THE HIDDEN PATH

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Extract from a Letter to "THE TIMES."

"Sir,—I shall be obliged by your making public the following appeal to those who may desire to assist the army in the East:—

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"Your obedient servant,

"H. P. WRIGHT, Principal Chaplain."

"Head-quarters, Crimea, Aug, 7th."

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THE

HIDDEN PATH

By MARION HARLAND,

AUTHOR OF "ALONE."

"The gentle heart, that thinks with pain
It scarce can lowliest tasks fulfil,
And if it dared its life to scan,
Would ask but pathway low and still;—
Often such gentle heart is brought
To act with power beyond its thought—
For God, through ways they have not known,
Will lead his own"

TWELFTH THOUSAND.

LONDON:
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1855.

DEDICATION.

To "The Trio."

More than a year since, with fear and trembling, I launched a lonely barque upon the uncertain sea of public opinion. It may have been a fond superstition which led me to imagine that its voyage would be more prosperous, its chances of making the desired port be increased, if it bore upon the prow the names of two of my home-circle; representatives to me of a group, whose eyes marked my course with affectionate solicitude. The success of that venture has emboldened me to send a second vessel in the same track; and I indulge myself with the fancy—presumptuous it may be—that my triple figure-head will ensure for it like favourable winds and gentle waves.

I remember with what a sinking spirit I wrote—"Readers and judges like yourselves, I may not—do not hope to find." You are, this day, proofs of the welcome falsification of what then sounded to my sad heart like a prophecy; and the tide of joy grows deep and wide, when I regard you, also, as types of a class; as representing the band of friends who have gladdened my way with words of praise and cheer; to whom this volume will come as a keepsake from me; who will read in its pages more than stranger-eyes can discern; love it for the author's sake, and the author the better for her book. If my former work was a heart message, this is trebly a token from my soul to yours—for I seem

to know to whom I speak. And now, as then, I have plunged into no abstruse speculations; or tested the strength of my imagination upon the cloud-capped heights of romance; to seek scenes and characters, I have not diverged from the "common road," beaten hard by the tread of the world's workers, rather than its dreamers. If I assail rooted prejudices, it is in no "strong-minded" spirit of Reform, but through love for the truly Good and Noble; and I do not esteem mine fruitless labour if I can teach Charity to one thoughtless or ignorant censor of his erring brother, or whisper of Hope and Faith to a single crushed heart—perplexed, cast down, despairing under the rough discipline of Life.

MARION HARLAND.

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA.

THE HIDDEN PATH.

CHAPTER I.

The sun hung low in the west at the close of a day of rare beauty, even for flowery May. The air was a tremulous golden haze, in which the sunbeams melted and floated. They wreathed the hill-tops with a halo of glory; rested lovingly upon the verdant meadows and in the depths of the silent woods, came quivering, glancing, sparkling down, looking, through the leafy canopy, like myriads of stars in an emerald sky. The landscape itself was not remarkable, except for the charm lent it by the light and its shadows. It possessed the usual characteristics of an old Virginia country-scene; broad fields of wheat, oats, and corn, interspersed by neglected commons, covered with broom-straw, russet and green, and dotted with clumps of sassafras and persimmon saplings; rambling rail fences, stretching in all directions, at every possible and imaginable angle; now and then, a brown or white farm-house, with its village of stables and cabins—and the never-failing girdle of forest, circling, bounding all. A crooked highway, distinguished from a plantation road by its many ruts, broken causeways, and the fence on either side, wandered over hill and valley, after a fashion which would have impressed a skilful engineer with a fearful idea of the ignorant stupidity of the inhabitants of the region. A dusty carriage—the only moving object in sight—was slowly following its erratic course. The horses were half asleep—the driver quite—but the occupants seemed content to let them take their own speed and time.

There were two passengers—a lady and gentleman. The former was still in the prime of healthy womanhood. She was in reality past thirty; but her smooth, fair brow, and fresh colour, made her appear much younger. She had laid aside her bonnet to enjoy the evening breeze, revealing abundant tresses of chestnut hair, untouched by time or care; and delicately formed features, whose expression was peculiarly sweet and womanly. There was little evidence of intellectual activity or decision of character in their lines, but the earnest, affectionate eyes compensated for the deficiency. She was playing with the tassel of the carriage window, threading its blue fringe with her taper fingers—her lashes sleeping upon the cheek, and a smile of perfect happiness, too full for speech, parting her lips. Not a word was spoken for several miles, for her companion also had food for reverie. He was her senior by a few years, and what most people would have called handsome, the kind of beauty which causes young ladies to exclaim, "the dearest man!" and elderly ones, "what a benevolent coun-

tenance!" that is, he had a comfortable, portly figure, a bland smile, dark eyes, rather sleepy, because veiled by the heavy lids, and a high forehead, the long hair put carefully back, so as not to mar its noble proportions. You would have known the sound of his voice before he opened his mouth; low, with a persuasive cadence—a pleading for attention and sympathy—not because he deserved it, oh no! but an appeal to the goodness within yourself. And as it met your ear, there would have been a sudden bubbling up of what you might have mistaken for the milk of human kindness, and which he certainly would never have insinuated, was gratified self-love.

Slowly and gently, so as not to startle, he laid his hand upon that which was busied with the tassel; but there was a start, and the rich blood swept over the lady's face.

"Agnes."

"Sir," was the low reply.

"Sir!" he repeated, reproachfully; "am I, then, so venerable? Are you afraid of me?"

"Afraid? no!" still blushing, but looking up archly, "but 'sir' seems natural and respectful. What were you about to say?"

"To inquire into the thoughts which have sealed your lips for an hour past."

"Not so long as that. I was thinking of home, and the children, and you."

"And what of home and us?"

"How dearly you will love the little creatures, and how happy I shall be."

"I love them already, for your sake. Do you not believe this?"

"Indeed I do; but I want you to know them. You and Jamie will soon be friends. His lameness has confined him so much to the house, and the society of his sister and myself, that he is more girlish and dependent, in appearance, than Bella. She is shy to strangers, and reserved in the expression of her feelings, even to me; but she has a warm heart, and is the most steady, trusty child of her age I ever saw."

"How old is she?"

"Twelve; and Jamie is eight."

"Is the lameness of which you speak the result of an accident?"

"Of disease; he has never fully recovered the use of his limbs since he had the measles, three years since."

"Perhaps he may outgrow it."

"I hardly dare to hope as much. The limb is shrunken; he does not realize the affliction as yet, but when he grows older, it will be a sad drawback. Bella feels it deeply, young as she is. Her devotion to him is wonderful, but, as I said before, she has strong affections—cold as she seems; and, I cannot but think she is actuated by Christian principles."

"Ah! that is most gratifying," rejoined her companion. "There is nothing so touching and beautiful as early piety."

"Bella makes no parade of her religion, or anything else," said the fond mother. "She dreads notice and questioning. I judge by her actions—her daily walk and conversation."

"Which of the children resembles you?"

"Jamie, it is said. Bella is very much like her father."

"I am afraid I shall be partial to the boy, especially if he has

'His mother's eyes—
For they are all to love and me.'

The history of our attachment is a singular one, beloved."

"Wonderful! this re-union, after years of estrangement, is the most remarkable of all its attendant events," replied the lady, her eyes serious and dreamy. "Little did we anticipate, in our youthful days, that the joint life we contemplated, would be so late beginning."

"It was wisely ordered, no doubt, although we cannot discover the motives of an inscrutable Providence in sundering us," moralized the other. "Let us be thankful that we were not kept apart for ever. Look! is not that 'home'?"

"Yes; how strange that you should have seen it first, and recognised it! Drive faster, Ben."

The whip sensibly quickened their motion. They left the public road, and entered through a gate upon a lane, lined by two rows of aspens, through whose restless leaves the light fell upon the turf.

"These are fine trees," remarked the gentleman, "and carefully kept."

"Yes; Mr. Conway was very proud of them, and always pruned them himself. The plantation was the best in the county while he lived."

The speaker was gazing intently towards the house, and too joyously expectant to note the smile which followed this sentence. In another moment the carriage stopped, and the door was opened by a lad, whom Mrs. Conway hastily greeted, as "Willard," before clasping to her bosom a pale, beautiful boy—"My dear, dear son!"

He had dropped his crutch as he threw his arms about her neck, and his sister restored it before her turn came. There was as much love, but less excitement in her embrace; and with an arm still around her, her mother turned to her escort. "Bella, my daughter, this is a friend of mine,—Mr. Snowden."

He took the shyly-offered fingers, and bent to kiss her, but she evaded him.

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Conway, in a tone of hurt surprise; and Bella submitted to have the soft lips pressed to her cheek. He contented himself with shaking hands with Jamie; and after Willard had been introduced as "Master Monmouth," they repaired to the house. Mrs. Conway had not exaggerated in speaking of her daughter's diffidence. While Jamie, seated in his basket-chair, leaned upon his mother's lap, and answered readily, though not pertly, the queries and observations addressed to him by the stranger, Bella drew a stool quite to the rear of the group, and concealed by a tall chair-back, remained silent and unnoticed. Willard Monmouth was the son of a near neighbour, under whose protection the children had been placed during the three weeks of their parent's absence, and he only lingered to deliver his mother's compliments, and receive acknowledgment of her kindness.

Supper was despatched, and Jamie's bed-time followed close upon it. Mrs. Conway gave him his good-night kiss in the parlour; and when Bella went, as usual, to see that he was comfortable, she found him wakeful and restless.

"Sister," he said, raising his head, his eyes large and wistful, "I don't

believe I can go to sleep without seeing mother once more. Wont you just peep, and if she and Mr. Snowden are not very busy talking, ask her to step here one minute—only a second—to kiss me, and hear my prayer? You know she has been gone so long!"

But the couple, now left to themselves, were talking busily, and Bella's instinct warned her not to intrude. Their backs were towards her, and their voices subdued, but she could see that Mr. Snowden held her mother's hand in both of his; heard the fond—"But, my own Agnes, my happiness is incomplete until you give me a right to call you mine,"—and the breathed remonstrance, of which the only articulate word was "Edgar!" The truth —to her a dreadful revelation—burst upon the poor child. Her mother was to be married! and to a man against whom her soul had arisen in abhorrence at first sight. Jealousy—cruel as the grave—for an instant, was the pervading emotion; then keen and bitter resentment against the loathed usurper, as she remembered her frail, crippled brother, hitherto the darling most cared-for by all the household—cheated out of a coveted caress on this, the very night of her return, by the glozing fondlings of a lover! Was this an earnest of what the future held for him? Shaking with horror and passion, she made her way back to Jamie's room.

"Can't she come?" asked the little fellow, his countenance falling mournfully.

"Not now, Jamie; but I will stay with you."

She lay down by him, put her arm over him, and hid her face among his curls. His sigh cut into her heart, and she replied by a closer embrace.

"Sister," he said, more cheerfully, "perhaps I could go to sleep if you were to tell me a story—a very pretty one."

She swallowed the rising sob. "What shall it be, Jamie?"

He named one, and with surprising composure she began it. Ere its conclusion, he slept so soundly that the long-repressed rush of grief did not disturb him. He smiled in his dream, as the hot rain deluged his hair and neck. But the agony of this great sorrow was not allowed its full course. She arose, smoothed the pillow, bathed her eyes, and went into the adjoining chamber, in which her mother and herself slept. Returning presently, dressed in her night-wrapper, she blew out the candle and mounted into the window-seat, above her brother's bed. Mrs. Conway found her there, on retiring to her room.

"Why, my dear! you will take cold if you sleep there!" she said.

"I am not asleep, mother."

Mrs. Conway stepped back to leave her light in the outer apartment; then came to her daughter's side, and drew her head to her breast.

"Of what is my Bella thinking, here, all in the dark?"

"Oh! of a good many things, ma'am."

"Of nothing in particular? Then shall I give you something to dream about?"

"If you choose," responded the girl, recoiling inwardly from the anticipated confession. Her mother paused, in embarrassment or reflection.

"Have you ever heard me speak of Mr. Snowden, my dear?"

"No, ma'am."

The next question was a hard one. "You like him—do you not?"

"I do not know him yet, mother."

"But you will, very soon. I have something to tell you, dearest, which will surprise and, I hope, please you. First, however, you must know that this gentleman and myself are old, very old friends. When I was about eighteen, we loved each other, and were betrothed. He went to live in another State, and in consequence of some misunderstanding, the engagement was broken off. Believing that I had ceased to care for him, he married, and then—not till then—I promised to become your father's wife. He had been attached to me for years, and although he knew the story of my early love, begged me to bestow some affection upon him. It was not hard to do this, Bella, for he deserved the entire trust of any woman's heart; and I can truly say that I was happy with him. You have seen how I have mourned his loss. Never had a thought of a second marriage crossed my mind until I met Mr. Snowden at your uncle's, a fortnight ago. All my tenderness revived when he told me how cruelly he had been deceived as to my real sentiments. It is a long tale, dear, and I will not tire you with it. He had been persuaded into marriage, while he thought me false; and his wife dying some years since, he has remained single until now. You can guess the rest, Bella."

"Yes, ma'am—you are to marry him—but when?"

"Next month, my daughter, unless you and Jamie object to having a second father. Do you?"

"If you are happy, mother, neither of us will say a word."

"Thank you, love. I was sure this would be your answer."

Another silence.

"Mother, how long is it since father died?"

"Four—nearly five years. Why do you ask?"

"Because I remember him so well. Is this wrong?"

"No, Bella. Think of, and love him as much as you please. He was worthy of it all."

Her manner was solemn and tender; but the memory of the generous devotion which forgave and forgot her earlier preference, and cherished her as the heart's best treasure, through life, and in death, did not stir the depths of hers, as did the thought of her first, and now her latest, love.

The kitchen lights burned long after those in the dwelling of the white family were extinguished. The country negro is a nocturnal animal. Having dozed at the plough handle, and nodded over his hoe all day, it costs him no trouble to borrow largely from the night, to make up the complement of waking hours. On the present occasion, there was some excitement astir. Staid mothers and decrepid elders, who seldom ventured out of their cabins after nightfall, were congregated in the audience-hall—the cooking-room, where presided Aunt Hagar, feared and respected as chief and oracle of the coloured cabal. Ben, the coachman, was principal spokesman. Drowsily as he had sat his box, he had gleaned enough concerning the projected co-partnership to create the ferment working so vigorously in the respectable confederation.

"For my part," he continued, when the outcry of surprise and incredulity had subsided into mutterings and discontented silence, "I am in favour of reviewing these affairs in a philological light. If this marriage is invariable (and circumstances prove this to my understanding), where

lies the wisdom of repelling against what is compelled to be? Here stands the case. Mistis is handsome, and what may be called wealthy. She represses the right to choose a husband—"

"But hur chillen! She aint got no right to give 'em a stepfather what'll break they sperrits, and mistreat 'em," objected an indignant female voice.

"Sure 'nuff!" "No more'n she hasn't!" was assented from various quarters.

"How did you sustain that Mr. Snowden would mistreat them?" interrogated the Socratic orator. "How many years have you been acquainted with the gentleman, Miss Harris? Mistis is just the species of woman to elect such a man for her 'separable companion, is she not, Miss Randolph? I don't mean to be severe, Mrs. Mosby, but I would command a little prudence to some of my perspective friends. It is always insecure to renounce an opinion upon what we are unaware of."

Bella's nurse took up the word. "Mighty fine talking, Mr. Jefferson! Reckon you'll palaver out of the other side of your mouth 'fore your new master's done with you. I see him walking 'bout the porch, when the hands come up from work, to-night. While they was saying 'how d'ye' to Mis', he was a countin' of 'em. I'll bound he can sleep without rockin' this night, he's so sure he done feathered his nest well. As for my young miss, the pretty creetur don't like him no better than I do. I see her flinch, just like a bee had stung her, when he kissed her. I'll 'bey Mis', and take care of my chile, until I die in my tracks, but as for makin' up my mind to like him, you may preach till your he-yar turns grey, and I wont do it. For all his shiny boots and spick-and-span broadcloth, he looks dreadful poor-white-folksy to me."

"Huth up, Catherine Martin, and you, Ben Jefferthon,—if you thpeak another word, I'll take the broomthtick to you," said Aunt Hagar, in her most authoritative lisp. "One thing ith thertain—you're gwine to have another marthter, and it ith jutht ath plain that he aint no more like your bleththed Marth' Henry, whar ith thafe in glory, than a free nigger ith like a white gentleman. I been take a look at him, through the dining-room window, and for all he turned up the white of hith eyeth, when he thaid grathe, and talked like butter wouldn't melt in hith mouth, I know'd he wath a Pharithee. But whar ith the thenthe of talking? Gabble, gabble; quarrelling till doomthday wont mend the matter. I'm a-gwine to 'form my duty ath long ath I can bile a ham, and roll out pie-crutht. Your mithtith ith your mithtith, if she had Nebuchadneththar for her huthband; and 'twill be time enough to thay whether you'll pray to the image of Babel, when you thee 'em thplitting wood for to heat the fiery furnathe."

"Precisely my resentments," chuckled the forgetful Ben.

The old woman punished his disobedience by a rousing cuff. "'Nother time, keep your tharthe 'till you're axed for it," accompanied this reminder. "We all need prayer more'n we ever did afore," she observed, taking a worn Bible from the cupboard.

"None of uth know what ith coming upon uth; but them thweet chillen in the houthe yonder standth more in want of pity and merthy. I'm afraid thith ith a black day for them, and for their ma, too, for that matter. Uncle Jacob, will you conduct the meeting?"

CHAPTER II.

THE wedding took place at the set time; for, besides the children, there was no one who had any right to object. Mrs. Snowden had brothers and sisters, but they were scattered through the Far West, whither her father had emigrated after her union with Mr. Conway, and were too much absorbed in their own pursuits to concern themselves about her. A brother of her first husband, the guardian of Bella and Jamie, resided in the metropolis—an easy-tempered man, who saw no impropriety in a young and pretty woman's marrying whenever and whomsoever she pleased.

Prejudice is hard to eradicate, and mighty in its operations while it remains; and this may help to explain the fact, that, while there was no sign of the domestic tyrant in Mr. Snowden's palpable devotion to his wife, his fatherly bearing towards the children, and his air of indulgent good-humour to the servants—while he was an invaluable acquisition to the neighbourhood church; and his liberal views, as freely stated in conversation and public meetings, joined to his suave manners, made him influential and popular abroad—in face of all these recommendations, Bella drew more and more into herself, and, never talkative, became taciturn to a proverb, resisting his efforts to win her confidence; that Jamie, once so free with him, avoided him if he could do so without attracting his mother's notice, and rarely spoke in his presence; and Aunt Hagar hardly waited until he was out of earshot, after saluting her as he passed the kitchen door, in his morning walk over the plantation—before she ejaculated, with a derisive sniff—"I doeth hate to thee white folkth tho 'theitful!"

"Conway Grove" was very properly deemed a misnomer for the estate, under the new administration, so the proper noun was dropped, and the definite article substituted instead. Mr. Conway had left it in excellent condition, and his successor was too sagacious to incur sneer or censure by innovations. His agricultural policy was, in most respects, the same as that under which the land had thriven heretofore. "He was a better financier than poor Conway," said the surrounding planters—and some of the most shrewd "reckoned that he had Yankee blood in his veins. At any rate, he loved money, and knew how to make it. However, the best of men had their foibles, and this one was comparatively venial." Indoors, there was still less change. He "honoured" the reverence felt for the late proprietor by mistress, children, and servants. "How did Mr. Conway manage these things, my dear? I desire no alteration," was a frequent observation, which led his partner to admire him as a miracle of generosity and consideration. The little ones were often reminded of the virtues of their departed parent, and exhorted not to cease to revere his memory, now that another earthly guardian had been vouchsafed to them. But Bella shrank away from these fulsome harangues to the great parlour —rarely used—to gaze, when her eyes had become inured to the obscurity of the lonely room, upon the portrait of a noble-looking man, with a sweet, feminine mouth, and melancholy eyes—wondering, in her simplicity, if her mother had forgotten him, or whether she had, in truth, loved him. It seemed impossible that the paragon step-father should fill a heart which had once been consecrated as his abiding-place.

We will, with the reader's permission, skip lightly over two years, merely mentioning the main event of the second—the advent of a younger Edgar, whom all agreed in loving.

The July sun was streaming into the open door of the school-house, a small, rude building, situated a mile from "The Grove." A democratic crew studied upon the benches, and wrote at the desks, which their forefathers had occupied for more than one generation back. The overseer's son, clad in homespun, sat beside the eldest hope of his parents' employer; and the "free scholar" borrowed a slate-pencil from her neighbour, the richest heiress for miles around. The "old-field school" system has undeniable evils, but they were imperceptible under the admirable government of the present teacher of the one we are describing. Mr. Barton's only barrier to fame and fortune was his poverty. There were those who, through respect for his talents and love of his amiable qualities, tendered him pecuniary aid; but he disdained to become a beneficiary. He had supported himself through two years of a collegiate course, and was teaching to acquire the means for completing it. He was faithful and conscientious in the discharge of his duty, not to the intellects alone, but to the manners and morals of his pupils. Boys who, at the beginning of the session, resembled the roughest of unlicked cubs, now, tidy and well behaved, were diligently conning the tasks they had vowed never to like. The girls' bonnets hung in a row, against the whitewashed logs, on one side of the room. The row of happy faces beneath was Mr. Barton's especial delight. They gave him less trouble, and repaid his cares with more grateful affection, than the line of masculines opposite. Like all other instructors, he was "partial," but the obnoxious word excited fewer heart-burnings than might have been expected; for the object of his favouritism affected no arrogance — never appeared to suspect that she was thus honoured.

Bella was now nearly fourteen—small for her age—Aunt Hager lamented, "mighty backward in growth,"—and possessed of a natural grace of motion, bashfulness could not destroy. Her habitual expression was demure to gravity; but a word of fun or love would send a bewitching play of roses and smiles over her face, the blushes seeking to hide themselves, as it were, in the dimples. These changes from shade to sunshine, and her eyes, so like her father's, had won for her the reputation of beauty. She was Mr. Barton's best scholar, Willard Monmouth excepted. Willard's active and ambitious turn of mind awakened both the hopes and anxieties of his preceptor. He was a fine youth, with dark curls, and a quick, bright eye. By his side, in marked contrast to the robust "large boys," who filled the rest of the form, was little Jamie Conway. Notwithstanding his desire to oblige Bella, Mr. Barton considered that it would be too bold an infringement of time-established custom, to grant the brother a seat among the girls; and his sister was reconciled to the separation, when saw him nestled under Willard's arm.

The morning was warm, the multiplication-table dry, not half so interesting as the book of fairy tales Uncle James had given him. "Sister and I will finish the 'Forty Thieves' in play-time. What a forgetful man that Cassim must have been, not to recollect such easy words as 'Open Sesame.' And how cunning in his wife to rub the inside of that pot with butter.

Sister would have looked into it—yes, and washed it, too, before she sent it home—*I* know." The ideas swam strugglingly in his brain, and he was fast asleep.

"Geometry class," said Mr. Barton.

Willard smiled, and directed attention to the head which lay upon his shoulder. The teacher was neither dismayed nor angry at this breach of discipline.

"Poor fellow!" he said, compassionately, as Willard stroked back the moist ringlets. "Some of us, who are older, find it hard work to keep our eyes open in this weather. Miss Bella, can you contrive a couch for him?"

"Here is the checque blanket!" said one of the girls, for they all loved and petted the afflicted boy. It was folded and spread in a cool corner; a pillow made of hoods and aprons, and Jamie left to repose.

Even in this peaceful band, there was a rebel spirit—a raw recruit, enlisted the previous week, and who had, up to this time, proved intractable to authority and persuasion. With no lack of natural powers, he was determined to be a dunce. He had been twice remanded to his seat, to learn a lesson Jamie would have mastered in five minutes; and Mr. Barton's askant eye perceived, that instead of looking at his book, he was making hideous grimaces at one of the girls.

"Attend to your task, sir," he ordered, interrupting a recitation. By the time it was fairly under way again, a ball of chewed paper flew across the room, and fell upon Jamie's face.

"William Harris, come to me."

He obeyed in unblushing hardihood.

"Why did you throw that ball?"

"I didn't do it."

"I saw you, sir. I never suffer a falsehood to go unpunished." He pointed to a watch upon the table. "In five minutes, if you do not confess that you have told an untruth, and ask pardon, I will ferule you. I have borne too much from you already."

Every cheek paled, except that of the culprit. When the probation was over, he reiterated his assertion with increased impudence, and received, in dogged silence, the penalty of his fault.

Nobody spent playtime within doors. Mr. Barton boarded at Mr. Monmouth's, which was but a quarter of a mile off; and went home for his luncheon. Jamie awoke in season to resign the "checque blanket" to the devotees of the game. They carried it to a flat rock, in the shadow of the trees, and the clinking of the glossy pellets mingled with exclamations of "Sally is out!" "Eliza's four-twoses!" "I'm in my three-oneses!" and much good-natured laughter. The boys had their marble-rings, and "hop-scot" diagrams; while the whistle and whip-makers drove a thriving business—the current coin of payment from their female companions, being smiles and thanks; from those of their own sex, an apple, a pear, or, perhaps, a top-cord. The Virginia boy is an indifferent trader—the Virginia man seldom a sharper.

"Jamie's reading room," as his mates styled it, was a grassy mound, between the roots of two oaks. It was within sound of the lesson-bell, but the din of other tongues did not reach it. The sun-glints through the

boughs fell upon the book in Bella's hand. Her tones were not loud enough to hush the twitterings of a pair of blue-birds which the children had watched with the interest of proprietors of the forest aviary, from the spring day, when, after noisy and prolonged confabulations, they decided upon the forked twig, as a suitable foundation for their nest—until now, when the fledgelings were able to hop from branch to branch.

The incomparable Morgiana was in the act of pouring the seething death upon the head of the chief of the forty robbers, when a noise, as of some animal, creeping stealthily through the brushwood, arrested the reader.

"It is that bad William Harris," whispered Jamie, peeping under the bushes.

"Be still! perhaps he will not see us," answered his sister, below her breath.

They observed his movements with curious surprise. With his knife and hands he dug a hole in the ground; fitted a chip in the bottom, and chose another for the top, then drew something from his pocket.

"It is Mr. Barton's watch," said Jamie. "He left it on the desk. Oh, sister!"

"Be quiet! we can get it after he is gone," she returned, holding him down.

The thief peered around, to assure himself that he was unseen; deposited the watch in the excavation, and started towards the house. Bella's white bonnet betrayed their vicinity. He retraced his steps.

"What are you all doing?" he asked gruffly.

"We came here to read," said Bella.

Her manner puzzled him; "Did you see me, just now," he questioned.

The inquiry could have been easily evaded; but Bella must speak truth, if she said anything; therefore, he had no reply.

"I say!" he persisted, brutally—stooping down to look under her bonnet. "Have you been watching me? If you can't speak, I'll find out whether this youngster is dumb."

"Let him alone! I will tell you what you want to know. I *did* see you put something into the ground."

"You did! what was it?"

"Mr. Barton's watch!" gazing steadily into his shameless face.

"It wasn't! It was mine."

Bella did not answer.

"It was mine! do you hear?" seizing her arm.

She released herself with a gesture of calm contempt, "I hear!"

"Don't you believe me?"

"No."

"Look here!" said Harris, wheedlingly, showing a knife and a handful of painted marbles. I will give this to Jamie, and all these 'checques' to you, if you wont blab on me. I want to play a little trick on Mr. Barton—for fun, you know."

Bella picked up her book. "Jamie, it is time we were going back to the school-room."

Her scornful repulse of the bribe was exasperating. The angry boy grasped her wrists. "You shan't move a step, unless you promise to hold your tongue!"

Her lips were blanched by the pain, but she would not yield.

"Will you carry the watch back?" she asked.

"No, I wont! I'll teach you to play spy and 'peach.' You had better take a straw, next time, young man!" he sneered, as Jamie struck him with his crutch. Holding Bella with one hand, he clutched the child's throat with the other.

For the first time, Bella screamed—a piercing shriek, which was heard distinctly at the playground. But there was a deliverer nearer at hand. Willard was permitted to visit "the reading-room," at all hours, and was on his way to avail himself of the privilege. Harris encountered him, before he had retreated ten steps, and Willard, although ignorant of the nature of his offence, closed with him, in a violent grapple. The whole school was upon the spot in a minute more, and a rush among the boys testified the direction of their sympathies.

"Stand back!" called out Bella's knight. "I can manage him. Give the coward fair play!"

"If he throws you we will skin him alive!" shouted one of his warmest friends.

Overpowered by this cheering prospect, in the event of his victory, or mastered by the superior force of his opponent, Harris went down, as Mr. Barton appeared upon the battle-field.

Bella had looked upon the contest, compelled by a species of fascination; but when her triumphant champion, his knee upon the breast of his foe, turned his glowing face to her, for the explanation Mr. Barton demanded, she shut her eyes, and leaned, trembling and speechless, against a tree.

Jamie told the story with childish vehemence; and produced the watch in proof thereof. Harris was expelled; Mr. Barton's utmost efforts being required to prevent the boys from punishing him; and the incident was remembered as one of the most thrilling of school-day traditions.

One evening, some weeks later, Mr. and Mrs. Snowden sat together in their chamber. The children had gone to bed; and their mother, her foot upon the rocker of Eddy's cradle, was mending a stocking of Jamie's, plying the needle to the music of a lullaby. Mr. Snowden had just finished the perusal of a letter received by the evening's mail; and while seeming to beat time idly, to his wife's song, was pondering upon some important subject.

"My dear," he commenced, in as honeyed accents as he had wooed her, maid and widow, "I want your advice in a matter, touching which your brother-in-law and myself have had some correspondence."

"A business affair?"

"Why—yes—it may be called such."

"Then I am afraid my head will not be of much use; for as you acknowledge, yourself, it ought not to be trusted with money matters," was the smiling reply.

"But it must try to comprehend this;" patting it. "You should be consulted, as it relates to your daughter."

"To Bella!" She was interested now.

"To Bella. Has it not occurred to you that the education she will get at Barton's, is not likely to qualify her for her proper place in society?"

"Certainly?" with some surprise. "Don't you remember we were

talking of it the other day, and I said it would be a good plan to procure a governess ?"

"A governess ! Excuse me, my dear, but *that* idea is rather absurd," said Mr. Snowden, as gently ridiculing a child's whim. "What well educated woman would bury herself in the country, to teach but one scholar?"

"But there is Jamie"——

He interrupted her in the same tone of indulgent pity. "*You* are forgetting now. You said then, that a boy's school—or one like Barton's, where both sexes are admitted, was best for him—a very sensible remark, by the way, displaying more knowledge of his character, and the world in which he will have to strive, than most people would give you credit for. To return to Bella. I would not wound you, my love, but you are not doing her justice. She has a mind. Distant and cold as she is to me, I have discovered this, and that it is not properly cultivated where she is. You cannot but see that her manners are shamefully neglected. She has nothing of the lady-like ease which distinguishes her mother. Mr. Garnett told me yesterday, that he should never have guessed whose child she was. Perhaps you think my plain-speaking meddlesome. If so, speak, and I am silent."

"O Edgar ! I am sure that you have Bella's good at heart ; that you love her as your own child. How can I regard anything you say or do, as interference ?"

He sighed, and rising, paced the room. "I hope that you may succeed in persuading the dear girl that I have consulted her true interest."

"If she does not see it now, she will, at some future day," answered Mrs. Snowden, in anxious soothing.

"But then her blind attachment to Jamie !" said he. "Ah ! there is trouble in store ! trouble !"

"You are exaggerating the evil, my dear. Bella is not unreasonable. Tell me your plans, and I will do my best to reconcile her to them." The wife was, for the moment, stronger than the mother.

"Spoken like a sensible, true-hearted woman !" was the reply, emphasized by a kiss. "Having settled it with you, that Barton's was no longer a suitable place for one of her age and condition, my next step was to make inquiry of James Conway, as to the female seminaries in Richmond. He spoke disparagingly of them all, and advised me to send her to Philadelphia ?"

"Oh, Edgar !"

"Wait a little, my love ! I was decidedly opposed to this at first ; but then I recollected your invincible dislike to boarding-schools, and as her uncle has not room for her in his family, she must be subjected to the inconveniences and privations which so many others—which you have endured"——

"I cannot consent to that !" said Mrs. Snowden. "Why, we used to sleep three and four in a bed, a dozen in one room, with no fire in winter, and no air in summer ; and the fare was coarse and unwholesome. It would ruin her health !"

"I thought of these things, and replied to her guardian, accordingly, acting as I did, in your name. He answered by bringing forward again the

Philadelphia scheme, and offered to write to a half-brother of his, who resides there."

"Not exactly a half-brother—the son of his father's wife, by a former marriage. They are not related by blood," corrected Mrs. Snowden.

"No? You surprise me! I imagined from the kind terms he employs in speaking of Bella, that she was a near relative. Here is his letter, which James enclosed in his last:—

PHILADELPHIA, *July 22nd*, 18—.

MY DEAR BROTHER,—Yours of 18th ult. rec'd last night. If our little niece is only one half as good as was our poor brother Henry (and you say she resembles him), we shall welcome her with open arms to our home circle. My eldest daughter, as you know, married, and removed to Massachusetts a year ago, and this request of yours appears to my wife and myself to be singularly opportune. Isabel has missed her sister sadly, and is overjoyed at the hope of having a companion of her own age. Our love to sister Agnes, when you write, and say, that in thus confiding her child to our charge, we consider that she has given the strongest proof of her desire to maintain the old family ties of affection.

The school which Isabel attends is esteemed one of the best in the city. The principal, Mrs. Mornay, is a valued personal friend, and we, at least, have no ground of complaint against her tuition and management.

Bella will be treated as one of my own daughters, and I trust will soon like her new home so well as not to pine for Virginia.

With love to your wife and the children, I remain,

Your affectionate brother,

ROBERT OAKLEY.

JAMES CONWAY, Esq., *Richmond*.

Mrs. Snowden did not reply immediately, and her husband affected not to see the drops which trickled upon her work.

"Another consideration, my dear," he pursued, "and one which will have great weight with you, is that your brother James and his wife are irreligious, worldly people, while Mr. Oakley's principles are the same as ours. This must not be overlooked."

"I know it! know and feel the truth of all that you say; but Edgar! it will be a severe trial to send my first-born—my only daughter, so far away! She has never been separated from her brother for a day; has lived always in this quiet country-home! She is so timid, so much afraid of strangers! I will undergo any expense, make any sacrifice, to keep her with me!" exclaimed the mother, bursting into tears.

He had expected, and was prepared for this. "Agnes! my dear wife!" he murmured, "do you suppose that I would have given you this pain, if it had been possible to avert it? If I did not love her, I would lay down my life, sooner than wring a tear from you. This emotion is distrust of me; doubt of my affection and judgment. Do as you see fit, my beloved, but be happy! I promise not to offend again."

"Edgar! you are wrong! all wrong! I trust implicitly in your heart and sense. I am convinced that you have acted wisely; but poor Bella! how she will suffer!"

"Your sensibility misleads you, dearest. She is not a sensitive child, and intercourse with strangers will be the surest means of dissipating her unfortunate bashfulness. Be careful, or you will bring on the evil you dread, by betraying your fears and grief. Strive for composure, and carry out the matter bravely, cheerfully!"

CHAPTER III.

It was a dark, cloudy evening, in the latter part of September, when Bella and uncle James, who had convenient business calling him north, just in time to be her escort, descended from the southern cars, at the Philadelphia Depôt. There was the customary amount of bustle and jostling, and they were ensconced in a comfortable carriage, rolling through what appeared to the country girl an endless, bewildering succession of streets; some dimly, others brightly lighted, but all of which, she thought, would be exactly alike by daylight. Her uncle was kind and thoughtful. If the truth had been told, his pressing errand to the Quaker city, was to see her safely to her future abode. He had not the intellect and foresight of her step-father; but he had a heart, and a warm corner in it, for his dead brother's offspring.

"We shall take Uncle Oakley by surprise," he said, gaily; "I wrote that we would be here to-morrow, thinking that I should have to stop a day in Washington, but some intelligence I heard as I was setting off made this delay unnecessary."

A fresh dread! Perhaps they would be unwelcome. Twice she opened her lips to entreat him to go to a hotel, until they could present themselves as looked-for guests; but her courage expired with the effort, leaving her voiceless.

"Half-past eight. Is it possible?" continued Uncle James, examining his watch by a gas-light. "That accident detained us longer than I thought. How well you bore it, Bella! Why, I, who have been on the cars some half-dozen times when they ran off the track, was more alarmed than you. You are a brave girl."

She "did not mind it all," she said, quietly; and Uncle James, tried in spirit by her silence and apparent indifference, wondered within himself, "what she *did* mind."

She could have told him, had words been granted her; told him, that "old" as her mother was wont to say her head was, the veiled heart was older. Although very young when her father died, she had felt the loss keenly, and had never forgotten the suffering. Her brother's affliction was a constant lesson of patience, self-denial and watchfulness to her. The fibres her nature sent forth towards him were not feeble offshoots, but the healthy growth of the tender plant, and she did "mind" it, when these were pitilessly broken. She seemed yet to feel the frantic clasp of his slender arms about her neck, and the tears he had shed upon her bosom were burning there still. She did "mind" that the mother she had reverenced as a being too pure and good to be the mate of any but an angel in heaven, had wedded a man she could not love or respect, although forced to call him by that angel-father's name. Whenever she saw him, she

thought of a cat, with musical purr and dainty tread. It was irreverent and wicked, but she could not banish the idea. He had never addressed a harsh word to her or her brother;—neither had their mother, until after her second marriage. She had detected and reproved a multitude of faults in each within the last two years, faults which gave her so much annoyance, that the amazed children, in endeavouring to amend them, grew cautious of showing their true characters in her sight, thus producing the effect of an estrangement, unobserved by her, or if noticed, referred to other causes, but felt and understood by them. She had, in obedience to her husband's injunction, concealed the aching at her heart, while communicating to Bella the arrangements of her step-father and her uncle respecting her schooling; and her calmness left an ineffaceable impression upon her daughter's mind. It was, in her eyes, a deliberate, cold-blooded severing of the bonds, which nature and love had knit about them. She did "mind" this, and would remember it to the day of her death. But she uttered not a syllable; only sat back in the darkest corner of the carriage, her teeth chattering with cold and apprehension.

"At last!" ejaculated Mr. Conway, as they drew up at a flight of stone steps, which, with the door at its head, was all Bella saw. "And *I* am not sorry, for one. Come, my dear."

The bell was answered by a half-grown boy, rather ordinary-looking, Bella thought; still she was surprised that her uncle's salutation was a nod, and "the family at home, Dennis?"

"It's the young masters and Miss Isabel that's in," was the rejoinder. He led the way along the lighted hall, to a back room.

"Misther Conway!" he announced, in footman style, throwing open the door. The name produced an evident sensation. A young man who was reading aloud, laid aside his book, and put down, with more care, a little girl some two or three years old, who had occupied his lap; a tall lad hastily closed his writing-desk, but Isabel was first to meet and welcome the travellers.

"Why, Uncle James, we are very glad to see you, and you, too," imprinting a hearty kiss upon Bella's chill mouth. "This is your cousin Maurice, and here is Henry, and Lilly—come, speak to cousin Bella, dear. How cold you must be after travelling this raw night. Stir the fire, brother, while I take off her cloak. What detained you, Uncle?"

And while he was relating the history of the accident, which "came so near being a serious one," Bella had time to observe her cousin namesake. She was about her age, but much taller, with that rare, beautiful nut-brown complexion found in perfection among the gipsies; thick braids of jetty hair wound around a finely-formed head, and a pair of magnificent eyes, which, of themselves, would have made her attractive. She was an uncommon girl, in face and deportment; and Uncle James recognised this fact, by an energetic—"Upon my life, Isabel, you are growing up a splendid woman!"

She laughed as gleefully as a child. "I shall believe your pretty speeches, when you prove your admiration by more frequent visits, Uncle."

"Take this seat, it is warmest;" and Bella was conducted to an arm-chair in the corner. Have you come all the way from Washington to-day?" inquired the same kind voice.

"She essayed to answer, "Yes, sir," but it was a husky whisper.

Her interrogator, whom Isabel had styled "Maurice," and "brother," took the shawls and bonnet from his sister's hand, and bade her, in an undertone, have tea brought in.

"Father and mother are supping with a neighbour," he remarked Mr. Conway. "They did not anticipate this agreeable surprise."

He did not obtrude his attentions upon Bella; but once when she mustered courage to stoop to remove the overshoes, which kept her feet cold instead of warm, he knelt and unlatched them, an office which her benumbed fingers could not have performed, pulled them off, and put them by, without interrupting his colloquy with her uncle. There was a certain likeness between him and his sister, but it was in expression, not feature. Both had the same air of strong, full life—more joyous in her, more of a passionate impulse; more of an even, constant flow in him. He could hardly have been deemed handsome; but there was something very pleasant in his clear, bold profile—in the rapid, smiling glance of his grey eye, and his sonorous voice, which, without being harsh or loud, told of wonderful power of the lungs heaving in his deep chest.

The nurse entered for Lilly. Bella's lip trembled as she approached her for a kiss. Her heart swelled at the thought of Jamie, sobbing himself to sleep for a few nights, then learning to live without her. Maurice may have seen that her hand was arched over her eyes, to conceal their moisture, as well as to ward off the red fire-rays; and he silently placed a screen between her and the grate.

Mr. and Mrs. Oakley returned home early. From them, Bella met the same cordial greeting, and received it with as little outward emotion. They all pitied her embarrassment and home-sickness, but they were not seriously uneasy at a reserve, which would, they doubted not, wear off in a day or two. Their talk was animated and cheerful; even the grave school-boy, Henry, taking a part. Numberless and futile attempts were made to divert and interest her. Her thoughts were ever at home, with her brother, or dwelling with anguish upon the fancied change in her mother's love. Old Mr. Oakley passed his arm about her waist, and smoothed the hair upon her forehead, as they exchanged "good nights."

"You remind me of your father, my daughter," he said, sighing. "Do you remember him?"

An upward motion of the head was all the reply she could make; and with a blessing and a caress, he released her.

Maurice held the door for the girls to pass out, kissed Isabel, and shook hands with Bella. "Good night! you will be refreshed, quite bright, by morning."

But Isabel told her mother in confidence, the next day, that she did not believe her cousin had slept an hour. Lilly shared her sister's bed, and her slumbers were broken. Isabel was awakened several times, by her tossings; and by the glimmer of the taper, could see that Bella's eyes were open, or heard her move wakefully. Mrs. Oakley wisely concluded to leave her to herself, until she should get used to the house and the new faces; so, although she was treated with the utmost kindness, no notice was taken of her dejection. The rain fell all day, and she sat in a low chair by the fire, never raising her eyes, unless addressed by name, sewing

as steadily as though her life depended upon her industry, upon a boy's embroidered collar.

Isabel asked her if she loved to read.

"Sometimes."

"Are you fond of music?"

"Yes."

"Do you play?"

"No."

"Isabel!" said Maurice, who was reading; "look at this." As she bent over, he whispered, "Don't disturb her. She is better left alone."

Night came early; and Maurice, shutting his book, looked towards the mute figure, whose hands were still setting invisible stitches. He had given his forbearance principle a fair trial. Bella started as he laid hold of her work.

"Little cousin, you are spoiling your eyes. Have you such a phrase as 'blind man's holiday,' in your part of the world?"

"No, sir—that is—I never heard it," she replied, confusedly.

"That is what we call this hour of the evening. I think it a foolish saying; but we, who have our sight, may be excused for being idle, when it grows so dark that we cannot labour, except by feeling and faith. Let me fold up this collar. Don't be afraid lest I should bungle about it. It belongs in this corner of your work-box, does it not? Now, your scissors, thimble, and needle-book. We will have no more sewing to-night. I am going away in the morning, and would like to talk to you awhile, so that we shall not be utter strangers when I come back. Would you know me if you met me on the street?"

"Yes, sir."

"When are we to have another visit!" inquired Isabel, seating herself upon his knee.

"In three, perhaps in two weeks. Will you be glad to see me, Bella?"

"Yes, sir,"—then with an effort which showed that his affectionate familiarity was not exercised in vain, she asked, "Are you going far?"

"Only to Princeton, a few hours' ride from Philadelphia."

"He is a student in the Seminary there," said Isabel.

"What is the meaning of that surprised look?" questioned Maurice.

"I did not know you were to be a minister."

"Am I very unclerical?"

Bella compared his laughing eye, lively tones, and youthful face, with the solemn aspects, sepulchral accents, and frosty polls of the Rev. Messrs. Chiles and Berry, who had charge of the churches nearest "The Grove." They often dined with Mr. Snowden; and although of different denominations, preserved the most amicable relations towards each other. Mr. Berry, as their parents' pastor, always noticed the children; patted their heads, made inquiry as to their secular studies and proficiency in the Catechism, sighed over Jamie's infirmity, but said that even St. Paul had a "thorn in the flesh," a figure of speech which Bella was afterwards obliged to explain to the mystified boy. She had early sought and known the gracious Saviour, who had promised to "these little ones" a place in Heaven, as they had upon earth, in His arms. Her consistent, holy life, convinced all who witnessed it of her sincere piety; but Mr. Berry recom-

mended to her mother a postponement of a public profession, "until some brighter manifestation should induce the child to long and insist upon entering the church visible. She displayed great reluctance to converse with him upon the subject, and in all candour, he must say, that he was not satisfied with her experience, as he understood it." The "strong meat" was carved in generous slices for those whose appetites craved it; of the gentle, nourishing "milk for babes," he knew nothing. Bella valued his pulpit-ministrations, and with much of her mother's simple veneration for the clergy, regarded him as a being above the reach of frailty or censure, too high and lifted up, for her to approach. All this rushed through her mind, as she returned, "You are like no preacher that I ever saw."

"Not so good as most of them, I fear; but I am young yet—just twenty. There is some hope that I may improve."

"St. John was no better!" said Isabel, wilfully. "We would not have him changed one whit; would we, Bella?"

Maurice did not expect the truthful monosyllable, which meant so much from her tongue, but it was spoken. "No!"

"You are a pair of unsophisticated children; and Isabel is a vain little simpleton to think of me as she does. It is well that I do not carry into the lecture-room any of the conceit with which she inflates me. I fancy I see Dr. —— frown, and hear the titters of my fellow-theologues."

Bella instantly conceived a very unfavourable opinion of the Rev. Professor's sense, and his class-mates' politeness. To ridicule Maurice was an enormity nothing could palliate.

The twilight's kind veil conduced greatly to their sociability. She listened attentively to his humorous anecdotes, varied by stories of a more serious or pathetic cast; answered with astonishing boldness and verbosity, the numerous appeals made to herself.

Others of the family entered; the gas-burners were ignited, and Bella again retreated into the shade.

Maurice had gained her ear, and, he believed, touched somewhere in the neighbourhood of the heart. He would not alarm her by more open overtures. The siege must be cautiously conducted.

"Remember!" he said, at parting. "You promised to be glad to see me, when I run down this way again. You will be domesticated by that time."

She tried to make his words good. By no means unobservant, she was mindful of, and grateful for the goodness lavished upon her. Especially did she appreciate Isabel's anxiety and Maurice's tact, but she could not tell them so. She grieved secretly at the departure of the latter. Much of the light of the house died out for her with the loss of his smile and inspiriting voice.

"You have never been to a large school, have you?" asked Isabel, as the two, equipped with hoods and satchels, set off on Monday morning.

"Mr. Barton had twenty scholars."

"And Mrs. Mornay a hundred and fifty, last session!"

"Does she teach them all herself?"

"Oh, no! There are several assistants and professors. Father does not like the popular system of female education. He thinks that every

girl should be instructed at home, if possible; so I never went to school a day, until after sister's marriage. I recited to her and brother, and was terribly discomfited when she went to Massachusetts, and he to the Seminary. Father had a serious talk with me before entering me at Mrs. Mornay's. He said that I was old enough to appreciate the importance of a solid education; not the acquisition of flimsy accomplishments, but such knowledge as would make me useful and happy. Brother prepared a schedule of studies, which Mrs. Mornay approved. She is an excellent teacher; never requires us to undertake more branches than we can carry on with ease—doing justice to each. She may be rather stately; but after you know her well, you will discover that she is kindness itself. You must not be afraid of the girls either. Your seat is next to mine; and until you are accustomed to the noise and crowd, you must not let your thoughts wander beyond your neighbour. She will be always ready to help or entertain you. This is the house." And pressing the nerveless fingers, she led her up the stairs.

"Here is Isabel Oakley!" cried twenty voices; and a buzzing swarm clustered about her. She disengaged herself with ready humour and friendly apologies, and conducted Bella into Mrs. Mornay's presence. The great lady was, as Isabel had forewarned her, dignified, but not stern. She seized a moment to "hope that Miss Conway would not be homesick," and to inform her that her "desk adjoined Miss Oakley's."

Bella opened a book mechanically, and propping her forehead with her hands, appeared intent upon its pages. The continually augmenting numbers, their hum and passings to and fro, faded from eye, ear, and thought. She and Jamie, guarded by Willard, rustled the dry leaves which bestrewed the forest path to the old school-house. Each misshapen trunk, each jungle was a familiar friend; the aromatic odour of the chinquapen and hickory, in spring-time, and the nutty fragrance that hung mournfully in the autumn air, were sweeter to their rustic senses than the choicest perfumes of after years. Willard was still Jamie's protector. He had promised not to forsake him, while he himself remained at Mr. Barton's. Were they talking of her now, as they trod the narrow way; or, seated at the brown and whittled desks, trying vainly to study, with sorrowful visions of the absent sister and playmate obscuring slate and book?

Bella made few acquaintances, and no intimate friends; while Isabel was the pride and pet of the school. First in her classes, and foremost in frolic, she kept on the right side of teachers and pupils. The highest place was conceded to her, as her lawful seat, without a pang of envy. Bella worked well. She had a good mind, and was far more studious than her gifted cousin. Her diligence won the esteem and commendation of her instructors. More than once, a note from the principal, couched in the highest terms of approbation, was laid upon her desk, the judicious lady adopting this mode of communication out of respect to the extreme modesty, which was wounded by public praise; and these precious missives were treasured sacredly, but never answered by written or uttered word. She was not unpopular among her mates.

"She was good-natured," they said. "No one had ever seen her angry or worried; she was willing and prompt to help one out of a hard place—and sensible enough—but, oh, dear! so sober!"

"I wonder she does not learn to be wild, living with you, Isabel," said one.

"There is fun in her composition, if I could only provoke it," she replied. "She is a good girl—conscientious and unselfish. Her one failing is in being too steady."

At heart, she knew that this was not all the truth;—that her frank, confiding disposition was at variance with her companion's reticence of thought and feeling. "If she would but love me!" she wrote to her brother. "She is kind; and there is a sweetness in her smile and voice that wins me; yet, although we have occupied the same room for three months, she has never breathed a word which might not be proclaimed upon the housetop—never shed a tear in my presence—never said 'dear Isabel,' or given me a kiss unasked. Is the fault in me or in her, do you think? She acts upon the highest principles, I believe, striving to do her duty to her Master and her fellow-creatures, esteeming her pleasure and convenience as nothing, when opposed to its performance. I wish I could persuade her that love is my due from those I call friends; she would grant it to me then."

Isabel did not read the answer to this letter for many weeks. In the exuberance of health and spirits, she was smitten down by a raging fever. The attack was dangerous from the first; and for a long time the balances of life and death hung so evenly that no one dared advance an opinion as to the result. And now the love, which she complained had not evinced itself in language, found abundant outlet in action. Bella was her unwearied nurse—urging mildly, but steadily, her claim to the office, never resigning it but to her aunt. Isabel was delirious whenever the fever ran high; but there were lucid moments, when weakness deprived her of inclination to move or speak, and no one knew that she was conscious. At such seasons, the tears and caresses she had pined for in health were showered like cooling dew upon her wasted face and hands; and in the still midnight she heard the sighs of her youthful attendant ascending to the Father of the fatherless, for the life of this, her "dearest friend—her sister"—words which, in that hour of death-like prostration, infused a glow of delight into a heart which seemed beating its last. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from us!" was the burden of every petition, and it was heard. The ministering spirit of her sick chamber, the comfort of her convalescence, could not be a stranger in health. Secure of her affection, Isabel was not exacting of protestations. She fell into the habit of colouring her cousin's guarded expressions to suit herself, and interpreting her sentiments and desires to others. This was not perhaps the best training for Bella, since it did not oblige her to overcome her natural diffidence, and made her, in a measure, dependent upon another; but she was happier in consequence of it. At home she was more sprightly.

The "fun" which Isabel had divined was in her "composition," gleamed forth in a keen appreciation of the ridiculous, in an occasional sentence of well-directed satire, always hailed by the family as refreshing; and, to the same partial ears, the low birdie laugh, blended with Isabel's ringing peal, was delicious music.

Thus went by three sessions, with the intermission of vacations,—visits home,—which invariably sent Bella back to Philadelphia with a clouded

spirit; for Jamie was almost as helpless as when she first left him, and more unhappy, with a fretful discontent with his lot, which she could have reasoned away if their daily intercourse had been continued. Her mother was passive as a babe in her husband's well-oiled fingers, and Master Eddy ruled the household—his father included.

The cousins were in their eighteenth year when their school-days were declared at an end; and, instead of returning home immediately, Bella joined a party who proposed to spend the month of August in travelling. It consisted of Isabel and herself, Maurice, and a college-mate, Frank Lyle. Maurice had been settled for a year in one of the most delightful of Pennsylvanian villages, near enough to his native place to render frequent visits practicable. Next to Isabel, he was Bella's favourite in her uncle's household. Exalted though her opinion was of his intellectual endowments and penetration into character and motives, she did not dread him. He had exercised a general supervision over the girls' studies—stimulating or aiding them, as the case required. Bella applied freely to him for the solution of difficulties she did not dare to confess to her regular instructors. His falcon eye pierced through the intricacies of technicalities, or the mist of verbiage, and his lucid explanation made the idea as evident to her. So far from tiring of such calls, he sought opportunities of thus relieving her, and refused thanks for "what had afforded him gratification."

Their excursion comprehended a week's stay with Mrs. Finlay, the married sister, in her beautiful home by the sea; from thence, a trip to Niagara, and the tour of the Lakes; closing the grand collection with the blue Champlain and its more lovely nestling, Lake George. The journey was like a dream of pleasure, in the retrospect. It was accomplished without a casualty or vexation. A more congenial quartette could not have been imagined by any one of those who composed it.

Maurice's bearing towards his sister combined the disinterestedness of the brother with a lover's tenderness. He was proud of her, and justly; for, as a woman, she did not belie the promise of her girlhood. Her bounding step seemed to scorn the level earth, as if suited for steep and lofty crags, and her eyes were full of strange, prophetic light—deep within them burned a fire, which would flash out upon a wondering, worshipping world some day; but they were often dreamy with the foreshadowings of woman's destiny; and between the ripe, pouting lips, lay "Love, all hushed and warm." Frank Lyle and herself were sworn allies. He, like Maurice, treated her as a petted child, humouring her freaks and fancies, whenever it was prudent to extend such indulgence, and checking her fearlessly if her vagaries threatened to run too far. Himself an enthusiast, he listened entranced, as were the others, to her unstudied raptures—the outbursts of a soul which found in "beauty a joy for ever," of an imagination uncurbed by taunt or reproof. In earnest faith she thanked God for youth and friends, and every blessing; exulted in His goodness, as seen in stream, lake, and mountain—in all things lovely and glorious in the earth He had appointed as her home; saw in the stars His ever-burning lamps, in the clouds His chariot—heard His voice in the thunder, the sea and stormy wind fulfilling His word.

