerily through the curtained windows, and a large lamp in the hall, and Margaret's eyes were dazzled by it as she stepped out of the dark fly. But little heads, one above another, came peering out of half-open doors, and then a rush and the joyful exclamation following of, "They are come, they are come! Aunt Katie, Ralph Atherton, and Margaret are come!" And the sitting-room door opened wide, and a smiling, fair-faced, and rather pretty-looking lady, in the quiet-colored silk dress of a "Friend," and somewhat coquettish-looking little cap over her soft brown hair, came out into the hall, and welcomed them; and behind her, as neat-looking and simple, if not quite as "Friendly," stood the blushing, trembling figure of "aunt Katie."

It was a warm and hearty welcome the travellers both received from Dr. Harford and his wife. Ever since Mrs. Harford's marriage, her home had been that of her young sister; and now she and her husband braved the scruples and doubts of the "elders" of their sect, and from their roof Ralph Atherton was to take his bride. The rising young physician, though still a Quaker in heart, was in too constant collision with men of fewer prejudices and wider views, not to find the rust of an almost insulated and somewhat bigoted body daily yielding to the friction of society; and if his own notions were becoming less "law-bound" than many of his brethren in the faith, they were also more "catholic" in their wide-spreading charity and good-will towards the judgments and opinions of others.

Mrs. Harford and her sister were orphans. The latter had been Margaret's schoolfellow when she resided at her uncle Waldron's. Perhaps it was the influence of her character on Katie

### *For Better, for Worse.*

which had first awakened in her heart that longing for a fuller measure of the "grace" which the blessed sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper give, and which, if not absolutely denied by "Friends," is at all events withheld from its members.

It was a bright October morning when Ralph Atherton, with Dr. Harford, Katie, and Margaret, entered the little parish church of St. Jude, for the early morning service. Few knew that a marriage was to be performed, and fewer noticed the simple white muslin dresses of the bride and her bridesmaids, for Margaret held two wondering little girls by the hand. Reverently they knelt with the few who worshipped so early in their parish church; and then, when the rector entered the chancel, and the marriage service commenced, Dr. Harford led Katie to the altar, where Ralph, with Margaret beside him, had already taken their places. A few old people gathered up nearer to them, to get a look at the pale, quiet face of the bride, and to hear the reverent tones in which every response was made by the tall, calm, and collected-looking bridegroom, whose whole soul seemed absorbed in the prayers and vows he was making. The ceremony was soon over; their signatures duly made; Dr. Harford's brougham at the door of the church had received the happy pair; and Margaret, leaning on the doctor's arm, with his little girls laughing and skipping about them, were making their way leisurely through the narrow streets of the old city, before many of its drowsy inhabitants had risen from their slumbers.

A warm welcome and a pretty breakfast awaited their return. Margaret clasped Katie in her arms. "My brother's wife, my own dear sister now!" she said, as she imprinted a warm kiss on her blushing cheek. "This is indeed one of my happiest days. O Katie! may your life be always as bright as this morning's sunshine; and if Ralph cannot give you riches, may you ever have that peace and that love which the world cannot take away!"

Mrs. Harford, in her plain rich silk and soft clear cap, looking so exquisitely fresh and pure, seated her fat, chubby baby on the rug; where, in stately baby consciousness of its white frock and sash, and the bow of white ribbons which tied on its embroidered cap, it sat watching with wondering eyes the various proceedings of the party, while its mother was dispensing the hospitalities of her breakfast table, over which a storm of beautiful flowers had fallen.

Tokens of uncle John and aunt Sarah's thoughtful love, in the shape of many useful household treasures of costly plate and china, were safely packed away for transmission to Leigh Moss; but neither of them could be persuaded to quit their own fireside. They were too old, they said, and too unused to such things now. One or two friends of the Harfords — Katie's friends — joined them at the breakfast table, where, however solemn and stately such affairs usually are, there certainly was no lack of laughter and merriment during that wedding breakfast. The children besieged Ralph's plate with all the good things they could heap together; while he laughingly pointed to their white sashes, and asked them what those "female dragons," the "elders and overseers," whom aunt Sarah held in such reverence, would say to the finery their mother had decked them in. "Children are the parents' safety-valves for Nature's inherent vanity, it is my belief," Ralph said, as he held up the ends of baby's ribbons. "Why else is it one so often sees a demure looking 'drab' mother, with a train of little ones in no way differing from the rest of the world, except, perhaps, in the absence of skill or taste in the harmonious blending of color, which two centuries of nipping and checking has almost obliterated?"

"That is touching on a tender point with my wife," Dr. Harford said. "I doubt if she will allow it. She will instance their love of color in every thing but personal adornment; their taste for flowers; their appreciation of

*For Better, for Worse.*

art; their skill in drawing and painting; their —”

Ralph laughed. “And what else?” he asked. “Their full appreciation of the comforts and conveniences of life I allow, but surely not of the beautiful; or why should they have chosen a style of dress so utterly out of harmony with all rules of art? They have not even the sanction of their founder for its adoption; for the broad-brimmed gypsy hats and the blue and green aprons, which aunt Sarah declares were the fashion even within her remembrance, must have been far more picturesque than the outrageous ‘coal-scuttles’ which adorn the heads of the present generation of ‘Friends.’ That they do follow the fashion I aver, though I should shock uncle John by saying so; or else, what has become of the venerable ‘three-deckers,’ and the knee-breeches, and long lapelled waistcoats that used to figure among ‘Friends’?”

“We are growing wiser, I suppose,” Dr. Harford replied. “We are learning the lesson that true Quakerism does not consist in the peculiar cut of a coat, or the shade of a color, or even in using the more poetical, if—as with us—the less grammatical, singular number. Perhaps my young ones may live to see the day when the present stringent rules of our society will be replaced by broader landmarks.”

“When Quakerism will cease to be, except as a tale that is told,” Ralph said. “Once remove the landmarks of singularity,—the self-imposed tyranny of rules and laws; that sort of petty martyrdom which enthusiasts delight in, and which acts alike on a Quaker, a Tractarian, a Plymouth Brother, or a Sister of Charity; that individual *espionage* to which you so tamely submit,—and, as a body, I believe Quakers will soon become extinct. What you will all become I cannot predict; some, perhaps, will merge into one sect, and some into another. Except as we know that extremes meet, the Church is not likely to gain many of you to her ranks. The long inherent dread of any thing approaching sacramental grace, the

abhorrence of a ritual worship, will take years to overcome; but the time is approaching, you may depend upon it, when Quakerism will be nothing more than an empty sound.”

Mrs. Harford laughed. “Not a cheering prediction, Ralph,” she said, “nor one much to be dreaded, I think. But I would warn both Katie and thyself how you attempt to sow the seeds of doubt among my young ones. There must be no followers in aunt Katie’s footsteps, I beg leave to say.”

Several twinkling little eyes were turned slyly up to uncle Ralph, and then back to their mother’s face. “But, dear mamma, aunt Katie has promised we shall pay her a visit, and uncle Ralph says we must go to church at Leigh Moss; and I am sure I liked going to church this morning very much.”

“Your mother must come with you, Jenny, and take care of you,” aunt Katie said, as they rose up from table. The carriage would soon be at the door, and it was time to think of starting.

Dr. Harford’s brougham set Margaret down at her uncle’s door in Acre Lane. Cordial and loving was the welcome she received from both her uncle and aunt; and old Betty declared, “that say what people would of Miss Maggie’s work, she never looked so well or so pretty in all her life.”

Margaret had many questions to ask and answer as she sat beside her uncle and aunt. John Waldron shook his head over Ethel’s marriage: “The young thing was too much a child,” he said. “Ethelind Atherton should have known better than have allowed it; but she was always a weak, silly woman, very unfit to have the care of young girls.”

“Mamma had nothing to do with Ethel’s meeting Sir Philip Leigh, or his proposing for her. Ethel met him at Repworth; none of us knew him. And it was entirely his own doing to follow her to Cheltenham, as he did.”

“And now, I suppose, she is hoping one match will make a second; Grace



## *For Better, for Worse.*

first, and then thyself, child, eh?" uncle John said. "We shall hear of you all in turn, I suppose."

"Thy mother, child, is always talking and thinking about her girls' getting married," aunt Sarah said, in her quiet, gentle tones. "It is a sad misfortune when a woman once gets this notion into her head; she little knows how she lowers herself in the estimation of every right thinking person. A single woman is far better off than a married one, unless the connection is in every way a desirable one;" and the old lady drew up her tall thin figure in her own maiden dignity.

"Mamma is very much delighted at Ethel's good fortune, as she calls it; and she does hope, I know, that it will be the beginning of better for Grace and myself; but I doubt if it will be through the Leighs. If all I hear is true, Sir Philip has by no means married the whole family. Ethel is his now, not ours; and we are no more to him than we were before."

"That is just what Ralph seemed to fancy; but I don't understand it," Mr. Waldron replied. "I own I don't comprehend a man's stealing into a family and taking off one member by stealth, and then being ashamed to own it. If a man likes a girl, by all means let him try and get her if he can; but having got her, let him boldly stand by his bargain, and take her and hers into his keeping. There is something mean and pitiful and selfish about it, and bodes no good to Ethel."

"We are not sure it will be so yet," Margaret said gently. "Perhaps we are uncharitable, uncle John, in harboring such suspicions." Margaret spoke cheerfully, but there still lurked the shadow of misgiving on her own heart.

### CHAPTER XIV.

THERE seemed no fear of Grace, in her brief authority at the rectory at Leigh Moss, finding time hang heavily on her hands during her brother's short absence. She had full employment in putting in order and arranging every

thing in and about it for the reception of its new mistress — choosing the sunniest and brightest little room for Katie's own; decking the low-roofed, French-windowed sitting room which opened on the bit of lawn and shrubbery, and was dignified by the title of drawing room, with all the little ornaments she could find scattered about the house; arranging a rustic stand of flowers in one window, and placing a bright nosegay in a glass vase in another; ransacking the rector's book shelves for the best bound books she could find to fill up the shelves of the little chiffonnier; and altogether making such a general hubbub and confusion as would have somewhat disconcerted the said matter-of-fact and very orderly Mr. Clifford, could he have witnessed the operation before the grand effect had been obtained.

Then there were the sick to visit, and some of them lived far away on the fells among the purple heather and the blue sky, which seemed to meet in the horizon stretching away on the distant hills. But mounted on Ralph's little shaggy pony, with her basket of provisions and good things slung on the pommel of her saddle, Grace was not afraid to start away alone on her mission of love in Ralph's service. And the people liked to see her bright face at their doors, and she grew used to their north-country dialect and their rough, unpolished ways, so unlike the gentler bearing of the more southern counties. It was drawing towards the close of the day but one on which Ralph was expected home, that Grace watched the sun getting low in the horizon, and remembering there was a short cut through the park, she decided in her mind to try and find it, though she knew well, had Ralph been with her, he would have walked miles round rather than have trespassed on Redenham property. Through the tangled masses of underwood, with the tall trees above her, the daylight wore a murky and dark appearance; but Frisky knew his road, and trotted briskly on, until the pathway suddenly opened, and a broad and dazzling flood of light discovered the sun sinking low in the ho-

### *For Better, for Worse.*

rizon, sending the long shadows of the trees across the mere, whose placid waters looked like a sheet of molten glass, stretching its light and shade over the undulating sweeps of the large, open, well-kept park. On a piece of table-land to the right, with the purple hills beyond, rose the proud, gray towers of Redenham, with its lofty walls, its broad terraces, its stately porticoes, and its files of windows; bespeaking the vast size and magnificence of the building, which had been added to, as generation after generation of owners had lavished his abundance in additions to his home, with little or no reference to anything like architectural uniformity. Time, however, had softened and blended it into a very harmonious and imposing whole. And few of the ancient families of the English nobility could boast of so regal or imposing a home as the Leighs of Redenham. "Well enough they may be proud of it!" Grace inwardly exclaimed, as she sat still on her pony for a moment, while her eye rapidly scanned the view before her. Workmen were scattered about over the building, and heaps of rubbish, ladders, baskets, and barrows were lying about over the broad stone terraces and the long flights of steps leading down to the gardens below. Two roads branched off from where Grace stood. One led evidently across the path to the village, the other turned off in a little bridle track to the Castle. Though it would prolong her distance, Grace's natural curiosity led her to take a nearer view of the home which was so soon to claim Ethie for its mistress. As she approached the house, she found, however, that it was but a private way, and led directly to the stables. It was too late to return; so, putting the best face she could on it, she made her way up to a respectable-looking woman who was loitering about and talking to some of the workmen, and asked her if she would kindly put her into the way to reach the village, as she had taken the wrong path, and did not like to return.

The woman looked at her for a moment, and then, apparently recognizing

the curate's pony, she called to a boy, and bade him lead the pony round through the stable yard to the other side of the house, and turning civilly to Grace, begged she would follow her through one of the open windows on the terrace to the entrance on the other side. Grace gladly enough did as her conductor desired, and soon found herself in a magnificent suite of rooms, opening one into another, with painted and gilded ceilings, and rich draperies, and large mirrors, and polished oak floors, and carved furniture, which only here and there peeped out from the thick holland covers which closely surrounded them.

"This seems to be an immense house," Grace said, as she walked on through one room after another by the side of her conductor.

"Yes, miss, 'tis, sure enough; and lots of rooms on the other side are hardly ever used," the old woman replied.

"There are a great many workmen about, apparently; do you know when Sir Philip and Lady Leigh are expected back from abroad?"

"We haven't heard yet for certain, miss, but orders came last week from the steward to have more hands put on; so methinks it won't be very long just now; and a great change it will make, one way and another, when the family are here again, after shutting it all up so close for so many years."

"Have you lived here alone; for I suppose you are the housekeeper?" Grace said.

"No, miss, I ain't the housekeeper; I was one of the housemaids at the time Sir Walter died, and when the late Lady Leigh and Miss Ann went away, I staid on with Mrs. Edwards to help her take care of it all. After a bit I married one of the gardeners; and as there was a smart lot of work to do to keep the place well aired and dusted, and Mrs. Edwards didn't like fresh faces, and I had no children, I still staid on. At last, when more than ten years went by, and we had a'most given up all hope of ever seeing any body coming to live here again,

*For Better, for Worse.*

Mrs. Edwards got a letter from Mrs. Leigh—that's Sir Philip's mother, you know—saying that Sir Philip was going to be married; and as his lady was very young, not much better than a little child, Mrs. Leigh thought, she said, 'twould be better to send down a more experienced housekeeper, as Sir Philip would wish to have every thing in first-rate style, and Mrs. Edwards was to leave. Poor soul, she took on about it awful at first. She had lived in the house ever since she was a child, and had served the family so many years, and nursed Master Arthur and poor dear Miss Ann in their cradles, and was with Sir Walter when he died. She fretted dreadfully at the thought of being turned out now in her old age. But Mrs. Leigh, you see, miss, is a very high lady, and she have got very haughty notions about doing things in the right way, and she thinks there never was any body like her son. And Sir Philip gives in to her entirely, they tell me; which to my mind is a great pity."

"And Mrs. Edwards has left you now, then?" Grace said, getting interested in this little peep behind the scenes of her sister's new home.

"Yes, miss. Mrs. Edwards had an aged mother Miss Ann had been very kind to, and had put into a cottage near her house in the Isle of Wight, and Mrs. Edwards went there to nurse and take care of her. Miss Ann, you know, would take care she never wanted for a home."

"And who is the Miss Ann you speak of? Is she Sir Philip's sister?"

"La bless you, no, miss! she's the sister, the twin sister, of poor Master Arthur as was killed—as beautiful a young lady she used to be, when I last saw her, as ever you clapped eyes on, and as kind-hearted as she was good. Every body loved her. 'Twas she as was to have been married to the present baronet if it hadn't been for that terrible accident. 'Twas all planned in their cradles, they tell me; how Master Philip—that was Sir Philip's nephew, and belonged to Leigh Court, the white house the other side of the mere—and our Miss Anne was to be married, and

Master Philip almost lived with his uncle. His father was dead, and Sir Walter brought him up with his own son. Well, then came that terrible accident that you have heard tell of, no doubt, when Master Arthur was suddenly killed, and poor Miss Ann was injured some way in her back, and for long they thought she would have died too; but she didn't, though I have heard she has been a cripple ever since. Sir Walter, poor gentleman, didn't live long, and then they all went away—Lady Leigh and Miss Ann; and from that day to this nobody has ever come back to live at Redenham."

"And Sir Philip did not marry his cousin after all?" Grace said, in a low, tremulous tone, as if consciously prying into family secrets when she had no right to do so.

"No, poor thing! They said—I won't answer for the truth of it—that she broke off the match. Mrs. Edwards heard that she should say, it wasn't right the heir of Redenham should be tied all his life to a poor cripple like herself. They said, too, 'twas long before Sir Philip would give up all hope; and when he did he never liked to put any body else in the place that seemed of right to belong to his poor cousin. Some said his mother (Mrs. Leigh and her daughters are awful high people) could never find any body good enough to match with her son! However that may have been, it seems he did meet with somebody to suit him at last; and right glad every soul in Redenham will be to see the old Castle alive again, with company coming and going as it used to be. No place was ever thought so much of for miles round as Redenham Castle."

"And Sir Philip's mother and sisters," Grace asked, nervously, "do they ever come here? Have they much to do with Redenham?"

"They will come here now, no doubt," the woman replied; "but they never have been yet. They go occasionally to Leigh Court, when Sir Philip has run down for a few weeks' shooting, and of course they would come once here, and

*For Better, for Worse.*

rout about the house finely; but they ain't like the last Lady Leigh or Miss Ann; they, young ladies, give themselves airs and interfere. They don't mean wrong, they tell me, and perhaps 'tis true; but people don't like it, and don't take to them. Poor Miss Ann! I would give a deal to see her once more, poor thing! Mrs. Edwards writes word she is more like an angel than any thing in this world; but she says she is strangely altered in face from what she was when I last saw her. If you will step into this room, ma'am, I will uncover her picture."

It was a large oil painting of two children, a boy and a girl, leaning over the stone balustrade of the terrace and gazing straight into your face. Their arms were thrown lovingly round each other's neck, and a tall Scotch greyhound was pushing his long nose close up to the little girl's cheek. The boy's eyes were large, soft, hazel eyes; the girl's darker, and brighter, and more glittering. There were dimples on their rosy cheeks, and smiles about their mouths, and their dark, glossy hair hung in ringlets upon their necks and shoulders. It was altogether a bright and pretty picture, and Grace felt she would have liked to have known more of the sorrowful story which had sent one to an untimely grave, and robbed the other of all that the heart holds dearest.

"If you would come here some morning, when the workmen are gone, miss, and the dust is cleared away, I would take you over the house, and uncover the rest of the pictures; there are a great lot of 'em about the walls, and some are counted very good by them as understand such things, they tell me; but just now we are in an awful mess and muddle. I am sure I shall be uncommon glad when the baronet and his lady come back from abroad, and the place looks a little more as it used to do. A lot of new furniture came in last week from London, for her ladyship's own rooms. Sir Philip is spending no end of money in making it all comfortable, though, for that matter, there seemed

enough of every thing in the house before, I should have thought, for any reasonable creature."

As they passed through the conservatory, still bright and glowing with autumnal beauty, Grace ventured to beg a nosegay to decorate her own little drawing room the next day; and then, with many thanks to her kind conductress, she mounted Frisky at the grand entrance in the court yard, and, following the pathway pointed out by the boy across the park, cantered briskly home to Leigh Moss.

There was no lack of food for Grace's thoughts as she bustled about her own home, dusting and arranging, and making the most of every bit of ornamental furniture she could put her hands on; but a cloud of doubt and uncertainty still laid heavily on her on Ethel's account, and she turned away, as resolutely as she could, from puzzling herself with possibilities, to the certain pleasure Katie's expected arrival was sure to bring her. Katie herself could not have desired a warmer welcome than Grace gave her, when she and Ralph drove up to their own door in a hired fly, and Grace's smiling, happy face and sisterly embrace greeted her as Ralph led her into her new home.

With her sister-in-law's arrival at Leigh Moss a new life opened to Grace Atherton. Together the two girls worked and drew, or helped Ralph in his schools and parish visits. Together they decorated the church for the Christmas festival; together they assisted the blind organist in the better formation of a village choir; together they roamed about in the fields to gather early violets, watched the young trout in the mere, or loitered under the hedgerows to await Ralph on his return from the extremities of his distant parish. Grace heard from Ralph all that Margaret was doing, and, willing to follow her footsteps in ever so humble a way, she volunteered her assistance to the one uncouth and very slovenly domestic of the rectory. The stout, rough, Yorkshire damsel who acted in the capacity of maid-of-all-work could hardly comprehend the revolution

*For Better, for Worse.*

which Katie and Grace effected after a time in the culinary department of their modest establishment — Grace, in her brown-holland apron and sleeves and white, floury arms, vigorously kneading the dough for the fresh batch of household bread, and Katie, with her cookery book before her, plunging desperately into the mysteries of some untried delicacy which was to surprise Ralph on his return home after his tiring walk.

“All this seems so easy to do, I can’t think why I never thought of it before,” Grace said, as she and Kate stood by their yule fire, having just returned from making their simple toilets, preparatory to their substantial tea, which took the place of a late dinner. “I knew how badly Charlotte cooked, and how cold and comfortless every thing was served up, but it never entered my head that I could alter it. I knew, too, that Margaret was doing a hundred wise things at Deighton, and I sighed and moaned inwardly, because nothing seemed to happen in which I could be of use to Ralph. It is a weary feeling to know you are a burden on those you love. O, how I longed to be an artist — an author — even a governess — any thing, in fact, which would give me the power of earning my own bread! And yet, when I talked to Ralph, he only smiled, and bade me not despair; and when I thought about it, I could not tell how I should begin; so nothing came of it but sighs and moans. I really do begin now to hope that single women are not such very useless beings after all.”

“We are apt to think we are useless, because we cannot go forth into the world in active combat with its difficulties. Perhaps, if we looked about our own quiet homes for those small, insignificant employments we are prone to despise, as leading to no definite results, we should ultimately find that higher and seemingly nobler duties opened out before us,” Katie replied. “Generally speaking, girls are not taught to employ spare moments diligently; we fritter away time in gossip and idleness, and also in the very longing for something to do, instead of res-

olutely fitting ourselves for doing that something, whatever it may be, when the right time comes.”

“Well, I for one ought not to be wasting time over trifles,” Grace exclaimed; “I who am doing nothing for Frank, my own brother, not yet even helping to take charge of mamma, while Margaret and Ralph, with but half the tie to them that I have, are slaving away for us all! Kate, do you know I only wait now till Ethelind returns from abroad. I have a strange, restless craving to see her; and then, when that longing is gratified, I mean resolutely to become a governess — that is, of course, if any body can be found weak enough to trust their children in such heedless hands.”

Kate smiled. “Things certainly appear brighter than they did, Grace, and it is entirely due to your energy; you only wanted starting. I do not see how Ralph could spare you from your class in school, or from the choir in church, especially as I can give him no assistance, except in keeping the children quiet and orderly in their seats. Charlotte has already improved so much under your care, that we shall soon be able to get her a better place, and take a young girl from the school as her substitute; besides, if you leave, what is to become of me without you? How I should weary of Ralph’s long absences! Make all the use you can of your time, Grace: it is erring on the safe side to be prepared for every emergency; but you must not think of leaving us for the present.”

It was drawing on towards the middle of March, when Ralph came in one evening from his study to his wife and sister, who were working busily by the fire.

“Grace,” said he, “Simpson has just been here. He came to tell me Sir Philip and Ethelind are expected at the Castle to-morrow evening. There is to be a gathering of the tenantry on the lawn to greet their arrival with a band and banners, and bell-ringing all day.”

The blood forsook Grace’s cheeks,

*For Better, for Worse.*

and then went rushing wildly back over neck and face. "What! Ethie actually in England! How strange it is she should never have sent us one little line to say so!" she exclaimed. "But she will explain it all now, I am sure! O, I am so delighted! Dear, dear Ethie!" and Grace bounded out of her chair, and looked radiant with expectant joy.

Ralph did not say much; he stood with his elbow on the mantel-shelf, looking thoughtfully into the fire.

"Did Simpson give you any particulars?" Grace asked nervously, as she saw the cloud on her brother's brow. "Does he wish you to join the people on the lawn, Ralph?"

"He suggested it, of course, and in ordinary cases it is most certainly what I should have wished to do; but now comes the difficulty of my present position. I do not choose to force myself on Sir Philip; I must leave it to him to make the first advances. I could not tell Simpson why I shall not be with them. It is altogether, I fear, a very awkward dilemma in which I find myself."

"I am afraid it is," Grace replied, thoughtfully, "unless Ethelind has worked a great change in her husband; and even then, after all I heard from that servant at Redenham of his mother and sisters, I own I have very little hope."

"But can you excuse yourself, Ralph?" Kate suggested. "Will it not look strange in the eyes of your parishioners not to be with them at such a time?"

"It will, but it cannot be avoided; Sir Philip must take the initiative, come what will. I told Simpson I could not possibly join them, though I should have liked to have done so, had it been possible. Not knowing me, Sir Philip, I said, would not notice my absence. I think it puzzled him; he looked as though he could not comprehend it all, and, as I could not explain further, I could only turn off the subject. Their pew is to be got ready for them, to come here to church on Sunday if they please. New velvet cushions, &c., are to be sent to-morrow."

"And I shall have to meet Ethel for the first time in church! O Ralph, how can I possibly avoid rushing into her arms?"

"Grace," Ralph said, and there was a careful look on his usually cheerful face, and a subdued, determined tone in his voice, which struck his wife and sister instantly, — "Grace, my fear is, we shall all have to learn the difficult lesson of restraining our first natural impulses. For my sake, for Ethel's — and hers is even dearer to us than our own — resolutely guard your feelings from display. I can give you no cue as to what should or should not be done. I may be over-cautious — over-careful; but this I earnestly require of you: unless you are prepared stoically to endure whatever may be in store for us, do not venture to appear in church on Sunday until you are sure they will not honor us with their presence from Redenham."

"And you, Ralph," Katie said, "can you venture, do you think, to go through the service? Are you sure you will not break down?"

Ralph threw himself down on the sofa by Katie's side. "Anxious little wife!" he replied. "Anxious for her husband's nerves; more anxious for his reputation! We men have such things, I suppose; nerves of brass, perhaps; certainly of a less excitable nature than yours. Yes, I can manage it, I hope; at all events, I must try. My fear is, for Ethelind first — then, darling, for you; for if matters prove as unpropitious as I sometimes dread, my Katie may find herself homeless!" Katie kissed the broad, open brow which rested on her shoulder.

"God will not forget us, dearest," she replied, "if we do what is right. Do not let us be disheartened. It is no fault of yours that we are here. If it really will prove for Ethelind's good that we quit our home, we will go at once, when you can get the curacy satisfactorily placed in other hands."

"Sooner said than done, little woman!" Ralph replied. "But where is Grace off to?" he added; "into her own room for a quiet flood of tears, now, I'll

be bound. Poor girl, it was a sharp trial for her, and Ethie, too, to be so near each other, if they must not meet; but in that case, for both their sakes, I shall pack Grace off to Deignton; any place will be preferable to her remaining here." And Ralph went back to his study to put the finishing touches to his sermon.

Grace listened restlessly to the bells, as from early dawn they continuously pealed out their joyous welcome. She remembered how desolate she had felt, when the noble peal from St. Mary's tapering spire had heralded forth their wedding, nearly twelve months ago. She watched the people from the hills and vales flock past the rectory door, in their holiday dress. She caught the roll of the distant drums, mustering in the village beyond. The sun shone gayly; the birds sung in the trees. Every thing seemed rejoicing and gay, except the restless spirits at the rectory. It was vain to attempt hiding their anxiety from each other. It was useless attempting to sit still; and though Ralph laughed at Grace, and several times very philosophically returned to his study writing-table, Grace caught the sound of his footfall across the floor, or his low whistled snatches of old tunes, which told, plainly enough, that the mind of its occupant was not entirely absorbed, either in the study of divinity, or the final touches of his pen to his next Sunday's sermon.

#### CHAPTER XV.

NOT until the porter had shut and locked the door of the carriage of the train which Ethelind and Philip had just placed themselves in at the Euston Square Station—not until the panting and puffing engine had carried them far beyond the dull, dirty-looking houses and streets of the suburbs of London, into the pleasant, sunshiny country fields and budding hedgerows—did Ethelind freely draw breath, and feel herself once more at ease. The yoke of her mother and sisters-in-law's pride had pressed heavily on the fresh, young spirit of the

poor girl. If this, her first peep into the ranks of the "upper ten thousand," better, she felt, far better, would it be never to quit the shadow of some quiet home, with her own Philip at her side, as he had been during their stay abroad; better almost to be exiled from her native land forever, than have to submit to the stern shackles of society, which offered so few attractions in return for its own hard exactions. And Philip, too, breathed freer away from Barbara's sarcasms and Diana's stiff, insisterly formalism towards his young wife. They had each galled him in his most sensitive feelings, though he did not choose to show it; and he turned again to Ethie's bright smiles and merry rejoinders, with a double relish, as they whirled rapidly along in the express train towards their new home. "It won't be long now before we reach the Leigh Station," Philip said, as he put down his paper, and looked at his watch. "I don't know what sort of welcome is intended for us, but Simpson sent me word he thought there would be some sort of demonstration in honor of our arrival."

"Will there?" Ethelind said, in a startled tone. "Nothing, I hope, in which I must take part. You will tell me what I am to do, Philip! Do you know, I am growing very nervous about my duties and responsibilities. I don't really think, if I had ever guessed what they were, I should have mustered courage to have become your wife. I forgot all my fears this morning, when I shook myself clear of London; now Redenham, and its cares and its duties, are staring me in the face. It seems as if life was made up of cares, and every step you take brings you deeper into them."

"Well, so I suppose it is; but you will do very well by and by. If you had any doubts, why not have brought Barbara or Di with you? They would have relieved you of all responsibility, and introduced you to the neighborhood. I should have proposed it, only I thought you did not take to them very readily."

"They were very kind to me," Ethel replied; "but I certainly prefer being here first without them." She did not

wish Philip should think her prejudiced against his sisters; but had she not been rejoicing the whole day through, at having left them miles behind her?

As they neared the station, Ethelind's quick eye caught sight of a travelling carriage and four splendid, gray horses, with postilions in dark-red livery and black velvet caps. A dignified and very sedate-looking butler was on the railway platform, with two or three other servants in livery beside him. "Welcome to Redenham, Sir Philip, and my lady, too," he said, making a profound bow to Ethelind, as Sir Philip helped her alight from the carriage.

"Thank you, Stephens," Sir Philip replied, heartily; "we shall be very glad to be amongst you all again. Is there any body else here? Where is Simpson?"

"He is just outside, Sir Philip. With your leave, the yeomanry cavalry and the tenants are all out at the cross-roads to meet you; shall I lead the way to the carriage, my lady? James and Robert will look after the luggage; I suppose Mr. Godfrey knows where it is." And Philip, with Ethel on his arm, walked out to the other side of the station, followed by Valerie, bearing endless cloaks and shawls. A crowd of people gathered round the carriage door, to see the young wife Sir Philip had brought home; but Ethelind thought only of their pleasure in again welcoming the possessor of Redenham to his home. It was some little time before they could start. Valerie had to be stowed away safely in the rumble, by the side of Godfrey, while Stephens and James mounted the coach-box. Robert was left to follow with the luggage in the Redenham break.

It was fully two miles to the first lodge; and here a large cavalcade awaited them,—mounted horsemen in cavalry uniform, with banners flying, bands playing, and hundreds of people, of all ages and sexes, striving eagerly to keep pace with the carriage, by taking short cuts across the park, and round by the glassy mere. Philip bowed, and Ethelind bowed, and laughed, and smiled, as she watched them all, as much amused as if she had merely been a spectator

amongst them. As they wound up the broad drive and came out on the summit of the gentle eminence, with the noble front of Redenham full before them, all Ethelind's fears came over her again in their fullest force. "O Philip!" she exclaimed, in a low, suppressed voice, "what a magnificent home you have brought me to! I never dreamed it was half so noble a place as this." Her husband caught the expression of her face,—there was surprise more than pleasure in it, without doubt.

"Do you not like it, Ethie? Is it not what you expected?" he asked, anxiously.

"It is too grand, too magnificent," she murmured. "I had not thought of it as half so large. But it is very beautiful!" And she drew a long breath to recover herself; and before Philip could attempt to reassure her, the horses had struck into a quick, sharp trot up the steepest part of the road, and then drew up with a proper demonstration in the court-yard.

Philip sprang lightly out, and then assisting Ethel to alight, and leading her up the flight of steps to the entrance, drew her arm within his, and turning round and taking off his hat, he stood for some minutes facing the throng of people who had gathered close up round them. Three hearty cheers rung out for "Sir Philip and Lady Leigh." Ethel's arm trembled as it rested on her husband's; but except for the shade of heightened color on his cheek, and the glitter in his eye, you would not have known how moved the strong man really felt at the scene before him.

"My friends," he said, and his voice rung out sharp and clear, so that every one could distinctly hear him, "I sincerely thank you for the warm and hearty welcome you have given us to-day—a welcome as unexpected as it is gratifying to my feelings to witness. As yet, I owe it entirely to your own kind hearts, and the love you bore those who preceded me. The time will come, I trust, when we may have some better claim upon you for our own sakes as well as theirs. It will be Lady Leigh's endeavor,



*For Better, for Worse.*

as I am sure it will be mine, to deserve the honor you have done us to-day, and to endeavor to bind closer, by sympathy and mutual help, the bond which should ever unite the interest of proprietor and tenant. Again, in Lady Leigh's name, I must thank you specially for your welcome, and we hope you will go round to the north entrance, where a barrel of Redenham home-brewed and a cold dinner is already prepared, Simpson tells me, for those who would like to partake of it after their exertions."

Again cheers, long and loud, rang out for Sir Philip and his lady; and then, still clinging to his arm, Ethelind followed her husband into the hall. A long file of servants were drawn up to receive their new mistress, headed by a large, red-faced, imposing personage, dressed out in a bright-green silk dress, with black lace cap, and flaunty yellow ribbons. Stephens and Godfrey were there also; but most of the men had disappeared to the other side of the house, where their services were required to serve out the hospitalities of Redenham to the crowd.

"The dinner, my lady, is ordered for half past seven o'clock," the yellow-ribbons murmured, in a soft, oily voice; "will it please your ladyship to say if that hour is agreeable?"

Ethel glanced towards her husband appealingly. "Yes, that will do; but serve it in the library to-night, remember: Lady Leigh is tired with her journey, and the room is warmer and smaller than the others." And Sir Philip looked sharply at the smooth, red face, and its endless bends and becks, though he made no remarks. "Come, Ethel," he said, "there is an hour to dinner yet; let us go and explore some of the rooms of this great place, which seems to have frightened you so much. I will take you to your own room first—I want to see what that fellow, Snell, has made of it all, for I have trusted entirely to his judgment and taste in their arrangement." They ascended the broad oak staircase, which opened on a long corridor, running round three sides of the house, lighted by large oriel windows, with

magnificent views over the park and of the country round. It was carpeted with dark-red cloth, throwing out boldly the noble groups of statuary standing between the windows and the paintings, which hung on the walls between the doors. Tables, and chairs, and ottomans were standing about in the deep recesses of the windows, inviting you to lounge about in the bright sunshine, enjoying the extensive views, or to take exercise in that warm promenade on a wet day. Ethelind's suite of rooms—bedroom, dressing room, boudoir, morning room, &c., all opened into each other, with a pretty conservatory, with a flight of marble steps leading down into a larger one on the terrace, which connected her room with the drawing rooms below; so that from within or without she had free access to her own private apartments.

Nothing had been spared to make it the perfection of luxurious comfort and elegance. The only doubt which at all troubled her, was a feeling that it was too luxurious, too artificial, for her ever to feel at home in it. She almost longed to see some old easy chair, or well-worn sofa, on which she could have thrown herself while she took a survey of her possessions, and learned to adapt herself to her new life. Alas, poor Ethie! She was but a child still, and had yet to learn how very soon the soft luxuries of life steal upon you one by one, and so become insensibly the very necessities of the rich. Valerie was already taking possession of wardrobes and toilet tables; and as she shook out the soft folds of her mistress's pink *barège* dress, and brushed out and braided her bright, glossy hair, she could not resist pouring out, in eloquent strains, her admiration of the splendid *château* which owned Sir Philip as master. Valerie's English mother had taught the girl enough of her own language to make her child sufficiently familiar with it as to add very considerably to her comfort now that she was thrown entirely amongst English servants in a strange place and a large house. Valerie could already have told of the admiration excited by her

mistress in the servants' hall; of the wonder created by her extreme youthfulness and beauty. "Such a sweet face!—and for all the world like a young child, rather than a woman!" "More, by half, like Sir Philip's daughter than his wife," seemed the general opinion; while the sleek, meek, red-faced yellow-ribbons exclaimed, inwardly, "Goodness me! well enough Mrs. Leigh should say our new lady was no better than a child! See if I don't get the upper hand of every thing in this place in a twinkling! Sir Philip's got a sharpish look with him—the Leigh eye, I s'pose 'tis—that they tells me sees every thing; 'twill be sharper than I takes it for, if it sees through me,—that's all. It takes something to beat me, when I sets my heart on any thing. At all events, 'tis worth a trial."

With her cashmere wrapped carefully round her shoulders, Ethel wandered with Philip over the house; looked at some of the old paintings; admired the wide-spread views from the windows; crossed the magnificent hall with its lantern dome of colored glass; the steel armor, which glanced bright on the walls, reflecting back the flames from the burning logs in the quaint fireplaces on each side the staircase; its leopard-skin rugs, and the silken banners still floating round the tall, clustering pillars of polished marble which supported the groined roof; and then finished off by passing the evening together in the wainscoted library, just as they did abroad, in the full enjoyment of each other's society, uninterrupted by any thing which could throw a shadow over Ethelind's intense happiness.

Ethel often recurred in thought to that first evening spent at Redenham, which, like a sun-picture, remained so indelibly traced on her memory, that neither happiness nor sorrow in after years could ever succeed in effacing it. But the realities of life were beginning. Youth and its bright visions were passing away, and Ethel Leigh learned on the morrow that she must gird up her loins for the battle, for that womanhood had assuredly come, with its trials and struggles,—as come it must to us all,—

and her time to take a part in the combat had now arrived.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

ETHELIND sat for more than an hour over her twice-replenished teapot, patiently waiting for Philip to join her at the breakfast table. When he came in at last, he brought heaps of letters and papers, which he sat reading and poring over as he sipped his tea. The steward from Leigh had been with him. News had come down by the night train, of the Ministry having been defeated on some important question, and their expected resignation the following day. Mr. Jones, a shrewd, active lawyer and a great politician, hoped Sir Philip would bestir himself in politics again, as he used to do; so he had posted over to Redenham by daybreak, to consult as to the course he should take if any stir in the country ensued.

"And you, Ethel, must fill the house," he said; "on Monday you will have callers from all the neighborhood. I will give you a list, by and by, of those I wish you to be most civil to. We will fill the house, if we can, at once."

"Fill the house, Philip? What can you mean?" Ethel replied, with a bewildered look, as visions of all those numberless rooms flashed across her.

"Why, get some of the people in the neighborhood to come and see us—give a sort of house-warming—make Redenham what it used to be years ago."

"But not directly, Philip; I know nobody yet. What should I do with strangers here?" And she looked up, with a distressed face, to her husband.

"If that is all you fear, we will soon remedy that evil. I will send for Diana or Barbara; they know every one, and will soon introduce you, and take the burden of entertaining your guests off your hands. I should have proposed bringing one of them, only I did not fancy you quite contrived to hit it with the girls. You always seem afraid of Barbara's nonsense; and Di, I know, seems cold to those who don't know her. Still,

for all that, I will write to-day, and tell them both to come to us on Monday."

"O, if you please, Philip, do no such thing," Ethelind replied. "I dare say I can manage; at all events, I will try, if you will only tell me when I do wrong."

Philip laughed. "Well," he said, "you must remember and keep that horrid woman my mother has sent down as housekeeper, in her right place; I don't like the look of her. No such finery as hers ever used to see daylight in Redenham in old times; and her smooth, oily tones don't please me, any more than the horrid dinner she favored us with last night. Perhaps one has been spoiled lately by French cookery; but, pray, do see, Ethel, that out of the loads of dishes she favors us with, there is something eatable to-night. After luncheon, I have ordered Robert to bring round your pony carriage; I will give you your first lesson in driving."

Presently the housekeeper herself appeared, and Ethelind, entirely ignorant as she was of housekeepers and housekeeping, was soon fairly beaten by the plausible speeches, and the smooth tongue of the wily woman. "O, I know so exactly what you would like, my lady!—I, who had, you know, all the responsibility on my own shoulders of the Marquis of Liddington's family; and such a splendid place as it was, and always so full of company! And as to the Marchioness,—I don't know whether you are acquainted with her, my lady,—such a kind, affable lady, and so pleasant in her ways to every body. 'Now, Blake,' says she, 'we shall want the best dinner you can send up for thirty; ' or it might be a hunt-breakfast, you know, or a ball-supper, or any thing of that sort; and the house, maybe, crammed full of people from top to toe. 'Well, Blake,' says she, 'I shall leave it all quite contented like in your hands, because I am sure you will manage it all better than I can, and make it go off a great deal better than if I interfered!' So you see, my lady, I shall be quite at home, and I hope you will be also."

Poor Ethelind felt at that moment any thing but at home in her new duties;

but she would make an effort for Philip's sake. "The dinner, yesterday, was not quite what Sir Philip liked," she ventured to say, with a rising color, which she tried hard to keep back; "could you send us up one or two nice little French dishes?"—and she ran over the names of those she remembered to have heard him particularly recommend,— "and let every thing be very hot, if you please, and not quite so many dishes on the table. We are alone to-night, and Sir Philip is extremely particular."