CHAPTER IV.

'ISABEL!" said Frank, suddenly.

"What is it?"

"Your eyes are burning holes in the carpet?"

She coloured, as she laughed, at perceiving that her abstraction had attracted Maurice's and Bella's attention also.

"Do you know that you have not spoken since your father and mother left us, half an hour ago?" continued Frank.

"Have I been so unentertaining? My selfishness was not premeditated. My thoughts wandered insensibly beyond my control."

"You may atone for your fault by informing us what was the magnet-subject," said her brother.

"If she can," added Frank.

"No saucy insinuations, sir! My reveries are not always unconnected day-dreams. I was thinking of life—the real, earnest life, upon which we four may now consider ourselves as embarked; a little discontented, I confess, that the most intense light borne by the glow-worm man, cannot penetrate an inch into the darkness before him. Frank, have you never felt an irresistible longing to tear down the veil which hides futurity, to see and grapple with your fate, before the slow wheels of time bring it upon you?"

"Often. It is an instinct of human nature. Some learn to control it, some to overcome it, because it is useless, and, if indulged, leads to sinful anxiety and repinings; but of its hold upon the many, we have proof in the vulgar superstitions of all countries and ages. Astrologers, seers, gipsies, and dreamers have ministered to and fostered this desire. It was once a passion with me; I would have walked barefoot to the further end of the globe to look into the fabled magic mirror."

"Yet you must have known that you could not bear the sight," said Maurice. "There is a celebrated mountain-pass in Switzerland, over which the traveller is conducted blindfold. He would lose his footing with his reason at a glimpse of the abyss beneath him. In like mercy God deals with us, in withholding a premonition of what even the morrow is to bring forth. I, too, have had my seasons of impatient curiosity. Now, if the curtain which concealed the whole panorama of my existence were within reach of my hand, I would dread its uplifting."

"I have been looking through it this evening," said Isabel. "I imaged the course and destiny of each of us."

"Our outer lives will bear a certain degree of resemblance," returned Frank. "If we would have the biographies of men dissimilar, and veritable daguerreotypes of character and conduct, we should have heart-histories. What a book one could make of such material, Maurice! soul-pictures, nothing covered or extenuated, external circumstances only adverted to, as they bias feeling and opinion. How unimportant! how contemptible would appear events whose progress and effects we can discern with our bodily eyes!"

"They are, in reality, of trifling moment, when compared with the

revolutions of the microcosm each one of us carries within his bosom," rejoined his friend.

"Yes," mused Frank. "The inner life of every human being is a poem, a romance—how often a tragedy! I have long since ceased to call any man or woman uninteresting. As in the natural world the most important operations are effected silently, so the history of the most commonplace person you know may be crowded with events of thrilling interest. Do you recollect Lewis Merton?"

"Yes," responded Maurice, "I knew him slightly when we were classmates. Nobody was intimate with him."

"Or cared to be," said Frank. "We sat side by side, at prayers and recitation, for a year, without getting beyond the frigid politeness of the most indifferent of acquaintanceships. His appearance was unprepossessing. Ungainly to awkwardness—with a sallow complexion, straight, light hair, and lack-lustre eyes, he was universally set down as the most homely man in the class. He neither sought, nor exactly avoided his fellows, who, on their part, let him alone as too insignificant to be made the mark even of a jest. He recited in a monotonous drawl, notwithstanding he had a rich-toned voice, if he had cultivated it. His strict adherence to the text-book or lecture was absolutely provoking, his mind seeming ever to grovel upon the same dead level. If I thought of him at all, as his slouching figure crossed my field of vision, it was to despise such a reptile existence, to look down upon him as a butterfly might upon a slimy snail. Yet that man, as I have since learned, toiled with an energy I could have admired but not emulated; endured sufferings which would have driven me to madness or suicide; and achieved victories, to which those of the selfish heroes men magnify into idols were the veriest child's play. He was a diamond in the rough. In another life, the Great Lapidary will see that a soul like his is properly polished and set."

Bella had been interested from the moment Frank pronounced the name of his hero. "Have you any objections to giving us some of the particulars of his history?" she asked. "I have heard of a family of that name, in Virginia."

"His uncle, perhaps. He has one there, in Richmond, I believe. His father was naturally a passionate man—violent and dangerous when heated by wine. The older children married, or exiled themselves from home by other means, until only Lewis and the youngest girl remained with the parents. This boy had always been the scape-goat of the household, the laughing-stock of his brothers and sisters; neglected by his mother—hated by his father. Little Jane was the general favourite, adored by none as by him she treated as a contemptible menial.

She never gave him a look or word of love; but he served her, body and spirit. Mr. Merton came home one day reeling with intoxication, and furious as a tiger; his wife was absent; the poor children had to sustain the brunt of the storm. Lewis would have hidden his sister, but she was a fearless child, and had a temper almost as high as her father's. She boldly opposed him, denying his assertions, defying his threats. He struck at her once, and the cane encountered the shielding form of Lewis. Dashing the stunned boy aside, he felled Jane at a stroke. The mother returned to find one child mourning in helpless woe over the inanimate

form of the other, and her husband fled, no one knew whither. The injury to the brain, it was said, must prove mortal; but she recovered her health of body to live an idiot. The dull plodder, whom we gay sophos dubbed 'dunce' and 'prig,' was, at that time, the support and protector of a sickly parent and the unfortunate sister. Mr. Merton died in Texas two years after his flight, and the noble youth assumed the responsibility everybody else was disposed to shirk."

"Noble! more than noble!" cried Isabel, her eyes brilliant with excitement. "Where is he now?"

"Practising medicine with Dr. Barclay, and doing well."

"Here, in Philadelphia?"

"Yes. Jane is dead; but Mrs. Merton's condition draws heavily upon his time and thoughts. She is quite bed-ridden. He and I are better friends than of old, and it shall not be my fault if we are not bound together by yet stronger links."

"I will renew my acquaintance," said Maurice. "Such a man deserves to hear 'God-speed' from sympathizing hearts. He is a true Life-warrior."

Isabel had drawn nearer to Frank as his story proceeded. She now stood upon the rug, her arms crossed on her breast, her head bent slightly forward—her usual and graceful attitude of thought or attention. "And there are many more," she said. "Some come forth bleeding victors, more fall honourably, with their armour on—the Omniscient eye only marking the conflict. What force lies in the words, 'He suffered in silence!' One could hardly ask a nobler epitaph.

'Oh! fear not, in a world like this,
And thou shalt know, ere long,
Know, how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong.'

"To suffer and be strong," she repeated, dropping her voice as in soliloquy. "To suffer and be strong!"

The most accomplished actress could not have clothed the line with more power and meaning. She walked slowly up and down the room, followed, for a silent minute, by the eyes of brother, friend, and cousin. Maurice resumed the conversation.

"This proud fortitude is one of the thousand reasons why such a book as you propose will never be written, Frank; and it is, perhaps, the most praiseworthy motive for concealment."

"Except the dread of inflicting unnecessary pain upon others," said Bella.

"Thank you; I was about to add that exception. Frank's heart-history, then, would be stigmatized as a most improbable and pernicious romance. True, those works have the largest meed of popularity which copy some phases of nature with most fidelity. A man will forgive much in an author, who lays hold upon the horns of the altar of his heart, pleading for mercy and love, in consideration of their common brotherhood; but who has been, who ever will be, willing to acknowledge the mystery and iniquity of the innermost chamber of his imagery? The stubborn pride of our sex would not allow one of us to make such humiliating display of weakness, inconsistency, and folly—to say nothing of crime—

condemned if it break out in the actions of others, when in his secret self he is conscious of practising the vilest hypocrisy, while thanking God that he is not like this publican."

"Woman is better adapted for the task," said Frank, who was an amateur theorist. "Her life is within herself. She studies every change, shade and variety of the affections, and has, moreover, less cause for reserve."

"Why?" asked Bella, in her quiet tone.

"She is more single-minded," answered Frank; "purer in heart and purpose. Your millennium will precede ours by at least five hundred years."

Isabel was eagerly preparing to controvert this dogma, but Bella proceeded. "I will not dispute a doctrine so agreeable to us—to the determined spinsters, particularly. You have not convinced me that women have 'less reason for reserve' than the sterner sex. If they have fewer frailties, they are such as meet with stinted charity. A girl learns concealment from her cradle."

"My education in that department has been deplorably neglected," said Isabel. "O, Bella, dear! rely upon it, there is something radically wrong in that code of morals or customs, which inculcates the suppression of our sweetest, holiest emotions, and the manufacture of artificial graces in their stead. When my smiles no longer come spontaneously, I will not contort my lips into a deceitful grimace. I do not mean to be sad, if I can help it; but if I am, I will not defraud those who love me of their right to sympathize with my grief, by a meaningless laugh and heartless jest." This speech came back to her in after years, with Bella's and Maurice's replies.

"You have not been tried, dear Isabel."

"I hope circumstances will never put such necessity upon you, sweet sister."

"It is a principle of mine, not to discuss grievances which I cannot reform," interposed Frank. "The iron rule of society shall not bind you in your home, Isabel—so a truce to croaking. I flew off at a tangent from the subject introduced by you. You had been sketching our respective prospects, you said. May we see them? Begin with Bella's."

The merry light returned to the sibyl's eyes. "Hers is a pretty picture, a pleasant southern home, every room reflecting the taste of its mistress; flowers in the windows, a canary hung above them; a choice library; a painting or two, an Indian summer harvest-field, and a moonlight lake—nothing gayer; and a tortoise-shell kitten upon the carpet, beside the work-basket. As evening approaches, a round tea-table occupies the centre of the apartment, white china and a modest show of silver upon it. As the lamp is lighted, enter—wait a year, and I will tell you his name."

Frank answered her mischievous smile. "A fair and probable scene—in perfect keeping with the demure fairy who is to rule it. I cannot imagine you the heroine of a stirring romance, Bella. And yet," he continued, as if forgetful of her presence, "the smoothest by-paths are not always appointed to the lovers of peace and retirement."

"Dare you question my prophecy?" demanded Isabel. "I am not a Cassandra, breathing out danger and ruin. I will have no critical pencil,

making interrogation points upon the margin of my sketches. Hers *shall* be a turfy lane, with flowers spangling the hedge-rows."

"Far be it from me to doubt it," rejoined Frank. "Now for Maurice's horoscope."

"Is it not written in the annals of Mooresville, that he is to live and die among his flock, his first love?" said she. "I could ask for him no more blessed lot than to serve out his time upon earth there. Enticed by no 'louder calls,' too frequently sounded upon the brazen trumpet of ambition, or by the tinkling of golden castanets—disheartened by no whispers of wounded vanity, or the weary flesh, that his 'usefulness is at an end;' let him 'fulfil his course,' and when, like a shock of corn fully ripe, he is gathered unto his fathers, may his honoured grave be watered by the tears of men in their prime, whose infant faces he bedewed with baptismal waters—by matrons, whose marriage vows he administered—by youths and maidens, the precious lambs of his old age. Shall it not be, dear brother?"

He bent to kiss her, with a whisper of love and blessing. The ardour of her affection for him, and her zeal for his high calling, had betrayed her into this outbreak of eloquent feeling—enthusiasm whose contagion none could resist.

Again Maurice recalled her. "And Frank?" he asked.

She eyed her favourite, teasingly. "Frank will travel, see Westminster Abbey, and smoke cigars in the cafés of the Palais Royal, admire Mont Blanc, and kiss St. Peter's toe, and bring back, among other contraband articles, a pair of moustaches, like streaks from Aurora's rosy fingers. Then he will marry some angel, with wasp-like waist and melting eyes, and, cutting foreign dandies, literature, and redundant beard—settle down, the model of hum-drum Benedicts. Now, Frank, I will be generous, and deliver my weapon into your hands—promising not to flinch at a single stroke."

"'There was ink upon her thumb when I kissed her hand,'" chanted he. "You will be a blue, wear purple spectacles, and be perpetually dying in a 'green and yellow melancholy.' It is useless to try it, Isabel; I can laugh as heartily as any one, at your raillery of me. It does me more good sometimes, than graver talk; but I cannot even affect to ridicule you. Yours will not be the common lot of woman. You will be distinguished, courted, great, and happy in your fame——"

"Fire! fire!" rang out, startlingly, from the street. Maurice opened the shutters, and a furious flood of red light poured in. A column of flame was rising through the roof of a tall building, upon the next square.

"Miller's new houses!" exclaimed Frank. "He took me over them yesterday, to admire their splendid finish. Each was already let to tenants, at a high rate. What a loss!"

A turbulent mass blocked up the pavements, dividing and swaying, with boisterous applause, as the engines clattered through their ranks; the clank of the brakes, and the rapid peal of the bells, arose incessantly above the roar of the crowd; jets of water, silvery curves in the lurid air, streamed steadily upon the fiery tongues, licking and curling through roof and windows. The rafters fell in, sending up a cloud of sparks to the zenith; hen was shrieked a hoarse warning, at which the throng receded precipitately. The walls reeled and crashed inwards.

The multitude had dispersed, and but a solitary engine tarried by the smoking ruin, when our friends retired from their look-out. Maurice made but one remark as he shut out the dismal scene—

"Man proposes; God disposes!"

CHAPTER V.

From the spring at the foot of "The Grove" garden, ran a bold stream, twisting and flashing among willows and spicewood trees, singing as softly as a mother murmurs a cradle song, until, with a gurgling laugh, like that of the waking infant, it fell over a sloping ledge of rocks into a basin, dark from its depth, but still clear—where the minnows sported and the silver perch glanced, and the purple dragon-flies circled and chased from winter to winter. Thence it flowed in a calmer current, into which the Sagittarius dipped its shining arrows; and the Love-vine—anomaly to botanist, which lives without root or culture, if cast upon a bosom that it loves, and screened from the sun—covered with a queenly garment of Cloth-of-gold, the wild Touch-me-nots, and other succulent plants which crowded down to the water's edge.

A faintly-worn footpath followed the course of the brook; and along this, on as bright an afternoon as that described in our opening chapter, trod a young man, with eager step and face, impatient, yet happy. He paused at the pool, and looked into it.

"I could almost think those the same 'shiners,' that never would be caught when I fished here in my boyish days. How mischievously they whisk by me, as though they remembered my fruitless attempts upon their liberties! Play on, old friends! I am angling for something better worth the trouble, now."

Lower down the bank, a rude seat had been manufactured of logs and grape-vine. A semi-circular grassplot lay before it, and the wild rose bushes enclosing this, were trimmed into a neat hedge. The sylvan bower was the terminus of the little path; and the youth halted, in disappointment and doubt.

"I surely expected to meet her at the old place! She seldom used to walk further. But find her I will, if I have to travel to the world's end!"

The stream grew broader and deeper, at every few rods taking a smaller rill into its bosom, until it rushed a dark, rapid creek, its steep banks bristling with pines. And here, through a vista of the severe-looking stems, he caught sight of the object of his quest. She was seated upon a stone, imbedded in the brown carpet of the grove, gazing into the water. Her mourning garments, the solitude, her posture of thought or woe, gave her the aspect of something unearthly—the genius of melancholy who inhabited these solemn woods. He approached more slowly and stood behind her, ere she was aware of his coming. A word transformed the sad Dryad into the blushing, agitated girl.

"Bella!"

"Willard!"

Holding her hand still locked in his, he re-seated her and placed himself

at her feet. "I came up from Richmond last night," he said, "reached home about noon. My best of parents opposed no objection to my rambling over to The Grove, the minute dinner was dispatched. Your mother said you had walked out—I did not need to be told in what direction. I have not forgotten former days, although you prophesied that the whirr of business would scare away such memories."

"You look well. How are you getting along? Are you still pleased with your situation?"

"Yes—I suppose I am. I am not making a fortune as fast as I was foolish enough to hope to do; but Mr. Merton shows considerable partiality for me, as my father's son; and was pleased to write to him, assuring him of my capability, etc. What were you musing about when I surprise you, Bella?"

"No matter now. Tell me more of yourself—your prospects."

"My 'prospects!'" A roguish smile shot over his features. "You know them as well, perhaps better, than I do. You certainly have most power to change them."

The flush he expected to see suffused cheek and temples; but it was a burning glow, succeeded by pallor. "I am afraid, Willard, we must not"—her voice failed.

"'Must not' what?" demanded the impetuous youth. "Bella! you cannot mean to play me false, when I have loved you from childhood, through separation, coldness, everything that could shake or discourage affection! Oh, I believed you would never change!"

"I have not changed."

"Then what can part us?"

"Adversity!"

"What do you know of that?"

"Nothing, as yet; but I may soon. You will be surprised at what I am about to tell you," she said, speaking with forced calmness, her eyes still avoiding his. "I do not comprehend it myself."

"I am trying to be patient," he returned, attempting to smile. "Go on! I have a right to hear whatever distresses you, my own Bella."

She went on, in the same tone of strained composure. "You may know that my father, reprobating the laws of our State respecting the widow's portion, bequeathed to mother the plantation and negroes, in fee simple—I think that is the term."

"Yes, I recollect. The possibility of her marrying again probably never occurred to him. He contemplated its reversion to you and Jamie." He forbore to add, that but for this act of unlimited confidence it was currently reported that his relict would never have become Mrs. Snowden.

"The remainder of the property, estimated at twenty thousand dollars, was equally divided between Jamie and myself," pursued Bella. "Up to the time of his death, last winter, Uncle James had entire control of this; and upon the settlement of his affairs, it appears that he died insolvent, and that my portion has been swept away—how, no one knows—but it has gone!"

"Gone?" echoed Willard, in amazement, "and he esteemed an honest man!"

"He was!" interrupted Bella, firmly. "In some things he was weak,

easily guided, and overruled by others. He may have been guilty of errors of judgment, but never of deliberate fraud. A part of the loss can be accounted for. I have been unfortunate (so to speak) with my servants, of whom I had four. The two men were killed by an explosion in the coal-pit where they were hired; one of the women died of fever last summer, and Catherine, a poor, sickly creature, can perform no labour, except of the lightest kind. She was my nurse, and I would not hire her out, if I could. Mr. Snow—, father, offers her a home at The Grove, free of charge."

"Wonderful liberality!" sneered Willard.

"It is," answered she, gravely, "for she is confined to her bed half of the time. My education was expensive. The sums spent upon that show for themselves; still there remained certain city property, which, ten years ago, was said to be worth seven thousand dollars. Finding that it was depreciating in value, Uncle obtained a decree of court to sell it, and re-invest the money. The sale took place, at a sacrifice of two thousand dollars upon the original appraisement—and now comes the mystery! That money cannot be produced. Not a vestige of it is left, nor a scrap of writing to indicate whither it has gone. I have been greatly annoyed by conjectures and speculations about its disappearance. One which distresses me most, because it is the most difficult to disprove, connects the loss with Thomas Conway's departure for South America, a year since. He was a wild, dissipated young man, a sore grief to his father, who seized upon the hope of reformation, held out by his proposal of going to Rio Janeiro, as the agent of a respectable Northern trading-house. He went soon after the sale spoken of, and it is now six months since we had news of his death from the epidemic fever of the climate. The shock nearly unsettled my Uncle's reason. He never held up his head again, but sorrow, not remorse, brought on his end. His character is stainless in my eyes; and I have something else to do than vex myself with useless theories as to how I became penniless."

He had never heard her say so much at a time before. She had uttered it, as under constraint to state the case fully to him, yet absolve her guardian from blame. There was ever a gentle dignity in her manner, even to him, her plighted lover; and now her unimpassioned, almost stern demeanour, actually awed him. He could not, as he wished to do, fold her to his heart, and comfort her by encouraging pictures of the love-cottage he would prepare for her, the release from care their union would purchase, the joy of watching over, and cheering him in his labour. She held him down to the critical discussion of the business before them.

"There is one method by which you may recover a part, if not all," he remarked.

"By suit? I would not load the memory of an innocent man with public disgrace, if I could regain the entire amount. As it is, it would be idle. I have said that the estate is insolvent. My aunt has opened a boarding-house, and barely earns a support for herself and family."

"But," suggested Willard, "when a man accepts the office of guardian, he is required to give securities, as they are styled, who, if he fails in his trust, are responsible."

She interrupted him. "I have heard that too. Besides the exposure

I have referred to, the objections to proceedings against them are, that one is dead—the other bankrupt. No, Willard! there is no alternative. I have learned to look facts in the face. I am thankful that Jamie has a support. I am able to work; and if I had the right, would never touch a cent belonging to him."

"But what will you do?" he inquired, apprehensively.

"The only thing a woman, raised as I have been, can do—teach!" settling her eyes steadfastly upon his countenance.

As she had foreseen, it changed visibly. He was a proud, high-spirited Virginian, cherishing, in full force, the chivalrous punctilios, the prejudices against manual labour and salaried employment for women—prevailing among his class. He had not scrupled, when a reverse of his father's fortune compelled him to abandon his collegiate studies, to accept a situation tendered him by a city merchant; but that a girl, his promised wife, just entering upon the enjoyment of life, and accustomed to every refinement, should occupy a position which he considered as little more elevated than the grade of an upper servant, galled him to the quick. Looking up, he met her glance, and the beam acted like the torch of Ithuriel.

"I cannot bear to think of it!" he said, truly.

"I knew it! From the beginning, I anticipated the effect it would have upon you. I trust I am prepared for even this."

"Bella, my beloved! you do not understand me!" his manliness and affection arousing together; and grasping her hands, he poured forth a torrent of assurance and persuasion.

"There is a way of escape from this living death. Marry me now, dearest! I am poor, but strong in my love for you, and willingness to toil for independence and a home. I would not urge you to desert one of comfort to brave the privations of my humble lot; but the most lowly dwelling, blessed by mutual love, will be sweet compared with a governess' life. No! I cannot endure for you to be the slave of stupid, rude children and their purse-proud parents; borne down by the society you would have adorned, or received into it upon suffrance; slighted by senseless coxcombs and furbelowed misses! It is revolting, Bella!"

Had the prospect no terrors for her—the modest, sensitive creature, who required the perpetual sunshine of affection to develope any confidence in herself—whom nature seemed to have formed like the woodbine, to grow strong only by clinging? Did not her heart pant, in its flutter of fright, for the rest and joys of the home offered by its best-beloved?

She answered decidedly. "The attention and respect of those you describe is not worth having—certainly not, when weighed against my sense of right and your freedom. You cannot support a wife at this stage of your affairs. You must admit this. Do you think so meanly of me as to believe me capable of hanging a clog upon every step of your career? It would be a fatal blow to your advancement."

He combated this but feebly, for he felt its truth; yet he persevered in opposing her resolution. "Your mother has wealth, which should have been yours. Stay with her until you can reconcile it to your conscience to comply with my prayers. Honestly, I do not see that this will involve any compromise of self-respect. You will be making use of what your father designed for you. Jamie needs you. How can you leave him?"

"O, Willard, no more, if you love me!" she intreated, in agony, pressing her hands over her eyes. He saw no tears, but the suffocating sobs threatened convulsions. "If you had seen him this morning," she said, brokenly, "when I told him that I must leave him again! If you dreamed what he has suffered—what he is likely to undergo—you would have spared me this pain. O, my brother! my brother! are we never to have the same home?"

The stifled moan died into silence—stillness, unstirred, save by the unceasing sigh of the pines—like the prolonged expiration of some dying spirit, doomed to give forth its life for ever, and never draw in a new supply.

Bella raised her head. "I have suffered so much lately, that I am weak and nervous. Forgive me for causing you trouble. You cannot shake my purpose. We had best talk no longer upon this point."

"Is this kind, Bella? Am I forbidden a knowledge of and sympathy with your trials? Let the worst come! but a few years will elapse before I claim you; for I shall now work with redoubled zeal. Jamie will live with us—be my other silent partner."

There was a smile-gleam at this playful allusion to her want of loquacity; but the rigid despair returned at his query—

"Does your mother approve of your decision?"

"Entirely. She advises it."

"And Mr. Snowden?"

"Commends my independence, and bids me regard his house as my home, as long as he has one to offer."

Willard noted the unconscious bitterness in this sentence.

"Answer me frankly!" he exclaimed. "If the Grove were still your mother's property, would you hesitate to live there?"

"Not if she desired my company."

"Have you reason to suspect that she does not?" he interrogated, with rising heat.

"She leaves it to my conscience. You have heard its decree," was the reply. "It grows late. Jamie has had a headache all day, and fell asleep just before I came out. I must stay with him as much as possible this week; I enter upon my duties in ten days from this."

"Where is your school?"

"At the house of a Mr. Norwood, in Columbia county."

Mr. and Mrs. Snowden, as was their custom, sat in the piazza at sunset. Edgar, now a handsome boy of four, scampered noisily about the yard, chasing the chickens and ducks to their nightly quarters.

"Did I not see young Monmouth, walking down the Spring-lane, this afternoon?" inquired Mr. Snowden, taking his pipe from his lips.

"He was here—that is, stopped an instant at the door to ask for Bella. She had strolled out, and he went in pursuit of her," replied his wife.

"He will get a clever wife, when he can afford to marry," said the step-father, smiling benevolently. "She is not the milk-and-water character her manner would make one believe her. She has sense and energy, too."

Mrs. Snowden sighed heavily. "I hope she may be satisfied and happy *then!* I wonder what Willard will say to her teaching!"

The answer extinguished the glimmer of hope in her face.

"Unless I am mistaken in the boy, he will not be averse to a portion with his bride, even if she has to earn it. He is not rich enough to be fastidious in these matters. My dear Agnes! why will you look so downcast whenever this topic is introduced? You grieve me, and effect no alteration in Bella's will. If this state of feeling is to continue with you, I, as your husband, the keeper of your peace of mind, will speak to this wilful girl—assert your authority over her, and force her to relinquish this Quixotic purpose."

"No! no!" exclaimed she, deprecatingly. "She is weaned from me—does not prize my affection. If she had informed me of her desire to live away from a home she used to love—said that she found dependence upon her mother irksome—if she had granted me her confidence at the outset, instead of withholding it until everything was settled—even the day of her departure—I could have borne it better. It is this coldness—this alienation that almost kills me. Whatever may be my faults, I do not deserve that my children should be estranged from me!"

The husband glanced at her weeping face, and his own worked with a momentary twinge. Then he stepped off the porch, and catching Eddy in his arms, carried him to his mother, and bade him "say how much he loved her."

"Ten thousand million bushels!" said he, springing to her breast. "Mamma! what makes you cry? Am I naughty?"

Her fast, passionate kisses made reply; and his father, satisfied with the result of his experiment, set him again upon his feet, and let him return to his play.

"You are not comfortless," he resumed. "Your sons adore you; and, after all, the spice of Yankee spirit in Bella, of which this school-keeping scheme is the proof, is very pardonable. She dislikes to apply to you for a ninepence whenever she wants a trinket or ribbon."

"She did not scruple to draw upon her uncle for as much money as she chose," rejoined Mrs. Snowden; "and I never refused her a reasonable request in my life."

"Ah! my love, we old-fashioned country-people cannot enter into the squeamish delicacy of the present generation. But the lovers are coming. No sombre clouds, now, my darling! Do not embitter your daughter's last days at home. It may be mistaken for peevishness."

Mrs. Snowden arose abruptly and entered the house. The smile demanded was impossible just then.

The incrustations left by misunderstandings, many and multiplied, upon the ice-bar, the first chill of which had fallen upon the night of the announcement of the mother's betrothal, had now heaped it mountain-high. Both parent and child were in fault; the latter, in the obstinate reserve—natural in some degree, increased greatly by circumstances—which prevented her taking advantage of her mother's susceptible, affectionate disposition, and setting the truth resolutely in her sight; the former, in her weakness and timidity, in lending a credulous ear to her plausible consort's opinion in all things; in swallowing the sugared poison which racked her with distrust of her flesh and blood, yet deterred her from an open rupture, that might have xposed every thread in the subtly tangled web.

Mr. Snowden had assisted in the examination of the late Mr. Conway's affairs, and upon him devolved the duty of acquainting Bella with her changed fortunes. He was also a sufferer by the deceased, having been one of his endorsers, "but this should not hinder him from sheltering and maintaining his daughter, if she would accept of his protection."

"You may have to live rather more economically than has been your habit, my dear; still, this will be a common misfortune. We shall all fare alike. I take it you will prefer this course to drawing upon your brother for a support. He has no legal right to extend such bounty."

Bella's honest pride was militant and defensive.

"I shall rely upon my own resources, sir. I am able to make a livelihood, and will not be a dependent upon any one, so long as I have this ability. I shall not require your assistance, except in obtaining me a place as teacher in a school or private family. And I must trouble you to make inquiry for this situation without delay."

Her step-father regarded her in pitying admiration. "My child! you have not reflected maturely. Take time, and weigh your determination. Your mother led me to apprehend this conclusion. She was sure your conscience and reason would dictate this step; but, as I argued with her, you unsuspicious, charitable ladies know so little of the evil that is in the world, of the hardships which will beset you in your proposed capacity. You, Bella, are better versed in the usages and prejudices of society than she is, and may hearken to my objections."

"You need not reiterate them, sir. Her approval confirms my intention."

He bit his lip in vexation. "I wish I could learn prudence! I might have had the discretion to be quiet upon that head, after having been cautioned! Rest assured of one thing, my daughter, your mother will second me in any arrangement, any sacrifice, to promote your welfare."

"Thank you, sir!" in a tone he did not understand. "May I ask you to inform her of my design, without stating that I am in possession of her judgment?"

"Cannot you be persuaded——?"

"No, sir!"

In due time Mr. Norwood's proposals were received, and the bargain was concluded. Being in mourning, Bella needed little addition to her wardrobe. It would have been well if there had been more to employ her hands and head; the spirit would have been less acutely wrung. Her mother's variable moods and unaccountable bearing puzzled and pained her. The Tempter was often at her ear. "While she could pay her board, she was tolerated; or, perhaps, her influence over Jamie was offensive to his parent. She had sometimes seen a look which denoted jealousy or uneasiness at some exhibition of their reciprocal fondness; or, it might be the habits she had acquired at school made her companionship unpleasant. But, who had sent her thither?' That Mr. Snowden was one cause of the change, she had the penetration to see; yet, he must have a foundation on which to build. She could not speak of her going; and, if she had had the inclination, the careful avoidance of the subject by her mother was sufficient to glue her lips. Jamie's impulse was to make an instant and vehement appeal, but his sister checked it. Mr. Snowden was the mouth-

piece, and wore a semblance of injured regret. He manifested the most thoughtful solicitude that nothing should be lacking to Bella's comfort and creditable appearance; going so far as to present her with an elegant watch, with "E. & A. S. to their dear Daughter," engraved upon the inside of the case—a gift which Willard protested she should not wear, "it was so essentially Snowdenish!"

Very Snowden he was, as, with his chair tipped back, his well-strapped black gaiters upon the piazza railing, he blew the smoke in blue curls from his benignly-opening mouth, and watched the pair who were ascending the Spring-lane. They walked slowly arm in arm, tasting, in trembling delight, each moment of the interview which was to be the last for months. Then came the sound of a halting step, and the tap of a crutch upon the floor, behind the smoker, and there issued from the house a frail, boyish figure, with a countenance of wondrous and spirituelle beauty. Bella and her lover quickened their pace as he appeared. Willard pressed the thin hand, stretched towards him before they were within speaking distance, and linked his arm about him in a way he and Bella understood, so as to supersede the crutch. Thus they proceeded to a summer-house in the yard, and sat down. They had a lengthy, apparently a cheerful chat, in which Willard was chief spokesman. Mr. Snowden conjectured rightly, that Bella had delegated Jamie's favourite to console and encourage him. There were fine schemes laid in that arbour that night—pencillings of the Future, which found Jamie sad, and left him hopeful; which made of Willard a convert to his own representations, but were impotent to lift the dead weight which rested, like a nightmare, upon the heart of the placidly-smiling girl between them.

CHAPTER VI.

"A CARRIAGE for Miss Conway!" was shouted into Bella's ears, as she stepped ashore from the canal-boat at the "village" of Haysville. It was the duskiest hour of night—that which precedes the dawn—and it was assuredly not the sense of sight that apprised her of the presence of several persons upon the bank. Her escort must leave her directly to continue his journey, but she clung to him in nervous trepidation.

"Oh, don't go just yet," she begged. "Some one must be waiting for me."

A lamp hung out from the deck glared over the scene, and simultaneously with its appearance a strange voice accosted her. "Miss Conway!" said a tall shape, with an inclination towards her.

"Yes, sir," promptly responded Mr. Burnett, whose kind heart would not permit him to desert his unprotected charge, yet whose return to the boat was imperatively demanded.

"My name is Norwood," continued the apparition. "My father's carriage is close by. Will you take my arm?"

They lingered a moment for Mr. Burnett to pay his hurried adieux, and Bella to identify her baggage; then her conductor assisted her into the carriage, and told the coachman to "drive on, carefully." They went no

further than the public-house, where Bella was shown into a dingy room, in the upper part of a story-and-a-half building, with the choice of stretching her weary limbs upon a feather bed, or sitting, until daybreak, upon an upright wooden chair. She preferred the latter, it being by the casement, which she set wide, and laid a pillow upon its ledge. Drowsiness and fatigue overcame her, notwithstanding her sorrowful thoughts and novel situation. She was aroused from a dream of Jamie and Willard, by the gruff accents of a blowzy servant-woman, who called her to breakfast. Bella adjusted her hair and dress; laving her face and hands in a cracked, dusty basin, not larger than a slop-bowl. She was thirsty, but had not courage to use the tumbler of green glass, which smelt so villanously of whisky. These, although trifling evils, aggravated her sense of forlorn discomfort.

"Which way am I to go?" she inquired of the negro.

"Mr. Norwood waitin' for you at de foot de steps," said she, sulkily; and Bella, feeling that she only advanced to set her feet upon brambles, obeyed the direction of the great, black fore-finger. She found no prickles in the entry below. A gentleman who might or might not be her nocturnal attendant, was sauntering back and forth, and paused as she descended. His smile gave a most agreeable expression to a set of intelligent features, and in his morning salutation, there was discernible much of the negligent grace of the thorough-bred Southerner.

"I am afraid your accommodations were none of the best," he remarked, as they entered the breakfast-room, "but I did not like to risk your safety over the very rough road leading to my father's. It is disagreeable in daylight—dangerous after dark."

His attentions were assiduous, though silent, when his liveliest sallies had failed to elicit any but monosyllabic replies. She could not eat, and vainly hoped that he would attribute her loss of appetite to the muddy coffee, heavy bread, and oily butter, instead of to home-sickness. They commenced their journey as soon as the meal was concluded, yet they were until near mid-day in accomplishing the fifteen miles which lay between the canal and Coldmount, Mr. Norwood's residence. The name was an omen to Bella's sinking heart, the more that the son said it had been bestowed upon the site by his father—"whose fancies are hard to be understood, sometimes," he added, smiling.

There was no coldness in Mrs. Norwood's welcome to the stranger. She was more than inclined to embonpoint; in fact, if she had ever had a figure, no lines of it could be traced in the waves of flesh which had overwhelmed it. She had watched them from the last turn in the road, and when they stopped, walked down the porch steps, and out to the gate, key-basket in hand, a cap trimmed with pink streamers, set above her rubicund countenance; but with a smile, so sincere in its goodwill and bountiful charity towards all men, so beaming with a kind of universal maternity, as though she would have folded the whole animate creation to her expansive bosom, with an appellation of cherishing fondness, that one must have loved the sight better than the fairest vision of a Venus or a Juno. Bella felt it to be entirely in keeping with her appearance, that her first words were, "My dear," seconded by a kiss, and a "Come, walk in," and her tall son, who had been absent but one night, stooped for a like testimonial

of affection, with a look of genuine satisfaction. He used to say that his mother's formula to visitors was limited to three sentences,—"Come, walk in,"—"Come, take off your bonnet,"—"Come, have something to eat." Those who had heard this, could never see her, without imagining that her pleasant mouth had become so shaped to the pronunciation of one word, that "Come," was legibly stamped thereupon.

The something to eat was, at this hour of the day, a plentiful luncheon —cold ham, chicken, biscuit, cakes, raspberries and cream, followed by iced cordial, which it was always prudent to take, after eating fruit. "Mr. Norwood had gone to court, but would be back by night," the hostess said. She was assisted in doing the honours by Powhatan, or Powhie, as almost everybody styled Bella's earliest acquaintance, and his sister Lydia, a blonde of eighteen, in whose physiognomy was perceptible a strong likeness to her mother, and whose open-hearted hospitality was as freely extended. Four children, ranging in age from fourteen to six, viewed the teacher at a respectful distance, with curious, doubting eyes, until a glance from their brother recalled to their minds the incivility of staring. Bella was "made at home" in Lydia's chamber, and upon Powhie's description of her last night's lodgings, was notified that she was "dying for want of sleep," and forced to go regularly to bed, while the children were dispatched to "the quarters" to play.

She looked brighter, and was more composed in mind by dinner-time; and not too tired, although Mrs. Norwood feared she would be, to walk out with Powhie and Lydia at sun-down. She was paler again, when as they were summoned to the supper-table, she met the master of the manor. He was as imposing in his deportment (of which he had a great deal, and after the Turveydrop order), as his better half was unaffected—a man of Presence, which said "Presence" was apt to overshadow modest strangers with a vast penumbra of his importance and their insignificance. Bella was presented, darkened, completely enveloped, and passed into the light once more, when Lydia designated, as her seat, the one next the presiding genius of the tea-tray. It was a changeable sheen, subject to frequent obscuration, for Mr. Norwood levelled most of his discourse at her. Polite he was undoubtedly, painfully affable; and in his desire to talk of what would suit her taste, harangued principally upon her calling.

Men as wise, and more acute than he, oftentimes commit this blunder, and chagrin, instead of flatter their auditors. It may be incredible to those who seek to be "all things to all men," but I have occasionally met with farmers who could converse rationally and agreeably about other things than "crops," the "weather," and the "jointworm;" physicians, who would willingly forgive the untaught wight whose opening question, after introduction, did not chance to be, "Much sickness now, sir?" clergymen who tired, sometimes, of relating the "state of their churches;" and, most miraculous! have known authors who could discuss other topics besides books and reviews.

Bella's profession, as we have seen, was not one of choice, but necessity; nor had Jamie's grief and Willard's pride lessened her repugnance to a life her extreme bashfulness made her dread. It was no marvel then, that she quivered and drooped and drew up closely into herself, like any other sensitive plant, at the interrogations and dissertations of her employer. Dis-

play was her aversion; it was Mr. Norwood's delight—and she was his property now. At supper he merely patted his purchase, by way of overcoming her shyness; but removed to the parlour, it was time for business; to see how she could work—what she knew—and, what was of greater importance, what she did not know.

"I am an odd man, Miss Conway," he said, smoothing the hair of Lizzie, his second daughter, who sat by him—"a very odd man, as you may have discovered."

He had told her so twice before, therefore she ought to be aware of it.

"There is a boarding-school, five miles off," he continued, "and all my neighbours say I should encourage its proprietor, because he gets his living in that way. Let him do it! I do not hinder him; but contend for the right of educating *my* children in *my* way. I sent my son to Hampden Sidney, afterwards to the University, and his instructors say there are not many men of his age in the State who are better fitted for any profession. This is as it should be. If I had fifty boys, I would adhere to the same plan with all of them. But with girls it is vastly different—the spheres of he two genders are unlike—also their purposes and aims in life. At this boarding-school, they study Chemistry, Natural Philosophy, Botany, Geometry, Astronomy, and a dozen more sciences, for which they have no more use than Powhatan has for a knowledge of pudding-making and knitting. Your father describes you as an eminently practical young lady, Miss Conway, and I congratulate myself that our views upon this subject coincide so well."

Bella disputed the harmony of sentiment in her heart, but her tongue was discreet.

"Make of my daughters sensible women, Miss Conway,—prepare them to adorn society. I do not proscribe light accomplishments—French, music, and embroidery. These add a finish to a lady's education."

"In other words, they make the most show for the trouble," thought the governess.

Powhie, who was not in the room when the monologue began, had stood behind his father as he uttered the last sentence or two.

"What is *their* practical use, sir?" he asked, glancing at Bella, and provoking a sparkle in reply.

"They keep girls out of mischief, and entertain their brothers and overs."

"And if they marry, what resources have they for the entertainment of husbands, who care for none of these fripperies?" inquired the son in the same jesting tone.

"Good housewifery."

"But if they are dyspeptic, and cannot enjoy the pleasures of the table?"

"There will be an opportunity to perfect themselves as nurses."

"One more question, sir. If Lizzie never marries, and her stock of learning consists in the accomplishments you enumerate, how is she to employ herself, how find food for her mind, when her fingers are too stiff for the piano keys; there is no one by with whom to jabber French, and the canvas and Berlin wool try her failing eyes?"

"What good would a smattering of every 'ology' under Heaven do her, either?" asked his father, somewhat fiercely.

"A 'smattering,' none, I grant you, sir;" and, as if wearied with debate, he crossed over to a seat by Bella. The instinct that she had a protector at hand, afforded her strength to answer the next question with tolerable firmness.

"Do you speak French, Miss Conway?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am pleased to hear it, since it was formerly a favourite study of mine. My pronunciation may have grown rusty from disuse, but Powhatan there, is reputed to be a fair linguist. Oblige me by conversing with him in that language for a short time. I should like to judge for myself of your proficiency."

She would as willingly have gone to the stake; Powhie did not require the pleading terror of the eye which turned to him to teach him this.

He smiled encouragingly. "Ne craignez rien. Votre juge n'est pas formidable. Il ne sait qu'une phrase—'Parlez-vous Français?" [Do not be afraid. Your judge is not formidable. He knows but a single phrase —Do you speak French?] "Which is, being interpreted," he said to his father, "I have forgotten all that I ever knew about 'la belle langue.'"

His senior frowned. "I regret it, sir. You had best refresh your memory by a course of lessons with Miss Conway."

"Volontiers?" answered the rebuked. "Miss Conway, will you be very severe upon an indolent, stupid pupil?"

"That will depend upon whether his stupidity is natural or feigned," she said, meaningly, in a voice audible to him alone.

His quick laugh showed that he relished the hit. They were fast becoming friends.

The crowning ordeal was to be the trial by music. The untried teacher already stood by the instrument; a circle of listeners drawn up in the back-ground; a dreadful silence prevailing, in which she could hear the irregular boundings of her heart—when an unhoped-for deliverance arrived —the key was missing. Lydia had not played for a week, but was almost sure that she had not locked the piano as she shut it; Mrs. Norwood emptied her inseparable adjunct—the willow-basket—and produced, from her pockets and drawers, at least twenty more keys of every form and size; her lord fretted, as much as dignity and the presence of the ladies would permit him to do; even Powhie appeared vexed, and tried each one of the bunch belonging to himself, reiterating with some emphasis, the truism that the lost article must be somewhere; but the search was unavailing.

Superior Court was in session. Mr. Norwood was safely off on the second day of its sitting, when Powhie arrested his sister on her way up stairs with Bella, to help unpack her trunks.

"If you or Miss Conway would like to have this, it is at your service," revealing a small key in the palm of his hand.

"Why! where did you find it?" said Lydia, catching it.

"In the parlour," replied he, seeking, and again receiving his reward in a grateful ray from Bella.

He did not presume upon her consciousness of obligation. He saw in her, a pretty, diffident girl, from whom a naturally kind heart and the spirit of hospitality prompted him to avert every annoyance. For awhile she owed his care of her when present, his defence in her absence, to these

motives; but her unruffled sweetness of temper, her conscientious discharge of duties, which, he knew, would have been insufferable to him, the well-trained mind and infallible judgment of right and wrong which spoke in her conduct and the conversations in which he contrived to engage her, won upon his admiration. He, of all the household, understood and appreciated her. Mr. Norwood was, as she soon saw, disappointed. He coveted distinction, notoriety—and under the influence of this monomania, was continually doing something he considered eccentric—which those who had sense enough to be common-place, deemed nonsensical. The oddity he affected, as an evidence of his dissimilarity to the rest of his kind, consisted in acting diametrically opposite to the counsels and opinions of others. Mr. Fontaine, his nearest neighbour, having named his place Summer-Hill, it only remained for Mr. Norwood to style his Coldmount. "The ridge was bleak," he asserted, "and he was not a man to disguise the fact by any fair-sounding title." If the neighbourhood turned out *en masse*, to hear a popular preacher, the Norwood carriage jolted over a broken road, ten miles in another direction, to attend upon the ministrations of old Parson Brownley, who was as illiterate as prosy, and never attracted more than fifty hearers. But Mr. Norwood's conscience was complacent. He had swerved, and at a right angle, from the beaten track, and was compensated for this, and much sorer inconveniences, by hearing himself alluded to, as "that odd fellow, Norwood." He was opposed, upon principle, to the modern fallacy of girls' education; the correct rendering of which was, that there was a school-fever in the district about the time his daughters were ready for instruction. Powhie was indebted for his University term to the accidental exclamation of a neighbour, "How much longer *do* you mean to send that boy to college?"

"Until he chooses to stop, sir!" was the instant rejoinder.

"What profession will he follow!"

"None, that I am aware of."

Still, he was upright and honourable in his dealings; the most indulgent of husbands and fathers, and his paternal pride craved nothing more than to see his children make a figure in the world. The fulfilment of this hope was anything but probable under the policy of their unpretending governess.

A voluble, superficial woman, all flash and noise, who would have littered up the school-room with embroidery-frames, papier maché and mono-chromatic apparatus; who would have interlarded her talk with mongrel French and worse Italian; who, without losing time in teaching the chords and how to count, would have made Lizzie "take" the Battle of Prague in less time than was consumed by the original combat—such an one would have been praised, and puffed, and paraded to his and her hearts' content. The engagement was made; and for a year he must bear, with what grace he could, the sight of the very sedate little lady, who sat from nine a.m. to three, and from four to six p.m., in the school-house in the corner of the yard, hearing hum-drum recitations in grammar, geography, and arithmetic, and examining English copies as carefully as she did French themes.

Lydia was a belle, in virtue, not only of her beauty and her father's fortune, but as much in consequence of her amiability and winning man-

ners. She disliked no one, and loved everything that would allow her the privilege; so, to her, Bella was a "sweet old darling"—the adjective of age designed to convey an idea of inapproachableness, she had likewise experienced in the society of those advanced in years. She had not read through a book since she quit school, at sixteen. If she undertook a "splendid novel," recommended by some of her bosom friends, the style, however polished, was lost upon her, and the fine-spun, overwrought sentimentalism, disgustful to her pure heart. The usual sequitur to these intellectual repasts was a long nap. She dressed tastefully; liked company; enjoyed having a bevy of beaux about her, and was very sincerely attached to George Herbert, a flourishing sprig of the law, who, his "shingle" said, "practised in the district and county courts of A——, B——, C——, and D——." In short, our fair Lydia gave promise of working out what was, according to her sire's creed, the destiny of woman; impelled by public favour, to shoot swiftly and brightly before the admiring eyes of the crowd, at the highest point of her graceful parabola; to dazzle them to blindness with the glorification of a brilliant match, previously to being submerged darkly, noiselessly in the gulf matrimonial.

Lizzie's mind was more like her brother's, and having an eager thirst for learning, she was a source of comfort and pride to her instructress. Her pupils all loved and respected her, and, except from Mr. Norwood's hints and frowns, she encountered no interference with her system of study and discipline. Nevertheless, there was a large admixture of drudgery with the solaces of her labour. Few children learn from the love of knowledge; fewer yet, fail to wear out a teacher's endurance and ingenuity, while acquiring rudimental principles. They have no mnemonic process, by which to retain dates and numbers; they must be impressed upon the brain by frequent and unvarying repetition. "Delightful task," though it be, "to teach the young idea how to shoot," the fallowing, and hoeing, and raking, and planting, without which there would be no seed to "shoot," are hard, unromantic toils, for which the heated husbandman often gets neither thanks nor credit—which are forgotten by harvest.

The summer was intensely hot; and Bella coaxed her scholars to rise an hour earlier than the rest of the family, for recitation; thus prolonging their intermission, before and after dinner. But they, sunburnt rustics, thought all weathers alike propitious for ramble or frolic; and if they were dull in lesson-time, dissipated all anxieties on their account, by the whoop and scamper, which proclaimed the "breaking-up." Confinement and care left their imprint upon the teacher. She was too warm and weary in recess to eat; too weary to take exercise after school; sometimes too weary to sleep; but she resolutely denied being sick, and declined Mrs. Norwood's panacea—"cordial." "If she was pale and thin, it was only the weather;" and day after day, without missing one of the hot steps, her aching, blistering feet trod the tread-mill round.

CHAPTER VII.

George Herbert was spending the day at Coldmount; and in the cool of the afternoon, invited his *fiancée* to a stroll.

"Go with them, Powhie," advised his mother, "and call by the school-

room for Miss Bella. Prevail upon her to take the air, if you can. It distresses me to see her looking so badly."

Bella was at work upon a difficult sum, which had vexed Lizzie for two hours, that morning. Her hair was brushed back from her temples—a sure indication of lassitude or feverishness; and as the party paused at the door, they heard a long-drawn sigh, as if patience and strength were in departing. Signing to the others to proceed, Powhie stepped in, and laid his hand upon the slate.

"What have you here?" laughing at her frightened look.

"A sum I promised to do for Lizzie."

"For Lizzie! Where is the vixen? You ought to make her get her lessons for herself; it is enough for you to hear them."

"She is a good, faithful child, and hardly ever misses a recitation; you must not scold her. I am no wiser than she in this matter. There is some mistake here, but I cannot detect it. This is this the third time I have gained the same answer, which the key pronounces wrong."

"Have you tried to prove it?"

"No; I preferred getting the right product first."

"You have made no error," he said, running over the figures. "Give me the pencil;" and, with two minutes' cyphering, he wrote out the proof, and showed it to her. "The key is in fault—not you or Lizzie. No! no 'thank you!' I am not to be recompensed in that way. You must put up your books, and walk—or ride—with me. You are not able to walk far or briskly enough to benefit you."

"I am much obliged, and will accept your offer with pleasure, presently. There is still an exercise to be corrected."

"Let me have it!" securing it before she could refuse. "Go, get your veil—not your bonnet. I will revise Lizzie's scrawl."

The buggy, with Powhie's best trotter attached, was at the door, when she reappeared, dressed in white, a black-lace scarf thrown over her head, and veiling her shoulders, after the manner of the Spanish *saya y manto;* so lovely in her etherealized beauty, that Mrs. Norwood could not refrain from whispering her admiration in her son's ear. His face lighted with glowing pleasure, an illumination which had not gone out, when he kissed his hand to her at starting.

The dame stood in the porch until the turn of the road concealed them. "A pretty and a *good* girl," she said, half aloud. "Why shouldn't it be? She is poor, but she comes of an old family, and was not bred for a teacher. She has never lived out before—that is an advantage. She would steady the boy; I am always afraid of his running into dissipation, having no work to keep him out of evil. I could trust him with her. I suppose his father would object, but he need not suspect it until the thing is fixed one way or the other. Anyhow,"—and this was spoken very distinctly—"it is the best plan not to meddle with these affairs. They will take their course—like the measles and typhoid fever—have done so from the creation, I reckon."

As Powhie gathered up the reins, he opened an earnest argument against Bella's unremitting application to mental employment.

"It is undermining your constitution, and alarming your friends. There is no necessity for so much work, with only four scholars."

"Perhaps not, to those who understand how to economize labour," she returned. "I am comparatively inexperienced—have not learned the shortest, most direct routes. I cannot abridge my tasks without neglect of duty—unless," she added, struck by a sudden thought—"your father and mother disapprove of my management of the little girls. If you ever hear any expression of dissatisfaction—know of any change they would like to propose, I shall consider it a great favour if you will tell me. Do they think that I give them too much to do?"

"Nothing of the kind!" he said impatiently. "The hearty romps will not overload their brains, I'll engage. What I—what we all declaim against, is your martyrdom to Duty. This is the Juggernaut, whose wheels are crushing your life out. If it were to require you to tear out your heart, and throw it in its track, your hands would not tremble while they did the deed."

Bella did not respond. She remembered that she *had* believed herself called to this immolation, and the outcryings of the woman's nature as she offered the sacrifice. It had been mercifully forbidden, but she could not think of it yet without emotion.

"Forgive my bluntness," said Powhie, "I am your friend, and should be recreant to my trust, if I suffered you to injure your spirits and health, without warning you. Make me deputy-warden of your conscience, with liberty to interfere, when I see matters ill-conducted. Ha! I know the signification of that shake of the head, and queer little smile. It is a battering engine thrust against the gates of my Castle of Indolence. Just let me tell you what you soliloquize about me, in these dog-days. 'Here I am, a feeble girl, spending my time and talents in the effort to make myself useful in the world; exerting every energy to maintain my standing in the responsible station Providence has allotted to me; and that good-for-naught, Powhatan Norwood, with a man's mind and a man's might, not over-endowed by Nature, but with a reasonable allowance of intellect, and every advantage of education, is content to vegetate in retirement, useless to his fellow-creatures—worse than useless to himself. Oh! for a scorpion-lash to scourge him into the arena of action.'"

"Partly right and partly wrong," answered Bella. "You are not the nonentity you have portrayed; but are you content without a definite aim in life?"

"The question is this," said Powhie, leaning back in his seat, and tapping the foot-board with his whip, "what 'definite aim' will suit me better, or as well, as my present *dolce far niente?* I have read law. I do not practise it, because I detest the chicanery and sycophancy requisite to win popularity: for medicine I have no vocation and a thorough contempt—and if I were Cicero or Hippocrates, should be briefless and patientless in these parts. There is a lawyer to every mile, a doctor to every league of Columbia county. Thus much for the 'learned professions,' in which, allow me to say, in passing, there is more humbug and as much ignorance as can be found in any other—rude and unlearned though it be. As to farming, I love my ease too truly to introduce the reform I can see is necessary, and which my conscience (you see I have one) would force me to attempt, were I to undertake a plantation."

"Does not Sprucedale belong to you?" asked Bella.

"Yes; an inconsiderate legacy from my grandfather—peace to his ashes!

It was a fine old place in its day; and would be valuable now if it had a master. I am a gregarious animal. I cannot live there in solitary sovereignty; and the overseer prevents things from going behind-hand. Once a-year I make a mighty effort; yawn over his accounts for a day or two, and, professing myself satisfied with the result of my investigation, give him a clean score to be filled up in another twelvemonth. George Herbert will probably purchase the estate, eventually. Lydia has a fondness for it; and I would not disoblige them, by denying her a home, which is so unattractive to me. These are family secrets; projects which may be frustrated or put into execution, as Providence may direct. I do not trouble myself about what is yet unrevealed."

"It would be better for you if you were worth nothing," said Bella, "if you were cut adrift, to live by your own exertions."

"There you are right," rejoined he candidly, "but even then I might be tempted to lounge about home, be clothed by my mother, and fed by my father. Do you despise me very heartily, Miss Bella?"

"Not in the least; still I think you would be happier if you were doing more; you have capacity and opportunity to effect a great deal."

"For my own aggrandizement?"

She looked up in surprise. "No—for the welfare of others."

"I have occasional turns of spasmodic activity," said Powhie, "and map out plans that would have reflected immortal renown upon Howard; but having no steady lure to industry, I speedily relapse. As the beggar said to the king who bade him work, 'Ah, sire! if you but knew how lazy I am!' I am a visionary—so are the so-called Reformers of the day; but while they are trying to hasten the Golden Age by iron, water, and fire; and even the most sanguine crying, as they look towards the rayless East—'Where is the promise of its coming?' I, with no materials but the thin air, and the fragrant fairy rings floating up from my Havana—fashion people, and govern my world. If I accomplish less good, my skirts are clear of many sins which they unwittingly commit. Each generation writes down a fearful column of errata against the record of the preceding. If I make a false calculation to-day, and do not rectify it to-morrow, no one is poorer or more miserable for it."

"If you had been intended for this mode of existence, you would have been created bodiless, and with a much smaller modicum of brain than you have. You were made up most wastefully," replied Bella, with that gleam of mirthful irony it was Isabel's delight to excite. "Heads, arms, and hands were only meant for the many, who must walk in the common road."

"The common road—I hate it! It is a straight, tedious turnpike, macadamized with flint, which hurts the feet and offends the eyes. There is an accent in your reproof, which betrays that you, too, find the dust settle too heavily upon your soul—'eminently practical,' as your step-father warrants you to be. I happened upon his letter to-day, and reading it over, dwelling upon his description of your 'thoroughly disciplined mind, freedom from school-girlish romance,' and 'surprising self-control,' I laughed heartily at the recollection of the stately, starched, spectacled spinster, I endeavoured to school myself to meet, as I paced the Haysville landing, between the hours of three and four, one cloudy morning, three months ago. Here it is; see if you recognize your portrait."

There was nothing in its contents to call the blood to her cheek, in such

hot haste, or kindle a fire in eyes generally so serene; yet the colour and flash came with the unfolding of the sheet. She turned it over and examined the post-mark; then commenced its perusal, reading slowly, as if to gain time to recover from the sudden heat. It might be that the date had aroused unpleasant associations. How could it be otherwise? when this offer of her services to supply the "eligible situation," the writer "understood Mr. Norwood wished to have filled," was written a week before she was informed of the failure of her maintenance—when nothing was more remote from her intentions than the adoption of teaching, as a means of subsistence! She had never put faith in Mr. Snowden's pretended dissuasive measures, but with all her clear-sightedness, had not suspected this systematic deception, that she had been bargained off, without her knowledge or consent, and subsequently walked, as she thought, of her free will and accord into the path so craftily prepared. Oh, he had calculated shrewdly upon the metal to be wrought upon! But the mortification of having been duped, was nothing in comparison with the renewed sting inflicted by the conviction that her mother had been privy to, perhaps had connived at, her husband's artifice. Her manifest uneasiness whenever the subject was reverted to; her troubled reserve and unconquerable depression seemed very like the remorse which would have followed the commission of an act so opposite to the dictates of her real nature. Bella had prayed and struggled against her unfilial doubts; had gathered around her heart the innocent, healthful memories of childhood; the fond and frequent caress; the happy communion of the day; the nightly companionship; the united prayer at morning and evening; and her letters home were written in a cheerful affectionate strain, and answered in kind. Her waning health was not the effect of positive unhappiness, but of distasteful occupation, unrelieved by positive joy. Her love for Jamie and Willard kept the outgoings of her heart open and free; and although the separation from them weighed ever upon her spirits, she was resigned to the privations, alive to the privileges of her condition. This was especially the case when Powhie was by. He interested and amused her; even her disapprobation of some of his ideas and habits imparted zest to their intercourse. But the reaction produced by the drive and his society was gone; and the perplexed charioteer anathematized his folly, in giving her the luckless missive, alternately with the bombast of its author, which had tempted him to exhibit it.

He dived eagerly into a labyrinth of conversation to break the mysterious spell the trifling incident had thrown over the two, who, a moment before, had talked easily and frankly as friends; but there was no return of sociability. Bella was not repellant—only uninviting, thoughtful—not reproachful.

He detained her, after helping her to descend from the vehicle.

"It would be idle," he said, "to affect ignorance of the fact that I have displeased or wounded you. It is an awkward business to apologize for an offence, the nature of which is unknown to myself. I can, however, beg you to credit my declaration that it was unintentional."

"You are innocent—have done nothing wrong," she replied, gently; "there is no offence or error to forgive; if there were, I could do it cheerfully."

She walked beside him into the house, and vanished up the staircase, leaving him bewildered and annoyed.

The sound of many and strange voices arose from the parlour, and Bella sought refuge in her room, where, in the still obscurity, she sat down to meditate, more sick at heart than she had been during all the wearisome summer. The air was sultry; masses of murky vapour looming up from the western horizon, illumined now and then by a ghastly lightning-beam. The gay company were in another wing of the house, from which their merriment could not penetrate to this. She heard nothing but a distant Whip-poor-will, until a mournful cry was borne in through the window; a familiar sound heard at dawn and evening twilight from her infancy—the call of the Southern swine-herd, a wordless summons, indescribable but unmistakable—rising with a regular crescendo swell, till hill and forest resound for miles, to a wail as wild and piercing as was ever Banshee's death-warning. She remembered how distinctly it rent the air on the morning succeeding her father's death. She could never hear it now without a vision of the white sheet, stretched tightly over the bed, in the room where he had died, and the strange outline of the figure underneath it, as they appeared in the uncertain light, to the scarcely-awakened child, who crept on tiptoe to the door to see if his parting blessing and her mother's grief were not all a dream, instead of a reality of the past night.

"Why was he not spared to me? What wisdom was there in a bereavement, from which has sprung every ill I have since endured?" These are questions which the afflicted can understand; which they and the Chastener can forgive. Those whom the rod has never touched, and the callous worshippers of self and propriety, reprobate them as "murmurings"—"unreasonable indulgence of feelings"—an excess, into which, *they* can never be convicted of having plunged.

CHAPTER VIII.

The supper-bell brought Bella to her feet. She must hasten into the dining-room before the guests gained it, to escape the embarrassment of a formal entry. She was foiled. Standing at the stair-head, she listened to the flutter of robes, the gallant badinage and answering laugh, betokening the passage of several couples through the hall; and as delay would but make matters worse, she ran down as the last one disappeared. The long table was an appalling sight; but Powhie met her at the door, and led her with playful grace—not to her seat, but the one opposite, usually occupied by himself—while he took the next.

The custom of introductions in detail, not omitting one of the company, was then, as now, in full vogue in the country; and before a chair was drawn back, "Miss Conway" was presented to "Miss Berkeley, Miss Leigh and Mr. Leigh, and Miss Archer," William Fontaine, a frequent visitor at Coldmount, she recognized. She had never met Miss Berkeley before, but would have known her if her name had not been called. This lady was the unconscious usurper of her chair, and returned her look with a supercilious curiosity, mingled with wonder at Powhie's courtesy to one, who, it was plain, was to her as "one of his father's hired servants."

Bella had had repeated descriptions of her person, and some fragments of her history. Her father had once held up his head among the grandees of the State, and having squandered his patrimonial possessions, could not brook the mortification of a residence, under altered circumstances, in his old neighbourhood. Adelaide, the eldest daughter, was seventeen years old when the family removed to Tennessee; in less than six months she returned to Virginia upon pretence of a visit, but in reality to fix her abode in the house of a great uncle and aunt; a wealthy couple who, having married off seven children, were never so happy as when surrounded by young relations. Neither money, servants, nor carriage were denied to their niece, and she improved her advantages by becoming the glass of fashion and arbiter of social forms to a large and obedient circle. Her beauty was of a singular order. Her hair was true auburn—a hue, differing as widely from the red and sandy locks, falsely distinguished by that name, as pure old gold does from yellow brass. Too abundant to be confined by the jewelled comb, it rolled and waved on either side of the swan-like throat; and to set off the transparent skin, nature had, in some strange freak, bestowed upon her black eyes. She was stylish and imposing, with much "manner"—that compound of foreign affection and the pretension of American *parvenu* aristocracy, which the juveniles of our time would introduce in place of the high-born ease, the unstudied politeness of their ancestors.

Bella learned from Miss Berkeley's talk, that she had, after a winter in town, made a jaunt to Old Point, then to Cape May, and was now at home, jaded by the weather and dissipation. The passion for excitement did not burn low. She had succeeded in inflaming most of her clique with the tableaux fever she had contracted at the last-named watering-place. The conversation at supper ran upon this topic. Miss Berkeley was in high feather; questioned and referred to by all. Powhie was not behind the rest in flattering interest, and to none other, did "Miss Adelaide" more graciously incline. Bella, like most silent people, gathered more from a diligent use of her eyes and ears than if her tongue had been active, and she was not slow to perceive that his inquiries and remarks were adroitly ploughing up the shallow mind of the conceited beauty, exposing the poverty of the soil—his object and success unsuspected by herself. The young ladies still listened, as to an oracle, as she confounded mythology and history, poetry and romance, but the gentlemen bit their lips and bent over their plates, in suppressed laughter. When she described as the "happiest hit" of the farcical pictures, the "scene of Tam O'Shanter, Souter Johnnie, and the landlady from the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,'" George Herbert's application of his handkerchief to his mouth was followed by such a fit of coughing, that Mrs. Norwood anxiously inquired if he "felt the draught from the window"—and similar pulmonic symptoms were prevalent among the male banqueters, a minute later, as she concluded a circumstantial account of "the *chef d'œuvre* of the season—the Veiled Prophet"—she enacting Zelika, and a handsome Colossus, Mokanna. "The 'mystic veil's white, glittering flow,' concealed features which were quite out of character. I knelt before him, with clasped hands and upturned eyes, hanging upon his inspired lips—a devout believer in his divine mission, and the Koran he had given to mankind."

"A convert to Islamism!" said Powhie, with inimitable gravity—"I shall hear of you as Sultana, yet."

"Who knows?" laughing—then reflectively—"Is it not amazing that this man should have founded an empire and a religion, which will probably continue to the end of time? that his Hegira should be the era to as many as is our Anno Domini?"

"Marvellous, indeed! particularly hard-favoured as he was, too."

"*Peccavi!*" he said to Bella, in the bustle of leaving the table, "but this temptation is irresistible. Some people ought not to be taken at their own valuation, nor yet at that the world sets upon them. I sound coin for myself, and love no fun so much as that of ringing a specious counterfeit."

"In your own house?" asked Bella, in mild reproof.

"'Desperate diseases require desperate remedies,'" he replied, his colour betraying that he knew the rebuke to be just—"Whither are you going?"

"Upstairs."

"You are not! We want you in the drawing-room."

"But I am not acquainted—"

"No—and you never will be 'acquainted,'" mimicking her tone, "if you run off to the garret, whenever a neighbour darkens the door."

He held her hand fast within his arm, bore her by main force to the drawing-room, and put her under Mr. Herbert's care, being himself in duty bound to play the fascinating to the lady visitors. Lydia's betrothed was gentlemanly and sensible, and Bella had every prospect of a pleasant evening. By-and-by they were summoned to the ring, encompassing the centre table, which was bestrewed with books and prints. Miss Berkeley had decided that the first party should be at her house within a fortnight, and all were on the *qui vive* for scenes and characters. Amid the medley of "This is fine!" "How will this do?" "Julia! you can take this part!" "Lydia, this will just suit you!" Bella started to hear William Fontaine say, animatedly, "Miss Conway! here is the very image of yourself! We *must* have this!"

All leaned towards the engraving he held up.

"Jephthah's Daughter!" and he read aloud the verse beneath.

"'And it came to pass that when he saw her, he rent his clothes, and said unto her—'Alas! my daughter! for thou hast brought me very low; thou art one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and may not go back.'"

The resemblance to Bella was indeed marked. The expression of holy self-abnegation, resting like a marble mask upon lineaments so youthful; the averted eyes, that feared to behold the woe of another, aided to complete the likeness. Powhie had seen her look thus; been struck by the power of emotions so chastening and elevating, but which never found egress through her lips—and Lydia exclaimed, involuntarily, "It is you, Bella, as I have noticed you, late on Sunday evenings, when you sit in the door, and fix your eyes upon something away off in the distance—and sometimes you have that air while reading your letters."

"How differently the same thing appears to two people!" observed Miss Berkeley. "Now, to me, it is more like you, Lydia. What is the dress? A white tunic, embroidered skirt and sleeves—a mantle falling from the

shoulders. That long, scarlet shawl of yours—with the palm-leaf pattern, will show grandly in that costume."

"Who ever saw a Jewish blonde?" asked Powhie; "Lydia has too much of the Saxon to personate that character."

"Nothing is easier than to darken her eyebrows and skin, and a veil will hide the hair," persisted the lady.

"Why take the trouble of disguising her, when Miss Bella will serve our purpose without any such art?"

"How obstinate you are, Mr. Norwood!" said the beauty, laughing to cover her anger. "If Miss Conway wishes to act in this or any other tableau, I am the last person living who would deprive her of the pleasuse. I entreat your pardon for my thoughtless interference—" courtesying to Bella, and retiring with a parade of humility to the rear of the group.

Bella became by this unexpected movement the centre of observation. Most of the company looked blank and sorry at the resignation of their Dictatress. Powhie was not disconcerted. He carefully collected the volumes and engravings, and tendered them, on his bended knee, to Miss Berkeley.

"To thee, O dread Sultana! we surrender our liberty of action, speech, and conscience. Do with us, body and soul, as thy gracious caprice may dictate—only blast us not by thy terrible frown!"

She saw the action—grateful homage, though offered in jest, and discerned no hidden meaning in his language. She replied in a like theatrical strain.

"Arise, Sir Knight! you exaggerate your misdeed, and our displeasure, and condescended again to rule the deliberations." Bella had taken advantage of this moment for escape; and the guests saw no more of her—she breakfasting with the children at the second table.

Lydia was busy and excited all day, after her friends had gone. Laces and furs, muslins, and silks were scattered through every room; and such smoothing and ripping and piecing were never witnessed before in the orderly household of amazed Mrs. Norwood. Bella lent her aid when school was over. A few judicious hints and unobtrusive alterations from her did more towards bringing order out of confusion than Lydia's hours of labour had accomplished.

"Who would have dreamed that you knew anything about these matters?" said she. "Where did you learn? Did you ever act in any tableaux?"

"My cousin Isabel liked the amusement; and it was very fashionable among the school-girls of Philadelphia one winter."

"Oh, how lovely! You are so clever! Brother, see how elegantly she is copying that Greek costume with these old things."

"Well done!" ejaculated Powhie, sweeping aside the motley pile that cumbered the sofa, so as to station himself near the fingers which were performing such wonders. "'Iphigenia' I'll ask Miss Adelaide for her history next time I see her, provided it be not 'in my own house.'"

The mouth he was watching parted and curled, just as he liked to see it. Lydia was unobservant of the by-play.

"I wish I were as smart as Addie!" said she. "She is never at a loss, no matter what you talk about."

"My dear little sis, I have seen streams which were beautiful in their very want of depth and transparency, and liked them a thousand times better than others that pretended to be deep, but were only dark."

"I don't see what that has to do with Addie and the tableaux."

"Then understand that those tableaux furnished the very short pole with which I sounded Miss Addie's vaunted mind; and a deal of mud and trash it stirred up from the bottom!"

"You don't mean that you were quizzing her all the time?" said Lydia, in alarm. "O, brother! when will you leave off that college-boy habit? It is so disrespectful and unkind!"

"I never quiz a lady, sis; and when Miss Addie learns to be respectful and kind to those of her own sex, she may claim exemption."

"Isn't she a lady?" inquired the shocked Lydia.

"She has not one of the essential qualities of a true *woman*—for I like that honest word best. She is a vain, capricious, silly, unprincipled flirt."

"Brother Powhie!"

"Fact, sis! every word of it; and the half left unsaid. That she is vain and whimsical—'somewhat spoiled,' you would say, her admirers admit. Ignorant and weak I proved her to be last night, although she has an exalted idea of her abilities and attainments; and if she were the solitary woman in the universe, her unfilial impiety would prevent me from marrying her. Her father is living in a log-house. I saw him when I was in Tennessee, last year, toiling like any common labourer to earn bread enough to hold together the souls and bodies of a wife and six children; her mother, raised in affluence, is overworking a frame never robust; cooking, scouring, and sewing; and here is a stout, healthy girl, throwing away money by the handful, aping the millionaires and nobility; staring down, as from an unscalable height, upon those who have too much sense to be idle, and too much wholesome pride to be dependent beggars!"

"What is the question of debate?" asked Mr. Norwood, whose siesta his son's voice had disturbed.

"We are speaking of Addie Berkeley, Pa," said his daughter, her eyes swimming, and her lips tremulous.

"A superb woman! such an air! Don't you agree with me, Powhatan?"

Powhie was too indolent to argue with his father more than twice a year.

"As you say, sir, she *has* an air which few ladies acquire. If it were otherwise, I would turn misogynist," he added, aside.

Lydia's cloak of charity, though ample, could not cover the unpardonable omission of Bella's name upon the list of invitations. She was sure when cards arrived for her brother and herself, that the messenger had dropped the third, and ran out to scold him.

"Recollect, Dick! Say to Miss Addie that she forgot Miss Conway's ticket, or that you lost it."

"I wont forgit it, marm; but I never los' none."

The oversight not being repaired, she communicated her uneasiness to her intimate friend, Virginia Fontaine, who readily engaged to speak to Miss Berkeley. The day before the party, the consequence of her intercession was transmitted in a brief note.

"DEAR LYDIA: I reminded Addie of Miss Bella's invitation, and she answered that the neglect was intentional—that she does not consider herself acquainted with her.

"In haste, yours,

"GINNIE."

Powhie wrested the billet from Lydia's fingers, and read it to his mother.

"Why!" was all the utterance the hospitable matron's surprise allowed her; but a volley of exclamation points could not convey a tenth of the astonishment signified by the interjection.

"I was confident that the insult was premeditated," said Powhie, apparently unmoved. "I could have forewarned you of this from the moment of their meeting, and 'Jephthah's Daughter' made it certain."

"How unjust you are!" said Lydia, with a faint show of deprecation.

"But, my dear," reasoned Mrs. Norwood, "she ought to have been invited, if only because she is your friend, and staying here."

"Yes, madam, and if she were a visitor at Coldmount, she would be importuned to go, if she were as ugly as Pluto, and unrefined as a cornfield negro!" responded Powhie. "She is pretty, gentle, and lady-like; but she is the teacher of your children, and therefore immeasurably beneath Miss Berkeley, who would let her parents, brothers and sisters, starve before she would lift a finger to feed them; whose chances of escaping the poor-house are sponging upon rich relations, and catching a wealthy husband."

"Teaching is a most genteel occupation," said Mrs. Norwood, "and the Conways were one of our first families, quite equal to the Berkeleys. Miss Bella was not brought up as a governess; and I think it is to her credit that she takes to it without grumbling. Why, dear me! there are not ten men in the county who have not failed at one time or another. Old Mr. Berkeley, well off as he is, may die a bankrupt yet. It wont do to give ourselves airs. None of us know what we may come to."

Lydia was standing in the back porch, but within hearing. Powhie eyed her closely during this dialogue. As his mother ceased, he stepped out suddenly, caught her around the waist, and lifting her face, saw that she was in tears.

"Why, sis! did I or Miss Addie bring these great pearls out of the blue waters?" kissing her on both cheeks, and laughing in her woebegone countenance.

"I am so hurt, brother! and Bella can't help feeling hurt too."

"A 'hurtful' affair, but not worth crying for. Miss Berkeley is no friend, or she would not have subjected you to this trial. Shall I guess at another cause of your distress? You are afraid lest I shall say that you ought not to go, after this pointed slight of a daily associate, whom you regard as your equal."

Lydia nodded; an ingenuous blush mounting to her forehead.

"I impose no restraint upon you," he said. "Go, if you choose."

"And you?"

"Cannot escort you; but as George would perform that duty if I were along, this need be no impediment to your enjoyment."

"What excuse can you give?" questioned Lydia.

"None. If Miss Adelaide pushes you for one, refer her to me."

"People will talk about it, brother. They say, already, that you are smitten with Bella.'

"If 'people' hint or assert such a thing to you, tell them that in a neighbourhood where it is the fashion to despise modest worth, to repudiate industry, all the attention I can show to the stranger within my gates, who possesses one and practices the other, will not compensate for their dereliction from duty, and lack of politeness."

Hatty, the third daughter, was present at the reading of Miss Fontaine's note, and too indignant to contain herself, carried the contents straight to her loved instructress.

Bella smiled without speaking.

"Ain't you sorry to be obliged to stay at home, Miss Bella?" asked Em, who was still younger.

"No, my dear."

"But I am, and angry too," said Hatty. "I cannot bear Miss Adelaide Berkeley! She is so bold, with her long tongue and big black eyes!"

"Hatty!"

"And just because you are a teacher," continued the excited child, unheeding the admonition. "Brother says that is it; but mother said yours was as good a family as Miss Addie's own, if she does carry her head so high. I don't know what sister wants to go to her tableaux for. I heard brother tell her something about staying away, and a 'pointed slight' to you, and she cried!"

"Get your books! it is nine o'clock," commanded Bella, in her ordinary tone. When they were in their respective places, she enjoined diligence and order, until she should return, and tripped over the yard to the house.

The brother and sister were still in the porch. Lydia looked conscious as she espied her. There was a small, bright spot in the centre of each cheek, but Bella spoke pleasantly.

"Hatty says that you, Lydia, are in trouble, because Miss Berkeley does not request my company for to-morrow evening: and I ran in, to beg you not to think of such a trifle. I am not disappointed. I did not expect a ticket: and if you will not quote 'sour grapes' to me, I will say that I should not have gone if she had honoured me with one. My dress would be unsuitable in a large company, if I had a taste for gaiety."

"You could wear white," interposed Lydia, answering this, as though it had been the only obstacle.

"But with black trimmings," said Bella. "You will not vex yourself further about this; will not let it affect your plans, will you?"

"I don't want to go?" exclaimed Lydia, impulsively. "I like you better than all the Adelaide Berkeleys upon the globe!"

"Then, oblige me by accepting her invitation, and looking your prettiest," replied Bella, aware of how evanescent this indifference to a revel would prove.

She went, with many misgivings and regrets, that marred the pleasure she had anticipated so joyfully.

Not so, Powhie. He rode over to Sprucedale, the day of the rout, halted at the gate of Berkeley Manor, to deliver a message from his mother to its mistress, and was careful that the family should learn his destination; also, that the trip could have been indefinitely postponed.

CHAPTER IX.

The scholastic year was drawing to a close, and Bella had received no official intimation of a desire for a re-engagement. Her pupils were thriving and contented under her tutelage. She could not but perceive that she had laid a basis, upon which a substantial and elegant superstructure might be erected. Careful study of the mind and disposition of each had qualified her to be its architect; but she dared not indulge the hope that she would be granted the privilege. To no monopoly are parents of this age so bitterly opposed, as to that of the education of their offspring; to no change so constant, as a change of instructors. Of the latter, it may well be affirmed—"These men began to build, and were not able," i. e. not permitted "to finish." There is small cause for wonder, then, at so many intellects of a vile composite order—Doric shafts, supporting Gothic arches; Egyptian columns, surrounded by Corinthian capitals.

Mr. Norwood's "odd" plan had not worked to suit him. Hatty had a fine ear and touch, and played with taste and accuracy the easy pieces she had been taught; but the juvenile Fontaines and Archers rattled and pounded the ivory slips so vigorously, as to awaken in the ambitious parent an envious discontent. In vain Hatty declared "there was no sense in what the piano said, when they played;" and repeated triumphantly to her father their confession, that they "could not note a piece to save their lives," while she had the "finger-boards at her fingers' ends." He "could see no difference between people who knew nothing to show, and those who showed nothing that they knew. Miss Conway was a most amiable young lady, unpretending, and no doubt had an inexhaustible store of common sense; but she wanted style."

This was remarked in confidence to his wife, who imparted it to her son and daughter. Lydia was "not so sorry as she would be if she expected to remain at Coldmount much longer, herself," and Powhie said "a change would be better for all concerned, except the children. Father will find out, when too late, that the teacher they have now is one of a thousand."

"He objects that she does not bring them on rapidly," ventured Mrs. Norwood, whose faith in Powhie's judgment often clashed with her wifely creed of infallibility.

"I wonder why the world was not made in one, instead of six days," said Powhie, in his soliloquy fashion, wandering up and down the hall, with his hands behind him. "I wonder why seed-time and harvest do not come together—why we are compelled to wait first for the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear. Aunt Peggy brought in some of that early corn this morning, mother. Did you see it?"

"Yes. Your father says it is an infamous humbug. There are nothing but little 'nubbins,' with not more than a dozen grains to the ear," heaving a sigh at the consequent delay of the "Brunswick stew" she had hoped to have smoking upon her board that day.

"Precisely such badly-filled 'nubbins' your children's minds are fated to become, if you adopt the forcing, hotbed system with them. They are sprightly and intelligent, growing fast enough, keeping pace with their

bodies. Look at Rowena Archer! a heartless coquette at fifteen—never having tasted the freshness of childhood's pleasures."

"Mr. Archer intends sending her to Clayton Institute," interrupted Lydia. "The rules there are so strict, that he hopes it will be the means of breaking off her engagement with Mr. Harris, Addie Berkeley's cousin."

"And an unprincipled fortune-hunter!" said Powhie, "bold as bad. No girl, whose moral sense was not depraved, could tolerate his advances. Shut up in a convent, in her sixteenth year, to keep her from sealing her lifelong misery? Verily, this is a 'fast' age! Mother, what do you say to stretching Hatty and Em upon a rack, every night, or hanging Lizzie upon a nail, by the hair of her head, with a weight attached to her feet?"

"Powhatan Norwood! are you crazy?"

"My dear mother! think how they would run up! Hatty would be as tall as Bettie Archer in a week."

"Yes! and look like those lean, spindling geraniums, which were kept in the cellar last winter!" retorted the dame, contemptuously.

"Just so, ma'am! They were cooped in a warm, dark room, and watered abundantly, when they were reaching vainly for the sun and dews of heaven. More than one clause of Agar's prayer 'has lain by until it is rusty.' Who prays—'Feed me with food convenient for me?'"

"That is a bad practice of yours, son—quoting Scripture upon light occasions."

"I do not consider this a light occasion, ma'am. I wish there was a little more illumination on the subject."

Bella read in the signs of the times, that with this session would terminate her residence at Coldmount. The anchor was to be shipped; there would be a few weeks of sunny weather, for Jamie's society would impart a calm, as when Halcyone broods upon the deep; the fog-bank and clouds rested beyond.

Mr. Norwood paid her salary promptly and liberally,, without reference to the future, and this was taken, as he designed it should be, for a virtual discharge. The farewell would be painful. From no one of the household had she ever had an unkind word or slight. No familiarity from the servants, no haughtiness from their owners, indicated that her station was less honourable than Lydia's. Mr. Norwood was pompous and dogmatical; but he respected her profession, and upheld her dignity with a steady hand. He had at heart something of the gallantry of the "gentlemen of the old school" (blessings on the race, so nearly extinct!) and rather than have Bella travel alone, would have accompanied her himself; therefore, he heartily sanctioned Powhie's proposal to see her safely home.

The sun had not arisen when Bella entered the school-room, on the last morning she was to spend with the charges, endeared to her by months of constant intercourse—with the friends who had made this, their home, that of the stranger also. She had purposely left much undone until the trying hours preceding her departure. Books and portfolios of drawing and music still occupied their usual places in the neat apartment. A blur fell frequently before her vision, as her shaking hands collected and packed them. The topmost layer was pressed down; the lid closed with a click, which aroused a desolate echo in her heart. Gifts for each of the children were laid within their desks. They would not discover them before she

should be many miles on her homeward way. She looked around the room. All the tranquil seasons of solitude, and the hardly less grateful once of active duty, she had enjoyed in that quiet retreat, passed in review before her. She forgot the toils and misgivings of those first months, when she distrusted her own powers, and the appreciation of those for whom she laboured. It seemed like a blessed haven, in which she would fain hide from the world, and await the time when the dim prospect of a dearer and more permanent abode should be defined into reality. She could have envied her unknown successor her possession of the beloved precincts—and "her children"—how could she give them up?

Bella was a deep thinker; and as she sat upon the door-step, gazing towards the sunrising—the luxuriant streamers of the Prairie-rose forming a fitting frame for her young, sweet face—she was studying the problem of life; not with Isabel's impatient longing or exultant enthusiasm—yet seriously and intently; not only conjecturing what might be the next turn in the hidden path, along which an invisible hand was guiding her, but searching for the end thereof; trying to divine the purpose of this mysterious course. Her tastes were so simple—her views so lowly—with all her trust in a Father's love and wisdom, she could not but marvel sometimes that their gratification was so sternly forbidden. Graver and yet more grave grew the sober face, and one who was regarding it from no great distance, saw that with another cloud the rain would fall. Heaven forgive her—and us, when we cherish such repinings! She was thinking how meagre was her store of mercies—how little she had seen to be thankful for.

A glittering trembling ray touched the crown of a poplar before the door, and there rang out upon the morning air a thrilling burst of song. A mocking-bird sat upon the highest pinnacle of the tree—Nature's spire, which, untrained by man, pointed ever heavenwards. How he sang! as though the happiness of the universe were concentrated in his throbbing heart, and his mission in life was to pour it forth. One long, delicious gush of thanksgiving, a clear, liquid shout of joy, as the sunbeam gilded his crest, then the mantle of light spread down the hill-sides and over the forests; and he mounted aloft, borne up by his own music, higher and higher, in darting, eccentric circles, sending down, like a rain of diamonds, glad trills of rapture. "The morning! the morning!" he sang, "God made it?" and as if the doors of Bella's heart had been flung open, light, and perfume, and song filled it.

"Where are our human mocking-birds?" asked a manly voice beside her. "Nightingales we have in abundance, and more of those into whose breasts the thorn has penetrated too far to leave the power of song. Our mocking-birds singing because they cannot help it, giving out their whole souls in the transporting melody, which is to them thought and feeling—where are they?"

"I know but one," said Bella.

"Isabel? It is early dawn with her as yet. The dart may pierce her heart before the dusk!"

Bella did not reply. The bird's song was ended; the gates were slowly swinging to. They shut suddenly, as he resumed, "You leave Coldmount to-day?"

It was not like Powhie thus to darken her spirit. He went on perversely, "Do you grieve to go?

"I do."

"Most women would have said more, but I prefer those two words."

His smile made him himself again, one of her best and kindest friends. "You have done a good work here, Miss Bella. Part of your reward you are receiving now, in the acknowledgment and regrets of those whom you have benefited; and let me tell you, the affection of a child's heart is not to be despised; it is an unblemished offering. You have not lived in vain, if you never garner more precious sheaves than the love and gratitude of such."

She was strong and hopeful when they arose from the worn step; a cheerful fortitude which did not desert her in the leave-takings and the journey from the hospitable homestead. There were patches of ever-during light upon the shadowed pathway.

The boat stopped at Haysville about sunset. The passengers were most of them upon the deck, and thither Powhie conducted his companion, in preference to the stifling cabin. A gentleman reached out a helping hand from the head of the short step-ladder at the stern. Bella availed herself of it; and Powhie touched his hat in recognition of the courtesy as they were passing the stranger, when a laugh of extreme amusement arrested both. Bella threw back her thick veil. She saw, within two feet of hers, a pair of eyes sparkling with mischief and delight. She could just ejaculate, "Willard!"

"You do recognise me, then?" said he, bending to her ear; "are not 'off wi' the old love?' My own Bella? may I say it still?"

An ear as quick as hers caught something of the import of the greeting. Powhie was very pale as she named her friend, and extended a passive hand for his cordial grasp.

"If you will take Mr. Monmouth's arm, I will clear you a passage to the other end of the boat, where there are seats," he said to Bella.

He cast but one glance at her happy face, still rosy with the glow of meeting, and declining shortly Willard's offer of a chair, left them side by side. There was suspicion mixed with pity in the gaze Willard bent upon his form as it disappeared in the crowd, and renewed tenderness in his deportment to his betrothed. He had come up the canal the night before on purpose to meet the "down boat," and take her home.

"We are very busy just now, too; but I told Mr. Merton that I was entitled to a week's vacation, having had none at Christmas. Put your veil quite back! I want to feast my eyes—it has been so long since!"

Powhie was forgotten during the two hours that ensued. The rose-coloured clouds faded into a greyish purple, then into ash; and in the sky above the stars were kindled, one by one. Over the low bank of the canal they could catch the gleam of the rushing river, and the groves edging its shores stood up grim and black against the horizon. Myriads of fire-flies hovered in the scanty strip of meadow-ground between the water-courses, and as the boat swept by, they appeared to move at the same rate in the opposite direction; the torches of an innumerable army tossing with the regular step of the mailed soldiery.

This was Willard's conceit; one of many to which he gave utterance that evening, while Bella, restored to her habitual quietude, seldom volunteered a remark. He had improved in appearance since their parting. The care and responsibilities attendant upon business life, deeper insight into

human nature and the current of existence, had given him a manliness and decision of manner which caused Bella to look up to him with proud confidence. They walked no more hand in hand, as boy and girl, over a daisied path. She leaned upon his stronger arm as they trod the broad, hard track, trampled by the multitude.

"I am happier to-night than I have been for long, long months," he said, in the subdued key which rendered their conversation unintelligible to those around them. "This still, soft evening hour infuses its spirit of calm into my very soul. I hold communion only with you and Nature. The turmoil in which I was involved yesterday, the crosses, misfortunes, and trickery of trade, are all a confused dream I could wish never to know again. I am sick of it, Bella! heart-sick! I want some near road to independence and happiness."

"The path of duty is the nearest and safest."

"I am not so sure of it as you are. I fret in the harness more and more every day, and when I remember you, I am tempted to break away at once, and try my fortune elsewhere. Money will purchase everything. To me it would bring bliss unspeakable. I want money."

"Is your business less profitable than you anticipated?"

"No; and I ought to be glad that I am earning something, be it ever so little; but this delving, plodding life is what I detest!"

"I am afraid you are impatient—rebellious."

"Indeed I am! I will not shock you by recounting my fits of morbid discontent; my unchristian anathemas against the chance which precipitated me from the top to the bottom of the wheel of Fortune."

"Not chance—Providence!"

"That is your name for it. I can see your sorrowful eyes by the starlight. I shall become very wicked without you, my guardian angel! But for the ægis of your love I should have been a castaway ere this."

"I do not like to hear you speak so, Willard—you make me uneasy. Do not try to destroy my trust in your——"

"Mr. Monmouth! excuse me, sir! I expect to get off in the night, and would like to have a minute's talk with you about that matter I mentioned," interrupted a consequential voice, and Willard, with a muttered invective against "this eternal bore—business!" went aside with the speaker.

Bella was dreamily watching the fire-flies and listening to the soughing of the keel through the water, when a hand touched hers. Willard still talked with the unwelcome intruder, but his seat was occupied.

"You are as happy as I am miserable!" was Powhie's abrupt address.

"'Miserable!' Why?"

"I do you the justice to believe that you are unconscious of the pain you have occasioned. I do not mean to censure you, or damp your pleasure. I would say"—he checked himself and went on more steadily. "You will leave the boat a little after midnight. I shall keep on to Richmond, and must say 'Farewell' before you go below. I am not the man I was this morning, Bella; I drew joy and hope then from your grief at quitting scenes to which it was my fondest desire to restore you. The sad cadence of your voice, when you confessed your regret, was sweeter music to my heart than the merriest notes of the bird's song. I had the pre-

sumption to hope that you might be persuaded to undertake my reformation; was blind to the pre-occupation of your heart. I concealed my attachment from you while you were under my father's roof; nor would I reveal it now, were I still your protector. You are incapable of trifling with my feelings or of inconstancy to your lover. Your truth to him did not preclude a sisterly regard for me. His eager whisper, as he almost caught you in his arms, was a poisoned arrow in my breast. If I turned from you angrily, it was because the pang was so recent. Will you forget my unworthy petulance, and think of me ever as your faithful friend—your brother—one to whom you have been everything of comfort, and blessing, and inspiration; to whom you can never be an object of indifference?"

His rapid enunciation had afforded her no space for reply, if words had been ready. This declaration was so unlooked-for, that in spite of his tone of mournful sincerity she could scarcely credit the evidence of her senses—was tempted to believe it a dream or a jest.

"I certainly do not comprehend you!" she stammered. "I never suspected that I was more to you than other girls I could name. You have been very kind to me, but I thought it was through compassion for my loneliness. I could not attribute your conduct to such motives as those you have expressed. We are so unlike"—

"Do not remind me of the vanity which would have beguiled me into a contrary belief! You are not like me, Bella! for I am indolent, selfish, and worldly"—

"No! no!" she remonstrated.

He pressed her hand. "Thank you! but the truth remains the same. If you have found good in me, it has been by the alchemy of the philosopher's stone, developed, if not created, by the surpassing excellence of your character. Hear me out! I am too sad to flatter—too much in earnest to withhold the truth. To the world you appear cold and gentle to inanity. I have seen and heard the beatings of the woman's heart, fervent and strong, and have some conception of its value. I thank you for the impulse you have lent to the nobler part of my nature; for the charity recommended by your precept and example; for the views of my responsibility to my neighbour and my Maker you have unfolded to eyes so long dulled by conceit and love of pleasurable ease.

"My wish, my prayer at parting and through life is, that he who has won the priceless gem may be worthy of and prize it rightly. Mr. Monmouth is coming! Heaven bless you for ever!"

The narrow berth, into which Bella cast herself for a short interval of rest, might have been set with thorns for all the sleep she gained. It is a trial to every right-minded woman to reject a true and honest love, although she would seal her own misery by yielding to its demands; and there was much in this instance to sharpen the sting. She appreciated the delicacy of Powhie's affection, his self-control, lest he should alarm or wound her, his generosity in desiring to elevate a penniless, unknown girl to the station his wealth, family, and intelligence would ensure to his wife; and in severe self-reproach she censured the reserve which had folded her heart over the knowledge of her engagement, shutting it in from friendly, as well as prying eyes. She could not have disclosed it in explicit terms,

even to one whose interest in her happiness was so evident as was his, but in justice to him she should have excited a suspicion of the truth.

Her eyes were wet, as, standing upon the bank, she looked after the departing vessel, and saw, by the rising moon, a tall, dark figure upon the deck, motionless, until she waved her hand, when an answering gesture testified that she was still the object of his eyes and thoughts.

Willard could spare but three days to his family and his betrothed, and the flight of the wheeling hours made Bella almost dizzy. Round and round they sped in sunny mazes; and ere the painful fulness of excessive joy calmed into peaceful content, the throe of parting came. Their last pilgrimage was to the scene of their plighting—the seat by the brook. They wandered further, to the pine-grove, and in the twilight of its shade spoke with aching hearts of the discouraging past, of the uncertain future, he confident in but one thing—her truth; she, with as much faith in him, clung, in gloom as in sunlight, with unquestioning trust to the hand of her Heavenly Friend.

CHAPTER X.

Bella's second "situation" was that of French and music teacher in an "institute" of some celebrity, for an hundred miles or so in the surrounding country. Mr. Waylie, or as the circulars set forth—"Cornelius Waylie, A.M., Principal of Clayton Female Institute," had fifty or sixty young ladies under his care, and he was Mrs. Cornelius Waylie's vicegerent. He was handsome, with somewhat of a saturnine cast of feature, large black whiskers, and a carriage so dignified it verged upon stiffness. His articulation was measured and distinct; his sentences having the sound, if not the sense of oracles, and he understood to perfection the art of prudent silence, made eloquent by nods and glances. Some of his pupils feared, some disliked him, and none ever presumed upon familiarity; but all contemplated him with a species of pride, as their head and representative. Many cheeks flushed and eyes beamed with gratification, as the lengthy procession, arrayed in the summer uniform of white and pink, or dark-green cloaks and hoods of winter, marched up the church aisle, in the sight of all the congregation, and were waved into their respective pews by the impersonation of manly elegance, clad in an irreproachable suit of black, always relieved by a white cravat, and, upon state occasions, by the smoothest of snowy vests.

His lady was less precise and more voluble; had much natural quickness, and a great deal of art. The latter trait was signally manifested in the training of her spouse. He boasted, in his staid way, of his disregard of dictation, let it proceed from what quarter it might; and the knowing listener's politeness only suppressed the smile, which would have curled his mouth, as he saw the pedagogue bow his stately neck to receive the collar, open his wise jaws to admit the bit, the small, fair hands of his consort adjusted in their usual positions. He stalked—toes out and head erect; she tripped mincingly beside him, eye secretly vigilant, and forefinger ever ready to single out and expose a delinquent. She knew all the jugglery and free-masonry of school-girl craft. Was a "glorious" supper of fried

eggs, cold turkey, and pound-cake served at midnight, in the dormitory most remote from the family chambers? although quilts and blankets were pinned over the windows to prevent the emission of a ray from the candle-ends, hoarded for weeks beforehand in trunks and boxes, although soap and sand were faithful in expunging every tale-telling grease-spot — the shovel, the impromptu frying-pan, was subjected to the action of both fire and water, and the room fumigated with camphor, besides being ventilated for the rest of the night—they might yet count, with tolerable degree of certainty, upon the appearance of a slip of paper from the Principal's left hand waistcoat pocket, immediately after roll-call in the morning; from which said slip he would read the names of each and every one of the revellers, as "guilty of violation of the 10th, 20th, 38th, and 77th articles of the Constitution"—rules prohibitory of unlawful assemblages; eating, except at stated seasons, and in the dining-hall; lights in the dormitories after nine o'clock p. m., and general misconduct or failure of respect to the appointed powers. Milly Dawson, the wildest, most daring of imps, had not had occasion to let down a tuck, even in her Sunday dress, since the dreadful breakfast, at which Mrs. Waylie, in one scathing sentence, such as she alone could concoct and deliver, made public her knowledge of her own sobriquet of "Puss Pry," and her lord's equally appropriate nickname of "Corny Caudle," and designated their author.

Bella could not readily become accustomed to the ubiquity of one, who was advertised as "bestowing her personal superintendence upon the food, dress, behaviour, and morals of the young ladies." A heat, very like indignation, warmed the new teacher's brow, as the trim figure was discovered at the back of her chair at the conclusion of a recitation or a music-lesson; and the uneasy consciousness of her probable presence, when she was not assured of her being near, hung a shade of awkward embarrassment over her. Margaret Lynch, a kind, but quick-tempered girl, who had charge of the preparatory department, entered an energetic remonstrance against this invasion of her territory, and for the remainder of the session was made to comprehend, by oblique hints, in season and out of season, that the trustworthy never dreaded the investigation of their acts and lives.

No sterner law than conscience, and anxiety for her scholars' improvement, had spurred Bella to diligence, as the Norwoods' governess. Necessity was her mistress now. She had literally not a moment to herself. There was a piano in her room, and at daylight one of the four girls who shared the chamber with her commenced the unmeaning jingle. The prayer-bell rang at six, and she must give a lesson before it sounded. The service consumed five minutes—the roll-call was read, and breakfast was announced. Two hours before school sufficed to dispatch two or three more musical pretenders. With a groaning spirit she repaired to the "French room," partitioned off from Miss Lynch's premises by a wooden wall; and between the clamour of infantine voices on one side, and the execrable jargon of girls, who plumed themselves upon their skill in the language, having "taken" one, two, sometimes three "quarters," from as many instructors, the confused victim wondered her senses did not entirely desert her.

The trouble here was not that the classes would not learn, but that they

persisted in their refusal to unlearn. Bella would rather have attempted to educate an idiot than one of the self-sufficient, "accomplished" damsels upon the forms before her. Into the fine and regular warp of the Creator's arrangement had been thrust many a presumptuous shuttle, reckless of symmetry and beauty, breaking threads, and weaving fantastic, tasteless patterns, which could neither be altered nor cut away. Study was delightless labour—their minds were distended—not expanded—by a mass of heterogeneous stuff, crammed, pushed, drilled into the brain—knowledge totally unavailable for the business of life—bringing no pleasure to its possessor, and loading the faculties, which should have been employed in the digestion of healthy, life-giving nutriment.

Oh! the arrant, monstrous humbug of fashionable female education! a farce that tempts one, in desperate disgust, to wish for a return of the "good old days" when his grandmother spun and wove her linsey-woolsey gown; knit her husband's hose; read the Spectator, Pilgrim's Progress, and the Bible, and never battled for the intellectual equality of the sexes!

Yet those who were favoured with a sight of the "Institute Library," comprising "such works as were used in the school," went away highly edified by the inspection, and impressed with a profound admiration for the tide of erudition which would roll over the land from this fountain head. Butler's Analogy, Paley's Theology, Lyell's Geology, Simson's Euclid, Davies' Trigonometry and Mensuration, were text-books in the hands, and upon the tongues, of each member of the senior class; the same young lady, at the same time, reading, "L'Histoire Universelle de Bossuet," "Harmonies de la Nature," "Les Œuvres choisies de Jean Racine," and "Cicero de Amicitia et de Senectute." Mr. Waylie's seminary had a reputation as a "finishing school," and Bella could not avoid the conclusion that if he did not "finish" the tender minds he was deputed to train, no one else could.

There were other and more grievous wrongs than those done to the intellect. Here were guileless children, who had never before left their mother's eye; from whom all things unholy and hurtful had been kept with jealous watchfulness; the first and last duty of whose day had been to kneel solemnly at their bed-sides, and breathe their simple, "Our Father who art in Heaven,"—and to these, as daily companions and bedfellows, were assigned bold, vulgar scoffers, hardened in iniquity, adepts in deceit, and heartless, as nothing but premature exposure to the world can make a woman. You and I have seen such, candid reader. I leave it to you to name the proportion their number bears to the "total attendance" of the "Institute," you are thinking of at this minute.

Bella sorrowed, as she marked the blush of offended modesty, the tear of wounded feeling, become less and less frequent: the hasty and then suspended devotions; the gradual initiation into the subterfuges, the falsehoods, practised to evade the rules and their penalties; finally, the shameless forehead, the ready tongue, and forward bearing, characteristic of their early tormentors—now their mates. She saw—powerless to arrest or mitigate the spreading plague. The influence purchased by her gentleness, was slight compared with the hold her opponents had acquired by flattery and ridicule. From the day of her arrival a coalition was formed against her, because she belonged to "the faculty." It was easy to call her diffi-

dence, pride; her timid declaration of opinion, ignorance; her firm discharge of duty, harshness; and thus sprang up a prejudice, to live down which years, instead of months, would have been required. Nor were her superior officers more sympathizing or congenial. Mr. Waylie had Mr. Norwood's formality, without the manliness and high notions of honour which had caused her to respect the latter—"odd" though he was. Contempt was added to distrust as a further acquaintance displayed the Principal's unfitness for his post; his deficiencies of mind and education. She did not know which most to despise—his dishonesty, or the gullibility of the public in encouraging this glaring imposture.

It was a wet Sunday—hopelessly rainy and dismal. The girls had yawned through the Bible lesson, recited every Sabbath in the school-room—Milly Dawson said, to "keep Mr. Waylie in practice." Church, although but a quarter of a mile off, was not to be thought of by any of the feminine gender; but precisely ten minutes before eleven o'clock, Mr. Waylie and his black silk umbrella moved majestically down the road leading to the village. He never forgot that he had the dignity of the school to support—even his manner of stepping around, instead of over the puddles, expressed his consciousness that more depended upon his spotless preservation than upon the welfare of an ordinary man. A tittering knot of mischief-loving scholars surveyed and criticized him from Bella's front window. Conspicuous among them was Rowena Archer, the pert, frivolous daughter of Mr. Norwood's neighbour. Bella had never liked her, and had every reason to believe that the unfavourable impression was mutual. She had the temerity to hint something to this effect, when Mrs. Waylie proposed her as one of "Miss Conway's room-mates—a measure which she presumed would be very agreeable, as they already knew each other."

"Ah!" she said, pursing her lips and lifting her brows as Bella entered her protest, "It is a pity!"

When Bella mounted to her apartment, Miss Archer's trunk and bandbox were there, and at night their owner ensconced herself in one of the three double trundle beds. Mrs. Waylie had not many superiors in manœuvring. The chances of a league, defensive and offensive, against the constituted authorities, were lessened by appointing to the same quarter of the camp those who were hostile to each other.

"I wish he had taken Puss Pry with him," said Paulina Butler. "I am awfully moped in this dreary old castle. It would do me an immensity of good if I could have a tearing race up and down these tremendous long passages. Eleven o'clock! Three hours to dinner! six more before we go to bed! Mercy! what were rainy Sundays made for?"

"Like a thousand other things, and some people, to fret us!" answered Rowena, whose humour was as unpleasant as the weather. "If I thought there was the least possibility of getting Pa' to listen to reason, I would not wait another day to write to him, and tell him what sort of a place this is for a gentleman's daughter. I have not eaten a decent meal this session, and I am literally starving. I was not brought up to feed upon middling and cabbage one day—salt beef and turnips the next, any more than I was raised to trudge to church on foot, like a darkey. I should think that I was in the seventh heaven, if I could get into a carriage once more, or sleep in a bed by myself. I don't know what Ma' would say to

packing five people in a cuddy-hole like this, all lodging, washing, and dressing together. It would not be quite so abominable if one could select her company."

This clause was not resented. Her eye and pout aimed it beyond the circle around her. Bella had been subject, from childhood, to violent headaches; and was now suffering with one of the worst type, aggravated by a cold. The disorderly chamber and hard bed did not tempt to idle ease. She would not have lain there if she could have sat up: yet she knew, from the rude looks and whispers of the girls, that they put another construction upon her remaining. They were not all unfeeling. Milly Dawson would have hushed her loud laugh, and walked with lighter tread if she had believed that the uncomplaining sufferer was, in truth, in need of such forbearance; and there were others as humane; but graduates in deception themselves, they were sceptical in everything that could be counterfeited.

"I hate a spy! a mealy-mouthed one, particularly!" said Rowena, loudly and significantly. She was bent upon ridding the room of an occupant so abhorred; dragged trunks and chairs about, "to make elbow-space," she said; talked noisily and coarsely, and, most trying of all—beat the uncarpeted floor with her foot—every tap sending sparks of bloody fire across Bella's eyeballs. She was in the midst of a story, of which she was the heroine, and whose sole attraction, to any but school-girl's ears, would have been its marvellousness, when the door unclosed to admit Miss Sally Sprole.

The narration stopped; speaker and auditors looking angry, but becoming still instantly.

The visitor advanced to the bed, and asked Bella "how she felt."

"My head aches very badly," she replied, faintly.

"And will, while there is so much disturbance," said the other, sourly, shooting a glance from beneath her thin lashes in the direction of the window. "I brought this volume of sermons with me, thinking you might wish me to read one aloud."

Milly Dawson was first to move. Her exit was the signal for a stampede.

Miss Sally smiled grimly. "Have you taken any medicine?"

"No, ma'am."

"Right! you want sleep." She stirred the fire and opened her book.

Bella was too nervous to apply the remedy prescribed. She was almost as much afraid of her deliverer as were the rabble she had dispersed.

Miss Sprole was one of those people who remind one of the mystery of Melchizedec; seeming, as they do, the first and last of their race. The idea of Miss Sally's ever having been young was amusing; of her having had parents and friends, beloved and loving, preposterous. From time immemorial she had been an appendage of the Institute, retained like a toothless watch-dog, to intimidate by growls, when the power to bite had departed. Bella was, for a time, disposed to view her as a supernumerary, inasmuch as she filled no definite capacity, but observation soon corrected this aspersion of Mrs. Waylie's social economy. There were no drones in her hive; Miss Sally buzzed and fluttered, bore and spread wax, with the rest. She was not the housekeeper, although she counted and rubbed the silver, and washed dishes; not the washerwoman, if she did make the

tour of the establishment, every Monday morning, and noted down lists of the linen intended for the laundry; no mother would have sent her child to a school, whose infant class was intrusted to her tender mercies, yet she was often in Margaret Lynch's room, hearing lessons which had been re-committed for after-school study; Mr. Waylie would have received with lofty scorn the suggestion that she could ever act as his alternate; but there were "black days" when business or sickness detained him from his post, and Miss Sally took his place. With a vision like that of a lynx, and a tongue like an alarm-bell, she was the *bête noire* of the naughty, the most incorruptible of judges to the fallible.

She read on untiringly for half an hour, and Bella's weary eyes refused to look at anything but her. They renewed the inventory of her rusty mourning dress, worn on week-days and Sundays, for nobody knew whom —Milly Dawson would have it—"for the husband she did not get."

Bella smiled in her pain and desolation, as she recalled the saucy hit. Miss Sally could never have been otherwise than excessively homely, in her best days. Her prominent eyes were light grey, their fringes short and sparse; her eyebrows were almost white, and had a fretful perk; her teeth projected, those of the upper jaw over-lapping the lower; the lips never meeting over two hideous tusks, which, if I may quote again from the Institute Punch, "kept perpetually before Milly's mind, Red Riding Hood's wolf, with his great mouth, the better to eat you, my dear."

She shut the book. "Were you educated expressly for a teacher?" she asked, without preamble.

"No, ma'am," replied Bella.

"Then, why are you one?"

"I teach for a living."

"A reverse of fortune?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Parents alive?"

"My mother is."

"Do you support her, too

"No, ma'am."

"Is she still a widow?"

"No, ma'am."

"Aha! A step-mother drove me from home. You have a step-father. Is he unwilling or unable to maintain you?"

"He is able, and has offered to do it."

"Then why—" setting her chair nearer the bed, and facing the sick girl, "why, in the name of common sense, don't you let him do as he wishes?"

"I prefer being independent."

"Prefer making a fool of yourself!" retorted the irate spinster. "If I had my life to go over again, I would scrub floors, clean my step-mother's shoes, and set her foot upon my neck, before I would leave my father's house. 'Independence,' forsooth! I tell you, you have chosen the most slavish profession that society ever put upon woman. Don't I know? have not I followed it for forty years? I am out of date now—'old, ugly Miss Sally!' but I was esteemed intelligent and accomplished then; could read, not speak French; knew a Latin word, when I saw it; was versed in the

English classics; played on the spinnet, and painted on velvet. I was not handsome, so I cultivated my mind to make myself attractive. I was hot-blooded; my step-mother had the same failing, and I vowed insubordination to her tyranny. Once in the whirlpool, escape is next to impossible. Marriage is the only means of release, and men have a prejudice—not a groundless one, by the way, against marrying governesses. They are angel-martyrs or shrews—one or the other is the inevitable consequence of their employment, and the probabilities are fearfully in favour of the second. I never had a lover. I was fastidious in my youth, and had my sentimental conceptions of affection and refinement. As I grew older, I would have accepted a home from any one who would not actually abuse me. A home!" she said, fixing her eyes upon the fire, and speaking in a melancholy tone. "We are all pilgrims and strangers upon earth, but even the swallow of a summer has a nest. For forty years I have been home-sick!"

Bella drew her Bible from under her pillow, and began turning its leaves.

"Don't trouble yourself to look for it!" said Miss Sally, testily, "I have marked, in mine, all those texts which promise 'a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;' 'the rest that remaineth,' and 'an abiding city yet to come.' I have laid them more to heart than you ever have done—but, child! life and its trials are here! pressing upon every square inch of the body and soul. They bow one down until he cannot look up. I was angry with you, and with those who sent you here, when I saw you cross the threshold of the front door. Take my advice, and go back to your mother. If her house is a degree cooler than purgatory, and your step-father an inch higher in the scale of humanity than a fiend, you will do well to quit this school-teaching. You are young and pretty. Every day you spend within these walls, diminishes your chances of making an advantageous settlement. You can't tell me anything I don't know about this matter. I have knocked around in the world for forty years; understand its sentiments and ways. You are too weak and delicate to bear exposure to the rough winds, which will blow upon you from every point of the compass. Now, there is Margaret Lynch—"

"Yes! here *is* Margaret Lynch!" responded that young lady, catching her name, as she entered. "What of her, Miss Sally? She has a tongue that is always ready to speak for her."

"And which is for ever out of place," was the amiable rejoinder. "Pity you had not listened a minute more at the door! you would have added another to the hundreds who have verified the adage—'Eavesdroppers never hear good of themselves.'"

"Miss Sprole!" said the spirited Margaret, "none of my name or blood have ever been guilty of a meanness. It is a late day for such an accusation to come from so despicable a source. Your age and insignificance are your protection."