"So Mrs. Leigh pleased to inform me, my lady; indeed, it was on that account she was pleased to select me. The high recommendations, you see, my lady, that I brought from the Marchioness. 'Such a treasure as you are, Mrs. Blake,' as she was good enough to say over and over again, 'how shall I ever get on without you?' Poor Mrs. Leigh, the tears were in her eyes as she hired me: 'So beautiful and young as my daughter-in-law is,' she said, 'how can she know any thing of housekeeping, Mrs. Blake? So on you I shall entirely depend.' 'And you may rest assured, Mrs. Leigh,' says I, 'that I will do my very utmost to serve her ladyship and Sir Philip.'" The oily-tongued, red-faced Mrs. Blake forgot to add, how rejoiced the Marchioness of Liddington had felt in having, by her absence from home, when Mrs. Leigh had called for a personal character of her late housekeeper, escaped the necessity of telling the truth respecting her short three months' reign in the Liddington household; glossing over faults in a short note, to save the consequences of telling the truth, under the charitable excuse to her own conscience, of preventing the poor woman from earning a livelihood, and thus not only entailing trouble and disappointment on others, but perpetuating an evil which is daily gaining ground amongst us, threatening to uproot the reciprocal bonds of masters and servants, and to break down the whole state of domestic peace and economy throughout the country.

Wrapped in her warm fur jacket, with her veil tied closely over her bon-

net, Ethelind took the reins, while Philip sat beside her, teaching her how to guide her high-spirited, but well-broken ponies, as they wound their way across the park, by the glassy mere, amongst the browsing deer, and then up the purple hill, covered with heather and yellow gorse, and round through the little straggling village of Leigh-Delamere.

"What a pretty, picturesque church! And that cottage to the right, I suppose, is the rectory. How picturesquely the thatch slopes down over the windows, making quite a little veranda, with the woodbine and honeysuckle over it! And only look how bright those flower-beds are, with crocuses and jonquils!" Ethel exclaimed.

"That is where poor Clifford lives. My mother, I remember now, said something about his being away, ill. I must inquire, by the by, whom he has got for a curate; the place looks inhabited, for I saw one lady, if not two, looking out at us as we passed," Sir Philip said.

Ethelind had been too busily engaged in looking at the curious gray church tower, and the bright flowers in the curate's garden, to notice any one within; and in another minute they had swept through the village, and up the turn in the road, and into the lodge gates. And Ethelind, excited by the fresh breeze on the hills, and the pleasure of driving her own pretty pair of ponies, came down from her toilet, looking fresh and bright as a young May-queen.

"The tea has waited for you so long, it is quite cold; do wait until I have rung for a fresh cup," Ethelind said, as Philip made his appearance after dinner. She did not look up, or she would have noticed that something not very agreeable had clouded her husband's brow, since she had left him sitting over his dessert.

As the door closed on Stephens, who had brought in the replenished teapot, Philip turned round suddenly to Ethel, and asked, abruptly, if she knew where her brother was living.

Ethelind started. "At Cambridge," she said, "when I left; but how can I tell now? I have not heard from home

for months. Why, Philip, what makes you ask?"

"Your brother is in orders, I think you told me."

"Yes, before he left Cambridge,—before dear papa's death. But tell me, Philip, have you heard any bad news?—any thing that—that I ought to know?" and the color died away out of her face.

"I have heard what I can scarcely believe," Philip replied, as he stood moodily stirring his tea, and never noticing his wife's very anxious face. "Simpson has been with me this evening, and he tells me the curate Clifford engaged to take his place at Leigh-Delamere during his absence is named Atherton—the Rev. Ralph Atherton! It is scarcely likely there are two Ralph Athertons in the world, much less in orders."

"It must be Ralph. Only think, dear Ralph actually at Leigh!—living within a mile or two of Redenham, and I know nothing of it! How very delightful!" Ethelind exclaimed, forgetting every thing else in her joy but the prospect of again meeting some of her own family. There was no responding joy in Philip's face; a dark cloud had gathered upon his brow.

"I don't understand how it has all happened," he said, stirring his tea so vigorously as to indicate the war raging in his breast. "I think Clifford had no business to appoint any man to the curacy without consulting me. In ordinary cases, no doubt, it rests exclusively with the rector; but here—close under our windows, within a stone's throw of one's house—it is not at all pleasant to find people put into office you literally know nothing about, and assuredly would rather not meet."

"I can imagine under some circumstances it might be awkward," Ethel replied, scarcely understanding the drift of her husband's complaint; "but I am sure I, for one, feel most grateful to him for giving it to Ralph. How delightful to think I have the most distant chance of seeing dear mamma or Gracie!"

Philip saw it was useless dissembling

*For Better, for Worse.*

the truth any longer from Ethelind. It was time now she learned the price at which her present happiness had been purchased. He set his cup and saucer on the table, and then turning round to her, he said, "It is natural enough that you should be delighted at finding your brother-in-law so near you, Ethelind. You cannot be expected to see, at present, the serious inconveniences and annoyances such a close neighborhood will occasion us. I cannot receive him here in any other light than as the curate of the parish; neither can I possibly allow you to have free and unrestricted intimacy with your family at the rectory. They say he has lately married."

"Married!" Ethel exclaimed. "Ralph married!"

But Philip's cold, resolute look checked her. "It will be a painful struggle for you, I believe; I have tried to prepare you for it, and I had hoped your own good sense would have pointed out to you the utter impossibility of your keeping up any thing like intimacy with your own family now. When a woman marries, it is well understood she gives up father and mother and every thing for the sake of her husband. I know you have been dwelling vainly on the time when you should renew your intercourse with your mother and sisters. I have been unwilling to wound you needlessly by speaking out plainly hitherto. I had hoped my systematic checks on your writing home would have awaked you to the truth, and saved me the present unpleasant necessity for plain speaking. The time is come when the truth can no longer be disguised. You may guess, then, my extreme annoyance when I found your brother actually located in my own parish."

Philip had intentionally kept his eyes fixed on the fire; he feared his own resolution if he caught a glimpse of the effects of his hard speech on Ethel's expressive face. Every word he had spoken had fallen like a stone on her heart. She felt too stunned for tears, and her white lips quivered as she asked in a low and scarcely audible tone, "if she was to understand, from what he

had said, that henceforth she was to have no intercourse whatever with her own family."

"I will not say that," Philip replied, in a tone of undisguised annoyance. "As the curate of Leigh, of course I shall be necessitated to notice your brother; but I want you clearly to understand that only in that light can I have any thing to do with him. You ought by this time, Ethelind, to be as much aware as I am that, though I married you, I had no intention whatever of connecting myself with all your family. Your path in life and theirs are widely different. You will soon learn to see how wisely such things are ordered. To break through the distinctions and grades which the necessities of the social system have drawn round us would entail endless confusion and discomfort. Of course, at present, I do not expect you to acknowledge all this; but I do expect you to trust to my better knowledge and acquaintance with the world, and cheerfully to yield to my wishes."

Poor Ethelind, how the certainty of what had only now and then flashed across her as a doubt now broke upon her mental vision! How her heart died within her at the cold, unyielding tones of that voice which until now had never spoken a harsh word in her ears! What Philip had most dreaded was a violent flood of tears; but no tears came to her relief. Her voice shook so much, however, she had great difficulty in framing her words correctly.

"I should like to know, Philip," she ventured at last to say, "exactly what you wish me to do. I suppose it will not be possible to avoid meeting Ralph and his wife, and my mother or sisters, if they ever come to Leigh. They may call here; I do not know that they will; but if they should—if I by any chance meet them—you do not surely mean that I am to pass them by and not speak? You would hardly expect me to do that?"

"This is just the annoyance of which I complain, and not without cause. Your brother's good sense should have

*For Better, for Worse.*

told him to have spared you these difficulties." Philip took up the poker and vigorously stirred the fire. The cold, hard look was on his face which Ethelind so dreaded; but she never looked up at him, as he stood leaning on the mantel-piece, nor he down on her bent head.

"Then I am to pass them by!" she said with a great effort. "I will try and do it, but you must let me write one line to Ralph, and tell him why I do so. It would break my heart that they should think I had grown to forget them—that I had become proud towards my own kindred. I will be very careful, Philip," she added submissively, "if you will let me write this once."

"And make a fool of yourself and me too," Philip replied impatiently, as the difficulties of his position forced themselves more fully on him. "No! Let there be no nonsense of that sort for the gossips to chatter about. If they call, well and good; you must receive them as you would Mr. Clifford and his wife, but no more. If you choose to call on them, do so; but let there be no intimacy—no fuss—no scenes. Above all, don't let them look upon you as a martyr, and all that sort of nonsense; if you do, you will drive me wild. If you give large parties, of course invite them, just as you will ask any other of the clergymen in the neighborhood. Do you understand? As the curate of Leigh Moss, your brother is as good as any one else. Beyond that, I will have nothing whatever to do with him or his!"

From her youth upwards, tears had been Ethelind's relief for every kind of excitement,—"floods of tears," as Grace called them, which would come down suddenly in the midst of sunshine, and through which, like the sun in an April shower, her smiles would come flitting back before the drops were dried from her cheeks. But there were no tears now. A sense of oppression and wrong, quite new to her, and quite undeserved, was burning within her bosom and almost stifling her. She seemed to feel intuitively that it was Barbara's doing; but it cut her to the heart that Philip should have been cowardly enough to

listen to his mother and sisters, and deliberately plan such cruel schemes against her. Were not her relations as dear to her as they were to him? Had she not as great a right to be proud of them as Philip had of his kindred? Surely money was not the standard by which he valued society! If it was but the exclusiveness of a set, no one, surely, in that set could condemn him for at least treating with proper deference and respect the family from whom he had chosen his wife. Then she called to mind how often, when writing home, Philip had framed excuses for delaying her letters, and she learned to see with sharpened eyes that all which had hitherto been so bright and fair was but the semblance of necessity, put on to aid a purpose, and to gloss over a breach of faith. Ethelind took up her embroidery and tried to work, but her hand shook and the needle would not go into the right place. She took a book and pretended to read, but the lines were dancing up and down, and her thoughts would run off into their own current. Philip threw himself down on the sofa with the newspaper in his hand, which he crunched, and crackled, and turned, until it almost drove his wife beside herself; but neither of them spoke. At last, Ethelind, who could bear it no longer, rose up and lit her candle; and Philip, who seemed, without looking, to know exactly what she was doing, opened the door for her to pass out. Two burning spots on her cheeks were the only signs of emotion she gave. Philip never spoke, but, as he closed the door after her, he threw himself at full length on the sofa, to consider, in this very awkward state of things, what was next to be done. He had been so angry at suddenly finding the well-planned schemes which it had taken months to carry out frustrated by one unthought-of movement of Ralph Atherton's, that he had rushed headlong into Ethelind with his grievance, forgetful how well he had withstood his mother's and sisters' entreaties entirely to prohibit all intercourse with Ethel's family, and how the patient, quiet hope which he knew she placed confidently

in him, to take her once more to her mother's arms, was working its sure way to his at length yielding to her wishes. But that was entirely over now. If the Athertons meant to force themselves upon him, they should find he was not to be so lightly dealt with. They must take the consequences of their own ill-advised conduct. He had broken the ice now with Ethelind, he was bound in honor to his own family to go through with the work he had commenced. Ethelind would be hurt and annoyed at his plain speaking, no doubt; it was natural enough that she should be; but she would recover herself after a time, and, with her own natural good sense, would learn to see it all in its proper light.

Ethel dismissed Valerie as quickly as she could, and went to bed, that she might brood in quietness and solitude over the sickness of her bruised spirit. And Philip, unwilling to encounter her tears or entreaties, which he believed would be sure to follow her present excitement, sat over his dressing-room fire, until it was so late that it was useless, he thought, undressing; so he threw himself at length on the sofa-bed in the room, as the first streaks of morning were beginning to dawn in the eastern sky, to catch half an hour's broken rest before the sun rose above the purple tops of the distant hills.

"Sir Philip bade me tell you, my lady, he has breakfasted, and has ridden over to Leigh to see his steward," Stephens said, as Ethelind, with a pale face and a racking headache, made her tardy appearance in the breakfast room. It was Friday morning. On Sunday they would go to church. It was impossible she could first meet her brother in the church. She could not trust her nerves to such a cruel ordeal, and with Philip beside her watching her the whole time; and therefore, loath as she felt now to see the dear faces for whom she had been so long pining, the effort must be made, and she would set off at once.

Robert was ordered to bring round the carriage and ponies, and after her interview with Mrs. Blake, an ordeal

sufficient to damp a stouter heart than poor Ethie's, she started on her mission to Leigh-Delamere. The fresh air revived her, drove away the feeling of languor and fatigue which oppressed her, and the very attempt she made to manage her spirited little ponies gave life and energy to her, and a little color to her cheeks. Descending at the gate, and bidding Robert drive home, and return for her in an hour, Lady Leigh made her way across the little flower-garden, gay with its bright spring flowers, to the entrance door of the rectory. Grace, who had been busily engaged in helping Charlotte in her bed-making, had caught sight of Ethelind from one of the windows as she stepped lightly across the gravel-path; and flying down stairs, without pausing a moment to consider her own not over tidy appearance, after the fanning and fluttering of sheets and blankets, ruthlessly discomposing her glossy braids, opened the door to her herself, and in one moment the two sisters, without a word spoken by either, were locked in one long, convulsive embrace in each other's arms. Large tears flowed from the eyes of each, as again and again the warm, loving embrace was renewed. At last Grace drew Ethel into the little room which Katie called her drawing room; and Ralph came in from his study, and Katie had to be fetched, in her plain gingham gown and brown-holland apron, fresh from the kitchen, to be introduced to her new sister; and Ethelind, in her intense delight, had half forgotten her annoyances, and was asking question upon question of Grace and Ralph about her mother, and Margaret, and Susannah. Neither Ralph nor Grace could but be struck by the marked improvement in Ethelind's appearance. Grown taller and stouter, and more fully developed in figure and beauty, and with an indescribable and all-pervading grace in every movement, which gives a far higher charm than even beauty itself, they could not take their eyes from her, nor wonder if she became the courted, the admired, the flattered of her own exclusive circle. No wonder Sir Philip

should be proud of her; they felt very justly so themselves. And now she was with them again, after nearly twelve months' absence, and Grace had a thousand questions to ask, and hardly, in her intense delight, knew when or where to begin.

"And you are very, very happy?" Grace said, as she sat at Ethel's feet, looking up lovingly into her face; "and have never regretted running away from us all, darling?"

"O, so happy!" Ethel replied, with a faint tinge of color on her cheek, at what she felt to be the truth, though not quite the whole truth. "I only wanted you to share it with me. You would so have enjoyed the lovely scenery, the curious old foreign towns, the grand old cathedrals, and the strange adventures we met with; but I knew well it could not be, so at first I tried to write to you; but even that failed. We moved about so irregularly, and Philip never planned a day beforehand, and he was so particular about letters missing us, that I was obliged to give up the hope of hearing from you, and learn to be patient. But, O darling, you don't know how much I longed to get one little scrap of news from home."

"And Mrs. Leigh, and Sir Philip's sisters," Grace asked, with a mischievous look dancing in her bright eyes, "are they really such dreadful monsters as we used to think them?"

Ethelind's face changed. "O Grace," she exclaimed, with a heavy sigh, as if to shake off the oppression which weighed her down; "O Grace, you cannot tell what a horror I have of those people! I bore it for a fortnight, in London, on our return from abroad, and I hoped I had shaken them off when I came here. But Philip has written to them to come down to us. They have entire influence over Philip. He does just what they bid him, and they will separate us from each other, I know, if they can. So you must not be hurt, dearest," she added nervously, and with a heightened color, "if I do not ask you freely to Redenham when they are with me. You won't think me unkind or for-

getful, will you?" she added, as she turned appealingly to her brother and sister. "Philip is so different, so thoughtful and kind, when we are away from them; but directly they come near him, they will rule him entirely."

Ralph came and sat down by his sister's side. "Do you know, Ethie," he said, "I have been in trouble ever since I learned that Redenham was in my parish. When I accepted the curacy, I did not know any thing about the place or the people. In fact, I had it through a friend. I have feared my being here might lead your husband to suppose I had other views in locating myself so close to him. But for that I should have joined those who welcomed your arrival, and I should have called yesterday on Sir Philip. As it is, I leave him to make the advance."

Ethelind's color came and went. She would have been wiser, perhaps, had she told the exact truth; but she hesitated in how far she could exceed the limits Philip had bade her keep to, and with a true wife's sensitiveness to any insinuation, however shadowy or groundless, against her husband, she merely stammered out the hope, that, however little either Philip or herself appeared to wish for unrestricted intercourse with the rectory, it would be in appearance only, and they must not for a moment attribute it to any other motive. Gradually she hoped, she said, — alas, how faint the real hope grew in Ethel as she thought of it! — that the incubus of his mother's and sisters' pride would die away, and that her own influence would strengthen as theirs declined. And Ralph and Grace and Katie all assured her, over and over again, that she might set her mind at rest on that score; they never, come what would, should think ill of her. And though it did not satisfy her, and the time came for Robert's return with the ponies; and she had sent long, loving messages and pretty presents to her mother and Margaret and Susannah, and left the ornaments for Grace and Kate; and had listened to their admiration of her carriage and ponies, Ethelind went



## For Better, for Worse.

back to Redenham at last, soothed in heart, but by no means fully satisfied with this one interview with her own family.

When Ethelind reached Redenham, she found carriages and callers from all quarters awaiting her. In ordinary circumstances she would have felt dreadfully nervous at the idea of encountering so many strangers, and Philip not there to introduce her and help her through her difficulties. But a strange spirit of contradiction had come over her, puzzling even herself; and, calm and collected, she moved about from one group of morning callers to another, finding by chance the right thing to say and do, and winning golden opinions from them all; not only for her extreme beauty, which none could deny her, but her childlike simplicity and easy, unaffected manner, under an ordeal which of itself would have been trying to more experienced wives.

Ethel was dressed, and waiting the announcement of dinner in her own pretty morning room, when the door opened and Philip put his head in to see if she were there. He had encountered Lady Gwynne's carriage as he drove out of Leigh, and had had to listen for full ten minutes to their rapturous admiration of his young wife, and the graceful way in which she had welcomed them; and, as she was one of that privileged set whose verdict stamps its irrevocable seal on all aspirants to fame, Philip could not help feeling gratified, and his vanity flattered, and his ruffled pride soothed, by Lady Gwynne's enthusiasm; and he came into his wife's room in a much pleasanter frame of mind than when they had parted the evening before.

The electioneering expedition, too, into which his steward had decoyed him, had raised his spirits, and revived some of the old political zeal which had been slumbering for so many months; and not unwilling to break the awkwardness of a *tête-à-tête* with his wife, which, to tell the truth, he rather dreaded, he availed himself of the excuse to bring back with him his steward, the leading lawyer, and the surgeon at

Leigh — all active, zealous supporters of the new Ministry.

"I am in a dreadful fright about my dinner," Ethelind said, as Philip enumerated his guests. "I cannot tell at all what Blake will send up to table. She overrules me in every thing I pretend to order; and if I were to send down and inquire, I do not think she would let me know. If you would but speak to her, Philip, yourself, or send a message by Stephens?" And Philip disappeared into the housekeeper's room.

It was quite useless Mrs. Blake volunteering a long story of her "capabilities" to her master, or the value set on her by the Marchioness of Liddington. He soon stopped that story by a look and gesture which seriously flustered and discomposed that yellow-ribboned functionary. "Now, Mrs. Blake," he said in his sternest and gravest voice, "you must send up, at half past seven o'clock, a dinner for five; and such a dinner as a gentleman is not ashamed to see on his table. What you have hitherto favored us with has been perfectly uneatable. Simpson tells me there is no lack of good things in the larder; so look about you. Remember, I never complain of a cook twice. If you do not do your work well, I must find a substitute who will do better." And not waiting for the volley of protestations and testimonials which were ready to be hurled at him from the indignant lady of the lower regions of Redenham, he stalked out of the housekeeper's room to his guests, who were in the library, still busily discussing their probabilities of success in case of the threatened general election.

Ethelind looked remarkably well in her pale blue silk dress and black lace polka jacket; and the guests departed full of the extreme loveliness, and childlike simplicity, and unconscious grace of Sir Philip's young wife.

"You did so well last night," Philip said, as they sat at breakfast, "I really think I might have spared Barbara her long journey. And Stephens tells me you had plenty of callers yesterday. There is one thing; Barbara will take some of the

*For Better, for Worse.*

fatigue off you, and manage that Gorgon in the kitchen better than you can do. That woman is enough to frighten any one into submission — short of a Leigh! My mother could never have seen her, surely, or she would not have sent her here."

"I think, if you please, I should prefer managing my own house," Ethelind said, in a meek voice, which almost trembled at its own audacity. "There is no need to seek Barbara's help in these things. Though, of course, if you wish to have her here as a guest, I cannot object. But it will neither be right towards the servants or myself that any one but you or I should exercise authority over them."

"O, if that is the order of the day, by all means let it be so. I only thought of it to spare you trouble and annoyance. The difficulty must be overcome at some time or another; and I think you are quite right to meet it at once, and have done with it. If Mrs. Edwards had been here, it would have been altogether a different matter, — she had lived here so many years, she seemed to belong to the place; and besides, she knew exactly what was right and proper in a large establishment like this. Why my mother ever thought of superseding her, I can't imagine."

"Perhaps she would return to us," Ethel ventured to say. "Stephens told me yesterday she was living near your cousin Anne, in the Isle of Wight. Do you think I should be wrong in writing to inquire?" she added timidly.

"As I told you before," Philip replied, "I shall leave all the details of housekeeping in your hands; I hate being worried with these things above every thing. Let me have a good dinner, well dressed, at the time I order it; and so long as you and Simpson contrive that there shall be no unnecessary waste going on in the various departments of the household, I don't care to hear any thing about your proceedings." And Philip rose up from the breakfast table, and left Ethelind to make out as best she could what would be required of her in her new responsibilities.

It was Sunday morning, and long after the church bells had ceased to chime for service, and the parishioners had dropped one by one into their seats, and Ralph had delayed as long as he could do so the commencement of the morning service, the Redenham carriage, with its gay retinue of liveried servants, and its splendid pair of grays in their silver-mounted harness, drew up at the churchyard gate; and as Ethelind and her husband walked up the aisle, every eye was turned simultaneously on the new-comers. Even Grace could not withstand the temptation to raise her head from her Prayer Book, as her lips mechanically made the responses, that she might get one look at Philip's tall, manly figure, and be able to form some judgment, as she fancied herself wise enough to do, as to the future relationship which would exist between them and Ethel's husband. But tall and upright and handsome as he looked, his countenance was as impassible to Grace's scrutiny as human features could be. Ethelind's color was bright, and her heart beat audibly; as she sank down upon her knees on the velvet cushion before her, she hardly dared raise her head, and not until the prayers were nearly over had she at all recovered her self-possession.

Many hearts, however, besides Ethelind's beat quicker than usual that morning; more, perhaps, than cared to acknowledge such a weakness. Ralph's voice trembled for one moment; but a man sooner recovers his equanimity than a woman, and one glance at Sir Philip's impassible face completely restored his self-possession.

Katie was in a strange state of nervous dread lest her husband should make some startling blunder, or break down entirely, or, in his anxiety to do his best, make a less favorable impression on his audience than usual. To all outward appearance Philip was the only unmoved worshipper within the walls of that small parish church. Quietly and calmly he opened his Prayer Book, and joined audibly in the responses, and, when the sermon commenced, kept his eyes stead-

ily fixed on the beautiful east window above the altar, which had been Anne Leigh's memorial offering to the memory of her parents and brother.

But wife though she was, and therefore sensitively alive to the good opinions of others regarding her husband's sermons, Katie might have spared herself any anxiety on Ralph's account. There could be no doubt he possessed his father's gift, with a full, rich voice, that, without any apparent exertion, enabled him to fill the farthest corners of the church, so that the old and hard-of-hearing had no excuse for staying away. But there were not many of his scattered congregation who would have wished to do so. The very simplicity of his sermons made them liked. He went straight away to the point, with little or no circumlocution, and without that ornamental and flowery flow of words which constitutes much of what is called "style," and which after forty minutes' hard listening often leaves the listener as little the wiser as if he had staid at home. All that he said bore the evident marks of deep thought and patient study, and it possessed also that sure claim on a listener's attention—the unmistakable stamp of *reality*—the certainty that every word was spoken from the earnest convictions of the preacher.

No wonder if, while Ethelind listened to those familiar tones, and thought of her father's sermons at Wylinstre, the tears stole into her eyes, and her heart overflowed with loving remembrances of the mother's love she was longing for; and when it was all over, before any one else left their seats, Sir Philip had led her out of the church, and she had taken her seat in the carriage, and the order "Home" had been given by her husband, almost before Grace had recovered her self-possession, or Ralph had descended the pulpit steps.

"And so ends our intercourse with the Leighs," Ralph said, as he held the gate open for his wife and sister to pass into their little garden. "There can be no mistake now as to our future course." And, annoyed even more than he cared

to acknowledge by the manner in which Sir Philip had thus publicly ignored them, he felt himself seriously called on to decide at once on what his plans of action should be.

Grace went straight up stairs to her own room, where, tossing aside her bonnet, she sat down before her little writing table, and burying her face in her hands, burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. It was useless attempting to stave off the bitter flood—it would come, over and over again, as she thought of her darling sister, cut off entirely from her own relatives; and then, as she at last slowly wiped them away, she drew paper and pens to her side, and, as her last resource, commenced pouring her sorrows and perplexities into Margaret's ever-ready ear.

"What a pity that man should be such a tyrant," Katie said to herself, as she laid aside her best bonnet and mantle, to assist Charlotte in laying the cloth for their early dinner. "He is very handsome. Indeed, I think I never yet saw such a superb couple as they are; he so stalwart and strong in his stern, manly beauty, and she so gentle and shy, looking up to him as if he were her father. I doubt if I could have loved him. That bright, glittering eye, and the firm, compressed lips, do not look made for yielding; and a man who does not know how to yield at the right time is not a being to love. 'Real love casteth out fear.'" And Katie's eyes involuntarily wandered away to the bit of bright sunshine which streaked their one gravel path, where Ralph, in his own manly beauty, was slowly pacing up and down with his hands behind him, and his hat drawn down over his eyes, in deep thought, pondering over the necessity for quitting Leigh-Delamere, and feeling for the first time the cares and responsibilities which spring up in a man's path the moment he links another's fate with his own.

"Well, little woman," he said, as he came in at last and sat down in his own arm-chair, "it is no good disguising the truth—we must go; you took me for better for worse, for richer for poorer.

The worse is soon come, sooner than I had thought it would : but I can see no alternative. To-morrow I shall write to Mr. Clifford. What will the Harfords say when they hear how I misled them into believing I had a home for you ? I cannot explain my reasons for throwing up my curacy. No one would comprehend them, I think, perhaps, if I did. And yet, at present, I can see no alternative."

"Dear Ralph, don't distress yourself about any thing the Harfords or any body else may think of you. If it is right to do so, we will do it, cheerfully and willingly, for Ethel's sake. It seems hard upon you, certainly, to be driven away by prejudice, or pride, or whatever other motive may be influencing Sir Philip ; but there can be no question about its being your duty to do so, if Ethelind is made to suffer by our continuing here. Look, here is the *Ecclesiastical Gazette*," she said, taking up the paper from the drawer it had been put aside in when it arrived by the morning's post. "Surely, so many people wanting curates and so many curates wanting curacies, there must be something or other which will suit us, if not so well as this, yet better than no duty at all."

Ralph laughed. "You will grow wiser, little woman, I can tell you," he said, "before you have been another six months a wife. You will find out rectors want the largest possible amount of work at the lowest possible remuneration, and curates want the rector's stipend without his responsibilities. And so it goes."

"Yes, but that must be among unreasonable people. Now, you are not unreasonable, Ralph ; you would be content with what was right and proper, and you would not spare your work ; and there must be fifty rectors who would rejoice to get such a curate, I am sure, if you did but know where to find them."

"In fact, you think I have but to ask and to have. Do you know, Katie, I am just as unreasonable as every ninety-nine men are out of a hundred. At all events, I should be reckoned so by those who were not interested like myself in my search. No one knows until he has

tried what weary work it is hunting for a curacy which is at all worth taking, and how discouraging a task it is to have to begin your work again just as you are beginning to feel you are getting some little hold upon the people. However, that is not my greatest trouble in this case ; my coming here has misled Mr. Clifford, and to bring him back to England just as he is gaining strength from the milder climate of Italy, seems almost a crime. I shall write to-night or to-morrow, and tell him circumstances have arisen which I never could have foreseen, but which will render my leaving peremptory ; but that, if he will trust to me, I will put some one into my place, as carefully, as regardfully of all he could desire, as if it were my 'own charge.'"

"And he will trust you, Ralph, depend upon it. If he has once seen your honest English face, he cannot doubt you ; nobody could, short of a Leigh ; and I am not quite sure yet that you are not too precipitate ; that Sir Philip will not change that cold, scornful look of his when he finds how little he has to fear, and how much to learn, of his new brother. Perhaps, after all, he does not know that you were ignorant of Redenham being his when you came here — that you are not hoping another day to step into Mr. Clifford's place."

"No matter what he knows, Katie, or what he thinks. We must go," Ralph said, as he gazed lovingly into the bright, hopeful face of his little wife. "If the Leighs are proud, I am not sure that the Athertons are less so, in their own way. I cannot live on here in peace, and feel I am a thorn in the side of any man, especially when Ethelind's happiness depends on our leaving." And Ralph got up, and took his place at dinner with a heavy load at his heart, as he thought how that bright, hopeful spirit which looked so cheerily out of his Katie's soft, brown eyes must in all probability be crushed out by the cares and anxieties which, even within the first six months of their short married life, were already winding their slow but certain links round his precarious fortune. Well, in-

*O, it's hard to die frae Hame.*

deed, it is for the hard-working, faithful servant of God that a sure reward awaits him in that hereafter to which, in his troubled passage through this world, he can turn in his greatest need as the one bright spot where harassing and weary cares never enter. But Ralph's battle of life had only just commenced. He was still hopeful himself, and vigorous; and if he chafed needlessly at the uncourteous welcome of his rich

connections, and shrunk with innate pride from forcing himself upon people who looked down upon him and tried to ignore him, it was not so much for himself he felt the sting, as it was for that gentle being who had bound up her fate with his, and who would now be thrown on the world, dependent on any chance which should enable him to secure a home for her.



## FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

### CHAPTER XVII.

THE Redenham carriage, which took Philip into Leigh, was to return with Barbara, who was expected by the afternoon train from town. Ethelind, full of doubt and fear, had been vainly striving to forget her expected presence, until her arrival actually took place. She had gone into the housekeeper's room, and encountered that exceedingly disagreeable domestic, and she had wandered over the large, rambling galleries and corridors of the old house with Martha, the only female domestic remaining of those who had lived there in the old baronet's time. Ethelind had learned this fact, first from Valerie, who had taken wonderfully to Martha amidst her

new associates in the servants' hall, and afterwards from Stephens, when she had turned to him for some information about the rooms which once belonged to Miss Leigh, and, greatly to the disgust of Mrs. Blake, had desired that Martha should be sent up to her own room.

"Any body in the world med see with half a high," Mrs. Blake exclaimed, as Martha left the servants' hall to wait upon her young mistress, "she's no lady! Who she was 'eaven only knows! I don't. But would the Marchioness of Liddington, do you think, have condescended to consort with housemaids, and them sort of people indeed? Not she!" and Mrs. Blake put her hands on her hips, and tossed up her head with a

jerk, and decided in her own mind, that if her ladyship meant to draw out of plain, honest Martha, who would go her own way, in spite of her taunting, trick-making, thoughtless companions, the secret doings of the servants' hall, she would soon convince her who was the strongest at Redenham, in spite of them all.

Ethelind was lingering in the hall, admiring the stained-glass windows, and the groined roof, and the bright armor, and lingering over the large baskets of lilies of the valley, peeping out of their deep, mossy beds, which the gardener had been placing under the windows, when Barbara alighted from the carriage. "Well, who would have thought of my being here so soon," she said, "when we parted last week, Lady Leigh? I suppose I ought to feel very grateful to you for sending for me, for one always takes it as a sort of a compliment to be wanted; but I am not quite sure I should not have come after all, even if no invitation had arrived. I have a little private business with Philip, who, I hear from Robert, is at Leigh. Well, by and by will do for that. But how do you get on? What do you think of Redenham? Really, between Simpson and the architect, and Snell, and a score more clever people Philip employed, the old place is so renovated and smartened I should hardly know it."

Ethelind drew Barbara into the morning room; but she was far too active and busy a spirit to be quiet any where long. "And so you are going to have a houseful of guests? Whom have you invited?" she asked. "Come, let me see your list." And as Ethel laid it before her, and she ran her eye over the names, commenting on one and the other lightly, and setting her veto on this family and that, she quite bewildered her hostess.

"But from what I could gather from the few people I have seen, the Barclays and the Hibberts are very nice people," Ethelind ventured to say timidly, as she saw Barbara drawing her pencil through their names.

"Good people!" she exclaimed, with her own ringing laugh; "yes, to be sure they are — all the world is good, if it comes to that — these people especially; but that has nothing in the world to do with it. They are not in our set."

"But Lady Gwynne visits them I know, and thinks very highly of them," Ethel replied stoutly, determined, if she could, to convince Barbara she meant to have her own way.

"My dear little unsophisticated sister, you do not understand, that whatever vagaries Lady Gwynne pleases to commit, can be no rule at all for you. A man may be as rich as Cræsus, and his wife and daughters patterns of wisdom and goodness, and all that sort of thing; but if they do not belong to your set, you can have nothing to do with them. By and by, perhaps, when you are more experienced, you, like Lady Gwynne, may venture to make a few exceptions to the general rule; but certainly you must not venture on so hazardous a step at present. It is not wealth, or beauty, or title, remember; it is blood! pure, unmixed, patrician blood. Without that, no one is eligible to be placed on your visiting list."

Ethelind saw clearly it would require a stout heart to enter into combat with Barbara for the mastery of her own affairs.

"Now, perhaps, you would like to see your rooms. Will you let me take you up stairs?" Ethelind said, anxious to turn the subject. "Philip, I believe, brings home a few gentlemen to-night from the meeting, and Lady Gwynne and her daughter are here. To-morrow the house will be fuller."

"Then you have invited your friends!" Barbara exclaimed, with a disappointed look. "I thought Philip told me in his note you waited until I came to you."

The color mounted up into Ethelind's face. "A great many people have called on us," she replied; "and as Philip said they were old friends of the family, it seemed scarcely worth while bringing you so far to send out a few invitations. As it is probable there will be an election, and Philip is so interested in pol-

itics, I think you will be able to help me in making Redenham pleasant to his party."

"Well, upon my word, I did not give you credit for so much spirit; Redenham has wonderfully improved you!" Barbara said, as they went up the staircase together. But Barbara was not going quietly to her own room. She would see Ethel's own suit of apartments; fell into ecstasies over their arrangement and effect; commented on all the pretty things which so lavishly adorned them; stood in admiration over the winding staircase to the conservatory, with its light, gilded balusters, covered with the brightest creepers; ran lightly down them to gather a nosegay for herself for the evening, and then came back, determined to go the round of the long corridor.

"And these were Ann's rooms formerly. What have they made of them, I wonder?" she asked, as she laid her hand on the lock of a door opening into a circular turret at the western extremity of the castle.

"Please do not go there!" Ethelind exclaimed, in a nervous, uncomfortable tone. "It is left just as it used to be, and I have given strict orders that no one goes there but old Martha. I mean to have every thing cleaned and renewed; so that when Ann comes to us she may take possession of them, if she pleases."

"Well, upon my word, Lady Leigh, you are a most extraordinary person," Barbara exclaimed. "It's my belief you would be doing Ann a far better service in having every trace of the old place swept away. In the second, I doubt very much your ever getting her here; and certainly, if I had been in your place, she is the last person I should desire to have under my roof."

"I am sure I cannot think why," Ethelind exclaimed, with more spirit than she had hitherto expressed. "Next to my own sisters, I have never met any one who has so pleased me as Miss Leigh. I feel as if I had known her all my life; and I could go to her for advice as freely almost as to Margaret."

"Poor little thing!" Barbara said,

provokingly. "So your lord and master has not thought fit to open his heart to his child-wife, and lay bare the secrets of his bachelor-life; and as I shall not venture to forestall him in his revelations, I will go back now to my own room, and see what progress Elize has made in her preparations for my dressing for dinner."

Ethelind watched her retreating figure, as she went dancing and skipping gracefully down the corridor, until she was out of sight; and then, throwing herself down on one of the cushioned seats in a large oriel window, she gazed long and wistfully on the lovely valley, clothed in its tender green, until it stretched up from the quiet waters of the lovely mere, which lay before her, reflecting the bright blue sky and green trees in its clear bosom, to the purple hills which rose abruptly behind it.

"And what could be the strange mystery which enshrouded that poor crippled daughter of their house, which they all kept so jealously from her. Did it concern her? Could she have come between Philip and Ann in any way? and if so, why had Philip sought her out? Surely, if she was such a sufferer, and had been, by their own acknowledgment, for so many years, she could in no way interfere with her comfort and happiness, unless, indeed, it might be inasmuch as until now Redenham had remained entirely deserted since the sad blow which had made Philip its possessor." And satisfied at last that she had unravelled the mystery, and seeing by her watch that it was already time her guests should arrive, Ethelind rose up from her seat, and with a feeling of nervous excitement at encountering Barbara's sallies, as well as heading her own table for the first time to a large dinner party, she went into her room to commence her hurried toilet.

Philip returned home so late, he only came into the drawing room just before dinner was announced; but he watched Ethelind receive her guests, and take the head of his table, and though he could not hear what she said, he knew by her animated face she was joining in



*For Better, for Worse.*

the conversation. Stephens, too, who had taken a wonderful interest in his young and gentle mistress, and who had already written an indignant letter to Mrs. Edwards at the goings-on of Mrs. Blake, who was, he said, trying her best to frighten and overrule his lady in every thing, hovered about her chair, and placed the dishes so that she should require the least help, and did her more silent benefit than even Ethelind herself was at the time aware of. Barbara, whose keen, sharp eyes were every where, could but inwardly acknowledge that, if their brother had stepped out of the prescribed path in marrying out of his own set, they had no vulgarity to dread in their new sister-in-law, and that the natural grace (if it could not be right training) she possessed made her readily adapt herself to her altered position, and perform her part admirably. The dinner, to her critical eye, was as bad as bad could be. This she attributed to Lady Leigh's entire ignorance of what was right and proper. She did not think for a moment that Ethelind had no more power over her *cuisine* than if she had never entered her own kitchen, or given any orders at all. Lady Gwynne, who sat by Philip, was in raptures over the youth and beauty of her young hostess; for though herself plain, and possessed of three intelligent, highly-educated, but decidedly plain daughters, she was keenly alive to beauty and grace, whether in connection with art or nature; and the child-like simplicity and shrinking beauty of Ethelind had strangely won on the strong good sense and right feeling of the warm motherly heart. And while she would, as a matter of rule, have deprecated the equivocal step Philip had taken, she yet in her own Welsh obstinacy applauded him for maintaining his own right to act against the strong prejudices of his weaker-minded mother and sisters; though, in her inmost heart, she dreaded the ordeal his young wife must pass through before she would fairly establish herself in her rightful position.

"You must take care of that young wife of yours, Sir Philip," she said;

"she will be the leading beauty of the season, depend upon it. And it would be a thousand pities that the purity and freshness of her mind should be disturbed by the admiration she is sure to excite. If you are immersed in politics, and leave her to make her way as best she can, you will be throwing her into great temptation."

"I shall put her under good care, Lady Gwynne, depend upon it. You forget my mother and sisters will be close to us."

"They will be very kind, no doubt," her ladyship said, somewhat doubtfully; "but you must remember, a wife cannot take all at once to her husband's relations. She clings naturally to her own people, especially if she is young and timid, like Lady Leigh; and, cut off from them, who else but her husband can she look to to shield and guard her in those thousand little difficulties and dangers which beset the path of every pretty woman? You must excuse my blunt Welsh manners in volunteering you advice, Sir Philip," she said, as she saw the blood mount up into his face; "we are too old friends for you to take umbrage at an old woman's fidgets, if they turn out nothing more; and you will forgive them, in consideration of her being herself a mother, if not of pretty daughters, at all events of good and true ones." She did not wait for Philip's reply; she saw that Ethelind was growing hot and nervous at making the move into the drawing room, and she instantly rose up with a bright smile, to relieve and reassure her by herself leading the way.

Oppressed by a nervous headache from over-excitement, Ethelind was not sorry to follow her guests up stairs to bed. She had already begun to learn the uselessness of waiting up until Philip made his appearance; so she dismissed Valerie when she had completed her undressing, and soon afterwards fell into a sound slumber. Not so Barbara. Telling Elize she should not require her services, and waiting until she heard the two or three gentlemen who were sleeping in the house pass her door, she took

## For Better, for Worse.

up her candle, and, with a shawl wrapped round her shoulders, quietly descended the stairs, and crossed the hall to the library. She tapped at the door, but, without waiting for the word of admission from Philip, opened it, and stood beside her brother's chair. He was sitting in a brown study over the fire, and almost started at Barbara's unexpected presence.

"Why, Barbara! I thought you were in bed an hour ago. What in the world brings you down here at this time of night?" he exclaimed. "Is there any thing the matter with Ethel?"

"Ethelind! no. What a worry you are always in about her! She's in bed and asleep long ago. You seem to have made yourself very comfortable here, Master Philip," Barbara said, as she came up and stood before his bright fire, and gazed at herself in the glass over the mantel-shelf, and arranged the red geraniums in her dark hair. "But early days, is it not," she added provokingly, "to be sitting up at night after your old fashion, and leaving the little 'lady' alone to while away the first hours of the night? I see you are like the rest of your sex, 'to one thing constant never;' — now, don't be angry; I mean no reflections. I only want to talk seriously to you for a few minutes, and then I will release you from my presence." And she threw herself down on the easy-chair opposite, and spread out her white-muslin dress, and put her little satin *bottines* on the fender, utterly regardless of the not over-gracious reception her brother vouchsafed to give her. "Now, you think it was entirely your invitation which brought me here, Philip; but I can assure you you were never more mistaken. It is a matter of more importance than playing the part of duenna to your wife — who, however, let me tell you, seems very unwilling to accept my services. Have you heard lately from the Cliffords?"

"The Cliffords? Yes. I heard through somebody, — you, or my mother, or Simpson, perhaps, that he was ill, and had gone abroad for a couple of years. But what of them?" Philip asked ner-

ously; for, to tell the truth, the hasty way in which he had lost his temper with Ethelind, and the foolish part he had acted on Sunday, had made him feel very much like a man not altogether in the best humor with himself.

"Well, Ann corresponds every now and then with Mrs. Clifford, and in a letter the day before yesterday she mentions that they had been offered the chaplaincy at Naples; and she feels so sure it would prolong Mr. Clifford's life to remain some years abroad, she had almost persuaded him to accept it, if they could prevail on you to give the living to the present curate. Now it struck us, that as soon as Ethelind knew it was vacant, she would naturally enough urge you to appoint her brother, who, I think she said, was in orders. So, to avoid the unpleasant necessity of a refusal, we think you might safely venture to promise it to poor Di's unfortunate Lothario, Arthur Langton."

"Arthur Langton! my dear Barbara, you must have lost your wits. Why, what on earth could the fellow think, but that Di repented her rejection of him, and was now asking him in the civilest way possible to come forward again! It is no light matter, let me tell you, young lady, trifling with a man's feelings in that way, and I for one will have no hand in it."

"Bless me! what virtuous indignation you display all at once! As if Diana had not a right to change her mind if she chose!"

"She had far better have known it at first, I think," Philip said petulantly. "She would have saved herself trouble, and Langton too. I would have her think well before she commits such a piece of egregious folly. Remember, she could not do otherwise than accept him, if he proposes again."

"At all events, you can never say a word to Di, or any body else, against mixed marriages," Barbara said, in a cool, mocking tone, with her large black eyes bent steadily on her brother's white face. "With your laudable example before her, it is natural she should begin to doubt the wisdom of her late decision.

*For Better, for Worse.*

However, you need not distress yourself unnecessarily; I am not at all sure she would wish to have that old sore reopened; I am not sure she does not see the evils entailed by such folly and weakness, more plainly in your case than she ever would have done, perhaps, in her own. We only proposed it as—first, a sort of retributive justice to poor Langton for all the misery Di caused him; and, secondly, to relieve you from what may prove a very annoying and perplexing difficulty.”

“And who is the curate, think you, Mr. Clifford is so very anxious to serve?” Philip asked, with a flashing eye, all his old enmity returning upon him in full flood, under the lash of Barbara’s foolish tongue. “I did not know it until last Friday, when Simpson, in speaking of him and what he had done in the parish, mentioned his name. Of course I knew at once it must be Ethelind’s half-brother; but I must own I felt desperately angry in being actually bearded in my own den. There was such a want of common good-breeding,—such an absence of all right feeling towards Ethel herself, thus to push himself into a place of all others so very objectionable,—that I freely allow it gave me a very bad opinion of the family, and I am now, more than ever, determined to cut them altogether.”

“Then, as it turns out, my proposition comes at the right time,” Barbara said, with evident satisfaction at her own wisdom and forethought; “for of course Ethelind will be put up to worrying you into giving it to her brother, the moment they hear Mr. Clifford is going to resign.”

“I don’t know about Ethel,” Philip replied, musingly. “I think she begins to feel already, that having one’s relations so near you adds very little to your domestic comfort. The parishioners will wish it, I am prepared to believe; for, turn where I will, or speak to whom I will, they are all equally full of praise of what Atherton has done for them since he has been here. The fellow is hard-working and zealous, I have no doubt; and certainly he preaches a good

sermon. I have seldom, if ever, heard a better than he gave us on Sunday; and if it had not been for this confounded connection with Ethelind, I would as gladly have given the living to him,—more so, indeed, than to any body else I know.”

“Well, now, having enlightened you on the subject of my mission to Redenham, I suppose I may take myself off,” Barbara said, slowly rising from her chair, and proceeding to relight her candle. “I don’t think her ladyship did amiss to-day; she got through the honors of the table better than one could have expected from such a child; but I can’t say as much for her dinner. My gracious, Philip, it was well mamma was not here; her propriety would have been utterly confounded at such a profusion of uneatables. You really must try and instil into Ethelind that she has not fallen among cormorants; neither do we exist entirely on cold soup maigre, or flabby half-boiled salmon.”

“And whom, I should like to know, am I to thank for such an atrocious woman as housekeeper, but you or my mother?” Philip replied, in a tone of voice which would have quite petrified Ethel, but which only made his sister open her black eyes wider and shrug her white shoulders. “This is the second time you have sent some ill-tempered, overbearing servant into Ethel’s service, instead of doing what I asked you. Why in the world my mother dismissed Edwards, I can’t conceive. If she was a little behind the day, she had good sense enough not to attempt things she did not understand. Ethel is no more able to manage that woman, with her flaunting ribbons, and her finery, and her saucy tongue, than a baby.”

“The truth was,” Barbara said, with her eyes very meekly cast down, “mamma and the rest of us got a notion into our heads that of course Miss Atherton, the daughter of a clergyman, would have been taught all sorts of housewifery. One always has an idea that those sort of people are proverbially domestic; and, moreover, coming from

*For Better, for Worse.*

Lady Liddington's, who is so very particular and *recherché* —"

"If Lady Liddington had found her good for any thing, she would never have parted from her. And if ever you or my mother favor us again with such creatures as this woman or old Frippery, I'll forbid your interfering in my household."

"Well, upon my word, you are grown very ferocious, I think, Master Philip. Neither you nor Ethel are such very bright specimens of connubial felicity as one expected to find you. She looks thinner and paler than when she first came from Italy; and as to you—but, good night," she added hastily; "I won't wait for the storm which I see brewing, lest I should absolutely lose my head." And, taking up her candle, she went lightly up the silent stairs to her own room, leaving Philip in a towering passion with his mother and sisters, and the Athertons, and every body else.

In crossing the hall the next morning, Ethel's eye was caught by three cards lying on the marble table. They were Ralph's, Katie's, and Grace's. "Has Mr. Atherton called here?" she asked nervously of Stephens. "Yes, my lady. Mr. Atherton and two ladies called just now; walked over from the Moss, I think, for they are all great walkers, I know."

"I hope you said I was at home," Ethel said hurriedly.

"I told them you were at home, my lady; but Mr. Atherton said at once they did not intend going in. I even ventured so far as to say I thought, maybe, the ladies would need a rest; but they said no—they would leave their cards."

"And where was I at the time?" Ethel asked, foreseeing quite plainly that Philip's behavior on Sunday had effectually barred the door to her own people.

"You were writing in the morning room, my lady. I don't exactly know where Sir Philip was. They inquired very particularly for you, my lady." Ethelind said no more; she only passed

swiftly up the stairs, and, having locked her door, eased her troubled heart by a sudden and violent burst of tears.

On Sunday, Ethelind and Lady Gwynne, and her daughters, drove over to Leigh-Delamere to church. Philip, Barbara, and the rest of their guests, drove to Leigh. In the afternoon Ethel again found her way to church; but this time she drove herself in her pony carriage, with Nest Gwynne as her companion. Neither morning nor afternoon had she been able to do more than give Grace and Ralph a kind look, as she left her pew. The parishioners seemed to wait for her to precede them out of church, and the rectory pew was near the chancel, and consequently those in it were the last to leave. She could only take her seat in the carriage and drive away, as she had no plausible excuse to offer her companion for lingering in the churchyard.

In spite of her nervousness, Ethelind could not but feel she was falling gradually into her place in the stately home her husband had brought her to, and among a houseful of people utterly unknown to her. But she could not shut her eyes to the fact that a misty gulf, never dreamed of by her a short fortnight ago, had opened somewhere between her and Philip, which clouded all her pleasure, and weighed upon her like a nightmare. It was not that he was less kind, — sometimes she fancied he was more so than he had ever been, — but there was now one subject neither ventured to approach. One set of people neither ever mentioned; and if by chance they became the topics of conversation among others, both Philip and Ethelind instinctively felt that each tried in their own way to lead it away to some other. Ethelind had never dared mention the call which the Athertons had paid them; though she knew, indirectly, that Philip was aware of it. Neither had he ventured to inquire if Ralph and his wife and sister had been included in the invitations to the ball, though he had almost hoped they had, when he heard the whole neighborhood ringing with the indefat-

*For Better, for Worse.*

igable labors and capital sermons of the young curate at Leigh-Delamere.

"You are very early in your dressing," Barbara said, as she came into Ethel's room; "half the people have not gone up stairs, and I have my hair and every thing to do."

"I have not seen Philip yet," Ethel replied; "and besides, I have to receive my guests. I hope I shall not make any very stupid blunder, it will so annoy Philip, I know."

"Now, never you care about Philip; just go your own way, and leave him to his. 'Tis the worst policy in the world to be always fretting and fidgeting about your husband; and, let me tell you, they don't like it half as well as a stout, sturdy wife who maintains her rights."

Ethelind sighed. "Perhaps not," she said sadly; "but for all that your advice sounds very hard and unnatural."

"Well! if Philip is not proud of you to-night, I am mistaken," Barbara broke out, in a more honest burst of kindness and admiration than was usual with her. And the heart must have been hard which withheld its full meed to such transparent and fragile-looking beauty as Ethelind's appeared to-night. Philip came into the large ball room, where Ethel was standing to take a last survey of the splendid tiers of hothouse plants, and colored lights gleaming, out of rich wreaths of flowers, up the marble pillars and around the cornice of the lofty room. She was standing by the fireplace, beneath the soft light of a chandelier, the full white lids falling partly down over her large violet eyes, made deeper in color by the thick fringe, which cast its shadow on her rounded cheek, while a soft halo glimmered round her head from the bandeaux of opals which bound up the deep rich coils of her golden hair. Her white rounded arms fell down upon the full folds of her mauve dress, round each of which was clasped a massive jewelled bracelet. She seemed lost in thought.

"Why, Ethie, you look a queen of the revels," Philip said, coming up to her, and almost making her start. "But

I don't think you are wise to be standing about so early. You will have plenty to do by and by. Not that you must dance much, remember. The opening quadrille, I suppose, you must stand up in with Lord Marwick; but I cannot let you do more. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," Ethel replied, "and, at present, I have no wish to do so. When the dancing begins, it may remind me of the first and only ball I was ever at. I will not promise what I may do then."

"Ah, that Repworth affair," Philip said. "Yes, I remember that ball well enough. I danced with you then, Ethie. My last dance, I suppose. I hardly knew what I was about that night. All I cared for was getting possession of your hand." He put his arm round her waist, and, for a moment, her head rested upon his shoulder. "Was that what you were dreaming about when I came in just now? But we are old married people now; we have lived long enough together to find out there is something else to do in the world besides dreaming one's life away. The theory is, I believe, that, as the first enthusiasm of love subsides, a harder and sounder, and wholesomer state of feeling, which people designate as 'affection,' takes its place. I don't know whether the awaking from that first dream is not rather mournful, especially if the shock comes suddenly, however much more healthy the second phase of one's matrimonial experience may be. What say you, Ethie, with the little experience you have had?" And Philip looked down upon the half-closed eyelids, and the flushed cheek, and the tremulous lip, which still rested against his shoulder.

"We do not stop to ask ourselves what the future will be," Ethelind said, in a low tone, and not without some effort to keep back her tears. "Women are very weak, and very trustful; it is their nature, I suppose; and when their hearts are full, they have no desire to lift the veil which mercifully obscures the future."

Philip put his head down, and gave her the warmest kiss he had bestowed

upon her since that unlucky Friday night the week before. He turned to go away; then he came back to where Ethel was standing.

"Will the Athertons be here, do you think?" he asked.

"I don't know. I have received no reply; but I should think not. I asked them, as I thought you wished it. I hope I did right?"

"Quite," he replied. "I hope they will be here."

But Ethel, though she said nothing, sincerely hoped they would not.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE had been a long discussion at the rectory whether the Redenham invitations should or should not be accepted. Ralph tossed the little colored envelope down, and walked away. He felt it was a sort of mockery, when Sir Philip had not condescended to acknowledge him in any way in his own parish.

A girlish and very natural desire seized Grace to be present at this dance, which formed the subject of conversation and speculation to the neighborhood. She naturally longed to see her sister in her own home.

"Had Sir Philip ridden over, and said simply, 'Atherton, do as you please, come, or stay away,' I would have gone," Ralph said indignantly. "But Ralph Atherton, the curate of Mr. Clifford, the but lately Fellow of his College, the son of Ethel's father, steals into no man's house because, for very shame's sake only, he cannot be excluded. Besides," he added, cooling down from his burst of temper, "I should not dance. I gave that up when I took orders. I shall not go. At the same time, if you, Grace, can persuade Katie to chaperon you, I won't say a word against it; and, as far as that goes, if your dress stands in the way, I will give you whatever is needful for the occasion."

Grace's tearful eyes were bent on Kate. A faint remembrance flashed across her, rather unpleasantly, of a

caution Margaret had given her, never in any way to come between Ethel and her husband. Would Ethel have asked her if she had not wished to see her? Could it be, after all, that Sir Philip meant nothing, and that Ralph, in his over-sensitive feelings, had needlessly taken offence? And so Grace planned and contrived, and thought it all over, and tried to close her eyes against her own long-maintained impressions of Philip's intentions towards them, which she had hitherto stoutly maintained against all arguments.

Supported by Lady Gwynne's motherly presence, to prompt her where her own knowledge of her guests failed her, Ethelind found her task by no means so arduous or difficult as she had expected; and, by the time the dancing had commenced, she had entered as thoroughly into the excitement, and joined as heartily in the gayety, as any one in that large and brilliant party. It did Philip good to stand by, and watch her animated face, and listen to her sparkling repartee, and her soft, trilling laughter. And he could not resist asking Barbara, as they stood together for a moment, if he really had ever overstated her beauty in describing her to them.

In spite of his calm, unmoved face, his sister's unqualified admiration gave him intense gratification.

Amongst the three hundred faces which had passed in review before her, Ethel had not recognized any one from the rectory; and wondering whether they had indeed been too conscious of Philip's shortcomings to accept her invitation, she almost started when Stephens, in a low voice, announced "Mrs. and Miss Atherton;" and Ethelind turned and followed the servant nervously across the room to the hall.

"They are in the small ante-room, my lady," he said. "They begged to see you alone first; and I thought, my lady, I had better take them there."

"O Gracie!" she said, "I had quite given you up. Why did you not come earlier? and where is Ralph? Surely he has not sent you here alone?"

## For Better, for Worse.

"We are come, Ethie, dear," Grace replied hurriedly, and with a bright color, "only to see you! I had a feverish longing for one glimpse of you in your own home. I wanted to see you dressed, as you are to-night, in jewels, and lace, and velvet—to feast my eyes upon your face, to get it all stored up in my memory; and then I think I shall be better able to settle down to my own quiet life."

Ethel laughed. "Dear Gracie," she said, "there is not much for you to see in me, I think. I am just the same 'Ethie' I have ever been. Nothing can change me, even though I do wear all this finery; but it is not a bit prettier than your pretty white dress;" and she looked at her scarcely less lovely sister, in her simple white folds of muslin.

"Grace, we ought to apologize to your sister for coming at this late hour," Katie said; "but we wished, Lady Leigh, to avoid notice. We leave early for the same reason."

"And pray, Ethie," Grace broke in, "don't come near us, or try to get us partners. Katie won't dance; and I just know enough people among your guests to have the chance of a quadrille, if I wish it. But we do not come to dance. We are here just to see you once in your own home, among your new friends."

Ethelind's color rose at the remembrance that all these excuses should be thought needful by her sisters, who ought to have been the honored guests in Philip's house. She was grieved to the heart that she could not—dared not—bring Philip peremptorily to forbid such a phantom visit.

"Come in with me, now," she said, "and I will introduce you to my friend Lady Gwynne; I am sure you will both like her; and Katie can sit quietly by her side while I find a partner for you."

But Grace shrank back nervously, and would not consent to what her sister urged. At this moment Barbara's voice was heard calling for Lady Leigh.

"You are wanted," Grace said. "Go—do go! dear Ethel, or you will make me repent that I came."

Again Barbara's voice reached them.

"I must go," Ethel said hurriedly. "But I will tell Stephens to take you through the conservatories, and then no one will observe you." And the next minute she had disappeared.

"I wonder who that pretty girl is Heathcote is dancing with; you will see her presently, when she takes her place just opposite to us. To my mind, she is the best-looking girl in the room."

"Not very gallant of you, Lord Redcar," Barbara answered, as she took that nobleman's arm, and came and stood where she could get a better view of the dancers, "with my brother's wife, who seems to be turning the heads of all the people to-night, and myself beside you, the sole representative of the renowned 'Leigh beauty.' But she is good-looking though, I allow," she added, "now I get a better view of her face; and, upon my word, not at all unlike Lady Leigh's own style of beauty."

"Now you mention it, there is something that reminds you of her in her eyes and hair, and the expression of her face. I wonder who she is." And Lord Redcar turned round to Sir Philip Leigh's steward, who was behind them, and asked him if he could tell him who that pretty girl was dancing with Heathcote.

O, yes, Mr. Jones knew. What does not a shrewd, active lawyer always know of every body in his neighborhood? "It was Miss Atherton, the sister of Mr. Clifford's curate at Leigh-Delamere; the man who was doing so much good at the Moss, and who was drawing the people from all the neighboring churches to Leigh-Delamere to hear him preach."

Barbara started. This, then, was Ethel's sister! Could Philip know they were here? And, without waiting to hear more, she darted off into the crowd to seek out her brother, and tell him who were his guests. He was standing by the fireplace talking to some one she did not know. Barbara touched his

*For Better, for Worse.*

shoulder with her fan. He turned round.

"The Athertons are here," she said, in a low voice. "Did you know it?"

Philip started. "I think not," he said; "if they had been, I must have seen them."

"They are, though. Mr. Jones knows them, and he has seen them. It is a great piece of presumption, I think, to push themselves in without an invitation."

"Who says they were not invited? Not Jones, surely?" Philip exclaimed, leading Barbara to a vacant corner.

"Ethel never said they were; how should I know?" Barbara replied angrily. "But asked or not asked, it shows a great want of good taste to elbow themselves into notice in this way. It does not exalt one's notions of these sort of people. If it were my case I should be annoyed beyond measure; and I should either let them know from myself, or bid Ethelind make them understand, that I could have nothing whatever to do with them."

And horridly annoyed Philip was; but it was as much with Barbara's thoughtless, wilful words as the knowledge that the Athertons were really beneath his roof. Vexed enough he had been at the necessity for either asking or excluding them. He had sincerely trusted they would have kept from him and his, to make it a matter of little moment to any body but Ethel and himself if they ever met again. But this near neighborhood had entirely frustrated all his plans. The whole countryside was ringing with the praises and commendations of Ralph; and here, in his own parish, it was a very difficult matter to carry his point without creating observation. And Barbara certainly did not help him to a peaceful solution of his complicated and disagreeable part.

Philip turned away from his sister, and, with his eye more narrowly bent on the dancers, at last discovered Grace, sitting beside a lady he felt sure, from the outline of her profile in church, which had come between him and the

east window, must be Mrs. Ralph Atherton. He went up and held out his hand to Grace, but it was not that hearty shake he had given her when they had first met on the Promenade at Cheltenham. Still, if it was somewhat stiff and formal, it was courteous, and left Grace nothing to complain of.

"Mrs. Atherton, I presume?" he said, bowing also to that lady, before Grace could introduce Katie to Ethel's husband. "I did not know you were here until a minute ago, Miss Atherton," he said. "Have you seen Lady Leigh? Is she aware you are here?"

The color flew up into Gracie's face, and her dark gray eyes flashed scornfully. "It was a point of much discussion amongst us whether to accept Ethel's invitation or not, Sir Philip. It was, in fact, my doing, to come, as it would be the only opportunity I may ever have of seeing Ethel in her own home, and among her new friends."

"Lady Leigh would not ask those whom she did not wish to see," Philip said coldly, a little taken aback by Grace's scornful manner and not very civil speech.

"As far as Ethelind was concerned," Grace replied, "it did not cause us a doubt; but wives are not always considered to be free agents, I believe."

Philip bit his lip. "Your sister has not many restrictions, and the few laid on her are more perhaps for her own ultimate benefit than her friends can understand. But where is your brother?" he added, looking round the room, to change the dangerous turn the conversation seemed taking.

"Ralph is not here; Mrs. Atherton and I came alone."

"He does not approve of such things, perhaps; though working hard, as I hear he does, a little relaxation would do him no harm; and this is not like a public ball, to which, I believe, some clergymen object."

"Ralph is likely before long to get more relaxation than he cares for," Grace said indifferently. "He leaves Leigh-Delamere as soon as Mr. Clifford can replace him, and it may be some time



## *For Better, for Worse.*

before any thing else in the shape of a curacy is found."

Philip started. "Indeed!" he said; "I had not heard of it. This is a sudden thought surely. But so popular a man as your brother is hardly likely to rest long on his oars. I hear of him every where."

"Ralph will try and do his duty, go where he will; but popularity, will it always insure a good curacy?"

"Is it not a pity, then, that Mr. Atherton should throw up a certainty? It may be some time yet before Clifford is fit to resume his duties. Indeed, there is some rumor that he thinks of resigning the living altogether, though I know nothing of it officially."

"We have not heard so," Katie ventured to say. "And even if it were true, it would make little difference, I fear. My husband's resignation is already on its road to Italy."

"It is not for me to know the motives which may have influenced Mr. Atherton," Philip replied, turning to Katie as he spoke; "but is it not a pity he undertook the curacy, if he must give it up so soon? People, especially the poor, are not fond of change; and your husband, Mrs. Atherton, from what I hear, seems to be a great favorite with his parishioners."

"Circumstances have unexpectedly arisen which make it needful," Katie replied, rather sadly. "We had hoped, when Ralph took it, it had been certain until Mr. Clifford's return."

A perverse desire urged Philip to ask what those circumstances were which rendered this sudden change imperative. And Grace, whose high temper, when roused, nerved her to saying any thing, was as desirous to have said out boldly, "Then why do you drive us away?" when at that moment Lord Redcar came up to Philip, and begged him to introduce him to Miss Atherton, who would, he hoped, join him in the quadrille just forming on the other side of the room. As Grace was led away by her partner, Katie turned round to speak to some lady, who was taking Grace's vacant seat, and Philip dropped back

among the crowd, speculating in his own mind whether the beauty which had so bewitched him at Repworth would be strong enough in Grace's less striking, but still remarkable face, to lead captive the gay Lord Redcar, as it had so effectually done himself.

Most of the guests staying at Redenham left early the next morning. No one remained but Lady Gwynne and her daughters; and these, with Barbara, Philip had promised to drive to Burnley Wood, to luncheon, and see some old friends of the Gwynnes. Ethel looked so tired and worn out with her exertions and late hours the night before, that Philip specially insisted she should remain quietly on the sofa in her own room. Ethel threw herself down on the sofa, and had dropped off into a half-waking day-dream, when Valerie opened the door, and announced "Mrs. Atherton!" She started up, expecting, naturally enough, to see Katie; what was her surprise and delight when her mother, with outstretched arms, rushed towards her, and covered her face with kisses!

## CHAPTER XIX.

"It is too bad of us to keep you up so late, Ralph," Katie said, "but Gracie was so much in request, I could not get away earlier."

Grace threw herself into the great leathern chair. "I do believe," she said, "we are punished far more in having our own way than in giving it up. I had pictured Ethie, living like a queen of the fairies, amongst every thing the heart could desire; and now —"

"You have come down from your high-flown dreams," Ralph said, "and find out that hers is no more than the ordinary lot of mortals."

"O, it is bright and fair enough outside; as like fairy-land as any thing you can imagine; and Ethie herself is absolutely superb. But a strange feeling came over me to-night, as I talked to Sir Philip, and watched (for I never once spoke to) his sister. Ethel is not happy. Hitherto I have hoped against

## *For Better, for Worse.*

hope. Indeed, apart from ourselves, I never doubted her happiness for a moment: but to-night it seemed clear enough; and you are quite right, Ralph, — we must go!"

Ralph's brow clouded. "Yes," he said, "if the necessity for going had never crossed me before, it has done so unmistakably to-night. Do you know, I have had visitors in the house since you left."

"Visitors!" they both exclaimed. "Who? where are they? Not Margaret, surely?" and the blood rushed into Grace's cheeks.

"No, not Margaret; I wish it had been; she might have helped us solve some rather difficult questions. It is your mother, Grace, and Susannah."

"And what could have brought them in such a hurry, without even a line to tell us they were coming?"

"Margaret, it seems, had never told Mrs. Atherton that Ethel was at Redenham. Last week she had intelligence of the illness of uncle John, and she left at once for Wylminstre. In looking over the newspapers the next day, your mother saw an account of the reception given to Sir Philip and Lady Leigh on their arrival at Redenham; and without waiting for Margaret's return, she and Susannah started for this place. How they managed it all I don't know; but at all events here they are; and a fine load of trouble is thrown on my shoulders; for she is determined to see Ethel; nor do I know that I have any right to interfere; no one can deny a mother's natural anxiety for an interview with her own child."

"It would never have happened if Margaret had been at Deighton," Grace said.

"Certainly not; and that my mother knew. At any other time I could have laughed at the clever way in which she has outwitted us; but just now, with things so crooked and unhappy, I freely acknowledge I was very sorry to see her. However, there is no help for it; here she is; and see Ethie she declares she will."

"We must send to Ethie and tell

her she is here. Perhaps she will drive over to us," Katie suggested.

Ralph shook his head.

"You don't know Mrs. Atherton, Katie, as I do. She is bent on seeing Ethelind in her own home. She is sure we are prejudiced against Philip. She even made certain of her 'fly,' by ordering the man who brought her from the station to be here by ten o'clock, to take her to Redenham."

"Philip will be so angry," Grace said nervously. "Ralph, what can we do?"

"I really don't know, Grace. I have sat here pondering it all over, ever since Mrs. Atherton went off to bed; and the only solution I have arrived at is, to let her go her own way. I have no right to stop her. Perhaps Ethel may be glad to see her. Philip may not object. At all events, I am clear of any connivance, however it will look against me. But come, you shall go to bed; and talking over this unhappy affair won't help us." And Ralph lit their candles, and hurried them to bed.

"And this is your own room, Ethie?" Mrs. Atherton said, looking round the luxuriously furnished boudoirs, when she had in some measure recovered her composure, and wiped away her tears of joy. "What a lovely place it is, child! and every thing as magnificent as a palace! The queen herself could not desire a better home. And such a retinue of servants. Do you know, I felt quite bewildered when one after another ushered me up stairs? Grace told me this morning you were grown, and so I think you are; but now that bright color is gone out of your cheeks; you are looking pale and thin; and your hand trembles, and your color comes and goes. You are not looking so well as I expected to see you."

Ethelind laughed.

"I am quite well, dear mamma, I assure you, — only a little tired with my late hours last night." And she might have added, a little nervous and frightened lest Philip and Barbara should return, and find who was her guest.

Mrs. Atherton had a hundred questions to ask ; and Ethel sent for Susannah, and she learned all she could of Margaret and Deignton, and the last news from Frank ; and all that had happened to her mother since they had parted from each other.

The time slipped rapidly away. Mrs. Atherton had set her mind on seeing the house. She could better appreciate the step her child had gained in society, if she could picture to herself the way in which she lived. It was a dreadful disappointment to her finding they left for town early the next morning. "Surely, for her sake, Philip would postpone the journey just one day, when he heard that she had travelled down into Yorkshire on purpose to see him." Ethelind could only shake her head. "Her mother did not know what pressing affairs required Philip in town. Besides, he never altered his plans for any one."

"Well, I am sure he was not so inexorable at Cheltenham," Mrs. Atherton replied. "I told Grace and Ralph to-day no one could have been kinder or more considerate than he was then. Indeed, my dear, if he had not been, I never should have trusted you to him."

Ethel's brow flushed painfully.

"But Philip is most kind and careful of me, mamma," she said nervously ; "and I am sure you will say so when I show you all the beautiful things he has given me." And she offered to take her mother round the long suit of rooms ; led her through the long galleries and conservatories, gathered her a splendid nosegay of the choicest flowers, and ordered luncheon to be brought into her own boudoir. Mrs. Atherton hoped that Ethel would have insisted on her dining with them ; but as Lady Leigh never proposed it, she did not herself know how to do so. She did not know that her child's great anxiety was to get her mother away before Philip and his party returned home ; but this was not an easy task to accomplish, when Mrs. Atherton was bent on making her visit as long a one as she could, in the hope of seeing Philip before she

left, and judging for herself if the hints Grace and Ralph had given her could be founded on any thing but prejudice.

"You know Ralph is going to leave Leigh-Delamere?" Mrs. Atherton said, as she lingered over her luncheon.

"Philip told me so last night," Ethel replied, in a constrained tone, fearing what the subject might lead to.

"Yes ; I was dreadfully annoyed with him when he told me so. Such a nice place as it is, and the people liking him so much, and so near to you ; I can't make it out. But Ralph was always crotchety and unsettled. Nobody else would have thrown up a fellowship and married as he did."

"But Katie and he were engaged for a long time, and they seem so happy ; and you know, mamma, we always said she was made for Ralph."

"If the poor dear Dean had been alive, it would have been another matter ; but now, circumstanced as we are, Ralph ought to have looked higher, and married somebody who could have pushed him on in his profession."

"Ralph is sure to do well ; and though Kate's family cannot help him, she herself will give him her sympathy, and make a far better wife, perhaps, than a fine lady, who knows nothing of what a clergyman most needs."

"The mischief is done now, and can't be helped," Mrs. Atherton said, with a sigh ; "but I do hope Grace will manage better. I shall quite look to you, Ethie, to get Grace well settled. You must ask her to see you in town. She has felt your loss very much, and it will reconcile her to it better if you can contrive to give her a little gayety. Besides, if Ralph does throw up his curacy, she will be a tie to him. And having made such a capital match yourself, I shall depend on you to get Grace as well married as yourself."

"You may be sure, dear mamma, I shall always do the best I can for Gracie ; and directly it is possible, she shall come and see us ; but you must not forget," she said, in a constrained tone, "that neither Philip nor I can do quite as we like yet. Mrs. Leigh still exer-

cises great control over us ; and Philip, I am sure, will never do any thing to displease her or his sisters."

"Displease them ! What could they be displeased at in your having your own sister with you on a visit ? And so pretty and elegant a girl as Grace is too, though perhaps I ought not to say so of my own child."

"You forget, dear mamma, that neither beauty or goodness, nor virtue or accomplishments, have any thing to do with it. They think Philip went out of his way, I believe, in marrying me. The Leighs are very proud ; for many generations they have never married out of their own set. I don't understand it all ; but—but," she said nervously, and the color flitted painfully over her face and neck, "they have accepted me into their family for Philip's sake. I do not think that at present I could venture to invite Grace."

"Accepted you indeed ! Yes, I should think so ; and proud enough they ought to be of you ! Where, indeed, would Philip have found a wife to compare with you in beauty ? And as to family, no one could say your family was not a good one. Your father was a dean, and I was the daughter of a colonel in the army. You had no fortune, I allow ; but Philip told me himself he did not need it. What more could they want ? And that puts me in mind," she added, almost in the same breath, and before Ethelind had time to reply, "you have never shown me your jewels, and your pretty Parisian dresses."

Glad to turn her mother's curiosity into any harmless channel, Ethel sent Valerie for her jewel case, and showed her her prettiest dresses, and kept her eyes turned on the little pendule on the mantel-shelf, and listened nervously if she heard a footfall on the carpeted floors, dreading every time the door opened that Barbara should suddenly make her appearance among them. At last the visit drew to an end ; the fly was ordered round, and Mrs. Atherton drew Ethel down, and whispered something in her child's ear. Ethelind colored scarlet, and then as suddenly became

quite pale. Her mother smiled proudly. "I am so glad to hear it, darling," she said ; "an heir to Redenham will be quite sure to put you in your proper place. Now take care of yourself, and don't attempt too much. I shall be very anxious about you ; I wish I could see Philip, to caution him. Young people are so thoughtless and inconsiderate." And Mrs. Atherton threw her arms round Ethel's neck, and, for the first time, they both experienced in their mutual anxiety the full knowledge of the deep gulf which now separated them from each other.

Lady Leigh breathed a sigh of intense relief as she watched the hired fly, with Susannah's smiling face at the window, turn out of the courtyard ; then sat down to try and collect her scattered senses before Philip and his sister made their appearance.

"Stephen tells me you have had visitors, Ethel," Philip said, when he came up into her room. "Did Grace tell you, last night, that your mother was at the rectory ?"

"Mamma had not arrived when Grace left," Ethel replied quietly. "Her visit was as unexpected to them as it was to me."

"I suppose she came to urge your brother to change his mind, and not throw up his curacy ?"

"My mother would not influence Ralph in any way. She is vexed about it, I can see ; but I do not think she has attempted to alter his intentions."

"Then her visit was to you, I conclude ?"

"I think so," Ethel replied gravely, and with a half-stifled sigh.

Philip stood looking out of the window, whistling a low air. He turned round suddenly : "You told her, of course, that we left Redenham early to-morrow morning ?"

"Yes, I did."

"That was right. I was afraid she might expect an invitation here ; but whatever one might do in that way another day, I could not possibly have her here now."

"Whatever mamma's wishes were

## *For Better, for Worse.*

when she left Deighton, she was made fully aware of my inability to ask her here before she reached Redenham. Indeed, I think, on the whole, she was perhaps less disappointed at our short and unsatisfactory interview, than I was at being unable to claim her as our guest."

Philip reddened. "Of course your mother is woman of the world enough to know, when a girl marries into another set, she does not take her whole family with her. It is only some absurd notion you have picked up from your brother or sister. You yourself will grow wiser before another twelve months are over your head."

"I am wiser, Philip; far wiser, within the last fortnight, than I ever thought I should be; and I can truly say, that in my case 'ignorance was bliss,' compared with my present state of feeling;" and Ethelind buried her face in her handkerchief, and gave way to the tears she had been striving so long to keep back. Philip paced restlessly up and down the room. Ethelind's tears always unmanned him; he could bear reproaches infinitely better. He sat down, and putting his arm round her, drew her head down on his shoulder.

"It seems very hard," he said, "that a man's peace and comfort is to be thus broken in upon by people who have no business to interfere with us. What right had your brother to come here, annoying and worrying us in this way? You never wanted your mother and sisters when we were abroad. Why on earth you should be fretting after them now, I can't understand. If they would but leave you alone, you would do well enough. It will end in making you ill, I am certain; and I am determined, if they come here any more, I will give strict orders to have you denied to them, and so put an end to the thing at once."

Ethel listened to all Philip said in mute horror; she dared not trust herself to reply; she could only comfort herself with the remembrance they would leave Redenham too early to run

the chance of another call from the rectory.

"There," he said, kissing her forehead, "now don't cry any more; you are quite unfit to come down stairs; I will excuse you to Lady Gwynne, and tell Valerie to take care you are not disturbed." And, lifting her on to the sofa as he would have done a little child, he left her to her own reflections while he went down to dinner. \*

"Those Athertons are enough to drive a man wild," he said to Barbara, as they stood together in the evening. "To be hunted out of one's house in this way is unbearable! If Clifford resigned his living to-morrow, that fellow should not have it, I am determined. And how on earth one is to get rid of him, I can't think. Of course, if he has a purpose to serve, he will stick there as long as he can, and Ethel will be ill if it lasts much longer."

"You must make a virtue of necessity, I suppose," Barbara said carelessly, "and find him a better berth elsewhere; I expect that is what he is scheming for."

"I would have done so willingly, if they had asked me; but to thrust himself and all his tribe on me in this way has cancelled all his claims to consideration. I strongly suspect it is the work of that eldest sister of Ethel's. She must be a strange person, to be doing all she does at Deighton; and she has great influence over the family."

"You leave this to-morrow," Barbara replied; "in London, you will cut them altogether."

## CHAPTER XX.

FOR some weeks Margaret Atherton had been uneasy at the weekly missives her aunt Sarah sent of her uncle John's health. Margaret had an indescribable longing to go to Wylmynstre to see him. She looked at her mother and Susannah, who were beginning to feel reconciled and happy in their new home. Could she leave them? Could she yet quite trust Rachel Gray, or Annie Morley, though she was daily putting them

*For Better, for Worse.*

more forward, and encouraging them to take the responsibility of the school upon themselves? But no one would act independently while Margaret was there; and, in self-defence, she often assured Mr. Weldon there was no help for it, they would themselves drive her away from Deignton.

The fame of Deignton School, in spite of Margaret's precautions, was spreading far and wide; and Mr. Weldon, sorely against his will, had to bear meekly the credit of so great an advance in the educational mania of the present day. Margaret always contrived to slip away when visitors dropped in to look at the school. She said she had not bargained for being made a lion of, and therefore she thought she had a right to hide herself in her own territory, which, she stoutly declared, must be looked upon as forbidden ground. For a long time she had been wonderfully fortunate, Mr. Weldon deprecating all visits not made during half-holidays, when schoolmistress and children were away; so that "time-killers" and "curiosity-seekers" had only the satisfaction of looking at empty benches and bare walls. One afternoon, in the midst of their work, a carriage, with the bright Oakley livery, drew up at the gate, and a party of ladies and gentlemen got down, and asked permission to look at the school. Mr. Weldon, who had just come from the school house, at once refused. "It was against the rules; he was sorry, but he could not give leave." Lady Elizabeth Thorpe was not so easily put off. She pleaded the distance they had come; the desire she had to learn from their success wherein her school failed. Mr. Weldon hesitated, stammered, made the best resistance he could, and was at last overpowered by the obstinacy of his annoying persecutors. "It is entirely against the rules, Lady Elizabeth," he said, in a tone only barely civil, as he very reluctantly lifted the latch.

"We will not interrupt you," her ladyship replied, in her softest tones. "We shall so enjoy listening to the way in which your children do their work."

And firmly persuaded that the vicar stood in mortal fear of the governess, she followed him into the school room.

Margaret was determined not to allow the children to be made puppet-shows of, for the mere gratification of idle curiosity. So she gave the sign for them to put away their books and work; and in an instant, almost as if by magic, the little urchins ran trooping out on the green before the astonished guests comprehended the sudden movement. A half-suppressed smile crossed the face of the rector as he watched the manœuvre, and Margaret's quiet, stately manner as she just gathered up her belongings, and then disappeared into her own room. The folding-doors, however, had been fastened back to give air in the warm school room, and Margaret was compelled to leave them open, subjecting herself to the annoyance of hearing and seeing all that went on between Mr. Weldon and his visitors. As the truth broke slowly upon her ladyship, her face flushed slightly. "This is a disappointment," she exclaimed to Mr. Weldon. "It was to hear them going through their work we came here. We don't care about the school house; our own at Oakley is far better—a pretty Gothic ornamental building, not so shabby-looking and patchy as this is; but we wanted to get some hints as to your successful method of teaching, for I hear from all quarters what wonders you have accomplished since you changed your governess."

"Well, so far you have heard truly," Margaret could not help overhearing Mr. Weldon reply. "The governess certainly has a great deal to do with the matter. For instance, our governess is very positive; she won't be interfered with in her work, and won't give her lessons while there are strangers in the room."

"O, I see—keeps you a little in order, I suppose. Likes to show her power; knows that she is valuable to you. What a trying class of people they are to deal with! Why, I think we must have had a dozen in the last four years; and if they teach well, they give them-

## *For Better, for Worse.*

selves airs, and think you cannot possibly do without them; and you must submit, or they leave you."

"Miss Atherton threatens to leave us," Mr. Weldon said, with a mischievous smile lurking about the corners of his mouth. "It will be a sorry day for us all when she goes."

"Do you think, Mr. Weldon, she would take the school at Oakley?" Lady Elizabeth asked. "We could not give her a very large salary; but the school house is so good, we always make that a set-off. Still, if I thought we could tempt her, I would not mind an additional five pounds."

Mr. Weldon was too annoyed even to smile; he felt himself growing quite hot, for he knew Margaret could hear every word that was said.

"There is no hope for you in that quarter, I am certain, Lady Elizabeth," he replied stiffly. "When Miss Atherton quits Deignton, she gives up her present employment altogether. We are too sorry ourselves to allow any neighboring parishes securing her services, however tempting the offer."

Lady Elizabeth looked at the rector's hot, angry face, and, like all imaginative weak minds, she at once jumped to the conclusion that there were reasons which the rector would not give for the governess of whom he thought so much quitting her post at Deignton. She could see it all plainly now. No wonder they were not admitted; no wonder she was so cried up. Old men were often great simpletons. The governess was pretty, and certainly, though dressed plainly enough, had an air with her very unlike the rest of her class. Mr. Weldon would not be the first clergyman who had done a foolish thing in marrying the schoolmistress; and with a sick sister always on his hands, he had some excuse for acting foolishly in his old age.

Margaret would have given any thing to have been able to leave the room; but to do so she would have to pass the two younger ladies and gentlemen who had been attracted there by her aquarium, which it had given the children

so much pleasure to assist her in stocking.

"Now I'll be bound this little river-garden has effectually put an end to fishing for minnows with crooked pins, and all the wicked devices young vagabonds are up to for tormenting God's creatures out of their lives. No wonder Deignton is rising in the scale of intelligence and civilization, if ferneries, and aviaries, and aquariums form part of the education they get."

This was said in a manly, straightforward way, and in a voice which instantly struck Margaret's ear as familiar to her. She had not looked up at any of the party; she was busying herself in folding up work at a little table beside her. She had not seen the start her name had caused in one of the two gentlemen, when Mr. Weldon had spoken of her as "Miss Atherton." She did venture now to glance at her tormentors. The lady who was speaking to Mr. Weldon was evidently, by the likeness, the mother of the two fat, fair girls who stood apart with the two gentlemen by the window. One of those two was as evidently, from the family likeness, a brother. He looked uneasy and out of place, and Margaret heard him declare, "It was too bad of his mother to force herself in on the school, annoying Mr. Weldon, when she knew it was against the rules."

His companion, who stood with his back to Margaret, evidently agreed with him; for, putting his arm into his friend's, he said very quietly, "Come, Thorpe, there is no reason why we should stay because your mother's curiosity is not yet appeased. Let us go; perhaps the rest will follow."

He turned slightly as he spoke, and gave one quick hurried look to where Margaret stood. Their eyes met for an instant only, and were as instantly dropped; but in that short mutual glance there could be no mistake, — in spite of Margaret's altered position, in spite of his sunburnt face, the dark, thick mustache covering the upper lip, — they had each recognized the other. Margaret's whole frame shook as if an

ague fit had attacked her; she literally gasped for breath. She watched Mr. Weldon handing Lady Elizabeth into the carriage.