"Margaret!" exclaimed Bella, beseechingly.

"She shall not insult me, Bella."

"Cannot you exercise a little patience: Miss Sally meant nothing."

"Miss Sally meant much—more than she said!" returned Miss Sprole.

"Bella is fainting!" cried Margaret, running for water and Cologne.

She had not swooned; but it was several minutes before the deadly

nausea had passed away. As the blood reddened the pallid lips, she smiled in the anxious faces leaning over her.

Miss Sally waited to hear her say that she was better; then picked up her volume of sermons and went out.

"She wont stand it as long as I have done, by thirty-five years," she muttered, as she betook herself to her comfortless closet—all her own, since no one would consent to room with her.

Margaret had an uncomfortable misgiving that her passion and Miss Sally's acrimony had produced Bella's illness.

"I made you worse," said she, remorsefully, bathing her brow and hands. "I wish I were dead!"

"My dear Margaret!"

"Can't help it, Bella! I do—or that I had never been born. I am constantly doing something to hurt those I love, and irritate my enemies. I sneered at Mrs. Waylie this morning; and she preached me a homily upon the evils of a passionate disposition; the necessity of self-command in one who professed to guide the young, and the supreme importance of a respectful demeanour to superiors. I came here to have a good cry, for you would not despise my tears, and that odious old——"

Bella's hand drove the word back. Margaret held it to her lips until the angry tide subsided.

"My poor mother used to prophesy trouble from my ungovernable temper. It blazed out towards her, sometimes. She is dead now! I would give the world to see her once more, and ask her forgiveness."

"You will—in heaven," answered Bella.

"I fear not? I am so sinful! I was a spoiled child. My father indulged me to excess because I was motherless. When he died, I went to live with an uncle, whose family was large and means limited. He prepared me to provide for myself, and I am doing it; but, dear Bella, it is a miserable life! A teacher ought to have neither spirit nor feeling."

"Will you sing for me?" requested Bella, unable to listen to a second edition of Miss Sally's story.

Margaret had a pleasant voice, and her selection was a hymn they had often sung together—

"O, where shall rest be found?"

The patient's countenance was so calm, her posture so like sleep when she finished, that she was complacent in the soothing effect of her music. She rearranged the fire, and laid down beside her. Her Irish blood had cooled; no trouble oppressed her long; the day was propitious for a nap, and she disposed herself to take one. Bella's lids were unsealed when her friend's somnolent condition was apparent. The drizzling mist made the window-panes seem like ground glass, through which the light fell upon the plain and defaced furniture, the bare floor and soiled walls. She could live without luxury; but at "The Grove," and in Isabel's home, comfort and neatness were synonyms. Here, they were as rare as gentle and affectionate words. Her head ached still—the temples beating a tumultuous alarm, in response to the loud tattoo of the heart. The bodily pain would have worn her spirits low, if there had been no other source of disquiet; if her mother's soft hand had played among the hot tresses, tossed far

back, as if their weight were oppressive to the swollen veins—or Isabel's cooing notes had wooed ease and repose. She was a woman—sick and sad and lonely; and she wept until exhaustion compelled the approach of the coveted cure—rest for brain and heart.

CHAPTER XI.

Her stupor was prolonged. She aroused sufficiently to murmur a refusal of the tea Margaret brought her at dinner, and again at supper-time; her real awakening was not before night. It was sudden. She could have said that an unusual noise broke the spell of slumber.

"Who is there?" escaped her lips, as the mists of sleep parted before her eyes. All was still. The rain had ceased; the clouds flying over the moon, impelled by a strong, cold wind. The half curtain of the window flapped in the blast. It must have been this sound which had disturbed her. But why was the window open? She raised herself, and numbered over the inmates of the other beds. They were all there—sleeping as quietly as though the night breeze were not pouring danger upon their heads. She was feverish, and wrapping her dressing-gown over her bosom, paused in the act of lowering the sash, for one inhalation of the fresh air. The gleam of a lamp made her drop it.

"Miss Conway!" said Mrs. Waylie, her voice full of astonishment and rebuke.

"I arose to shut the window," Bella replied, trembling from weakness and surprise.

"And how happened it to be open?"

"I do not know, madam. I awoke but a moment ago."

The lady-commandress examined the casement, as if it had its tale to relate, and a different one from that just heard. Behind a trunk which stood beneath it, she found a chord, knotted at one end.

"Whose is this?"

"I do not know, madam."

Mrs. Waylie rolled it up; went to each couch, and flashed the light in the face of the four pupils.

"Your head will not be improved by your standing in the cold, Miss Conway. I advise you to retire;" and she departed, carrying the cord with her.

The Institute had been "haunted" for years; ever since the decease of Mr. Waylie's mother, who, servants and boarders reported, made occasional jaunts from the spirit-land, to ascertain how affairs were progressing with her son. She rapped at doors; groaned in closets, and under beds, and there was every session a standing supply of one or more, who would swear to having met her some auspiciously dark night, upon the stairs or in the corridors. These tales were not questioned in the winter twilights, when the younger children and those of a larger growth, who loved the wonderful, and did not despise the impossible and preternatural, clustered about the fire; each trying to outdo her neighbour in the recital and manufacture of stories of love, murder, and phantoms; but they were ridiculed by the matter-of-fact majority.

In December, an incident occurred which converted some of the stoutest infidels to the faith of the ghost-seers. Margaret Lynch was awakened at midnight, by the clapping of a shutter, upon her floor of the building. Mrs. Waylie had a prudent housewife's horror of fractured glass, and her subordinate knew that she would be held responsible for such accidents within her jurisdiction. She lighted a candle, flung a cloak over her shoulders, and started into the gallery. A shriek and the fall of a heavy body alarmed the household. When Mrs. Waylie hastened to the scene of confusion, Bella, Miss Sally, and a crowd of shivering, terrified girls surrounded Margaret, who lay upon the floor in a dead faint. She declared, when she recovered, that she had met just without her door, a woman of gigantic stature, enveloped in a white mantle, flying along the passage, her arms extended, and hair streaming upon the air.

"Go to your rooms, young ladies!" Mrs. Waylie commanded the aghast throng—"*and stay there!*"

They understood the direction of her surmises, from her emphasis, but it was an unpopular theory.

"You heard a shutter close, I think you said, Miss Lynch?" said she to Margaret, but looking at Bella.

"Yes, madam; then a sound like a window let down very softly."

"Exactly! I have been annoyed by a similar noise once before this winter. Is it your belief, Miss Lynch, that the ghost came in at the window? She was very considerate in fastening it after her. If you hear her again, I recommend that you remain in your chamber. I have confidence in her. She will not harm any one except herself. Miss Conway, perhaps it will be wise for you to stay with your friend to-night. I trust to your benevolence to allay her fears. Pleasant dreams, young ladies."

"She don't believe you, Miss Margaret," exclaimed one of her roommates.

"She may doubt it, then!" said she, justly incensed at the cool sarcasm heaped upon her. "I did see all that I have described. Bella, don't leave me! I am quaking now—it was so frightful!"

"What do you think it was, Miss Conway?" asked another.

"Nothing supernatural, Ella. If spirits revisit the earth in a visible form, it is upon more dignified errands than scampering through these empty galleries, scaring women and children to death. It was a foolish trick, played by some thoughtless or evil-disposed person—perhaps one of the servants."

Mrs. Waylie's morning inspection of the premises, especially the bolts of the doors and windows, elicited no information for the agitated public, and a week elapsed without a return of the apparition. Then a negro saw it in the yard, soon after supper. It spread its wings as before, and flew—he averred, upwards; but his mistress' cross-examination extorted the confession that he "was running away from it too fast, to be very positive which way it went." This would never do. The utmost excitement prevailed throughout the institution and the neighbourhood. Letters poured in upon Mr. Waylie, from parents and friends, demanding explanation and redress. He was at his wits' end, and could only hope for elucidation from his wife's talents.

"Another letter, Olivia!" he said, ruefully, one Saturday morning. "Mr. Farmer writes that he will take away his daughter and niece, if the

matter is not cleared up by Christmas. He has had extravagant accounts of it, and denounces 'the negligence that permits this dangerous trickery with the imaginations of youthful minds.'"

"Write that you have a clue to the author of the mischief, and that detection and punishment will follow," replied his wife.

"But, my dear—"

"Well! have you written already?"

"No, my love; I am mending my pen. Ahem! Would it not be advisable to wait—"

"For what! If you had rather manage the business yourself, I shall be rejoiced to be rid of it, Mr. Waylie."

The obedient Cornelius penned the epistle as directed.

"Now," continued his better half, "before you go out, ring the bell for Martha."

This was equivalent to a peremptory writ of ejectment. Cornelius Waylie, A.M., put his letter in his hat, "to carry to the post-office," summoned the servant, and paced out.

"Ask Miss Conway to step here," was Mrs. Waylie's order to her maid.

Bella obeyed the call. Mrs. Waylie was setting new buttons upon her husband's second-best coat.

"Be seated, Miss Conway."

She chose a chair on the other side of the stand.

Mrs. Waylie doubled and waxed her silk.

Bella contemplated the operation with seeming interest.

"I do not presume to control your actions, Miss Conway; still less to oppose your inclinations in *affaires du cœur*."

Mrs. Waylie "knew" French, and upon delicate occasions took refuge in that language.

"Had you been a pupil in the institute, I should have communicated with your parents three weeks ago, upon the flagrant impropriety of your lowering letters to your lover from your chamber window by night; but I trusted that the warning you had then would teach you caution for the future. I do not accuse you of wanton injury to Miss Lynch. The window at the end of the corridor was a safer outlet for your correspondence than that of your room, since it enlarged the pale of suspicion. Your preux cavalier was not so cautious. I picked up this envelope from the ground, where he had thrown it."

In utter amazement Bella received it. It bore, in her handwriting, the superscription, "Willard Monmouth, Esq., Richmond, Virginia."

"You recognise it?" asked Mrs. Waylie.

"Yes, madam; I lost it from my portfolio."

"I will allow you time for explanations presently. You will not thank me for opening this billet, deposited last evening, under a stone by the garden fence—a romantic letter-box, although hardly so safe as the village post-office, even when the sacred spot is guarded by the ministering spirit who terrified poor Isaac so, the other night. As the envelope was blank, you will excuse me for the liberty I took in breaking the seal. May I request of you the favour to read it in my presence?"

Half-stunned, Bella complied, with the same mechanical obedience. "My precious angel," was the orthodox heading, and three pages were but

variations upon that one string, with allusions to "hard hearts, which had forgotten their own early loves, and felt a savage joy in serving two adoring souls."

"This is none of my property, madam," said Bella, collecting her firmness.

"Read on, if you please?"

"I laughed heartily, my sweetest, at your ingenious device to keep meddlers at a distance. They are fools to fly from such a lovely apparition. If *I* were only permitted to approach his presence! My precious—how long shall bars and bolts, ogres of school-tyrants and unnatural parents deny us supreme felicity? I shall hover in the neighbourhood for some days yet. My visits to this part of the country are easily accounted for to my worthy paternal. My 'collecting tour' covers a multitude of delays. I shall look for a letter to-morrow night. Should you be unable to leave the house unseen, we must resort to the window again—at half-past ten o'clock. Be *very* cautious. I would not have my darling fall into the claws of Puss Pry.

"Ever your own devoted and unchangeable W——."

Bella replaced the letter upon the table. She spoke in her usual clear, soft key, but with a perceptible curl of the lip.

"Am I to understand that you suppose me to be the person addressed in this paper?"

Her proud innocence did not impress Mrs. Waylie. She had seen culprits as hardened before. "You correspond with Mr. Monmouth—do you not?"

The tips of the small ears were suffused with scarlet. "I do, madam!"

"Are you engaged to him?"

"I do not acknowledge your right to ask the question."

"Nevertheless, I must have a reply," clipping off another button.

Bella meditated a moment. "I *am* engaged to him!" she said, "with the full and free consent of my parents. Our correspondence is carried on through the regular mails, with no feint at concealment. That is neither his hand or style. Mr. Waylie can tell you that he brought me a letter from Richmond, yesterday. He has not left that city since I have been here. I could have no motive for clandestine communication, except a love of romance and intrigue. Slight as is your acquaintance with my character, Mrs. Waylie, you will acquit me of any such propensity."

She was excited—her soul stirred to its depths by the degrading charge, so mercilessly presented. She remained standing at the table, pale but apparently calm.

Mrs. Waylie was a woman of tact and discretion. She had pursued a wrong trail to a hazardous termination; to abandon it with a good grace, was her next move.

"I ask no proof except your word, Miss Conway, of your ignorance of this disgraceful plot. The thought of your implication in it has caused me extreme pain, but you can see that there was a respectable array of evidence to support the conclusion. It was my duty, as matron of the Institute, to sift the matter thoroughly. I rejoice in the result, thus far. I thank you sincerely for your honourable candour. Your secret is safe in

my keeping. You stand higher in my estimation than you ever have done before. You will pardon my trial of your temper and feelings ?"

Bella granted the desired assurance and retired, not disposed to reciprocate Mrs. Waylie's expressions of esteem.

Miss Sally Sprole was closeted with the baffled tactician for an hour; but the conferences of these wary counsellors were conducted with too much cunning to excite remark.

Bella was wakeful that night. Mrs. Waylie had informed her that the letter had been replaced in its subterranean receptacle and removed in the course of the day, that the delinquent was observed and identified; but "that to obtain proper evidence, strict circumspection was necessary on the part of those concerned in the inquiry. All that I ask of you, is to remain quiet, whatever may transpire."

This was an accomplishment in which Bella might be safely said to excel. Mrs. Waylie saw that she could trust her.

The clock had struck ten, when the teacher's attention was attracted to the restlessness of one of the girls, in the bed nearest hers. The room was dark; but she judged from the sounds, that she repeatedly raised her head to listen, and as the minutes stole on, sat upright. Bella's ears were as sensitively active. A handful of gravel was thrown against the window. The bed-clothes rustled; were still; unslippered feet glided along the floor; the sash was raised without creak or jar. Bella could scarcely refrain from springing up to intercept the imprudent creature; and this impulse grew into an agony of impatience, as she discerned the outline of her figure, bending to reach or see something from below. A fierce bark and a shout resounded through the yard; a broad light streamed over every object in the chamber.

"Miss Archer! that letter if you please!" and ere she could refuse or obey, it was in Mrs. Waylie's hand.

Miss Sally held the lamp. "Here is your ghost, young ladies!" said she, sardonically, to the others, who had started from their pillows at the noise without and within. "She will not trouble you again."

Rowena was transferred to a room off of Mrs. Waylie's own apartment, and was vigilantly guarded until her father came to take her home. Bella heard her lover's name with strange emotions. It was that of William Harris, the turbulent member of Mr. Barton's flock; and whose overbearing persecution of herself, Willard had gallantly punished. He was Miss Berkeley's cousin, and although his home was professedly with his father in Richmond, was at the Manor every few weeks. Adelaide had aided and abetted his courtship of Miss Archer, after all parties had been warned of her father's opposition. He arrived post haste, eager to save his child and shoot her admirer; but the latter had not been seen since the dogs chased him from the grounds.

Rowena had undoubtedly known that an innocent person was likely to suffer for her folly, if she did not endeavour to fix suspicion upon that one, by purloining and dropping the envelope directed to Willard; yet Bella pitied, more than she censured her. She had lived in a boarding-school for seven years, and might almost be pardoned for seeking emancipation at any price.

The Christmas holidays were coming. Bella's engagement was by the

quarter, and Mr. Waylie condescendingly stated his willingness to avail himself of her services for that which would begin with the New Year.

"I will think of it," she replied.

Margaret Lynch followed her into the deserted school-room.

"You hate this place as much as I do, Bella."

"O, hush, Margaret! I am afraid I am very wicked! The thought of returning to that French class sickens me—I absolutely loathe the sound of the piano—but these are nothing to the continual wear of heart and soul. You are all my comfort, and you will not be here then."

"Don't come back!" pleaded Margaret. "Miss Sally will kill you—murder you by inches."

"I do not dread her more than I do Mrs. Waylie. Yet I have no other offer—I cannot reject this rashly. Let me think! I cannot talk now."

She folded her arms upon a desk, and buried her face between them—praying—not reflecting. Blind and helpless, she felt for some hold in the gloom before her—with a despairing cry—"Lord! how long?"

No captive Israelite ever raised the lamentation with more fervour than did she, in the prospect of a continuance of her thraldom.

"A letter, with the Richmond post-mark!" cried Margaret, joyfully.

Bella was too wretched to open it, although it must be from Willard.

"It is a lady's hand," added her friend.

"From my aunt, I suppose," said Bella, languidly. "'A. M. Bailey!' Who can she be?"

Her countenance changed from midnight to noon, as she read.

"See!" said she, passing it to Margaret. She could not articulate another word. It was from Mrs. Bailey, principal of the largest female seminary of the metropolis, offering her a place as English teacher—one of her departments being unexpectedly vacant. Her letter was written in flattering terms. "As to certificates of character and ability," she said, "I could ask no more satisfactory testimony of your worth and acquirements than that of my friend, Mr. Norwood, in whose family you formerly resided."

Within two weeks after the receipt of this proposal, Bella was moving in the clock-work machinery of her new orbit.

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. James Conway's large and fashionable boarding-house was full; if there had been room for her, Bella would have preferred a home of a different character. Mrs. Bailey proposed one in a pleasant street, at a convenient distance from school.

"Miss Ellis is a most estimable lady; somewhat eccentric perhaps, but pleasing in her very singularity. She lives modestly, though in comfort, with no companion except her niece, a charming girl, about your age. Miss Martin, your predecessor, boarded with her, and I expect that her room is still vacant. If you would like to make inquiries, I will, with pleasure, accompany you thither."

Bella admired the neat dwelling, and liked the manners of its mistress. Miss Martin's chamber was engaged, to the satisfaction of all interested.

Mrs. Bailey called again the day after her assistant's removal. She was a pretty woman, affable in demeanour, and sagacious in intellect; equally popular in society and in her profession. Her kindness to Bella may have been dictated by policy, but the stranger felt and valued it. Let it spring from what it would, it raised the temperature of the atmosphere to a more genial warmth than the raw fogginess of Mr. Waylie's realms. A sentence of commendation of her conduct of her classes, that day, lifted a load from Bella's mind, and was a skilful preface to a conversation, designed to discover more of her disposition and capacity. She sustained the test creditably, because she was unconscious of its application.

"I congratulate you, my dear," said Miss Ellis, returning to the parlour, after escorting the visitor to the door. "I will not tell you— no, I would not, upon any consideration—it would make you blush—just as Kate here does, when she is praised—as her mother, my sainted sister Mary, used to colour up. Kate is the image of her—what she was at her age. She was two years my junior, my love—two years and three months—and we were often mistaken for twins—an impression confirmed by the similarity of our names Mary and Maria. I remember that M. Duponçeau—a clever young gentleman he was, for a foreigner—used to tease us by saying that they were one and the same in all languages except English. He did not like our tongue, although he learned to speak it fluently—with an accent, of course, my dear—but that made him more interesting, *we* thought. He went back to France, and we lost sight of him—but I can assure you that Mrs. Bailey, who is a very good friend of mine—I have known her intimately for many years—she was a belle in her day—the beautiful Miss Garland—and married a wealthy man, it was thought—but change and death, my dear Bella! for I cannot say 'Miss,' since you are now one of the family. Kate begins to love you like a sister already, and I discard ceremony with those whom I esteem, especially when they are so much younger than myself. After her husband's death, Mrs. Bailey, with commendable independence —excuse me, my love, but *you* seem to me to possess an uncommon share of this quality—not boldness, but self-reliance—I can assure you that Mrs. Bailey is delighted—charmed with you, and expressed herself so to me. 'Miss Maria,' said she, smiling—did you notice her teeth, my child? Some malicious gossips say that they are false; but it is not so. When we were girls together, we were both praised for our sound, white sets—hers were more pearly than mine, but they have lasted as well—straw-coloured, as the dentists call them, generally wear best. 'I think we have secured a treasure, Miss Maria,' she said, 'and one which is not yet spoiled by improper usage.'"

Dear Miss Maria! She was a picture worthy of Cruikshank's graver, as she stood upon the hearth, adjusting the lumps of blazing coal, so as to throw a yet stronger light upon her short rotund figure, her fair face, upon which fifty years had left but a line or two, and her curls, large and full, streaked here and there with silver. The fount of human kindness ever gushed and sung within her heart. Cheery, chirping canary! that she seemed to Bella; flitting from room to room, setting the tea-table with her own hands; her blithe notes forming a medley, without beginning, end, or

theme; amusing in its oddity, and pleasant, because in each desultory fragment, was a sparkle of the charity and good-will to men, which made her beloved and respected in her advanced—and what would have been to most women—desolate spinsterhood. She and Mrs. Norwood were more than a counterpoise to Mrs. Waylie and Miss Sally.

Bella was gratefully happy. She laughed out several times at Kate's witticisms and her aunt's stories, and did not once repel them by the reserve, which was usually so marked to those who did not know her well. Kate had two pet kittens, whose supper was prepared as regularly as hers. When the tea-table was rolled back she introduced them to Bella.

"My dear!" exclaimed her aunt, "in politeness, you should have asked her permission to bring them in. How do you know that she has not an antipathy to cats—like Dr. Burnley, a learned professor of chemistry, who was in the habit of visiting at your grandfather's? He wore spectacles, and a wig. I ought to have pitied him, but I could not help laughing to see how briskly he mounted upon the centre-table—it was an old-fashioned, solid mahogany stand, more substantial than the light, showy ormoulu or veneered furniture made now-a-days; but as luxury increases, comfort diminishes—when a tabby ran under his chair."

"I have no antipathy to such pretty playthings as these, Miss Maria," replied Bella, kneeling upon the carpet at Kate's side, to take up one of the gentle creatures. "They are Maltese, are they not? Let me help you to feed them."

Kate had a novel style of doing this. A kitten leaped upon each shoulder, and, their whiskers meeting under her chin, they lapped milk from the same saucer, rubbing their sides against the round cheeks, in gratified enjoyment. Bella was laughing, and Miss Maria detailing other of the drolleries of her adopted daughter, when a gentleman appeared in the doorway. Bella arose from the floor.

"Good evening!" she said, with a deep blush: "Miss Ellis, Mr. Monmouth—Miss Seymour."

Kate gathered up her kittens and their supper, and made the best of her way out.

"She is nothing but a child, Mr. Monmouth," apologized her aunt. "I hope—pray be seated, sir; not that chair—this is more comfortable; gentlemen like arm-chairs—I trust, my dear Bella, that you will communicate to her some of your dignity and sobriety. This is but one of the numerous happy changes I anticipate from your residence with us. She will like Richmond, sir—most ladies do, although you gentlemen vote unanimously for the country."

"I believe you are right," said Willard. "For myself, if I could be freed from the chains which confine me here, I would never voluntarily inhale the smoke of a town again."

Miss Maria was a zealous advocate of the philosophy which transmutes necessity into a virtue, and addressed herself to the task of softening down the rougher portions of his picture. Bella did not join in. To the subdued happiness of having him near, of hearing him speak, and meeting his eye, without the reflection that the swift hours were hurrying forward the moment of separation—succeeded an uneasy survey of his countenance and action, for which she had not had opportunity in their previous meetings,

since she had been in the city. Miss Maria thought him "a very handsome man, well-bred and intelligent." So did Bella, but she did not know that frequent compression of the mouth, and sternness of eyes, once so merry in their glancings. The elderly lady withdrew, presently, and the polite smile was replaced by a look of weariness.

"I have broken the net, by a violent wrench, to give a whole evening to you," he said. "Feel my forehead, Bella. Ah! your cool soft palm calms its throbbings! It beats so, every night—sometimes it is worse."

"You are not well—you work too hard."

"How can I help it! I will not be a laggard in the race; and those behind, push me onward at the top of my speed. My body is too inactive; for the brain there is no rest. Morning, noon, night, it toils perplexed, scheming, harassed! I try to harden myself; to grind with, and sustain the rubs of my fellow mill-stones of trade, but sometimes, the friction wears me down; at others, the flint gives out fire."

She spoke soothingly of patience and hope.

"Patience was exhausted long ago!" he said, fretfully, "and Hope would die but for Ambition. I will not be trodden down! The purse-proud churls who sneer now, shall fawn one day. I wish I had no heart. I wonder in what market Sidney, and Arthur, and a score more whom I meet daily, disposed of theirs!"

"Oh, Willard!"

The tone did not change his mood. "Your nature is less sensitive than mine; your capacity of endurance greater. You do not feel as keen a pang at seeing me struggling in the mire at the foot of the hill I would climb, as I do in meditating upon your labours and difficulties."

She felt this as acutely as he could have wished. Had she wept in melting reproach, or heart-breaking anguish, he would have repented of his cruelty, and loved her the more for these tokens of his power to wound; but as she would not add a feather to his burden, would not join remorse to his discontent; as her voice did not shake, and her eyes were dry, her consolation and cheer fell like sand upon a burning rock.

From that evening, she began to instruct herself carefully in the principle sand technicalities of his business—chiefly by conversation with him. She had a clear head, and had always been "quick at figures." Willard was not conscious that their tête-à-têtes were becoming just such talks as he held in counting-rooms, and warehouses, and at Bank; never dreamed that he was transgressing any law of etiquette, much less of kindness, in carrying out his habitual train of thought and speech. How should he suspect it? She never objected to or attempted to change the current. Her interests were identical with his, and this recollection should have made her pursue with delight, the scheme of a projected speculation in stocks or goods; the tedious calculation of sums gained and lost; it was refreshing recreation after the monotony of a day in the school-room.

For once, Bella acted weakly; yet it was a weakness growing out of the might of her love. She saw that she was helping to rivet the shackles of worldliness and selfishness; kneeling with him at the altar of Mammon; saying with the Syrian captain, "When my master goeth to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow down myself in the house of his god, the Lord pardon thy servant this thing." Her mind wearied with the

effort to comprehend and retain things years of study had made simple to him; and the hungry heart cried, in fainting accents, for its rightful share of sustenance; but she suffered one to toil, and the other to starve, rather than be stabbed again with, "You do not feel for me." He was not happier, although he said he was, for her self-denial. "Sympathy was better than diversion," he asserted. Bella's good sense told her that a union of the two was what he needed, and she ought to apply, but she had not courage to make the first great struggle.

She thought herself contented, or that she "would have been, but for his troubles"—as if, unless we can alleviate the sorrows of those we love, a lively sympathy with them were not one of the heaviest griefs the spirit can know. She had accepted with joy a call to the city which was his home, and would not own, even to herself, that his society was a drawback to the comfort of her sojourn there.

Her duties at Mrs. Bailey's were not onerous; and beyond her recitation-room her responsibility did not extend. The labour of classing, governing, the settlement of complaints and questions of order, fell to the principal, who went through all with ease and honour. Bella's pupils were not refractory; her associates were friendly; Miss Maria and Kate affectionate. This snug home was all she had desired. She had the best apartment in the house; and her convenience was consulted in every household arrangement—not as a matter of form, but out of real regard for her well-being. Old Polly, who still referred to Miss Maria as "Young Miss," was mute upon the subject of her aching bones, when she carried coal and water into "Miss Bella's room." "She's so kind o' dutiful-like, to aged parsons, and talks so smooth and pretty—with them beautiful eyes of hern, that I haven't the heart to say a cross word," she said to her mistress.

"You are correct, Polly," was the answer. "She is a treasure, as Mrs. Bailey remarks. We must take care of her, Polly. She does not appear robust, and though she would never complain, we could not forgive ourselves if the dear creature suffered for lack of attention."

The three ladies formed an interesting group as they gathered around the fireside in the back parlour, when the day's tasks were over. Miss Maria, twittering and cheerful, could knit as fast as talk, and unwound the worsted from her ball with fewer breakages than happened to the thread of her discourse. Bella sat also at the candle-stand, sewing, generally upon some article for Jamie, serene as ever, but for a slight nervous start and glance at the sound of a footstep in the hall. Kate Seymour—golden-haired and blue-eyed—a spoiled and loving child, never worked herself, and was always quarrelling with those who did. Her place was upon a cushion at her aunt's feet, where she chattered and laughed until visitors or bed-time came. Since Bella's domestication, Kate entertained evening visitors in the other room, and Willard's custom was to enter without ringing, and pass unseen along the passage to the door at the further end. He called every night, stayed fifteen minutes, an hour, or spent the entire evening, as his engagements warranted him in doing. Sometimes he was in ball costume, for he was much sought after by the gay and fashionable Bella could better support his absence when she knew that he was in such enlivening scenes. He was fond of company, and the recreation must relax the strung bow, strained all day to breaking. When business took him

away early, the hours were dreary indeed; haunted as she was by his care-worn aspect, and the dry, abrupt tone of command and reply exchanged between himself and his "brother machines," as he bitterly termed them.

He had ingratiated himself with Miss Maria so successfully, that she declared to Kate her unqualified approbation of his visits to the house and to Bella.

"Really, Mr. Monmouth," she would say, rolling up the stereotyped lambswool stocking, "we are very glad—most happy to see you. Bella has been very communicative and entertaining—she is more talkative than poor Miss Martin was—but she was older, by ten or twelve years, and delicate—I have said again and again that it is the height of injustice to judge of one's appearance or disposition, when

'Health has dissolved its charming hue,'

as somebody once wrote in an acrostic upon my name—I must show you my album, some of these odd times, my dear Bella. Ah, gentlemen wrote poetry in those days. The author of this piece, the first in my book—in fact it was the dedication—was Mr. Lippet, who would have been a great poet, if he had not taken to merchandizing:

'H—ealth may dissolve its charming hue,
A—nd adverse winds of fortune blow—'

My middle name is Hall—but I fear that she finds in me a dull companion, Mr. Monmouth—knitting and nodding the whole evening. Have you ever heard Kate sing 'We're a' noddin' ? She acts it so well—the mischievous puss! The theatre was open and lighted as you came by, I suppose, sir? Dear me! I recollect when the old one was burnt—it was an awful night for Richmond! yes, as well as if it were but yesterday. No, Bella says she is happy—sunny and pleasant all the time—but she must want other company than an old woman, who hardly opens her lips for hours together. Hear Kate laugh! I must run in and see what fun is going on. I love to see young people enjoy themselves. I was young myself once," and off she would trip—a final exit for that night; for she "had been young" herself, and knew that her presence would be a restraint upon the lovers. Such, she was certain, was their relation, although she had never asked a question, or plied either with inuendoes. Her heart was as plump and fresh as her cheeks—like healthy winter apples; no dryness, no wrinkles there.

"She is motherly and good," said Willard, on one occasion, "I respect her many sterling virtues; yet I cannot help wishing that you were differently situated," looking around the simply-furnished apartment.

"Every wish is gratified here," returned Bella, "and you know, Willard, I never cared for show."

"No, nor ever will." There was petulance in his voice. "This humdrum life is not fitting you for the station in society in which I hope to place you."

"Are you ashamed of me?"

He was of himself, as he gazed into her truthful eyes. "I have an immoderate supply of what you would deem false pride, dear Bella, and you—do not be wounded when I say it—have not quite enough regard for outward show. In many instances, I have yielded to your wishes, never inquiring whether your 'principles' might not be prejudices. While we live in the world, conformity to its maxims is indispensable to our peace."

"What would you have me do, Willard?"

It was a natural—an inevitable question; but he had no answer ready. Vexed by his own embarrassment, he said out the thought which was uppermost.

"If you would but alter your style of dress! You would pass for a Quakeress in that snuff-coloured gown and close collar. 'School-mistress' is stamped upon your demure face—speaks in your measured pronunciation and prim carriage."

The "snuff-coloured gown" was a rich shade of dark-brown merino, and fitted to a charm; the collar turned back from the throat over, and was fastened with a pink ribbon, which shed a blush upon cheeks too often pale of late; her articulation had never been quick, but was remarkably pure and distinct; and only an irritated man could have slandered the pliant shape, by annexing to his mention of it, the epithet of "prim."

She laughed—a husky effort which choked her.

"Did you look over that magazine before you sent it up?" she asked, searching for it among the books upon a table, keeping her face out of his view.

"No—what of it?"

She brought it to him. "Another of Isabel's sketches which I have reserved for you to read to me. The editor compliments it highly."

He read the editorial first; dwelling with pride upon the prediction that the youthful authoress was destined to take a lofty rank among the distinguished writers of America. The story followed.

Willard forgot trade and ill-humour. Bella's wounded heart ceased its moanings, while the spirit of the enchantress abode with them. Glowing and beautiful, from the heart—not the brain of the writer, had sprung the fair creation—instinct with life—*her* life! thrilling with love, and desires, and hopes, which are never born but of such souls as hers. Bella's comment was truer, more eloquent praise than the most extravagant panegyric would have been.

"It is so like Isabel!"

Willard was animated. "She is a glorious creature! Her name will ring through the length and breadth of the land, before many months have passed. You must be very proud of her, Bella!"

"I am. I love her, too, as a sister."

"Love her! How one could worship that woman, and feel his being elevated by the homage! In the possession of that one pearl of price, he would have all that he could crave of pleasure, wealth, and distinction."

There were unsightly tear-blots upon those pages, for the next reader. Bella's last aspiration that night was a vain sigh, unlike any that had ever heaved her breast before—"Oh! if *I* were beautiful, or gifted, or rich!"

And as Willard traversed the space between the unostentatious cottage and his boarding-house, past towering, aristocratic mansions, whose owners had, at the commencement of their career, been much nearer the bottom of the social ladder than he now stood, he chafed angrily at the slow rate of progress to which circumstances restrained him, and uttered aloud in a sort of passionate regret—"Honour and Love are iron trammels to Ambition!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"You are late, Mr. Monmouth," was the greeting of his youthful hostess, as Willard entered a crowded saloon, a full hour later than the time at which a devotee of ton might appear without risk to his reputation, at a "social party of friends."

"I am repaid for the pain my unavoidable delay has cost me, by hearing that you have remarked my absence," he rejoined, gallantly.

Miss Hyde's fine teeth glittered in a smile of unfeigned pleasure. Willard was distinguished in this, as in other fashionable circles, as a "rising young man"—a "promising catch"—names which would have ensured him attention and court, had his birth been obscure, his person and address as mean as they were elegant. A minute more, and they were swimming in the dance, as dashing a couple as glided there.

He had spent the former part of the evening with Bella. The picture of the low-ceiled, imperfectly-lighted back parlour, with its quiet seamstress in her dress of plain black silk (she never wore the "snuff-colour" after dark, now), seemed very tame, when recalled in this scene of mirth and splendour. He tried to paint her apparelled like the belle who clung to him in the waltz; he smiled at the ridiculous figure. Bella had some pretensions to beauty; but the sloping corsage, the mere apologies for sleeves, the ribbons, flowers and jewels would be sadly out of keeping with her style. Yet he admired them. His taste was quoted as excellent; and it ran after the striking, the gorgeous in manner and attire. He could not conceal from himself that he was never more in his element than when breathing this perfumed air; floating in its brighter than sunlight; smiled upon and caressed by the fairies who crossed his path at every step. He loved none of them as he did that unknown girl; he only wished that she resembled them in some—in many points.

"Mr. Monmouth!" hailed a noisy rattle at the supper-table, "I call upon you to stand and deliver the name of the lady you were waiting upon, so very properly, at church, on Sunday night."

"Sunday night! where was I?" said Willard, affecting to try to remember, but not able to hide the glow that crept over his face.

She laughed wickedly. "Actually a blush! *Now* I will know! You shall not speak to another person, or move an inch, until I hear the history of this sly damsel, who has captivated you with her serious eyes and Madonna expression. We, simple reprobates, have missed our chance, for ever. I thought as much, the instant I saw you reading out of the same prayer-book—she sanctified—you penitential. '*Priez pour moi!*' said your glances, and I could imagine that she replied—'For thee—for only thee.'"

"My penitence was of short duration. Am I the better for it to-night?"

"No—because she is not here. O, these men! what eye-servants they are! A glimpse of that plumeless white bonnet and mouse-coloured cloak would metamorphose you into a would-be-saint, dancing-boots and all. Who is the fair nun? confess!"

"Another flame, Monmouth! Own up, man, as you hope for mercy!" said the foppish Melville Snyder, simpering. "He wavers, Miss Mason! One more charge, and the victory is yours!"

Willard drew himself up haughtily. "The lady in question is a friend of mine, who has been in Richmond but a short time," and he continued the conversation Miss Mason had interrupted.

The imperturbable tease was not disconcerted. "Mr. Howard! Did you see Mr. Monmouth at St. Paul's, on Sunday evening?"

"I did."

"The lady with him! There is some mystery connected with her. Her name! and I will dance the next set with you."

"Miss Conway," said the male gossip, confidently. "I learned it several weeks ago."

"'Conway!' a good name! You need not have been afraid to tell it, Mr. Monmouth. Where does she live? Where does she stay, while in town?"

"She is a teacher at Mrs. Bailey's, and boards in a private family—that of a Miss Ellis."

"Miss Maria Ellis! that queer old maid?"

"The same."

"I am satisfied!" said the querist, curving her coral lip. "Excuse my inquisitiveness about your private lessons, Mr. Monmouth. Mr. Snyder, shall we go back to the drawing-room?"

"Miss Conway! Is she called Bella?" asked Marion Herbert, an intelligent girl with whom Willard was standing.

"Yes," he replied, surprised.

She paused in thought or doubt. The next inquiry was adroitly worded not to offend his pride. "Do you know whether she is acquainted with the Norwoods of Columbia?"

"She is. I have heard her speak of them."

"Then I must call upon her. My brother married Lydia Norwood, her intimate friend, and I have learned to love her from the descriptions I have had of her graces of character and person. Lydia will be charmed if I can persuade her to visit me. Will you give me her address!"

"Allow me to accompany you," said Willard, with a touch of right feeling at the exhibition of an independence which he should likewise have showed. "I see her frequently. We have been acquainted all our lives."

"I honour her principles, and her firmness in practising them," pursued Miss Herbert. "She is submitting without a murmur, to privation and labour, rather than be a burden to those upon whom she has no claim, or who admit none. I have had the whole story you perceive."

"You have a correct version," answered Willard, in greater astonishment.

"From one who understood and esteemed—who loved her!" added the lady, with an inaudible sigh. "I abhor the class of 'strong-minded women,' Mr. Monmouth; but are not the brainless butterflies—the ignorant, idle dolls of civilized, of fashionable life, yet more contemptible? How many of this giddy assembly do you suppose capable o Miss Conway's heroism?"

"You at least, are!"

"I am not. I can do justice to her; scorn those who do not; and yet be too fond of my present mode of life, too indolent, to renounce a solitary luxury from the motives which actuate her. I do not fear society—do not allow its ban a straw's weight, when I think or act—but I love it. Who can foretel what reformation Miss Conway's influence may achieve!"

"She is too modest to undertake to reform others," rejoined Willard.

"The battle is not always to the strong," said Miss Herbert. "Cases have fallen under my observation, proving what miracles may be wrought by her practice, more effective than sounding precepts. If convenient to yourself, I should like to call very soon."

She stipulated, moreover, that they should go in the evening, at the hour for his visits; she seemed to know that they were constant. Bella liked her at their first interview; still more as they improved their acquaintanceship. Marion had been adopted—a motherless infant—by her aunt, the wife of a city physician; and the death of her father, which occurred when she could scarcely lisp his name, made Dr. Ford's her permanent home. She encouraged and insisted upon the visits of her new friend, and took pains to publish their intimacy. She was the ruling spirit in her particular "set," hers the ascendancy which intellect and will ever gain over feebler minds. Cards—some, extremely modish bits of pasteboard—were daily left for Miss Conway, to the infinite pleasure of Miss Maria, and Willard's equal, but unspoken gratification. Bella sighed over them—heartless compliments, to be returned with reluctance. She could not afford to enter the sphere in which her visitors whirled, and felt that in pretending to do so, she was placing herself in a false position. In company with Marion she paid calls, robbed of their terrors by the address of her protector; invitations, except to Dr. Ford's, were invariably declined. Rumours were rife concerning her connexion with Willard, some representing it as a friendship perpetuated by him, through pity for her altered fortunes, as much as for any remnant of their childish affection; others, proclaiming the engagement with genuine sighs over the "sacrifice of such a man." Mammas and daughters concurred in the decision that it would not be safe o slight her; and there were cherished, but not divulged hopes, that she might not grow in favour by contrast with the associates of his riper years.

"Miss Conway does not honour us to-night," said Augusta Hyde, at her second party. "She does not go into large companies, and I cannot but commend her prudence. I am not conversant in these matters; I fancy, however, that the remuneration she receives will not justify the expenses attendant upon a winter in society. It is a pity! she appears to be an amiable person."

"I wish she had called her pickpocket instead!" growled Willard, who overheard her; and no one who has heard the concluding dissyllable from patrician lips, will question his sincerity. How witheringly condescending tis the one! a peacock perched upon the gable watches in listless amusement the sports of a swarm of gnats in the sunshine; a gold coin rests complacently beside a tarnished copper piece, which it "doubts not is very good of its kind." Miss Hyde was cognizant of the proximity of her whilome cavalier, and knew that she had said enough. She was too politic to arouse him by abuse or ridicule.

"Who is that superb creature, Wadsworth?" asked Willard, in the low tone of intense admiration, as a lady passed him.

"A singular coincidence, 'pon my word!" answered that dandiacal personage. "Not five minutes since, she was remarking upon your distingué air. It is a Miss Berkeley from up the country; a wealthy heiress, and fated to be the reigning belle for the rest of the season. Why not throw yourself into the lists, Monmouth? You have made a favourable impression; and are heart-free, are you not? or is there a spice of truth in this report of your attachment to one of Abbess Bailey's co-adjutors?"

"Nonsense!" said Willard. "Tell me something more about this rising star. Is she as brilliant in conversation as in person? and as certainly endowed with more substantial, if not more lasting charms?"

"Here is one who can furnish the needful information. My dear fellow!" touching the arm of a young man before him. "My friend Monmouth is hopelessly smitten with your county-woman, and only waits for corroboration of her real worth, to fall at her feet. Can you fix his wavering mind?"

The gentleman cast a glance of mingled contempt and displeasure upon the tipsy spokesman and his annoyed companion.

"What is it you desire of me, sir?"

"Does Miss Berkeley hold her fortune in her own right?"

"She does;" curtly, with an equivocal smile.

"Good! and the childless uncle who has raised her will cut up handsomely—will he not?"

"He is the richest man in our section of country. Anything else, sir?"

"Thank you—that will do—hey, Monmouth? Where has the boy gone? He is a capital fellow, but proud as Lucifer. Between ourselves, Norwood, he is engaged, for all he is pushing inquiries about this red-haired belle. He denies it, to be sure, and won't bear any allusion to this Miss Conway, although she is almost a beauty, very ladyish: and if she is a school ma'am, is received into good society under Miss Herbert's patronage."

"Miss Herbert—Miss or Mr. anybody else, with whom Miss Conway associates, is the recipient of an honour which no civility of his or hers can repay," retorted our friend Powhie, disdainfully. "As she is an intimate friend of my family, you will oblige me by speaking of her with more respect. In my presence you *shall*, assuredly."

"A perfect fire-eater!" mused the discomfited Wadsworth. "There he is, with Miss Marion, according to custom. If she had been near just now, she would not look so interested in the small talk he is feeding her with. What deceitful wretches we are forced to be!"

Marion's face was growing sad, for Powie was relating the conversation, heard and participated in by himself.

To do him justice, Willard did not seek an introduction to Miss Berkeley. She had designs of her own, a presentation was one of the preliminaries to their accomplishment, and she managed that it should be brought about without any seeming volition of hers. An invitation to dance was unavoidable. Willard's vis-à-vis was Miss Herbert. He did not understand her coldness to himself; but it piqued him to greater devotion to his

partner. She played her line well. In ball-room chit-chat she was incomparable, and had the art of causing her companion to appear as entertaining as herself. Another set followed, then a promenade, a waltz; and Adelaide protested that she "was too much fatigued to take a step more." The flattered Willard was only too happy to be foremost in her train; preeminently the favourite, until the festival was over.

As he accepted the proffered seat in the carriage, which waited for her, he caught sight of the stern, mournful face which had rebuked his complimentary sayings in the dance, and beside it one he had not recognised, when Wadsworth turned it towards him. He did not need Miss Berkeley's "Good night, Mr. Norwood!" to tell him when and where he had seen it first. Powhie lifted his hat in mock homage; but his smile was more sneering than polite, and excited in Willard a strong propensity to throttle him. Mr. and Mrs. Berkeley, with their niece, were boarding at the Exchange Hotel, and without knowing why or how he did it, Willard found himself asking and receiving permission to pay his respects in a day or two. Meeting a friend of the old gentleman the next morning, he engaged to go with him that evening, sure, by this management, of having to enact the agreeable only to the queenly Adelaide.

He had often, lately, regarded his visits to Bella as meritorious—deeds of charity to one so forlorn in his eyes; had meditated with pleasurable emotions upon the luxury his society must be in her uneventful life; this evening, he looked upon the hour he must resign to her as a positive weariness of flesh and spirit.

"You are as welcome as the flowers of May," began Miss Maria, in a subdued bustle. "This poor girl has a terrible headache! I have been bathing it with eau-de-cologne, and making her smell hartshorn—although it is horrible stuff. I used to like it, but dear life! I never shall forget how I once took a mouthful, without diluting it, for the toothache. It was the 4th of July, the soldiers were on parade, and I had a friend—a beau, people said, but there were as many nonsensical reports then as now-a-days—quite as many idle tongues and meddlers—who was captain of one of the companies, the Blues—they are in existence still, but he has gone! Of course I wanted to see him at the head of the column in his uniform—and Ameline Tarlton—a kind-hearted girl she was, but so thoughtless! Yet that was not to be wondered at, for her mother had been dead a long time. I took the hartshorn into my mouth as soon as she advised it—there, Bella! sweet child! Mr. Monmouth will not expect you to get up, he will excuse your lying on the sofa, I am sure—and it stripped all the skin from my lips and tongue."

Willard's heart ached with self-condemnation, as the languid eyes beamed, and the bloodless lips tried to smile for him. He knelt at her side.

"Are you suffering much?"

The tender voice was a better cordial than any in Miss Maria's pharmacopœia, and when he added, "What can I do for you?" her look said, "You have commenced a cure already."

Miss Maria was "called out by Polly," a summons heard by no one else; the throbbing head was transferred to another pillow, stroked and caressed into quietude.

"You are so good to me!" she said in a grateful whisper.

The heart upon which she leaned bounded in sudden pain, and the responsive murmur of endearment had an intonation of repentance.

She was weak and weary, now that the acute agony was over.

"Talk to me!" she said, in the plaintive tone of a sick child.

"Talk of what, dear one?"

"Tell me that you love me."

The touching petition unmanned him. Reserve, diffidence, the nameless constraint arising from her dread of wounding or troubling him were laid low in this hour of feebleness; trusting, helpless, loving, she lay in his arms, imploring but a word of love, as the thirsting desert-pilgrim prays for one drop of water. He could not speak, but the long kiss and humid eye conveyed what she had besought. The veil which hid her heart was drawn aside, and he gazed into its glowing depths. He beheld Love there —such as his mercurial nature had never experienced—a love, ever walking hand in hand with sorrow, yet undismayed by its grim co-mate; a love anxiously concealing its own bleeding wounds—hushing the cries extorted from nature by bitter wrongs; a love which he had misjudged and slighted —and he could have prostrated himself in the dust to acknowledge his vileness and supplicate forgiveness.

"Bella! my angel, Bella!"——

One! two! three! Willard started as the clock struck eight. At that hour he was to have met his friend. With the thought of the outer world, he felt its wonted influence. He wished, for her sake, that the engagement had not been made; to break it was impossible.

"Is it?" reasoned conscience, pointing to the drooping flower resting so peacefully upon his breast. "What is the disappointment—what the anger of indifferent worldlings, opposed to one pang of hers? If you love her, stay!"

The steely hand of will crushed the monitor.

"My beloved!" he said, as inviting her attention, "I grieve to leave you"——

She caught his hand convulsively. "Must you go? Cannot you stay with me this one evening?"

"I wish I could!" some obstinate demon urging him on, "but I have an important appointment at eight o'clock."

"Is it very pressing? but, no! I am wrong to detain you, if your duty calls."

She sat upright, smoothed her tumbled hair; striving to seem well and cheerful. "I am so much indebted to you for this visit! I am easier now. You are a good nurse. Have I hindered you? Is it past the hour?"

"Only a few minutes. You are certain that you are better?"

"O yes!" but the gasped sentences should have betrayed to him that there was great pain still.

Relieved that she was more like the Bella of other days, he said an affectionate "Good night."

"I am glad to see you," said Miss Berkeley, rising from her velvet fauteuil—"the more," she continued, sotto voce, "that I have been undergoing mental martyrdom for an hour."

She glanced at a coxcomb, known about town as silly and conceited,

who, like most weak men, admired "clever women," and was now paying a visit to Miss Adelaide as such.

She motioned Willard to an ottoman, placed close to her chair.

"Do talk to me! my brain is innocent of a single idea—has been pumped until a complete vacuum is created; my exchequer is exhausted! I have been watching for you as a blessed relief, and my soul had begun to sicken with hope deferred."

The first sentence of this speech reminded him of Bella's request, and for one instant the sick, dispirited girl had his thoughts and regrets; then a sparkling, roguish face, ravishingly beautiful, filled his eye, and everything else was forgotten. The youth who had played suction-pump had not the valour to contend with an adversary so far superior to himself, and evinced his discretion by decamping. Mr. Berkeley, at a nod from his niece, enticed his crony into the reading-room.

"Now!" said Adelaide, with confiding frankness, "we shall not be interrupted for a short time, and waiving all preface, I would like to speak of a matter interesting to us both."

Willard bowed.

"You will not think me officious; not accuse me of presumption; if I offend, will forget the act, not the motive?"

"I can forget nothing you say, and cannot conceive of the possibility of your offending."

"Thank you. Then to our subject. Are you acquainted with my cousin, William Harris?"

Despite his pledge to the contrary, a cloud fleeted over his brow. "I know a William Harris, who may be your relative."

"He is my cousin—my brother, and your friend;" the liquid orbs lustrous with sisterly affection or interest in himself.

The schoolboy would have thundered forth the "Never!" which burned upon his tongue—the polished courtier replied—"Against a mass of conflicting evidence, I credit your word."

"He is your friend," reiterated Adelaide. "We had a lengthy discussion of you to-day. He esteems—loves you—to cite his language, 'for your innate nobility, your talents, your uncorrupted heart.' He would have solicited your friendship ere this, but for your hauteur. You have not, he says, buried the memory of a boyish quarrel, in which he behaved like a ruffian; you, as a brave, honourable man. This is unworthy of you, Mr. Monmouth. He has changed since that unhappy period of his life. His parents were absent from this country, for two years, and the neglect of his temporary guardians was near ruining his disposition. Try him! grant him an opportunity to remove this unfortunate impression. It is my request. Am I to be denied?'

The acting was consummate. Her blandishments swayed him as the zephyr waves the reed.

"His is the more manly soul now," he said. "It shall be as you desire."

"A thousand thanks!" Joy flashed from her eyes over every feature.

"He will be here by-and-bye. If my intercession had been ineffectual I would not have admitted him. I cannot express my sense of obligation. Poor Will has been a faithful brother to me. I am his confidante in his tribulations, for he has known sorrow."

Willard was ignorant of Rowena Archer's love-stratagems and the detected correspondence. Bella's convictions of honour and propriety forbade the narration of circumstances which belonged rather to the private history of others, than to her own. The school-fellows shook hands as cordially as Miss Berkeley could have wished.

"This is as it should be," said she, smiling sweetly upon her kinsman.

"Blessed are the peace-makers!" he rejoined. "You are the best, most disinterested of mediators."

"Not disinterested! I never did an unselfish thing. This reconciliation conduces as much to my happiness as to yours. I cannot be glad when those I— when my friends are sad."

Her bright roses, as she tripped in her incautious speech, rendered her yet more enchanting.

If the change in Harris's inner man corresponded to the improvement in the outer, he justified Adelaide's encomiums. Willard had seldom met a finer-looking man, or one whose bearing was a better passport to the good graces of strangers. Fluency in conversation was a family gift, as was also an indefinable charm of manner, which those who disliked them most, could not gainsay. Before it, his old antagonist's prejudice vanished into air. Citizens of the same place, and engaged in kindred branches of trade, each was familiar with the other's person; but their former feud had barred the way to their intercourse. Willard condemned and despised his foolish grudge an hundred times, in that one evening.

It struck twelve, as the young men descended the steps.

"This shall be no hollow peace, on my part, Monmouth," accompanied Harris's adieu. "I am an implacable foe to half-way measures."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE pupils enrolled in Ward No. 3 (Bella's department), stood about the fire, built to expel the unseasonable cold and damp of an April morning.

"If Clara Merton hasn't got her hair in curl-papers again!" exclaimed one, as a precocious young lady laid off her bonnet.

"I am going to the concert to-night," she deigned to explain.

"The concert! I thought you meant to attend the theatre last evening."

"I was there," answered the incipient belle. "Does that prevent my going out again for a month?"

The other shrugged her shoulders. "It is none of my business; only, I wonder how some people find leisure for study. Not being a genius, I have to work hard, out of school, to prepare for recitations."

"I have not opened a book since we were dismissed yesterday," responded Miss Merton. "I had a headache in the afternoon, and was obliged to sleep it off. What I did after dark, nobody has any right to inquire."

"*Chacune à son goût!*" said her classmate. "If I could survive M. Perrot's biting sarcasm, and Mrs. Bailey's dignified displeasure, I would as lief never see the inside of a theatre as have Miss Conway look at me as gravely as she does at a friend of mine, whom I will not name, for fear of being thought personal."

"Miss Conway, indeed!" retorted Clara. "What do I care for her frowns? Matters have come to a pretty pass if I am to be controlled by that poverty-stricken piece of insipidity."

Bella was hotly defended. Sarah Wentworth, whose assault of Miss Merton had incited her to the use of this unladylike language, delighted in riots and revolutions. Clara's superciliousness made her unpopular, and Sarah artfully kept her vulnerable points before the public. The scholars had not, as a body, any firm attachment for a teacher so recently installed; but most of them liked her; some were moved to uphold her cause by a love of justice; more, from hatred of her maligner. Sarah listened to the war of words with a malicious smile. Seeing Clara pause for breath, she threw in a petard.

"You will retract what you are saying now, when she is married to your father's head-clerk and future partner."

Clara reddened furiously. "She marry Mr. Monmouth! He would not look at her!"

"He does great violence to his feelings then. Kate Seymour says he is at her aunt's every evening, and I have frequently met him walking with Miss Bella at twilight."

"Because he happened to know her in the country, when they were children. I have heard Pa' say, over and over, that it was politic to cultivate the clod-hoppers."

"I trust you are duly thankful for the compliment, young ladies," said Sarah, to several daughters of planters and country gentlemen, who were bystanders. "Your parents cannot refuse patronage to Mr. Merton, after those laudatory remarks. Miss Conway, although a 'clod-hopper,' requires less 'cultivation' than some city plants.'

"She never will be Mrs. Monmouth," said Clara, glad to adhere to this topic. "He is addressing Miss Adelaide Berkeley, an immensely wealthy heiress. He was with her at the theatre last night, and they were the most splendid couple there. Pa' favours the match."

"Doubtless that will influence Miss Berkeley's decision," replied the provoking Sarah. "I am surprised that 'pa'' does not reserve the handsome Willard for his daughter, as his will has so much weight in the formation of his matrimonial designs."

Clara had oftentimes been twitted with her *penchant* for her father's *protégé*. "He will never consent to his marriage with a poor schoolmistress!" was her reply; and she flirted across the hearth to her desk. Her flounces caught in the grate; in a second, the blaze wreathed her form. The girls scattered, shrieking, towards the doors and windows, while the hapless victim's piercing screams implored help. A resolute hand threw her to the floor; wound and pressed about her the drugget hearth-rug. It was the "poor schoolmistress" who extinguished the flames, supported the sobbing, terrified girl upon her knee, and re-assured them all by reporting the trifling nature of the injury. Her escape was miraculous. Slight burns appeared upon the hands and face, and the hair was singed; she would not be in a situation to present herself at the concert, but the physicians consoled her by guaranteeing an entire cure in a week's time.

Her intrepid saviour was the heroine of the day. Mrs. Bailey thanked

her feelingly for having averted a catastrophe, the remembrance of which would never have been banished from the minds of its witnesses.

"I bless you for having spared me misery, as well as for the preservation of her life."

"I do not merit your praises," said Bella. "My entrance at the critical moment was providential. I acted from impulse, not benevolence."

Miss Maria burned down the theatre, the "Old Eagle Hotel," and private dwellings, too numerous to mention; in each of which was consumed a small coloured child; besides recounting the direful destruction of her own and her "sainted sister Mary's" holiday wardrobe, by the same malignant element. She cautioned her factotum, Polly, "not to pile the coal above the third bar; and if you have an atom of regard for my peace of mind, Polly, never let the kitchen fire blaze!"

She examined every article of Bella's dress, after a particular scrutiny of her person.

"My dearest!" she ejaculated, when this was over. "He gave his angels charge concerning you! There is not the smell of fire upon your garments."

Mr. Merton and his confidential clerk were in their counting-room the day but one after Clara's deliverance.

"Monmouth," said the merchant, with his pen between his teeth, while he folded a batch of letters. "Do you know this Miss Conway?"

Willard was expecting the question. "Yes, sir."

"She displayed considerable presence of mind in that affair o Clara's. Any man would have done what she did, but women generally go crazy at these accidents. I have been studying how to reward her. Mrs. Merton thanked her yesterday in a special visit; yet I am not willing to stop at that. She is in reduced circumstances, I hear, and a liberal testimonial might be of signal service to her. What do you think of a note of one or even two hundred dollars, hey?"

Willard was holding up the lid of his desk, and fumbling among its contents.

"She would not take it, sir."

"And why not?"

"She is not in penury; eighteen months ago was independent. James Conway was her guardian."

"Ah! I recollect that affair. She belongs to that family, does she? Poor and proud they are! poor and proud! It was a good stock once, but I distrust the blood now. It is well that I conferred with you. I should be sorry to offend one to whom we are so much indebted. What would you advise instead of the money?"

"A letter of thanks, sir. Nothing more."

The senior twitched his mouth, discontentedly. "That looks rather small to me. I must consult Mrs. Merton. Harris takes up that note to-day, does he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Punctual as a clock! You are with his son a good deal, I believe."

"We see each other quite often."

"He dropped in yesterday while you were out. By the way, Monmouth," diverting the conversation very skilfully, he thought—"are you

paying attention to a rich young lady of Columbia? I am questioned about it at every corner."

"I visit, occasionally, a Miss Berkeley from that county, sir."

"An evasion! Well, well! I don't seek to pry into your secrets. All that I have to say is, in old Davy Crockett's words—'Be sure you are right, and then go a-head!' I see so little of the gay world myself, that I only get a flying rumour, once in a great while. I insinuated an inquiry or two to Harris the younger, without compromising you at all. He was discreet, although he did not suspect what I was driving at. I drew out of him, however, all that I wanted, viz.: that there was no mistake about his cousin's fortune. I am interested in you, Willard. If matters dovetail as I wish this year, I intend taking you into partnership at the commencement of the next. You have excellent business talents, and have proved yourself entirely trustworthy. The interest I shall give you will justify your marriage, which I have hitherto discouraged. If you have no prior attachment (and I take it for granted that your prudence has saved you from such scrapes), I don't believe you can do better than to address Miss Berkeley—provided her property be one-half of its reputed amount. I saw her on the street the other day. She is a grand-looking woman; one you would not be ashamed to put at the head of any establishment. She has a plantation in Tennessee, I am informed. You had best sell out there. I can tell you of a safe investment, whereby ten thousand would bring you twenty"—

"I am not engaged to the lady in question, sir," interrupted Willard, desperately—"and do not know that I ever shall be."

"Pooh! pooh! 'faint heart never won' anybody! Modesty is becoming in these affairs, but you are in no danger—handsome, sprightly, with fair prospects. The girl will be governed more by her eye, than the length of your purse, as she has enough to fill it. Secure her, and we will discuss pecuniary matters afterwards. I am pleased that you are likely to draw such a high ticket. It would be a mortification to me, if you were to marry a poor woman. It impedes a man's course terribly. I say all this, in a fatherly way, my boy. Having no sons, I have nothing more at heart than your success in life."

"My beloved Bella!" cried Miss Maria, breathlessly. "I have been *so* restless for your return from school. I have an astounding—a most agreeable surprise for you. Just guess what was brought here for you this morning, by a servant in livery—black suit, ornament with gold or silver—I forget which—or maybe the pantaloons *were* grey. I do not approve of this kind of dress—it reminds me of foreign aristocracy—but every man has a right to his own fancies and fashions—and I have heard my father say that General Washington's coachman and footman wore liveries—he was a privileged character. Cannot you guess? I must assist you—how is Miss Merton to-day? I must say that Mr. Merton has behaved like a gentleman—though, dear me! what is a silver goblet, in comparison with the life of a child? Well, since you cannot form the most remote idea of what your present is, I must show it to you."

She lifted a white napkin from the sideboard, uncovering a wrought silver vase, inscribed, "To Miss Conway. A token of gratitude from John and Susan Merton."

"I am very proud of it," said Bella, as she showed it to Willard.

"No doubt," scornfully.

He forgot that she was ignorant of the original proposition of the donor; that she could not surmise that it was presented from any other motive than the outgoings of the parent's hearts towards the preserver of their daughter. Her pleasure at their gift, implied to him, a paucity of spirit and independence; a sinking to the inferior station assigned her by his money-worshipping employer. He vouchsafed but that one contemptuous glance, and was "low-spirited," as he complained—a candid looker-on would have said "surly," while he remained in the house. Mrs. Merton had pressed Bella to take tea with her that evening; and her husband having ascertained that Willard was a friend, surprised, almost disconcerted him, by a request that he would be her escort. She carried the vase up-stairs, when she went to get ready; locked it up, and did not look at, or allude to it again for months. Like those in the garden of the Persian princess, her roses had no smooth stems.

"There will be no company; only Mr. Monmouth and yourself, to relieve the stiffness of a family party," the merchant's lady had said; and Bella thought a blue silk, long-sleeved and high in the neck, sufficiently dressy for the occasion. It was not shamed by her hostess' rich, but sober-hued apparel. Clara was overdressed; but this was no uncommon occurrence. Mr. Merton's attempts at patronizing were set at naught by Bella's gentle dignity. She accepted his hospitality as his equal, and was oblivious of any claim upon her gratitude. Willard understood his stare of surprise, and working mouth; knew that he was repeating to himself—"Poor and proud! poor and proud!" Mrs. Merton, too, was secretly ill at ease. It is not a pleasant disappointment to be forced to respect, when we had meant to be condescending. "The teacher" was as much at home in her vast apartments, as in Miss Maria's parlour, and although she was disposed to be taciturn, showed no awkwardness; violated none of Fashion's by-laws. She had not passed all her life in the school-room.

Ring after ring succeeded the departure of the tea-trays; other guests entered, singly and in pairs, until twenty or thirty were assembled. They were Clara's friends. A "stupid time" with her parents, Bella and Willard, was not to her taste. If she must remain at home and in the parlour, she stipulated for "some of the girls to save her from boredom,"

A *soirée dansante* was the consequence of her mother's acquiescence.

Willard lingered at Bella's side. He was still moody, and anxious to amuse him, she besought him to join the set forming.

"I have no spirits for dancing," he rejoined.

"But try to forget business while you are here. Look! Mr. Merton is interested and merry as the youngest of us. There is a girl in the corner, who will be left out. She looks lonely and mortified. Do take her for your partner, Willard!"

"Are you very desirous to be rid of me?" inquired he, brusquely.

Her laugh seemed ready and natural. "You only asked the question to hear yourself contradicted; so I will not indulge you. I am sorry for that young lady, and at this moment, would enjoy myself more in seeing her gratified by your politeness, than if I continued to monopolize your society."

"Ah, Monmouth!" said a young man, familiarly. As he shook hands with Willard, he looked significantly at his companion, a mute demand, which was answered by naming to her, "my friend, Mr. Harris."

The woman's instinct, rather than memory, told her who he was. Her bow was slight and formal, and Harris enjoyed her discomposure, as Willard sauntered away. He tried his vaunted talents of fascination; not the fulsome flatteries, with which he would have deluged Clara and her minaudering comrades, but the most delicate of compliments; the grave, reverential voice; the intense, but unuttered interest in every motion and word; the adroit catching at each gossamer clue to her tastes and sentiments. Bella would not succumb. She had a genuine contempt for him; and was even imprudent in her carelessness as to whether it was manifest or no.

He was relating an anecdote with seriousness, amounting to pathos, when she smiled absently; a faint glimmer, but not to be misinterpreted. It was a smile of ridicule. She was imagining how he must have looked, scudding over the Institute lawn, with Rover and Argus at his heels.

The shrewd observer, at her side, divined the tenor of her thoughts, so far as to be convinced that the derision was aimed at him. He stopped instantly; the fierce malevolence of the boy flaming in the eye of the man-

"Miss Conway!" he said, in a sibilant whisper, like the hiss of the snake ere he strikes, "It is then your will that our enmity shall be eternal? *I* have small cause to sue for a truce. You have twice crossed my path; thwarted and disgraced me; and I am not one to forget an injury. The time is at hand, when you will recall these words. Further provocation will not dispose me to be more merciful."

He glared upon the same face, which had charged him, in the oak-wood, with theft and falsehood. Its blenching, now, as then, denoted indignation, not fear. He would not have dared to hold such language towards any but a defenceless girl. Willard was not beyond call; but with true feminine modesty and discretion, she referred to another protector.

"You speak in riddles, sir! Shall I call upon Mr. Merton to unravel them?"

The host was approaching, in company with a stranger, and Willard, who had watched Harris and Bella, in alarm, drew near as Mr. Merton said, "Miss Conway, my nephew, Dr. Merton from Philadelphia, desires the pleasure of your acquaintance."

Her chagrin and perplexity sped away like frightened phantoms at the magic sentence. She recognised Frank's hero, better known to her since, by Isabel's letters. Nine people out of ten would have sentenced him to irremediable homeliness; yet five of the nine, if once allowed to hear or see him speak, would have subjoined an amendment to their hasty verdict. His cold, restrained bearing, indicative of excessive pride or bashfulness, was tempered into cordial respect, as he saluted Bella. Her brightening eyes would have assured the most dubious of a welcome, and he was emboldened to take the chair Harris had resigned. Still there was an awkward pause; Dr. Merton clearing his throat twice, before broaching the subject, which was paramount in the mind of each.

"I parted with some friends of yours, the day before yesterday, Miss Conway."

'My uncle's—Mr. Oakley's family?"

"Yes. Miss Oakley entrusted me with a letter, which I should have delivered at your residence, had I not learned that you were to be here to-night."

"Are they well? Did they send me any message?"

"They are in health, and charged me with a cargo of love for you; Miss Oakley appointing me special pleader in a cause which has enlisted my sympathies, and selfishness too, I am afraid. She commands you to return with me."

"Impossible! Her heart, not her reason dictated the mandate. My engagements preclude such a visit before August; or the middle of July, at the earliest. Yet I look forward to meeting her then. It is two years since I have seen her. Has she changed in the interim?"

"Very little," with embarrassment; then a smile warmed and lighted the irregular features. "She is certainly not less attractive; those who knew her at that time would hardly have admitted the possibility of improvement."

Praise of Isabel never met a lukewarm response from Bella. "She is beautiful, is she not?" she asked.

"Her beauty is her least grace;" the leaden eyes softening. "Her mind and manner are subjects of louder eulogium; but her heart is her richest, rarest gift."

"The public are determined to spoil her, if it can be done," observed Bella.

"Pure gold is indestructible," he replied, proudly.

The ice had disappeared; smoothly and gaily they sailed onwards, until the tide of communion was dammed up by the close of the evening's entertainment. Dr. Merton attended her to the cloak-room, and said his farewells, while Willard was hunting for her shawl.

"A veritable 'smitation!'" said Clara, to one of her friends. "They have been talking literature all the time. Whenever I went near them, it was nothing but sketches, poems, critics, and authoresses."

"Miserably bad taste!" answered the chrysalis censor of etiquette. "Is that my cloak, Mr. Harris? Thank you! We were speaking of 'blues'—do you affect them?"

"They affect me; so I steer at a safe distance from them. But Miss Conway is no blue-stocking."

Willard was immediately behind him.

"What is she then?"

"A coquette!"

"And you go to-morrow?" Bella was saying. "You must return as heavily laden with love as you came. I will write to Isabel"——

Willard interrupted her rudely, by throwing her shawl around her.

In her excitement, she did not observe his unpromising mien. She had confided the fact of her engagement to Isabel; and Dr. Merton, as her intimate acquaintance, would be interrogated concerning Willard. Forgetting that Mr. Merton had already presented them, and in her hearing, she said, with a happy smile:—

"Dr. Merton—Mr. Monmouth. I am his debtor for a most agreeable evening," addressing Willard. "He is the bearer of dispatches from my Philadelphia home."

"I have had the honour of an introduction to Dr. Merton," said Willard, stiffly—even she could not deny, ungraciously. Her spirits were effectually dashed. Humiliated by the idea that she had made herself ridiculous in his—in everybody's sight, she exchanged the brief and necessary compliments with the doctor, and accepted her escort's arm.

They were almost at Miss Maria's gate before he opened his lips, except to say "Yes" and "No" to her remarks.

"I wish, Bella," he said, peevishly, "that you would study the established forms of society. You would spare me much annoyance by a decorous obedience to what you may view as an arbitrary, unjust code. No one but an ignoramus, or a confirmed flirt would have sat apart for four hours, conversing with one gentleman. It excited much remark. For my sake, avoid such conduct hereafter."

"Dr. Merton sought me, not I him," she returned, with unusual spirit. "He was at liberty to leave me when he choose. But for him, I should have been very dull. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Merton noticed my presence after his entrance."

"Because they perceived how absorbed you were in his conversation. You were carried away by his eloquence. *I* have never succeeded in inspiring such animation. That *contre-temps* of our second introduction vexed me and amused him. How could you forget that we had been presented to each other, before your very eyes? He must feel flattered at your bewilderment."

"If he has the feelings of a man—I will not say of a gentleman—he will not misconstrue my joy at meeting a messenger from my relations; and I, who have so few to care for me, may be pardoned for showing some emotion at such an event."

He had trampled too cruelly upon the bruised plant; the prickles stung him. By a strange contrariety, often exhibited in the masculine character, his love, as well as his respect, was revived by this retort. The prize seemed worth retaining; he dreaded its withdrawal. Shame at his unmanly conduct may have concurred with this in producing the revulsion of feeling. He was the creature of impulse; imperfectly curbed by worldly maxims and debasing ambition. His better angel grasped the wand, and he bowed to its wave.

He detained her in the porch. "Bella, do we part in anger?"

"No."

He would not unloose her hand. "Forgive my harshness—my injustice to the best friend Heaven has given me. If I were to forfeit your affection, my punishment would be just. I am unworthy, O, how unworthy of you!"

"More than worthy!" Her head sank upon his arm. "O, Willard! why, if our mutual confidence remains, should we hesitate to speak as freely as of old? I care for no approbation but yours; next to my duty to my Creator is the allegiance my heart owes to you. Do not doubt me. I was impatient just now. Bear with my faults awhile. I will try to be all that you desire."

CHAPTER XV.

"I SENT a letter to you, yesterday, dear sister; but my head and heart are so full of a new project, that I cannot help telling you of it without delay. Cousin Isabel—(is she not the sweetest, noblest, best friend, mortal ever had?)—has written to invite me to Philadelphia. She says, 'My plan is this, dear Jamie. Henry and I will review your English studies with you. For mathematics, this same brother of mine has a decided fondness, and is enchanted at the prospect of a plea to dive deeply into them. Your lessons will prove a welcome diversity to Coke and Littleton. You can have the best language-masters, and we can offer additional facilities for the practice of the living tongues. Mr. Lyle, of whom you have heard from Bella and myself, has lately returned from Europe, with the most approved accent of French and Italian. I converse and read, each day, in the former language, and he hails your arrival, with the hope of finding in you a more docile pupil. Lilly shall teach you music—mother nurse and father spoil, while brother instructs you in Hygiene, in the healthy air of his country parsonage. You are lonesome now that our Bella is not with you; and I gather from your chance allusions to pain and debility that your health is not firm. Change of air and scene may be all the medicine you require; if not, the experiment can do you no harm, and will be a gratification to us. You have genius, Jamie. I do not say this to flatter or deceive you. It breathes in every word you write; but united to this genius, is its alas! too frequent accompaniment of a frail physical organization, and a heart so sensitive that it quivers at the slightest touch. The thorny outer branches of the tree of Life have, as yet, met your clasp; but fragrant flowers and luscious fruits grow thereupon. Come to me, and I will show you, how, if you do not fly at the first prick, you shall bear away a load of happiness. This is a beautiful—a glorious world, dear cousin, and Our Father loves to see His children enjoy it. You, my bright-eyed Forget-me-not, have been hidden too long by the tangled growth which overtops you. I bid you come into the sunshine! Blessed will be the mission of her, who shall transplant you into richer, lighter soil. Say, shall it be mine?'

"Uncle Oakley wrote to papa, by the same mail, and I think he is inclined to consent. Mamma is sorely grieved, but refers the decision to him. Were it not for her and you, I should welcome the proposition with unalloyed rapture. This has not been home to me, since our mother's marriage, and each year severs one of the remaining ties. I am sick, Bella! sick and weary! This atmosphere of deceit and selfishness stifles me. I could pray sometimes for pure air; this is nitrogen to my moral lungs. But why distress you, now that there is a hope of succour?"

The relief was made certain by a joint epistle from Mr. and Mrs Snowden, stating their approbation, and asking Bella's opinion of Isabel's offer. She replied at once, strenuously advising the measure. The step was not postponed longer than necessary; warm weather was already upon them; and Bella commended the haste of the preparations, when she witnessed Jamie's feeble state. He had grown, but not strengthened, and the melancholy, which had stamped his features from his birth, was becoming fixed

in lines of thought and gloom. The ardour of his anticipations had cooled; the parting with his idolized sister shook his resolution to its base. She confirmed it by loving raillery and sanguine words. Kate would hear of nothing but resigning her room to him, for the night he spent in Richmond, "that he might be near his sister the whole time." Miss Maria chirped her liveliest notes, and flitted from perch to perch, with greater activity than ever, to "be sure that the dear young gentleman was comfortable."

Willard invited himself to supper; an act of sociability, which, Bella doubted not, signalled another engagement. He never had an entire evening for her now; yet she had hoped, that as he was apprised of Jamie's coming, he would have kept this free. This early playfellow had always been to the lame boy the embodiment of manly perfections; loved next to her he refused to set lower than the angels; this night, he was almost shy. Willard was uncomfortable under his gaze, removed, if he saw that it was remarked, to return, when the meeting eye again wandered.

"You look as if you did not know me, Jamie," said he, at last. "Have you forgotten me, or have I changed?"

Jamie coloured, without replying.

"His whiskers alter him, do they not?" asked Bella.

"A little;" but in a moment the same earnest look seemed to be reading the most profound secrets of his soul. As Bella expected, Willard was "obliged to leave," half an hour after the table was cleared.

"Where are you going," inquired Jamie, innocently.

Bella never interrogated him as to his movements, but she was surprised that this direct question confused him.

"A business appointment," he answered, with assumed ease; "and, as you will discover only too soon, Jamie, such cannot be neglected, tiresome though they are. I will not say 'Good-bye,' as I shall meet you at the railway in the morning."

Jamie sat, his head upon his sister's shoulder, thinking silently, until she began to wonder at his abstraction.

"Are you tired, dear?" she asked.

"Sister! are you as happy here as you hoped to be?"

"You can judge for yourself whether I have not a good home, and at school everything goes on swimmingly. I should show a thankless spirit if I were to murmur, although I feel that I can never be quite satisfied unless you and I live together again," purposely leading his thoughts from what she guessed was their object. She gained her end.

"Perhaps Uncle Oakley could find you a place in Philadelphia," seizing the idea with avidity.

"It has never occurred to me," in a tone that disappointed him.

He would have been seriously wounded had he known the cause of this apathy; he had seen the Oakleys and himself cast into the scale and outweighed by one who, the boy's exquisite perception made him suspect, was a changing lover. Willard's name was not uttered again except in secret devotion; each praying with a pained, unselfish heart for the happiness of another.

Bella smiled to the last; even when Jamie's mournful face looked its farewell from the window of the swiftly-gliding car. Her voice was so calm as she answered Willard's commonplace remarks on their way home

that he did not detect the faintest flutter of the tried soul which fled for refreshment to his love, and found a congealed fountain.

Pic-nics were all the rage that spring; and a large and gay one was arranged for the last of May. Marion Herbert was pressing in her importunities for Bella's attendance. School-duties were the excuse up to the Saturday preceding the fête, when, on calling at Dr. Ford's she was hailed by her friend with outstretched hands and joyous face.

"Good news, my dear! I have had a call from Abbess Bailey, who not only sanctions your taking a holiday on Wednesday, but has asked me to use my influence to induce you to do so. She is uneasy lest the city summer should be too trying to your health. I do repent me of my legion misdemeanours while under her sway! I could wish that I were a school-girl for a week, to testify my penitence. She will hear your classes that day herself."

"She is kind—too kind!" commenced Bella; "but indeed I cannot agree—"

"Nor can I," interposed Marion, "that Mr. Norwood and myself should have our fond expectations blighted by your over-scrupulous whims. You will not withhold this trifling favour from him, Bella. He is coming to town on Monday, for the express purpose of escorting us."

"'Us!'" repeated Bella, archly. "I am obliged to you for your benevolent intentions, and do not question Mr. Norwood's sincerity; still I do not believe that either of you will be inconsolable for my absence."

"You wrong him, Bella. You have no truer friend upon earth than Powhie."

"I know that he is my staunch friend. I owe him much, and love him dearly. I flatter myself that my stand in his heart is hardly inferior to Lydia's; yet there is one who deserves a higher place, and she has it."

"If you mean me," said Marion, hastily, "you are mistaken. You have an erroneous impression that we are engaged, or at least attached to each other. We are not betrothed—never will be!"

"So you think and say now," returned Bella. "Time will determine which of us is right. As to the pic-nic—I cannot go. I would enjoy the country stroll with you and Powhie, but if I were to reconcile it to my conscience to impose upon Mrs. Bailey's goodness, you know my horror of a crowd."

"We can have our select party," persisted Marion. "I have my reasons for urging you to form one of it. Without knowing them, rely upon my word that they are sufficient to justify my entreaty."

"You are trying to work upon the curiosity spring," laughed her companion. "I will send you my final answer on Monday. Have your brother and Lydia arrived?"

"Yes; they are at the Exchange. Do you mean to call to-day?"

"It is my sole chance of seeing them. Will you go with me?"

"I would gladly—but have promised to shop with aunt. She has one of those odious country orders to fill."

Bella had not foreseen this refusal. A visit even to easy, kind-hearted Lydia Herbert was formidable, and she had scruples as to the propriety of going alone to a hotel. A thought of sending for Willard passed over her mind, to be rejected with a reproof of her selfish timidity.

She gave her card to the servant who answered her ring at the private entrance, and was conducted into the drawing-room. Two ladies occupied a divan, at some distance from her chair. Her motion to remove her veil was arrested by the voice of one of them. The veil of embroidered black lace disguised her, without obstructing her vision. She knew the elegant figure; the proud poise of the head; the flashing eyes; the strangely beautiful curls; nor were the bell-like tones more easily forgotten. The other was a visitor, whose bonnet shaded her face. With the dangerous indiscretion we see constantly manifested in public places, they continued their dialogue.

"Powhatan Norwood! Nonsense!" said Adelaide, tossing her head. "I never cared for him. Flirt though they call me, I am guiltless of having encouraged him. When I marry, I want a vassal—not a tyrant."

"Mr. Monmouth is not averse to bearing the yoke," replied the other. "Come, Addie, confess, when is it to be?"

Miss Berkeley played with the cord of her morning-dress, in affected consciousness. "How you jump at a conclusion, Harriet. Do a gentleman's attentions argue a promise of marriage on the lady's part?"

"I should say 'yes,' when they are as pointed as his. What objection can you or any sensible girl have to him? He is handsome, well-connected and energetic—in the straight road to wealth, too. Be careful, Addie, you have heard the proverb about 'going through the woods and picking up a crooked stick.'"

"The truth is," said Adelaide, candidly, "I commenced a flirtation with Mr. Monmouth for three reasons. He is engaged to be married"—

"Yes—to a teacher at Mrs. Bailey's. It would be charity to rescue him."

"So I thought," continued Miss Berkeley. "Moreover, I had a grudge against this same school-ma'am. She taught in Mr. Norwood's family a year ago, and had the credit of robbing me of the hopeful scion of that house. Of course this was totally false, for she would have been overjoyed to get him, yet it was provoking to hear such a tale, and he would not contradict it, although I pushed him hard to make him deny that he addressed her. He was her champion everywhere, and at all times; once, actually declining an invitation to a party of mine, because she was not asked."

"The blockhead!" commented the charitable Miss Harriet.

Adelaide went on. "I am credibly informed that he recommended her to Mrs. Bailey, using the old gentleman as a cat's-paw. There is modesty for you; receiving such favours from a discarded suitor! I met Mr. Monmouth at Augusta Hyde's ball; was told of his entanglement, and advised to break it. My dislike of her was my main reason for undertaking the task. Then there was another which operated that evening. I wanted to pique Powhie Norwood in revenge for his devotion to Marion Herbert."

"It is said they are engaged," said Harriet.

"She is welcome to him. A nice couple they will be; disagreeable alike!" was the spiteful reply. "What do you think of her telling me, not a month since, that I was sacrificing public respect and injuring my prospects, by my open preference for the company of a man who, it was said, was betrothed."

"It was like Marion Herbert. She fears the face of no man or woman alive. What was your answer?"

"That she was presuming upon our acquaintance, and that when I needed a monitor in morals and conduct I should apply elsewhere. She is a friend of this Bella Conway—patronizes her extensively. The poor thing has the sense to keep in the back-ground, and all Maid Marion's fussiness cannot get her into society. I have not seen her this season."

"'The season' is over, at last, I suppose," said Harriet. "When do you go home?"

"Next week. I should not have stayed so long by a fortnight, but for the pic-nic. I have left P. P. Cs. everywhere. My appearance, Wednesday, will be a surprise to most of my friends. You are going?"

"Yes, and have secured an unexceptionable cavalier—Mr. Snyder."

"I prefer mine," responded Adelaide, again looking down.

"Very natural, my dear. If the question has not been propounded yet, that day in the woods will make sure of him. 'We went a gipseying, and we are married.' But your third reason, Addie?"

"Will Harris asked my co-operation with him in a scheme of his, to lower this young lady's pretensions. When a mere child, she procured his dismissal from school, and only last December was officiously active in exposing and breaking off a love affair"—

The door closed, and both glanced around.

"Has that woman been in here all this time?" exclaimed Adelaide.

"I hope she was edified by our conversation. Fortunately she does not know our names, and we said nothing that could do mischief. This is one of the evils of boarding."

Bella had retreated as soon as her limbs would carry her; as soon as her shocked brain comprehended the impropriety of her situation.

When Mrs. Herbert returned from a shopping expedition, she found a card upon her table.

"I am so sorry to have missed her! Except Marion, she is the only person in the city whom I really cared to see. What unlucky things happen sometimes!"

Bella was confined to her bed with a sick headache, all that day and the next. Mrs. Bailey was "alarmed" at her pale cheeks, Monday, and "delighted" that she intended to make the excursion on Wednesday. Marion was notified of her reversed purpose, and early in the forenoon of the important day, Dr. Ford's carriage stopped at Miss Maria's door. Powhie and Marion looked bright and happy; nor did Bella's laugh fail once to answer theirs during the ride.

The pic-nic grounds came into view at the top of a hill overlooking the river. A green lawn sloped to the water's brink, broken by grey rocks, which served as seats for the picturesque groups of Arcadians, scattered about under the majestic trees of the grove. Our friends attracted universal notice, as they walked down the path, inaccessible to vehicles.

"Norwood with Miss Herbert, as usual," said Mr. Wadsworth. "Who is the Madame de trop? Monmouth, as I live, it is your former flame, Miss Conway!"

Willard could not prevent a start and exclamation, and his brow grew balefully dark, as his eyes certified to the truth of the discovery. Miss

Berkeley contemplated him with malicious amusement; replaced by reproachful tenderness, when he caught her eye.

"Will you walk?" he said, hurriedly.

They were directly in the way of the advancing trio; and she read his design.

She arose; but the wind filled her light scarf, and wafted it towards the river. Willard gave chase, and by this delay they were standing side by side in the path as the new comers came up. For an instant the forsaken girl and the temptress were confronted—looked, each the other in the eye—a gaze long-remembered by both. It was a thrilling act in a heart-drama, one of such as are daily being performed in this life, we call tame and monotonous. Bella had seen a glance of amazement and displeasure exchanged between her guides, as they espied Miss Berkeley and her attendant—understood intuitively what had been Marion's motive in bringing her thither—to win back the recreant by the sight of her, mingling freely with the proudest there in the unceremonious sports and converse of the occasion; or fright him into a return of affection by Powhie's respectful homage. The syren still had his ear. Bella was least ruffled of the party. She had come, impelled by a desperation which urged her to know the worst; to ascertain for herself, if the coarse, unfeeling worldling had spoken truth of the defection of her lover. She had expected to find them together, and, save by her steadfast look into those triumphant orbs, evinced no feeling. The salutations were short and cold, and Powhie led his charges onward.

Marion was immediately surrounded, and Bella shared in the meed of admiration lavished upon beauty and vivacity. Miss Herbert regarded her with astonishment, Powhie with anxiety, as she lent pleased attention to the airy nonsense of the most rattle-pated; bandied the shuttlecock of repartee with the skill of a practised coquette. The fever-spot in her heart inflamed her system to madness; she made no exertion to act her part; but abandoned herself to the wild spirit which held possession of her breast; Willard was not near her again before the collation was spread. Then, apparent accident brought together the regal belle, her bright locks bound with roses and myrtle, her cheeks bathed in a glow, as when the sun streams through rich wine, reigning sovereign of the hour and day—and the fragile form, never robust, seeming ready to bend with every breath; only upheld by the delirium strength which fired the mild eye, and painted the delicate skin.

It suited Miss Adelaide's purpose to be affable. She went so far as to appeal to and consult "Miss Conway," in difference of sentiment between herself and Mr. Monmouth. Powhie, whose high, gallant spirit could not endure to see a woman suffer, burned with ill-concealed rage at the disgraceful manœuvres of the successful rival. Had he been by Bella he would have avoided Miss Berkeley's neighbourhood, or beaten her with her own weapons. The polite Wadsworth had the post, and as the manual of "society" contained no recognizance of broken hearts or any code of honour, except that between man and man, he watched the game as "something decidedly interesting to one who knew the circumstances," and afterwards expressed to his confidential "chum," Snyder, as his opinion, that "though the Berkeley carried the highest head, and had the

most springy step, the little Conway had as true mettle. Be hanged if I wouldn't bet upon her in a three-mile heat!"

No, Bella neither faltered nor wavered. The womanly pride which had been dormant under misconstructions, slights and coldness, was aroused by this foul, dishonourable wrong; she answered every query; reciprocated every ironical compliment; and as her baffled tormentor moved from the table, returned her mocking obeisance with a bow as graceful and profound. She looked at Willard for the first time, and a trembling seized her at the regard she encountered. He was not happy; misery and shame spoke to her from his eyes. The heart she had laid heavily to rest in the earth, pressed down under the weight of leaden despair moved painfully to heave its burden. Weak to faintness, she took Powhie's arm, and wandered away with him into the woods. Little was said. He had no consolation to offer; he extended to her all the relief he could afford—outward quiet; freedom from observation. After walking for some time, they reached a fallen tree, from which the foliage and twigs had dropped. Two of the largest branches remained, entertwined into arms and back for the seat presented by the trunk.

"You had better rest here," said Powhie, kindly. "The day is warm, and the hill we have climbed more steep than I thought it when I proposed coming up."

"Thank you; I am tired." She leaned languidly upon the rough bough and closed her eyes; so pale, that he reproached himself for having brought her so far.

"You must not go back to the grounds," he resumed. "Miss Marion intends to leave early, and this is near the main road. Your walk will be shortened if you stay where you are."

Another "Thank you!"

He sat down near her, and began weaving a chaplet of oak and fern leaves. Lifting his eyes, he discovered that hers were fixed upon him with a strange, he could have said, a painful interest. To divert her and relieve his embarrassment, he set the crown playfully upon her head.

"Thus I crown thee Queen of May!"

She did not reject it; but her frame quivered as it touched her brow.

"No, no," she said, sadly. "Such an one is not for me."

"Not for you?" commenced Powhie, indignantly——

"Mr. Norwood, I have been searching for you everywhere, sir," said Dr. Ford's coachman. "Miss Marion is afraid of them clouds, sir," pointing to a few fleeces in the zenith, "and told me to ask your advice about going home."

"I am ready—that is, except my bonnet," said Bella eagerly.

Powhie forced her back into her seat.

"Do you fear to stay here alone for awhile?—or, no! Roger will be with you while I speak to Marion."

"There is no necessity for him to remain. Nothing will harm me; and if danger were near, I have but to call, and I can have help," directing him to the glimpses of moving forms through the trees.

Nevertheless, he ordered the old man not to lose sight of her; instructions countermanded by her when their author's back was turned.

'Uncle Roger, you have to attend to your horses, and I am perfectly

willing that you should leave me; so, go. If Mr. Norwood objects, tell him I sent you off."

She bent her head upon the arm of the rude bench. The coronet still encircled her temples, but it was not remembered in the cruel pressure of that of thorns she was thinking of when this was tendered—thorns, woven by best-beloved hands, with poison in every puncture. She was a lovely picture, so fair and modest in her white robes, with no ornament but the emerald wreath; her slender figure drooping, as overcome by slumber. In the tree above swung and chirped a noisy cat-bird, springing from bough to bough, and lower at every bound, until he screeched his discordant cry into her ear. She did not heed or hear him.

Roger had scarcely gone, before a reptile head—red and brown—reared itself from the other end of the log, and crept slowly towards the unconscious girl, dragging after it the striped and mottled train from its concealment in the hollow trunk. Its brilliant eyes were riveted upon the bird, which had, until it felt the glare, sung cheerily upon its perch. As in obedience to the fatal fascination, it reluctantly descended, the loathsome charmer approached—coiled himself under Bella's very hand—wound among the muslin folds of her dress.

This was the sight which awaited a pair, who also extended their ramble to this remote spot. Bella, startled by a loud scream, beheld, as by a lightning-flash, Adelaide Berkeley clinging to Willard's neck; his gaze of horror fastened upon herself—then a sharp fang was darted into her arm. She saw upon what her hand had fallen, and fainted.

CHAPTER XVI.

Bella re-opened her eyes upon a scene of confusion; in the rear, a wall of frightened, inquisitive faces; a busy, anxious group immediately about her. A heap of cloaks and shawls had been tossed together, and upon them she lay, supported by Marion Herbert. Through a mist, she saw Powhie, deep concern depicted in every line of his countenance. He held the wounded member extended. A tight ligature was tied above the elbow; a sure and skilful hand was cutting into the soft flesh, where the serpent's tooth had entered. The smart triumphed over the torpor of insensibility. Uttering a cry of pain, she raised the uninjured arm to stay the knife.

"It is all over!" said the surgeon, and less distinctly she heard, "she is fainting again! Quick! the hartshorn!"

He was holding the cup to her lips, when she revived. The draught was unpalatable, and she turned her head away.

"You must drink it!" said the gentle but decided tones.

She recollected them now. With thoughts of happy years agone, and Isabel, the tears welled from beneath her lids, as she murmured—"Cousin Maurice?"

He took the cold hands in one of his, and pressed them to his heart. "You will soon be well, dear Bella! The danger is past. I think she can be removed, Miss Herbert."

A man, upon whom minutes seemed to have done the work of years, came forward to assist in conveying her to the carriage; but Powhie sternly put him aside, and Bella did not see his grief-worn countenance, or catch his whispered prayer for 'pardon.'

They bore her back to the city; ghastly as death, and almost as helpless; her body writhing in torture; blood-stains streaking her garments; murdered Peace lying stark and lifeless within her soul.

During her confinement to her room, Maurice Oakley was her constant visitor; claiming the right in virtue of his relationship. He had arrived in Richmond, the day of the pic-nic, and intending to proceed further into the State upon the following morning, had sought for his cousin at Mrs. Bailey's. He alluded to his disappointment at her absence, in a conversation with a gentleman to whom he brought letters, and the obliging Virginian proposed to drive him out to the fete. He was one of the prime movers in concerting and preparing for it, but should be detained in town until the afternoon. They overtook Powhie and Marion on their way to Bella's retreat, and Maurice accompanied them. Miss Berkeley's screams quickened their speed, as they neared the place. They saw Willard break from her, and lift the inanimate body from the earth. Even in that moment of consternation, Maurice remarked the angry disgust of Powhie's expression and action, as he snatched Bella from her supporter, and said through his clenched teeth—"*your Adelaide* needs you, sir! you have no business here!"

Marion was Kate's relief-guard in the sick-chamber; Miss Maria cooed and glided in and out, every movement bespeaking sorrowful love; Powhie delayed his departure that he might have daily tidings of her convalescence; and the broken-hearted creature strove to win back strength and spirits, for the sake of those who still loved her. A crumpled note had lain hidden in her bosom, since the second day of her illness. It contained but three words.

"BELLA! Forgive! WILLARD."

With her stiffened, aching arm, she wrote—"I do, Farewell," and from that time, had received neither letter nor message.

Kate was reading to her one morning, when Miss Maria tripped in, her aspect ominous of pleasant tidings. Bella did not observe her entrance. She reclined upon a lounge, her face nearly as white as its spotless cover; one arm, newly freed from the bandage, thrown over her head, exposing a scar, redly visible upon the colourless flesh; the lips were dry and contracted, and the eyes showed darkly through the lids. The old lady sighed, as she recalled the bloom and contentment of her earlier sojourn under that roof.

Bella looked up—a stare of alarm or expectation.

"Ah, Miss Maria!" relaxing the parched mouth—"I am better, to-day, am I not? Kate's voice lulls both pain and fever."

"Is there no other voice you had rather hear?" asked Miss Maria. She meant to break the news of a visit with infinite tact; but Bella's manner, passing from the extreme of lassitude to wild excitement, precipitated the disclosure.

"A school-mate, my love—or I should say, a fellow-teacher—that is all

my dearest! Kate! where is the sal volatile? How careless—how unpardonably inconsiderate in me to agitate you! I am a clumsy nurse, dear Bella! a blundering, foolish creature. My father used to say, 'if there is an awkward thing to be done, Maria's your girl! she will bungle it!' She said I must give her name as Mrs. Allen, to puzzle you, and let her undeceive you in person, but I objected. 'My dear lady,' I represented, 'our beloved friend is much enfeebled, and too nervous to bear the slightest shock.' I could just get the words out, when she cried, 'Oh, then by all means prepare her to see Margaret Lynch!'"

"Margaret!" exclaimed Bella, a momentary ray piercing the cloud of despairing disappointment. "And she is married, did you say!"

"Married, dear one! to as good-humoured and friendly a gentleman as you ever beheld. He seems fond of her—calls her 'Mag,' as though she had the concentrated virtues and charms of all womankind enclosed in her soul and body; but, dear me! all young husbands carry on in that fashion. Your father, Kate, trotted after your mother, over the house, for all the world like a spaniel dog."

Kate's girlish laugh answered a simile so derogatory to her parent's dignity. "Mrs. Allen must leave her spaniel in the parlour," said she. "You and I, aunt, will watch him; see that he does not tear the sofa cushions and carpet, or scratch the paint on the lower panels of the door. They are apt to commit such misdemeanours when left by their mistresses. Let me brush your hair, Bella! this pillow needs shaking. One kiss, my beauty! I wish it could paint these poor cheeks. Ring the bell when Mrs. Allen wants to come down."

By the time they had reached the parlour, Margaret's light foot was heard on the stairs. She came in with an effort at self-control, kissed her friend, and commanded her voice to a low, quiet pitch, as she inquired after her health. A more prolonged look brought out Margaret Lynch in true colours.

"O, Bella! it is hard that you should suffer so severely, when I am happy! You deserve a thousand more blessings than I do."

"If I deserve them I shall get them," replied Bella. "When were you married?"

"Yesterday week. This is our bridal trip. We are *en route* for Saratoga. I have taught since Christmas at the house of Mr. Allen's father. I wish you could see him!—*my* Mr. Allen, I mean. He is no Adonis," she laughed; "but the best, dearest man alive! the one of all others to manage me; for he is firm, and not in the least passionate. His mother declares that she never knew him to lose his temper. That is saying a great deal, Bella."

"It is, indeed! I congratulate you most heartily. Where will you live?"

"That is another stroke of good fortune. I have a home of my own! *I*, Margaret Lynch that was, have a *bonâ fide* home! in which, please the kind Providence that gives me this bounty, with all others, I mean to live and die. It is the neatest house, built upon a farm, adjoining the plantation of the senior Mr. Allen. He bought it for his son, when he was informed of our engagement. And, don't you think, Bella! the family favoured the match!"

"It is not incredible," said Bella.

Margaret pinched her ear. "You dear tease! that sounds so like the pithy sayings with which you used to cool me down. I have tried to grow better; have carried your lessons, and the remembrance of your practice, upon my heart ever since we parted; thought of you whenever I was tempted to indulgence in my angry fits. Everybody at Mr. Allen's—'father' he begs me to call him—was good to me—all loved me, I believe. I know one did."

Her bridal garments became her; accorded well with her merry face and lively gestures. She stroked Bella's hair with her white glove, as she continued: "I have talked to him about you; what an angel in appearance and disposition you are; how I wished that I were just such another, and asked him if he did not. What do you imagine was his answer?"

"If he is a sensible man, it was 'No.'"

"It was! and when I scolded him for the falsehood he said—don't think him vulgar, Bella; he has true refinement of heart and mind, but he is a farmer, you know; so he said that he was accustomed to breaking in wild colts. I boxed his ears, I can tell you!"

"He can bring this one up to his hand," replied Bella, "and use no bridle but the gentle one of love."

"I will repeat that to him. He is so anxious to see you! I foresee that you will like each other at sight. When you get well I must have you all vacation at my house. Don't laugh at my boastful way of saying that! It is such a sweet word—that, and 'home' to one who has been buffeted from billow to billow, as I have been. If *you* only had"— She halted in confusion.

"My rest is not yet," returned Bella, hoarsely and slowly. "Have you had any intelligence from the Institute this session?"

"We stopped over night in 'the village,' on our way down; and I walked up to the 'convent' after supper. There has been no falling-off, and little increase in the number of pupils. Mr. Waylie is as pompous as ever; Puss Pry as artful (how she honeyed and sugared me!); your successor is a Mademoiselle Somebody, one of those cognomens that require a corkscrew throat and a forked tongue to pronounce them; her father was a Pole, and her mother a Frenchman; they have a staid, stingy old maid in my place; and oh!"—a shadow of forced gravity beclouding her features —"Miss Sally Sprole is dead!"

"I am not sorry!" uttered Bella, involuntarily. "She has gone home."

"I hope so," said Margaret. "Poor woman! I hated her once; but she had a struggling, unhappy life. She was sick three weeks, and was sure from the first that she could not recover. Mrs. Waylie bored me with a quantity of sentimental twaddle about her 'resignation;' the 'grief of her innumerable friends;' the 'irreparable loss to the Institution and the community.' I did listen with interest to what Milly Dawson told me, that she was astonishingly softened throughout her illness, and when she was dying, called all the girls to her bedside, 'not to reprove or warn them,' she said, 'but to ask their forgiveness for what had appeared wanton unkindness on her part; not to guard them against mourning for one who had found at last an abiding-place—unchanging, eternal—only to beg them not to rejoice that their tormentor was no more.' O Bella!

fancy the humility of spirit which must have prompted that request! Milly cried when she repeated it, and I, as I heard it. She left enough money to defray the funeral expenses, and purchase a head-stone, upon which she ordered to be engraved—'For forty years an instructor of youth,'—with name and date—nothing more."

When Margaret's visit was ended, Bella did not ask Kate to re-open the book. She seemed inclined to sleep. The worn brain was tugging again at the knotted cord of Divine purposes and means. Margaret could say confidently and joyfully, "a kind Providence." Could it be this benignant Power which was dragging her through the pit-falls, the horrible darkness of her compelled journey; which had conducted Miss Sally through forty years of desert pilgrimage? She cowered—appalled at the sandy waste, trackless and shadeless; its landmarks, the bleaching bones of those who had perished by the way. The grey-haired, foot-sore wanderer had forded the Jordan, and entered the Canaan beyond. Before her the wilderness spread; its hot, red sands billowing to blind and suffocate her; with its Marahs, near which hung no tree of healing; its fiery serpents, without Moses and the sacred symbol of redemption. The pillar of fire and cloud might be hovering in the blue heavens; she could not raise her head to search for it. She heard again Miss Sally's words—"Life and its trials are here! They bow one down until he cannot look up!" appreciated in its intensity of meaning, her plaint—"homesick for forty years!"

"And when I am sixty, I may review my existence with like dissatisfaction; may stand in the world as she did—a tree transplanted so often, that it has lost its resemblance to those who were its mates in the Eden where it once grew; a sapless trunk only fit to be cut down; one whose memory will die before the grass sprouts upon my grave!"

"Are you asleep, love?" chirruped Miss Maria. "I would not awaken you at dinner-time, for I said to Kate, 'I fear Mrs. Allen, with the kindest intentions (as no doubt she has, my dear—I never met a more affable lady, and her husband made a conquest of both Kate and myself), is yet an inveterate talker—a bad habit in a sick room—I am reconciled to my misfortune of taciturnity when I witness the ill effects of so much conversation—and may have fatigued our little girl; we will let her rest!' so I dined with the utmost expedition, and set myself to work upon a slight repast for you, my dearest. 'Her appetite is very poor,' I said to Polly, 'yet I have the vanity to hope to tempt it.' Dear me! I remember how fond my sainted sister Mary was of my arrow-root jelly—likewise of my sago; not the wishy-washy stuff most nurses concoct. 'Maria,' she would say, 'it is like angels' food, so pure, so delicately seasoned!' Mrs. Allen—who is an enthusiastic person, my sweetest—I like her the better for it—I admire warm hearts, and if they must always be joined with hot heads, why I will take them anyhow—calls you 'an angel upon earth'—therefore, this is the diet for you."

Her hands were as busy as her tongue. She had wheeled a claw-footed stand to the side of the couch, covered it with a damask napkin, and set in array upon it two saucers of old-fashioned, real china, a cut-glass bowl of pale amber jelly, shaking from its fluted mould; an antique silver pitcher of cream, flavoured with rosewater, and mantled with nutmeg; a plate of sponge-cake, yellow and fresh, one of bread, and a tiny salver,

bearing a pine-apple ice, which had been sent with Miss Herbert's compliments.

Bella made a futile attempt to swallow. The invisible fingers enclasping her throat forbade its repetition.

"It is very nice, Miss Maria," she said, regretfully, "yet I cannot eat a morsel."

"Dear! dear! you must, my beloved! I do not like to be positive or harsh, but the doctor's commands are strict. He prescribes nourishment, and this, although very light, is most nutritious food. Try one more bit, to please me!"

Bella obeyed, it threatened to choke her.

"What is to be done, Kate?" queried her aunt. "She cannot ride, unless she eats something; and there is Mr. Oakley waiting for her."

"For me!" said Bella. "Can he think me able to ride?"

Kate was quick-witted. "Mr. Oakley!" she called, from the head of the steps, "we have an unruly patient here. Will you help us subdue her?"

He ran up, bringing a glow of light and strength into the room.

"Unruly!" he said, dropping upon one knee beside Bella, and pulling off his gloves with the air of a man who had taken a desperate resolution. "What is her fault, Miss Maria? Not that she refuses this most irresistible combination of delicacies! Bella! my dear child! that I should have lived to see in you such a heart-rending exhibition of depravity and vile ingratitude! But words are wasted! That saucer, if you please, Miss Kate!"

He set his lips tightly together, and held a portion of the ice to her mouth. She could not refrain from smiling, and the lump in her throat was fast melting.

"Bravo!" he ejaculated, as she took spoonful after spoonful from his hand. "Now! the jelly!"

If he had commanded her to eat it all she must have complied; but he detected the first symptom of satiety, and did not suffer it to become distaste.

"I could not have done better myself," said he, setting aside the table. "As a reward, you shall drive out with me. I have the most softly-rolling of carriages, the safest of horses, and most accommodating of coachmen in attendance upon your ladyship's convenience."

"I am very weak," said Bella, doubtingly; but she was looking stronger every moment.

"I have a vivid conception of that circumstance. If you were well you should walk, or ride on horseback. I would not countenance so luxurious a habit as taking an airing in an enervating, curtained chariot. Will you get her bonnet and shawl, Miss Kate, and when she is ready, let me know? I will come up for her."

He supported her down stairs, despite her assurances that she could walk alone, and put her into the vehicle. She smiled and bowed to Miss Maria and Kate, as they drove off—"almost like herself," said the latter.

It was a lovely June evening; there was no dust, and the curtains were rolled up, to permit a free circulation of the air from the hay and clover-fields. It was very grateful in its fragrant coolness to Bella, after her

imprisonment; but the hale tones and cordial smiles of her companion were more inspiriting. He talked much of Jamie; of Isabel's fondness for him, and her prognostications of his future eminence in the world of letters. The climate was more favourable to his health than the variable, although milder one of the south.

"The whole family will spend the summer with me. Have you had a description of my parsonage, of which I was not the tenant when you lived with us? No? Then imagine an ancient, rambling edifice, originally a cottage of four rooms, two above and two below, enlarged as the numbers or riches of its occupants increased; a chamber added here, as the boys were thought too old to need the constant maternal eye; another built there, as the young ladies outgrew the dressing-closet, 'back of mother's room;' doors and cupboards and 'cuddies' everywhere, except in the places where you would expect to find them—nor must I forget my addition, a library-parlour the entire length of one side of the building, shaded by the elms which embower the house. We have rare family parties in that room; for my study proper is up-stairs. Henry is often with me; his practice not being much restraint to his social propensities, although the boy is getting on better than we had any right to hope. Not a week elapses without a visit from Frank Lyle—you have not forgotten Frank? He returned from a European tour three months ago, and is now the able editor of a Philadelphia journal—the same noble, ardent soul as ever—a digression worthy of good Miss Maria! I cannot conclude my list of hospitable enjoyments with a better climax than allusion to Isabel's and Jamie's frequent excursions. I have a paragon of a housekeeper—an elderly spinster who eschews cats and snuff; is neither acid nor prudish, and looks upon me and mine as the height of human perfection. Will you be content to pass your vacation there, Bella?"

She would have said, "You are too good!" but the tear and smile had to speak instead.

"All in that home love you dearly, sweet cousin. We will make you strong and happy again. My heart aches at the thought of how sad a life yours has been."

The trembling mouth and contracted brow warned him to cease; but he was not one to withdraw the probe at the shudder, which proved he had touched the festering iron.

"We cannot see now, dear Bella, why you, who have spent and been spent in the service of your fellow-beings, the harvest of whose past has been a sheaf of arrows, plucked or warded off from the breasts of others, should see, as yet, no recompence of her toil; but there was Another, whose dearest friends 'all forsook Him and fled' in the hour of tribulation and anguish. He knows and loves the heart now pierced through with many sorrows; pities and sympathizes with the mortal grief, which some, who are themselves more feeble, would term 'weakness.'"

The nerves were too much shattered to rally to the support of the will. The tears which came with the sobbed, "O, cousin Maurice! I am *so* unhappy!" streamed healthfully and abundantly as those of a grieved child.

He drew her nearer to him. "I know it, my poor darling!—know all—how the sumless treasures of a true and loving nature have been out-

glittered by gilded trash; that the crushed, long-suffering spirit would pray for death were it not sinful. Let me ask you, dear cousin, does not our Father overrule all things for our good?"

"Yes!" with a struggling sigh.

"You believe this, and that He consults not only what men call 'our good,' in their vague way of speaking of these matters, but also the happiness of His youngest, frailest child? He is not the austere Judge, who does not blench at the groans of the victim upon the rack; He takes no delight in our pains and cries, although He knows that the suffering is necessary. No, Bella, He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities, yet ought He to indulge them if they are hurtful? Many, many, who have been left to their idols, have at last spurned them with sick horror, cursed God, and died!"

"I have been an idolator all my life," said Bella, brokenly. "I deserve my punishment."

"Who has told you that it is a punishment, dear Bella? He gives us friends and the capacity to enjoy them; has, with His own gracious lips, bade us cherish them as our very lives. It is not until they attract our affections from Him, when we love Him less for having them, that His approbation is turned to sorrow. I do not believe that you have committed this sin. You never prayed with more singleness of heart, more fervour of devotion, than when the name of the beloved one blended in your petitions; the earthly attachment was another link in the chain which bound you to the throne of Him whose being and whose name is Love. We are too prone to misconstrue our Father's actions. I have heard parents, when weeping above the coffin of their child, say, 'It is a chastisement for our idolatry,' when, perhaps, the Chastener's soul was yearning over them in pity and love, as faithful children, whose precious one He had taken away from the evil to come, and spared them unbearable sorrow. And so this affection, the nurseling and comfort of years, has been destroyed to save you a greater woe. I thank Him that your dream has been broken thus soon. A lifetime of misery must otherwise have been your portion. I do not expect you to feel this now; after awhile, when you can reason and judge, you will see that this trial was sent in mercy, not in wrath. Will you try to credit this, Bella?"

"I will," returning the pressure of his hand.

"There is something else I have to ask concerning this affair. May I go on?"

"Yes, I can bear to hear you speak of it."

"Is your engagement with Willard formally cancelled?"

It was a bold question, and shot through every nerve. She shook her head.

"Is it virtually annulled?"

An affirmative gesture.

"Am I wrong in supposing that you desire me to see him; that you would be spared the task?"

"It is what I have wished to ask of you," answered Bella, steadily. "It has been delayed too long already. I would leave him unfettered by a mere letter of honour."

She was calmer when this was settled. The "farewell" she had written,

let it be the last. She would depute another to set the tombstone above the grave of this early hope. Her tears for the bereavement must be as secret as their source was sacred. The world enjoins that tearless, careless eyes be veiled with crape, wraps bombazine in melancholy folds about a heart unpierced by a sigh for the decease, which brings wealth or release from unwelcome duty. Woe to the mourner who laments that the light and joy of life are extinguished, yet can show no clay corpse as token of her loss!

CHAPTER XVII.