"Now, really, Miss Atherton, these people are too bad," he exclaimed as he came in, looking more chafed and angry than Margaret had ever seen him. "To be scared out of your own house and home in this way, and your scholars dismissed, to gratify the curiosity of an idle woman, who does not know the value of time, (unless it is any fresh scheme for killing it,) is past endurance; and I am quite determined I will find out some means of guarding you from it in future, even if we keep them out with the aid of Chubb's locks."

Mr. Weldon would have given a great deal if he could have known exactly how much of the conversation had reached Margaret's ear, and to that he fully attributed the pale, scared look which she still wore.

After Margaret had succeeded in dismissing Mr. Weldon, she had the inquiries of her mother to satisfy. Mrs. Atherton had watched the carriage and its gay liveries drive up to the school. She had seen the party alight, and, after their parley with Mr. Weldon, disappear within the school room door. She had watched eagerly to see them depart, and now she was all anxiety to know who they were—where Oakley Park was. Did Margaret think it was intended as a call on her? Would it lead to an invitation? Margaret knew not which question to answer first, they came so thick and fast. "I am sure I cannot tell you, mamma, where Oakley is," she said; "some six or eight miles off, I believe; but as we are never likely to see it, it does not much matter."

"You are put out, my dear, at having to show yourself to people in your present calling. You understand now, Margaret, I hope, what I have all along tried to impress on you—the awkwardness and incongruity of your filling a station so much beneath you."

"Indeed, mamma, you mistake me," Margaret said meekly; "I was dreadfully annoyed at Lady Elizabeth's per-

sisting in forcing herself where she was quite aware she was not wanted, and saying things before me which she ought not to have done before any schoolmistress. As to calling on us, she was hardly likely to do that when her visit was to tempt me to go to Oakley as schoolmistress to their village school."

Mrs. Atherton's cheeks grew scarlet. "That is just what I have always said it would come to," she exclaimed wrathfully; "you have played at being a schoolmistress until every body believes you are one!"

Her mother's words sounded in her ears as a bitter truth. Margaret could hardly repress her tears. "Perhaps I have, mamma," she said sadly,— "not played exactly, but worked and tried to do my best; fancying that every one would understand my reasons for doing so, without feeling I had lowered myself in the estimation of the right thinking. I have been spoiled, I fear, by Mr. Weldon's kindness and consideration for me. The fault is as much mine as his." She kissed her mother, and went into her own room, and eased her throbbing head by a flood of tears—the first she had shed for a long time.

Margaret could do little the next day. In place of her usual smiles and bright, cheering words to her little classes, the work dragged; she could not keep her attention, much less insure her pupils'; and feeling irritable and unhappy, she at last gave up the struggle, and resigned her place to Rachel Gray; contenting herself with pretending to work in her own room, though any one might have observed how often it lay idly resting in her lap, while her thoughts were far away from the objects which surrounded her.

Mr. Weldon was vexed to see how pale and fagged she was looking, and mentally blamed himself for ever having allowed Lady Elizabeth to set foot within the school room.

Rachel Gray had dismissed her scholars, and every thing was quiet and still after a busy day's work, when, while still sitting in her own room, Margaret was aroused by the sound of foot-



*For Better, for Worse.*

steps on the gravel walk. Believing it was Mr. Weldon, and that he had some more last words to say before returning to the rectory, she said, "Come in" to the tap at the door; and almost before she had ceased speaking the tall upright figure of a stranger stood before her, his shadow darkening the twilight in the low room in which Margaret sat. For a moment both were still; then Margaret arose, but her utter astonishment took away the power of words. The visitor seemed equally spell-bound. A woman's pride at last came to Margaret's aid. "I do not know to what cause I can attribute the honor of this call, Captain Vyvian," she said stiffly; "I had hoped the knowledge so unfairly obtained yesterday might at least have been held sacred. It was enough surely to have outraged all right feeling in forcing yourself on us then, without adding this visit to the account."

"It was to apologize for that unfortunate visit I am here now. Believe me, Miss Atherton, I was perfectly unaware of your being in these parts when I joined Lady Elizabeth in her drive yesterday. No power on earth should have tempted me within these walls, had I known to whom they belonged."

"I acquit you entirely," Margaret said, with the color returning to her cheeks; "but I should have thought more of your regret if it had restrained you from repeating your visit."

Captain Vyvian put his hands on the back of a chair facing Margaret. She had sunk down on the seat from which she had risen on his entrance.

"I could not bear you should believe me capable of forcing myself upon your notice, of prying into your present mode of life against your evident desire. Whatever your previous opinion of me might have been, I knew I did not deserve the charge of such want of manliness or delicacy, and it was to assure you of this I have now come here."

"As I said before, you might have spared yourself," Margaret replied; "I did not, could not accuse you; your start at the sound of my name convinced me you were taken by surprise. I repeat

again, your visit now is unnecessary and uncalled for."

Captain Vyvian turned almost as pale as the trembling girl before him. "However circumstances may have made us strangers," he said, "you must believe me, Miss Atherton, I have long been painfully anxious to learn what had become of you since the deanery was no longer your home. Finding you here so unexpectedly, you will, I trust, forgive the question: Is it choice or necessity which has made you adopt your present mode of life? For the sake of old memories, forgive the past enough to answer me this question."

Margaret rose up haughtily from her chair; her eye glittered, and her lips were almost as white as her cheeks.

"Captain Vyvian, I have no old memories," she said sternly; "it has been the business of the last five years to root them all out, and I must have succeeded poorly enough in the effort if a single one connected with you remained to me. But I will so far satisfy your curiosity as this,—that both choice and necessity have placed me here. Necessity, inasmuch as our means are lessened for a time; and choice, as it better suits my taste and inclination than any other method of earning money I could hear of when I accepted this situation."

There was a pause. Margaret seemed to wait for any other question to be put to her. Her companion turned away to the window; there was a strange, troubled look in his face, and his eyes fell before the bright, glittering gaze of the calm, statue-like figure before him.

"Captain Vyvian," at length Margaret said, "you must be aware this is no place for you. I cannot receive strangers alone. I have satisfied your wishes, inasmuch as I have replied to your inquiries. We must now part;" and, without moving from her place, she motioned to him to leave her.

"You are right; we are strangers now," he replied, slowly and with visible effort. "I have no business here;" and seizing his hat, with a hasty bow,

## *For Better, for Worse.*

and with no attempt to shake hands, he strode out of the door, and down the path into the street, as suddenly as he had come in.

Margaret stood like one stunned. When she awoke from the tumult of ideas which pressed upon her, a thousand fears tormented her. Had she been too harsh? too unrelenting? Had she not shown anger and mistrust, instead of merely common civility and cool indifference?

The following morning found her on her way to the rectory. She came there to tell Miss Weldon the news from Wylminstre was not good, and she believed it was now her duty to go and see her uncle.

"My brother will rejoice to hear your decision," Miss Weldon said; "he is growing very anxious and nervous about you. He is sure you are overworked, and require change."

Margaret smiled a wan, sickly smile, — it came amidst a flood of tears; and for the first time since her residence at Deignton, she readily acknowledged she did.

### CHAPTER XXI.

POOR Margaret! fears, perplexities, and annoyances seemed to meet her on every side. Her uncle's state of health was evidently serious. Aunt Sarah seemed from the first to have quietly realized the fact, and was thankful she was able to care for and nurse him, and, if it must be, bear the short separation which was in store for them.

The impending general election kept Wylminstre, as it did other places, in a fever of political excitement; and Mr. Waldron, consulted by every body, both in and out of office, entered into the spirit of the strife almost as eagerly as if he had not been caged up within the four walls of his sick room. Margaret, while she was in Acre Lane, resumed her old occupation of reading the papers to her uncle, and in them the speeches of Sir Philip Leigh, whose oratory seemed to be startling the country to a knowledge that a new and unlooked-for star had arisen in the polit-

ical horizon at a critical moment, when the old people fancied that talent had almost worn itself out.

"Just read that paragraph, Maggy," her uncle said one morning, pushing the newspaper across to his niece. "I don't often read the trumpery they fill papers with; but this seems to concern Ethelind."

Margaret took the paper, and read:

"Last night, for the first time since the return of Sir Philip and Lady Leigh from their lengthened continental tour, the noble mansion in Belgrave Square was thrown open to a select and brilliant assembly of the most exclusive families of the aristocracy. Carriages continued to set down for nearly two hours. The noble suit of rooms were beautifully decorated, and no expense had been spared in rendering it one of the most brilliant receptions of the season. The sensation caused by the loveliness of the youthful hostess, of whose beauty rumor had already said so much, far exceeded the highest expectation; and we believe we may confidently predict that Lady Leigh will be the reigning attraction of the season."

"The fellow who wrote that stuff deserves to be well flogged for his pains," was uncle John's commentary, in his short, testy voice.

"I wonder what mamma will say to this when she reads it," Margaret said. "I believe she would give any thing to see Ethel in her own house; and it does seem hard, I own, that Sir Philip should have separated her so entirely from her family."

"When a woman marries she must submit to her husband in these matters. Keep thy mother from the Leighs, if possible, Maggy; she is sure to make mischief with her weak, silly tongue and want of tact. And now the poor child is married, it would be wrong to throw difficulties in her way."

"Then you do not think Ralph so wrong in throwing up his curacy, after all, uncle?" Margaret said. And uncle John laughed, and declared he meant no such thing.

## *For Better, for Worse.*

The next morning, Margaret, equipped for the walk aunt Sarah would not excuse, came in to inquire if her uncle had any commissions she could execute. There was a check to be cashed at the bank before it closed; and thither she turned her steps. As she pushed open the heavy oak door, and entered the low, dark room, amidst a number of towns-people gossiping together,—as they always do in a country bank,—at the furthestmost desk, chatting to Mr. Graves, stood Guy Vyvian.

Instinctively Margaret hesitated, and her cheeks flushed; but recovering herself the next moment, with a quiet, self-possessed step, she turned to the younger partner, and delivered to him her uncle's message and check. As the precise, methodical man of business deliberately counted the notes, and gave them into Margaret's hand, by a sort of instinct rather than sight she knew the eyes of Captain Vyvian were fixed upon her. But she neither turned towards him nor looked up; the next minute she felt, rather than saw, that he had quitted the bank. Margaret lingered on, chattering with Mr. Graves, and answering all his inquiries about her uncle, until she had no further excuse for stopping; and when she had regained the open street, and saw that not a single person was visible, with something between a sigh of relief and vexation she turned her steps homewards. "I tried to convince him that we must be as strangers, and it seems I have succeeded," she mentally exclaimed. "How hard it is to do one's duty steadily and unflinchingly! One fancies it easy enough until the effort has to be made. The reward, I suppose, will come in due time; but whether it does or not, it must be done;" and she turned into the open door of the cathedral, and stood beside the little flat stone in the centre of the cloisters, until the band of smiling, careless chorister boys trooped past, warning her that evening service was about to commence. Following them into the choir, she turned into her old seat near the deanery door.

"I must leave you to-morrow, uncle John," Margaret said, as she sat by her uncle's side in the dim twilight. "I had a letter from Ralph this afternoon. Mamma, I find, stole a march on me after I left Deignton, and started off to Leigh Moss to see Ethelind. She was only just in time, though; for Sir Philip and Ethie came to town the next day. Ralph has heard of a curacy he thinks likely to suit him in Somersetshire; so he took mamma part of the way to Deignton, on his road there; and he begs me to meet him by the 8:10 train at Swindon to-morrow, on his return into Yorkshire."

"I am sorry to part from thee, child," John Waldron said; "but I should like thee to meet Ralph: a little conversation with thee will do him good, and thou wilt better understand his motives for leaving Leigh. I have been vexed at his quitting Leigh; but old people and young see things in such different lights, that perhaps I ought not to judge for him. I know what expenses changing a home entails, and I give him this check," he said, pushing a piece of folded paper into her hand; "it will help to make his difficulties less, perhaps."

### CHAPTER XXII.

RALPH'S tall figure on the platform at Swindon was the first which Margaret caught sight of as the London train pulled up; and bidding a porter take charge of her luggage, he hastened her up stairs to a quiet room he had secured for themselves, free from the inquisitive eyes and ears of the people who thronged waiting rooms.

"We must make the most of our three hours," Ralph said; "I have lots to say to you, little sister."

And Margaret noticed, with little satisfaction, the look of care and anxiety on her brother's bright, handsome face.

"You ought to be very hungry," he said, pouring her out a cup of coffee. "Come, eat first, and then we will proceed to business."

Margaret laughed. "I cannot eat or

*For Better, for Worse.*

drink," she said, "until I hear from yourself there is no help for your leaving Leigh Moss. I believe every body who knows any thing about it at Wylminstre firmly believes you are mad."

"I am prepared for that, because it is purely a matter of feeling. No man can enter into another's difficulties, unless they have been similarly circumstanced. There are some things we must decide for ourselves, even if we thereby brave the opinion of the world. So long as Katie sees it as I do, I feel I am not called on to enter into explanations."

"And Katie does approve?"

"How could she do otherwise, Maggie? How could I get on in my parish, — independently of the squire, who owns every acre, — even, if we had not been connected? How could I have my own relations about me, as a mockery of poor Ethie's feelings? How could I constantly meet Ethel as if we were utter strangers? No! the more I think it over, the more certain I am I am doing the right thing. The new home is my trial. Where is it to be? and what?"

"Have you not just been looking at a curacy?"

Ralph smiled. "A curacy!" he said; "I have seen nearly a dozen! But however, this one does not seem so very unpromising. Eighty pounds a year, and a large, inconvenient house. But it is a sole charge, and I can take pupils if I like. I think I must try it. The rector is old, and he seems easily satisfied, and in flourishing health. As soon as Katie is fit to travel, we must make the move."

"And now, Maggie," and he roused up from a reverie, "you must come and see our Yorkshire home. It will always hold a pleasant place in our memory as the first sphere of our married life."

"When Katie needs me, Ralph," Margaret said, cheerfully. And then she proceeded to tell her brother of her visit to Wylminstre; of her uncle's altered health; her own fears about him; his thoughtful kindness to Ralph, — a

gift so seasonable as to lift a load of anxiety from the heart of her listener.

Then they discussed Ethelind's compulsory estrangement from her own family; her so suddenly quitting Redenham, no doubt to avoid the visits of Mrs. Atherton; of the brave heart with which Grace had borne her disappointment, and the bright, loving spirit she had displayed during the whole of her long visit to her brother.

"And this Grafton curacy, Ralph," Margaret said, — "it is to be hoped there is no squire in the way there!"

Ralph laughed. "I took good care to ask that question to begin with. Grafton is not favored with such an appendage — at least not one living near the place. But, Maggie, Mrs. Atherton tells me you intend leaving Deighton; she says you have at last been frightened out of the folly of pretending to be what you are not by some Lady Somebody, who persisted in mistaking you for a village schoolmistress."

"I thought mamma would tell you some wonderful story of my conversion to her opinions, as she calls it," Margaret replied, reddening a little even now at the remembrance. "Rude enough Lady Elizabeth was; but it would have required more than any thing she could have done to shake my purpose, had I not for some time felt my work there, as far as I am concerned, was nearly accomplished. Mr. Weldon knows, as soon as Rachel Gray can be left to herself, I shall go. But, Ralph, dear, who do you think was with Lady Elizabeth when she called at the school? No other than Guy Vyvian!"

Ralph started to his feet. "Guy Vyvian call on you, Margaret! Mrs. Atherton never mentioned his name."

"Mamma knew nothing about it. On Guy's part the visit was purely accidental. Indeed, I do not think he recognized me, until my name, and then my profile, I suppose, betrayed me. His voice first enlightened me; I could not mistake that any where. I did not feel at all sure he had recognized me, until, later in the evening, when sitting

## *For Better, for Worse.*

alone in the school room, he suddenly stood before me."

"The rascal!" Ralph exclaimed angrily, the hot blood rushing into his face and kindling his dark eyes. "He would never have dared do it if he had not known you were unprotected. I trust, Margaret, you ordered him to leave the house instantly."

"I could not tell him to go; but my cold manner showed how unwelcome his presence was. I do not now remember what either of us said, though my spirit rose, and I felt I could have faced a lion. But O, Ralph," she added, sinking her head down upon her brother's shoulder, and bursting into tears, "I never knew until after that interview how hard a battle I had been fighting with my own heart."

"My poor Maggie!" and Ralph folded Margaret in his arms. "As if he had not sufficiently ill-used you, without forcing his presence on you when you were alone and unprotected!"

"You must not be unjust to him, Ralph," Margaret replied, slowly wiping away her tears. "He only wanted to convince me he had nothing to do with Lady Elizabeth's visit; and also, I think, to find out, if he could, the motives which induced me to be at Deighton."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I cannot tell you; it was so sudden and unexpected it quite bewildered me, and it seems now like a painful dream. But that I succeeded in convincing him of the impassable gulf between us I have had ample proof. I saw him again yesterday, in the bank at Wylminstre, and we met like utter strangers."

"At Wylminstre?"

"Yes! I knew he was in the town, because he had seen and talked with aunt Sarah, and quite won her good will by his inquiries for all our family. She asked him to call in Acre Lane. The fear of his doing so hastened me away."

Time sped on. Not a moment had been wasted since the brother and sister met; and when at last they parted from each other, they each looked the

brighter and happier for the short communion they had enjoyed.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

CURLED up in her corner of the railway carriage, scarcely heeding the high spirits of Barbara, or the sharp repartees she and her brother enlivened each other with during their long journey, Ethelind had plenty of time for her own reflections.

As regarded her own family, she had quite resolved to give them up. Any intercourse, under present circumstances, was worse than useless; and while it could not add to their or her comfort, it only chafed Philip, and gave his mother and sisters a greater hold over him. In London they would be free from family collisions, such as had marred her happiness at Redenham, and she would give herself up to Philip's wishes, and try if she could not, by so doing, win back his old love.

Ethelind's uncommon style of beauty soon became the theme of conversation at the clubs; and Philip, as his eyes involuntarily followed her, and saw her — perfectly graceful and self-possessed — entering with the freshness of an unspoiled mind into animated discussions with clever men whom women held in awe, or in a simple, quiet truthfulness defending her own opinions against those who were esteemed great authorities, felt his nervous doubts had been uncalled for, and that he might safely trust his young wife to take her own place in society, without fear of the criticisms which had always exercised such a powerful influence over his otherwise strong mind.

And this first introduction to a new life was not without its charms to a young girl to whom every thing was fresh and new. But in spite of the long lectures she received from her stately mother-in-law, or the laughing raillery of her husband and sisters, she could not submit unrepiningly to the almost total separation from Philip which his political duties exacted. With the exception of attending her to her first

*For Better, for Worse.*

"drawing room," and occasionally dropping in to her opera box a few minutes before the fall of the curtain, or rushing home from some committee of the "House," barely in time to dress and receive the guests he had specially desired her to invite, life to Ethel, as far as Philip was concerned, had nearly become a blank. But this was the inevitable lot of wives of public men, — at least so she was constantly assured by Philip's mother and sisters; so it was only to be borne in the best way she could devise, patiently waiting for the breaking up of Parliament, when, with time and leisure on his hands, her husband, she hoped, would once more devote himself to home and its pleasures.

"You are early to-night," Ethel exclaimed, as Philip came into the drawing room where she was at work; "Barbara assured me just now the House was not expected to break up till very late to-night."

"So every body imagined; but the ministry found themselves unexpectedly in a minority soon after the House met, and the Premier is gone off to consult her Majesty: of course the House broke up. It has made no end of commotion. Has Stephens brought in the evening's papers?"

"Yes; they are on the table beside you," Ethelind said; and then she rested with her needle-work in her lap, and wondered how people could be so excited by politics as her husband's family were, wishing, for his sake, she could feel as enthusiastic as Barbara did.

For some time Philip was entirely absorbed in his paper; then suddenly looking up, he asked Ethelind if she had not some relative or connection a leading man at Wylminster.

"I have not," she said, "but Margaret has, — old Mr. Waldron, the banker. Why? What makes you ask the question?"

"Only that every one agrees in thinking that Lord L—— will try the effect of a new Parliament before he resigns office. In which case, we must strengthen his hands as much as possi-

ble. Redcar tells me, if he could secure the interest of one or two influential men at Wylminster, he thinks he has a very fair chance of a seat for the borough; at all events, it is worth a trial. I mean to run down with him, and see what can be done. How is one to secure this man's interest, do you think?"

"What man? Mr. Waldron, do you mean?"

"Yes; this uncle of Miss Atherton's."

"You forget he is a Quaker; you might not like to have any thing to do with them."

"O, never mind that; in politics one overlooks all minor considerations. If he is a good fellow, and answers our purpose, it does not signify what his creed may be, or the cut of his coat, for that matter. We must contrive to surmount that difficulty."

"But Mr. Waldron has some very strong prejudices; and if he should not happen to agree with Lord Redcar's opinions, and should oppose you?" Ethel said, nervously.

"Then we must fight the battle out between us, that is all," Philip replied, coolly; and he went on again with his paper. Presently he looked up, and asked abruptly, "Where is your sister now, Ethel? She seems to exercise great influence over all her family. Do you think, if you wrote to her, she would help us?"

Ethel looked up in astonishment. "You forget," she said, "that I have not written to Margaret since I married. I have, at your wish, carefully avoided any intercourse with my family; I could not let my first letter to any of them be about politics."

Perhaps Philip's conscience accused him; he did not attempt to meet his wife's eyes, or notice the color which dyed her cheeks.

"It does not signify," he said; "if you object to write to Miss Atherton, I suppose we must find some other way of going to work. I only thought you might have been glad of any chance of renewing your correspondence with your own people."

*For Better, for Worse.*

“Not in that way, Philip,” Ethelind replied, indignantly, for the cool manner in which her husband tried to make a convenience of her family ruffled her temper more than any thing which had occurred between them. “You yourself forbade my writing to, or thinking of them; and, hard as it has been to resign them, I have done so for your sake. You would not seriously ask me to expose myself to their just condemnation for the mere sake of politics, which I neither understand nor care about. Gladly as I would accept your offer, on almost any terms,” she added, with tears in her eyes, “my first letter to Margaret must not be a political one.”

“If you are not political now,” Philip replied, “you must learn to be before long. If the ministry should weather out this storm, it is more than probable I shall be offered a seat in the cabinet. In that case, you must fulfil your part of the duties: receptions, entertainments, applicants to receive, suing, through you, for your husband’s patronage. Needy politicians, and aspiring wives and daughters, will crowd round you, and beset you; and it will be your place to carry yourself in such a manner towards them all, as shall most conduce to your husband’s peace of mind, under his trying duties and hard work.”

“Then why engage in it at all?” Ethelind asked, mournfully. “You do not want place; you have all you can desire, Philip, and honor, at such a price, cannot be worth the labor it will cost you.”

“Suppose every man thought as you do, Ethel, what would become of the country? Wait a year or two, and I will answer for it you will make as good a minister’s wife as Lady L—— herself. An interest in politics depends very much on ourselves. Read the clever leading articles in the daily papers, listen to the arguments wise men urge and argue, and an interest springs up in the breast of every man or woman, which, depend upon it, is the source of that patriotism that so distinguishes England from the whole world beside. I seem to have alarmed you, Ethie,” he

added; “but what will you say when I tell you — in the strictest confidence, remember — that I have already been offered a seat in the House of Lords?”

It would be unnatural to suppose Ethelind, young as she was, totally insensible to the ambition which, in more or less degree, is innate in every breast. And Philip watched with a quiet smile of satisfaction her visible start of surprise, and then the deep bloom which spread over her neck and face.

“You are not trying to play on my credulity, are you, Philip?” she asked.

“In simple truth, I mean what I say. Lord —— offered me to-day a seat in the Lords, by any title I liked to name. I have eight and forty hours given to accept or decline.”

“And the title?” Ethelind asked.

“There can be no question about that,” Philip replied; “the same my ancestors bore will serve me. In fact, it is but the restitution of a forfeited right that I would accept. I could not have listened for a moment,” he said, proudly, “to the offer of any new creation, such as is enacted by mere moneyed or political interest. In my case it is only a question of restitution to an old and well-earned right, which no man, when it has been so freely offered, has a right to refuse.”

“Earl of Redenham!” Ethelind said, slowly, as she came up to her husband’s side, and laid her hand on his arm. “It is a pretty title, and an old one, I suppose. But I think I am glad you were only Philip Leigh when you married.”

Philip laughed. “You silly little thing,” he said, “would you try to cheat yourself into a belief that a countess’s coronet would have made you refuse me?” and he stooped down and kissed the white forehead resting against his arm.

“I did not mean that exactly,” Ethelind replied; “but no idea of your wealth or your position influenced me. I could have loved you just as well had you been without a name or a belonging —”

“A real case of love at first sight, eh,

## For Better, for Worse.

Ethie?" and he put his arm round her waist and drew her closer to his side.

"How pleased they will be in Eaton Place!"

"Yes, it will gratify my mother and sister's ambition, which has always been more aspiring for me than my own. My great trouble is about Ann. Poor soul, it will be a blow to her, I fear; but she will exercise her usual self-sacrifice, and we shall hear nothing from her but warm congratulations; but I would rather it had not come upon her through me."

It was very seldom Philip alluded to his cousin, and when he did there was always something in his manner which, while it puzzled Ethelind, forbade her asking any questions.

### CHAPTER XXIV.

Two days later the announcement of the Redenham peerage appeared in the *Gazette*. Ralph Atherton read it in the paper, while the bells of the old church at Leigh-Delamere rung out their most joyous peal. And Margaret read it aloud to the delighted Mrs. Atherton and Gracie as they all sat round the tea table in their tiny parlor at Deighton. And John Waldron threw down the *Times* newspaper with one of his expressive grunts, and deliberately took off his spectacles and rubbed them bright in his coat tail before transferring them to his pocket, wondering in his sober mind what inducement a man could have for accepting such a doubtful honor, when he already possessed every thing else which wealth and position could give him, and deciding satisfactorily to himself that it must have been the influence of Ethelind, who had doubtless inherited her mother's weak ambition, and whose little thoughtless head had been turned by the absurdities of that gay world into which, without any preparation, she had been so suddenly thrown.

A fortnight later, as Lady Redenham was returning through Hyde Park from an early drive, she came upon the conspicuous figure of a Quaker lady, trip-

ping along the broad walk beside the Serpentine; the freshness of her subdued-color silk dress, in its straight, close folds, gathered up so as to display the white dimity petticoat and the snowy stocking; the large Norwich shawl, and the stiff drab bonnet, with its deep cardboard poke, throwing into shade the prominent features and bright intelligent eyes, which could belong to no one but Margaret's aunt Sarah; at whose eccentric and unchanging dress Ethelind had so often laughed, and of whom, in her heart, she had always stood in great awe.

Remembering Philip's anxiety for an introduction to Mr. Waldron, Ethelind instantly pulled the check-string, and, to the no small astonishment of her well-bred servants, desired to be put down by Miss Waldron's side. Poor old lady! when she a little recovered her surprise, and Ethelind had succeeded in persuading her to return with her for an early luncheon to Belgrave Square, they seated themselves in the carriage, and the order "Home" was given.

"Thou wilt wonder what can have brought me here, I dare say," she said to Ethelind; "but just now it is our yearly meeting, and the confinement is rather hard work for an old woman like myself; and feeling this morning as if a little fresh air and sunshine would do me good, I played truant, and came as far as Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park for a stroll among grass and green trees. But I hope to get back in time for the evening meeting."

"I will take you myself, Miss Waldron," Ethelind said, "after I have given you a luncheon. I am so glad I met you; I am sure, after such a long walk, you must require rest and refreshment."

Time had been when Ethelind would have shrunk from an hour's *tête-à-tête* with Margaret's stiff and very plain-spoken old aunt; but her long abstinence from home news, and her desire to forward Philip's schemes if she could do so without compromising her own family, made her overlook all such



*For Better, for Worse.*

fears now; and she sat by Miss Waldron's side, chatting as freely as if she had been Margaret herself.

The old lady followed Ethelind into her morning room, and took off her bonnet and smoothed her neat cap over her gray hair, and gazed on the luxurious apartment; and then, drawing Ethel to her side, imprinted a warm kiss on her cheek. "With so much around thee, dear, to make thy heart cling to this world," she said, "thou must not forget that riches bring with them great responsibilities. Though thou art but a young wife and mistress, it is well to bear in mind that there are many things better worth living for than the pleasures or applause of this world."

"I think of it often, Miss Waldron," Ethelind replied, meekly; "and I often long to share my comforts with those who do not possess them. But there are some difficulties," she added, with a blush, "which I suppose every wife experiences when she first enters her husband's family. I cannot, and perhaps I ought not to, explain them to you; but I think, at least I hope, that Philip's prejudices are giving way, and then I trust I shall be able to have my own family about me."

"I am not sure, dear, that it would be desirable for Grace to be much here," Miss Waldron said, looking round her. "Grace is easily led away, and she has not the same steadiness of purpose which Margaret inherits from her mother. I am not sure it would be right to fill her mind with ideas or hopes which could never be realized. It would only unfit her for her own sphere of usefulness. Now Margaret would be a great help to thee. I wish thy husband knew our Margaret!" the old lady said, firmly believing her favorite niece could combat every difficulty in Ethel's way.

"Before very long you will see Philip at Wylminstre," Ethelind ventured to say; "he wishes very much for an introduction to Mr. Waldron. Lord Redcar, who is trying to get in for Wylminstre at the next election, has heard that Mr. Waldron has great influence in the town."

"My brother is but a poor invalid," Miss Waldron replied; "but I am sure, for thy sake, dear child, he will see thy husband. I must not promise his interest in favor of any one, until he is sure their views on political matters would agree; but he has read with great interest thy husband's speeches, and will be very glad to make his acquaintance."

Ethelind smiled at the old lady's caution; but she had gained her point, — and the only one which concerned herself; and, with a light heart, she led her guest through her long suit of rooms, and showed her all the pretty things which adorned them, and, after a hot luncheon, ordered the carriage, and drove with her to the narrow little entrance of that long stone passage in Bishopsgate Street leading to the sombre amphitheatre which, during the bright month of May, is crowded by "Friends," young and old, who throng up to London, from their far-off country homes, to discuss the business of the society at their annual meeting.

Many an inquisitive glance was cast upon the gay equipage which stood at the low archway, while aunt Sarah bade an affectionate farewell to Lady Redenham. Many a young man, ("Friend,") or fair girl, in her delicate dress of pale-colored silk, trusting entirely to her unadorned simplicity for that admiration which not even the Quaker training for generations can entirely subdue, turned again to get a second look at the lovely young creature who was so earnestly listening to Miss Waldron's parting words.

"Dear child," she said, "I am very glad we have met; and I thank thee for not passing by an old woman. Thou art surrounded by many luxuries thou couldst hardly have dreamed of in thy father's lifetime. Take care that they prove blessings to thee, and not snares. 'Where much is given,' we are told, 'much will be required.'"

"Dear aunt Sarah," Ethelind mentally exclaimed, as she gave the order "Home," and sat back in the carriage, listlessly gazing on the throng of vehicles and pedestrians streaming contin-

uously through the narrow streets of the city; "how I used to dread and dislike her at Wylminstre! and yet how kind she is, and what good her bright face and loving words have done me! I have actually secured an introduction for Philip, and perhaps opened a way for communication with my own people."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE heat of London, and Ethelind's white face, induced Philip to take her down to Redenham before the close of the London season. A few days, it was thought, would bring the session to a close. Quiet and country air were becoming absolutely necessary for her; and in the course of a week or ten days Mrs. Leigh and her daughters were to follow her into Yorkshire, while Philip ran down to Wylminstre with Lord Redcar.

Grace had been at Deighton for some weeks, and Margaret was to go down to Leigh Moss directly she received a summons from Ralph.

As matters now stood, Ralph did not choose that Katie should call at the castle; so he only left his and her card at the door, when he knew that his sister had gone out for her daily drive. It was a large house for one solitary inhabitant; but as rest and quiet had become absolutely necessary to her, Ethel rather enjoyed the novelty. Among other employments, she determined to carry out her scheme of putting Ann Leigh's rooms into proper order for her visit to them; and as old Martha was her only available authority, she was taken into consultation on the matter, over which Ethel had become quite eager.

"And a fine lot of trouble you are taking, my lady," Martha said. "I am sure if Miss Ann did but know about it, she would be very grateful, poor, dear heart! for she always is so thankful, Mrs. Edwards says, for all that's done for her, — as if it was not a real pleasure to work for any body so good and gentle as she is."

"And when it is all ready, I shall

write and beg her to come to us," Ethel said. "Mrs. Leigh thinks she will not do so; but I cannot believe, when I tell her her old rooms are prepared for her, she can refuse me."

Martha shook her head. "O my lady," she said, with tears in her eyes, "if it would do any body good, Miss Ann would come, even if it broke her own heart. But when you think she has never set foot within the old walls since the day she left it, after my poor old master died; that then she lost, as you may say, at one blow, father, brother, and husband, — you can't wonder much at her being loath to return."

"I never heard she was to have been married?" Ethel said inquiringly. "To whom, then, was she engaged?"

"I wonder, my lady, you never heard; but there! I don't know well how you should; the family are uncommon proud and reserved like; and I have heard Mrs. Edwards say scores of times they never could bear to have people talking about their concerns; and the story died away, out of mind, as you may say."

And Martha stood turning about the hem of her apron, forgetting, in her interest for poor Ann Leigh, she was transgressing the very rule which was so imperative a one in Lord Redenham's family. Neither did it strike Ethelind for a moment she should not inquire further of the garrulous old servant; she felt glad to learn any particulars of the sad fate of that new cousin whose genial warmth of heart had struck her so forcibly when first contrasted with the want of sympathy or love in her husband's mother and sisters.

"From their cradles almost, as one may say, Sir Philip — I beg your pardon, my lady; the Earl I ought to say — and Miss Ann were engaged to be married; and dotingly fond of one another they were, I have always heard tell. Leastways, Miss Ann was of Sir Philip, I know. But after that accident, when our poor young lady got so ill and crippled, the marriage was put off. Several stories were told about it; some said one thing, and some another; but Mrs. Edwards, who knew the rights of it all,

## For Better, for Worse.

maintained that for a long time Sir Philip (the Earl, I mean) would not give Miss Ann up, though she, poor soul, persisted he should not be tied for life to a poor cripple. Be it as it may, ten years Sir Philip kept single; and, to my mind, if he had not met with you, my lady, he would have been so to his dying day."

Happily for Ethelind, it was too dark for Martha to see the effect of her communication on her white face. She dropped her courtesy, and left the room.

Ethelind threw herself back in her chair with a feeling of such unutterable agony as she had never before experienced. The mystery concerning Ann Leigh was now unravelled by the simple straightforward honesty of old Martha, who could have no purpose whatever in deceiving or misleading her. And Ethelind, who until now had been believing herself the idolized wife of her husband, suddenly jumped to the conclusion that through happening to possess a pretty face she had been made the victim of a marriage of convenience for the sake of an heir to the estates, and for which her compensation was to be the luxuries of unbounded wealth and an ungracious acceptance into her husband's exclusive family circle.

How long she sat there she never knew. But Valerie found her, as the evening closed in, pale and cold, just as Martha had left her two hours before.

"*Mon Dieu!* my lady, how cold and ill you are looking! Do let me give you a little of this eau de Cologne, and wrap you up in a shawl; or, better still, will you go to bed? You had better go to bed," she added anxiously, as she saw her mistress shaking as if she were in an ague-fit.

"Yes, I will," Ethelind said, in a dreary, strained voice. "I do not think I am very well." And she gave herself up to Valerie's care like a tired child.

And by a bright fire, and covered with blankets, Valerie sat and watched the still shivering Lady Redenham, as she lay with closed eyes, only answering in a low, weak voice when spoken to. Poor Valerie! what would she not have given to have transferred her responsibility on

any other shoulders! But Mrs. Blake only laughed at her fears, and declared "that fine ladies always gave themselves airs. Poor people did well enough at such times; and why should not Lady Redenham? It was standing about gossiping with old Martha that had tired her; and it served her right, too. What business had a lady to gossip with under-servants?"

Poor, innocent, unconscious Martha could give her lady little help. She could only suggest that, in her anxiety for poor Miss Ann, she had over-tired herself, and that a night's rest would do her good; and so she and Valerie determined, by the advice of Stephens, who had instantly despatched Roberts for Dr. Smart, to sit up in the dressing room; and he himself telegraphed to Lord Redenham.

### CHAPTER XXVI.

It was a warm evening in June. Ralph Atherton, with one great load lifted from his heart, and the strange, new feeling of parental love and pride glowing in his bosom, as he looked at the little, blinking eyes and fat, soft, downy cheeks which peeped out of the bundle of soft muslins and lace, over which Nurse Brown had grown quite eloquent, was wondering by what train Margaret could reach them that evening, when sounds of suppressed voices in the kitchen aroused his attention. The door of the study was opened, and Charlotte's face put cautiously within the door.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Roberts is here from the castle; he wants to speak to you directly, if you will see him. He says Lady Redenham is taken ill, and the Earl is away."

Two long strides brought Ralph into the kitchen, where, white with fright, and great tears running down his rough face, Ethelind's favorite groom begged that Mr. Atherton would "please to go up instantly to the castle, if he wished to save his 'lady's' life." She had been taken suddenly ill, he said; he himself had fetched a doctor from Leigh, and they had telegraphed for Lord Redenham. But Mrs. Blake would do as she

*For Better, for Worse.*

chose, and wanted to keep Valerie and old Martha out of her ladyship's room; and they all knew that their lady could not bear to have Mrs. Blake near her. "I have got the ponies and carriage here, Mr. Atherton," Roberts added imploringly. "We shan't be ten minutes going, sir. For our lady's sake, for God's sake, do come back with me."

"Wait one moment until I have seen Mrs. Atherton, and I will go with you," Ralph said. And, trying to look cheerful and calm, he strode up stairs to Katie's door.

"Katie, darling," he said, stooping down over his half-dozing wife, "Ethel's time has come, it seems, before she was quite prepared for it. She has no nurse with her, or any one but the doctor who understands these sort of affairs. Could you manage to spare nurse for one night? Charlotte and Harriet are here, and will take care of you and baby for an hour or two, while I take Mrs. Brown up to the castle. I will return directly I learn how she is, and let you know."

"We both hope to sleep all night. Take nurse, by all means. I am only too glad to be able to help Ethel at such a time. Do not leave her until Philip comes. I shall do very well." And Katie kissed her husband, and closed her eyes to set Ralph's mind quite at rest on her account.

Before poor Mrs. Brown had recovered her astonishment, or had half shaken into her bonnet and cloak, Roberts had dashed over the broad road, and up to the castle; and Stephens, with a blank face of dismay, could at first only answer Ralph's inquiries by a deep-drawn sob.

"Thank God you are come, sir, and for your bringing Mrs. Brown. But my lady is very ill, and we are all at our wits' end. Dr. Smart has just sent James for another medical man from Leigh, and he has positively forbidden Mrs. Blake's going into my lady's room. But if you will walk up into the ante-room, sir, I will tell Valerie to let Dr. Smart know you are here."

In a few minutes Dr. Smart came in.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Ath-

erton; and Lady Redenham's maid tells me you have been thoughtful enough to bring Nurse Brown with you. I fear we are sadly inconveniencing Mrs. Atherton; but, upon my word, I am dreadfully in want of some such efficient help. The women here are all terrified out of their wits; and that old fishwoman of a housekeeper is only fit for Billingsgate, and will be the death of Lady Redenham if she goes to her."

"And Lady Redenham herself—what of her?"

"Her ladyship is certainly very ill. As yet there is no actual danger: but she is exhausted, and her pulse so feeble that the responsibility is very great, especially in his lordship's absence. However, with Mrs. Brown's assistance, I hope we shall weather through it. But of course you won't leave us till the worst is over. It was well Mrs. Atherton could spare you both to be here."

Ralph wandered restlessly up and down the room, looked at the pictures on the walls with a vacant, abstracted gaze, hardly comprehending their subjects, and listening anxiously for every sound that reached him from the inner room.

The hours passed slowly on. Morning broke; and the gray dawn crept in through the thick velvet curtains of the great Oriel windows. The clock, with its deep silvery tones, had just struck six, when the feeble wail of an infant's cry broke on Ralph's ear; and, the door opening gently, Mrs. Brown walked in, with a tiny bundle of flannels in her arms.

"O, sir," she exclaimed, "I am so glad you are here still! I was afraid you would have gone home to look after Mrs. Atherton."

Nurse just unclosed the wrapper for Ralph to get a peep. He had laughed at the tiny dimensions of his own flourishing boy when good Nurse Brown had first laid the little fellow in his arms; but any thing so small and fragile as Ethel's child, bearing the stamp of humanity in its little pinched-up features and pitiful little wail, he could not have believed possible.

"If you will take it from me a minute,

## *For Better, for Worse.*

sir, I will send in my lady's servant, and go back to Dr. Smart;" and, placing the tiny morsel in Ralph's great arms, Mrs. Brown disappeared into Ethel's room.

There Ralph stood with the little heiress of those broad acres in his arms, her breath wavering and flickering between life and death, as he gazed anxiously on its lined little face; while his own big, handsome boy, bigger and broader than the generality of babies at his age, heir to nothing but his father's cares and uncertain, doubtful future, lay sleeping quietly at home on his mother's arm. Valerie soon appeared to relieve him of his charge, and Dr. Smart ran in for a moment to see how it was going on.

"I must not quit my post for long," he said, "but I thought I would just give a glance at the little lady. It has been a sharp matter for the poor young mother, and even now I cannot say she is out of danger. I wish the Earl had arrived, to tell us what to do; I do not understand our having received no telegram." And with a more anxious heart than he liked to acknowledge even to himself, Dr. Smart went back into Ethel's room. The next moment Stephens beckoned Ralph into the corridor.

"Miss Atherton is here, sir."

"My dear Margaret!" Ralph exclaimed joyfully, "next to Lord Redenham I would rather welcome you than any other creature living."

"Katie insisted on my coming. I reached your house just after you left, and then by break of day I came on here. But tell me, is Ethel out of danger?"