Willard Monmouth was alone in his room. The astral lamp poured its soft light upon an open ledger, flanked by corroborating day-books, a letter or two, and an inkstand, the pen lying across it, as if cast down in absence of mind or fretfulness. Its master had whirled his revolving chair away from the desk, and, his head resting upon his hand, was immersed in deep, evidently disagreeable meditation; a dejection from which the exciting labour for the wealth his heart hugged as its chief good could not awaken him. A knock at the door had to be repeated before he responded, "Come in."

A coloured man handed him a card.

"Where is he?" he interrogated.

"Down stairs, sir."

"Show him up!"

Willard remained standing, his features set in dogged resolution until the visitor was within the apartment. Then he advanced a step, and bowed distantly.

"The Rev. Mr. Oakley, I believe."

Maurice replied with dignity, and refusing the chair offered, introduced the business which had caused his visit.

"Miss Conway withdraws from the contract voluntarily," he said, "convinced, as are her friends, that no good could result from adherence to its conditions. It is to be regretted that she has not viewed the matter in this light before. I am the bearer of your letters and other pledges of your betrothal, and am authorized to demand hers."

He laid a bulky package upon the table.

Willard opened a drawer, and produced from thence several bundles of neat envelopes, tied with blue ribbon, a disorderly heap of notes, a Bible, lastly a miniature. Rapidly and silently he was packing them into the smallest compass, when from the Bible fell a long curl of silky hair. He shook it from his fingers, caught it up again, and gazed at it with eyes which Maurice was sure were humid.

"Can I see Miss Conway, sir?" he asked, abruptly.

"For what purpose, Mr. Monmouth?" inquired Maurice, mildly. "You are conscious that your conduct has been the cause of the dissolution of your engagement. Should you desire its renewal, you could hardly give a guarantee of future constancy which would satisfy her or those to whom her peace of mind is too dear to be made dependent upon a slight tenure. If this be not your object, the interview will be productive

of unnecessary pain to both. In denying your request, I honestly believe that I am sparing you a useless pang."

"One moment, sir!" said Willard, as Maurice bowed. "What is the state of Miss Conway's health?"

"She is recovering from the effects of the accident. As no virus mingled in the circulation, and the loss of blood was inconsiderable, the most serious suffering was consequent upon the shock to the nervous system."

Willard breathed more easily. "Will she return to Mrs. Bailey's?"

"No, sir; she goes with me, next week, to Philadelphia."

The devotee of ambition, the sacrifice of vanity was once more alone. Fortune beckoned wooingly; the world's applause slumbered only at his permission; a peerless bride closed a gorgeous and short vista;—his reverie was of none of these. Liberty had been too ardently craved not to be welcomed. He had long since opened his eyes to the knowledge that the betrothal entered into before the character of either was formed, was repugnant to his tastes and habits. Had they remained heart-free for two years later than the day of their plighting, he felt that they would never have chosen each other; that the love of the boy was a dim spark to the flame which burned in the bosom of the man; in all this, he was to be pitied more than blamed. It is an experience common to many who form early engagements, forgetful that there is but one chance in a thousand that the immature minds, which are to ripen under diverse influences, will, when perfected, assimilate or blend.

Willard had been more weak than wicked—his conscience acquitted him thus far; but it upbraided him with a stinging tongue for his duplicity. He, who had prided himself upon his honour, had been guilty of a train of double dealing, disgraceful in the meanest craven; had wooed one, while his word was still another's; forfeited the respect as well as broken the heart of the blindly-devoted girl, who had never entertained a doubt of his fidelity, until his perfidy, in all its blackness, was forced upon her. He dared not seek the presence of her he had so cruelly wronged; yet it seemed to him that his remorse would be less keen could he kneel once at her feet—no more to speak of a love dead for ever, but to pray in bitterness unutterable, "Forgive!"

Another tap at the door. The intruder was William Harris.

"You have grown wonderfully ceremonious," said Willard. "You enter generally without knocking. Have a seat and a cigar?"

Harris accepted both with grave politeness.

"How is the weather?" asked his host, feeling the spell of his constrained demeanour.

"Cloudy. We will have rain shortly."

A few more remarks, as original and important, were exchanged. Willard fidgeted about his papers, turned the wick of the lamp up, and then down. Harris did not lose a motion or glance, while apparently absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Is it probable that we shall not be interrupted for an hour or so, Monmouth?" he questioned, with portentous formality.

"I shall have no more calls to-night, I think."

"I came around to talk with you upon a delicate topic," said Harris.

He stopped to fillip the ashes from his cigar. Willard drew his breath hard.

"I have a high esteem for you, Monmouth; a sincere friendship—and should deplore any circumstance which tended to alienate us. I prefer, therefore, to speak to you in the first place, as one brother might to another; to ask, as a favour to myself, the explanation which is my right as the relative of one of the parties concerned. My ears are offended, day by day, with impertinent and malicious rumours, tying your name to those of two ladies who are, by this connexion, brought into rather more intimate juxtaposition than I relish. Throwing apologies and preface to the winds —I want you, without circumlocution or evasion, to define your position with regard to Adelaide Berkeley."

Willard was not quite willing to walk blindfold into the trap, yet the influence this man had acquired over him, was too potent for him to do more than struggle weakly in his toils.

"Before answering, I would like to know why you ask the question," he replied.

"I have told you—because of my interest in you and my kinship to her. A trusting, guileless girl, she met you; and allowed your attentions, in the belief that they were paid in good faith. All winter you have appeared at her side, assuming the place as yours of right; neglecting no means to win her affections. I have looked on, I will not say passively—for I mean to be candid throughout; I declare, then, that I have seen your intimacy with undisguised satisfaction, for she is more like my sister than my cousin, and I liked you. I recoil now at the idea of lowering my opinion of you, but you cannot blame me if, when it is a question of wrong to be done to you or to her, every emotion of manliness and natural affection arms me in her defence. Everywhere, I repeat, I am assailed by the same tale—that you have been from your boyhood affianced to Miss Conway—a secret engagement which you do not design ever to cancel—which you have kept up by stealth, while paying public court to Adelaide."

He dashed his cigar into the grate, in admirably-dissembled fury.

"Monmouth! I cannot, will not, believe this detraction of your character, unless it is confirmed by your confession. It is a base attempt to injure you and her. She would die of shame if she knew that it had obliged me to make an inquiry, so revolting to her delicacy—but I speak as man to man—are you trifling with her?"

"I am not!" answered Willard, solemnly.

"Do you intend to marry Miss Conway?"

"No."

"Give me another cigar, my dear fellow!" laughed Harris. "This laconic eloquence of yours is amazingly refreshing. You have not addressed her yet, of course, out of respect for the feminine code, which prohibits the enunciation of the magic 'question'—how burningly soever it may hang upon the tongue—anywhere but in her home, if she resides within an hundred miles of a reasonable distance. When do you visit the 'Manor?'"

"That will depend upon her."

"Enough!" squeezing his hand. "I am not a Paul Pry, and my catechism is finished. I have but one suggestion. Let me accompany you to entertain the old people. Moreover, I have not absolutely relinquished

the hope that that neighbourhood may, 'somehow or somehow else,' do something in the matrimonial line for your humble servant. You have guessed, perhaps, if Addie has not whispered it to you, that my Dulcinea resides near her. We have had a stormy courtship; but now the prospects for glorious weather are most flattering."

Before retiring, Willard indited a letter to Adelaide Berkeley; a declaration, never framed by the lips, or penned before; but which his eyes and actions had proclaimed, times without number. He had his discharge; could honourably discard the flimsy mask of devotion to a power, against which he had secretly rebelled; and he crossed the Rubicon, to win or lose all.

"I cannot forgive him, Mr. Oakley!" said Miss Maria, trembling so, that she could not thrust her knitting-needle into the mouth of the silver fish pinned to her side. "No! and if I live to Methuselah's age—which I am sure I trust I will not do—for, as I have said again and again, what is life, when friends and youth are both gone? And to think in what a pal he has shrouded that child's existence! This rupture has made me misanthropical, I am afraid; I don't know in whom to confide. I thought him a model of constancy and honour; and as he is unfaithful, I am inclined to suspect every man alive—not every one, exactly—but one thing is as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians—I never shall respect ro care for Willard Monmouth again! If I spied him coming up the street, I would cross or go round a corner to avoid him. And it is all off, you say, sir?"

"Yes, madam. Bella has acted with firmness and prudence."

Miss Maria relented. He must suffer, poor fellow! how sad and deep his eyes must look! for he knows as well as you and I that there is not her duplicate in the universe; and I can't feel, after all, that he was deliberately false. I dare say he was enticed by evil counsellors to the commission of deeds which he repents now in sackcloth and ashes. Not that I would have dear Bella quite marry him; for if he is disposed to be fickle, her lot would be unenviable. Dear me! I remember the misery of a sainted friend of mine, who was united to the most fascinating man I ever saw. Ah, well! she died of a broken heart, and he never blamed himself for it. They do say—it is contrary to my principles to listen to gossip—but people will talk—and as I have often said, 'where there is smoke there must be fire'—they do say that poor, dear Willard has been led astray; and while we cannot justify him, we must not be too unsparing, Mr Oakley. Who of us has not cause to pray, 'Lead us not into temptation!'"

"Very true, madam"—Maurice began, when Kate and Bella appeared at different entrances. The former was in high glee.

"O, Bella! I have the nicest plan—I did not know you were in here, Mr. Oakley!"

"I will not mar the nicety of your scheme; will be an accomplice if you will intrust me with it," said he, gaily.

Kate, romp and scapegrace though she was, did not stand in awe of him.

"You will be an invaluable accessory," she returned. "Mr. Scott has called to invite me to walk on the square. The band plays there this evening; and it is the clearest moonlight! He proposed that Bella should join us, and I thought she would enjoy it."

"She would!" Maurice said, not giving Bella time to agree or decline. "But Mr. Scott's mind must not be distracted by two such damsels. He would be a capital illustration of the puzzle of Mahomet's coffin. Bella will go with me, if she is equal to a promenade of moderate length."

Kate's phrase, "the clearest moonlight," was not a bad description of the radiance that broke upon them as they gained the outer air. It was the month of roses, in our fair city of gardens, and the summer breeze rifled a million dew-gemmed chalices of their perfume, to glad the senses of the strollers. Kate, although impatient to hear the music, stopped frequently to peep through a white paling, or over an iron fence, to have a nearer view of the fountains of her pleasure. Bella was very still; but Maurice divined—from the serenity of her eyes—not miserable. At his wish she leaned much of her weight upon him; a burden which his strong arm scarcely perceived.

The platform for the orchestra was erected near the centre of the square; the living stream, flooding the principal walk, parting on either side of it to form a confluence beyond. Bella could not breast the tide, and after a single turn in the avenue of linden trees, Maurice diverged into a lonely path, leading out upon the southern terrace of the capitol. They paused in its shadow. Above them towered the building, beautiful in its massive but graceful architecture, overtopping the city, with a mien of maternal protection; in front, the horizon was bent in the mellowed distance, around river and town and plantation. The atmosphere was all music and moonbeams; and the palpitating heart of the world seemed, for once, asleep under its enchantments.

"God has made a lovely earth for us!" said Maurice, softly; and they listened again and looked in silence. As the ear learned to distinguish other sounds than the strains which had wrapped the soul in speechless delight, there rolled to them through the air the surging anthem of the river; dear to him, who has long lived within call of its voice, as was the song of the waves to the exile who languished, in the vale of Tempe, for "the sea!" It rises above the hum of busy noon, to salute the coming stranger; murmurs to him amidst the rush and clamour of the crowded mart; sweeps, in grand diapasons, over his midnight couch, and dies moaningly, like the echoes of the past, as he leaves the seven hills behind him.

"It is like the voice of the heart," mused Maurice. "The roar of life may strive to drown it; the Circe, pleasure, woo it to repose and forgetfulness; the ice of worldliness chill and bind; but it flows for ever—never satisfied, never still, until it loses itself in the ocean of the Infinite and Divine."

And the sighing of the heart beside him was, "How long! O, how long!"

A laugh from below grated harshly over their spirits. Bella's fingers clenched upon her cousin's arm.

"Let us go," she said, huskily.

They had advanced but a step into the light, when two men ran up the slope of the terrace. To pretend non-recognition was vain. If Bella had not known Willard's laugh, she could not have mistaken his figure and features, as distinctly delineated as if the sun had been in the meridian

He stopped upon the brow of the bank, in irresolute surprise. His comrade drew him onwards, affectedly ignorant of the persons of those whose solitude they were invading.

"So we start for Berkeley Manor, to-morrow!" he said, exultingly.

They strode by; the evil genii that had darkened her life; blots from which her book of remembrance could never be cleansed.

"I should have guarded against this, dear Bella," said Maurice. "I did wrong in tempting you out."

"It is best," was the abstracted rejoinder.

She explained it as he was about to leave her for the night.

"I fear you are no better for your exercise," he observed. Her paleness and short, painful breathing were, to him, a reproach of his innocent want of thought.

"I am no worse," she said, calmly. "It is a relief to be assured that I am the only sufferer."

Harris was unusually exhilarated on this evening. The spirit of perverse opposition to her parents' will made Rowena more constant than the passionate entreaties of the most enamoured lover could have done. In a note he had received that afternoon, she signified her consent to an elopement, and modestly suggested the expediency of celerity in his movements, as her father was away from home, and not expected for some days. His love and revenge prospered equally. He had been Adelaide's efficient ally; her arsenal of contrivances and artifices was at his service. He anticipated with ecstasy the momentous events of the succeeding fortnight—the term of his furlough in the country; the excitement of outwitting the Argus guardians of the misguided girl; the flight beyond the boundary of a State whose laws reverence parental authority, if they cannot secure homes and firesides from robbery; the triumph of exhibiting his bonny bride; the supreme felicity of disbursing the ample sums to which she was entitled, by the will of an uncle—said fortune to pass into her hands at her majority or marriage.

After quitting Willard at the door of the latter, the bridegroom expectant repaired to the rendezvous of the choicest of his boon companions—the bar-room—in their parlance, the drinking saloon, of a fashionable hotel. The place was warm, they finally discovered; iced-juleps and sherry-cobblers did not depress the temperature of the air or their blood. Six "genteel" rowdies, primed for frolic, they collected upon the granite steps of the portico. Harris was the orator of the occasion. Wine had not made him incautious; his well-modulated tones were pitched just loud enough for his select auditory; but the quiet of the night was unpropitious to privacy. A chair was tipped back at the base of one of the huge columns, and in it, his feet propped by another, à la independent Virginian, was a gentleman who had come out of doors to smoke, and fallen asleep in the act.

The moon paved the street with silver pebbles, streamed in noiseless cascades over the roof, and adown the stuccoed walls; spread great, unwaving sheets upon the marble floor; eleven strokes flashed out from the bell of the capitol, responded to by the sentinel's cry, "All's well!" The cluster of hilarious blades were still there, their heads uncovered to the gently-stirring wind; eyes gleaming and teeth shining with mirth.

"You found no letter under the stone? What was the matter?" asked one

"Matter enough! as you will see presently; but success had rendered me fool-hardy. She was not untrue, I was confident, for the pretty Archer loved me too well to play that game. I supposed only that she had not found it convenient to quit the house. I could not endure the image of the dear creature steeping her pillow with tears, because I did not take advantage of the *dernier ressort* I had named; so, at the hour designated, I was under the window and gave the signal."

None of them saw that the dozing gentleman had restored his chair to its quadrupedal position. He was about to arise, when a hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Wait! I will interfere in good time," was uttered in his ear.

The speaker disdained concealment. He paced the flags within arm's length of the scandal-mongers; but no one, except Harris, had anything to apprehend from an additional hearer. His back was towards the promenader, and the story continued:

"I had some forebodings that the spying music-teacher's ears would be inconveniently sharp, as on the Sunday night aforesaid; but the sash went up without a sound; my charmer's white robes fluttered above me, like 'an angel's wing through an opening cloud;' her letter was in my bosom and mine on the ascent to her—when, presto! the window was illuminated; the door, by which I stood, was flung back, and out jumped a brace of blood-hounds, baying and yelping like fiends!"

He was interrupted by a laugh.

"That was what I call a fix!" remarked one of the group.

Harris resumed: "Rely upon it, boys, man's powers of locomotion are set down at too low a figure. Miraculous energies are developed by emergencies. Wings seemed to unfurl at my feet and shoulders; Eclipse in his best days was a trotting hack to my prodigious feats of agility."

Another uproarious laugh. They were as well pleased to be amused as he was to make fun for them, even, as it would seem, at his own expense.

"Shout away, fellows! I can laugh with you; for, mark me! I am to carry the girl off the day after to-morrow night—so help me Cupid! I can trust you to hold your tongues for a couple of days; then blab as loudly as you choose. The grandest chicken-heart of you would run such a race for such a prize."

"But who was the traitor in the camp?" was questioned.

"The mealy-mouthed under-governess! Who else could it have been? She did not appear in the expose, but we had evidence enough of her culpability—the meddling hypocrite! I have paid her off for it, though—in round numbers—interest compounded, according to a table of my manufacture."

The taller and younger of the bystanders disappeared into the hotel, and returned with something in his hand. His friend advanced towards the steps.

"Payment in full, which she has receipted!" pursued Harris. "The luckiest accident imaginable enabled me to introduce my fingers among her heart-strings, and I promise you I gave them a tweak, from which they will bleed for many a month!"

"Harris!" exclaimed an indignant voice, whose owner had enjoyed the relation as much as any of the others, "you cannot be speaking of Miss Conway! Is she the school-mistress of your tale?"

"She is!" answered he, with effrontery, unabashed by the murmur of disapprobation; "and a more thorough amalgamation of deceit and impudence was never moulded into the form of woman——"

A shower of lashes, cutting and fiery, astonished his unsuspecting shoulders. He started up to have his wrists manacled by his assailant's left hand, while the right continued the summary justice.

"Hold, gentlemen!" vociferated the other stranger, in a voice tremulous with grief and anger. "Who dares to stop him will have two to fight! I am the father of the unhappy girl whose affection has been his unmanly boast, here and in my hearing!"

The appeal touched the honour or sensibility of each one. Harris had got himself into a scrape, and it was not their province to interfere. The castigation was prosecuted vigorously. The chastised swore, and twisted, and kicked in unavailing rage; he had his master in his athletic combatant.

"Boys!" he spluttered, furiously, "can you stand this treatment?"

"If *you* can, sir, we will not object," was the contemptuous reply.

"Do you know me?" asked the knight of the whip, letting his weapon drop at his side.

The crest-fallen bully was sulkily dumb.

"I see that you do! You want no enlightenment as to my conduct. To you"—to his associates—"I have to state, that both of the ladies he has insulted by his mendacious story and epithets, are my acquaintances; one of them my friend. I am no eavesdropper. I call you all to witness that his slander was spoken in a public place, in the actual presence of Mr. Archer. If there is a man of you who would have acted differently if he had been in my stead, let him stand forth and speak!"

No one moved.

Powhie released his prisoner, who threw himself into a pugilistic attitude.

"Come on!" said Powhie, scornfully. "Although somewhat out of breath, I am competent to the management of a man who dares not attack any one but an unprotected woman."

Harris was sensible that this was no idle bravado. Those who he might have hoped would have backed him, stood coldly aloof; he measured the finely-knit limbs; encountered the bold, bright eye of the challenger; the odds were too fearful. With a muttered execration, he picked up, and replaced his hat, and rushed into the street.

Powhie bowed courteously to the rest. "The curtain falls, gentlemen. The evening's amusements are at an end!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE family at Mooresville Parsonage were spending a rainy Saturday within doors. The day had been a dusky twilight, unblessed by a smile from its Parent and Source. The morning broke vaguely through drizzling mists; at noon, the showers abated in force and frequency; and Mr. Oakley, with Frank Lyle and Henry, embraced the auspicious opportunity to come

out from the city. As if the spirit of the tempest had employed this breathing-time in assembling and reinforcing his scattered bands, the skies had poured forth a deluge ever since.

Mr. Oakley smoked in tranquil ease in Miss Brown's sitting-room; the even-tempered spinster sewed and talked with the still lovely lady she regarded as something more than human, not merely for her surpassing virtues, but as the mother of her idolized pastor; and Lilly listened delightedly to their reminiscences and legends of the olden days. Maurice was in his study, engaged in preparation for Sabbath duties; the others were collected in the favourite haunt of all—the long library. Henry, whose legal studies had not vitiated his taste for classic lore, lay back in a stuffed easy-chair before the fire, buried in a ponderous tome abstracted from his brother's shelves. Bella had transported her embroidery-frame to one of the roomy alcoves, and was employing herself and Jamie in winding a supply of crewels just received from town. Isabel and Frank occupied the other recess at the far end of the apartment. Each held a book, but neither bestowed much attention upon the printed page.

They were a strongly contrasted pair in appearance; her gipsy hair and complexion, orbs like starry midnight, and proud, buoyant air, the adjunct of unimpaired health and spirits; and his grave, intellectual face, pensive even, when at rest; deep, blue eyes, eloquent in animated speech and thought, more beautiful when the heart, warm and sensitive as a woman's, was touched and moving. Both were engaged in contemplation of the scene without.

The fall of the summer had hitherto been dry; but the earth was now soaked and overflowed with the wished-for waters. The bearded heads of grass swam in the lake that could find no outlet from the flat meadow; the gravel walks of the garden were wide channels, with their flotillas of bubble-skiffs and foam-rafts, bearing aloft a freight of rubbish, sticks, and leaves, rolling onward to some unknown haven. The orchestra of the woods gave out rich music; a bass like the rush of a cataract, as the winds roared through the dripping boughs; higher notes as the flexile branches ground and creaked against each other; the unintermitting pour of the descending floods forming a solemn alto, to unite and harmonize all. It was as if the trees were leagued with the assailing clouds; their shouted chorus the martial music of the bannered hosts, as they wheeled and dashed, dispersed and rallied, in mad exultation over the earth, that lay conquered and unresisting, awaiting her doom.

Isabel spoke. "Why has 'a rainy day in the country' passed into a proverb as the acme of dullness, the engenderer of ennui? Who can prefer the holiday glare, the garish sameness of a cloudless sky, to this storm—its every feature so grand—its general effect so imposing!"

"Those who admire a farce more than a natural exhibition of passion and feeling; an Ethiopian melody upon the banjo more than the most pathetic strains Paganini ever discoursed upon his weird violin," answered Frank. "The world is overstocked with them—people who like the tinkle of your foam-bells of fun and fancy better than the loftier music of your genius."

A blinding flash of light divided the warring clouds; then crashed forth a rattling peal, jarring the house to its foundations. A general exclamation

was followed by the silence of expectancy and suspense; but it was the sole volley exchanged by the belligerents.

"The parting salute of summer!" said Isabel, whose cheek had crimsoned, and eyes glittered as in glad welcome. "Electricity has an unaccountable effect upon me. For hours before a storm comes up, I am restless, and excited with a tumultuous flow of spirits and ideas which challenge propriety and pen. No organ notes thrill me with the awful transport I feel while the thunder reverberates nearest. I do not know how to sympathize with those who tremble at it. I suppose my dauntless courage may proceed in part from my physical health. Nerves were left out when my constitution was fabricated."

"I look for the solution of your superiority to this puerile fear, in your turn of mind and education. The child sees his silly mother shrink and scream as the lightning blazes a warning of the report she dreads yet more, and learns to view this, one of God's best blessings, as a destructive instead of a beneficial agent; a terror which the knowledge and philosophy of the man cannot dissipate. I shall never forget my earliest impressions of a thunderstorm. I was but four years old, and had no recollection of the occurrences of the previous summer, if, indeed, I had ever noticed any such phenomenon. I was playing in the yard one sultry afternoon, when a flash of light seemed born out of the air, close beside me. I looked in every direction for the cause. It was succeeded by a hollow, booming noise, which attracted my attention to the heavens. Piles of black vapour had shut out the blue ether, and while I yet gazed they were cleft by a dazzling line, reaching to the earth. Another and yet others glanced along its track. With the speed and vividness of the lightning, a thought penetrated my brain. Heaven was in the sky—I had been told so thousands of times. These bursts of splendour—so glorious, so fleeting—were glimpses of the light that filled it, not only in the day, but 'there was no night there!'

"'Yes,' I reasoned, 'the angels come out, and good people who die go in—as the doors open, the blaze shines through. Oh, how I wish they would stretch them wide, once, just once!' I repeated in a sort of prayer, my hands joined and face upturned, disregardful of the big splashes of rain that began to drench my hair and clothes. 'One sight of Heaven! of the dear angels who, my mother had taught me, watched me all night, and took care of me all day—one sound of their harps—one little sight of my dead baby-brother, and the shining white wings God had given him!'

"I was standing in the middle of the road, whither I had gone, because the trees in the yard obstructed my vision, when I heard a voice bidding me 'Take care!' It was our minister on horseback, and in haste to reach home before the shower grew more violent. *He* knew all about Heaven! he preached of the way to it every Sunday! and I sprang to his stirrup—'O, Mr. L——'

"'Not now, child! Run in! you'll be wet to the skin!'

"'*But*, Mr. L——! there!' as a jet of electric fire played over us. 'Didn't the gates of Heaven open then! can't I see Heaven now!' as another blinded me.

"'*No!* silly boy!' and the horse bounded off at the prick of the spur. I hid in the darkest corner of the house, and cried as though my heart would break. All was a blank! no angels; no golden doors; no harps

no Heaven! That emphasis of sneering contradiction alone filled my soul. To this day, I experience a disagreeable sensation when I hear that man's name. I felt then that he had aggrieved me beyond repair; had taken away my Paradise, and directed me to no other."

He related this little incident in a subdued voice; its inflections even passionate in their feeling. The delicately-toned spirit, vibrating in music or discord to every breath, spoke in each word.

Tears hung upon Isabel's black lashes, as he concluded.

"It is this unpitying murder of childhood's fancies, which peoples the world with prosaic men and women," said she. "Yet we are endowed with as much Imagination as Reason, and I can discover no clause of the Divine law, which commands us to crush one with the other. To me, it is an abominable fratricide. I could believe that the 'primal, eldest curse' abides upon those who commit it; recognise the brand of Cain in their brazen fronts and stony eyes—indices of a petrified heart. A man of intellect, devoid of love for beauty, bankrupt in feeling, is a frightful mockery of a just and loving Providence."

"To what vocabulary, then, shall we have recourse, to depict a woman whose affections subserve her mind?" asked Frank.

"Did you ever meet this paradoxical creature?" she inquired.

"Yes! many, whose female sympathies had been packed away in the bottom of the chest, unshaken, unaired, for so long, that they were moth-eaten and musty."

Isabel looked out into the windy tempest; troubled waves driving over the portals of her soul.

Frank bent towards her, and with the affectionate freedom of an old playfellow, raised her head.

"What is it, dear Isabel? Have we not agreed that you are never to hesitate in saying out your whole heart to me? There is doubt and pain there, and you are reluctant to let me share it."

"You used to approve of my writing, Frank. Did I act unwisely during your absence? If you had been here when I was solicited to publish the volume now in press, what would have been your counsel?"

"Precisely what was given by those who know and love you best. I should have said, as I have done since, Isabel—'you are a genius! ought not to, if you could—cannot, if you would—conceal it.' The sun never says, 'I shine.' Light is his essence; without which he would have no being. As spontaneously and generously do you diffuse your radiance; glorying, like him, in your strength—not because it is yours, but that it confers happiness upon others. Are you answered?"

With an irrepressible impulse of gratitude, she caught his hand and bowed her face upon it.

His smile was yet more tender. "The suspicion that I thought of you, while describing the unnatural pretenders to the name of woman, was more unjust to yourself than to me. If you can forgive, I will forget it. But the laurel-wreath, which they have smothered their hearts to obtain, is ready for your temples. It is your birth-right; voted to you, moreover, by the acclamation of your subjects; and you will wear it royally."

"I do not want it, Frank! no woman covets it while the roses and pansies blossom within her bosom. I have no ambition to acquire fame.

This is why I wished you to understand me. I am happy! Not a flower peeps from beneath my feet; not a bird warbles; not a breeze sighs, but has a lesson of beauty and gladness, and truth for me. I am never lonely —never sad! How can I be, when my heart is full of life and joy, and love for all things, and Him who made them! My friends lavish upon me what my spirit most desires—affection—and my breast swells with answering devotion. Before I knew Life, I thought others—many—as blessed as myself, but gradually, wonderingly, I became aware of the misery, the self-love, the ignorance of everything that makes man most happy, that prevail in the world; and, with the authority of an inspired command, the conviction dawned upon me that I had my mission; that, freely as I had received, it was my duty to give—not merely to those in the limited sphere of my personal influence, but to the toiling, suffering masses whom my pen could touch. It is my sceptre. Formerly it was my plaything, handled familiarly for my recreation, and to promote the enjoyment of my home circle. I cannot tell you how it is endeared, sanctified to me by its uses. A thought—like a bright-winged seraph from the clime of the blest, comes to me, diffusing perfume and light through my heart. I know that far away, perhaps, an earth-wearied soul is sinking beneath her load, and I say—'There is hope and peace and blessedness in store for you! As to my sister—partaker of my Father's love, I bring you a message.'

"I have seen a flower, Frank, which growing upon the upper stem, received more sunshine and rain than its lowlier mates, screened by the branches, and bowing, it sent the glittering drops down to the wilting petals below. My cup brims—overflows! Shall I deny the refreshing shower to dry and thirsting hearts, where no water is? I dare not! I should deserve a curse if I did!"

"Isabel! noblest and best! you do not belong to earth!"

"Yes, Frank!" The exaltation of the Pythoness subsided into the mournful intensity of earnestness with which she had commenced speaking. "I am a woman, weak and dependent, and not ashamed to avow it. I would not be what some miserably misguided fanatics call 'superior to my sex.' When true to ourselves and to those whom God has entrusted to us to love and cherish, 'the sex' has no superior—not even in boasted man! Although his is the higher sphere, he can do no more in it than we can in ours—work for his Creator and his kind, according to the measure of his strength. To me it is appointed to do—to some—O, my soul sickens in blasphemous despondency, sometimes, to think how many—to suffer!"

She glanced, through the increasing duskiness of the room, towards Bella, and the sympathetic fount again surmounted its bounds.

"Can your sceptre heal her?" asked Frank, unguardedly.

"No?" sadly; then she added, "is it a trifle to be able to beguile a stricken spirit into forgetfulness? to reflect light upon that which shines no more of itself? Bella is not happy; but it alleviates her woe to know that I am; my love is a comfort, if not a joy. This is something, Frank."

The deprecation, so humble and touching, went to his heart.

"It is! Heaven bless you, Isabel! good as gifted! God speed your work! There is many a soul to which the mission of your love shall come as dew and manna, strengthening it for another day of life, again to pre-

sent its thank-offering of grateful praise. He who has assured the harvest of golden sheaves to the weeping sower, will crown with abundant blessing such labours as yours. There would be no justice in the gloom which should rest upon your path. Yet you will meet your fate bravely, whatever it may be."

"Not in my own might. Now my spirit leaps fearlessly forward into the 'shadowy Future,' for I hold up to it the lamp of experience; see it by its rays. A shadowed Future! one such as hers! I cannot bear the anticipation! how, then, could I support the reality?"

"Do you remember my maxim, Isabel, and Maurice's corresponding text?" said Frank.

"'The grace comes with the burden,' and 'as thy day is, so shall thy strength be!'" she answered; "I shall never forget them. I read the other day of a fact in Botany, which struck me forcibly. It is said that a process very like the fatal 'girdling,' is practised upon trees to make them productive. The removal of a narrow strip of bark will prevent the sap from returning to the roots, and retain it for the benefit of the fruit. Cut more deeply—through the 'alburnum,' and you destroy life. Does not the All-wise Husbandman most frequently employ the milder method of improving his vineyard?"

"And this makes you hopeful for Bella?"

"Yes; more than hopeful—confident. I cannot think that a heart like hers will always grieve for the deprivation of an unworthy object. When esteem is no more, the death of affection cannot be lingering or agonizing. She will be happy yet."

The sanguine and loving prophetess would have had less faith in her prediction, could she have unbarred the jealousy-fastened doors of her cousin's inner being. She never felt cheerful; of late she was sometimes resigned; the resignation which can stand by and see the clods closing, yet restrain the frantic impulse to tear them apart, in its reaching after the dead idol; to-night, her heart sobbed and shrieked with the wind, tossed wild arms towards heaven, like a battered tree lashed and vexed by the pitiless tempest.

Jamie longed to comfort her; but even he was debarred from entering the penetralia. She was never inattentive when his theme was himself, or other of the loved ones at home; at an allusion to her trials or prospects, she relapsed into external apathy, the snow-crust that hid the seething lava.

"Mr. Lyle brought me encouraging advices from the editor of a Review," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"Ah! he has read your critique then?"

"Yes; and it will appear in November. He says that if it had been sent anonymously it would have been inserted; its intrinsic merit secured it a place. Mr. Lyle promised me that he would not acquaint him with my history, or add a syllable of recommendation. I will not owe my advancement to the commiseration of strangers or patronage of friends."

"You need not fear that you will rise by either of these means. You must depend upon your talents and energy; but if kind hands smooth your path, you must not spurn them. I wonder if Isabel will suspect who her critic is!"

"I hope not—for a while, at least," answered Jamie. "There is a pure delight in consecrating the first-fruits of my labours to her service. If I am ever a man in mind, much of the honour must be awarded to her. She is the mother of my intellect, as all that is good in my heart traces its parentage to you."

"Others have contributed to its enrichment and growth," was her reply. "It has never been visited by a dearth of affection; for who can help loving you, Jamie?"

She smiled, but her hands wandered aimlessly among the gay worsteds.

"That is not right!" said Jamie, checking her. "You are winding red and green together. Had we not better wait for Monday morning to finish them? The daylight is fading."

She put balls and skeins into the work-basket; covered it and the tapestry-frame, and set her chair back into the alcove.

"I am tired, and very dull," affecting to yawn, "and this rain is the most soothing of lullabies."

The boy walked up and down the apartment, his halting step inaudible upon the carpet, his figure dimly defined in the uncertain light of the embers. He avoided a near approach to the window where the low dialogue was still carried on; but Isabel noticed him at last, as well as the stillness of the others. With a severe reproof to her negligence and selfishness, she arose and called him.

"What say you to some music, Jamie?"

Music was his consolation and passion—Isabel's of all in the world. Henry replied promptly to the demand for his assistance, and Frank unclasped his flute-case.

"Bella!" said her cousin.

No reply.

Isabel went over to her, and after listening a moment, returned.

"She is asleep, poor girl! We will not awake her."

"But the music!" remonstrated Frank, as she put her fingers upon the keys.

"Never disturbs her!" answered Jamie and Isabel, together.

She did not sleep; but in her numb agony, could not have spoken or moved.

First, at Jamie's request, Isabel's beloved "Spirit-waltzes" mingled with, rather than broke the twilight silence; not like strains from mortal fingers, but veritable spirit-voices, wafted down from some holier height, caught and repeated by the listening air. To Bella, they whispered of quiet and forgetfulness—to Isabel, more. She heard the almost spent echoes of the hymn, which "the young-eyed cherub quiring sings;" the sweeter notes of the seraph's song of love; from her exquisitely attuned soul-harp, floated responsive harmony, as ethereal and delicious.

Frank's was the next selection; a ballad he had given to Isabel a few days before, and which Bella had not yet heard. The quartette often rehearsed in company, and performed with taste and expression. A prelude, in which the flute's wail and the faintly-throbbed accompaniment told more truly than words could have done, of a heart-breaking sorrow and

THE PARTING REQUIEM.

We parted in silence—we parted at night
On the banks of that lonely river,
Where the fragrant pines their boughs unite—
We met, and we parted for ever!
The night-birds sang, and the stars above
Told many a wondrous story
Of friends, long gone to the kingdom above,
Where the soul wears its mantle of glory.

We parted in silence—our cheeks were wet
With tears that were past controlling;
And we vowed that we'd never—no, never forget!
And the vows at that time were consoling.
But the lips that echoed that vow of mine,
Are as cold as that lonely river;
And the sparkling eye, the spirit's shrine,
Has shrouded its fire for ever.

And now, on the midnight sky I look;
And my heart grows full to weeping.
Each star to me is a sealed book,
Some trace of the lost one keeping.
We parted in silence—we parted in tears,
On the banks of that lonely river;
But the colour and bloom of those by-gone years
Shall hang round its waters for ever!

"The fragrant pines!" They seemed to wave above her now, and the dark waters to tumble and foam below, as on the afternoon when Willard, having missed her from her accustomed resort, too gay, with its flashing rivulet and clustering flowers, for her sombre mood, had sought her in their heavy shade. O, had she but the memory of the loved and dead to dwell upon, like "some bright eternal spot" in the midnight sky! If the sighing branches had bestrewed, with their falling leaves, a nameless mound, forsaken, forgotten by all but her, she would have borne thither the amaranthine wreaths of remembered joys—the immortals of celestial hopes—and laid them upon his breast with tears indeed, but such drops as ease the wrung spirit, and glisten in the sunlight of a Father's love and promises.

A groan escaped her. "Would to Heaven that he or I had died."

"Dear Bella!"

Unperceived by the musicians or herself, Maurice had entered and found her out as by instinct.

"May I sit here with you for a little while?" he inquired.

She assented and yielded her hand to his. There was magnetism in the gentle pressure. He appeared engrossed by the music; but she was calmer for having him near.

"The hymn you sang for me, last Sabbath evening, Isabel," he said, at the conclusion of a piece.

It was her own composition, and she sang it alone; Jamie and Henry

standing behind her; Frank leaning over the piano, his forehead supported by his instrument, in rapt attention or devotion.

Father in Heaven! gently bend,
To list the cry Thy children send
Up to Thy throne!
The language of each voiceless sigh,
The lifting of each tearful eye
To Thee are known.

O, Thou! upon whose kingly brow
Resteth the crown of glory now,
Saviour divine!
The rugged road we fainting tread,
On its most cruel crags is red
With blood of Thine.

O! aid us in this darkened hour!
Above us angry tempests lower;
Snares are beneath;
Bleeding and sick, with inward smart,
Oppressed with doubts and dreads, the heart
Could pray for death.

To lift our load of guilt, was laid
On Thee, a weight of woe, in dread
Gethsemane.
O, Saviour-man! our brother, priest!
To whom shall mourners turn for rest,
If not to Thee?

All blind and helpless, would we come
To seek in Thee peace, comfort, home;—
Our only plea,
Thou didst the form of mortal wear,
Thou didst the griefs of mortals bear,
On Calvary!

CHAPTER XIX.

If Bella had desired a return to Virginia, she would have been borne down by the storm of opposition, which the least intimation of such intention invariably excited. Mr. Oakley would not hear of it.

"I have a better title to you than anyone else, your mother excepted. When she wants you, you may go; until then, you stay here. The house is spacious, so are the hearts of its inhabitants, and in each you have a large, warm chamber which you must occupy. 'Dependent!' Don't vex me, child! If you are obliged to work, we can find enough for you to do. What with Lilly's lessons, her writing, household duties, and the claims of society, Isabel's labours are too numerous and burdensome. I would like to engage you as Lilly's governess."

"I fear that I am not competent," commenced Bella.

"No more of that! I never quarrelled with a lady in my life; but I will if you harp upon that string. It is settled, then. Lilly! come kiss your teacher!" and after going through a like ceremony himself, with all three girls, he went off to his counting-house.

Isabel had convened Maurice, Henry, and her mother in council the pre-

ceding day; Frank Lyle obtaining her sanction "to sit as a corresponding member;" and she seizedt his opportunity to communicate their proposals and decision.

"We respect your independent spirit, Bella, dear," she said, "and are content to humour it. I could not remain the useless cipher in my home, the majority of young ladies become after their schooling is done; dreaming and lounging away the most valuable years of their lives. I have my work, you shall have yours. Lilly is from henceforward our joint charge. She has had no teacher besides myself, and I cannot resign her entirely. With your consent, I will continue to give her lessons in music and drawing."

"The branches for which I have least taste!" exclaimed Bella.

"And I most!" returned Isabel. "You write an excellent hand. Henry can procure for you as much copying from his office as you wish; and lastly, Frank wants a corrector of the press."

"O, Isabel!"

Isabel laughed at her terror. "It involves no great exercise of talent, my dear. We do not mean to constitute you one of the literati, in defiance of ability and inclination. The essential qualifications for the task are care and a correct taste, and you have these. I will help you until you are versed in your calling. I am tired of the sight of my proof-sheets, but Frank's are more agreeable objects."

This sketched routine was reduced to a system. The variety and close succession of her occupations was irksome to Bella, for a time. The action of her mind had been retarded, if not weakened, by two years of drudgery. It was harnessed, too, to a load of care, which opposed the sudden shifting from one road to another. But the friction diminished with every effort. She had not leisure for the luxury of grief during working hours, and Isabel's ingenuity incessantly devised recreations and enterprises, which could not be undertaken successfully without her aid.

Isabel's study, in their city home, was a small room in the rear of the family parlour. In the arch, which separated the apartments, hung crimson curtains in lieu of doors. When these were closed, the sanctuary was as inviolate as if secured by bolts and bars; but there were certain hours of the day when the folds were drawn aside far enough to allow a view of the pleasant boudoir, its light, convenient furniture; pictures and books kept in perfect order, with nothing of careless or studied confusion, that double-headed arrow in the hand of the satirist, whose most savage witticisms are hurled at "literary women."

It was a clear November morning. The envious veil was looped back, revealing an attractive tableau. Bella, at her writing-table, was transcribing a legal document. Her health was completely restored, and the patient sweetness which had distressed Isabel and Maurice, when she came to them, was supplanted by a more resolute and hopeful expression. Jamie was in his customary seat, by her, reading with eager, thoughtful eyes. A desk was wheeled directly in front of the door, and piled with letters, the answers to which engaged Isabel's nimble fingers. The sneering critic, mentioned just now, would have scanned her form in futile search for the characteristic symptoms of his "blue stocking." A dress of claret-coloured cashmere, its open bodice displaying a snowy chemisette, became her brunette

beauty; and the raven locks were faultless in their disposition about the Sappho head. From the tip of the slipper, peeping from beneath the edge of the skirt, to the filbert-shaped nails of the hand which guided the obnoxious (woman's) pen, the neatness of the lady was as conspicuous as the cultivated taste of the authoress. It was interesting to mark the play of her countenance; serious, mischievous, and loving by turns, as the various epistles were written and folded. She was the playful girl, rather than the popular writer, upon whom were hourly flowing in congratulations and eulogiums; for her book was the work of the day. To some of the letters before her were appended names as widely-known as that of the country honoured in having given them birth; and she bowed in graceful humility to receive the guerdon of their hearty praise and welcome to their illustrious fraternity. But the glow of natural exultation at the survey of these trophies of her triumph did not warm the heart and kindle the eye, as did far more humble tributes from obscure or unknown readers—her "friends" she loved to style them; blessings and thanks from the sick, the weary, the oppressed, to whom the touch of her flowery sceptre had brought ease, strength, and rest. There were two other classes of letters; the inquisitive and the mercenary. The latter were summarily disposed off; a few dashes of the pen sufficing to answer their inquiries and applications; the former were laughed at, and toossed into a scrap-drawer, as undeserving of notice.

Her work was suspended by the arrival of a budget of papers from her publisher.

Jamie clutched them. "You do not prize them half so much as I do. If your reviewers knew how indifferent you are to their good opinion, they would be more sparing of their compliments."

"I am not indifferent, Jamie. As if I did not weep with joy over an article in the last number of the Review!"

"Because you suspected its authorship."

"I had only 'internal evidence' of it. To stranger-critics I am very thankful. You had heard me read the MS. of my book—and I flatter myself that my voice and emphasis clothed it with some charms; they judge from a perusal of the cold paper, without the assistance of the judicious authoress to point out to them the well-turned sentences, and jog them at the witty passages. I reiterate it—I am very thankful to them."

"When they but do you justice, Isabel?" asked Bella, who had divided the package with her brother.

"Justice, my love! The goddess has lost one scale of what was, of yore, a pair of balances. There is an infinity said and written of the rough way of literature. I, young and unskilful, have just entered it, when not only is there spread a carpet of flowers for my unsteady feet, but I can hardly move for the laurels and bouquets which are rained about me. Yet their odour does not stifle me, Jamie. I love to hear my own praises—so proceed, Mr. Speaker."

The pen was resumed, and moved regularly onward, as he read aloud notices, such as had appeared every day since the issue of the volume. She smiled frequently, with an innocent happiness which would have convinced her grateful encomiast that his was but the lesser blessing of receiving; sometimes laughed out gaily at an overstrained or blundering panegyric.

Another packet—this time for "Miss Conway;" yet Isabel glanced up

excitedly; the free, flowing chirography was irregular, and her hand rested idly upon the sheet, as Jamie, tearing off the envelope, exclaimed:

"Now for Mr. Lyle! Ah! he is not so niggardly of room as some editors I could name. Shall I read it?"

"By all means," responded Bella.

Isabel said nothing.

"Ahem! 'That this is an age of progress is in no one thing so forcibly illustrated as in the march of woman's mind. She has, from the primeval ages of the world, been owned as sovereign despotic of our hearts and our homes, with power to reverse the destinies of states and empires; but this might she has hitherto owed to the omnipotence of affection and fascination of personal appearance. Our sapient forefathers, with a sagacity which our humbled contemporaries will yet be compelled to approve, chose to ignore female intellect. The world of letters was man's undisputed arena. It remained for the masculine literati of this generation to see themselves eclipsed in their own firmament; to lay down their dulled arms upon the hitherto uncontested field.

"'The best-tempered lance of them all must shiver at the contact of such metal as that borne by the girlish hand of the fair creature, the title of whose *chef d'œuvre* heads this column. For ourselves, we franly confess the inadequacy of the English language, as understood by us, to express a tithe of our admiration'"——

"A base forgery!" said a voice from the parlour.

Isabel was before him. "Jamie!" said she, pushing aside her desk, and speaking with a warmth entirely foreign to her usual manner, "give me that paper! Frank Lyle never wrote a word of what you are reading. Let me have it!" as he withheld it, and attempted an apology, unintelligible in his mirth.

Frank's hand was upon it as soon as hers, and his surprised, "Why, Isabel, you see that it is a jest!" made her conscious of his presence.

She would have hastened from the room, and when he detained her, to his amazement and Jamie's consternation, she burst into tears.

Bella approached with concern, and Jamie pressed forward to entreat forgiveness; but Frank motioned them to retire, and dropped the curtain after them.

"Now, dear Isabel!" he said, leading her to the sofa, "what is the meaning of all this? It was a thoughtless trick of Jamie's, but he did not dream of wounding you."

"I know it. It was very wrong and foolish in me, but"——

"Do not try to talk yet," said Frank. "Let me read you the real article so outrageously caricatured by our *protégé*. We must curb, instead of fostering his poetical propensities, if they incite him to such disrespectful licences."

The critique was as just and appropriate, as Jamie's unfortunate effort was unworthy. Isabel drank in every word, and when he finished, returned his smile with a face irradiated by pleasure.

"If you were my only reader, I should exult in having written that book!" she said. "You enter into its spirit. None of my other reviewers, except Jamie, have understood one-tenth of my meaning. You discern beauties unknown to myself. I do thank you, Frank, from the depths of my heart."

He suffered her to go on until sunshine had expelled every mist of gloom; then asked with kind gravity—"Were you displeased at Jamie's version, because you believed that I wrote it; or would your emotion have been the same had it emanated from any source whatever?"

"I did not believe that it was yours," she rejoined, a shadow returning, "that is, after a second's thought. I was shocked and disappointed. I had hoped to please you, and expected your judgment so anxiously."

"I tremble for you, Isabel! There are those who are mean or bitter enough to write and publish things far exceeding in rancour the most severe criticism you have yet received. From them neither your youth or sex will protect you. It is an unpleasant but necessary duty for me to prepare you for their attacks. You must bear in mind that you have now two characters, and beware how you merge them into one. As an authoress, you must be susceptible only to what will advance your happiness and usefulness. Abuse will harden you, or, still worse, sour you into misanthropy."

Isabel had a peculiar child-like fearlessness of manner, which could never be mistaken for boldness. With it she met this warning.

"I require no preparation but the knowledge of the motives of these disingenuous foes. If these are, as you affirm, meanness or malice, their assaults are beneath my contempt. You err if you attribute my hasty conduct awhile ago to mortified vanity. I shall never shirk honest criticism, nor resent sarcasm. Jamie's mock editorial, ay, one twice as unkind in its irony, might have been spun out into four columns of any journal but yours. But where is he? I must set his heart at rest. I was peevish—harsh!"

She turned back at the door. "And you, Frank! your mentorship is no sinecure, as you must have suspected long since. I shall never be able to repay you for your goodness and forbearance; but, believe me, I am sensible of it, and try to profit by your teachings."

"Were ever such artlessness of soul and knowledge of human nature combined in a character before?" meditated Frank, while she was gone. "I her teacher! when I am never with her for an hour without beholding something new and wonderful, though I have studied her from her childhood."

It was as the child that he knew her still; he had fathomed the intellect, but not the heart of the woman.

He picked up one of the papers Jamie had thrown by when his "proof" was brought in.

"Now this is a narrow escape! I suppose they have not seen it; am sure of it, from Jamie's mood. Stay, Isabel!" as she came through the curtains, and prepared to fasten them back.

"What is it?" she inquired, hastily.

He pointed to a paragraph.

"Married, at Berkeley Manor, Colombio county, on the 1st inst., by the Right Rev. the Bishop, Willard Monmouth, Esq., of Richmond, to Adelaide, eldest daughter of Madison Berkeley, Esq., of Tennessee. Philadelphia papers please copy."

"And why 'Philadelphia papers?'" cried the indignant Isabel. "O! can he have added this insult wilfully!"

"May we come in?" said Jamie, from without.

"You may"— then hurriedly to Frank—"*You* did not insert it."

"Could I"

She wondered at her stupidity in asking the question.

He pocketed the journal; ascertained, by a seemingly careless inspection of the rest, that no other contained the notice, and the conversation went blithely on. To Isabel, the certainty of Willard's marriage was a release from doubt and apprehension. Her generosity made her often debate the question of his guilt. She relied implicitly upon her brother's discretion, yet the testimony upon which his judgment was predicted might have been false. This step had rendered that verdict irrevocable. She fancied that Bella had also clung to this ghost of a hope, and trusted that with its banishment love and regret would likewise wing their flight.

"Jamie must communicate it," she said to herself, "but not yet. She is more lively to-day than I have seen her since our school-days, and then, the wedding to-night! I will not spoil her enjoyment. To-morrow will do as well."

Jamie, satisfied by his cousin's behaviour to others as to himself, that his unintentional offence was forgiven, volunteered himself as proof-reader, until Bella should be ready.

"Touch it at your peril!" said Frank, shaking his finger frowningly. "Graceless reprobate that you are! you have no appreciation of an editor's responsibilities. I have had a specimen of your interpolations. I should expect to be aroused to-morrrow morning by the din of 'Stop my paper!' from a thousand voices; to say nothing of a yard of cold iron through my body, and an ounce of lead in that cavity of my cranium, where the brains should have been when I let you meddle with my engine. Stick to your poets' corner!"

Isabel was reading.

"You may well advise that," she said, pausing in the middle of a poem, "for who can fill it as he does? This surpasses all previous efforts, Jamie, I think."

"And so do more impartial judges," answered Frank, "I showed it to Mr. P——, who was in my office yesterday. He ran his eye over it in his quick, nervous way; then read it aloud with a zest yet more complimentary than his verbal praises. He says, my boy, what we were keen-sighted enough to perceive before, that you will make your mark on the age, prosaic though it be."

"If I do," said Jamie, with faltering utterance, "the merit will not be mine, but theirs who have nurtured and trained my poor gift."

"Not 'poor,' Jamie!" corrected Isabel. "Noble and grand! worthy of its Giver. It has been our privilege to encourage it."

Frank had a "spare hour," a discovery he generally made when he found the girls without visitors; and enthroned in what common consent appropriated as "his chair," offered his "services to the company at large. Command me as you will, to read, listen, or to talk."

"You may do all three," replied Isabel. "Will you look over these letters of mine?"

Prior and subsequent to his European travels, his had been the earliest perusal and revision of whatever she wrote; and not many young authors have had so useful a friend. For many months her productions were solely for his eye; and when, finally, he stimulated her to publish, she did it un-

hesitatingly, without a doubt lest what had suited him should not be acceptable to the public. Her progress, during his absence, raised her above the need of his aid; but this she was pertinacious in contradicting, and seldom did a line, penned in her literary capacity, leave her desk without being submitted for the seal of his approval. He opened one envelope after another, granting the coveted confirmation by a nod; occasionally a word; always a smile—one that lingered lovingly in his eyes, after the last was refolded.

"What of the wedding?" he questioned.

"Bella, Henry and myself will go," said Isabel, "and we expect brother this afternoon."

Frank put on a doleful visage. "I am politely excluded from the arrangements, then? Jamie, we will have a French conversazione at home."

"Your absurd assumption of offended pride, tempts me to leave you to your perversity," answered Isabel, "but my charity prevails. Henry is pledged for this evening (I will not undertake to guess for how many more) to Julia North; and unless some fairy godmother blesses me to the extent of sending me a beau, brother will have double duty to perform."

"I will be Prince to this disconsolate Cinderella," he rejoined. "Honestly, I would have stayed away if I could not have appeared as your cavalier, or Bella's. Weddings are the stiffest of assemblies which purport to be social; and this will hardly prove an exception."

"I hope you may be disappointed," said Isabel. "Mrs. Bryce's house is renowned for easy hospitality; and Sue would overleap the conventionalities that fence in a bride, to lend her personal efforts to the amusement of the guests, if she observed any tendency to formality. Mr. Olmney, also, is extremely agreeable."

"I have not yet met him. He is a Baltimorean, is he not?"

"A resident of that city. He comes of a Southern family."

"And Maurice has mustered fortitude to witness the ceremony?" smiled Frank. "Time, the all-curer, has wrought with salutary effects upon him."

"Were there wounds to heal?" inquired Jamie.

"So the world says."

"And like other of 'the world's' bulletins, this one held false intelligence," said Isabel, positively. "Sue was engaged to Mr. Olmney while the rumour, heralding her nuptials with brother, was at its height."

"You demolish my little romance as ruthlessly as if you had never constructed one," was Frank's reply. "He will be in by the evening train, did you say?"

Bella raised her head. "He has come!" and they heard the swift, bold tread in the hall.

Isabel bounded from her draped nook to his embrace; Frank and Jamie welcomed him in one voice; Bella left her table to meet him. The study had been cozily cheerful before; it was now lightsome beyond compare.

MSS. and desks were consigned to pigeon-holes and corners. His full, joyous life infused spirit into all. None could know him without longing for a place in the great, rich heart, and each one then present was sure of his and her dwelling within it. Between him and Frank Lyle, the tie of

boyish intimacy had tightened with every year. Men, now, with different orbits of action and separate homes, their sympathies were as ready, their interchange of sentiments as unreserved, as when they were co-partners of one desk at school—chums at college.

"You are just in season to refute a calumny," remarked Isabel.

"A calumny in this company! Of whom?"

"She will have it," returned Frank, "that I disparage you by pitying your lacerated heart—torn open afresh by Miss Bryce's marriage."

"How your compassionate nature will bleed for me then, when you know that I am to speak the words which bind her to my rival!"

"Insult added to injury!" said Frank.

"But where is Dr. B——?" asked Isabel.

"He was unexpectedly called out of town; and moved, as Frank would insinuate, by a remaining spark of tenderness, Sue despatched Olmney to Mooresville yesterday, with a petition for my good offices in their behalf. It is a drop of balm, Frank, that I make her over to a worthy mate. His brother was with him; a gentlemanly fellow, but more silent and sedate than the groom."