Ralph led his sister up stairs; and Margaret, on her knees beside the little baby, listened to Mrs. Brown's whispered account of Lady Redenham. There was something in Margaret Atherton's quiet, self-possessed manner which instantly inspired confidence in those who came in contact with her. Nurse Brown, Valerie, Dr. Smart, were all equally affected by it; and an immense load seemed at once removed from the worthy man's shoulders when he could let nurse go, with the satisfactory assurance he could install Margaret in her place.

As Margaret followed the doctor into

Ethel's room, she could scarcely recognize the bright, happy young girl, she had parted from two years ago, in the colorless cheeks and closed eyes of the extended form before her. Her long, bright hair lay tangled upon the pillows on which her white face rested, and Dr. Smart was assiduously administering stimulants between her half-closed, colorless lips.

Hour after hour passed away; neither Dr. Smart nor Margaret quitted their posts in the sick room until, as evening again drew on, the good doctor joyfully assured Margaret the crisis was past, and, with proper and judicious care and nursing, there was no reason why Lady Redenham should not do well.

During that long day Ralph had never rested. Under the directions of Dr. Smart, he had himself procured the services of a competent nurse for Ethel, and a young married woman at Leigh, the sister-in-law of Philip's own man, whose infant, only three weeks old, had just died.

### CHAPTER XXVII.

"I wish Philip would come," Ralph said impatiently, as he and Margaret stood counting the minutes on the little pendule over the chimney-piece. "I don't know what he will say to us for what we have done. He is just the sort of fellow to take offence at our interference, though I don't know how poor Ethie would have fared without us. Has she ever asked for Philip, do you know, Maggie?"

"Not once," Margaret replied — "though I have several times seen her eyes wandering round the room as if in search of some face she missed. Indeed, she has hardly spoken at all. Once she called 'Margaret;' and when I went to her, she threw her arms feebly round my neck, and hid her face in my bosom; and when I told her I hoped Philip would soon be here, she started at the name, but never looked up or spoke. Just now she asked in a faint whisper if she could not hear the cry of a baby; and when I told her it was her own, she inquired eagerly if it was a boy. On my telling her

### *For Better, for Worse.*

it was a little girl, she made no remark, but turned her face away from me, and I thought I saw tears stealing from her eyes, though the lids were closed."

Again Ralph impatiently pulled out his watch, and calculated the arrival of the trains. Roberts had been at the station for several hours, awaiting his master's arrival; and every ear was anxiously bent on first recognizing the sound of carriage wheels.

Presently Valerie's eager face appeared at the door. "The carriage is coming, mademoiselle. Miladi still sleeps. Who will meet milord?" And the pretty little French girl evidently showed by her manner she hoped Margaret would undertake the office.

"I will go down and meet him," Ralph said; "you, Margaret, must prepare Ethel for his arrival;" and so saying, he disappeared down the corridor. Lord Redenham was rushing up the hall steps as Ralph reached the foot of the stairs. He was deadly pale; and, grasping old Stephens' shoulder, he tried to articulate the question his trembling lips refused to utter. "Thank God, Lady Redenham is safe; the infant, too, though small, seems likely to do well." Philip staggered into the library, threw himself at length on the nearest couch, and, burying his face in his hands, gave vent to his long-suppressed excitement and the sudden revulsion of feeling. Ralph stood quietly by, watching the heaving chest of the strong man; then he turned to Stephens, who was himself little less overcome, and, begging that wine might be brought, poured out a glass, and almost insisted on his swallowing it.

"It is a cause of great thankfulness," Ralph said, "that the report is so cheering. Dr. Smart hopes, with care and freedom from all excitement, Lady Redenham will soon recover her strength."

"Fool that I was to leave her!" Philip exclaimed bitterly. "But I knew nothing of these things; and my mother, who ought to have been more alive to them, never once suggested its being wrong."

"You might have had the advice of men better known than Dr. Smart, had

it occurred in town," Ralph said earnestly; "but you would scarcely have equalled, certainly not exceeded, the great skill and kindness displayed by him under very trying and responsible circumstances. Whether, my lord, you will think my sister or myself have taken more on ourselves than the occasion justified I cannot tell. Our excuse must be, if we have erred at all, that it has been through our great love for Lady Redenham, and the helpless state she was in."

"Mr. Atherton," Philip said, "I cannot thank you; I cannot tell you how grateful I feel for your care of my wife. It has been a noble and generous revenge on your part."

The color mounted into Ralph's cheeks. "You must not look on any little service I have rendered your household in their extremity in that light, my lord," he said quietly; "what I have done for you as the clergyman of the parish, I should have done equally for the poorest of your people. But you must be anxious to see Lady Redenham; Dr. Smart is taking his first rest, after many hours of fatigue and anxiety; the nurse will be here in a few minutes to tell you when you may venture into Lady Redenham's room. In the mean time I will now wish you good night, and return to the rectory."

Philip paced impatiently up and down the room to recover his equanimity, when the door slowly opened, and Margaret, candle in hand, came into the library. She was in search of Ralph, to tell him Lord Redenham might venture up stairs. They each started. Margaret spoke first.

"I beg your pardon, Lord Redenham," she said, quietly, "but Lady Redenham knows you are come; and though Dr. Smart is not here, she has become so excited, I think it will do her less harm to see you at once than to wait his leave." Philip rushed to the door. Margaret laid her hand on his arm. "Excuse me, my lord, but it is necessary you should be very cautious and self-possessed. Ethel is very weak, and the least excitement might produce

fever. You must be prepared to see a great change in her."

In an instant, and without a word having passed his lips, Philip rushed past her, and staggered up the staircase.

"God help them," Stephens said, as he watched his master out of sight; "this is their first trouble. Maybe they will learn that we must all have them in this world, whether rich or poor;" and he turned away to wipe the tears from his old eyes.

Full half an hour Margaret remained in the anteroom, but Philip did not return. Becoming uneasy, and trembling at her own audacity, she first consulted nurse, and then gently opened the door and walked in. Philip was on his knees beside Ethel, his head bent over her white face, which was turned from him; large tears were falling over her wan cheeks from her closed eyes.

"It is time Ethelind had some nourishment," Margaret said anxiously. "This excitement, my lord, is not good for her." And Philip, unable to control his emotion, passed out of the room.

In less than an hour Ethelind had sunk into the first natural sleep; and, leaving her in charge of nurse, Margaret passed into the outer room. Philip was standing over the fire, his elbow on the mantel-piece, looking the very picture of wretchedness and misery.

"What a fool I have been!" he muttered, as he paced up and down the room.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

Most willingly Margaret had lingered on at Grafton, installing Katie in her new home, and assisting Ralph in his plans and arrangements for his parish work; but her visit was shortened by the accounts Gracie gave of her mother's health. Through her agent, Margaret had learned that an ample sum of money for Frank had been placed at his disposal by Lord Redenham; and though Ralph and Grace both stormed at the insult, Margaret persisted that for Ethelind's sake it was right to accept her husband's first acknowledgment of her family. It would enable her now to quit Deighton, and remove Mrs. Atherton to a more bracing climate.

"But I knew nothing about these things; and my mother never told me of danger, or on no account would I have trusted her alone in this out-of-the-way place. Miss Atherton, — for you must be Miss Atherton, I am sure, by your strong family likeness, — I do not know how you or your brother came here; but I shall always owe you a deep debt of gratitude for your care of Ethelind during my absence." Before Margaret could reply Stephens came in to say Dr. Smart had gone down to find Lord Redenham.

During the following three weeks, Margaret, at Philip's earnest entreaties, continued at Redenham, devoting her time and energies to Ethelind, whose slow recovery and strange depression of spirits became a source of intense misery to Philip, and a mystery which Margaret in vain tried to unravel.

Except during their *tête-à-tête* dinners, in what Grace would have pronounced "very solemn state," Margaret saw little of her brother-in-law; but that little strongly prepossessed her in his favor, in spite of the prejudiced view Ralph continued to take of his character. When Mrs. Leigh and her daughters arrived at Redenham, though Philip urged her to remain, and Ethie pleaded piteously that she would not leave her, Margaret vacated her post as nurse to her sister, and returned to the rectory, to assist Ralph in the removal of his family to Grafton.

She found, on her return to Deighton, her mother was looking old and care-worn; and Susannah had grown anxious, and joyfully welcomed Margaret. Grace had grown into great favor with the Weldons, as well as their nephew, a Mr. Chudleigh, a rising young barrister, who had been visiting at the rectory, and whom Grace declared the good rector and his sister had brought there with the laudable intention of retaining Margaret in their own possession. Rachel Gray, with her grave, staid manner and quiet self-possession, had grown used to take command; and with Annie Morley to assist, there seemed little fear of failure.

"This termination to your residence among us is so unexpected, it comes

*For Better, for Worse.*

upon us like a thunder-clap," Mr. Weldon said, with strong emotion struggling in his usually cheerful face. "We see you are right; so I can only say God bless you, and make you as great a comfort and help to others as you have been to us;" and he pulled his hat over his brows, and turned back to the rectory.

After consulting the best medical opinion, Margaret took her mother and sister to Brighton.

Nearly all correspondence with Lady Redenham had died away. Grace's long letters to Ethel had extorted only one or two short notes in reply, which had left (if the truth were told) a sore spot on Grace's heart. Mrs. Atherton never failed to look down the fashionable movements of Belgravia for any mention the papers might give of her child's gay doings. She was growing imperceptibly into the belief, that to speak of Ethel as "my daughter Lady Redenham," amongst their small circle of acquaintance, was the only gratification the connection afforded her. Grace studiously read Philip's speeches in Parliament. A man who could be "great" in every thing but his domestic relations could be no hero in Grace's eyes, and she felt almost angry with herself for taking any interest in him at all; but Margaret was always ready to vindicate Philip against Ralph or Grace, though there was much she could not understand. His devotion to Ethelind she never doubted. That he was proud, and arbitrary, and reserved, required little penetration to discover; and this, perhaps, acting on Ethel's quick, sensitive disposition, had forced back her love, and had replaced it by fear and timidity. Whether Ethel had outlived her affection for Philip, or whether she had really only feared and never loved him, was a puzzle which often harassed her in retracing her visit to Redenham.

Amongst others, the Repworths were at Brighton, for Sir John's health; and from them they gleaned constant intelligence of Lord and Lady Redenham.

"She has grown dreadfully thin, and

looks as pale as death if you meet her early in the day," Lady Repworth said; "but she is flushed of an evening, and her eyes are so large and bright, it would make me very uneasy if I were her husband."

"Goes to two or three parties of a night," Sir John added; "turning the heads of the men, young and old. You would never believe she was the little timid girl I remember her at Repworth. To be on her visiting list is every thing — quite an introduction to the best society."

"But, then, you must remember how much Lord Redenham is thought of. Quite the rising man; such a clear business head, combined with such sound judgment and discrimination."

At the Repworths' the Athertons made the acquaintance of a Mrs. Aylmer. Grace was particularly taken with her and her two little girls. They were going abroad for two years, and Mrs. Aylmer was wishing to hear of some lady who would accompany her as friend and companion, and assist her in the education of her little girls.

"If she is really as fascinating and good on a nearer acquaintance as we have found her, I should like to go with her myself," Grace said.

"You?" Margaret exclaimed, raising her eyes hastily from her work, and looking anxiously at her sister. "Why, Gracie, what can have made you think of it?" Grace was playing nervously with the bunch of charms on her watch chain.

"You know, Maggie," she said, "I am a great believer in instincts, and my heart warmed to Mrs. Aylmer at the first sight. Then, I have long wanted to go abroad; and besides, I feel I ought to do more than live on idly at home, as I am now doing. It is not good for me; it makes me grow weary and discontented. This seems such a good opportunity, that had it not been for mamma, I would say, 'Let me go at once.'"

Margaret watched the color come and go over her sister's face. She was silent for a minute. Then she said



## For Better, for Worse.

quickly, "I do not think mamma's health need prevent your going, Grace; she is much stronger now, and so anxious you should see more of the world. I do not think she would place any needless obstacles in your way. If you really mean all you say, I will find out what I can about Mrs. Aylmer, and see if it would be a pleasant or desirable arrangement for you."

That same afternoon Margaret went to the Repworths, to gather, indirectly, all the information she could of Mrs. Aylmer. And then, taking that lady into her confidence, (with Mrs. Atherton's full concurrence,) it was settled that Grace, under the pleasant title of "friend," and with no other remuneration than her travelling expenses, should spend abroad with the Aylmers the following two years.

### CHAPTER XXIX.

It was the middle of July. Parliament had not broken up, and weary statesmen and worn-out dowagers were looking anxiously forward to the 12th of August, when the powerful attractions of the moor should supersede even the most urgent business of the state, and disperse the West-End population into the free air of their country homes.

Philip had often urged Ethel to take her child and go down for a time to Redenham; but she shook her head, and would not listen to the proposition. It was not the society of her husband which tied her to London. Between his parliamentary labors, his club, and Ethel's perpetual round of gayety, they now seldom met, unless in a room full of strangers, or from some unsatisfactory encounter over their various plans and arrangements.

A great change had imperceptibly come over Ethelind since her marriage. She had become easy and self-possessed in spite of her timidity. She had striven hard to overcome her dislike to her husband's mother and sisters; and though Barbara knew she could always, if she chose, make her wince under her thoughtless tongue, on the whole Ethel

lind was better able to encounter her raillery; while Diana candidly acknowledged her beauty was her least attraction. The only marvel to her was her remaining so entirely unspoiled by the open admiration she universally inspired.

The fierce beams of a midday sun shut out of her morning room by sun-blinds, Ethel was leisurely sipping her coffee and idly turning over the pages of the *Morning Post*, casting occasional glances down the long columns occupied by her husband's speech, which had electrified the House the night before.

A tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Barbara.

"Don't disturb yourself," she said; "I only came to talk to you for a few minutes;" and she threw herself into the arm-chair opposite. "How cool and comfortable it feels here after the heat and glare of the sun!" she added, as she untied her bonnet strings, and laid it on the chair beside her.

"Now," she said, "I want to ask you, if Diana comes to you, to be very careful about the advice you offer her."

"What possible advice can she seek of me?" Ethel replied in astonishment. "She should go to Philip."

"That is my opinion, but Di thinks differently. She swears by you, and declares you will stand her friend against all of us. The truth is, Philip was not over-wise, considering all things, when he gave Arthur Langton the living at Leigh-Delamere. Of course he did it with the best intentions to serve an old friend, never supposing he would presume upon it. Be that as it may, yesterday's post brought a letter from him to Diana, saying he was now in a position to sue again for her hand, and he is to be in Eaton Place to-morrow, for the purpose of a last appeal. Poor Di is in a dreadful state of excitement, and I am quite sure, unless we are all very positive, more especially yourself, Lady Redenham, she will never find it in her heart to reject him."

"Do not let her come to me," Ethel exclaimed nervously; "rather let her consult Philip, or you, or Mrs. Leigh."

*For Better, for Worse.*

"You would take the romantic side of the question," Barbara said, fixing her black eyes on Ethelind's flushed face. "Of course you feel bound to stand by all love-matches."

"I don't know what I could advise," Ethel replied hurriedly. "It is a difficult question. Once, a long time ago, before I was married, perhaps I might have done so; but not now. Unequal marriages are not wise, no matter whether in station, age, temper, or any thing else. They are a great risk and a great trial — a trial which cannot be understood, cannot be felt, until it is too late. No! I do not think I could advise any one to run the risk, not even Di herself."

Barbara looked at Ethelind's flushed face, and listened to her low nervous voice. She had seldom seen her so excited.

"Well," she said lightly, "I certainly did not expect to find you on our side. I thought of course you would uphold Di. I am very glad we have you with us. Not, after all, by the way, that you know much about it, your beauty has done so much for you; and besides, a wife takes rank and position from her husband. Now, if Di marries Arthur Langton, she becomes simply a 'parson's wife,' and falls of course into his set. As I told her to-day, she must make up her mind to be cut by all her old friends. What his are, Heaven knows! He is decent enough himself, poor fellow; but neither he nor she can expect us to recognize them."

"It is a hard trial to sacrifice your own family even for a husband's love," Ethel said, in a low quivering tone. "Still, with it, it can be done; only Diana should think well of it before she sees Mr. Langton."

"That is the awkwardness of the thing. I believe a little wholesome advice from some one she could trust would turn the scale; only it will be impossible to prevent their meeting. When we go down to Redenham or Leigh Court, there will be no help for it, and our labor now will be lost."

"One of the inconveniences of Mr. Langton being so close to you."

"Say, rather," Barbara replied sharply, "it is one of the inconveniences of Mr. Clifford throwing up the living. Well," she added, with a yawn, as she rose up to go, "I have said my say. If Diana really thinks such a life will suit her, let her take the Reverend Arthur 'for better, for worse,' as far as I am concerned, and Heaven help her! In five years' time she will have sunk down into a positive household drudge. She will have no end of socks to mend and garments to repair. There will be a house full of children — there always is in a clergyman's home; she will sport a cotton umbrella, print gown, and thick shoes, and spend the little time she can spare from her household labors in visiting the sick, teaching the village school, and touching up her husband's sermons! She won't even have the advantage of mixing now and then in decent society; they will be too poor or too philanthropic to visit; so her only relaxation will be the society of her husband's relations. I would not stand in her shoes for any thing she could offer me."

Ethelind could not help laughing. "She would hardly wish you should, perhaps," she said. "And who knows but this *fête* you go to to-morrow may not give you enough to do on your own account, without interfering on Diana's?"

A blush Barbara in vain tried to hide suffused her face, and made her black eyes fall for a moment. "As if I cared a straw for a fellow who flirts and falls in love with every pretty face he sees!" she said.

"Will you ask Lord Redcar when he starts for Munich, if you see him to-night?" Ethel said. "I am wishing to send a little present to my sister, and I would rather trust it to him than to the post."

"Which sister?" Barbara asked quickly. "That demure-looking Quakeress who nursed you in your illness?"

"No; the one you saw at Redenham, when we first went down there. Lord Redcar remembers her. He danced with

*For Better, for Worse.*

her several times that evening, and has frequently spoken of her since."

"O, yes, I remember, — a very pretty girl — very like you! He is always talking about her, and declares, next to you, she is the best-looking girl he knows. I don't think he means to go to Munich," she added hastily; "so I should not recommend your waiting. Better send off your parcel, and say nothing to him about it." She wished Ethelind good by.

The door had hardly closed after her before she put her head in again. "By the by, I had quite forgotten to tell you, we had a letter from Ann Leigh this morning. Some business which requires Philip's advice will bring her up to London. Will you tell Philip to meet her by the six o'clock express to-morrow evening?" And, without another word, the head was withdrawn and the door closed.

A thunder-clap could hardly have startled Ethel more completely. Walking hastily to and fro the large room, she tried to recover her composure, and face the ordeal which awaited her.

Long and earnestly she had been battling with the demon jealousy, until she sometimes believed no real cause for it existed, and that it must have been some phantasy of her diseased brain, under the excitement of fever and delirium. How often in the quiet watches of the night, as she lay awake listening for the click of the latch-key in the hall-door, and the long strides of Philip's footsteps, as he passed up the silent staircase, would she go over and over the numberless confirmatory circumstances she could now almost number on her fingers! Small enough they were, but nevertheless giving her unutterable anguish and distress.

"If he had but told me," she would exclaim bitterly, "I think I could have borne it. But to marry me only for my beauty! — a thing which may perish any day. To imagine that because I was a poor girl I should be satisfied and honored by the connection, without caring for more!" and she let her head drop on her arms, and her tears fell

until heart and eyes ached in sympathy.

Lately she had tutored herself into a calm and quiet exterior. She would try and wait patiently until Heaven blessed her with a son; for vague hopes flitted across her troubled mind of what great things a son might effect for her.

Now, however, this sudden announcement of Ann Leigh's visit quite upset her. Philip and Ann would meet, while she, standing patiently by, would see her hopes ruthlessly scattered by this one week's visit. Even if she ran away, and forsook husband and child, she must go! Her burden was becoming more intolerable than she could bear.

With an aching heart and hot tearful eyes, she sat on in her sun-blinded room, unable to do any thing, or see any one, during the rest of the day. When Philip came home, Ethel was lying on the sofa, looking white and haggard, and her eyes red and swollen.

"My dear Ethel, are you ill?" he asked anxiously, as he came to her. "What on earth is the matter?"

"I have a headache," she said; and she sat up and tried to speak cheerfully.

"It is these ruinously late hours you are keeping," he replied. "Enough to kill any one twice as strong as you are. Why will you persist in making one engagement after another, as you do, when you know what the end of it will be?"

Ethel pushed back her hair from her throbbing forehead, and passed her hand wearily over her burning eyes, to shut out the glare of the lamp. Philip was struck by the haggard look her face wore.

"Ann Leigh comes to-morrow," she said in a low tone, without looking up. "Your mother wishes you to meet her at the station at six o'clock."

"Ann Leigh! What can bring her to town in this hot weather?"

"Business of some sort, I believe; I don't know what."

"I wish she would offer to take you and the child back with her. Sea air would do you both good. Remember,

*For Better, for Worse.*

Ethel, if she proposes it, I will not have you refuse. Do you hear?" he added, as Ethel made no reply.

She was making a desperate effort. He was standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fireplace, looking down upon her, and wondering what had so upset her.

"Philip," she said, raising her eyes to his entreatingly, "will you let me go home?"

A cloud gathered over his brow, but Ethel did not see it. She had lost all control over her tears, and her face was hidden in her handkerchief. He watched her for a moment, and then said, in a short, dry tone, which was no unusual one, "What makes you so very anxious to go away now? I begged you to do so a short time ago, and you would not hear of it. And just after your illness I offered to take you myself to see your own people, and you decidedly refused. Now, just as Ann Leigh is to be here, and I want you to be with her, you suddenly take it into your head to go and see your mother. Where is your mother? How do you know she can receive you?"

"Mamma and Margaret are at Brighton," Ethelind replied, making a strong effort to recover her composure.

"Is your mother ill?" he asked, stopping in the middle of a walk up and down the room.

"I have had no news of them for a long time."

Philip pushed his hands deeper into his trouser pockets as he continued his long strides. Ethelind, the simple guileless girl he had married, whose very thoughts he had been able to read, was becoming a riddle to him. He hardly knew whether to be most angry with her or with himself. "Perhaps this is what Redcar has hinted at lately," he thought, "when he has warned me she was too young to be left so much alone."

Philip was not naturally despotic or unreasonable, but he felt chafed and irritated now at what really did wear the appearance of the waywardness of a spoiled child. He saw the lines of care about her mouth, the dark purple

rings round her sunken eyes, and his heart relented. She was ill, there was no doubt of it; and, like some little child, who scarcely knows its own wishes, she was pining for her own mother's love.

"I wish I could understand you, Ethie," he said; "but you are a great riddle to me; and I want you to remember there should be none between us now. No matter what our feelings may be towards others, to ourselves we should be open as the day. What is it that has brought on this sudden fit of homesickness?"

Ethel's head fell on Philip's shoulder; and, amidst convulsive sobs, which quite shook her slight frame, she said very earnestly, "If you love me, do let me go home."

Long after Ethelind had wept herself to sleep, Philip might have been heard pacing slowly up and down his own room. With all his love for Ethelind, and his own bright hopes of married life, he had failed in either making his wife happy or lightening his own cares. How, or in what way, he could not tell. The Leigh pride had been violated, and he had sought to soothe it by implicitly following the advice of his mother and sisters. Perhaps the time had come when some reparation might be made for such hard measures on Ethel. He would speed her off before they knew of the arrangements; and he kept his word. The next day he himself sent Ethel by express train, under charge of Stephens, on her sudden visit to Brighton.

CHAPTER XXX.

STARTLED beyond measure at the apparition of Ethel's pale face, Margaret clasped her eagerly in her arms.

"I have not felt well," Ethelind said hurriedly, and with a deep color on her cheeks at any evasion, however slight, from the exact truth. "I cannot tell you, Margaret, how I have longed to see you and mamma; and, last night, Philip gave me leave to come to you."

"But not alone, Ethie? Philip could never have trusted you alone, darling?"

## *For Better, for Worse.*

and Margaret's eyes wandered anxiously over her sister's fragile figure, and she looked into her clear, truthful eyes, for she could not at all comprehend the mystery of this sudden exploit. But so far Ethel had nothing to conceal. She said at once that a sudden desire came over her to see her mother; and, dreading Barbara's influence over Philip, she had persuaded him to let her start early, before her intentions were known in Eaton Place. That she would not listen to Philip's wish of accompanying her; that she had even dismissed Valerie and Stephens at the station, that she should in no way put her mother out of her usual course.

It was well for both they had an hour or two quietly together before Margaret told Mrs. Atherton of Ethelind's arrival. It gave Margaret time to gather up her scattered faculties, and so explain Ethel's sudden visit as to save any second explanations.

Except to satisfy the curiosity of her mother, Ethelind said little of her home life. She freely owned she could not love Mrs. Leigh or Barbara, and that most of her annoyances arose in some way or other from their interference.

Diana she had learned to love and to respect. If at times she was rude or abrupt, it was more from a desire to be honest than unsisterly or unkind. Of Philip little was ever said by Ethelind; but her anxiety for his letters, and her disappointment if they did not come, convinced Margaret that, whatever was harassing her mind, her heart was still "leal and true." An intuitive feeling that the inner life of husband and wife is sacred, even from their own kindred, not only sealed Ethelind's lips, but prevented Margaret from attempting, even indirectly, to lead her to unburden her heart to her. She knew there are some sorrows in which even a sister "intermeddleth not." All she could do for her was to brace her with strong and high resolves; give a healthier tone to her imagination; awake in her an interest in her daily duties; and try to make her brave and hopeful for the future.

The only drawback to Mrs. Atherton's

happiness was the absence of Ethel's child. Susannah was loud in her regrets that the little lady had been left behind. Both in their hearts gave the earl credit for not letting it accompany its mother, though they would not wound Ethelind by saying so. "Its mother's relations are not good enough for my lord's child," Susannah was heard to say several times rather bitterly; but she always took care that Ethelind did not overhear her.

Ethel listened eagerly to Margaret's description of Ralph's new home. She had never, either directly or indirectly, blamed Philip for his removal from Leigh-Delamere, because she could not help suspecting Barbara's interference had effected it. But it was an intense relief to her to learn from Margaret they were now comfortably settled at Graf-ton.

A week had passed, and Ethelind, refreshed and strengthened by her visit, had written to Philip for Stephens to fetch her home. His answer was short and hurried—just a pencilled note hastily written at his club. As she reported herself so much recruited by her visit, Philip thought it better she should remain a little longer. He managed very well alone. Indeed, he was hardly ever in Belgrave Square. Godfrey and the child had taken up their abode in Eaton Place. Ann had wished to have it as much with her as possible, and the little thing had grown wonderfully fond of her already.

Ethelind groaned in spirit as she read and re-read the letter. She was thankful it had come to her in her own room, free from the searching eyes of Margaret, or her mother's endless inquiries. All the sunlight of her visit had suddenly disappeared. She had begged hard to come, and Philip had reluctantly granted her leave. She was longing now he should ask her to return; and when she offered to do so, he intimated she was not wanted. O, the perversity of the human heart! At first she thought seriously of starting off at once, and begging Susannah for an escort. But gradually a better frame of mind came over her. She would follow

## *For Better, for Worse.*

Margaret's advice, and not look forward. She would strive to be patient, and do her duty as it was set before her.

When she ventured into her mother's room, the intelligence that Philip would spare her a little longer so delighted Mrs. Atherton, her joy almost overset Ethel's good resolution. Margaret no longer hesitated in allowing Ethel the privilege of insuring her mother's declining days those comforts which she herself was quite unable to procure. She knew Ralph or Grace would never have consented to her receiving any assistance from a brother-in-law who virtually ignored them; but she felt that, for Ethel's sake, it was only right. Cut off from participation in their care of her mother, this gratification ought surely to be granted her.

At length the joyful summons arrived. Stephens and Valerie would be at the station the following morning; and Margaret inwardly rejoiced as she watched the glow of pleasure lighting up Ethel's face as she read her letter. She looked brighter and happier than she had done for long; and Mrs. Atherton's parting with her favorite child was cheerful and happy, and full of fond hope that, after all, the marriage would turn out far better than Ralph and Grace were so fond of predicting.

There was a grave smile of welcome for Ethelind as Lord Redenham opened the door of the railway carriage to assist her out, and he remarked at once her visit had certainly very much improved her looks. In their long drive through the City, Ethel had time to learn that Ann Leigh had left town two days ago.

"She was very sorry to miss you," Philip said, "but the heat and dust of London were killing her, and my mother would not let her remain any longer. I don't know what you will say to it," he added, a little doubtfully, "but she has taken Godfrey and the child with her."

"Taken Baby — my baby!" Ethelind exclaimed hurriedly. "You never mentioned it in your letter."

Philip looked half fearful he had done wrong. "I hope I have not distressed you," he said; "but, to tell the truth, she had grown so fond of Ann, and Ann of her, she was seldom out of her sight. I never saw any thing like it. Even Godfrey was growing jealous. So when Ann proposed it, and my mother said how much better country air would be for her, I gave leave. Of course I thought you would not object, you seemed to care so little about her yourself, and Ann really enjoys having her. I am sure she will take the greatest possible care of her."

"I don't doubt that," Ethel said, in a constrained tone; "but they might have waited my return, or written to me first, at all events."

"It was only thought of the night before Ann left; so I could not write to you. Ann hopes you will join the child as soon as you can. Fix your own day, and I will take you down."

"O, I am sick of the sea!" Ethelind exclaimed, almost pettishly. "I am sure I am not going from home at present." Two bright-red spots were burning on her cheeks.

"Well, you shall do as you like," Philip said rather meekly. He was beginning to fear he ought not to have relied so entirely on his mother's assurance that Ethel would be glad to be rid of her child. All her pleasure at being again with Philip was spoiled by this foolish arrangement. As they rattled over the stones, the deafening noise forbade talking, and gave her time to recover her self-command.

"And how have you got on?" she asked at last. "I hope you have been busy, and not missed me much."

"Well," Philip replied, "it has just happened we have been unusually idle. I have hardly been at home at all. I have dined every day in Eaton Place; I could have almost fancied myself a bachelor again. It gave me the opportunity of seeing Ann. She is not like the same creature. I should not wonder if, after all, she lives to be a strong, active woman."

Again there was a silence. There was

a block-up in the narrow street through which they were passing. Philip asked for Mrs. Atherton and Margaret, where Grace had gone, and what news had been received from the midshipman. A brighter look and a happier expression stole over Ethel's face.

"O Philip," she said, "Margaret told me of your having taken Frank's expenses off her hands. At first I thought she was under a mistake, because I knew nothing about it; but she assured me it came from you. And I do not think even you could have calculated on the good you have done. It enables Margaret to leave Deighton, and live where it best suits mamma's health."

"And what about that brother of hers?" he asked. "Has he a curacy, do you know? He made me monstrously angry, I own, when we first went to Redenham. The fellow's sermons were the best I ever heard, and every body in the parish liked him. Perhaps I was over-hasty in giving Langton the living, and turning him adrift. But Barbara must take the credit of that move. She would not believe it would encourage him to offer again to Di, though I warned her how it would be. But Barbara is very wilful when she sets her heart on a thing. By the way, that is another piece of news for you," he added: "Diana is really engaged to Langton, and they are to be married the end of August."

"But your mother!—Barbara!—what do they say?" Ethel asked, her heart sinking at what Diana would have to endure at the hands of her own people.

"If Ann had not stood her friend, it never could have come to pass. Ann has more influence in Eaton Place than any one else, and she thinks, after their four years' probation, it is better to make the best of it, and let it be. Diana is gone home with Ann; and there, from her house—as quietly as possible—the wedding is to come off."

"Poor Di!" Ethel exclaimed, with a deep sigh. "I wonder if she will be happy?"

Philip looked down at her and laughed. "Is that the extent of your congratula-

tions? I expected you to applaud her for her courage."

"I should once; but one grows nervous and doubtful as one gets older. However, for Diana, who has strength of mind not to care for what people say, it is all right; and if Ann is her friend, she will soon persuade you all to look on the connection favorably."

"By the way, there is another change you will notice, when you get home, which, I think, will please you: that horrid woman Blake is gone, and Mrs. Edwards—'Old Edwards,' you have heard us speak of—is in her place. You will wonder how, in your absence, such a revolution was effected; but things were going on in a way I had no conception of; servants won't tell of each other, and though they were all uneasy, no one liked to speak. It came out at last through Godfrey, in some of her long stories with Ann's maid, and so to Ann, who asked me about it. Of course I sent for the woman, and by dint of being very determined, and threatening all sorts of things, succeeded at last in getting at the truth; and, as you may guess, I packed her straight off the premises in less than an hour. Then it came out, through Valerie, she had made a boast in the servants' hall of having made you fear her; that she could make you believe any story she chose to tell you."

The tears were in Ethel's eyes. "She terrified me from the first time I saw her; but your mother and Barbara always insisted she was an admirable servant, only she took advantage of my being young and inexperienced. I am very glad she is gone;" and she breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"Well," Philip said, "Ann proposed our having Edwards back. And as she knows our ways, and will relieve you of so much care and responsibility, we sent to her; and you will find her at home when we get there."

Poor Ethel, she hardly knew whether to be most pleased or angry at this interference in her household. Sore as her heart was at the abduction of her child, no wonder she did not feel quite so

## For Better, for Worse.

grateful as she otherwise would have been.

While dressing for dinner, Ethelind learned from Valerie the increased comfort of the servants' hall, under the quiet, careful, and yet stricter discipline which Mrs. Edwards had at once established. One glance at the arrangements of the table, as she took her seat at dinner, convinced her that, as regarded Mrs. Edwards, Ann Leigh had rendered her an inestimable benefit.

To Barbara's tirades against her sister's marriage, Ethelind turned a deaf ear. She was obliged to listen to Mrs. Leigh's long lectures on the folly of mixed marriages—lectures so personal and so bitter, that even Ethel's gentle spirit rose within her. She did not wonder at Diana's availing herself of peace and quiet under Ann's roof.

There was a happy, unrestrained light-heartedness pervading Diana's reply to Ethelind's letter of congratulation, strangely contrasting with her former cold reserve. It seemed as if the acceptance of Arthur Langton's love had awakened her sympathies, and opened the floodgates of her heart, and given her a new sense of the responsibilities of life.

"Poor Di," Lord Redcar exclaimed, as he and Lady Redenham sat chatting in Ethel's opera box, "she seems to have found out at last there really is something in the world worth living for. It does one good to see her face wear such a much happier expression."

"I have not seen her since it all came about," Ethelind replied; "I only fear it will be at a cost she has not calculated. No one but those who have tried it know how hard it is to give up your own family."

"You mean that it is all '*couleur de rose*' with Di now, but that by and by, when she is a parson's wife, and the tug of war begins, she will repent her bargain."

"No, you mistake me," she said. "I was thinking of another day, when a longing comes over her for her mother and sister's love. Not even a husband's entirely compensates for that loss. Mrs.

Leigh and Barbara declare they will never acknowledge Mr. Langton and his family. But at Redenham or Leigh Court it will be impossible to avoid a collision, and then it will be Diana who will suffer."

"What a lot of humbug there is in the world! it is the only thing Redenham and I quarrel over. As if we were not all flesh and blood, subject to the same laws, human and divine! Now, I take it, every man has some absurd crotchet or other, which he nurses and treasures until he believes it is a virtue,—and this, I maintain, is his. As if one man's blood was not as thick as another's! As if it could make an atom of difference to any of us at the last what was the length of our genealogical tree!"

Ethelind laughed.

"Ah, I see how it is," Lord Redcar said; "you are getting inoculated with the Leigh doctrine, Lady Redenham, and setting me down for a Chartist. I do grow angry sometimes when I see sensible men like Redenham setting up some idol, and then running a tilt against the world, who won't worship it as they do. Now I would not like to see a girl like Diana Leigh throw herself away on an adventurer; but they have known Langton for years. He was at Eton and Oxford, and is as gentlemanly and right-principled a fellow as I know. Then he is by no means badly off; he can afford her all reasonable comforts. More than that, his family, in spite of Barbara's tirades, are sensible, straightforward people, not at all pretending. His father is, or was, a merchant, or some such thing; looked up to, they tell me, as a pattern of honesty and uprightness. And really, if she likes him,—and she has proved it by her constancy,—I for one can't see why she may not please herself."

"Nor I; but I suppose they think they are right."

"Well, she has Ann Leigh on her side. Ann can do more for her than any one else. Her opinion is law with them all." Then he said, rather suddenly, "Lady Redenham, I think some-



times of doing something desperate myself. Do you think I look stout enough to outlive the storm I should raise about my ears?"

Ethelind caught the expression of his merry, mischievous eyes. "I don't understand you," she said.

"Don't you?" he replied. "Well, I am getting tired of a bachelor life. I start next week with Woodmancote in his yacht for the Mediterranean. I shall leave him at Venice, and return overland. If I pick up some pretty, young wife, whose beauty outweighs her pedigree, do you think Redenham will condescend to acknowledge us? I should never dare show myself in Barbara's presence again."

A vision of Grace rushed across her. Barbara's bitter disappointment! Mrs. Leigh's anger! It almost took away her breath. She knew Lord Redcar had never proposed to Barbara — had never said a word which could be construed into an intention of doing so. She knew that he and Barbara kept up a warfare of tastes and opinions on every imaginable subject, which, with a less good temper than Lord Redcar's, might have ended as many other of her friendships had done. She knew that he rather enjoyed the fun and excitement of their squabbles and reconciliations; whether he would equally enjoy them if ever they became "squabbles matrimonial" was very doubtful. The world said such flirtations could only end in a proposal. Ethel believed that Barbara hoped so, even if it were only to show her power in rejecting him. Ethel felt she had no right to speak of Barbara as if it would in any way concern her, whatever he might choose to do. So she asked if he would trust her with the name of the lady.

"You shall hear it, Lady Redenham, as soon as I have committed myself. I shall have to trust to your interest to make my peace with Redenham and the Leighs."

"You forget; I may not approve any more than they," she replied.

"I think you would; at least I hope so. I may even need your good word with the lady herself."

A color came into Ethelind's cheeks. "Lord Redcar," she said, almost nervously, "will you listen to a word of advice?"

"I am quite open to any advice you can give me; and, moreover, I engage to think well of it before I commit myself. What is it, Lady Redenham?"

"That you will assure yourself your family and all your friends approve; that you do nothing hastily. And now, if you please," she added, "I will trouble you to find my carriage."

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

THE 12th of August came at last. Mrs. Leigh and Barbara had already joined Ann's party at Bonchurch; and Philip, at Ann's request, had consented to give away the bride. Ethelind had striven to banish thought about the ordeal in store for her. To think would have been simply to have rendered the effort impossible. She and Philip to be together under Ann's roof — Ann's guest! For Diana's sake — for the sake of doing as she would be done by — it was necessary she should be there; and trying to stifle thought by active exertion, she had kept herself for the last fortnight in a perpetual whirl of excitement, such as she had never indulged in before. Perhaps she could hardly have taken a surer method of counteracting her good intentions. Caught in a thunder-shower while driving in the Park, she had become wet through; but worn out, bodily and mentally, she could not resist the effects of the chill, or shake off the inflammatory symptoms which threatened even more serious ills. And, to Philip's infinite annoyance and Ethel's secret joy, the medical dictum positively forbade any attempt at leaving town for a fortnight, and then only for the most perfect rest, either at Redenham or by the sea-side. So serious was Philip's discomposure, Ethelind felt positively thankful no wilfulness of her own had produced this untoward result. At first he declared he would not go; Diana might get whom she pleased for a substitute; he would have nothing at

## *For Better, for Worse.*

all to do with it. But when Ann wrote, urging it, if Ethel was at all well enough to be left, Philip reluctantly promised to be with them the night before the wedding.

Poor Ethie! well for her jealous heart no magic mirror presented to her gaze the gathering of that little procession, as it mustered in the chancel of the small, picturesque church, which stands facing the wide blue sea beneath the frowning cliffs of St. Boniface.

Ann trembled visibly. It was an unusual effort for her; and, besides this, on her rested the entire responsibility of the marriage, against which had been arrayed all the prejudices of a proud family. It was very far from being a merry wedding. Perhaps the really happiest faces were those of the bride and bridegroom. Tears were in Mrs. Leigh's eyes, which it seemed her studious endeavor to hide or repress. Barbara was short and undemonstrative; Philip, quiet and preoccupied, thinking, perhaps, of his own wedding, not altogether dissimilar, a short while ago, and wondering whether it would be Diana's fate, equally with himself, to find how unsatisfactorily unequal marriages turn out. Maternal love had at last vanquished pride, and Mrs. Leigh, drowned in tears, was straining her child to her bosom. It was to be their first separation; for she and Barbara were to start the next day on a long tour abroad. Barbara had persuaded her mother that it would be better to let the world's wonder over Diana's marriage die out before they personally braved its opinion.

As the brougham drove away, the ladies, one after another, disappeared, and Philip went in search of his child. Miss Leigh, the servants told him, had taken her little ladyship away in her wheel-chair; most likely they were gone down towards the old churchyard. By a side-path Philip came on Ann's chair, and her little page beside it, absorbed in "Leonard the Lion-hearted." Farther on, on her camp-stool, Ann sat with a large needle, threading an endless chain of daisies, which little Beatrice, with a shout of glee, was tossing

into her lap, and every now and then losing her balance, and in her wavering efforts to regain it threatening to upset her companion also.

"You have chosen a strange place for your gambols, Ann. If my little one had been older, you would make her prematurely sad," he said, drawing near to them.

Ann started. "Bee and I were so absorbed in our work we had no time to look about us. There, darling," she said, "go to papa; and let him see there are not many signs of sadness in that merry little face."

Philip took the child in his arms, then put her down gently, and threw himself beside them, on a piece of projecting rock.

"I did wrong in letting you kidnap her, Ann," he said. "But Ethel must thank you when she sees how much good this bright sea air has done her."

"Not more for her than my little 'busy bee's' love has done for me," Ann replied, earnestly. "That baby's love is filling up the void in my heart, which I thought nothing in this world could. You must tell Ethel so. Barbara said you heard from her; I hope she is better."

Lord Redenham drew the letter from his pocket. "I have hardly had time to read it myself," he said, "only I knew, by its being her own handwriting, she must be so." He ran his eye over it a second time, and then put it back.

"What a lottery marriage is!" Philip said, abruptly. "A man stakes his life's happiness on a throw. It is an awful thing if it turns up a blank."

"Your words frighten me," Ann exclaimed, nervously. "You forget how I have been laboring to bring it about. But it must be right," she added, energetically; "Di is so earnest and good, so anxious to adapt herself to her new life; and Langton is very high-principled, and most grateful for the sacrifices she makes for his sake. O, I am sure they cannot be otherwise than happy."

"And will fail, perhaps, at the last, in some unaccountable way, just as utterly as I have done."

"Philip!" Ann turned round sud-

## *For Better, for Worse.*

denly on her cousin. She could see the muscles of his forehead and mouth working nervously.

He got up hastily, as if ashamed of the emotion he could not hide. "Forgive me," he said; "I am the last who should add any burdens to yours. I ought rather to have emulated your heroism, and borne them as you have done." He turned away, and walked to the church. The door of the cold, damp, unused, little edifice was open, and he gazed vacantly on the tall, rough, old wooden cross above the communion-table. Ann sat on, lost in a tumult of sorrow and dismay, unconscious of the child, busily engaged in ruthlessly destroying the long necklace of daisies which Ann had threaded for her. Presently Philip came back, dropping quietly down into his old seat. They neither of them spoke at first, but the strong man had conquered. Lord Redenham's face had resumed its usual self-possessed look.

"Philip," Ann said at last, "I always thought you so happy in Ethel's love; I never even dreamed of this."

"We were," he replied, "at first; even Ethel admits it. But not since our return from abroad. How we have failed, or why, God only knows."

"O Philip," Ann exclaimed, earnestly, "Ethel's love is far too precious to be lightly abandoned. Good, and true, and loving, I am sure she is. Can nothing be done to disperse this dark cloud?"

Philip shook his head. "I thought, perhaps it was the sympathy of her own people she pined for," he replied, sadly; "and, as you know, I sent her to her mother when you were with us. But it has not remedied it. You can see her unhappiness in her face."

"Then you must bring her people to her. She was very young and very timid when she married. You brought her among strangers, and we are all cold, and reserved, and proud. It was a new world to her, and she could not comprehend us. I feared as much then; I see it all now. We should have opened our hearts to the young stranger, and made her one of ourselves. Then, remember,

you are so engaged in your public duties, it throws her entirely on herself."

"If all public men are equally unhappy in their domestic relations, God help them!" Philip replied, petulantly. "Neither name nor fame will ever remunerate a man for such a sacrifice."

"Ethelind is too young, too inexperienced in the ways of the world, to enter, as some women do, with a man's enthusiasm, and more than a man's zeal, into the high, holy aspirations which form the moving spring of great men's actions. She only sees you now devoting your time and talents to your country, and she grows jealous over what she believes should be exclusively her own. In time she will grow wiser, and learn to be as proud of you as we all are, — as I am."

"You would never have been jealous of me, Ann," he exclaimed, vehemently. "Think what a help your courage and counsel would have been to me. There are times when a man needs comfort and encouragement in the arduous toils of a public life. He craves for sympathy and assistance, just as a thirsty traveller craves for water in the hot desert."

"And do not women, think you, crave also for sympathy in those domestic cares which men despise and laugh at, but which are as arduous and wearing to a young thing like Ethel as your larger sphere of duties is to you? Believe me, whatever you require in a wife, Ethel is fully capable of giving you, Philip; but the gifts, be they great or small, must be reciprocal."

Philip heaved a deep sigh. "Ann," he said, "it is good of you to plead so heartily for Ethelind. I, of all people, have no right to darken your lot with my grievances; I wish I could learn to bear them as bravely as you have done your own."

Ann put out her thin hand on the small iron cross which rests upon a gravestone in that little churchyard. "Yes, the shadow of the cross has fallen on me," she said, slowly; "but as the day creeps on, so the shadow lessens." She rose up to go away. "Come, busy bee," she added, "it is time you

and I were moving." She stooped down to tie on the child's sun-bonnet, and gather up the scattered daisies into her little basket. Philip laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Ann," he said, very earnestly, "if any one can help us, it is you. Will you come to us this autumn, at Redenham? I know what I am asking; but for Ethel's sake, for my child's sake, do not deny me." Ann's sallow face flushed, and then faded back to a deadly white. "Never mind," Philip said, hastily; "I know you will do so if you can; but do not promise."

"Yes, Philip," she said, at last, in a low voice, "if Ethel asks me, I will."

"God bless you," Philip replied, heartily; and, seizing his child, he kissed her warm little cheek. "I must go, now," he said hurriedly, looking at his watch, "or I shall miss the last boat;" and a moment after he had disappeared beyond the churchyard gate.

Barbara told Ann Philip's fly had been waiting for him more than twenty minutes. She had no patience with young nervous wives, who would neither leave home themselves nor give their husbands a moment's peace out of their sight.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

AFTER Lady Redenham's visit to Brighton, an irrepressible longing took possession of Mrs. Atherton to return to Wylminstre; and she and Margaret, at the special desire of John Waldron and his sister, took up their residence in the unoccupied rooms of the old house in Acre Lane.

It was far on in spring, and so suddenly as to take even those about her by surprise, that Mrs. Atherton passed away; even Ralph could not be summoned in time. Of their scattered family, Ralph and Margaret could only follow their mother, and lay her beside their father's grave in the gray old cathedral cloisters; for Grace was at Naples, and Ethelind, from whom the intelligence had as yet been studiously kept, was lying ill at Redenham, with the long-coveted, one-week-old heir sleeping in his little cot beside her.

Margaret turned away from the dead to think and act for the living; for her uncle was gradually becoming more feeble, and Ralph was looking care-worn, and gray hairs were prematurely visible in his brown, curly hair.

The rector of Grafton was dead, and the curate, who, in his two years' residence, had done so much for the parish, had again to search for a home, with the additional care of a delicate wife and two little infants to provide for. The mastership of the grammar school at Fairleigh was vacant, and Margaret and her brother, as soon as Mrs. Atherton's funeral was concluded, went there to reconnoitre. Katie, in her lonely parsonage, read and re-read Margaret's graphic description of the old school house and its curious tumble-down old chapel, until she almost fancied she could see it; and discussed all the pros and cons with their eccentric old neighbor, Mr. Owen, who had taken an intense interest in the energetic young curate and his bright, hopeful little wife. After a sharp contest, Ralph came out the successful competitor; and, fetching Katie from Grafton, with Margaret to assist, the old school house soon grew into something like decent order. Fond as Margaret was of children, she became at last quite enthusiastic over the long rows of little curtainless beds, with their white coverlets showing so distinctly against the dark wainscoted walls and the high Gothic windows, through which the morning sun shone down so cheerfully on the rosy faces beneath. There was something, too, quite awe-inspiring in the large, gloomy school room, where, on a raised dais, Ralph sat enthroned in his high-backed chair, in the imposing dignity of cap and gown.

Leaving Susannah to assist Katie in her nursery, Margaret returned to Wylminstre, where her uncle's increasing weakness rendered her presence needful to him and to her aunt.

Dr. Harford had finished his round of patient-seeing, and was sitting beside his wife's work-table with the newspaper in his hand.

"John Waldron told me to-day," he said, "that Charles Sedgely has pro-

## *For Better, for Worse.*

posed again, and Margaret Atherton has refused him."

"Poor fellow! and after so many years' constancy. Margaret is no longer a girl. If she does not take care, she will end in being an old maid, like her aunt Sarah."

"There are few men worthy of Margaret Atherton," the doctor replied. "I never met with any one like her. How invaluable she is to her family! By the way, I wonder what has become of young Vyvian? One hears nothing of him now."

"He was here a year or so ago," Mrs. Harford said; "for I remember both John and Sarah Waldron saw him. She can hardly be keeping single for his sake. Constancy and true love are well enough, but even a virtue may be exaggerated. Besides, he used her very badly."

"I suppose, from all I hear, he was awfully passionate and hot-headed; and her father and brother must have thought so, or they would not so entirely have broken with him, after his having for years been like one of the family."

"Margaret had, from a child, a marvellous influence over him. A word or look from her could check or control him instantly. When his regiment went to India, the dean would not allow any formal engagement, though to all intents and purposes they were so. I think, much as he liked him, he had not quite sufficient confidence to trust his favorite child with him; besides, they were both very young. The sudden death of his uncle brought him back unexpectedly to England, to look after the property to which he was heir-at-law. He had heard rumors that Margaret was engaged to Charles Sedgely. So he posted off to Wylminstre directly after his arrival, and met Sedgely coming out of the deanery. He begged hard to see Miss Atherton alone. What followed I cannot tell, for it was kept a profound secret by them all; but from that day to this Guy Vyvian, I know, has had nothing to do with the Athertons."

"For my part," Mrs. Harford added, "I must say I pity poor Charles Sedgely; and I think Margaret would show

her good sense if she forgot all about this boy-and-girl love, and rewarded him for his long-tried constancy.'

Spring and the bright summer's sun stole over the loving watchers by the sick-bed of John Waldron, and then no further anxiety harassed them on his account. The active, yet peaceful tenor of his life, had closed in as quiet and peaceful a death-bed. Crowds followed him to his grave—his own large circle of friends, besides the rich and poor of Wylminstre, each anxious to testify their respect and sorrow. Sarah Waldron would deny no one; and Ralph and Margaret supported their aunt as she followed the unpalled coffin to the little graveyard, which almost bordered the orchard at the bottom of the garden in Acre Lane. A pin's fall might have been heard as that large, motley assembly gathered round the open grave. Margaret almost started as the clear, soft, and not unmusical notes of a woman's voice broke the stillness in earnest supplication for all present. Reverently every hat was lifted, until the voice ceased, and the crowd turned away to the small, gloomy chapel adjoining, where Margaret and her brother listened impatiently to the strange, disjointed addresses which occasionally broke the stillness of that long hour's exercise. By Mr. Waldron's will, his property, after amply providing for his sister, so as to insure a continuance of many of his charities, was to be equally divided between Ralph and Margaret, and which, if it did not constitute a fortune, was, at least, enough to enable Margaret liberally to assist Grace and Frank, and to set Ralph's mind at ease in the maintenance of his increasing family.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

DURING the following two years, diversified occasionally by visits to Fairleigh, assisting Ralph in his favorite project, — the restoration of the old chapel, — Margaret's home was with her aunt Sarah, in Acre Lane. Twice she had found her way to Deignton; once to assist Mr. Weldon in meeting

*For Better, for Worse.*

the difficulty of overflowing numbers in his school. Margaret suggested a trained master to assist them.

Mr. Weldon shook his head. "He will set us all to rights. Rachel Grey will stand no chance. He will new-fangle all our old-fashioned schemes, and turn the school topsy-turvy."

Margaret could suggest no other solution of their difficulty. Little boys had grown into young men; and the night-school overflowed. It was clear that it had outgrown Rachel Grey entirely.

Before quitting Deignton, Margaret had carried her point, and had seen the master himself installed under the vicarage roof, and cooperating very harmoniously with Rachel in the daily work. Six months later, Margaret was again a guest of the vicar; but this time it was to be present at the marriage of the grave, sedate Rachel Grey to the clever, merry, light-hearted, trained master, who had won the hearts of his pupils, and the staid, quiet schoolmistress into the bargain.

Margaret was rich enough now to keep her own little pony-carriage, in which she could drive about the neighborhood with her aunt, who would never have consented to such a luxury on her own account.

"Aunt Sarah," Margaret said, slackening the speed of her ponies as they crested the summit of a green hill on the bright, breezy downs which surrounded the old city, "I had a note from Ethelind this afternoon. She and Philip wish me to pay them a visit in town. It is the first time she has asked any of us; and though I am not much used to a gay London life, I should not like to refuse. So when you go up to the yearly meeting, I must go with you."

A pleasant smile played over aunt Sarah's face. "I am very glad to hear it," she said. "I dare say that dear child needs thee. Margaret, thou must go."

"Then, too, I had a long letter from Grace, written in such capital spirits. They had fallen in several times abroad with Mrs. Leigh and her daughter, who are just returned to England, and with a Lord Redcar, who is a great friend of the Rederhams; and she had again met

Mr. Chudleigh, the nephew of Mr. Weldon, with whom she made acquaintance at Deignton."

"And does she say nothing of returning home? I am old-fashioned and English; and I should not wish that dear child to marry a foreigner."

Margaret laughed. "We have not much to fear on the score of foreigners, aunt," she said. "In spite of her four years' residence abroad, Gracie's sympathies are English; and if there is truth in these rumors of wars, the Aylmers must of necessity return home."

Aunt Sarah heaved a deep sigh. Margaret could not see her face, hidden as it was in the depths of her dark drab bonnet; but the grave sadness of her voice almost startled her niece.

"I could wish, then, that, like thy uncle's, my race had run out, Margaret, dear child; then, I do think, even I should feel thankful that thy engagement with Guy Vyvian had never been renewed."

The lash of her whip fell with unusual violence across the backs of Miss Atherton's spirited little ponies, and the next minute they were cantering along the smooth turf on the brow of the hill, until they broke into the high road to Wylminstre.

Leaving her aunt at her friend Miss Wilkins's, at Wandsworth, Margaret accepted that lady's offered carriage, and drove to Belgrave Square. Most joyfully Lady Redenham welcomed Margaret, and listened to the latest news of Grace and Ralph.

"I hope my old-fashioned dress-maker at Wylminstre will not shock you," Margaret said, as she and her sister watched Valerie unfolding the new dresses which had made aunt Sarah and Old Betty hold up their hands in astonishment. "I would not willingly call up a remark that your sister Ethel was too antediluvian for Belgravia."

"As if that could happen!" Ethel replied. "As if, so quiet and good as your taste is, it could ever be *outré* or Gothic. As to ornaments, Valerie has an unlimited order to supply you from my store."

Margaret smiled. "Aunt Sarah al-

*For Better, for Worse.*

ways impressed on me," she said, "that 'a meek and quiet spirit' was a woman's best ornament. If I do not possess that, I certainly have few others."

Ethelind's eyes fell, as Margaret spoke, on an old-fashioned ring with a quaint device of two hands locked over a single and very bright ruby of unusual size. "O Maggie," she said, "how well I remember that ring! Years and years ago, as long back almost as I can remember! But surely," and she looked more closely, "there used to be a little pendant? What has become of the heart, Maggie?"

A faint color spread over Margaret's cheeks. "I don't know," she replied, hurriedly; "I lost the heart, I think, a long time ago."

"Well, never mind; it will be hard if we cannot find you a better in all London. But, hark! that is the dressing bell. I leave Valerie with you, and I will return and take you down stairs myself."

The two sisters descended to the drawing room; Margaret in her silver-gray silk and black lace, its folds sweeping down in one unbroken line from her waist to the floor, and Ethie's more youthful-looking figure in a gossamer dress of light blue, with many flounces, her brown curls drawn up into a gold net set round with coins, and necklace and bracelets to correspond.

"I must tell you Ann Leigh is here," Ethel said, as they descended the stairs. "She came to us this morning. Barbara and her mother dine with us. Lady Gwynne, too, is staying here. She once saw Grace; now I want her to see you. Ann does not appear until after dinner;" and then, with a quiet dignity, she formally introduced Margaret to her guests.

Barbara was as much struck by Margaret as Ethel meant her to be. She came forward and said frankly no introduction was necessary; she perfectly remembered Miss Atherton, even if she had not heard so much of her from her friend Mr. Chudleigh. Presently Philip had come up to where she was sitting, and, taking her cordially by both her hands, he gave her such a hearty greet-

ing, she could not doubt for a moment the invitation had been as sincerely given.

"I saw at once by Ethel's face you had come," he said. "Your visit will do her good; she needs some of her own people to bring back the 'old self' which we all like to remember, though she will not own to any change."

"Time changes us all," Margaret replied. "It has greatly improved Ethel's appearance since I saw her at Brighton. She is grown stout, and looks so remarkably well and matronly."

"Is Ann Leigh come, Ethelind?" and Philip laid his hand on his wife's arm. "No one told me. And Queenie, is she here too, and I not know it?"

"You could have done so if you had inquired," Ethel replied. "She came early, and is resting; the children have been with her all the afternoon; they are to be here when we leave the dining room, for Margaret to make Leigh's acquaintance." Then she turned towards her sister.

"I have brought a gentleman, dear," she said, in quite a different tone, "who is most anxious for an introduction. It seems, from his account, you are already old friends, in all but personal acquaintance;" and she formally introduced Horace Chudleigh and Margaret to each other.

Horace Chudleigh took Margaret in to dinner, and, seated between him and Lord Redenham, with Lady Gwynne opposite, it was impossible that conversation should flag; besides, Mr. Chudleigh had just returned from Deighton, and Margaret gladly availed herself of this opportunity of learning particulars of all her old friends.

Ethelind linked her arm in Margaret's as they left the dining room. "The children are in the drawing room," she said; "I long to show you my boy."

On the hearth-rug sat a splendid child, not quite four years old, though you might have mistaken him for five or six, his bright golden curls falling in heavy masses on his broad, fair shoulders, and his dimpled arms half buried in the long, silky coat of a small white Scotch terrier he was intent on teaching

## *For Better, for Worse.*

to beg for the morsels of biscuit he was doling out to it.

Half reclining on a low couch sat the invalid Ann Leigh, and by her side, busy amidst bits of colored-silk patchwork, nestled the transparent fairy, little Beatrice, so absorbed in her employment, that only now and then you caught a glimpse of her large, violet eyes, half hidden in their thick lashes.

"Look, cousin Ann! Look, Queenie, look!" the little fellow exclaimed, his dark eyes — so much darker than his hair — flashing with delight. "Aunt Barbara said I never should make Flossie beg; but I knew I should, and I have done it." Margaret stooped down to him. He blushed, looked in her face, and then, throwing his arms round her neck, said, with a proud little air, "You must be my aunt Margaret mamma tells me about. I think I shall love you, you are so like my mamma."

Miss Leigh put aside the children, and rose to meet her. "This is a pleasure I have long desired," she said, as she shook hands with her, warmly, while Ethelind passed on to her other guests. Barbara came up to Margaret.

"Is not Leigh a splendid child?" she said. "Did you ever see such eyes? Real Leigh eyes. You should see him in a passion. There is nothing I enjoy more than putting him in a passion. Ethel dotes on him. It seems as if all her love had centred in that child."

"Not more than in the delicate, wan little Beatrice, who looks as if a puff of wind would blow her away."

"Ethel cares no more for Beatrice than if she had never belonged to her. Philip is as ridiculous in his way about her as Ethel is with Leigh. Such a fuss as he and Ann make together over her! One can excuse it in Ann, poor thing, with all her trials and disappointments, and the child is now, I suppose, given up to her keeping."

When the gentlemen came in, Margaret watched Philip go at once to Ann's sofa. The color flitted nervously over Ann's face; Philip took his little girl in his arms, and bent down over her in confidential chat with his cousin.

Margaret turned to look for Ethelind.

She was beside an ottoman, on which little Leigh had climbed, to whisper some secret request. Her arm was clasping him, and his fair round cheek was pressed against hers, as he tried on tiptoe to reach her ear. Ethel was watching the meeting of the cousins. A bright, hot spot burnt on her cheeks, and a fire-flash almost changed the color of her violet eyes. Then suddenly stooping, she hid her face in her boy's neck, and almost deluged him with a flood of kisses. When Margaret looked for her soon after, she was talking quietly to Horace Chudleigh in a distant corner.

"Ann tells me you have made acquaintance with your niece, Miss Atherton," Philip said, coming across to Margaret. "She has grown since you saw her last at Redenham. Do you not think her very like her mother?"

"As like Ethel as Lord Leigh is like yourself," Margaret replied.

"Ethel will not allow it."

"Does Beatrice live entirely with your cousin?"

"She has for some time now. She was weak and delicate, and Ethel cared so little about it, that when Ann offered to take her, I could not well object. The arrangement was at first temporary, but it has now become permanent. To remove her, would, I fear, distress Ann. If the step ever becomes needful, Ethel must do it."

"It is scarcely wise," Margaret said, "to separate a mother from her child; but I do not think Ethel would act unkindly towards Miss Leigh."

"Ethel is changed, Miss Atherton, since you knew her," Philip replied, thoughtfully; "I can't tell you in what way, but you cannot be here long and not see — not feel it."

Barbara came back to her old seat. "Of course I am bound to believe you have never met Mr. Chudleigh before, Miss Atherton; but it must, I suppose, be a case of love at first sight. When we were at Rome, in the spring, I used to accuse him of being smitten with your pretty sister Grace — who, by the way, is an arrant flirt; but the fit was nothing compared to what he is going through to-night on your account."



*For Better, for Worse.*

"The only flirtation I incline to," Margaret replied, "is with my splendid little nephew."

"And he, and Ann, and little Bee, are all gone off to bed: I met Ethelind taking them away."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"COME, Maggie, those children have plagued you enough for one day. The carriage will be at the door in ten minutes, and as I have set my heart on having you presented at this next drawing room, it is time to set about the needful preparation for your dress."

"But, Ethie, dear —"

"Now I know exactly what you are going to say, and I am quite determined not to listen. If you are afraid of the lecture Miss Waldron will read you, I will write a note, and ask her to come and see you when you are dressed; I know she won't refuse me."

Margaret laughed. "I have given myself up entirely to you while I am here; so, of course, I cannot refuse any reasonable request; the only question is, whether this is so or not."

"Of course it is! and, as even aunt Sarah would, under similar circumstances, feel called on to afford herself a new drab-silk dress and mob-cap, there can be no reason why you should not do as other people do, when they are brought into the presence of majesty. I will promise you it shall all be as simple and plain as it is possible on such an occasion."

"Then, — let me see," Ethelind said, as she followed her sister into the carriage, — "there is my ball on the 30th, and our *fête champêtre* at Twickenham on the 5th."

"Be merciful, I entreat," Margaret exclaimed. "Remember I am but a poor, simple countrywoman, quite unused to the gayeties of a London life."

Margaret laughed heartily at Lady Redenham's large acquaintance, as they drove home through the Park. Margaret sat back gently in the corner of the britzka, a silent spectator, except when Mr. Chudleigh joined them; and, as he persisted in cantering by Margaret's

side, she could not resist joining in the conversation.

"You have heard the news, Miss Atherton, I dare say? It has been just received at the Horse Guards. Sebastopol must be ours soon, if only they can send reinforcements in time. Lady Redenham, you won't have his lordship at dinner; there is a Cabinet Council this afternoon, and the House is to meet early."

"No matter," Ethelind replied. "I take my sister to the Opera this evening, to hear the new *prima donna*; Mr. Chudleigh, will you dine with us, and be our escort?"

And to judge by the expression of Horace Chudleigh's usually sedate face, it did not seem that Barbara Leigh's quick-sightedness had misled her, when she declared he had already lost his heart to his uncle's charming friend.

Philip was at home when they returned. He had been lured back by the desire to have a game of play with his little girl. "Miss Atherton, has Ethelind victimized you in her passion for the Opera. Take care she does not wear you out with her own late hours," he said.

"You are careful of Margaret, Philip, for which she cannot feel so grateful as I do; but in this case it is unnecessary. I will take all care of her, while you look after Ann. We do not expect you to accompany us. Horace Chudleigh will dine and go with us."

"Chudleigh will have enough to do, then," Lord Redenham replied. "Tonight there is sure to be a crowd." He turned, and took his little girl in his arms.

Ethel watched them a moment, and then said, "It is but a cruel kindness in you and Ann to pet and spoil that child as you are doing, especially with such a morbid disposition as hers."

"And are boys none the worse for spoiling?" Philip asked, as he watched Ethel's flushed face.

"That is the old story. You tell me I spoil Leigh, and shall make a tyrant of him. I deny it. Arthur is too independent and high-spirited to be spoiled, even if I were inclined to do so. Now, Margaret, you are a comparative stran-

*For Better, for Worse.*

ger; we will make you umpire in this knotty question. After you have been here a month, you shall say, honestly, (and you are by no means a bad judge,) whether Leigh or Queenie is the most spoiled, and at whose door the evil lies heaviest; and, granting even the possibility of a verdict against my boy, whether the excuse is greatest in Philip, who has a mother, sisters, cousin, all the world, to claim his affection, or myself, with only my boy."

"I shall make no promise of the sort, Ethie," Margaret replied. "What mother ever allowed she spoiled her child, though all the world accused her of it, and could see it in every thing she did? Miss Leigh will not let Queenie suffer from over-indulgence, even if her papa is caught occasionally yielding to the temptation; and, as to you, Ethie, — spoiled as I fear you were by us all, and feeling its effects now, — I believe you will see the necessity for shielding your high-spirited Leigh from a similar misfortune. It is bad enough for a girl, it is worse in its effects on a boy, especially in the responsible position your child will fill." As she spoke, little Arthur's bright face appeared at the door. He rushed half-way across the room, and then suddenly stopped.

"Come here, sir; I want you," Lord Redenham said.

"I don't want you, papa; I want mamma," the boy replied, with a careless toss of his bright, curly head.

"Do you hear what I say, sir? Come directly, when I bid you!" The boy's eyes flashed, and the bright color came up into his little, determined face.

"I want mamma," he said firmly; and, climbing up into a chair beside her, he threw his little arms round her neck, and stood looking proudly and defiantly at his father, while he whispered some childish request in her ear.

A conscious feeling of conviction crossed Ethelind's heart. "You should do what papa bids you, darling," she said. "Go to him, Leigh, and never mind me." The boy saw the tears gathering in her eyes, though she strove to hide them by bending down over his curls.

"Never mind, mamma," he whispered again, but loud enough this time for Lord Redenham to hear. "Nobody loves you as I love you;" and he half-smothered her with kisses.

Philip laid his hand on his boy's round shoulder. "It is time, young gentleman, I took you in hand myself. When I call you, you must attend. Do you hear what I say?" Again the two pairs of Leigh eyes met; but the boy's never flinched.

"When I have kissed my mamma, and told her my secret, I shall come to you, papa; but I must go to mamma first. My godpapa told me, when he went away, always to go to mamma first, and attend to her first, and love her first, and never care what any body said to me for it, not even if they made me cry afterwards; and I told him I would. You may scold me as much as ever you like, I shall still go to mamma first."

Philip's hand relaxed, and he let the boy go. "Between Redcar and your mother you are incorrigible," he said; but he spoke in a tone which showed his brave, determined boy had touched him in his most sensitive part. Redcar, — all the world, perhaps, — even his own child, could see that its mother needed 'protection,' — and from whom? His eyes fell upon Ann. Margaret had caught up little Beatrice, and was playing with her at the farther end of the room. Ethelind did not speak; she saw the look, and read, or fancied she did, all it meant to convey. She loosened her hold of her child; a quick, sharp retort was upon her lip, but with a violent effort she repressed it; it curled and quivered for an instant, and the hot blood went back upon her heart. The next, and she had quitted the room, her boy tightly grasped in her hand.

Philip looked after her for a second, then he heaved a deep, heavy sigh, which welled up from the bottom of his heart. He rang the bell, and ordered his carriage. "Good by, Miss Atherton," he said; "I do not dine at home to-day. It would have been wiser, perhaps, if I had not let Queenie wile me back now." The next minute he was gone.

## FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

### CHAPTER XXXV.

As Philip had predicted, the crush in leaving the Opera was tremendous. Ethelind looked round to see that they were all together. Lady Gwynne's carriage was called, and Mr. Chudleigh left Ethelind and Margaret while he placed them in it.

"If I could but see some one I know!" Ethelind said, a little nervously, as she stood looking about among the crowd. "Philip said we should have a crush, but I did not expect such a one as this."

"You are not afraid, Ethie, are you?"

"Not if we can keep together; but if we get pushed far away from this spot, Mr. Chudleigh will miss us."

Presently he came up breathless, and elbowing his way till he reached them. "They are off at last; but there is some squabbling among the coachmen, and I thought I should never get them up to the carriage. Yours, Lady Redenham, comes next; you have no time to lose." He gave his arm to each; but Margaret was soon dragged away, and for a moment she feared she should be borne off her feet. Suddenly a figure, wrapped in a military cloak, with his cap drawn down over his brows, came to her, and seizing her hand, drew it unceremoniously through his arm, and, before she could recover her surprise, had not only cleared a way for her, but had kept back the crowd from pressing upon her until he had placed her in safety in Lady Redenham's carriage.

"Thank goodness, we are safe!" Ethel exclaimed, as Margaret sprang in. "I was terrified to death when I saw you carried away, and I begged Chudleigh to go to you and leave me, but he would not."

"How should I ever have faced Redenham, if I had done so?" he replied;

"but, upon my word, I was in a fright. If I had seen Vyvian at first, it would have been all right; but I never caught sight of him until I looked back, and saw him so gallantly rescuing Miss Atherton. What a fellow he is, with his head and shoulders above every body else, and his strong 'iron will,' as I always call his resolute temper."

"And gone before one could thank him," Ethelind exclaimed, as she wrapped her shawl round her.

Margaret started. Could it indeed be Captain Vyvian who had almost lifted her into the carriage? And yet had never spoken a syllable, given no sign of recognition! What he would have done for any woman in distress, he had done for her; for he must have seen her and recognized her, standing, as she had done, so long by her sister's side; but if any lingering doubt remained that they were forever strangers, this would effectually dispel it; they must meet now as if they had never met before. It had not crossed Margaret's mind, the chance of her encountering Guy Vyvian during her visit to her sister; now it all came suddenly before her, and, for a moment, she felt as if she must wish Ethel good by, and return to her quiet home at Wylminster. But as she recovered herself this weakness subsided. Why should she do so? What were they now to each other? Was not the world wide enough for two people who only looked back on their past love as a dream? And since it was so evident he had no intention of breaking through the rule she had herself insisted on, why should she be disquieted?

After wishing the others good night, Ethel drew Margaret into her room. "It has only just flashed across me," she said, "that you and Guy Vyvian

*For Better, for Worse.*

were once friends. It was so long ago, and I was such a child, I had forgotten all about it. I hope it did not annoy you, dear, meeting him so suddenly to-night?"

"It startled me for a moment, because I was not expecting him; but I am rather glad than not to have done so, because if it happens again I shall be prepared for it."

"But it shall not, unless you wish it. He and Philip are great friends of late. He is often here; but I will tell Philip not to bring him while you are with us."

"I should very much prefer your saying nothing to Philip about it. If he comes, let him. I by no means object to meet him. Only remember, we are strangers, and it is our mutual wish to remain so."

Ethelind kissed her sister. "You shall do any thing you will, Maggie; you are sure to choose wisely and well; only do not look so pale to-morrow, or I shall be miserable. Come here," she said, drawing her sister to the side of the bed, and pulling back the curtains. Nestling down among the pillows, his soft brown curls falling away from his broad open forehead, and his long eyelashes throwing a shadow on his round rosy cheeks, slept the little heir to Redenham, his dimpled arm across the coverlet, exposing his bare broad chest and fair neck to the loving gaze of his mother and aunt.

"Leigh! and here, Ethie?"

The color had flown up almost into Ethel's brow. "He fretted one night; awoke in a dream, I believe, and I heard him and brought him here, and now he does not care to go away," she said, apologetically.

"In a little bed of his own — a crib — it might lie; but surely not here — not with you?"

"It has been so for a long time now;" and her color came and went nervously, and her lip trembled. "Our hours do not agree. It began as an exception, it has ended in becoming the rule. Can you wonder my boy is such a treasure to me?" She threw herself

down on the sleeping child, and covered him with passionate tears and kisses.

Margaret was greatly distressed. "Ethie, darling," she said, "I feared something was not right, but I never thought it had come to this."

For a few minutes Ethelind wept bitterly; then she suddenly wiped her tears away: her courage had returned, now she had given Margaret this one insight into the inner life she had so carefully shrouded from all other eyes. It would account for those inconsistencies which she felt must strike her sister's quick perception, both in her own and Philip's manner.

"But your friends — his family?"

"I conclude they attribute it to the mistake he made in his marriage;" and her lip curled scornfully; "to me no allusion has ever been made on the matter. And, after all, it is but an everyday occurrence, I dare say, if we could go into other homes and get a look behind the scenes."

"God help you, Ethel," Margaret exclaimed, as she kissed her sister sorrowfully and went back to her own room.

Ethel stood for a moment after she had dismissed Valerie. Her bosom heaved, and her eyes were red with weeping; but the feeling that Margaret knew some of her trials, that at least she was sure of *her* sympathy, softened and subdued the wounded pride which was hourly hardening her against her husband. Valerie had said she believed his lordship was not quite well, and had gone to bed directly after Miss Leigh had left the drawing room. Perhaps she ought to go to him. Once she would have done so. She put her hand on the door which separated his dressing room from hers. She tried to turn the handle; it was bolted. Her good resolutions wavered. In withdrawing it, the lock made a rebound, and the click awoke Philip.

"Halloa! who's there?" he asked, in the tone of a man suddenly awaked out of his first sleep.

"It is I — Ethel!" she replied nervously, regretting she had been weak

## For Better, for Worse.

enough to try the door at all. The night bolt suddenly slipped back, and Ethelind opened the door a few inches.

"I am sorry I disturbed you, Philip; I would not have done so had I known the door was fastened," she said meekly. "Stephens told me you were not well — that you had a headache, and had come home early and gone to bed. Can I get you any thing? Is it better?"

"Stephens is an old fool to have said any thing about it," was the not very civil reply. "How late you are! Why, I have been asleep these three hours. My head is all right now, thank you; go to bed yourself — these late hours are enough to kill a horse."

And poor little Ethie closed the door softly, drew the bolt on her side, and sat down to harden her softened and repentant heart by all the miserable suggestions which a half-waking, half-sleeping brain never fails to conjure up.

On the day of the drawing room, Ethelind took as much pains over Margaret's dress as if she had been a dowager mamma bringing out her first fair child. Barbara was called in to decide if Ethel's opals would not look well in Margaret's dark hair; but Margaret was not to be moved in her resolution against wearing any of her ornaments at all.

"Miss Atherton is right in refusing those opals," Ann Leigh said. "Beautiful as they are, they should be looked at, and not worn. I am superstitious, perhaps, but I wore them once, at my first and last ball. I warned Ethel of it, when she had them reset. It strikes me she carries deeper lines on her face, and a less careless step and voice, since she used them."

The color rose instantly over Ethel's cheeks. She snapped down the lid of her jewel-case. "If I only knew how to counteract all other evil influence as readily as I can undertake it with my opals," she added nervously, "I should be the happiest woman alive."

Lord Redenham accompanied Ethelind and her sister to the drawing room.

While waiting for their carriages, with a bevy of fair girls and fat dowagers around them, Margaret constantly heard the question, —

"I say, do tell me who that girl is in the white dress and mauve-colored train, standing with the Redenhams. She is not so pretty as Lady Redenham, but she is uncommonly like her. Do you think she can be a sister?"

Once she heard a reply. The voice came from behind, and made her heart beat.

"That is the eldest daughter of the late Dean of Wylmynstre, and sister to Lady Redenham."

"I thought so by the striking family likeness, though she is certainly not so good-looking."

The deep tones reached her again. "You would not have said so if you had known her ten years ago."

"Do you know them?"

"Lady Redenham, well! her sister I knew once, but we are strangers now."

Lord Redenham touched Margaret's arm. "Our carriage waits; are you ready?" She started, but rose and followed her sister. At that very moment Horace Chudleigh came up to them.

"I have been trying to get to you for the last half hour," he said; "but those stupid old women jam up the doorways, and prevent a fellow from moving hand or foot."

"How well Vyvian looks in his uniform!" Lord Redenham said, as the tall figure of an officer, striding up St. James's Street, caught Margaret's eye just as they turned into Piccadilly. "I told him, Ethie, we should expect him at your dance to-night."

Ethel glanced nervously at Margaret.

"And will he come?" she asked.

"To be sure he will!" and the subject dropped.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

MARGARET was standing on the hearth-rug, talking to Ann Leigh. The light shone on her white *moiré* dress and the three-cornered bit of gold lace

*For Better, for Worse.*

which Valerie had fastened into her back hair. Her small foot, in its white slipper, rested on the bright fender. Horace Chudleigh was by her side, amusing Miss Leigh with his humorous account of the adventures of the morning, and making them both laugh at the comic view he had taken of the whole proceedings, which, a few hours ago, had worn such a very serious and important aspect.

"You don't mean to sit still all the evening, Miss Atherton?" he asked, a little anxiously. "If you won't accept me as a partner for old acquaintance' sake, at least you will do so for my uncle's."

"You are ingenious, to say the least of it, Mr. Chudleigh," Margaret replied; "and perhaps by and by, if you ask me for a quadrille, I won't refuse; but now I prefer looking on."

Margaret sat down by Ann's side, where she could see without being seen. She thought she had never seen her sister looking so sweet and bewitching. The opals gleamed in her hair and round her neck, and costly bracelets encircled her wrists; and the gold tissue of her shining gossamer dress gave a "shimmer" as she glanced from this side the room to the other, or stood, like "Titania," among the profusion of beautiful exotics which adorned the rooms.

Philip, who had come up and bent over Ann's sofa for a chat, had noticed "How pretty Ethelind was looking!" and "How well her dress became her!"

"Yes," Ann said, "and I think you ought to ask her to dance with you to-night."

"I! dance with my own wife!—my dear Ann, people would say I had gone mad. Ethel herself would not thank you for giving her such a partner. No! my dancing days are over. Better perhaps for both if they had never come;" and he turned away into the crowd.

The dance was ended; the dancers were parading about to obtain air and ices. Presently Philip returned, bringing Guy Vyvian with him.

"Miss Atherton, allow me to pre-

sent my friend, Captain Vyvian, to you," Lord Redenham said; and Margaret had to rise, and make a stiff, distant bow, and then again she tried to glide back to her low chair.

"Vyvian is a capital dancer, Miss Atherton, and I have brought him on purpose to tempt you to join in this *valse* they are beginning."

"Pray assure Captain Vyvian I never *valse*, Lord Redenham," Margaret replied in a low tone.

Captain Vyvian colored slightly, just bent stiffly to Margaret, and turned suddenly to speak to some one who was passing.

"Miss Atherton, you have frightened Vyvian away. I had taken great pains to bring him here, telling him I had the best partner for him in the room. He is an uncommonly good fellow, I can tell you. I don't know that I could wish a girl a better lot than to be that man's wife; and how he has remained single so long, I cannot think, for they are all in love with him, and he has a very good fortune, besides his good looks."

As soon as she could, Margaret glided out of a side door near. In the hall, leaning against the balustrade, she ran full against Guy Vyvian before she had time to retreat. He had to move to let her pass up the stairs.

"And this is the result of all my good resolves," she exclaimed bitterly, as she bolted her door, and threw herself down on her sofa. "I, who thought I could have met him—nay, almost wished to do so—that I might show him we could be friends, even if we were nothing more."

She would have given a great deal to know if he had come to her of his own free will. It was clear he had not told Philip of their former acquaintance, or he would not have introduced them to each other as strangers. A tap at the door startled her. Ethel had sent to see what had become of her sister.

"I am coming," she said, hastily smoothing out her hair; and, arm in arm, she and Miss Gwynne entered the brilliantly-lighted drawing room. Eth-

elind came up to her. She gave a scrutinizing look, and quietly took her hand in her own.

"Now, Maggie," she said, "I want you to dance. It is a quadrille next; you won't object to that. Will you dance with Redenham, if I ask him to be your partner?"

"No, no; do not ask Lord Redenham, Ethie. I heard him say just now his dancing days were over. Besides, I have already refused so many, I should perhaps give offence."

Captain Vyvian made one step forward, hesitated, and then fell back. Horace Chudleigh was before him.

"Miss Atherton promised me, Lady Redenham. I hope she will not disappoint me."

Margaret, afraid to raise her eyes, put her hand in his arm, and they went to join the set just forming.

"It is so long since I danced a quadrille, except with little children," she said, "I am not sure I remember my figures. Mr. Chudleigh, you must put me right if I make any terrible blunders."

When Margaret turned, to her consternation, Barbara Leigh and Captain Vyvian were there *vis-à-vis*.

"There is no fear now," Horace Chudleigh whispered. "We have the two best dancers in the room."

Without giving herself time to think, Margaret turned to her partner. Barbara was laughing and talking in her highest spirits, while Guy looked gravely down on her bright animated face, and pretty, light, airy figure.

"Mamma was maintaining just now, Miss Atherton could not dance; that Quakers never did. I am sure she dances admirably—so much more quiet and lady-like than half the girls who stand up."

Guy replied, gravely, "Few people could dance better than Miss Atherton did once."

"Bless me, do you know her, then? I thought Redenham said he introduced you this evening."

Guy colored. "It is some years since we met; I don't know her now. Sol-

diers are thrown amongst so many whom they seldom or ever meet again, they are scarcely likely to be recognized."

"Of course you would remember her; she has such a very peculiarly intelligent expression. Now, don't you think so? It takes a great deal to make me acknowledge beauty in people, especially when you hear girls cried up as so lovely, so sweet looking, so very pretty—coarse, vulgar, unintellectual faces, without one good feature, or one redeeming expression. My opinion is, beauty has degenerated even in my day." And Barbara gave her head a conscious toss, as if she felt sure what the verdict must be in her own case.

"I am not a professed admirer of beauty, Miss Leigh," Guy said, "unless it has something more than mere regularity of features to recommend it."

"Well, then, you must agree with me that there is something in Miss Atherton perfectly different from any face you ever saw. Not so regularly formed as Lady Redenham's, but a sort of idealized spiritualism in it, which makes you think of the Madonnas of the old Italian painters."

Captain Vyvian was spared a reply. He had to go forward and take Margaret's hand. The tips of her gloved fingers just touched his broad palm. For a moment he felt inclined to let that touch say what words could not convey; but she turned round, and replied to something Horace Chudleigh was saying, without even a look towards himself, and he dropped the fingers coldly, and stepped back into his own place beside Barbara Leigh.

"Miss Atherton must be several years older than her sister," Barbara began again. "It is strange she is still single—and such a favorite, too, as she is with the gentlemen! My brother is quite bewitched by her, and Horace Chudleigh is losing his heart to her as fast as he can; see how they are laughing and chattering."

"Hang that girl, she will drive me mad!" Guy mentally exclaimed; and to change the current of his companion's ideas, he commenced the all-ab-

## *For Better, for Worse.*

sorbing topic of the War, and the probable chances of his being called to join the troops already in the Crimea.

"I wonder what your Deignton pupils would say, if they could only see you as you are now, Miss Atherton," Horace Chudleigh said; "they would really believe in the truth of those fairy tales you used to improvise for them—that you actually were the possessor of Cinderella's glass-slipper."