Frank's "spare hour" lengthened into two, and then he forgot to count.

He could not decline Mrs. Oakley's invitation to the dinner, which was served and waiting; and compromised with conscience for a wasted morning by taking Maurice off to his office to pass the afternoon in the same manner.

CHAPTER XX.

ISABEL had never been more certain in her prognostications of a happy evening; never looked more bewitching than when, before donning cloak and hood, she danced into the room, announcing "Miss Conway and Miss Oakley upon exhibition!"

Mr. Oakley reviewed his "daughters" with fond pride; his less demonstrative helpmate expressed herself satisfied that they were becomingly and comfortably clad; and Maurice shielded his eyes from the brilliant apparitions.

"The bird of Paradise and the swan," said Jamie, and Isabel added a kiss to her good-night, in payment for her part of the compliment.

The rooms were filling rapidly when they arrived at Mrs. Bryce's. For the thousandth time, Frank whispered, "I am proud of you!" as Isabel made her entry upon his arm; a sensation sufficiently palpable to the many gazers, who leaned and looked towards them. As girl and woman, she was familiarly known to most of the beholders, but they partook of the popular belief, that having "become an authoress," she must have undergone a marked transformation of person and deportment. She bore the scrutiny with inimitable composure. Engaging and piquante in style and conversation, she moved among her acquaintances with unaffected simplicity, unconscious that she was the "bright particular" of the galaxy of fair ones who thronged her way. They who flocked about her to catch the pearls and diamonds which were to fall with each parting of the scarlet lips, went away disappointed, but, if they had hearts, agreeably; for the

candid speech of such feeling as hers was worth all the pedantic bombast ever uttered.

At a sign from Mrs. Bryce, Maurice relinquished Bella to Dr. Merton, and took his position in the doorway between two of the apartments. His regard for the bride was brotherly in its warmth; and his deep voice was impressive in its solemn meaning, as he required the vows which were to settle her weal or woe for life.

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your brother's distinguished success, Miss Isabel," said an elderly gentleman.

She gave him her sunniest smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Grey! I will not affect the modesty to say that I did not like it myself:" and neglectful for the time of her troop of admirers, she continued the dialogue.

Mr. Grey was the founder and conductor of an extensively-circulated magazine; the pioneer in the line of letters to which it belonged. Isabel had dubbed him her "literary sponsor." Her maiden article appeared in his columns; and he, instantly recognizing the genius of its author, had opened a correspondence which led to an engagement beneficial to both. Since then, her own father had not watched her upward career with more interest. Of the many untried writers whom his arm had lifted across the rough threshold, and sustained through the vestibule of the Temple of Fame, she was his pet and boast; an attachment entirely reciprocated by the whole-souled girl. To her, "dear Mr. Grey" was the most interesting gentleman present, always excepting "brother" and "Frank."

A lady brushed by, and stopped abruptly before them.

"Oh! do be careful!" in musical, ringing tones to her attendant. "Another step would have been destruction to my bouquet. I have dropped it under your feet."

He stooped to regain it, and she bowed smilingly to Mr. Grey.

"Upon observation, I acquiesce in your remark, that the Philadelphians have been misrepresented by their Southern neighbours," she said.

"I am happy in having been instrumental in your conversion,' was the answer.

She paused a minute; looked hard at Isabel, and yielded to the impetus of her gallant's arm.

"Who is she?" questioned Isabel.

"I was introduced to her a while ago, but forget her name. She is a relative of Mrs. Bryce's, and is from the South—Georgia, I believe. I suspect the lost bouquet was a ruse to detain her in your vicinity."

"Mine! why?"

"I was talking with her as you entered. She asked who you were, and expressed much admiration of your works and yourself. It might have been taking an unfair advantage of your good nature, but I should have presented you to her had I recollected her name.

The crowd had divided for an instant to where Frank stood, in conversation with the lady under debate. Isabel watched her with curiosity, not free from dislike. She was magnificently attired, and had the address of a thorough woman of the world, verging upon forwardness, Isabel thought, as she noted the protracted rest of the dark eyes upon Frank's face, and the sauciness with which she tapped his arm with her fan, in

reproof or reminder. Disapprobation grew into displeasure, when she was convinced by her look and gesture that she was again the subject of her observations. Frank glanced in her direction but once, and Isabel, adept though she was in reading his countenance, was mystified. She could have said that compassion and aversion contended for mastery, but what or who could have begotten them? The lady beckoned a gentleman from a corner, and Frank made way for him with alacrity. The new actor in the pantomime which absorbed and excited Isabel, was likewise a stranger, and from her conduct, she judged him to be a connection of the coquettish Georgian. Their theme was, she was persuaded, still herself; a colloquy in which the lady seemed to insist; her cavalier to dissent; and Frank to listen; and the returning wave of forms engulphed them.

"Miss Isabel, will you honour me, by accompanying me in the promenade?" prayed Alfred Bryce, the kind-hearted, but not over-gifted brother of the bride. He fluttered around the star, feared by some wiser men—as a moth about lambent flame, which dazzles into ecstacy without scorching.

At their third round, they came upon the gentleman who had so stoutly withstood the pleadings of the fair Southerner. He was leaning moodily against a window.

"Why, my good fellow, what are you moping here for?" exclaimed the young host. "A fine opinion our Philadelphia belles will have of Southern gallantry! Miss Oakley, let me introduce to you my friend, Mr. Olmney."

A servant bustled up with a whispered message.

"Tell her I will be there in a moment," responded Alfred. "Miss Isabel, will you excuse me for transferring you to Mr. Olmney for a short time? My mother wishes to see me. I shall be the loser—not you or he."

The couple, whose linking was thus involuntary, walked on in the wake of the promenaders; Mr. Olmney diffident or sullen; Isabel, marvelling at his silence, until she bethought herself that as a native of the city, and an acquaintance of the family to which he was a visitor, it was her place to amuse him.

"How long have you been in Philadelphia, Mr. Olmney?" she inquired, sensible of saying a very common-place thing, but not knowing upon what else to found a conversation.

He started, and looked searchingly at her, then recovering his self-possession, replied—"Two days."

"But you have seen our city before?"

"Several times, as I passed through it on my way to New York, whither business calls me frequently."

"It is a pity," said she, "that there is not more friendly intercourse between the North and South. A mutual understanding of the customs and feelings of the communities, as composed of families instead of tradesmen, would be a death-blow to dissension, or, at least, give birth to more charity."

"I believe that the faults of individuals, as well as those of society, would be often pardoned, if those who now censure were acquainted with the true circumstances of each case; particularly if the punishment were as public as the offence," replied Mr. Olmney.

'It is not unfrequently as obvious," said Isabel, pursuing his moralizing strain, since it chimed in with his fancy, "but we are too dull to see it. Retribution is seldom instant. Does it not speak volumes in praise of abused human nature, that men are so apt to forget the crime before judgment is wreaked upon the culprit?"

"It is but another of the countless proofs of the selfishness of mankind," he rejoined. "They overlook the injured with the injury. If conscience ware as forgetful, there would be fewer aching hearts."

"Perhaps not," said Isabel, gravely. "Conscience is not the avenger of wrong alone; she also deters from its commission. Remorse for one deed may warn us to avoid future transgression."

"You are more merciful to evil-doers than most people, Miss Oakley. Can you imagine the possibility of one who is not old in worldliness and sin, being guilty of a premeditated wrong to an unoffending object?"

"No!" replied she.

"And a lapse into error, upon the attack of mighty temptation, you could forgive, if it were followed by repentance?"

"Repentance and restitution. They are inseparable," said Isabel. He was a monomaniac in speculative casuistry, or a haunted man.

"And if restitution is impracticable, an eternity of suffering would not expiate a youthful fault?" he retorted sarcastically. "Your sex have a surprising versatility of talent, Miss Oakley. I cannot determine which most to admire—their character as tempters, deceivers, or censors. In each capacity they are unsurpassed."

The ingenuous eye rebuked the unmerited slur. "You are jesting, Mr. Olmney; or it has been your misfortune to encounter perverted samples of female character. Pardon my plainness of speech, but I do not like these sentiments—seriously spoken or not—from the mouth of one who has, or had a mother and sisters."

"I had reference to women in society. My only sister died in her babyhood. I am thankful she did! My mother has always lived in seclusion. She has, by that means, preserved the shockingly obsolete article in the furniture of the modern lady—a heart!"

"I am no lady, then!" said Isabel, impetuously; "and most of my acquaintances—all of my friends, 'in society' though they are, must humbly fall into the same category. I might shun a dispute with you by claiming this as a peculiarity of Philadelphia and Northern social life: but my love and respect for your Old Dominion will not suffer me to let her rest undersuch an imputation. No citizen of hers was ever devoid of feeling. They are a generous race—warm-hearted to a proverb."

"You forget that I am a native-born Virginian," interposed her auditor.

"You are not heartless!" was the energetic reply. "If you were, you would not bemoan the insensibity of others. I repeat—I love your State! Independent of the historical associations which endear it, more than any other member of the Union, to every American, I have personal reasons for gratitude to it; for it has given me two of the best friends I have upon earth. They are natives of the soil, and never speak, but to laud the open hearts and hands of their fellow-Virginians—as a mass. The younger of my cousins, although a mere boy in years, is a fiery Southerner in prin-

ciple. I wish he were here to controvert your mistaken ideas. I shall entertain myself, by rendering to him a faithful report of your heresies. He is the soul of chivalry, and the odium you cast upon Virginia society, will not seem more heinous to him than your graphic classification of our sex. 'Tempters, deceivers, censors'—that was the order—was it not?"

Even he smiled at her laugh.

"No!" she persisted, taking this slight rift in the cloud as a favourable augury. "The world nor you are so wicked as you would have me think. Men ridicule the 'cant of goodness.' To me the cant of misanthropy and 'knowledge of mankind' is infinitely more disagreeable. It cannot be denied that it does more harm. To live, to be successful and popular among our fellow-mortals, does not demand the crucifixion of conscience or heart."

"In one like yourself, perhaps it may not," he returned, "for you are good and strong and independent. Can your kindness pity the weakness your upright nature contemns?"

"It does not befit the untempted to hoot at the failings of those who have been tried and found wanting," said she, beginning to suspect that there was some significance in his constant return to this point.

"Miss Oakley," he resumed, in an agitated tone, "will you strive to remember this, throughout the feeble justification I am about to make to you?"

A call for music and a dozen applications to "Miss Oakley" put an imperative period to the sentence.

"You may finish, by and by," she said, as she played a prelude.

She had a voice of uncommon power and melody, and sang as she talked, with spirit and earnestness. With due cultivation, her vocal abilities would have made her fortune as a prima donna; as an amateur musician, she would have been celebrated in the private circle, had she been endowed with no other gift. The company, although in general, not better-behaved than most musically indifferent throngs (and such are all mixed crowds), were respectfully silent while she kept her seat.

"Will you favour me—all of us—by singing this?" queried Alfred Bryce, setting up a piece of manuscript music.

Isabel demurred. It was a song she had written a year before, when it could have had no relevancy to her own or her cousin's history, but now, she was reluctant for Bella to hear it. She objected mildly; the audience complimented the "modesty of genius," and urged their demand. She knew the hand that straightened the sheet upon the rack.

"Sing it!" said Frank.

"Bella!" she breathed, as softly.

"Is in another room. Go on!"

She struck the chords.

"Say not that Time has wrought no change
In the love which once you felt;
I know before a fairer shrine,
In homage you have knelt.
I know another's presence can
More bliss than mine impart;
The Syren's luring voice has left
Its echo in your heart.

I must forget our former life—
Those glad and halcyon hours!
When all our path was scattered o'er
With Hope's most glowing flowers.
For I have seen their sad stems droop
And blacken, one by one;
As roses pine and fade away,
When shaded from the sun.

I ask not that thy flattering lip
Should breathe a second vow;
Were it more tender than the first,
I would not hear it now!
Though, with unswerving faith and love,
I each stern test have borne—
The spell is broken—and for thee,
My breast holds naught but scorn!"

"One more! only one more, Miss Oakley!" pleaded several.

"This!" recommended Frank, choosing one which would bring out the whole compass of her voice. As he spread it open, he said, "When you have sung it, do not glance at the gentleman with whom you were promenading. Draw on your gloves before you arise, and take my arm as you leave the music-stool."

In literal and unquestioning obedience, she conformed to his instructions, and was conducted into the conservatory. Others were there also, and Frank roved from flower to flower, chatting carelessly, until they were screened by a large orange tree.

"Isabel, did you know with whom you were walking when called to the piano?"

"Yes—Mr. Olmney, brother to the bridegroom, I supposed; the gentleman of whom brother spoke this morning."

"Humph! Who introduced him?"

"Alfred Bryce."

"I thought so! and you, my unwary little innocent, forgot to make allowance for the defects in the articulation of that thick-tongued youngster!"

"But this time, Frank, he did pronounce the name very distinctly."

"Doubtless—for Alfred Bryce! or maybe his head is so intent upon the Olmney branch, grafted upon the family tree, that he really misapplied the name. Supposing the blunder to have been yours—no starting now, my pet! but would not 'my fwiend Mr. Ormnow,' in his honest mouth, be Willard Monmouth in mine?"

"O, Frank!"

"Isabel!" The sternness restored her colour.

"I am not angry," he said, resuming the tone of gentle affection in which he usually addressed her, "but indeed, dear Isabel, I cannot permit any scenes here. You would have swooned or treated the lookers-on to an hysteric fit, if I had not scolded back your senses. Was I unkind?"

"*You* unkind!" reproachfully. "I did not intend to faint, although I was electrified by your revelation. Can it be that I held that man's arm and talked to him for so long! I, who have vowed never to speak to him at any time or place whatever! the unprincipled trifler with Bella's happiness!"

"A resolution better broken than kept," said Frank, pithily. "Did he discover your mistake?"

"He must have noticed it in my first sentence," answered she, running over the conversation. "Accident threw me on his gallantry, or, I fancy, it would not have been offered. Alfred was wanted elsewhere, and proposed him as a substitute——"

"Do not apologize!" interrupted Frank, laughing at her anxious vindication. "I knew that you were not his companion from choice. I was forced into an introduction to his bride, earlier in the evening."

"That tall, showy girl, with black eyes and auburn hair?"

"Yes. I saw you watching us, and tried to get a chance to advise you who they were. I apprehended that she would lay siege to you. She beset me with inquiries about you, beplastered you with flatteries, and drove me behind the entrenchment of civil subterfuge, to evade her anxiety to make your acquaintance. Then she telegraphed her husband, and pointed you out to him before my face, with the utmost audacity!"

"That is the least audacious of her offences," said Isabel. "Where is Bella?"

"I sent Maurice to her the moment Lewis Merton told me that they were in the house."

"Always thoughtful!" ejaculated she. "How did she bear it?"

"Nobly! I thought she might wish to go home; but he counselled her to remain if she could, and she answered that she preferred doing so. He asked me to caution you not to allude to their presence. She is in the certain possession of your sympathy, and outward demonstration of it might unnerve her. He understands her better than you or I. There she is—you can see her through the glass doors, looking prettier than ever. Yonder swims Mrs. Monmouth! He is more tolerable than she, if your expression, while conversing with him, was a criterion of your feelings."

"He talked strangely," said Isabel, "but I comprehend all now. He is miserable, Frank."

"He ought to be," was Frank's sentence, and Isabel, ever foremost to enlist on the side of the oppressed, engaged in a defence of the man she had declared most obnoxious of his species to her.

"He spoke of the weak and tempted," she said. "He has been betrayed into sin. Into what depths of moral degradation man plunges when Ambition usurps the throne of Principle! Men cannot love like women, because we owe no fealty to this bloody Moloch! This artful woman played upon his vanity——"

"By which we much-to-be-pitied men are also devoured," put in Frank. "I am sorry for him, Isabel; yet this does not make me esteem him less culpable. Had his love for Bella died out with the acquirement of different tastes and ideas of life;—or what would have been more excusable still—had he sounded in his breast a fount which her repaying affection could not replenish; discovered a concealed spring she had never touched, I would grasp his hand to-night as that of an honourable man who had my sincerest compassion. These things are not so; he wooed his bride as much for her gold as admiration of her person; has been undeceived as to the condition of her finances; is chagrined, and, I say, deserves to be miserable."

"Nevertheless, Frank, I must see him again." And she recounted how their interview had terminated. "Will you ask him to step in here, and return yourself in five minutes?"

Willard came, hard and frozen. He had surmised the purport of Frank's whisper at the piano, and Isabel's avoidance of himself; every word of her song had fixed itself in his soul; he was an outcast from love and forgiveness; yet, while inly owning the propriety of this reprobation, he was prepared to resent the slight. He met—not the intolerable scorn he felt those features could express—but a sad forbearance which subdued him at once.

"Mr. Monmouth," began Isabel, "unless I am much mistaken, my discovery of your name obviates the necessity of a conclusion of the story you commenced, with a proviso for my indulgence and lenient judgment. I have heard of you from my childhood, always with interest; of later years, with the joyful expectation of saluting you as a relative, at some not very distant day. I never thought to meet you thus!"

He winced, with a secret pang of memory or present discomfort.

"You have not spoken with my cousin this evening?" said she, interrogatively.

"I have not. Do me the justice, Miss Oakley, to believe that I am not yet a wanton, unfeeling villain!"

"I do not consider you either wicked or heartless. Bella is well, and happier than she has been for a weary season before. If she knew of our short acquaintance, she would desire me at its close, which must be here and now, to present with mine, her pardon for the past, and heartfelt wishes for your future welfare."

He bowed over her extended hand—not in feigned humility—he knew himself unfit to touch it—and thus ended their only meeting.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Some one to see me! Did you not say that I was engaged, Dennis?" asked Isabel, looking up from her desk.

"No, ma'am."

"Why, surely, I told you this morning——"

"Yes, ma'am, but it's Mr. Lyle," answered the Emeralder, who knew better than his young mistress when her orders were to be obeyed.

"Ah, Mr. Lyle! Very right, Dennis. Let him come in. Business before pleasure, Frank," she said, giving him her hand, without moving from her chair. "There are the morning papers and one or two books to wile away the time, until I shall be at leisure. I cannot speak to you again before I finish this. It is for dear Mr. Grey; he is never slighted, you know."

The flying pen soon wrote out a finale.

"Not now," she objected, as Frank would have taken up the manuscript. "I have had a surfeit of my written composition. My tongue is restless, and my ears burn for conversation. I am rejoiced that you dropped in. Bella and Jamie are out."

"Or you might have been minus the felicity of my company," rejoined the frank visitor. "They passed my office. As it is too fine a day to stay in-doors, I judged that they would be in no hurry to return home, and was not disposed to lose so tempting an opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* with you. I am never quite so near Paradise—as the Orientals say, 'reaching heaven with a finger'—as when lolling in this chair; the curtains down, and you opposite to me, Isabel."

"A young man of moderate desires," laughed she; "and your Eden is circumscribed in its dimensions, whatever may be said of the mind that sees in it the *ne plus ultra* of mortal bliss."

"It is only Eden when all mine," said Frank. "An houri more would spoil the effect. This nook is the dearest spot of the world to me."

"It is to me," murmured Isabel, surveying each cherished object. "I have never had a sad hour here, Frank. Everything exhorts to joy and hope. When fatigued with work, I have but to look around me to gather new vigour. My furniture, pictures, library, and what Henry styles my 'toys,' are gifts from those I love best; selected with reference to my wishes or whims. Ought I not to be glad and grateful?"

"Your friends should be, in having *you*," responded Frank, bluntly. "If more women were like you, the question of their use in this world would never be moved." Dropping his light tone, he continued, seriously, "To me you have been an inestimable blessing—more than sister could ever be, my fairy, my sunbeam, my angel of consolation. You are so accustomed to ministering to my necessities, bodily and spiritual, that you are unmindful of the number and importance of your kindnesses. I am not—the load oppresses me when I count them over."

"Frank! my regard burdensome?"

"A burden delicious in its very weight!" said he—the deep eyes full of holy light, "one than which I had rather part with life. It only saddens me to think that love and gratitude are all the return I can make for your immeasurable goodness."

"I could ask no other," said Isabel, her voice running over, as it were, with troubled joy—"no other—if you were as heavily my debtor as you say, and I were under no obligation to you, who have done more to mould my character, and shape my destiny, than any earthly friend beside. I cannot trust myself to speak of these things, Frank."

"Do not!" said he, taking in his the soft palm, within which she had laid her brow, and longing to kiss away the tears that were ready to fall. "Enough to know that each has no better friend than the other; and that this state of things will continue for ever—shall it not, dear Isabel?"

Her smile of perfect trust and affection replied with her lips, "For ever!"

They discoursed of many topics, freely and happily, with that true unison of soul such as no three upon earth can feel, each for the others. The sun shone warm and still upon the carpet, just touching, with a pencil of yellow light, Frank's chestnut locks; then brought out the purplish gloss of her raven hair, and gave a more vivid tint to his cheeks, stained with the crimson flush of stirring thought and noble emotion; left both in the shadow which crept stealthily after it, and went its way, to visit that scene no more that day; but to dwell upon no fairer.

Time, measured by heart-beats, lags far behind the relentless watches encased in glass and metal. The voices of Bella and Jamie reminded Frank to consult his more matter-of-fact repeater. He sprang up.

"Pray forgive me for stealing so many of your valuable hours. It was shamefully thoughtless in me!"

"They could not have been better employed," said she, "and I invite you to repeat the theft whenever you like. These talks do me good—benefit both mind and heart."

"They are my daily supply of sustenance," returned he. "I could go in the strength of this meat for forty days, and then scale whatever Hill Difficulty lay in my route."

"Stay one minute!" she said, as he advanced to take leave. "I have some agreeable tidings to impart. You have heard me speak of Alma May, my mother's niece, who passed winter before last with us?"

"You wrote to me about her; that she was a nice companion, or something to that effect," the thermometer of his spirits sinking as he anticipated the "agreeable" information in reserve.

"I received this letter from her to-day, in which she tells me to expect her again, and as early as next week."

"She is from the West, I believe?"

"She lives near Chicago, and is as lovely a flower as ever graced a prairie," answered Isabel.

"I am glad to hear it—that she is coming, I mean," his face belying his unwilling asseveration.

"What is the matter?" inquired Isabel, mirthfully. "It must be acknowledged that you do look overjoyed!"

Frank joined in her laugh. "I fear I shall never be able to utter a polite falsehood, without betraying my truth-telling habits. It must come out, Isabel!—so far as I am concerned, I wish she had stayed in Illinois. She will require much of your time and thoughts, and I am selfish. Despise me for it if you will. Your companionship is the ever-green and blooming oasis to which my spirit flies, when heated, travel-worn, and thirsting, in the desert of the life a man is obliged to lead; and I cannot think with indifference, much less complacently, of another—however fair and deserving—luxuriating in the shade, hearing the music of the cool waters, when I am pining for them."

"Shade and fountain will be ever free to you, when you seek them, Frank. No one can come between us. Alma is, as her pretty name denotes, gentle—amiable, almost to weakness. She will never dream of altering my habits or controverting your rights. This, our sanctum, is still ours."

It was with no enviable feelings that Mr. Lyle heard, three days afterwards, of Miss May's arrival. With a sigh which did not spring from an excess of delight, he rang the bell at Mr. Oakley's door, that evening. "Miss May," was an imposing title for the tiny rose-bud that lifted itself from the corner of the sofa, to bend a languid response to his salutation.

"Alma is fatigued by her journey," said Isabel. "I think she has borne it surprisingly. She has travelled two nights without stopping for rest.

"Three, cousin Isabel," said a sweet voice, as a bird might twitter in its sleep.

Her complexion was exceedingly pure and transparent; her blue eyes, rather drowsy just now, were darkened by lashes of extraordinary length; she had cheeks like August peaches, and a profusion of light-brown hair. Frank yielded the point of her beauty, albeit its order was not to his taste —"too yea-nay!" he muttered inwardly; and such similes as the youngest crescent moon, half smothered in a cloud; the floating, dissolving fleece of mist itself; a stealing rill, its song not louder than the whispering grass that hid it—occurred to his mind—while Isabel, with her gleamy eyes, was Venus in the full-orbed splendour of her reign; leader and glory of the evening host; a fount of laughing waters, with its diamond-spray and circling rainbow, and pæan of hope and gladness.

He was vexed—unconscionably, he knew—but vexed, nevertheless, at the solicitude manifested for the comfort of this uninteresting appendage to the fireside group. Isabel had never talked in a more commonplace strain. Who cared to hear the discomforts of travel dilated upon—magnified into actual and grievous evils? how much of the journey between Chicago and Philadelphia was performed by steamboat, and how much by land? of the terrible explosion which had "frightened" Alma "to death," she mistaking for a bursting boiler, the escape of steam in an orderly manner through the proper valve; of the more distressing catastrophe of a lost, and up to this time, missing trunk? Nobody but Miss May—yet Isabel and the rest appeared well pleased if she expanded her azure orbs, or showed the diminutive pearls beneath the pouting lips.

"A petted, spoiled baby!" exclaimed Frank, mentally; and he wheeled his chair quite away from her, to devote the remainder of the evening to a severely intellectual conversation with Jamie.

"Isabel lowers herself unwarrantably, in her desire to set others at their ease," he reflected, before falling asleep that night. "I must represent the danger of this habit to her, to-morrow."

He was constant to his purpose; but she "could not see the impropriety of discussing the themes which most interested her auditors."

"But, my dear girl, there are not many who have your conversational talent, or range of ideas; who can so simplify a grand, or dignify a trivial subject. You should give tone to the society you frequent; not wait for the key-note from another, and a baser mind."

A smile rippled her lips.

"It was said of some celebrated personage, Dr. Johnson, I think, that if he were writing of fish, he would make his minnows talk like whales. Men would protest against action so absurd and impossible. To humour your fancy, Frank, I will be leviathan. Is it not wiser to 'roar me soft' as the most minute minnow of the shoal, swarming about me, than to terrify and deafen them by giving play to lungs of a water-power sufficient to propel a steamer?"

"Ridicule is not argument, Isabel. Your motives are benevolent, I doubt not, and disinterested as your generous nature; but would not consideration for the improvement of others advise a different course? For example: your cousin is younger than yourself; and of a character so plastic, you might knead it at your will. Would you not confer a greater

kindness by raising her to your level, than by sinking so unresistingly to hers, that her untutored mind never suspects your condescension, or that there are heights above her?"

"Alma's character, morally considered, does not need elevation, Frank. She is amiable, truthful, guileless in heart and imagination, and happy in her way, as I am in mine. If I have pleasures which she has never tasted, she is unconscious of their existence; and therefore is none the worse for my enjoyment. She is refined in feeling and behaviour, and unpretending; consequently will never subject herself to ridicule. I would do violence to my sense of justice, and more serious harm to her, if I were to endeavour to lift her from the stand for which Nature and education have adapted her. The stripling David would have stooped and staggered under Saul's armour."

"True!" said Frank; "and the dove dies where the eagle soars. We will dismiss the matter."

"Not just yet, if you please. I am confident that you will like Alma. She is so lovely! and not always so devoid of animation as you saw her last night."

"She aroused whenever she was the object of remark," observed Frank, rather uncharitably.

"That was not said like yourself, Frank! She does not know yet what style of conversation or class of subjects we would prefer; only that we love her and encourage her artless details of her life, and what are to her —adventures."

"Right, as usual! and my unfortunate tongue has drawn upon its owner the imputation of ill-nature," said Frank, ingenuously. "I shall dislike her if she is to set us at variance."

"She will never do that. And as a proof of our amity, I am going to ask a boon. We have company nearly every evening; other visitors, to whom I must address my attention; Henry is often out, in the fulfilment of his devoirs to his Julia; Bella is not talkative, and moreover, shares my task; Jamie loves his books more than society—what will become of Alma, Frank, if you do not show her some kindness? Will you not try to overcome your unfavourable prepossession?"

"I will do anything you request. She is your cousin, and remembering your love for her, I will endeavour to make her time pass lightly. Only, for every evening consumed in entertaining her, I shall exact an hour and a-half, instead of my one hour with you, the ensuing morning."

And so, when Lewis Merton sought the presence which was the sun and glory of his lonely life; or Alfred Bryce, Will Norman, or any other of Isabel's avowed admirers paid his respects to the authoress in the form of an evening visit, Frank would betake himself with commendable fortitude to the side of the "little cousin," and instead of practising the "lifting" process he had advocated with Isabel, talked of things quite as unintellectual as steamboats and missing baggage. If she had been shy and homely, he might have taken to himself credit for disinterestedness; but she was self-possessed in her way, conversed readily and prettily; and had she not, he would have been content in default of better entertainment, to go on with a monologue of the length of their interviews, for the privilege of looking at any picture which had such eyes, mouth, and skin.

"She became familiar with him after a while. It was a complete reward for his self-denial to see her face light up at his entrance, and meet the small hand which she held out, in her Western fashion. Still more pleased did she seem when there were other visitors, for then his chair was sure to approach her corner; and the crotchet-needle darted in and out, with redoubled velocity, as she prattled of "home," "mamma and papa," "Bess and Harry."

"Bess" was her sister—"much older and more sober than I—but the best creature living. I love her, O! so much I can't tell you! and she spoils me—ruins me, papa says, but he is every bit as bad as she is."

Harry, for some time he believed to be a brother, but was undeceived by her asking his advice, respecting the answer to a letter he had written to her.

"Whether you ought to reply!" repeated Frank, in surprise. "Is it an unusual occurrence for a brother to write to a sister?"

"Harry is not related to me at all! I thought you knew that. He used to be a near neighbour of ours—lived in the white house just across the orchard; and as he was a stout boy when I was too young to go to school by myself, mamma always trusted him to lead and take care of me. He has moved to Chicago, is in a dry-goods store there, and is dreadfully home-sick. Hear what he says. 'Please write to me. The sight of your handwriting would do me more good than a purse of gold.' Now, Mr. Lyle, Bess would say that it is improper for a young lady to correspond with a gentleman unless she is engaged to him. What must I do? Will it be wrong to send him a short note?"

"What if I should say 'yes?'" said he, smiling into the limpid eyes.

"I will do just what you think best."

He could not trifle with the child's confidence.

"Answer Harry's letter, Alma; and speak as you would to your brother—as you would to me, if I were to write to you."

"I should dread to have you see any of my scrawls—almost!"

"And why 'almost?'"

"Because you are so kind, that I am not so much afraid of you as of most clever people."

"Isabel is clever, yet you do not fear her."

"No, for she is so sweet and good—not stiff and critical, like some of the authors and poetesses who come to see her. I am ready to run behind the door, or under the sofa, when I see them. Then I know her before she was distinguished. I don't dread Isabel, not even when she talks French by the hour with that gentleman who looks so like a robber."

"The French consul, do you mean?" asked Frank. "You must not be too hard upon him, for he is my particular acquaintance."

"Oh! I beg your pardon!" her eyes frightened and imploring, "I have no doubt that he is a nice, dear man, if I only knew what he means. It terrifies me to have him glance towards me, because if he were to put a question to me, I should not know what to say. Isabel likes him."

"And so would you if you could understand him. But Harry—is he sensible enough to be frightful?"

"Now, Mr. Lyle! you are the funniest man!" and she threw back her head to laugh. "I never called sensible people frightful—and nobody

but poor little me ought to stand in awe of them. Harry has a little—just a very little more sense than I have."

So Frank agreed, when, on the ever-to-be-observed 14th of February, she showed him a "lovely valentine," postmarked Chicago, and containing within the circlet of roses, held by two Cupids in pinafores, what Alma designated as "some original verses." The rhyme was faulty, the metre worse; but the sentiment was pointedly expressed.

Frank reperused them—a quizzical smile lurking about his mouth.

"Alma," he said, lowering the paper to scan her face. "Has Isabel or Bella read this?"

"No. I wanted you to see it first—I don't know why."

"Thank you. As you have made me your confidant, you must not be offended if I ask you a question which you may consider rude. Do you love Harry?"

"Yes," was the unhesitating response—"as well as if he were my brother."

He was disconcerted by her simplicity.

"But, Alma, Harry loves you more—far more than if you were his sister. Brothers do not write and send love-verses. Now I have alarmed you!" as she uttered an exclamation, and seized the paper.

"Please give it to me, Mr. Lyle! Indeed I never thought——"

"And there is nothing to trouble you in this document. The danger is in helping to build up his hope that you will some day become all that he desires. Perhaps, however," his penetrating eye again scanning the blushing countenance, "perhaps your heart tells you that you can return his affection?"

"O, no!" she stammered, ready to sink with confusion.

"Then your way is plain and easy. The next time you write to him, begin with, 'My dear friend and brother,' and sign with your name, 'Your affectionate sister.' He is a worthy boy, and we must spare his feelings as much as possible."

The recollection of this scene diverted him extremely; Harry's naïve, straight-forward declaration; Alma's perturbation, and the praise-worthy gravity he had maintained in his novel character of counsellor in a young maiden's first love-affair.

"The child will grow wiser before her face has smitten many more luckless swains. How I would like to tell Isabel. But no! Alma's secret shall be sacred."

The reply concerted to quash Harry's hopes, was also submitted to him.

"What have you there?" asked Isabel, as he opened the blue-tinted, gilt-edged sheet.

"A letter."

His tone quelled inquiry. Isabel apologized for her indiscreet curiosity, and passed on.

"I wonder that you dare to answer her so," said Alma. "If she had asked me, I would have handed her the paper without an objection; although I would not have her see it for anything."

"And why not? She would not ridicule or blame you."

"I don't believe she would; but she couldn't help thinking what a difference there is between my letters and hers."

Frank felt that it would be ridiculous to institute a comparison. Isabel's autograph would have been a prize to a connoisseur in these mementoes of celebrities and notorieties. Firm and distinct, it appeared to have been stamped rather than written; and once seen, was for ever after recognisable. Alma wrote a running fine hand, characterless except as it evidenced neatness of habits and pliability of disposition, copied, as it was, from the model which had served for the rest of her schoolmates. Every sentence was guarded in accordance with his warning. She described her city life and her uncle's family; questioned Harry respecting his business, amusements, and their mutual neighbours; rounding off the epistle with the form Frank had dictated.

"I will not conceal that I was flattered;" remarked he to Isabel, when she too had heard of Harry. "Her meek faith was as pleasing as unmerited by me."

"I dissent from the last words," replied Isabel. "Alma can be guided by a hair attached to the finger of one she loves, and yours is not a fourth-rate place in her esteem, Frank."

CHAPTER XXII.

TWILIGHT in the library of the Parsonage. In the bay window, set apart in summer for the use of Frank and Isabel, was suspended a flower-pot overrun by the glossy leaves and sweeping pendants of the ivy-geranium. The illuminated back-ground, which had relieved and burnished the foliage, was sobered into a neutral hue; and the fantastic image of the snaky tendrils, cast no more upon the ceiling, but reversed in its direction by the fire-gleams, shook and danced upon the inner wall of the recess. Each point of the gilded mouldings of the picture-frames was a quivering sparkle of flame; and the shadows jostled and overthrew each other in their haste to hide behind projections, beneath furniture, and in distant corners.

Maurice had been reading. The book was still open upon his knee. The impertinent blaze shone redly upon his marked features; pierced the eye that defied its power to blind. It was fixed and undaunted; but the lips were relaxed in pensive or tender mood.

A low chirp issued from a cage hung in the alcove.

"Piétro!" he said, caressingly, without moving.

Another chirp responded—then a breathed warble, a dulcet whistle, imitated in part from the pianissimo passage of the "Spirit-waltzes;" as if the soul of the feathered minstrel were being dissolved—exhaled into music. Instigated by no mortal influence, he sang thus each calm twilight; vespers, whose every note was in accord with the spirit of the hour.

It was his master's season of meditation—not thoughts of labour and anxious cares for the morrow—its food, raiment, and vicissitudes; but the time for introspection—when, looking courageously into his own bosom, he saw what he had been, was, and might hope to be to himself and his God. He was not ashamed—this man of lofty intellect and mighty heart, to depend with a child's helpless, incurious trust, upon the Eternal arm; to plant his feet upon the "Rock of Ages," and there maintain his stand,

although the breakers howled and beat about him, and smooth, treacherous seas enticed beyond. And this, his confidence and love, was also his consolation. The messenger of peace and hope to others, he was not without his temptations and griefs. As that plaintive evening song was sighed to the departing day, the eagle eye faltered—dimmed by the wing of Memory. He drew a locket from his breast and lingered wistfully over the face it held; the likeness, it seemed by the flickering rays, of a girl with floating curls and thoughtful eyes. Within the case was a lock of hair—it might be one of those drooping ringlets, and this was laid to his lips before being replaced upon his heart.

"It is a long time!" he said, but the cheerful faith came back ere the words died away. "I can wait," he added.

Piétro's trilled "Amen" had been chanted; the songster was wrapped in slumber, when a face was pressed against the window; a vision as fleeting as charming—a thing of light and smiles, which vanished into the darkness. The door swung back on its hinges, easily, slowly; swift feet sped over the carpet—the musing eyes were covered by cold fingers, and upon the broad brow fell a merry rain of kisses.

When Maurice was liberated, he beheld Bella, Alma, and Isabel, Jamie, Frank Lyle, and Doctor Merton.

"You have an indistinct idea that something more than a wish for your society and pity for your loneliness tempted us from home," said Isabel, "but politeness recommends that you should suppress inquiry."

"I am Yankee enough to guess that you have come to hear Frank's speech."

"Yes; and you have to answer to the charge of abetting his nefarious reserve upon the subject. Fortunately for us, the newspapers were not so ungenerous. You expected him, did you not?"

"No. Mr. Wilbur told me that he had invited him to tea. I intended, however, to lay violent hands upon him after the lecture."

"I am guilty of breaking a half-promise to your worthy neighbour," confessed Frank, "but here is my excuse," waving his hand towards the girls. "I shall tell him, as MacBride, the Sir Pompous of the college used to say—'It was by compulsion of force that I was compelled to alter and otherwise derange my plans.' Will you believe it, Maurice, they had no sooner seen, by that gossipping provincial Gazette of yours, that I was to play village Hampden for one evening only, than they hurried off to catch the last train, bearing three lorn captives along with them!"

"And what do you suppose was the one obstacle he invented in the haste and surprise?" retorted Isabel. "A fear lest Miss Brown's culinary talents should be inadequate to an extempore feast such as our sharpened appetites demand."

"A needless apprehension," replied the host. "Miss Brown is a feminine Napoleon in her sphere. You are heartily welcome—would be, were your numbers double what they are."

Bonnets and mufflers were doffed; lamps were lighted, and a laughing, happy ring enclosed the fire.

The Mooresville Lyceum was no contemptible institution. Men better known to Fame than Frank had not deemed their dignity compromised by haranguing upon its boards. His concealment of his invitation and design

was a proof not of shame, but repugnance to herald his own efforts. He was dubious of his success; for the subject was momentous, and he had had brief notice that he was selected to present it. He could bespeak no immunity from raillery, and Isabel appeared little inclined to spare him. She knew him; that if left to himself, he would be unfit for his task; that he must be exhilarated to the last minute, and that her innocuous satire was the stimulus he most needed and loved. On their way out he had thanked her for accompanying him, and in advance for the support her presence would be when he should stand upon the rostrum.

Miss Brown did not enter as usual to take the ladies wrappings, and "hope they were all in their accustomed healths;" and Isabel, having set in motion a subject which she thought would roll and rebound fast and loudly enough to enchain the attention of the company, slipped out on an expedition to the housekeeper's dominions.

She was, to quote her phrase, in "a peck of troubles." The "help" had requested permission to sup with a neighbour in another part of the town, and not foreseeing this irruption upon her pantry, the superior had consented.

"Because, you see, Mr. Oakley does not care for supper; eats nothing but a slice of bread, and drinks a glass of milk; and that he takes in his study or in the library. I regret, my dear Miss Isabel, that I shall perhaps detain you behind the hour for speaking; for there are biscuits to bake and coffee to boil; I must broil some ham for Mr. Lyle and Mr. Conway—they always eat meat at supper—then, there is tea and toast——"

"Do not disturb yourself, Miss Brown. Your bill of fare is too extravagant. Brother's bread and milk, in larger quantities, will content us."

The old lady prided herself upon her cookery; and Isabel could gain no concession.

"Then you will let me assist you?" she said, at length.

"You! Miss Isabel! What would you look like up to your wrists in dough, or scorching yourself over the fire, frying bacon?"

"It is what I have done, and not disgraced myself by what I served up," answered Isabel. "Give me a triál, and if I do not surprise you by my talents as Bridget's substitute, I will never show myself in here again."

Time pressed; so did work, and Miss Brown was conquered.

"'Many hands make light work,'" pursued Isabel. "I can supply you with two more assistants; and everything will be ready in good season. Now, young ladies"—as she preceded Bella and Alma to the kitchen—"the gentlemen must entertain themselves and each other, while we provide for their corporeal wants. When you get a husband, Birdie, recollect how much of his amiability depends upon having his meals well dressed, and upon the table punctually."

"I shall think him a cross bear if he is never good except while he is eating," responded Alma.

"I will reason you out of that fallacy at my leisure," said her cousin. "We must feed our menagerie for this once without questioning the propriety of pampering them. Let me have that biscuit-tray if you please, Miss Brown. Bella, give us a cup of coffee, made after Aunt Hagar's receipt—and you, pet, what will you choose?"

It was a fine frolic for the gleeful Illinoisian.

"Oh! anything. I can make cake."

"There is hardly time for that—unless we have drop cakes," said Miss Brown. "Mr. Conway is fond of them."

"Then I may make them, may I not? I will do anything to please Jamie."

The housekeeper hesitated—but Alma's "winning ways" carried the day. After one inquiry, she gratified her.

"Did you ever mix any?"

"Yes, indeed, madam? and papa said he never tasted nicer."

"The eggs are in that basket," instructed Miss Brown, opening a closet-cupboard. "I will sift the flour and leave it on the table for you; the sugar and spice are in those boxes—all labelled."

"Yes, ma'am—I am much obliged to you. There, go!" gently pushing her away. "I can manage now by myself."

She bared her round arms to the elbow, and fell to work in earnest, measuring, and mixing, and beating—somewhat awkwardly, it is true—but with such a witching affectation of the bustling importance of a notable housewife, that her cousins exchanged glances of admiring amusement. The biscuit were crisping in one of the tins before the fire, when Alma pronounced her batter ready for the other. Miss Brown had gone to lay the cloth, and it was Isabel who stopped the little maiden on her way to the fire.

"No, my dear! let me drop them. My swarthy skin will be none the worse for the heat. You would not be cool again for an hour, if you were to stoop over the blaze."

Alma resisted, but finally resigned the compound of which she was so vain.

Isabel dexterously turned it out, by the ladleful, upon the nicely-papered surface.

"There!" she said, resuming her upright posture, and flinging back the hair from her heated forehead. "We have fairly earned our supper; and those ingrates in the parlour will discuss it as coolly as if it had been cooked by the red-handed Bridget."

"They shall go hungry first!" exclaimed her brother from the door.

She untied the check apron with which Miss Brown had shielded her dress, and threw it at him. He caught it and Alma's at the same time—the mirthful elf having followed up the charge.

"That is the punishment for male spies into the mysteries of kitchen-craft," said Isabel.

In a second he had her and Alma around the waist; dragged them to the sink; filled a basin with water, and washed the restless, rebellious hands. Bella provided him with a towel; and he put the finishing touch to the operation by rubbing their cheeks with the coarse crash, and impressing a kiss upon each laughing mouth, as Miss Brown took up biscuit and cake.

The gentlemen approached the bountiful board, with a full knowledge of the circumstances of the preparation of its viands; ready to overlook all deficiencies, laud every excellence. Isabel poured out the tea and coffee. Bella was awarded a premium for her edition of the fragrant beverage; nor were the white, flaky biscuit inferior of their kind.

"Try those cakes, Doctor," said Isabel, "and you must not slight them, Jamie. Miss Brown remembered your partiality for them."

"Ah! I am honoured," and he took one.

Frank, Dr. Merton, and Maurice did likewise.

A sudden gravity ensued; each seeming intent upon the deglutition of the morsel he had deposited in his mouth.

Isabel saw that something was amiss. As her brother looked at her with a tragic-comic expression of amaze and inquiry, she was prepared to reply, "They are of my baking—so no wry faces!"

The seriousness exploded in a burst of laughter. Poor Alma coloured to the roots of her hair; and her bewilderment was increased by hearing Frank propound some inapropos query about the facilities of access to Turks' Island.

Isabel enlightened her after tasting a bit of the cake.

"A trifling mistake!" she said, readily. "If the tastes of sugar and salt are not precisely similar, they look alike, and so do the boxes in which they are kept; therefore the error is of no consequence, after all."

"Certainly," returned her brother, "as in eating, the sense of taste is a minor consideration"—

"And some contend is only a freak of the imagination," finished Frank. "For all other purposes, your macaroons are *comme il faut*."

"They are not hers," said Alma, with difficulty restraining her tears. "She baked, but I mixed them. She shall not be blamed for my blunders."

"'Blamed,' my dear cousin?" said Maurice. "At the worst, the affair is a capital joke; and our thanks are due to the one who furnished it. For this and other reasons, I rejoice that it has happened."

"And I!" echoed Frank, looking from Isabel to Alma. "There are sweeter repasts than those which regale the body."

Isabel understood and thanked him silently. Alma was only conscious that nobody thought of censure or ridicule; and esteemed them "very good-natured" for resisting the temptation. She even fancied that they liked her for her carelessness. Dr. Merton bestowed more notice upon her than was his habit. She "was afraid of him," and he was always with Bella or Isabel; bowing to her at his entrance and departure, and never speaking to her meanwhile. Maurice could not have increased his kindness; but he used many of Isabel's endearing epithets in addressing her, and kissed her as they arose from table; and she could not raise her eyes without meeting Frank's ("he had the most beautiful eyes in the world!" she said to herself), diving into hers with the excited delight of one who has caught the shimmer of a pearl-ray through the water. He walked with her to the Lyceum; and his praises of her truthfulness and self-sacrificing vindication of her friend, made the artless creature's heart bound, and elevated her, in her own estimation, to the rank of a heroine.

These emotions, more than sympathy with, or admiration for him in his public character, heightened her bloom during his address. Isabel was next to her; and the orator's observation was often attracted to that quarter. He drew inspiration from the luminous soul-wells which gleamed and gushed at his behest. The fluctuations of her countenance were a comprehensive commentary upon the lecture; to them he trusted to acquaint him with its effects upon those of his hearers whose colder

exteriors said nothing to his searching glance. He was a fluent, energetic speaker, enthusiastic as in thought. Lewis Merton, whose suggestions he coveted, curbed him sometimes with a hint of redundancy, and excess of beauty in word and figure; but the objection was seldom seconded. It would have been cried down to-night by a unanimous voice. Judgment was in the grasp of feeling, and he allured both to climb, explore, view, and triumph with him.

He had to meet the Committee of Managers after the audience dispersed; and did not arrive at the Parsonage until his speech had been dissected and approved at length. He entered smilingly to partake of the applause he most prized—that of the true and fond hearts, whose atmosphere of love was his vital breath. It was not doled out in niggardly rations, nor yet did it cloy by its abundance. They were better and happier for what they had heard, they told him, and he was for their appreciation.

"I borrowed largely from you," he said to Isabel.

"I did not discover the crime," was the rejoinder.

"You have then forgotten a conversation we had the other day, upon a kindred topic?"

"No; I referred to it several times while you were speaking, but if you eliminated any thoughts of mine, they are legally yours, in virtue of your having trained and clothed them until the original owner cannot prove her property. There is no pseudo-humility in my saying that I do not aspire to lay claim to a solitary idea you advanced."

"I could not help thinking that some parts of his address sounded like you," said Alma, who was leaning against Isabel's chair.

Frank cast another look at her—such as she had received at supper. It said, "There is more here than I suspected;" and he tried to lead her further into the subject. She was not to be inveigled beyond her depth.

"I don't know anything about the matter," she answered, frankly, laughing, without a tincture of shame at her ignorance.

"I enjoyed what you said—every word of it; and believed it, because I was sure you would not have told us falsehoods."

"But I may have drawn improper conclusions; or my premises have been erroneous, although you could pick no flaw in the argument."

"I never could argue," said Alma, shaking her curly head. You may as well be talking Greek and Hebrew, as telling me about your premises and conclusions. It is your business to find out the truth, and ours to believe it."

"That is woman's wisdom, Birdie, if the object of her confidence be worthy," replied Isabel, threading the waving tresses with her fingers.

"Isn't Mr. Lyle?" asked Alma, stretching her cerulean orbs.

Isabel looked up to him. His eyes were as cloudless as a summer's sky.

"Is he?" he repeated, smiling slightly.

"Though all the world said 'No!' my answer would still be, 'always, entirely worthy!'"

"Which of you will ride in the morning?" queried Maurice. "My horse and Frank's are idle in the stable."

This was a treat which Bella and Isabel had shared, on alternate days, at their previous visits; and both now turned to Alma.

"Can you ride on horseback, Fairy?" inquired Isabel.

"O, yes! I have the darlingest pony at home! I used to scamper all over the country upon him."

"Then you shall go, if you can be industrious and rise before breakfast."

She made the engagement promptly, pretending to be incensed at the implication of slothfulness in her cousin's sentence; but the morning testified to its justice. The horses stamped and pawned at the gate; Frank walked the piazza, snapping his whip and whistling, until the patience of all three ran out to the lowest sands. Isabel's appearance was an emollient to Mr. Lyle's temper.

"I am called a patient man," he said, "but from sundry uncomfortable nervous symptoms, spasmodic and uncontrollable, I incline to the opinion that I have shipwrecked my reputation in the past hour. Is not your Birdie ready?"

"I left her putting on her hat."

Quieted by this assurance, he chatted pleasantly for five minutes longer; then peeped at his watch, and put out his lip.

"I will call her," said Isabel. "Alma!" she cried, from the stairs. "Come, my love! we are waiting."

"So am I!" she rejoined, running down, pulling on her gloves as she came.

Her train escaped from her hold, when she was within a few steps of the bottom of the flight; was entangled by her feet—she stumbled—Isabel saved her from a fearful fall. She was mounting the stairs to meet her; and seeing her danger, braced herself by clinging to the balustrade with one arm, while the other was extended to catch her. Frank was up to them, at a single spring; but the peril was passed.

"Are you—are either of you hurt?" he questioned, anxiously.

"My dress is the greatest sufferer," said Isabel, recovering her breath after the shock. "The sleeve is torn." She hid the rent with her hand.

"I am so sorry! I am the most careless creature in the universe!" cried Alma.

"Not a word, darling! A few stitches will repair the damage. Off with you, and let me take them!"

Alma stole a dozen kisses; again declared herself inconsolable; jumped into the saddle, with the agility of a kitten, and cantered away.

"Bella!" said Isabel, her face paling with each syllable. "Will you go with me up to my room?"

Maurice, Jamie, and Lewis Merton were in the hall. The latter heard the whisper.

"It is cold here," remarked Maurice, "warmly as the sun shines. Shall not we go into the parlour?"

"I will be along presently—don't wait," said Lewis, and continued his walk. He was repaid for his endurance of the chilly solitude, as Bella ran down to him.

"Doctor," she said, "Isabel has injured her shoulder—not dislocated it—yet it is much bruised, and is swelling rapidly. She will not consent that any one shall know of it except yourself, and wishes you to prescribe for her."

He snatched up his hat. "Bathe it with cold water. Dr. Lee lives near by. I will get something from him. May I bring it to the door of your room?"

She had not said "Yes," before he was out of the house and yard.

"Don't shut the door!" requested Isabel, as Bella received the embrocation he had procured. "Doctor, I am not seriously hurt—it is only a strain, and by no means severe. I will see you at breakfast."

"You had better keep perfectly quiet," he advised. "Do not neglect yourself in your care for others."

She was disobedient. He had expected nothing else; and his vigilant eye would have been deceived by her equanimity, had he not been apprised of the accident. She wore a scarf, to conceal the traces of the "envious rent the well-beloved Alma made," she asserted. He saw as plainly as if it had been stripped off, the ripped sleeve which would not meet over the discoloured shoulder.

They had yet an hour to spend in the library, before the arrival of the train which was to take them back to the city. Too much perturbed to mingle in the general merriment, Lewis strolled to the ivied window. Through the curtaining sprays he watched the company about the hearth. Isabel, her hand laid upon Alma's lap, was talking to Frank and Jamie—racked, he knew, by paroxysms of pain, for her laugh was not always forthcoming at the right instant; now and then, a twinge contracted the muscles of the mouth, and the nails were buried in the palm of the disengaged hand; but her voice was firm and sweet.

Bella, with Maurice, was a little removed from them; her interest in his conversation only distracted as she glanced at her suffering cousin; the placid eyes ruffled by the breath of sympathy.

Alma, thrice as lovely as he had ever seen her before, was dwelling upon Frank's words and looks; seeing, hearing, dreaming of no one beside. To a casual observer, it was a pretty scene of domestic happiness; but sorrow had endowed that grave, quiet man with a glimmering of prescience. He knew not what he feared; a vague dread oppressed him, as of one who is overshadowed by the boding gloom of a thunder cloud. He strove with the unfounded depression; tried to lose its recollection in the philosophical style of reflection to which his mind had inured itself in his long years of unbefriended isolation.

"They are types of women," he said. "Alma representing the most common, Isabel the rarest class. Bella is the link, equally removed from the childish nonentity, with her quick, yet shallow heart, whose ideas never venture beyond the cramped horizon of her personal world, and the gifted, radiant soul, walking above the earth while living in it; wearing her robe of light as gracefully as though it were gossamer—how soon will she find it the poisoned mantle, she would, but cannot tear away!"

Isabel flinched as her brother wrapped her shawl around her. Ere he could question or apologize, she was laughing at Alma's raptures over "the *splendid* time they had had."

"Cousin Maurice," rattled the fairy, winding her arms about his, and gazing up into the kind face, "I wish you would get married! I would come and stay with you every winter—if your wife would let me."

"I can answer for her that she will," was the reply.

The heart rested tranquilly under the hidden miniature. It was used to "waiting."

"This has been the happiest visit yet—has it not?" asked Frank of Isabel.

"I shall remember it as such—until the next," she answered.

Talking cheerily, they wended their way out of that "most blessed of rooms," as Isabel's benediction christened it—through the porticoed entrance; and under the naked elm-boughs which seemed bending to stop them, while they were beneath, and beckoning them in entreaty as they passed down the avenue.

The library was left to the desolate sunshine. This was its master's thought as he re-entered it.

"The desolate sunshine!" he said, as it streamed over the vacant chairs, and silent piano, "since it only shows me that they have been here. And there are hearts whose light has no other use."

CHAPTER XXIII.

But a fortnight of Alma's visit remained unspent. The suns of March had dissolved the icy fetters of lake and river; and "Prairie Home" recalled its birdling. It was a busy time. Maurice and Jamie were going abroad in April; an event anticipated as delightedly by the scholar and divine, as as by the poetic boy who, from childhood, had luxuriated in reveries of a voyage to the Old World, as one of the bright impossibilities whose realization he could never know in life, yet had dreamed and painted the same. To his sister it was like a foretaste of death to resign him again; but she kept down the soul-throe bravely as of old, and entered into every plan and aspiration.

A disastrous fire had occurred in the city, whereby hundreds of the poor were rendered homeless, and some had sustained bodily injuries. Active measures were set on foot for their relief; subscription papers wafted in all directions; subscription dinners and balls were advertised; and at last, Mrs. Norman, a charitable but eccentric lady of ample means, circulated among her acquaintances the programme of an amateur concert. It was to be held at her house, and the entire proceeds devoted to the "relief fund."