"Whatever the children might think, Mr. Chudleigh, your uncle would say—and I am quite ready to agree with him—that I was doing more good in my Deignton home than any thing I am performing here."

"I don't think you must say so, Miss Atherton; you cannot think how much brighter and happier Lady Redenham looks since you came. Then, too," he added in a lower voice, "it has given me the opportunity of becoming acquainted with you."

"I wish some one could persuade Ethel to dance," Margaret said, as they finished their quadrille; "I don't think she has danced once to-night."

They separated; and whether Captain Vyvian had overheard her, or not, she could not tell, but she watched him go in search of Lady Redenham, and presently saw them waltzing together in the next room.

"Captain Vyvian," Ethelind said, as they stood together waiting for the music to commence, "I never properly thanked you for your rescue of Margaret and myself in our dilemma at the Opera the other night."

"Pray, don't thank me, Lady Redenham. If I had not stood hesitating about what I ought to do, I should have been of more service. Has Miss Atherton been long with you?"

"Only a week. Don't you think her looking remarkably well?"

"Older than when I knew her; but that is so long ago."

"To be sure she does! Who would not, after all the care and anxiety she has gone through since papa's death?"

"Is Chudleigh engaged to your sister, Lady Redenham!" Guy asked, in

a voice studiously unconcerned and careless.

"To Margaret, do you mean? O, no, Captain Vyvian," Ethel replied as carelessly. "At least, not yet," she added, with a malicious pleasure in teasing which seemed to have suddenly seized her. "He is very much taken with her; and she is so great a favorite with his family, such an event would be most popular amongst them, I suspect. But Margaret has refused so many good offers, I should tremble for even Mr. Chudleigh's chance."

"But he is a clever fellow, and a rising one, too, and your sister seems on such easy terms with him, I thought there must be an engagement."

"His uncle, you know, is the rector of Deignton, and one of Margaret's greatest friends. She never saw the nephew till she came to us. Of course they have long known each other through friends. I am sure I only wish it may turn out so," she added, her companion's indifferent tone piquing her into being vindictive. "Margaret deserves a good husband, if any one does, and you know she is no longer a young girl."

Again they joined in the giddy dance, and when the music ceased they were standing near Ann's sofa.

"Captain Vyvian," Ethel began, with a little blush on her cheek at her temerity, "Redenham told me you would remain our guest until after my picnic next week. Of course you did not then know who were our guests. If you prefer breaking your engagement, pray don't scruple to do so; I shall quite understand, and will make all proper excuses for you."

Guy gave a quick glance into Ethel's grave, demure face. "If my presence is an annoyance, Lady Redenham; if you think I had better go, advise it," he said.

"Not the slightest, I assure you," she replied with one of her bright merry laughs. "It was entirely on your own account I mentioned it, because, you see, I can by no means guarantee you against being a witness to Mr. Chud-



## For Better, for Worse.

leigh's surrender to Margaret's attractions."

"If my feelings only are to be consulted, pray, dismiss all fear," Guy said, with a cold, disdainful toss of his chin, and a little attempt at a laugh, which, however, never even moved the muscles of his resolute mouth. "No, Lady Redenham, thank you; I really feel very much obliged to you and your husband for your hospitable invitation. Will you tell me one thing," he added, as she was moving away — "does Redenham, Chudleigh, any body, in fact, but you, know that—that Margaret and I were once friends?" For a moment the resolute tones faltered, and the name brought up a color on his bronzed face as he spoke it.

"Not a soul!" Ethelind replied promptly. "Margaret would die rather than breathe a syllable to her dearest friend. Indeed, so careful has she ever been of your feelings, she has borne the blame which she really never deserved. And so entirely has it all died out of memory, even I had almost forgotten it, until your appearance at the Opera the other night, and Margaret's agitation, when she recognized you, brought it to my remembrance."

"Then my presence did agitate your sister—did annoy her—did put her out? But how could I stand by, and not help you? I blamed myself afterwards for having hesitated so long."

"O, dear, no. We were both very much obliged to you—at least, I was, for I thought once we had lost Margaret. Of course, coming suddenly on an old friend, from whom you had parted in anger, would naturally startle and surprise you."

"God bless you, Lady Redenham; "you have removed a great load from me!" Guy exclaimed.

"Not to save your conscience, though, remember," she replied promptly, the spirit of malice still working in her grave face. "Any one who could act as you acted towards Margaret, deserves no mercy. Remember, it is to torment you—by showing you what you once possessed, recklessly threw away,

would not have, and now never can—that I let you remain here."

She moved to go away; he put his hand on her arm. "Lady Redenham, say what you will, be as bitter and hard-hearted as you like; I deserve it all, and ten thousand times more besides. And I will show you my contrition by not even attempting to vindicate myself from the charges you bring against me." He let her pass on.

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN Margaret followed her sister's guests into the drawing room after dinner the next day, little Leigh and Beatrice seized on her for the conclusion of a fairy story she had been interrupted in the night before, and they drew her away into a distant corner, where, seated on a low ottoman, they hung round her in breathless expectation.

"Miss Atherton's story-telling powers are proverbial," Horace Chudleigh said, as he and Ethelind stole quietly up to them. "My uncle could repeat scores; I believe he used to listen as greedily as the children."

In his excitement over the *finale*, Leigh, who had been playing with Margaret's ring, dropped it on the carpet.

"It must be found, Leigh," Margaret said nervously.

The finding it, however, on a dark, soft carpet by lamp light was no easy task. Both children were on their knees looking for it. Mr. Chudleigh now came and joined in the search.

"I am very sorry to give so much trouble," Margaret said, annoyed beyond measure at the commotion.

Guy Vyvian was behind them, resting against the mantel-shelf. He dared not offer his aid.

"It must be found, Leigh," Ethelind said, coming up to Margaret. "Your aunt values it very much."

At that moment a sparkle caught Guy's quick eye. He stooped down; the ring had rolled away almost to his foot. His first impulse was to carry it straight to Miss Atherton, who had not observed his movements; but as it lay

## *For Better, for Worse.*

in his hand, it suddenly struck him — he recognized it, that it had once been his own. He turned to Lady Redenham.

“Here it is,” he said, “or part of it. Its pendant, I fear, is still on the floor.” He held it out to her.

Ethel seized the ring. “No,” she said; “it is all right, thank you. It had a little heart once suspended from this hook;” and she held it up to the light; “but Margaret told me a few days back she lost her heart a long time ago, and has never found it again.”

Lady Redenham said this in the most innocent, careless way imaginable; but she knew quite well Guy understood her; for he gave a quick, sharp glance at Margaret as she spoke, and he saw the blood rush violently into her cheeks, even to her very forehead, and then as suddenly go back, leaving her face paler even than she usually looked.

“A rascal who could steal Miss Atherton’s heart and keep it, without giving her his own in its place, ought to be scouted,” Horace Chudleigh exclaimed. “But come, Vyvian, we shall begin to suspect you of an inclination for theft if you don’t soon restore Miss Atherton’s property,” he added, rather enjoying the joke.

Guy dropped the ring on the mantel-piece, as if its touch had burnt his fingers, and fell back quietly.

He did not look again towards Margaret, or he would have seen the distress visible on her countenance, caused by the careless banter of her friends. She took her ring from Ethel, and slipped it quietly into her pocket, drew on her gloves, and walked away to the other side of the room.

Margaret sat down quietly to her work. Ethel had taken the children to bed. She tried to recover herself.

“Why should I be so disquieted about the ring?” she thought. “If he comes voluntarily where I am, I cannot help it. It was, I believe, his mother’s. Perhaps he regrets its loss.”

The thought flashed on her suddenly, and made her cheeks tingle. It was her only relic of their old love; every thing

else her father had returned. Her resolve was soon taken. She rose up, went to her room, drew out her writing materials, and wrote hastily on a strip of paper, —

“Miss Atherton exceedingly regrets the enclosed ring had not been earlier returned, and more so, that the little pendant has been irretrievably lost. She now takes the earliest opportunity of returning it to its rightful owner.

*“Saturday Evening, 10 o’clock.”*

She slipped the ring and note into an envelope, directed it, and rang for Valerie.

“Will you give this to Captain Vyvian’s servant,” she said; “and beg him to deliver it to-night?” And again she descended to the drawing room.

Horace Chudleigh came to her. “You look quite pale, Miss Atherton,” he said. “Late hours are telling on you; I thought so last night. You are doing too much; you will be ill.”

Margaret tried to laugh off his fears. “You are as fidgety about me as your uncle used to be. He was always afraid I should overwork myself; as if, in spite of my pale face, I was not really very strong,” she said.

Guy Vyvian was in the breakfast room alone, when the sisters entered it. He began talking to Lady Redenham about the heat and dust. Margaret shrunk from looking in his face. She thought the fact of her returning the ring would satisfy him. She fully comprehended the footing on which they were to stand towards each other, and she did not like her pale face and haggard eyes should betray what the struggle cost her.

“Margaret, you are looking ghastly!” Ethel exclaimed suddenly, as the light from the window fell on her sister’s face. “Aunt Sarah said yesterday you were not improved by London smoke and dust. I must take more care of you today; I shall not let you go to church.”

Margaret felt that there were tears in her eyes. She could not recover her self-possession. She knew Guy’s eyes

## *For Better, for Worse.*

were bent on her. She saw Ethel's fright, and she tried to pass it off with a faint attempt at a laugh, which made matters worse. Guy poured out a cup of tea, and placed it before her. Her hand shook so, she feared to raise it to her lips. She said something to Ethelind about heat, and want of rest; and then Ethel drew her away, to avoid meeting any of those who had not yet joined the breakfast table.

Margaret did not make her appearance again until dinner time. Ethel said she had a headache; and as she wished her to be looking her best at her fête, she was carefully nursing her for that occasion. Captain Vyvian was not at dinner. There were only their own party, and she could sit quietly between Ann Leigh and Lord Redenham in the drawing room, and enjoy the luxury of listening to discussions, in which she only joined occasionally.

The next day, Ethelind, with Margaret beside her, and little Lord Leigh in great excitement between them, drove down to Twickenham in her pony carriage, leaving the rest to follow as they pleased.

It was a lovely day; the heat of a bright June sun, tempered by cool, refreshing breezes, which just rippled the water on the bosom of old Father Thames, and made a stir among the fluttering leaves of the aspens that bordered its banks. The house, intended merely as a summer's retreat for the children, was too small to admit half the guests who thronged up the avenue to the hall door. But preparations had been made on the most ample scale, in the way of marquees, tents, and temporary ball rooms on the spacious velvety lawn, which swept down from the terraced front to the river side. Bands of music, wherries gay with flags, archery, cricket, ices, champagne—every thing, in fact, which could amuse or refresh her visitors was liberally provided; and Ethelind moved about from one group to another, encouraging every one to enjoy to the utmost this bit of rural life in the heart of a London season.

Even Margaret's spirits improved as the morning wore on; and though she

kept almost entirely with the little children, who had been invited as Leigh's guests, she entered heartily into the spirit of the thing, and strolled about near the river, under shadow of the broad elms and chestnuts, and, after much persuasion, was at last tempted by Horace Chudleigh to trust herself in a wherry, and be rowed by him across the river to the opposite ait, whose reedy, tangled surface had been cleared away, and a little seat erected under the shade of some aspens. Margaret had brought her sketch book with her. She thought the gay throng on the opposite lawn would make a pretty picture, and she sat down on the seat to try what she could do.

Horace Chudleigh moored his skiff to the stump of a tree, and then he threw himself down beside her. He watched her for some time, and made his remarks on the different groups of figures collected about under the trees and marquees. Presently he said all at once,—

"I am sorry I did not see you yesterday. When I called in Belgrave Square, Miss Atherton, I wanted particularly to speak to you; but it is kind of you to give me the opportunity now, especially when so many want you. But, dear Miss Atherton, may I presume to ask a question—make a request?" He was growing so excited and hot, his eloquence, almost indeed his power of speech, seemed deserting him.

Margaret raised her eyes from her paper. Something in his manner and the tone of his voice very much startled her. She began suddenly gathering up her drawing implements.

"Mr. Chudleigh," she said, "I will trouble you to row me back, if you please. We have been here long enough;" and she rose up to go.

"Stop, I pray you, one moment," Horace exclaimed desperately; "for my uncle's sake, listen to me. I will not detain you many minutes." Mr. Weldon's name was a talisman she never could resist. "You are no stranger to my uncle's earnest wishes. You know that though we never met, my uncle would have given all he possessed if, through me, he could have claimed you

*For Better, for Worse.*

for his own home. Now that we have met—that you do know me—that I have seen you, and can fully comprehend the admiration, the love you have awakened in my uncle's heart—in all hearts—will you, can you, give me one word of hope, one crumb of comfort, to carry back to them, that, at some future time—any time you like to fix on—after any scrutiny, any patient waiting on my part, you will look favorably on my suit—you will give me your heart?"

He had taken her hand, and was holding it between both his own. His brown eyes were bent on her face, trying to read his fate in it—trying to hope what his anxiety of fears almost forbade.

Margaret disengaged her hand from his, while she tried to collect her thoughts: the sudden shock had almost overpowered her.

"O Mr. Chudleigh!" she exclaimed bitterly, "that I could so unwittingly have misled you!—you, of all people, who, for your uncle's sake, I would have spared this deep mortification! Long ago, after you had been visiting at Deignton, your uncle hinted his wishes, and I hastened then at once to assure him that neither to you, nor any one else, had I a heart to give."

"But you had not seen me—you did not know me; we have met now, and if any thing could win you to reconsider your verdict, there is not a trial you could impose on me I would not joyfully accept, if it only gave me a shadow of hope."

"It may seem cruel and unkind to you now, Mr. Chudleigh, to tell you that there is none, there never can be; but you will learn to thank me for it another day. Our acquaintance has not been very long—therefore the disappointment will not be great; your prepossession for me will wear off. I earnestly hope it will; for I should grieve not to be able to number Mr. Weldon's nephew among my best friends." She moved down to the edge of the water. The boat had disappeared. "Some one has been playing us a trick, I fear," she said, in an uneasy, discontented tone; "they have unmoored the boat: see! there it is, drifting back to the shore."

The awkwardness of their position recalled Horace to his senses.

"This is very provoking for you, Miss Atherton," he said; "as to me, it matters little how long I am kept here; I cannot rejoin the party again to-day." He stood on a tree stump, and waved his hat and shouted. Presently from the other side of the island came the splash of oars, and Guy Vyvian, with little Leigh, whom he was amusing by rowing about, came within hail of where Margaret and Horace stood.

"Halloa, there, Vyvian! just give us a lift, will you?" Horace shouted; "somebody has been playing the fool with my wherry, and Miss Atherton can't get ashore. Can you take us in?"

Guy gave one or two vigorous strokes, and brought up the boat to the spot where Margaret, mortified and angry with herself, with Horace, with Guy even, for discovering them in their awkward predicament, could spring in, and so get released from the dilemma in which she was placed.

"It must have been the swell of those two steamers, and your not having properly secured the rope," Guy said, as Chudleigh ran down to the water's edge and pulled up the bow, so as to make it easy for Margaret to step in.

Margaret sat down in the stern by little Leigh's side.

"You were like Robinson Crusoe, auntie," he said, as he made way for her, "and Mr. Chudleigh was your Man Friday. How glad I am Captain Vyvian and I came by, or else perhaps you would never have come back! Should you have liked to live on that pretty island always with Mr. Chudleigh, auntie?"

Horace colored scarlet; but he took one of the sculls, and a few vigorous strokes brought them to the lawn steps. Margaret's tongue seemed spell-bound; she never opened her lips. Horace stood up to assist her in landing. He took her hand as she rose from her seat.

"God bless you!" he said in a low tone. "I may not see you again."

At this moment the prow of another wherry, with a merry, thoughtless party, came up with a long sweep. It

## *For Better, for Worse.*

bumped violently against them, and almost overset Margaret. She would undoubtedly have fallen, had not Guy's outstretched arms caught her; and, lifting her up, he placed her safely on *terra firma*.

Bewildered on every hand, frightened at her narrow escape, grieved at what had occurred with Horace Chudleigh, Margaret turned to thank them for their care of her; but Guy was already striding off towards the lawn, with little Leigh upon his shoulder, and Horace Chudleigh had entirely disappeared.

As they stood in the drawing room that evening, waiting for dinner to be announced, Barbara said, "I cannot think what has become of Mr. Chudleigh; he was to have taken us to the Opera to-night. Miss Atherton, some one said you and he were seen together on the ait; I hope you did not make a mistake, and leave him behind."

The color rushed into Margaret's face; for she felt that a pair of dark eyes were bent on her, as she replied, as quickly as she could, "Mr. Chudleigh helped to row me back; I have not seen him since, Miss Leigh."

"Well, as your *preux chevalier* has deserted you, perhaps Captain Vyvian will have compassion on you, and take you in to dinner." Barbara said this saucily, as she passed their end of the room to give her arm to Ann Leigh.

Margaret's distress was so visible, that Guy instantly turned round, and going to Lady Redenham, said, "You will not refuse me, I am sure; and as there are so few gentlemen to-night, it would be invidious to choose among so many fair ladies."

Lord Redenham said despatches had been received from Lord Raglan at the Horse Guards; and little else was discussed but the prospects and probabilities of the intended campaign in the Crimea. After dinner, Margaret begged hard to be allowed to remain at home with Ann Leigh; but Ethel, who had set her heart on having her with her, would not listen to it. She sat back in a quiet corner of the box where she could be least seen, scarcely spoke, hardly ever smiled, and at last looked

so wan and pale, that Ethel heartily wished she had not insisted on her coming against her will.

As they were waiting for their carriages, Guy passed her, and offered his arm to her sister.

"Lady Redenham," he said, "I cannot return to Belgrave Square to-night; I must say good by to you here."

"But why? surely this is a very sudden resolve!" Ethel's eyes instinctively turned towards Margaret, who was standing just beside her, where she could hear every word.

"My engagement, if you remember, was until after your fête; I have been so long idle, it is time I went back to my regiment."

"I can't understand it all," Ethel replied—"first one deserts me, then another. Mr. Chudleigh went this afternoon, now you! What does it all mean?"

"I am not responsible for Chudleigh, Lady Redenham; no doubt he has, or ought to have, good reasons for his disappearance. Even yet he may be able to explain them to you. For myself, a soldier must do his duty, cost what it will, and I have no business to shrink from mine. There is a rumor that our regiment is the next to start. If so, I shall contrive to wish you good by before we go." He placed Ethel in the carriage, then held the door while Margaret sprang in after her sister. "Good night, God bless you!" he said hurriedly, and closed the door.

Margaret rushed straight up stairs into her own room; nothing but a violent flood of tears could relieve the agony she had been enduring—those long-pent-up tears she had been battling with so resolutely, in her own strong power of self-mastery.

Yes, now it was all over! The thin, ghostly shadow of a dim, half-expressed hope had faded entirely away, and her own solitary, isolated lot was decided. And for some moments a dark cloud seemed to have closed over her, which no stretch of mental vision could penetrate.

Then came rushing to her memory Horace Chudleigh's most unfortunate

*For Better, for Worse.*

proposal; Mr. Weldon's bitter disappointment. Ralph, too, what would he say, could he only know that she had not only entirely forgiven Guy, but was actually grieving he had not openly made a renewal of his old affection for her?

Having dismissed Valerie, Ethelind, knocking at Margaret's door, and receiving no reply, gently opened it; she was horror-struck at the pale, ghastly face which met hers.

"Maggie! dear Maggie, what on earth can ail you?" Margaret dropped her head on her sister's shoulder.

"Ethel, I must go away," she said at last; "you must let me go back to aunt Sarah."

"We will talk of all that, darling, by and by. Now you must take off your dress, and let me help you into bed; you are ill, and I have been dragging you here, there, and every where, quite forgetting how little able you are to bear such late hours and so much gaiety. Yes, you shall go to aunt Sarah in good time; but now you must go to bed, and to sleep."

Margaret made no resistance. She did just what Ethelind bade her, and then, as she smoothed out her pillow and pressed her lips to her hot forehead, she said, "Now, Maggie, if you would be the happier for telling your troubles, let me hear any thing you will confide to me; I have known sorrow myself, so I can better sympathize in yours."

And, with her face pale as the linen against which it rested, Margaret unburdened the heart-struggles of years to her little sister.

"And this unravels the mystery of my two deserters," Ethelind said; "but never fear, you acted very wisely. The ring you did right to return. As to poor Chudleigh, I really pity him from my heart, because I could have told him his suit would be hopeless; and now he will have lost all chance with Barbara. Barbara is over head and ears in love with him, and would have had him, if she could, long ago; only had she encouraged him, she would have belied her own creed. However, perhaps she will never know what a foolish fellow he has been to fall in love with you, my

darling; and as neither of us will tell her, Horace can use his discretion in enlightening her by and by. As to Guy, I feel too angry with him to attempt any extenuation of his faults; he had no business to remain when he found you here, just to show his own power, and make you miserable. I will write to him to-morrow, and tell him I shall never forgive him."

Margaret sprang up in bed. "O Ethie, as you love me, never mention my name to him. Promise me," she said, her face flushing scarlet; "I would rather die than let him feel now that I have been weak enough still to love him. You will promise me that not to any one—Lord Redenham, Horace, aunt Sarah, least of all Guy—you will ever mention a word of what has passed between us to-night?"

"Not without your leave, Maggie," Ethel answered; "but you must try to sleep: if you are ill to-morrow, it will all be guessed. Already they are beginning to speculate on your wretched looks." And she smoothed her pillow, kissed her again and again, and stole back to her room.

Towards morning, Margaret slept; and if she looked paler than usual, Ethelind had prepared them for it at breakfast, by saying she had resolved her sister should have one quiet day—so much excitement was wearing her to death.

Ethel took Margaret into her morning room. "No one comes here without my leave," she said, "so you won't be disturbed; and when you want something to do, there are those plans of the church at Redenham, with the schools and parsonage, which Ann talks of building, and which she brought here for you to see."

Margaret lay quietly down on the sofa for more than an hour; then she sat up, walked restlessly about the room, examining all its pretty ornaments, smoothed out her heavy braids at the glass, and finally sat down to examine the plans and elevations of Ann's proposed church. She soon grew interested in them; she remembered the spot which had been chosen for their erection.

## *For Better, for Worse.*

Suddenly the door opened; Margaret's back was towards the door, and, supposing it was Ethelind, she did not turn round. A shadow fell on the paper, intercepting the light between her and the sun-blinded window. To her dismay and astonishment, Guy Vyvian was beside her! Startled, and completely taken off her guard, she half rose, then sat down, stammered out something about Ethelind, and seemed altogether so distressed, she quite disconcerted her visitor.

Guy's face was white and rigid. "Lady Redenham knows I am here, Miss Atherton," he said; "she told me I should find you."

Margaret's color returned instantly. "I wished particularly to be alone," she said; "Ethel knew that I did."

"Miss Atherton, I am very sorry I have distressed you by my presence; it shall only be for a few minutes; but now I am here, I do not like to leave you without explaining why I came today at all. This morning I received a summons from the colonel of our regiment. Orders have gone out from the War Office for the — to proceed at once to Constantinople, to join Lord Raglan in the Crimea. We sail in three weeks. Of course there are preparations to make; and I promised Lady Redenham last night I would call and wish her good by before quitting town." He stood leaning against the mantel-shelf, watching Margaret's blanched face, and apparently waiting for her to reply. "My especial mission to you, Miss Atherton, is to ask you, under these circumstances, when the probabilities are we never meet again, whether, after the wretchedness and misery my ungovernable temper caused you, you will not forgive me, at least sufficiently to let us part friends? It cannot injure you to shake hands with me, and it would give me the satisfaction of knowing — of feeling — if I should lose my life in the impending struggle, that I heard my forgiveness from your own lips."

Margaret was startled. She looked up suddenly into his face, and she saw his white, quivering lips, the misty look over his dark eyes, and his extended

hand held out towards her. In a moment her good resolves had vanished. She saw him stretched lifeless on the battle field; she heard the war of the guns. In an agony of distress she exclaimed, perfectly regardless of consequences, "O Guy! Guy! give me back my ring, I entreat you!" and then, recalled to herself by the tones of her own voice — terrified at what she had done, the blood rushing wildly up into her cheeks — she dropped her face down slowly into her hands, in deepest shame at her own involuntary confession.

Guy started — came eagerly forward, close up to her side. "Miss Atherton! Margaret!" He bent down over her. She did not raise her head. "Margaret!" he said again more eagerly — his large hand was laid on hers; then he dropped on his knee beside her, — "Margaret, dear, dear Margaret!" His arm was round her. For one moment their eyes met. His tears were on her face, as, drawing her unresistingly to him, he whispered softly, "O Margaret, my own at last, after so many long years of sorrow and remorse!"

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was a large, low room, decidedly too low to be in good proportion; but it was airy and pleasant looking. The oriel window at the end looked out into a small patch of turf, bordered by shrubs, which to some extent shut out the ivy-colored wall and the roadway running beside it; two smaller windows — modern additions — on the side overlooking a paved court; and beyond it the road in question (the chief thoroughfare leading into the little market town of Farleigh.) By the fire — for, though June, it had been a wet, blustering day — Katie sat, watching impatiently the hands of the little timepiece as they moved slowly round over its white face. Her ear caught the sound of the railway whistle. Then followed the well-known click of the latch-key, and the next minute Ralph's tall figure stood within the bright, cheerful room. A quiet, warm embrace, and then Ralph turned to the comfort-

## *For Better, for Worse.*

able fire. "All right, little wife?" he asked; "all gone on steadily and well?"

"Yes, nothing could be better; Mr. Marsdon said so just now when we came out of chapel."

Katie placed a chair by the tea-table. "Come, eat," she said; "you look as if you had taken nothing since you left us last night."

"It has been a trying errand; but I am very glad I went."

"Poor Mr. Owen!" Katie said — "and his death was so sudden!" — tears were in her eyes.

"Very; but, judging by his arrangements, not so to him."

"Why did the lawyer send for you? why not have waited until the funeral? You will not go again?"

"I think so. Owen has left me executor and residuary legatee. They could do nothing without my orders. I get an ample legacy by his death." Ralph looked very grave and pale as he spoke.

Katie laid her hand on his shoulder. "Two days ago, you said you would be in debt to your dying day. God is kinder to you than you believe."

"Katie, I can't eat," Ralph said, pushing aside his plate; and he sat for a few minutes still and thoughtful. "I shall be out of debt now," he said quietly.

Katie came and sat down beside her husband. "But had he no relations — no kindred?" she asked.

"As far as I can learn, but two, — mere peasants — country laborers, — whom he has well provided for. His doctor, lawyer, and old servants, too, are all handsomely remembered. To his godson, Owen Atherton, he leaves an estate in Hampshire, and 20,000*l.*, to accumulate until he is of age, when he is to take the name of Owen, after his own; and the rest, — 'in consideration of the spiritual comfort and consolation afforded him by the teaching and preaching of the Reverend Ralph Atherton, and the bright sunshine infused into an old and withered heart by his wife's hopeful spirit, — wholly and solely to the Reverend Ralph Atherton aforesaid.'"

Ralph looked into Katie's white face. He drew her gently to him with a solemn soberness, which involuntarily communicated itself to her. "All my life long hitherto," he said, "it has pleased God I should struggle with poverty — an increasing family with increasing wants — which, do as I would, have threatened to overwhelm me. Suddenly the trial is reversed. It will be our duty now to acknowledge the responsibilities of great riches. God grant we may fulfil them, for Christ's sake!"

Katie's hand fell on Ralph's shoulder. There were manly tears in his eyes, and a heavy flood pouring down from hers.

Long they sat silently thanking God, feeling, as many have done before them under the first shock of so great a gift, that the relief from one set of burdens is swallowed up in the magnitude and vastness of another.

When at length Katie went up to inspect her nursery before retiring to bed, Ralph, stretched on the sofa, was startled by a sharp ring at the outer door. Charlotte's voice reached his ears.

"Indeed, sir, neither my master nor mistress is gone to bed; if you will wait a moment I will take in your card."

"Say my business is urgent, or I would not disturb them at this unseasonable hour."

Ralph was sure the voice was familiar to his ear. He half met Charlotte as she came into the room.

"He is such a tall, handsome gentleman, sir; taller even than you."

Ralph smiled; but the smile died out instantly as his eye fell on the name. "It is a mistake," he said sternly. "Not here; not with me. Does he know who lives here? — my name?"

"O yes, sir! he asked for you — for Mr. Atherton — and said he wanted to see you very particularly."

The tall, upright figure, and the dark mustache, and the military cap and cloak, had made a very favorable impression on Charlotte's soft and impressionable fancy.

Ralph became more and more dis-



*For Better, for Worse.*

turbed. "The impudence!" he said, in a half-muttered tone to himself. "Well, I suppose I must see him. Yes; show him in." And standing on the hearth-rug, with lowering brow and unmistakable signs of annoyance on his open face — the hateful card still in his hand — Guy Vyvian was ushered into his presence.

There was no hand extended towards him, no words of welcome to greet him. Ten years ago those two had parted friends. Events had come to pass which had rendered them, one at least, the bitter enemy of the other. Ralph bent his head coldly.

"It is a late hour, Mr. Atherton, to call, but very urgent business has made it imperative on me to lose no time."

The tones of Guy's voice were manly and straightforward. He seemed quite prepared for his host's show of resentment and reserve.

"My regiment is ordered to the Crimea in three weeks. Under any circumstances, I could not have gone out without coming to you, to express my deep contrition and sorrow for past offences, and to ask you, as a Christian and a clergyman, to forgive what I have bitterly repented, and to extend such an act of grace as should have induced you, at least, to shake hands with me, even if we could be no more friends. But now circumstances are changed. She whom I so deeply injured — whom I have never for one moment ceased to love and reverence, — Margaret, — is again my own, and by her desire I have come here to tell you so."

Ralph's eyes shot sparks of fire. "And who says that Margaret has so forgotten what is due to herself — to me — to her family?"

"I say it, Mr. Atherton, on the word and honor of a gentleman, though I see you do not think I deserve the title; and more than that, Margaret herself says it, if you will read this." And Guy held out Margaret's letter, written in her own clear characters, to her brother, who was too bewildered and angered to venture on breaking the seal.

"There has been some over-persua-

sion — some woman's work — some interference somewhere — or Margaret would never have taken such a step without consulting me. Aunt Sarah, with her weakness for patching up quarrels — her 'peace principles,' as she calls them —"

Ralph was working himself up into a fury against his visitor, who stood so provokingly upright and calm, as if, in penance of his past sins, he was determined to bear meekly every galling sting Margaret's brother could hurl at him.

"Any thing that a soldier can hear and be silent, Mr. Atherton," Guy said, in a quiet, firm voice, "I have made up my mind to listen to from you, and any explanation you like to ask for, I feel bound to answer fully and freely; but an insinuation against your sister — against Margaret — I am bound now to resent. You must, I warn you, be careful how you allow her name to be called in question in my presence. If you would only give yourself time to read her letter, you will find that neither Miss Waldron nor any one else had any part in the transaction. It occurred under Lord Redenham's roof, and with the full and free sanction of him and his wife."

"Not content with making a fool of herself for the sake of a girl's love-fancy, Ethelind is now weak enough to entangle Margaret in the same misery," Ralph said bitterly. "Redenham has already come between me and my interests once; I suppose he is trying another tack now to annoy and provoke me."

Guy's patience was well nigh spent. He took up his cap from the table. "Atherton," he said, in a quiet, determined tone, "I have neither time nor inclination to bandy words with you longer. My stay in England is very short, and I have much to do before I leave. We can none of us recall the past; but we can forgive it and forget it. Margaret has done so. This morning — accidentally — her unchanged love for me was suddenly revealed. Mine has never wavered: and with the full consent of Lord and Lady Redenham it is fixed that our marriage takes place on Saturday."

*For Better, for Worse.*

"Impossible!" Ralph broke in. "Surely you must be mad. Margaret must have lost her senses. You tell me you are going with your regiment to the Crimea. Margaret can scarcely be so lost to all sense of propriety as to marry you under such circumstances. Captain Vyvian, tell her from me I protest against it as her nearest relative."

"If any thing could be an argument in my favor, surely it would be the unreasonable violence you have shown in this interview, Atherton. How could I trust your sister to you, after your open avowal of dislike to me? But that is not the question; it only makes it doubly my duty to give her a legal claim to the shelter my name and means will give her during my absence; but as neither life nor death will now change us, and as I have the duties of my profession to attend to, it gives us the right to be together until the vessel sails in which my passage is already taken. It may seem, to those who do not know the secret, somewhat hurried; but it cannot to the friends who know that for the last ten years — ay, from the hour when your father and you, Atherton, first took compassion on the friendless boy sent to England to make his way among strangers — my boyhood's devotion and my manhood's unswerving love have been offered up, without a moment's change, to your sister Margaret."

As Guy ceased speaking, a slight, frail little figure appeared at the half-open door, and Katie came in and stood beside Ralph. "This can be no other than Guy Vyvian. O, I am so glad!" she exclaimed, and frankly holding out her hand. "Captain Vyvian, the only blessing we needed to make our own already full cup overflow, was the assurance that Margaret's love had at last been rewarded, after so much patient suffering as she has borne. If this really has been Lady Redenham's doing, most sincerely do I thank her. I am sure she amply atones for any shortcomings on our own parts, in the happiness she will confer on Margaret."

A bright answering smile played over Guy's face. "For Margaret's sake, Mrs.

Atherton, you must let me thank you for your kind reception of a stranger; to you I shall not fear to trust our cause. Time was when Atherton and Vyvian were names which were seldom heard separately; and though your husband has seemed little inclined to listen to me to-night, I think I may safely leave it to you to win him over to our side. It would be a sad disappointment to Margaret, as well as myself, if you are not present at our wedding. It is Margaret's first request in my behalf; it may be it will be my last."

Guy's voice dropped; a thought would haunt him, in spite of a soldier's love of active duty, that this gleam of brightness, after such a long overcast sky, could but be the foretaste of that future brighter heaven which is in store for all who bravely do their best to overcome evil, and which perhaps even now might be awaiting him.

The trembling lip, and ashy cheek, and moist eye, did more to unlock Ralph's old love than a thousand words. He came up to his old friend; one hand rested on Katie's shoulder, the other was stretched out to Vyvian.

"Guy," he said warmly, "forgive my hasty temper. I frankly own to you that I have hated you with a bitter hatred, which has grieved Margaret, and often made shame burn my own cheeks, when I tried to preach forgiveness to others."

"Vyvian, I cannot join you," Ralph said, when they had talked it all over; and by degrees he found himself insensibly lapsing into his long-forgotten tones of familiarity with his boyhood's friend. "This funeral at Grafton, and the circumstances which make me chief mourner, preclude the possibility of such a thing. Moreover, I could not be a guest at Lord Redenham's. But to convince you that Margaret's interests are my first care — that I fully and freely acknowledge you my brother — I will be with Margaret at Portsmouth when you set sail. She will perhaps want me more than she does now."

## FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

### CHAPTER XXXIX.

● MARGARET wrote herself to Mr. Weldon and to Horace Chudleigh ; to the latter she felt it was due he should learn, through her own hand, how gladly she would have spared him the pain and mortification of the previous day. To Mr. Weldon she wrote as she would have done to a father. That she succeeded in convincing him she had not willingly misled his nephew, was proved by his hearty congratulations by return of post, and the readiness with which he came to town and performed the ceremony.

A quiet, subdued feeling of happiness, like a stream of evening sunshine after a wild, blustering day, had fallen around Margaret. "What the world said," had no fears for her. Guy's acknowledged love for her, and hers for him, had lightened her heart of a load which had been silently gathering over and around it, until, in spite of her well-balanced mind and firm religious principles, it nearly absorbed her in a hopeless gulf of despair. So, while she sat quietly in her room, writing long, loving letters to Grace and Frank, apprising them of the change which a few hours had made in her prospects, and pouring out her full heart to Ralph and Katie, and congratulating them on their sudden acquisition of wealth, she was quite willing to leave every thing to the energetic superintendence of Ethelind, whose little head seemed bent on having every thing connected with the wedding entirely after her own heart.

Under Guy's quiet exterior lurked an undefined dread, which so often comes with the accomplishment of an absorbing, long-coveted desire, a fore-shadowing, as it were, of the uncertain tenure of all earthly happiness. Then,

too, there was the din of war sounding in his ears, and the agony of suspense to which she, who waited patiently at home, must of necessity be subjected. And Margaret, outwardly calm, and pale as the white mist of lace and silk about her, was thanking God from the bottom of her heart that, come what might, she had an undisputed right to the privilege of sharing in the glories she believed him destined to win, or else to make no secret of her sorrow if the brief fortnight before them should prove the limit of sunshine which had so suddenly fallen around her.

Even Barbara was touched and steadied by the solemnity of the service.

"I never could have believed," she said in a changed and subdued voice, as she followed Miss Gwynne into the carriage, "that a wedding could be so affecting. I am sure I could hear my own heart beat, and I thought I should have burst into tears. What a dear old man Mr. Weldon is! no wonder his nephew thinks so much of him. I am determined, if ever I commit myself, I will ask him to come and perform the ceremony for me. By the way," she added, a few minutes afterwards, "what a bore it must be to have to go on Circuit. I'll be bound for it, Mr. Chudleigh would have given his best wig to have played truant, in spite of that handsome retainer he wrote about, if he could only have been here to-day, and had a sight of Miss Atherton in her bridal dress."

If Miss Gwynne had her own private reasons for thinking differently, she was too busy wiping away her tears to attempt to undeceive her volatile companions.

Three weeks after their marriage, Ralph Atherton and his sister stood amidst a dense mass of anxious wives,

## *For Better, for Worse.*

fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, bidding farewell to many a brave fellow who would never return to their loving embrace.

White and rigid as marble, Margaret had given no other outward manifestation of her intense agony. An order was suddenly given to clear the decks. Guy looked round for the boat which was lying at the foot of the companion-ladder. A hundred eyes turned away sorrowfully, that the tall, handsome officer and his young stricken wife might be undisturbed in their sad parting. Guy spoke a few hurried words to Ralph, and before Margaret — scarcely conscious of any thing around her — knew what they were doing, her brother and husband had placed her in the stern.

“Trust in God, Margaret! here, or in heaven, we shall meet again,” Guy whispered, as he strained her convulsively to his bosom, while his tears fell on her white cheek. Then, hurriedly wringing Ralph’s hand, he dashed back into the *mêlée* on deck.

The long, measured sweep of the boatmen’s oars against the rowlocks first roused Margaret to a consciousness that it might be she and her husband would never meet again in this world.

### CHAPTER XL.

It was the summer of 1855. Large preparations for another winter in the Crimea were making. England, with a natural impatience, was wearying and growing angry at the prolonged siege. Ministers were openly abused for not taking more vigorous measures, though each department of the State was strained to the utmost, forwarding every conceivable amount of supplies to the brave troops for another weary winter in the Crimea.

Aunt Sarah, who would seldom open a paper, and never listened to the long articles Margaret read, word for word, from the glowing pen of the *Times* correspondent, had strolled out into her orchard, leaving her niece absorbed in the *Times*; when suddenly the door of the sunny parlor in Acre Lane was

thrown open, and the Earl of Redenham announced. It was his and Margaret’s first meeting since they had parted on her wedding-day. A marked change had come over Philip during the last twelve-month. His pale, sallow face, and careworn, and harassed expression almost startled her, and she would have believed some bad news had prompted this visit, had she not just read in the *Times* newspaper a reformation of the Ministry.

“Mrs. Vyvian,” Philip said, “it is quite refreshing to look at you, you are so bright and sunshiny! As for me, I am perfectly worn out, and heartily glad to be released from the onerous duties which, while they have harassed us all to death, have failed in giving satisfaction any where.”

“It is the fate of great men, Lord Redenham,” Margaret replied, “never to receive justice till their deeds have become the property of the historians. John Bull was never famous for his patience. He can endure with heroic fortitude any amount of active suffering, but this long suspense, this weary waiting and expectation, tries his temper dreadfully.”

“I think of going out to the Crimea in a few days, Mrs. Vyvian,” Philip replied, “that I may see with my own eyes the condition of our troops. I start next week.”

“And Ethel — what becomes of her in your absence? Will she not be very uneasy at your going?”

Philip’s lips grew white and rigid.

“I cannot tell,” he said slowly, “but I think not. Mrs. Vyvian, you have cares enough on you already; it is a shame in me to add a feather’s weight to them. But it was to ask you to look after Ethelind I came here to-day. She would be very angry if she knew of my visit; but if she ever requires help or counsel, I am sure you will not refuse it, and I can fully trust you. From no one else would she submit to receive it. I cannot tell you for how long, — it may be months, years, perhaps forever, — but it is right I should tell you, — *we are separated.*”

Margaret started to her feet.

*For Better, for Worse.*

"Lord Redenham," she exclaimed, "you cannot, you do not mean what you say?"

Philip's face had sunk on his crossed hands, while his fingers nervously grasped the top of his walking-stick.

"It is too true," he said at last, slowly raising his white face. "The world knows nothing of it yet; and by every arrangement in my power I have endeavored to prevent a necessity for its doing so, — but such nevertheless is the fact. My visit to the Crimea is a natural sequence to my resigning office, and for a time it will stop inquiring. But we all know how fast the least breath of scandal flies; and of course, sooner or later, it must come out."

"O Lord Redenham!" Margaret replied, "are you not under some delusion, some great mistake? Ethel has been unsettled and unhappy, I know; but she is neither wilful nor headstrong; and then, too, she is so young, so easily led, so dependent on the love of her friends. Surely, surely, you must have fallen among bad advisers."

"Would to Heaven I dared think so, Mrs. Vyvian; but I cannot. I knew how my visit would grieve you, and yet I could not but come, for if any one can help her, it is yourself. I shall leave her in your care, and if —; but it is of no use attempting to enter into details. To estimate truly the miserable life we have been leading for the last five years, getting gradually from bad to worse, you must have been constantly under our roof."

"But if you had talked to Ethel, reasoned with her, explained, do you not think the cause for your mutual uneasiness would have been removed?"

"Then we must undoubtedly have quarrelled long ago. As it has been, we have lived lives as much apart as if we had never been covered by one roof. There has been no love, no sympathy, no desire to please, no mutual ground on which we could take our stand; and yet, strange to say, it would puzzle either of us, I do believe, to declare what the rupture is about. It has grown up and taken root and spread, until our peace

and comfort are quite gone, and I can see no other method of unravelling this vexed question but by separation."

"But it was not so when I was with you?"

"While you were with us, Mrs. Vyvian, I really began to hope a brighter prospect was opening on us. But it vanished soon after you left. Some trivial spark set her jealousy on fire, — for jealous, I fear, she is, though of whom or what I have no conception, — and since that we have gone on from bad to worse. As to poor little Leigh, he is on the high road to ruin; while, for the life of me, I dare not even mention the name of my little Beatrice, or I bring upon myself a whirlwind of trouble. However," and Lord Redenham's mouth became rigid, "there is an end to it now. I have made all my arrangements. She has unlimited power to draw on my banker; and she has (until my return, at all events) perfect freedom to choose her residence wherever it best suits her. My yacht, too, (for she has grown suddenly into a violent passion for yachting,) is left at her disposal. She is now at Cowes, and I came to you to ask, as a great favor, that you will go there and see her. If any one can help her, Mrs. Vyvian, you are the person; and though we can never be again as we were to each other, still I would most carefully shield her from the very shadow of blame if I could."

Margaret sank down in her seat, half stunned by this disclosure.

"It must have been jealousy of your devotion to politics, Lord Redenham," she said at last. "I heard her say your country absorbed all your energies; that you gave up every thing for politics."

"Perhaps I have; and I have paid dearly for it. The only reward I have received has been unsparing abuse from the press, and the loss of all my domestic peace."

Lord Redenham rose up to go; Margaret rose also.

"In a political point of view, it is sure to come right. History will do you justice, though the country is so sore

*For Better, for Worse.*

now over her disappointment. Perhaps when you are away my poor Ethie will regret her folly. Perhaps you may then both acknowledge that any life is better than one of entire separation and distrust. If it should be so, — if I really find it is some delusion, some phantom of the imagination, — may I not do my best to effect a reconciliation ?”

She looked up anxiously into Philip's face. The muscles round his lips did not relax.

“Mrs. Vyvian, I have unbounded faith in you, or I should not come here with my domestic grievance; a thing, by the way, a man would always, if he could, bury far down out of sight of his best friends. Had there been a single tangible point, I should have hope; but, as far as I can learn, there is none. I have tried to bring her to complain of any one thing, but it is useless. All we can say, then, is,” and a ghastly smile came over his white face, “that we are separated from ‘incompatibility of temper.’ I bring no charges against her, God knows, for I have always had implicit trust in her. I cannot foresee what will be the ultimate conclusion to this unfortunate episode in my life; but, as I said before, I leave it in your hands. Do what you will. I am sure you will act wisely. Only go to her; for she will need both comfort and advice.”

Anxious as Margaret grew about her sister, one unforeseen circumstance after another prevented her quitting Wylminstre before the beginning of September.

Stephens's face brightened as he recognized her.

“I am so glad you are come, Mrs. Vyvian,” he said respectfully; “it will do my lady a world of good to have you with her, for she is a great deal alone, and I don't think she is well.”

The old man spoke as if he suspected something was wrong; but there was no shadow of forwardness or familiarity in his manner. Margaret followed him with a palpitating heart. Ethelind was on a sofa, with a heap of books and newspapers tumbled about her, the Venetian blinds down, her brown hair

pushed off her forehead, and a look of care and anxiety entirely foreign to her unmistakably imprinted in the lines round her eyes and mouth. She started up on hearing Margaret's name, and a bright, deep glow suffused her face for a few moments; but it soon faded away, and though she kissed and fondled Margaret as she used to do, there was a constraint and uneasiness in her manner, which with all her efforts she could not succeed in hiding.

“What can have brought you here, Margaret?” she said. “You are the last person I was thinking of.”

“Aunt Sarah requires sea air,” Margaret replied, “and I wanted to see you. Remember, it is more than twelve months ago we parted. Where is Leigh? he will be grown out of my knowledge in twelve months.”

“Leigh is at Bonchurch,” Ethelind replied, with an attempt at indifference, though her sister could see she was trying to keep back her tears.

“With Miss Leigh, I suppose? Well, it must be good for the children to be together; but it would have been better for you to have had your cousin and Beatrice here.”

“That would not have answered the purpose at all,” Ethelind replied somewhat sharply, as she rose to adjust the Venetian blinds. “Arthur is learning his first lesson in life, poor little man. He is trying to do without a mother's love. It is a hard struggle; but in this world of struggles it is better to be initiated early.”

“Why, Ethie, darling, you are growing sage. One would not think you had endured many of them, and yet you speak as if the experiences of life had been any thing but pleasant to you.”

“That is how it goes. No one believes that I have cares and troubles. They even doubt my right to wish for that which can alone make any thing I have worth having. I did not think, Maggie, you would have judged as the idle, thoughtless world judges. But the Leighs — Barbara, or her mother — have got hold of you, and have told you what a miserable creature I am, so unfit

*For Better, for Worse.*

to have the care of my children, so wilful, so headstrong, so regardless of Philip's comforts!"

"Indeed, I have not seen Mrs. Leigh or Barbara since I parted from you on my wedding-day. I knew Lord Redenham had gone to the Crimea, and that you were here; and wishing to see you, I reached this place to-day."

"I am sick of the place!" Ethelind said. "Why I came at all, I can't think. I fancied I should like yachting; and so I did, when Redcar and a lot of people were here whom I knew; but they are gone, and I shall go too. I told Edwards yesterday to make preparations for going to Redenham the day after to-morrow."

"O, not quite so soon, I hope! I have so looked forward to a quiet visit to you, darling." And Margaret took her little sister's passive hand in hers.

"It is immaterial, if you wish me to remain," Lady Redenham said, in a half-irritable voice, any thing but encouraging. "One place is the same as another. Only remember, I am as stupid and dull as I can be. I see no one. How Stephens admitted you, I can't think, after my strict orders to be refused to every one. I never go out, except in the yacht. So that, really, the prospect you see is not tempting, either to you or your aunt Sarah. The only thing I care for is lying under the awning of the yacht, and listening to the ripple of the waves as they break against the sides of the ship."

Inexpressibly pained at Ethel's careworn expression, and the unnatural coldness in her manner, Margaret bent her steps back to her lodgings.

The bright sun, tempered by a fresh breeze which just rippled the surface of the water, though scarcely enough to destroy the sharp, clear reflections of the bright little yachts, which, with sails half up, were swinging idly at their moorings in the roads, waiting for their owners' orders, was a pretty sight to Margaret, as she stood at their bow-window the next morning. The click of the gate which separated them from the parade made her look up. Ethelind,

who had seen her through the window, was waiting outside to speak to her. How pretty she looked, Margaret thought, as she hastily threw up the window, standing there in her yachting dress, looped up over a bright red petticoat, so as to display the dainty little foot in its black-and-red morocco boots, with high tapering heels; a jacket of light blue cloth, like her petticoat, with bright gilt buttons over the cuffs and pockets, and a dainty little hat, with scarlet-and-white feathers falling in soft curls over the brim on either side, and mixing with the bright brown waves of her glossy, golden hair.

"What lazy people you must be at this end of the parade!" Ethel exclaimed, as her sister leaned out of the window to speak to her. "Captain Cause has been up to me to say the wind is right for a run to the Needles. What say you to going with me? Perhaps aunt Sarah will go too. I will wait here while you go and ask."

But aunt Sarah declined. She was not a good sailor, and moreover was not yet up.

"But you will come, Maggie? You said you would like a toss in the *Gypsy Queen*. Does she not look pretty as she lies there at her moorings?"

"Gladly, if only you will wait until I have had my breakfast," Margaret replied.

"Especially as I cannot at all tell what provision Captain Cause may have made for us on board," Ethel answered. "I shall go on board, then, and make due preparations for your arrival. You must not be long, remember; sailors are impatient people, and this breeze may lull. I shall send the gig for you to the hotel slip in an hour;" and catching up a little long-haired terrier, in which Margaret had in vain tried to distinguish either head or tail, Lady Redenham picked her way daintily down the moist, slippery stones of the hotel slip, and seated herself in the boat of the *Gypsy Queen*, whose four oars were not long in pulling to the yacht.

In less than an hour, Margaret, with the aid of Cause's strong grasp, stood

*For Better, for Worse.*

beside her sister on the deck of the yacht; her moorings were let go, and she started forward like an impatient steed, her white sails catching the fresh breeze which played freely about her canvas; and reclining each on their cushions and easy-chairs, there seemed nothing to do but enjoy the luxury of feeling the invigoration of spirit which comes so strangely on us when breathing a soft westerly gale from the sea.

"If I were you, Ethie, I should almost live on board," Margaret said, after she and Ethelind had made a tour of the yacht, examining all the little contrivances for comfort, and partaking of the good things which Cause's care had provided for their luncheon.

"I do," Ethelind replied languidly; "I come here, as I told you, to escape from callers — people who want to find out more than their neighbors contrive to do. Why," and she colored slightly as she spoke, "while my lord is away in the East, my lady chooses to go her own way, and live out of the world to which every one has believed her wedded."

She shook out her shawls, and rearranged her pillows without waiting for an answer. She turned suddenly to Margaret.

"How is it, Margaret, you never joined Florence Nightingale, and went out to our wounded? I never took up a letter or paper but I expected to see your name among the list."

"It is not my vocation," Margaret replied, "neither was it Guy's wish, much as we both honor those who did do so. Then, too, I had duties at home; my aunt Sarah; the children of Guy's regiment, with a care over the poor soldiers' wives and mothers. I don't think I have been idle; and should any thing happen to Guy, — should he be wounded," and her color faded as she spoke, "of course I shall go at once."

"I wish I had been obliged to go. I think it would have done me good. Not that I have any vocation for it; I never could do a useful thing in my life. Still it would have been an object — something to take one out of one's self."

"You may make work for yourself at home, if you wish it, Ethie, without going to the Crimea."

"Yes, and I am going to try. That is why I had decided on going off to Redenham to-morrow."

"With your children, you must surely be able to find full employment for all your energies," Margaret said.

"Only they are with Ann, you see."

"Because you sent Leigh there, instead of having Beatrice and Ann Leigh with you."

"Perhaps we shall see Leigh. Cause says he thinks we can get round the island if this breeze keeps up, and we shall run in within view of Bonchurch." Her face brightened at the very thought.

Then she talked of Susannah, and listened to Margaret's account of Katie's nursery, where Susannah now reigned as a sort of queen; her love and tenderness exercised as warmly, though perhaps, under Katie's eye, more judiciously, on Ralph's young ones, as it had been years ago on the dean's children. She listened, too, to Margaret's description of Gracie, — so grown, so improved, so developed, so matured in judgment and character by her three years' sojourn with the Aylmers.

"One of the things I cannot understand," Ethelind said, with a grave, earnest face, "is why Grace has never married. Offers I know she has had, because Redcar told me of two or three; but she refused them, he said, on the spot. You have seen her so often since the Aylmers returned, Maggie, you must surely know the reason."

Margaret looked at her sister.

"Did Lord Redcar ever tell you he had been refused?"

"He hinted as much, but I could not believe it. Why should she have refused him? If she knew his worth as well as I do, she would not have done so."

"Grace tells me she has never felt quite sure she really liked Lord Redcar as a girl should do the man she chooses for a husband. I am not sure she does not remember he was once supposed to be one of Miss Leigh's admirers. Besides, as there is a coronet in the way, she



## *For Better, for Worse.*

inclined to distrust her own and even her friends' judgment on so important a decision."

Ethelind's face became very white. "Gracie has witnessed the misery of one hurried marriage. It is right to assure herself the heart offered her is really her own. But Redcar has no relations. If only Philip had been without them, what a different life mine might have been!"

"I believe Mrs. and Miss Leigh are great trials to you," Margaret said, her heart aching for the tears which her little sister was wiping away; "but I think, if you had been braver and asserted your own rights at once, you would have kept them a little more in awe of you. I do not think you could love Mrs. Leigh," she added, cheerfully; "but there is really much to like in Barbara. And if, as I cannot help hoping, she may be Horace Chudleigh's wife, I do believe she will improve, as you tell me Diana has done, out of her mother's influence. As to their cousin Ann, I cannot tell you how highly I think of her. I am only surprised you have not taken her to your heart."

Lady Redenham shook her head.

"Maggie," she said, "you do not know the truth. When first I saw her, I thought I had found in her one who could have made up to me for your loss, and I clung to her as I would have done to an old friend. You can never know how I was deceived!"

Ethelind looked so broken-hearted, Margaret tried to turn the conversation; but the ice was broken, and she would not let it close until Margaret knew all.

"Maggie," she said, "did you ever hear that once, — a long while ago, — before that terrible accident to her brother, Ann Leigh was engaged to Philip?"

"Something you once said made me suspect it. But surely, Ethie, you have nothing to do with any thing that occurred then, provided Philip made it clear to you. He was free to choose when he offered to you."

"But he did not. I learned it accidentally, learned it suddenly, just before Be-

atrice's birth; learned that he had loved her for years, and would have had her, in spite of her affliction, and only married at last to secure an heir to the estates! At first I would not believe it — I could not. But Barbara's cruel innuendoes came back on me; Mrs. Leigh's open dislike to me; Ann's unmistakable love for Philip; her dread of coming to Redenham; her adoption of that child! O Margaret, it is all, all true! I have tried to shut my eyes to it, to be gentle and good, to be meek and submissive; but we drifted farther and farther away from each other. Philip's temper was hot; he spoke sharply, and I replied. I could have torn out my tongue again and again, when it was too late; and Philip would shut up his heart, and get absorbed in politics, and say cold, cutting things which half broke my heart; and he would listen to Ann's slightest suggestion, and wait on her, and look to her for comfort which I ought to have given him, and believe all his mother or Barbara said, until I grew a mere cipher; and then once — it was soon after Leigh's birth — we quarrelled. It was almost our only quarrel, I think; and I know now I said bitter things, which made him very, very angry; and from that time we have lived separate lives. I could not help it then; I would not help it since. And it has ended at last in his leaving me! — leaving me to be the scorn and laughing-stock of the world! Maggie, what can I do? How can it end, but in ruin to us and to our children?"

"My poor little Ethie," Margaret said, "you have had many and bitter trials. That Philip and Ann were once engaged is very probable, and that they still have a warm brotherly and sisterly love and sympathy for each other, I believe; but I must and do acquit Philip of any disloyalty to his wife, though he may not have taken the right method of showing either his love or his power."

"If he had only dealt honestly by me, and told me," Ethie said meekly, "I would not, I could not have blamed

*For Better, for Worse.*

him. I can see as plainly as any one how superior Ann is to me; I can acknowledge how much better she was fitted to be his companion, and the helper and adviser in his political life. But he chose me, he sought me out, he told me he loved me, and I believed him."

"Ethel, this is wrong," Margaret said. "You must not suppose for an instant that Philip is unfaithful to you. You have been placed in a difficult position, and he has not made allowance for your youth and inexperience. The past you must learn to forget, but the future is before you, and it is your duty to retrieve the mistakes you have been led into. Take my advice: begin by having Ann and the children with you; banish all feeling of jealousy toward your cousin; strive earnestly to make yourself what will most please your husband, and resolutely turn away from hard thoughts of him or any thing he may have unguardedly spoken, which only rankle in the heart the more you dwell on them. You will find solace and employment with the children; and in educating and training them, Ann will be a great help to you. Promise me that to-morrow you will drive me over to Bonchurch, and arrange it with your cousin."

Ethelind looked up pitifully into Margaret's face.

"I cannot promise now," she said; "but I will think of it, and tell you by and by."

It was moonlight when they landed under Cause's care; and Margaret left Ethel to Stephens's charge, as she turned into her aunt's house.

Ann Leigh had driven over with the children to see their mother, and, finding she was out, had come down and spent a pleasant day with aunt Sarah. The shy invalid had shaken off her "Leigh coldness and reserve," and had bared her heart to the calm, quiet old Quakeress, whom few would have selected as a confidante and adviser in affairs connected with the heart's affections and disappointments.

They had freely discussed Ethelind's unhappy separation from her husband. And Ann, while she readily acknowledged how great her love had once been for Philip, most fully acquitted him of ever having given her any return. They had been destined for each other from their cradles, there was no doubt; but the love, she well knew, had been only on her side.

The terrible accident which placed Philip in her brother's position bound him in honor to her, while it determined her the more resolutely to break it off. It was long before he would consent to her decision, and longer before he could be made to see the necessity of his marrying, which he felt would close forever the only chance he had of fulfilling a compact which keenly affected his own honor in regard to her, whom he had always loved and admired, though only as a fond brother loves and admires a sister. And Ann told how much she had loved Ethelind from the first moment she had seen her, and how she had tried to guard and shield her from the exclusiveness and pride of her aunt and cousins; how her own affections had centred in little Beatrice, and how much she now feared she had acted injudiciously in taking her away from her mother. She had promised Miss Waldron that if only Ethelind would allow her, she would go to Redenham, at whatever cost, with her and the children, where, devoting themselves to the little ones, they might lead new and better and more useful lives for the future.

The next morning Ethelind, on a low stool at Miss Waldron's side, with her bright wavy hair resting against the old lady's muslin kerchief and drab silk dress, listened as meekly and attentively as a little child to all that Margaret and her aunt urged in regard to her future conduct. And with something like hope gleaming out of her haggard eyes, and all her assumed coldness gone, she was trying to believe them when they assured her Philip's love was not gone past all hope of redemption.

CHAPTER XLI.

ONE morning Margaret was startled by the announcement of "Lord Redcar." She was deep in the perusal of one of Guy's never-failing letters. Margaret had never met Lord Redcar; but it was not a time for ceremony.

"Mrs. Vyvian," he said, "I see you guess the purport of my visit by that letter lying on the table. I too have had one from your husband, and also from the chaplain at Scutari, an old friend of mine. There is no doubt Redenham has been poking about these horrid hospitals, and picked up fever, and though not alarmingly ill, yet, with his mind unhinged from overwork and anxiety, he is less able to bear up against it; and if we could accomplish getting Lady Redenham out there, she would be able to look after him and bring him home. I know there are a hundred difficulties, but I don't believe they are insuperable. Though I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, I ventured to come to you before going to Lady Redenham. My yacht is now on her way to Malta, where I am to join her. What say you to Lady Redenham and yourself starting with me to-morrow to overtake her? We could take Lord Redenham on board at Scutari, and so get free of malaria, and his wife would be there to nurse and care for him. Your husband's note suggests the movement, though he did not know that, by a mere chance, I had not already started for Marseilles."

Margaret looked at the bright, honest eyes of the speaker, and tried to collect her energies, so as first to break it as she best could to Ethel, and then arrange for their sudden and hurried journey.

It is astonishing how much an energetic will can accomplish. Before night-fall, all was arranged! Ann Leigh, with the children, and accompanied by aunt Sarah, were to go to Redenham together for the autumn; while Ethelind and Margaret, with Mrs. Edwards and Stephens as an escort, were to accompany Lord Redcar to Malta, to meet the steam yacht he had freighted with an

endless store of comforts for the sick and wounded in the Crimea.

Until that eventful voyage, Margaret knew nothing of Lord Redcar; but his unwearied care and anxiety for Ethel's comfort, his ready resources in all difficulties, his unflinching good temper, and his honest, straightforward opinions, soon won golden opinions from her, and she really did marvel how Grace had so long withstood his importunities.

"Never mind, Mrs. Vyvian," he said one night, as they sat chatting on the deck of the *Flirt*; "I do not give up all hope. Your sister is worth waiting for, and I mean to win her. I am not easily repulsed when the prize is worth having. I know I have a warm friend in Mrs. Aylmer, and I hope to add you to my number. But I would rather, after all, she should choose me because she loves me, than because her friends recommend me. God grant, if I do get her, I may take warning by Redenham, and not make such a mess of it as he has contrived to do. However, it is all right now with him. When I left him a month ago in the Crimea, he was as wretched as it was possible for a fellow to be; and, but for very shame, would have returned to England, and thrown himself at Lady Redenham's feet, and begged her to forgive his madness."

"Poor Ethie, if only she could believe it!" Margaret replied.

"Never mind, Mrs. Vyvian; she will believe it fast enough when they meet, if, indeed, this horrid fever has not made an end of him. But it is of no use anticipating evils. I always try to see the bright side of every thing. I am sure we never could have been sent into such a bright, beautiful world just to make it dark and gloomy by our own gloomy previsions. If a fellow's conscience is clear, and his faith sound, surely if clouds and storms and this dreadful bloodshed, and the thousand ills that man's passions, rather than God's will, afflict us with, we need not fear the result. It is good for us all to be tried in the furnace occasionally; it proves our metal, and we ring the clearer and shine the brighter afterward. Between our-

## For Better, for Worse.

• selves, you know, much as Redenham loved his wife, he has never, to my mind, done her full justice. The Leigh pride, you know, is proverbial, and their exclusiveness so great, that nothing but some awful lesson like this could make them believe they were mortal. If Redenham is only safe out of his illness, I will stake any thing that from henceforth your sister, Mrs. Vyvian, will 'rule the roast.' ”

But no such bright hope could, or would, raise the cloud of doubt and misgiving from Ethel's sad heart. She took all the blame to herself; her own folly stood out before her perpetually. She looked the mere shadow of herself, as the anchor of the *F'liirt* fell in the clear, deep waters of the Bosphorus, too far gone for even tears of thankfulness, when Lord Redcar returned on board with the intelligence that Redenham was so far recovered as to be quite free of fever, and only suffering from its usual prostrating effects, and longing anxiously for her presence.

How her loving heart bounded as she urged Lord Redcar to land her instantly, and take her to the quiet apartment the good chaplain's care had provided for him at Scutari; and how impatient she felt at the delays which, even at the very door, seemed to beset her! And then how, all in a moment, as it were, her courage failed her, as she turned the handle of the door, and, creeping stealthily into the darkened room, found herself enclosed in two large, loving arms outstretched to welcome her, in an embrace which admitted of no misconception, and which seemed as if it never could again set her free! “ My Ethie, my own darling, my precious wife! ” was all she heard, all she cared to hear then; until, on her trembling knees, she had sunk down beside her husband, and in an agony of tears poured out the full tide of sorrow and repentance, which had so bitterly weighed her down.

The outpouring of those two repentant hearts was only meant for each other; and when, half an hour later, Margaret came in to see the invalid, she felt there was no longer reason to

doubt that, if God spared their lives, a new and brighter era had opened on Lord and Lady Redenham's future existence.

Scarcely had Lord Redenham been removed on board the *F'liirt*, when news came down from the Crimea of that terrible attack on the Redan, and with it the intelligence that Guy Vyvian was amongst those dangerously, though it was hoped not fatally, wounded. How Margaret bore the news, she never afterwards could remember. She only knew how heartily she thanked God she had come out with Ethelind to the Black Sea, and was thus enabled, with the aid of Lord Redcar, to be, within a few hours of the battle, by her husband's sick-bed; while the *F'liirt*, with Ethelind and Lord Redenham on board, proceeded on her voyage to England.

And Guy Vyvian, the strong, stalwart man, wearing, as his men believed, a charmed life, because, amidst the death and carnage of battle, and bloodshed, and famine, in the full vigor of his mental and bodily powers, he had almost defied danger in the fearless discharge of his duty, — ever ready to succor the sick and wounded; always with a firm will, but kind word, to all under his authority, — now, at the end of the battle, with victory ringing in the ears of that heroic army, that he should be stricken, cast a shadow and deep gloom where joy and gladness would otherwise have reigned.

How gratefully Margaret looked back to the events which had contributed to make her Guy's wife, enabling her to nurse and care for him! and when the doctors agreed that he must, if it were possible, be removed to London for the operation which was to extract the deeply-embedded bullet from his hip, (the result of which operation even she, with her hopeful heart, dreaded to anticipate,) with Lord Redcar still with her to aid and assist, they took their passage in one of the many crowded steamers whose ghastly freight told the horrors of battle in all its sickening reality.

Neither Philip nor Ralph, as weeks

## For Better, for Worse.

afterwards they stepped anxiously on board the *Ripon* at Portsmouth in search of Margaret and her husband, could believe their eyes when they fell on the thin, attenuated figure, with deep-sunk eyes and haggard features, extended on a mattress on deck, propped up by cushions, and supported by his pale, care-worn wife.

At sight of those two beloved faces, Margaret's heart leaped for joy. For the first time, hope sprung up in her heart.

Many of Guy's own men were there, to assist in bringing him ashore, — rough, bearded fellows, still showing traces of sickness and wounds, yet emulous who should do most for their beloved leader; and in their unpolished, genuine care for Margaret, whose time and money had been expended in behalf of their wives and children, touching the hearts of all who witnessed that landing.

### CHAPTER XLII.

THE twentieth of August, 1857, was a glorious burst of bright, warm sunshine. Scarcely a fleck of cloud floated in the deep blue sky. The gray walls of Redenham, and the rich foliage of the ancient oaks, were bathed in a glow of brilliant light. In the clear bosom of the Mere the blue sky above, and the shadow of the umbrageous forest around it, were clearly reflected, its surface only ruffled by the occasional darting of trout, or the ripple of the moorhen and her brood among the sedge, or the stately swans who floated so proudly, watching with curious eyes the motley groups congregating round the white marquees which had been pitched on the soft, green turf intervening between the lake and the castle. Flags of all colors decorated the tents; and while the bells from Leigh-Delamere pealed out a welcome, and bands of music were playing, the crowd of gayly-dressed yeomen came flocking in over hill and dale, to celebrate the young Lord Leigh's sixth birthday and the return of peace, by laying the first stone of the new church and rectory house for Leigh Moss,

which Ann Leigh and Lady Redenham were jointly building, "to the glory of God, and as a thank-offering for many mercies."

The large windows of the castle opening on the western terrace were all open, and foremost amongst the group congregated there to watch the dancers, stood the tall, handsome earl, the owner of those broad lands. A few gray hairs sprinkled his dark locks, which had grown thinner over his broad forehead since we last saw him.

First by the side of her husband, then darting off to a group of pretty children congregated on the steps of the terrace leading down to the dancers, then flying back to exchange some exclamation of delight with the invalid lady on the sofa, or to chat for a few minutes to the stately old lady beside Ann Leigh, Ethelind's figure is always conspicuous. The evening breeze is blowing about her bright, golden curls, and waving the soft, silvery folds of her gossamer dress; and though her color is brighter, and her figure rounder and plumper and a little more matronly than when we parted from her, there is a loving depth in her violet eyes, which are resting with their old childish confidence on Philip, as she puts her arm through his, and stands gazing down merrily on a group of dancers just below them.

Close beside the oriel window of the morning room, out on the terrace, Ann Leigh is sitting. She no longer acknowledges herself an invalid, though her pale face proves that this has been a trying day, and is testing rather hardly her newly-acquired strength and activity.

Sitting beside her, frail and delicate, and with a clear, transparent complexion, which causes many an anxious heart, Katy is hushing a tiny baby to sleep on her knees; while she, and Mrs. Leigh, and Ann, and Dr. Harford, are wondering and conjecturing why the morning's mail failed to bring any tidings of the travellers, — Barbara and Horace Chudleigh, — who are now on their wedding-tour among the Swiss mountains. Beyond them, and seated

## *For Better, for Worse.*

on the upper step of the broad stone flight leading down to the crowd, is Mrs. Harford, in her plain silk dress, beside Diana Langton, little less plain, and neat, and Quaker-like than herself, and Susannah, in her grandest array of white muslin, and gold trinkets, and pretty ornaments, amusing and taking care of a bevy of little ones, all eager and anxious to join the gay throng below.

Somewhat nearer to the low stone balustrade is a second group, collected round the sofa on which Guy Vyvian is lying. To judge by the smiles on his face, and the bright, quick flash of his deep-sunk eyes, you would not suspect the weary months of intense suffering which have been his portion since his return from the Crimea.

But Margaret is very hopeful. She has faith in her own nursing and care of her invalid, and more perhaps in the skilful treatment of Dr. Harford, who confidently assures her it is only time and patience and careful watching and nursing which Captain Vyvian needs. As to the doctor himself, he is brim full of spirits, like a young schoolboy just home for the holidays. This is the first time his patients have missed the daily round of his brougham at Wylminstre for many years, but Ethelind would take no denial; so, as he says, "to save appearances," he packed off his wife and children by the train, and then accompanied Guy and Margaret and aunt Sarah in the Vyvians' carriage.

If you look over the balustrade, you will see the pretty, active figure of a fair girl, scarcely so tall, and yet perhaps slightly stouter, than Lady Redenham, and so like her people turn to speak. But those who know them can never be mistaken; there is more self-reliance and decision in Grace than her sister, and though she never can be so perfectly lovely, there is somebody in that crowd who believes her to be infinitely more piquant and charming, and far more determined on obtaining her own way.

"Now, has it not all been a great success?" Grace exclaimed, as, later in

the evening, she came up to them, her face radiant in smiles, and her cheeks flushed with exercise. "I never danced so much in my life. I have scarcely sat down since breakfast."

"There is one thing you have not done, Miss Atherton," Lord Redcar said, as he came and stood beside her. "I have been begging and entreating one small favor the whole day, and you always contrive to put me off, in the most unscrupulous way possible. It really is more than a man can stand, and I appeal to Mrs. Vyvian whether you do not take advantage of your power, and abuse my good nature awfully."

Margaret looked up at the two bright faces as they stood together in the full light of the setting sun — so bright, so handsome, so free from care. She felt sure Grace could not long withstand such honest, open love as her companion offered her.

"There will be no more dancing to-night," Margaret said; "they are all coming this way in a body — going to thank Lord Redenham, I suppose, for their pleasant day."

"And my friend, that handsome young farmer, is to be their spokesman," Grace exclaimed eagerly. "I hope they will come to these steps, that we may hear what he says."

All eyes were now directed to the mass of heads gathered in front of the terrace. Philip, with Ethelind beside him, came to the top step; Margaret, with Redcar's help, placed a seat for Guy, and stood by him; while Mrs. Leigh, and Ann, and Ralph, and Katie, and Diana, and all the other guests, drew close round to listen to the simple, manly words which fell from the lips of the young spokesman, whose superior south-country education had marked him out as the fitting mouthpiece of the party.

The speaker's voice was almost drowned in the vociferous cheers of his comrades; but Margaret's ear caught the sound of Ethelind's name, coupled with a similar compliment to Ann Leigh; and amidst the deafening shouts and the waving of hats and handker-

## *For Better, for Worse.*

chiefs, she could see the flush on her sister's cheek, and the sparkle in her eye, as she and Ann were led forward by Philip to bow their thanks to the crowd.

Poor Ann! this was her first appearance in public for many years. Her lips trembled, and tears fell over her white cheeks; but she went through the ordeal very bravely, and then sat down, out of sight, beside Mrs. Leigh.

In making way for her, Margaret lost the commencement of Philip's reply. There he stood, in his own cool, collected way, addressing the crowd below, thanking them for the honor they had done him, and taking in review his reasons for the policy he had pursued since his public duties had commenced. A pin-fall might have been heard in the stillness of that vast crowd.

"In devoting myself so entirely to politics," he said, "I have hitherto been unable to fulfil properly the duties of a landed proprietor; but henceforth these, I trust, will claim a larger share of my time and attention. Few of us arrive at my time of life without feeling that, with the best and purest intentions, we often fail in fulfilling the duties set before us. Such has, I know to my sorrow, been my experience. But, as it is never too late to mend, I hope this day will bear witness that, in humbly acknowledging my errors, I trust, with God's blessing, to do much better for the future.

"In your kind wishes for Lady Redenham, my mother, and Lord Leigh, you call forth my sincere thanks. There is not a more zealous laborer in your service than Lady Redenham; and, confident alike in her ability as well as desire to serve you, you will always find me ready to follow in her wake.

"As to my boy, I trust when he comes of age he will not only deserve, but meet with as warm a welcome from you all as he has done to-day on his sixth birthday."

Margaret watched with intense interest the varying color on Ethel's tell-tale cheek; she saw a bright smile play round her mouth, while she brushed

away the tears from her eyes. Philip had put his arm round her, and now stood facing the crowd of upturned faces, publicly acknowledging his own failures, and openly, before all the world, according her the love and trust she coveted.

At this moment, Frank, with the light, crisp, curling hair and deep blue eyes of his family, and all the hilarity of a thorough sailor, dashed up the steps, and held a short conference with Grace and Lord Redcar; and the next minute he and Lord Redcar had disappeared down the steps.

Margaret's heart a little misgave her. "Those two mischief-loving people are hardly to be trusted," she said, appealing to Grace; but before her sister could reply, Margaret had to assist Guy on his crutches, to make his acknowledgments for the hearty "three times three" which followed the name of Captain Vyvian, coupled with "the heroes of the Crimean war."

Guy's clear, deep tones rung out in the stillness; and many eyes in that throng of attentive listeners were moist with tears, especially amongst the women, as they traced the ravages of sickness and suffering in his pale, hollow cheeks and thin, shrunken figure.

Before Margaret had succeeded in getting her husband back to his seat, there was a sudden parting of the crowd, and Lord Redcar and Frank Atherton dashed up the steps, bearing on their shoulders the smiling, excited little Lord Leigh.

A low murmur of welcome greeted the little fellow, as, with all the easy grace of a child, he gravely lifted his plumed cap from his curly head, and then bent low in acknowledgment of the compliment.

No wonder Ethel's heart beat as she listened to the murmured admiration he called forth, — his short, crisp, golden hair waving to and fro in the breeze, and his bright eyes flashing and dancing, and the row of little pearly teeth visible between his parted lips, and rosy cheeks, as he looked down from his pinnacle on the vast sea of upturned faces.

*For Better, for Worse.*

Just for a moment he was confused and bewildered by his strange position ; but a word from his uncle Frank prompted him to his work, and, with the color deepening his cheeks, his clear, shrill little voice could be distinctly heard.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I thank you for your kind wishes. I am but a little boy now, but when I grow up to be a man I hope I shall be as clever and good as my papa ; and then I mean to wear a sword, and be a soldier like uncle Guy, and go and fight great battles, just as he did, for my country and the Queen."

Here the bright little face became overcast, and was suddenly bent down to Lord Redcar's, and those near could hear the eager inquiry of —

"Redcar, what am I to say next ? I quite forget."

The next moment, however, the little face rose again, and the sweet, soft, treble notes were heard, only in more tremulous tone —

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you most of all for your good wishes for my dear mamma. She is the very best mamma a little boy ever had. If I grow up to be a man like papa, or a hero like uncle Guy, it will all be owing to my mamma's love and care of me."

Here the shouts of applause and violent clapping of hands again disconcerted the speaker, who, between bashfulness and excitement, was fain once more to drop his little face, and declare in tremulous tones,

"He could not say a word more."

But Frank, bent on fulfilling Grace's mission, and wilfully blind to Ethel's fever of anxiety on one hand, and Leigh's nervousness on the other, encouraged and bribed the child to go on, assuring him he never could be a hero until he had learned to make speeches like a man.

In a desperate effort of resolution, the flushed face was again raised.

"Ladies and gentlemen, uncle Frank says it will be a long time before my grand birthday comes — I can't tell how long ; but when it does, I hope I shall see every one of you here to spend

it with me, as you have done to-day. It is so late now, I cannot say any more to-night, only God bless you all until we meet again !"

And then, bowing to them, and kissing his tiny hand, he slipped down from his pinnacle, and rushed up the steps, and flew into the outstretched arms of his mother.

"Ethie's cup of happiness must be filled to the brim to-night," Margaret said, as she watched Lord Redenham congratulating little Leigh on his "maiden speech ;" while the smiles and tears struggled in his mother's face, as she bent over her boy's curls, and covered him with kisses.

"You must acknowledge, Margaret, it has been a very great success," Grace exclaimed, as she came to Guy's chair. "I know you were half-frightened when my two knights departed on their errand. And I am bound to acknowledge my heart misgave me when Leigh got frightened, and broke down. But really the open way in which Philip first, and now Leigh, have stood forth and acknowledged her position and her power, must, I think, convince Ethie I was no false prophet when I assured her on her wedding-day, with a brave heart she would hold her own against all the pride and prejudice of the Leighs put together."

"And now that your bidding has been so faithfully observed, fair lady, and having had some mean share in bringing your augury to pass, a trusty knight may surely be allowed to claim the guerdon for his services which he humbly trusts you will no longer withhold." And Lord Redcar dropped on his knee before his lady love, and modestly remained there, with his head bent towards the ground.

"The honor of a true knight is not dearer to him than is the word of her who sped him forth on his mission," Grace said, standing demurely and without a smile before the kneeling figure. "Be it known, Sir Knight, a deed well performed in a lady's service merits its own reward ; and therefore, and with all deference to your estate and the



## *For Better, for Worse.*

exalted position you hold, I herewith, as in honor bound, and in presence of these my witnesses, tender you my hand." And so saying, she gravely stepped forward, and placed her little gloveless fingers in his broad palm.

Pressing it between both his own, and springing lightly to his feet, he clasped her eagerly in his arms, and imprinted on either cheek an honest, hearty kiss.

"Now, hang me if that is not the best bit of love-making I have witnessed, off the stage, in the whole course of my short life," Frank exclaimed, in an ecstasy of delight. "And the cool, deliberate, shameless way in which that girl absolutely offers you her love, Redcar, beats all conception."

"And why, may I ask, Master Frank, should I be ashamed?" And Grace, releasing herself from Lord Redcar, though still leaving one hand in his, faced round upon the amused little group collected about Guy's chair to vindicate her womanly pride and dignity before her younger brother. "Have I not declared, over and over again, I would never marry until I was sure, not only that I loved with the hearty, honest love which would carry me safely through all the ups and downs of this very pleasant but perilous world, but until I was assured that he to whom I pledged my troth had proved by his perseverance that he loved my kindred, and was as proud of them as I am myself? How could I tell all this at once? If I have exerted my power while that power was still my own, I call you all to witness, that from this time forth I yield all due submission where submission becomes no less my duty than my own free will and pleasure."

"Well done, my brave, honest little wife," Lord Redcar exclaimed; "I honor and prize your love ten thousand times the more for the proof you have now given me of it. And who cares for what that graceless fellow says? Every body knows a sailor's idea of love, when he thinks it part of his duty to lose his heart to the prettiest girl in every port at which he touches. How should he

know what constancy and true love mean? But hark!" he added; "the band is playing 'God save the Queen;' we must go and do our part in speeding the parting guests, and make known ourselves to Lady Redenham the crowning point of her ever-memorable fête."

"That is an inexpressible comfort," Margaret exclaimed, as she and Guy, assisted by Ralph and Frank, made their way into the castle; "for though I had unbounded confidence in Grace's good sense, I own I did sometimes dread that she would overstep even Redcar's patience."

"O Maggie," Ralph said, "how my father would have rejoiced had he lived to see this day!"

Margaret's eyes were filled with tears; but smiles were still lingering about her mouth, as she gave her arm to Guy to assist him up the hall-steps. Her heart was too full for her to venture on a reply.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

It is full four years since the events occurred which are recorded in the last chapter. The church and schools, whose foundations were that day laid, have risen up in beautiful proportions, gladdening the hearts of the scattered cottagers on the Moss. Ralph often comes down to Leigh Court during the summer with his wife and children, doing more than a curate's work among his old parishioners; while the warmer and more sheltered residence at Owen's Cliff is looked on as their permanent home, until the little Owen shall have come of age to claim it. Pale and delicate as Katie still is, a winter in Italy has very much invigorated her, and Dr. Harford is not without hope that she may yet live to a good old age.

Absorbed in their parish work, Die and her husband care little for the gay life Barbara contrives to lead in town, where Horace Chudleigh's talents have already given him a name and a standing among the leading law officers of the Crown. Mrs. Leigh has no settled home; her time is divided between her children and Anna Leigh, whose winters

### *For Better, for Worse.*

are still passed in her own cottage at Bonchurch, though her own old apartments in the west wing of Redenham are exclusively devoted to her use.

If Ethie has lost her girlish beauty, she has become as strikingly handsome in the full bloom of her well-developed matronhood. Not a shadow of doubt has darkened the horizon of her or Philip's trust since that day's mutual repentance and sorrow at Scutari.

If Grace was long in deciding to accept the love of Lord Redcar, she has never had cause to repent the choice she has made. A merrier or more light-hearted couple never shared the bonds of matrimony. The accepted ways of the world have little attractions for them. In spite of their own young heir, and the tiny little Margaret, the *Flirt*, with its brave little crew, and its independent owner and his lady, and their well-appointed nursery on board, is seen spreading her white sails in every part of the globe where daring English yachts have yet ventured. Lady Redcar thinks the time may come when they will tire of their roving life; but until their little Maggie shall have grown old enough to be brought out, there is little probability of their name appearing as a leader in the gay circles which still hold sway over her sister Ethie.

Aunt Sarah, full of years, beloved and regretted by every one, sleeps in the quiet graveyard surrounding the old Quakers' meeting house at the end of the orchard. Dr. Harford's wife and children now inhabit the old house in Acre Lane; but modern taste and some of the luxuries of this refined age have metamorphosed it, until even Margaret fails to trace the spot where her own bit

of garden was parted off for her use, or the bright, sunny room which is still called by her name.

Guy Vyvian has recovered his lameness, but the fire and vigor of youth have never returned to his frame. With deep regret he heard the sad tidings of the Indian Mutiny, grieving that he could not join the eager throng of brave men who so nobly rescued the living and avenged the atrocities perpetrated on helpless women and children; while Margaret, as her bosom thrilled over the recitals, blushed when she owned secretly, in her inmost heart, a deep-hidden satisfaction that her husband could not yet expose himself to the perils of such a dreadful war.

One twelvemonth they passed with Ralph and Katie on the continent. For three months Margaret was her aunt Sarah's constant nurse; and between Redenham and Owen's Cliff, they never yet have found time for fixing on their own home, though Guy bids her remember, as the wife of the new member for Wylminster, she will be bound to endure as best she can the dust and heat of London, while he does his duty to his constituents, during the pleasant spring and summer. Ever ready to accept the sunshine, Margaret calls to mind a field of usefulness open to all who interest themselves in the welfare of others in that vast, overgrown city, while she remembers her proximity to those dear little nephews and nieces who are insensibly creeping into the folds of her capacious heart, and compensating in a measure for the one only blessing which has been withheld from her in her married life.

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