In her hunt for available musical talent, Isabel nor Frank could hope to escape, and both were coërced into service. Isabel remonstrated and entreated, but argument and prayer were alike idle breath. She was a "strong card" with the good lady, and "her refusal would ruin everything." With the best grace she could assume, she set diligently to work upon her rôle. A solo and a part of a duet were apportioned to her. She "must write the words"—thus ran the order—and Mrs. Norman had felicitous visions, of dazzling success, based upon the popularity of her cantatrice. The piece which her shrewdness predicted would win her most éclat was the aforesaid duet—Frank Lyle being the other performer.

The final rehearsal was upon the morning of the day set for the concert.

"I cannot see you to-day, Frank," said Isabel, regretfully, as they ascended the steps on their return home. "I have been overwhelmed with duties lately. Besides these practisings, I have to superinted brother' outfit, and by some mismanagement, there is an unusual press of writing—all to be done immediately. I never before experienced the inconvenienc

of belonging to the Public. The extortionate monster leaves me no control of my time. I am loath to cheat you of your hour, which you do not value more than I; yet steady confinement at my desk for the rest of the day will barely enable me to finish an article which ought to go to press to-morrow."

"Isabel, you wrong yourself in thus taxing your strength. You lose sight of your health and comfort in complying with unreasonable exactions."

"Have I the air of one in a decline?" straightening her lithe figure, and pushing back her bonnet to reveal her blooming complexion. "Many thanks for your solicitude, my good sir; but I am in no danger. Indolence would be a fatal disease to one of my temperament. Come in! I will send Alma or Bella to entertain you."

Bella was engaged with Jamie; Alma joyfully threw the book she was attempting to read to the other side of the room, and ran to the mirror.

"Not a curl or ribbon is needed, pet," said Isabel, kissing the rosy lips, and fondling the velvet cheek. "You are charming already. I must caution Frank not to lose his heart."

Alma blushed; a suffusion unremarked by her cousin; although Bella and her brother compared notes upon it when the two girls had gone down.

"Mr. Lyle is in the front room, love," Isabel said, dismissing Alma with another kiss. "I shall be in my study all the morning, and the sound of your voices would be too tantalizing. Be as agreeable as you can—which means—be yourself."

The obedient pen was willing, and almost as rapid as the mind, whose workings it recorded. Before dark the manuscript was folded, sealed, and despatched to the post-office.

With a light heart, and a more active body than that of the damsel, whose training for a party is a day of idleness and sleep, Isabel decked herself in her evening dress. She was excited; not so much by the thought of what was before her, as by her recent occupation. The glow of the divine afflatus had not departed. She burned to write on; to imprison for future use some of the winged fancies which hovered athwart her spirit's eyes; to make indelible the fire-fly traces which, by the morrow, would be dull and grey. The impulse was irresistible when she was quite ready, and perceived that half-an-hour must pass before they could go.

A fire burned in the library grate, she would not agree to have superseded by a dismal register. Never had her retreat been so inviting. She smiled lovingly to its look of welcome; and drawing up her desk, commenced writing. All was hushed and still except the crackling of the fire; the study lamp surrounded with a halo the bending form, its face alive with fast-coming thought-flashes; lips apart, and quivering with eager enjoyment. A step in the outer apartment arrested her hand. No longer Apollo's priestess, but more beautiful, very woman, in tenderness and welcome for the beloved one, she dropped the pen and moved towards the curtain. As she drew it aside, the parlour door opened. A petite figure, looking like a sunset cloud, with her blue robes and blushing face, appeared—paused a second in bashful trembling, then glided to the arms stretched to receive her, while a murmur of unutterable fondness reached the ear of the horror-stricken spectator. The heavy draperies fell together; and the lovers never suspected the wretchedness they veiled.

"My own Alma!" said Frank, in a tone of transport. "I was doubtful whether you could give me even these few moments. Yet I so desired them! if but to hear once more from your dear lips that you are mine. I am sceptical in my happiness, sweet one—it is like a blessed dream. Speak, darling! do you repent the promise you made this morning?"

The whispered reply was too faint for any but a lover's ear. Presently she spoke more distinctly. "It is all so strange!"

"'All' of what, dearest? 'Strange' that you should care for me? It certainly is not wonderful that I should love you—the most loveable of created things!"

"I think it is," said Alma. "Why, until you said what you did to me this morning, I believed you would marry Isabel."

"Marry Isabel! my precious one! She has ever been a sister to me. I never had the most distant intention of addressing her; and she would laugh at your fantasy as heartily as I do. That is another of your original notions."

"But you admire and like her so much!"

"I do admire her—person, heart, and mind! She is one of a thousand; and if she ever love, will ennoble the object of her attachment more than a coronet would do. For the present, it may be for ever, she is wedded to her art. My spirit bows in homage to her—my heart is yours. I glory in her—*I love you.*"

"Cousin Alma!" said Lilly. "Mother says it is time you were getting ready."

"She ran up stairs; and Frank went into the front room to gather up Isabel's music. He was humming her song, as she flitted past him unheard. The carriage could not contain the whole family, and she waited for its second trip.

The concert-room was a brilliant scene. The stage was decorated with flowers and festooned evergreens; the hall, formed by opening the entire suite of apartments, crowded with a full-dress audience. Little thought had they, in their hour of gaiety, of the woes their "charity" was to mitigate!

"I was not prepared for such an affair as this," remarked Mr. Oakley to his wife. "I regret having sanctioned Isabel's appearance."

Mrs. Oakley was uneasy. "I am myself surprised, and rather displeased with Mrs. Norman for misleading us," replied she. "She laid such stress upon its being a "private" concert, that I imagined there would be no more publicity than is attendant upon singing, as Isabel has frequently done in a room full of friends. I wish we could revoke our decision now."

"It is too late," said Bella. "The music begins."

The amateur orchestra acquitted themselves with distinction; from the moustachioed leader, who whisked and whirled his ivory baton with a grace JULLIEN would not have scorned to copy, down to Alfred Bryce, whose thick articulation did not extend to the keys and stops of his German flute.

Isabel walked to the front of the platform with a queen-like mien. A hum of applause arose at her entrance, but was instantly silenced.

"Magnificent!" whispered a gentleman near Bella.

Dr. Merton sat beside her, and she heard his short, laboured breathing. Mute worshipper though he was, no richer incense could have been offered at the shrine of the genius of the hour, than that which arose unceasingly, invisiby, from his heart.

"Rather theatrical!" said a passée belle, behind her fan, "but these public characters are privileged. I dare say she feels entirely at home upon the stage."

Nothing but the most pitiful envy could have seen aught save just taste in the black velvet dress, and diamond pin, confining the lace above the bodice. Her manner was destitute of pretension. She did not look once towards the assembly; spoke a word in reply to a question from the pianist, who was to accompany her, but paid no further regard to anything except the sheet of music in her hand.

Italian duet, nor fantasia, nor the more popular production of the unrivalled Dempster, had been listened to with the attention which now waited upon her utterance.

CHILDHOOD'S HOME AND THEE.

Oh! there are blessed dreams that come
  Around me in my sleep;
Brightly and rapidly they glide,
  And then I wake to weep!
Dreams of fair groves and sunny skies,
  Of wild streams flashing free;
Of tender words and loving smiles—
  My childhood's home and thee!

Now, though I dwell where life is passed
  In merry dance and song;
Where sorrow seems no shade to fling
  Over the laughing throng—
Their tones have not the melody,
  Their mirth has not the glee
I heard within my childhood's home,
  When sporting there with thee.

I've seen proud forms before my feet,
  In lowly homage bow;
And wearily I turned away
  From each impassioned vow.
No tale of love, though sweetly told,
  Is half so dear to me,
As the few words, so softly breathed,
  In childhood's home by thee.

No stifled plaudits now! Friends vied with strangers in the outburst that saluted her; and "*encore! encore!*" rang from all sides. She sang it again—that simple song, which might have been the overflowings of a homesick peasant's heart—pining amid gayer scenes and nobler suitors, for her forest cottage and early love—warbled it, without a false or imperfect tone; eyes passionless and features immobile; the waves of adulation filling her ears; roses and choice exotics at her feet.

A grand triumphal march and quick-step followed; and before this begun, Frank left Alma's side, to go round to the wing of the stage, where were accommodations for the actors of the evening.

Isabel had remained there constantly, busying herself in divers ways.

She was now encouraging a shrinking girl, who was to preside at the piano-forte.

"I shall faint the moment I mount the platform," said the trembling novice.

"You will be yet more conspicuous if you do," returned Isabel. "Do not think of the spectators; or, consider them so many lay figures. Once at the piano, your confidence will revive. After the first bar you will not mind it at all. Come, Annie! they are calling you. I shall be proud of you yet."

She accompanied her up one or two steps, saw her cross the scaffold, with a moderate degree of self-possession; receded out of the view of the crowd, and seemed to wait for the overture.

Frank approached. "You are pale, dear Isabel. The excitement has been too much for you."

"No! I am well—very well! How I wish all this were over!"

"You are nervous. Sit down in the corner yonder, and let me bring you a glass of wine—I insist!"

"And I decline," she said.

"Isabel!"

"Do not talk to me now, Frank. You know I have to sing."

"Will not your coming trial be eased by having a companion?" he asked.

"O! I shall not care. I would sooner sing alone than stay here and do nothing."

"You are worn down," persisted the perplexed Frank, alarmed by her feverish incoherence. "You want rest, and to-morrow you must seek it, if I have to stand guard over you myself."

"I want work!" she rejoined, with a bitter laugh.

The combat and the triumph were at an end. The piano had rattled and roared, as much like musquetry and cannon as one of the grand actions, with the help of both pedals, could do; the violins had screamed and huzzaed, as the captives or the victors were said to be passing; the flutes piped the national air above cannonade and shouts; and a couple of guitars were twanged and thrummed industriously, meaning nothing in particular, and doing their part as gallantly as the best of them.

The gas-lights were screwed up, dresses shaken out and seats shifted; programmes were dispensed with, and fresh bouquets distributed. Signor O—— established himself upon the music stool, in bland complacency. If the words were "Gertrude's" the music was his, and he would divide the honours. The song was arranged for a male and female a voice, in alternate verses. Frank's flexible tenor led off in the first stanza.

FRANK.

Sister, I faint! the world has been
To me a desert, drear and bare;
Its brightest light, a troubled sheen,
Dying amid the murky air.
Yet lightly onward bound thy feet,
And blithely sound thy words of cheer—
Dear Sister, doth some angel sweet
Whisper of Heaven into thine ear?

ISABEL.

When the storm-cloud draws darkly nigh,
When gloom enshrouds my upward way,
And through the night, the anxious eye
Looks vainly for one guiding ray—
Yet cheerfully would I press on;
I know the blessed light will fall
More purely, when the night is gone—
I hope, I hope, I hope through all!

FRANK.

Sister, I thirst! my heart has given
Its all, to win of Love one draught;
But wasted—from the cisterns riven
Have flowed the streams I would have quaffed.
Thy lip still holds its gladsome smile,
Thine eye is never dim with care,—
Say, is thy spirit wrung the while,
Or hath but Joy an entrance there?

ISABEL.

When eyes that ever used to beam
Affection warm, and deep, and free;—
Now changed to frozen fountains, seem
All cold and meaningless to me—
The heart will bleed! but each wild throe,
Each parting link is one more call
To the changeless Land to which I go—
Brother! I hope, I hope through all!

Mrs. Norman was satisfied. More could not have been said for the result of her scheme; for she was not a lady of humble desires, and this concert was her hobby. She fluttered from one to another of the guests, gathering honey for herself and her aids.

"May we go now?" questioned Isabel, as she saw her bearing down upon her, freighted with a cargo of compliments.

But Frank was searching for Alma's glove, and did not comprehend her appeal.

Mrs. Norman had not time to disencumber her soul of its gratitude and praise. She would call shortly and liquidate the debt.

"And I am so bold as to be a suitor for an additional benefit. Count Raymond de Tambour, the French lion, is here. He is compiling a volume upon the United States; is enraptured with you, and prays to be introduced."

"I thought that I explained my disinclination to receive any introductions this evening," said Isabel.

"True—but my dearest Miss Oakley! such a celebrated man may surely be an exception—"

"Excuse me, madam; I cannot oblige you," she answered, hastily.

"Mr. Bryce, have you seen Dr. Merton?"

"I told you, Isabel, that he went to order the carriage," interposed Frank. "We shall be detained awhile on account of the crowd."

"The heat was suffocating," she said, and Alfred conveyed her to the lower floor. They were standing at the front door when Frank and Alma rejoined them. The carriage could not drive up as yet, and Frank drew Alma back.

"The weather has changed since we came," he said. "The wind is raw. You will take cold—are shivering now?"

Isabel took off her boa and folded it round and round the shoulders that shrugged at the blast's frosty kisses.

"Thank you!" said he, "but you?" as Alma expostulated.

"Oh! I am hardy! nothing can hurt me, you know;" and the same bitter smile distorted her lips.

The bleak air blew sharply upon her unprotected throat and neck; but she would not move.

"Better freeze than smother!" she alleged; and Frank, almost angry at her obstinacy, and flippant rejection of his brotherly offices, turned with fond satisfaction to the dependant charge hanging upon his arm, who now nor ever, would know any will but his. It was no mighty sacrifice to be muffled up by his hands, and stand by him, while he sheltered her from the draught; but he thought more of it than of Isabel's years of deference and self-denial.

It was too late for Frank to go in, when they were set down at Mr. Oakley's. He made a whispered appointment with Alma, and an audible one with Isabel.

"I must have a talk with you in the morning—and that not a short one."

She was aware of its purport.

"You do not mean to sit up later, Isabel!" exclaimed Bella, as her cousin put on a dressing wrapper, after removing her gala attire.

"Yes—I am too wakeful to rest well, if I were to go to bed."

She kissed them both—Alma twice, holding her to her breast, with a passionate clasp; loosed her suddenly, and was gone.

The library fire was burning yet. She re-lighted the lamp—restored the papers to the desk, smiling again—that gleam of terrible scorn; brought up the easy chair to the grate; seated herself therein, and looked Life and Destiny in the face.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT does she see as she sits there, hour after hour, staring upon the whitening embers; silent and motionless, save at protracted intervals, when the salt surf of anguish dashes in upon her, a tenth wave, too cruel for even her soul to endure without a cry of distress?

"A youth and maiden walk hand in hand up the green slope of Life. The same sun beems on them; the breeze from the heights they would ascend, fans alike their earnest, hopeful brows. Sometimes the light on his is dimmed, the head bows in discouragement or pain, and she sings—a sky-lark warble—"Hope! hope through all!"—which re-illumes the fading eye, and curves the lip again with high resolve. She falters—weary and doubting—not of the prize that awaits them, but of her power to attain the goal. With giant strength he bears her on, until her feet can tread as firmly, and more quickly than his own. But a third figure, fairer than hers, steals to his other hand, and his eyes are fastened upon her. For a time he has still an arm and a cheering word for his earlier mate;

yet his soul goes out in adoration to the beauteous stranger. She accompanies him along the bright, pleasant path, leading off from the now rugged way, where toils the forgotten one—alone!

A moan breaks upon the still night. "Oh! I thought life so beautiful! I dreamed not that human nature could know such misery as this?"

"Look again!" she seems to hear.

He is desponding. It is the faintness she knows so well how to relieve. She could chase the evil spirits which hide from him the sunlight; buffet him with their black wings; gibber their blasphemies to his horrified soul—but his child-wife weeps in piteous terror, and recoils, instead of flying nearer to him. The shadow passes. Stirring thoughts awake within him; blaze in unearthly splendour from his eye; ring like martial music from his tongue. Oh! how her spirit loved to band itself with his, at such a time; to bask, and soar, and brighten in the flood of radiance steeping them from on high! And the young thing beside him shields her weak sight from rays which dazzle and amaze her; or prattles on, blind to their effulgence. Must this be borne? Can nothing preserve him and her from this sore disappointment—this woeful sacrifice of happiness? Is there no means of rescue, however perilous?

She shudders at the demon whisper. The icy fingers are locked in prayer—"Lead me not—O, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil!"

"Look!"

A phantom procession marches by. She knows each one of the laurel-crowned band. Their course winds far above the heads of the gaping multitudes, who hearken with strained senses to the inspired melodies they utter as they go; but the goddess-heads droop in mournfulness or fatigue, and blood clogs their footsteps. The gifted women of the earth! Received they all, like her, a fiery baptism, to consecrate them for their work? Was her title to be enrolled in their sisterhood insufficient without this fearful ordination, binding her to the ministry committed to her charge, by sundering all selfish ties! Must theirs be also her fate?

"Behold it!"

Rank, tall bay-trees hedge in the narrow road, sickening her with their penetrating fragrance. She tramples upon scentless flowers, grinds into the dust tinsel garlands—votive offerings of the admiring herd, whose clamour deafens, maddens her. And with a hand pressed tightly over her mangled heart—whose great droppings men treasure up as gems, or sport with as toys—she staggers forward.

> "On her young forehead, sorrow-sore and throbbing,
> She wears the prickly, Calvary-crown of Fame;
> And praises follow all her steps, but sobbing,
> Through the blank night, she breathes one hoarded name."

Sodom apples are held to her parched lips, while others feast prodigally upon the wholesome fruit towards which her soul has thrown its seeking arms, ever since it had a being; no cool nook, no secluded grotto for her! She must journey evermore in the blazing, blistering sunshine.

"O, compassionate Redeemer! by the remembrance of Thy agony and passion, I pray Thee have mercy!"

"*Wedded to her art!*"

How mockingly Memory hisses the words! "Art" to fill the large, open heart, whose every beat is love; its most jealousy guarded riches the affection of its beloved ones! "Art," to take the place of the dear domestic joys, blended loves, that a rise from the home-altar, the holiest flame this vile earth sends towards Heaven!

"*I glory in her—I love you!*"

Wherever she looks, she sees it written in characters of living fire. That sentence taught her her true position in life; warned her to trust no more in tones and language that would convey the tale of a soul's devotion to the less "distinguished" of her sex. She is a thing to be bowed down to, honoured, worshipped—everything but loved.

And on the morrow he will sit where she keeps her wretched vigil nor, and tell her of his new-created bliss; and she must listen, as the unselfish sister he deems her—crush, with the jagged heel of stern resolution, pain and sense out of her shrieking spirit; smile, as the nectar, for which she would barter her birthright of Fame, is poured forth, a copious sparkling draught for another!

Again that heart-piercing groan.—"Oh! by the memory of Thy temptation, grant me strength to live!"

The grey morning looks through the shutters.

From the cold hearth-stone arises a calm, tearless woman,

"—— the Future stretched before her,
All dark and barren as a rainy sea;"

an inflexible Providence pointing out her course, and a solemn voice saying—"If I will that thou traverse it alone, what is that to thee?"

CHAPTER XXV.

FRANK LYLE was a fond lover of music; and Alma sang with unskilled sweetness. It was but natural that he should summon her to the piano every evening, and confine her there until the benevolence of the most obliging of musical enthusiasts would have rebelled at the incessant demand. Alma had not courage to undertake the voluntaries and variations which Isabel awoke among the glancing keys. These concerts—which were rather exclusive, as to orchestra and audience—consisted of "Forget me not," "Remember me," "Come, rest in this bosom," and three or four more songs of the same class, interspersed with lengthy recitatives, to an *ad libitum* accompaniment, usually strummed with one hand; the plump fellow being held in durance, which the smiling performer evidently considered as far from "vile."

The family were astonished but not displeased at the engagement. They had not, with Alma, believed that Frank would marry Isabel; for he was already all to her that Maurice was, and therefore not likely to become more. The incongruity of tastes and minds of himself and his betrothed was a broad foundation for disbelief, until the fact was formally communicated.

Mr. Oakley administered a very mild reprimand for his untimely decla-

ration, saying that it would have been more appropriately delivered in her father's house, or, at the soonest, upon the eve of her home journey. Frank's excuse elicited a smile, which neutralized the reproof.

"Why, my dear, sir, I should have mourned the loss of this fortnight's happiness for the rest of my existence."

"You do not chide me, do you, Isabel?" he added, in repeating this dialogue to her.

"Certainly not. A vast deal of what custom has made to be decorum is sheer nonsense. You loved her, and had an undeniable right to inform her of it, when and where you chose."

"There was no choice in the case. The darling elf bewitched me into the confession, as she did into falling in love—by her winsome looks and unostentatious goodness. When you left us in the parlour on the important day of the concert, I had no more idea of revealing my sentiments in explicit terms, than I had of being captivated on our excursion to Mooresville."

"One month ago!" said Isabel.

Frank laughed. "My love sprang into life-like Minerva. I suppose I must have had a latent tenderness for her, from our first meeting—I think now, in reviewing my feelings and actions from that period, that I loved the dear child all the while; but I never owned it before that most sumptuous of repasts in the Parsonage supper room. I did not envy Jove his ambrosia, after I found out the manufacturer of those delectable cakes; although my palate smarted as if I had supped upon a fragment of the human-looking pillar, upon the shore of the Dead Sea;—ay, and washed it down with a bumper from the bituminous lake. How lovely she was in her tears and blushes, as she exculpated you from any share in her 'blunder'—the most transporting that mortal ever made! When I am married, 'drop-cakes' shall be a standing dish upon my bill of fare."

Isabel's manner to Alma was unaltered. "Pet," "Fairy," "Birdie"—the pretty diminutives by which she had ever called her, fell as softly and musically from her tongue—came as freely from her heart. Fierce as may have been the warring of opposing passions, one so ignoble as jealousy—that jealousy which spurs to resentment against an innocent object—gained no foothold. Abroad, she was witty and animated; in private, merry and affectionate. Only Bella discerned that her spirits were artificial. She shunned the curtained boudoir sedulously, and occupied herself with her brother's wardrobe; wielding the needle to the exclusion of the pen. This was the outer life; the unseen was known but to herself and God.

She was sitting upon her mother's footstool one evening, amusing her parents by a lively skirmish of wit with Jamie. Alma and Frank were absorbed in a recitative—male voice—piano and legato. A carriage rumbled to the door, and a gentleman's voice inquired for Miss Oakley.

"She is at home, Dr. Merton," replied Isabel, rising to greet him.

"I have not time to sit down," he said, yet accepting a chair from her. "This is a professional visit."

"And to me!" exclaimed Isabel.

"To you"—then seriously, "have you any recollection of a girl named Norah Carstone?"

"Yes. She lived with us four years—up to her marriage,"—"And

was the best domestic we ever had," subjoined her mother. "What do you know of her, doctor?"

"I will tell you directly, madam. Whom did she marry, Miss Oakley?"

"A machinist—John Moore, from New York. They removed from that city to Buffalo two years since. Norah wrote once to say that they were doing well. For eighteen months we have not heard from them."

"Your story corresponds with hers. I was called in to her child yesterday; this evening, she told me her history. Her husband deserted her four months back. She endeavoured to maintain herself and her child, a babe, a year old, by sewing, but her health failing, the landlord ordered her to quit the house, and levied upon the furniture. Some humane persons paid her fare to Philadelphia, where she says she left an aunt."

"She is dead," interrupted Isabel. "Poor, poor Norah! why did she not come to us?"

"She hired a mean lodging in the house of a countrywoman who is kind-hearted, but wretchedly poor, and altogether greatly inferior to Norah. The babe is dying—the mother too, I fear. She has no desire to live; her last request is to see you."

"I will go this moment!" said she, starting up.

"To-night! my daughter!" remonstrated Mrs. Oakley.

"She may not live to see the morning. Is it not so, doctor?"

"She may survive the night. The child cannot."

"She was so fond of me!" argued Isabel. "Mother, how unremitting she was in her cares when I had that spell of fever. If a stranger—if my worst enemy were to send for me to his death-bed, I would not hesitate. What then, when the petitioner is an old and faithful friend! I may go, mother?"

"But not alone, my love. I will look after the poor girl myself."

"This chill, damp evening! and you have been sick all the week!"

"It would be very imprudent, my dear," confirmed Mr. Oakley.

"Where is Miss Conway? She is never backward in deeds of mercy," observed Dr. Merton.

"And she knew Norah," answered Isabel. "It is unfortunate that she has had one of her headaches to-day, and ought not to be disturbed. Is the countrywoman you mention extremely repulsive?"

"No. I practise in her family. She is respectable and well-meaning—unpolished, it is true."

"That is nothing!" Isabel rang the bell. "Mother, can you spare Kitty?"

"Willingly, my dear."

"I shall remain in the house most of the night," said the doctor.

"I am glad to hear it," returned Isabel, apologetically—"I do not take Kitty as a companion or protector; but I judge from your description of the condition of mother and child, that other, and abler help than mine may be required before morning."

"O Isabel! how can you speak of such dreadful things?" cried Alma.

"Suppose she were to die while you are there? Just think of staying in the room with a corpse! Aunt! uncle! don't let her go! I shall not sleep a wink if she does. I shall see that poor, sick little boy and his

dead mother all night long. Dear Isabel! stay!" She clung beseechingly to her cousin's arm.

Frank marvelled that any one could withstand those pleading eyes.

"Let me find a professional nurse, Isabel," he offered, "one who can be more useful than yourself. I question whether duty calls you to such a scene at this unseasonable hour."

Isabel turned away, sorrowfully. "I expected different counsel from you, Frank! I will be ready instantly, doctor."

Frank stopped her.

"In Maurice's and Henry's absence, let me act with Lewis, as your protector."

Her voice was less firm. "I thank you, but it is unnecessary."

Mrs. Oakley also quitted the room, to pack a hamper of necessaries and comforts for the sick; and while Dr. Merton went into a more minute statement of the melancholy story to Mr. Oakley, Frank addressed himself to the office of allaying Alma's distress. He was talking to her in soothing whispers, when Isabel re-appeared, equipped for the ride. She looked back into the warm, lightsome apartment, as she shut the door after her. Her father and mother were with her in the hall; Jamie was at the carriage steps; Frank was still bending over his idol; admiring every gleam and shade of the April face, in which her amiable trouble at Isabel's determination was being dissipated by his coaxings and jests.

The cold and night met them without; the bitter reality of human woe, unmitigated by love or hope, in the garret where Norah lay.

Isabel remembered her as a ruddy, good-humoured girl; as the happy bride, whose wedding-dress she had helped to arrange. There was no evidence of the identity of either of these in the prematurely-old woman, whose sharpened features stood up rigidly from the pillow.

"Miss Isabel!" she gasped. "I was certain you would come. It seemed to me that I could die more easily if you were by. You never thought to see me come to this!"

"You should not have been reduced to it, if we had known of your wants, Norah."

"I was ashamed to beg, Miss Isabel."

Dr. Merton raised a warning finger.

"You must not talk now," said Isabel, as gently as though the pauper had been a duchess. "I will hear all when you are stronger. I must make you more comfortable, if I can."

A fat Irish woman whom the doctor accosted as "Mrs. Sullivan," was "weaving" back and forth by the fire, with the dying boy in her lap.

"He'll not last much longer; shure I think he'll go out with the tide," she said, in a whisper, like the wheezing of a pair of asthmatic bellows, as Dr. Merton felt the little wrist.

Norah had taken her cordial; one of Mrs. Oakley's blankets hid the ragged coverlet; another was pinned across the rattling casement; the grate was heaped with coal, and nothing remained to be done, but attend patiently upon the signs of the great change.

Dr. Merton leaned against the chimney, watching the pinched face of the child; and Mrs. Sullivan, relieved of her burden by Kitty, slept heavily in

her chair. Isabel was oppressed by the awful novelty of her situation. It was a miserable attic; the walls and ceiling grim with smoke and dust; floor thick with dirt; the crazy door yawning upon the props set up to keep it shut; sundry utensils of cookery were huddled in one corner; a wash-tub stood in another—but delicately-nurtured as she had been, scenes of squalid poverty were not unfamiliar to her. Where the sun never pierced, she had carried the light and joy of her presence; been met by sullen scowls and acrimonious retorts; been followed by tears of grateful blessing.

The shadow of Death brooded here! With an arm around both mother and babe, he was bringing them to each other's embrace, by enfolding them to his gelid bosom. The ticking of her watch seemed to be repeated by the impatient tap of his skeleton finger upon the minute-glass, through which was falling the thin stream of their life.

Norah spoke.

"Doctor, I am rested. May I speak with Miss Isabel?"

"If you will not say too much."

"Whisper, Norah! it will fatigue you less. I can hear you," said Isabel, seeing her exert herself to elevate her voice.

The proud, beautiful head bowed over the wretched bed, to catch the parting injunctions of the deserted wife. It was a sad, but common tale—related in broken accents; a story of misplaced trust, and the prolonged torture inflicted by neglect and cruelty upon a faithful heart—faithful unto death—for her petition of Isabel was to devise means for the reclamation of the wanderer—to transmit to him as a sacred legacy, the forgiveness and love of her he had wronged.

While listening to her, Isabel had not remarked the stir in the room.

Like the thrill of an electric battery came Norah's louder words. "He is dead! Fetch him to me!"

Kitty hesitated.

"Am I not his mother? I will have him!"

The corpse was laid beside her.

"O my baby! could you not wait for me?"

With her clammy fingers she stroked the waxen face; smoothed the fair curls—murmuring inarticulate terms of baby-speech. The sobs of the two women disturbed her.

"He does not *look* dead!" she said, in wild hope.

Isabel knelt again at her side. "He is happy now, Norah! safe in Jesus' arms—free from grief and pain!"

"And I'll be after going for a priest to pray for the innocent's soul, and shrive ye, poor darlint," said Mrs. Sullivan, wiping her eyes.

Norah's mind was weakening.

"Can he bring my Johnnie back?" she asked of Isabel.

"No; and O, Norah! when you think how he suffered, can you not thank God that he is at rest?"

"But the priest can do something. He is a holy man," said Norah, early superstitions expelling the principles of subsequent years.

"Norah!" said Isabel, solemnly. "Look at me! I never deceived you. If I believed that any *man* could help you, I would go for him myself. There is but one priest who is able to pardon and save. You loved him

once; have you forgotten—will you despise the Man of sorrows, who is acquainted with your grief? Rely upon Him alone. He has said, 'I will never leave thee or forsake thee.'"

"I do love Him, Miss Isabel! but my soul is growing dark. Pray to Him for light!"

Even the mortified Papist kneeled down before the prayer was concluded. It was nothing to Isabel that other eyes than those of the dying Norah were upon her, that other ears than hers and those which are ever open to the mourner's cry, heard the supplication. Not a thought of self tainted the pure fire of request for the peace and support of the bereaved parent.

Norah kissed the clay-cold lips of her babe.

"I can part with him for a little while. I shall join him by-and-by."

Dr. Merton had heard footsteps without, while Isabel prayed, and now went to the door.

Bella and Frank entered. A grasp of the hand was all the salutation exchanged; for Norah was quiet in sleep or devotion, and every heart was full. It was not until the gentlemen had withdrawn, leaving the females to prepare the child for burial, that Bella accounted for her appearance. Lilly had an inkling of her sister's errand, though not of her objection to her cousin's company. Accordingly, when Bella awoke from a refreshening nap, she was surprised by the relation, so far as Lilly's knowledge went. Frank was yet below. Despatching a message to him to wait, she dressed; and, obdurate as was Isabel to Alma's entreaties, placed herself under his escort.

She was a capable nurse; less exciteable than Isabel, and as tender. They seated themselves out of the range of Norah's eyes, and made the tiny shroud; their brows shadowed by the fell wings swooping above the bed; together they clothed the lifeless limbs in the last garment earth would provide. The sun arose upon them, as with locked arms they breathed the morning air at the open casement. Its crispy bitings could harm none in that chamber. Mother and son were united.

"Where is Birdie?" inquired Frank, as Isabel came down to meet him at the hour which was formerly hers, irreversibly.

"She is asleep. She sat up too late last night."

"That was my fault," he interrupted penitently.

"One you should not repeat too often. Her eyes were like half-drowned blue lilies this morning, and she had no appetite for breakfast."

"The fragile blossom!" said he, fondly. "I must be more careful of my treasure. I know I am too exacting, but I do not live away from her. I am still tormented by the impression of the illusory character of my bliss; a terror lest I shall awake some time and find it flown. You think me a weak fool, Isabel?"

"I do not; but that you are unwise in borrowing trouble, when none portends. Enjoy to-day, and the morrow will take care of itself."

"You are a philosopher," observed Frank. "So was I, not a century ago; but love 'makes cowards of us all.'"

"It makes a murderer of you," rejoined Isabel. "You decapitate quotations and dislocate ideas, to fit them to the one subject, until I wonder you are not haunted by the immortal victims of your ingenuity. Do you never have the night-mare? If Shakespeare does not pummel you in

his ire, there is no such thing as retributive justice executed by the shades upon insulting mortals."

"He jests at scars who never felt a wound," answered the incorrigible plagiarist. "It will be my time to banter, when yours for love arrives."

"I love a number of people now, Frank."

"Nonsense! will you never be serious? Can this diffusive affection be concentrated upon one person; water, with a strong constant rill of refreshing and gladness, the roots of one majestic tree, instead of distilling in scattered drops, upon a million plants? Will you ever feel for any man as Alma does for me?"

"Not exactly, I believe."

Frank beat the toe of his boot with his cane in dissatisfied musing. "You are an enigma—a contradictory compound. You have a true womanly nature; yet such cannot find the fruition of its hopes in philanthropy, however noble its object or entrancing its pursuit. You think yourself happy—'gloriously happy,' you affirm—in your fame and friends. I do not dispute it; but I am persuaded, and wish that you were, that this happiness would be enhanced an hundred fold, if it proceeded from the affection of another. It is a curious and an infallible law of our being—the sweet joy of dependence. Did you ever ponder upon it?"

"Occasionally," said she, indifferently.

"As you would speculate upon any abstract subject," returned Frank. "Isabel! sister! I have never been harsh to you; but it is obligatory upon me to speak very plainly. Mere mental wealth cannot buy love, any more than can gold and silver; nor will the tributes of the sagest heads satisfy your soul-cravings. Your heart is your richest mine. It alone can purchase enduring possessions. Do not block it up with ice. When you shall have reached the loftiest battlement of renown, you will view slightingly the gauds your devotees offer, and sigh for what you now spurn."

"I spurn no one, Frank."

"No, but you underrate much that is invaluable. I know those whose highest ideal of earthly felicity is to hold the first place in your affection—know one who would die, since he cannot live for you. I have studied you for hours together, when you were in his society; and not a blush, not a heave of the chest betrayed your consciousness of his attachment. Is your heart dumb, or are you—I shudder to allude to a crime so unnatural in your sex—are you trying to kill it with your intellect? You can do this, Isabel. I have told you of women who have acted thus; but you will rue it in unspeakable wretchedness, if you live to reap the harvest of such a crop. It is a warm heart, dear sister, magnanimous and sympathizing. Spare it for the good it has done—the blessings it may confer."

"I wish it were dead!" said she, in a stifled voice. "Unhappily it lives and feels!"

"Unhappily! Then my fear was not groundless. You are trampling upon Heaven's best gift. It cannot harm you. You may dread its cramping your energies; that you will lose your relish for your peculiar work, if you resign yourself to the domination of softer passions. Let me beseech you, by the memory of all that is precious in our friendship, by the loves of parents, brothers, sisters, not to permit your genius to dislodge from your heart those humbler emotions which make up the brighest parts of

our existence. Reserve the right—cherish the inclination to walk in the valleys, instead of roaming for ever upon the cold, though unclouded mountain top."

She hid her face upon the arm of the sofa, shaking like a leaf, yet determinately silent.

Frank took her hand. "Isabel, Lewis Merton loves you."

A violent start—but she did not speak.

He continued. "Weigh the consequences before you discard a devotion like his. You ought to rise above narrow, fickle prejudice; have too fine a spirit to demean yourself by coquetry. I shall not eulogize Lewis. You know him. The shell you have polished and may bring to any state of perfection you require. Perhaps you have pictured for yourself a brilliant destiny and a princely mate. He has the soul of a king. Will you think of this, dear Isabel?"

She lifted herself. "Are you his accredited ambassador?" she queried, with extreme haughtiness.

"Isabel, for Heaven's sake never speak to me in that tone again. You freeze my blood. Sit down. What ails you? Lewis is not even aware that I have divined his secret; would have been torn by wild horses sooner than commission me to say what I have done. He loves you with a vain worship which expression would profane. Sweetest friend, pay no heed to the clarion of Ambition—listen for awhile to the voice of your heart. You cannot delude me into the belief that you have subdued it. This very moment, while I speak, it is crying, like a child, for love."

"Frank!" she said, "you are killing me."

He believed it when he saw the inexpressible, tearless agony of that livid countenance.

"Dearest, blessed sister, forgive me," he cried. "Can I have caused such pain? What is it, Isabel?"

She trembled, as in an ague-fit, when he would have passed his arm around her.

"Do you cast me off?" he asked, grievingly. "On my knees I pray for forgiveness."

She stooped towards him for an instant. Her marble brow touched his hair.

"Leave me now," she begged. "Say nothing more, if you care for me. Another time."

She folded her hands over one of his, and kissed it as she motioned him to go.

"God bless you."

"And you, dearest Isabel, with His peace."

"God bless you." How the words vibrated upon his ear and heart through that and many succeeding days. Sleeping or waking, the tremulous music was never stilled; it abode with him like a heavenly benison. It was meet that it should. That fervent prayer was wafted upwards from beside a bleeding sacrifice.

"Isabel! Darling! are you ill?" exclaimed Bella, hurrying to the crouching figure.

"O, Bella, love me!" was her cry; and the straining arms caught her to her heart. "Love me, or I shall die!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I HAVE been hunting everywhere for you, Isabel," said Maurice, entering the library. "You have spent so little time here of late, that I did not expect to see you when I glanced in."

"I came for this portfolio. Jamie wants it."

"And you shall not escape without leave from me. We will have one dear, old-fashioned confab before I set sail for other shores. Not in that chair, darling, your seat is on my knee. I have something in my pocket which you would give a kiss to see."

She paid him in advance.

"I called to say 'Farewell' to Mr. Grey, and he presented me with this —anticipating the public issue."

It was a copy of the "Magazine" for the coming month—its principal embellishment an excellent engraving of Isabel herself—her nom de plume written beneath. She could not suppress a gesture of loathing as it was displayed.

Maurice closed the book.

"Isabel! that action was evidence of a revulsion of feeling, for which I have looked in vain, until I dared to hope that it would never come. You are not capricious. What has disgusted you with your work?"

She bowed upon his shoulder. "I am weary, brother! I cannot tell you how weary!"

"In mind or body, darling?"

"At heart!" was the startling response; and raising her head, she went on, passionately, "O, brother! when you saw me enter the path which should have been for ever barred to woman, you must have known the evils, the mortifications, the woe I was tempting. Why, why did you not dissuade me—drive me back! But no, you and all whose opinion I obeyed as law and truth, blessed me, as though I had not been rushing on to the ruin of my happiness. A word from you then would have saved me. Had you intimated that I was separating myself from the delicate and good of my sex; establishing myself without the pale of the privileges accorded as the due of their modesty and helplessness; setting up myself as a target for envy and malice and contemptuous pity—above all, excluding myself from that which you knew was as my very life—the affection of my kind—how thankfully would I have remained in the obscurity of my home!"

"Have all these curses fallen upon you, sister?"

"They have—and more."

"How did you discover this?"

"Experience is my teacher. When she has opened the eyes it is easy to see irretrievable errors in the Past—their penalty in the Present. I read curiosity and scorn in countenances which once seemed to speak of interest and approbation; abhor every mention of the 'profession' I imagined the world honoured as much as I, in my ignorance, was wont to do. It is hard that so weighty a punishment should be visited upon me for discharging what I in conscience, after many prayers, thought was my duty. I said—like the conceited ignoramus that I was—that I must improve the talent intrusted to my keeping."

"Would the doom of the unprofitable servant be more tolerable than what you now endure?" asked her brother, impressively.

"No; but I might have employed myself in a less questionable manner; have been useful, happy, and beloved, without forfeiture of self-respect, without public contumely, if I had not transgressed the bounds Providence has marked out for us."

"I will not reason just yet, dearest, or I would ask you to define the boundaries of that lawful ground. My first effort shall be to assure you that neither in written nor spoken word, in deed or in thought, have you ever been unfeminine. Your unperverted instinct is as sure a guide as the wisest code of the most prudent mortal. Have you offended against it?"

"Not knowingly—but"—

"And you would rebut an argument, supplied by the Divine hand, by recapitulating the one-sided maxims—by referring to the prejudices of besotted men, who are totally unfit to judge of the gift they affect to despise. I knew in the outset of your career, that there were dangers in the route, few females had shunned; but I had faith in your lofty nature, that it would prove invulnerable to venomed spite; and by the majesty of its purity cow the sneering into silence."

"Read that!" said Isabel, catching up a newspaper from the table. "Read it aloud!"

In a lively sketch, thrown off for a weekly of another city, she had inadvertently wounded the local pride or personal vanity of the editor of the hebdomadal her brother now held, and here paid the imaginary insult in this wise:

"'Gertrude,' the occasional and flippant correspondent of the ——, one of the fast-increasing tribe of literary old maids, who, having failed in their attempts to entrap husbands, take to scribbling as a profession, and dip their pens in the acidulated gall of their own hearts"—

Without reading another line, Maurice tore the paper down the middle; crumpled it into a ball, and flung it into the fire.

"Now!" resumed Isabel, "the first perusal of that article did not raise the temperature of my blood a degree. I received it two weeks since. It was sent by the editor, and if only for that reason appeared simply despicable. To-day I happened upon it, and read it as the blunt expression of a universal sentiment—more welcome in its homely truth than the lurking sarcasm beneath the finished encomiums of my complimentary reviewers. O brother—I so prized—so gloried in my womanhood! and now to find myself what I am!" and again she buried her hot face in his bosom.

His astonishment and distress exceeded description. Could this be Isabel, the buoyant Isabel, who had ever filled her home and all hearts therein with mirth and music? from whose lips he had never heard an angry or repining word; the zealous advocate of her species; the proud exhibitor of good in the nature she knew, from herself, was not totally depraved! What terrible revolution had thus changed her? His spirit died within him at the question.

"You are thinking, and justly, that I should not expect my reward on earth," was Isabel's next remark, "but I have so joyed in life; have scrutinized the features of those I loved, for some token that I had not laboured for nought; recognised in the smiles of such as I had rejoiced, the earnest of my Father's blessing!"

"And you interpreted it aright," said her brother. "The exquisite pleasure you derived from these fruits of your toil was a meagre foretaste of the final recompence."

"It is a weary road to the end, brother! I went to a funeral yesterday—that of an old maid, who was *not* 'literary.' She had gone meekly through the obscure by-paths her Master willed her to tread; known to none beyond her own street; scarcely missed from the very house in which she died. I have pitied her many a time, as I have met her trudging along the crowded pavement, so forlorn and neglected; have wondered why her span of existence was lengthened to three-score years and ten; wished that I could bestow upon her a portion of my happiness. I stood above her coffin—I, whom men style gifted and brilliant—and gazing upon the unlovely, time-worn features, I envied that dead woman in her shroud!"

She should proceed no further. He would be heard in his turn.

"I visited that aged disciple as she lay upon her death-bed, dear Isabel, and when I spoke of her tedious, cheerless journey, whose greatest comfort she was now experiencing, in the hope that this was its last stage—she smiled, and whispered a text, which had been her star of hope throughout the dreary way. Listen, darling! 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.' 'Not worthy to be compared,' dearest sister! Think of it!"

She lay still, nestled close to him, as though his heart were the only resting-place for her stricken one.

"You have acted conscientiously in choosing your part in life, dear one. God never gave a talent which it would be sinful to improve. We are guilty before Him, and defraud our fellow-creatures, when we allow ours to fall into disuse. You felt thus!"

"Yes."

"And you regret having obeyed Him? I do not mean a reproof. Too grievous a load has been imposed upon your spirit already—I will not inquire by whom, or how. I comprehend, however, from what you have said, that the motives and aim of your mission have been misconstrued—and, yet harder to bear—that your heart, so precious to those who know its worth, has been depreciated. Is your trial worse than Bella's, sister?"

She had never thought of comparing them; and one after another points of resemblance arose to view. She stated but one to the brother, who was her second self.

"We are both the victims of prejudice," she said.

"Martyrs, rather!" The brow, generally so open and clear, clouded. "We men—enlightened Anglo-Saxons of the nineteenth century, are as veritable tyrants to women as were the feudal lords of the Middle Ages. We cultivate her mind, and forbid her to use it; unlock to her the storehouses of learning, and suggest that she secrete what she bears away; recommend to her to live a mean parasite, rather than brave patrician scorn by earning a livelihood by manual or intellectual labour. We are training up a generation of ornamental dunces—mentally and physically weak—to be the mothers and guides of the future guardians of our Republic and Religion. When I reflect upon this monstrous injustice, my condemnation is less harsh of those misguided traitors to their sex, who

rush into an opposite, and as fatal an extreme, and batter at the doors of our churches, medical colleges, and court-houses."

Isabel sat upright; forgetful of her own sorrow while pursuing his thoughts.

The stern lines of his face softened.

"Women like you, my sweet sister, do more in one year to effect your emancipation than these unfeminine ranters will in a century. You command respect now, and the time is certainly coming when the glittering diadem of the authoress will not blind men to the loving eyes beneath it; when, through the sacerdotal robe in which your worshippers have arrayed you, shall be perceptible, the rise and fall, regular and healthful, of the woman's heart. In my Utopia, darling, the sister is the companion and friend of the brother; the wife, the co-adviser and confidante of the husband; the mother, the instructress of her children, sole governess of her daughters. You may hasten the dawning of that Millennium."

He took up her pen—dry and dusty—and thrust it between her fingers.

"I will use it," she said, in a low but steady voice.

Maurice produced a letter from his pocket. This sudden recollection of it appeared to him afterwards, in the light of a special inspiration. It had come through her publisher's hands, and bore only the direction—"To Gertrude."

Isabel broke it open listlessly.

"Let me read it," proposed her brother.

It was written in a beautiful female hand, and dated from a distant State.

"I feel to-night, that I must write to you. The quick impulse has come to me, and stays but to let me tell you my thanks. I would that the pen it guides were eloquent to express them; but I think you will pardon me if I use no hackneyed phrase, save the simple—'I thank you!'

"I was weary, and you have rested me;—suffering, and you have soothed;—hopeless, and you have taught me hope;—and so, in my loneliness, I come to you with my gratitude. Books are my friends now. Once they were a study, a passion, and a pride; but in ceasing to be these, they are more—constant and sympathizing companions. Do you know what it is to play an invalid's part in life? I hope not—though the weary rôle is an oft-told tale—so I will not ask you to understand how the overwrought nerves shrink from spoken words of counsel and hope, and yet find them gratefully upon the printed page. And so, your book came to my couch a stranger, and lies beside it now—a friend. Seeming, as every true book must—but a part of its author. You will permit me to say that I am Gratefully yours, "G—— S——."

They came! the blessed tears! repressed until the burning brain was almost mad with fever. Not a syllable was uttered; but as Maurice folded her to his heart, a rapturous ejaculation of praise arose from its inmost depths—"Thank God!"

O, wan sufferer! bound to thy couch of pain; looking with wistful eyes upon the golden light the southern sun pours into thy chamber, and pining, all vainly, to walk abroad in its kindly warmth; to take in plenteous draughts of the balmy outer air, admitted so cautiously to thy labouring lungs; thy thank-offering has been more than sunlight and spring breeze to a fainting

spirit. The freshness distilled in dew from her heart to thine, has returned to the fountain—a heavenly shower.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WOEFUL gap was made in the Oakley household by the absence of the three travellers. Although Maurice's nominal home was elsewhere, there were not many days of the week or month, in which his genial presence did not enliven the dinner or tea-table; and if this were wanting, Mooresville was not far off. The tap of Jamie's crutch would have been music to all ears, and each felt the loss of the family plaything—Alma. Frank was very desolate, and, as he had ever done, came to Isabel for consolation. She gave it; sympathized in his sad, and beguiled him of his gloomy moods; and was to him, as to father, mother, and cousin—an angel of blessing and strength.

Between her and Bella, there was a new bond of union—though unconfessed by either. They were constantly together, always busy, and, in appearance, cheerful. Only at twilight they would repair to the study, seat themselves side by side upon the rug, link arms, and the head of one upon the neck of the other, remain for a long hour without speech or change of posture; the beating of their hearts alone conveying the mutual assurance of a prayerful conflict with memory. It was a custom adopted by tacit consent—a communion of soul which would never have been thought of by girls of ordinary character; but one which comforted and sustained them.

On the same day which brought the news of the voyagers' safe disembarkation upon English ground, Bella received a most unexpected summons. Her mother wrote a recal to "The Grove;" despatched with her husband's consent, but while he was away from home, and to this fact Bella attributed the unrestrained affection of every line.

"I was sick all winter," said she, "and have been miserably weak throughout the spring. I am apprehensive sometimes, my daughter, that I shall not live many months longer; and oh! if this be so, I must have you near me for the remainder of my stay upon earth. Our Heavenly Father knows what suffering it has cost me to give you up; how I have prayed daily that you might be instructed and protected by His love. He has raised up friends to whom you owe more than to the weak mother, with whom you have not lived since you were a child; but will you not come to her because she is your mother?"

The pages were yet damp and blistered with tears, when Bella brought the letter down stairs to her uncle. Her countenance and Isabel's prepared him for a distressing communication; but he wiped his spectacles repeatedly before he read it through.

"You must go, my child," said he, laying his hand upon her head. "I said that you were mine until she should claim you. Your highest earthly duty is to her."

The library hour, that evening, was sad to heart-breaking. There could hardly have been a more affecting sight than the endeavours after fortitude of the souls which had been so sorely tempted and smitten.

"I cannot talk, and I dare not trust myself to think," said Isabel,

at last. "Before me is a curtain of blackness; every joy is withering under my steps. I am haunted by visions of our school-days—those glad morning hours. How their freshness has been brushed from our hearts!"

Bella could not reply.

"It is sinful to despond," resumed Isabel, with a mournful attempt at cheer. "We will hope for the best. You will be restored to us by your mother's recovery; and during your visit to her, our letters will be frequent. This must ever be your home. I cannot exist without you. I wish I could thank you, however imperfectly, for what you have been to me. There have been times when it seemed to me that I should have died but for you. And you support your individual burdens with such Christian meekness. Now, you stand more in need of comfort than I—and like the frail, selfish thing I am, I can speak none!" She wept aloud.

The calmer current of Bella's tears mingled with the anguished tide. "And I but this, dearest," she answered, controlling her voice. "'I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight!'"

Another band was wrenched from the household chain, which, at the beginning of the winter, appeared so thoroughly welded as to be proof against change of seasons and circumstances. A sad-hearted dove left the ark to revisit the nest, in which she had been nursed—altered now and profaned—but holding still the mother bird, whose plaintive voice urged her to speed her flight.

The Grove carriage awaited Bella at the canal landing. "Uncle Ben"—unchanged, except by a slight grizzling of the tall pile of wool combed upwards from all sides of his head—was profuse in his congratulations and bows.

"I hope missus will survive at the sight of you, Miss Bella. For some time subsequent, I have had fears that she was diminishing daily. This evening she 'peared more like her mutual self. She gave me the constructions about coming for you with her own mouth. Mr. Snowden (he never said 'Master,' behind his back) was called away on business, which may retain him all night; so you, and your ma' can have a sociable evening together."

Bella was not sorry when her baggage was strapped to his liking; for his tongue was as indefatigable as those which he thrust into, and pulled out of the buckles. He had the character, among his mates, of being "fussy;" and his manifold preparations and fixtures, combined with his garrulity, made his passenger restlessly impatient. They were finally upon the road; the same over which he had driven his mistress and her betrothed suitor ten years before; a journey to which Bella reverted on this May day, as the commencement of the troubles that had befallen her, thick and fast, since. She checked herself in their detail, as she neared what was then "home." The double line of aspens tossed their quivering leaves in the long slants of the declining light; the blackberry sprays, gay with snow-white blossoms, waved and bowed to their old friend. She certainly recollected and loved them, whether their recognition were imaginary or real. Upon the piazza was a figure, holding to a pillar for support, a stout boy beside her; but he, who had always been foremost and warmest in his welcome—alas! the ocean rolled between them!

Bella had known that she would see some alteration in her mother; but

she had not looked for the emaciated creature, whose feeble arms encircled her, with a sobbing cry—"My child! my child!"

Her daughter helped her into the house, and laying her upon a bed, courted composure for her, with caresses and tender words. She had never acted thus before. When a child, she was too diffident; throughout her girlhood, the evil shadow had stalked between.

The chamber was in good order, but there were none of the conveniences and appliances so necessary for an invalid. Aunt Hagar stood by—scolding Sarah, the housemaid, for being "thuch a numthkull when anybody wath thick. You might have 'thpected she would 'a fainted, 'pon theeing hur daughter."

In her brawny hand she held a huge camphor-bottle; and marvelled with exceeding admiration, at Bella's substitute of her vinaigrette. The trundle-bed upon which Mrs. Snowden reclined was, undoubtedly, Eddy's sleeping-place; and he notified his sister of his title, by diving head-first into the pillows, and playing bo-peep from under the counterpane.

"Mars' Edgar! ain't you ashamed! Your sister never see a young gentleman behave so, I know," said Sarah.

"I don't care if she hasn't!" retorted he, loudly.

He had never been properly managed; and since his mother's sickness, having been entrusted wholly to his father and the servants, had become wayward and boisterous. Bella coaxed him to her knee, and after accomplishing the preliminaries of an acquaintanceship, gave him one of the toys she had procured in Philadelphia for him. The others were wisely reserved as bribes for future docility. He ran off to show it to his dark-skinned courtiers, and did not enter the house again until supper-time. Then, tired and dirty, he fretted like a great baby, to climb into his mother's lap.

His sister interposed. "Eddy, do you like to hear stories?"

"Yes," ceasing his whining.

"Well, if you will wash your hands and face, and eat your supper without crying, I will tell you a pretty one, when you are ready to go to bed."

He was not an ill-tempered boy, and conformed to his part of the agreement. The history selected was that of little Samuel." In Jamie's childhood, he had most frequently begged for this; and Bella's mind strayed backwards continually, as the oft-told tale hung upon her lips. She left Eddy asleep, and rejoined her mother. She was weeping.

"You will consider me very silly, my dear," she said, dashing away the tears in a confused alarm, which impressed her daughter most unpleasantly, indicating, as she thought, expectation of accustomed rebuke or ridicule. "I was so much reminded of poor Jamie, and how you used to love each other!"

"We love one another as dearly now, mother," replied Bella, kissing the thin hand. "But we must not say 'Poor Jamie!' He will come back a grown man—a travelled poet."

"What of his lameness?"

"It will never be perfectly cured, I fear; still it will be a less serious disadvantage than if he had chosen a more active occupation, or if he were dependent upon any profession for a subsistence."

"He will travel for a year! a year!" repeated Mrs. Snowden, reflectively. "Poor boy!"

Bella perceived her meaning, and could not refuse acquiescence, as she surveyed the hollow cheeks and attenuated form. "I shall be jealous if you talk more of him than of me," she said, rallying. "I am determined to be spoiled in my turn."

"I do not love him better, my love," responded her mother, "although you may have believed that I had forsaken you. O, my daughter! you have never guessed my sorrow on your account; how, while you were drifting about on the wide world, wearied and wounded, your mother's heart yearned to receive you——"

"That time is past," interrupted Bella, fearing the consequences of her agitation. "We are happy together once more. I am to have a grand holiday remember, and to spend it with you. Now, let me show you our Jamie's likeness—and this, on the reverse of the locket, is Isabel's. Is she not handsome? Yet no picture can do her justice. Her expression varies every instant. You have read her book, mother? I forwarded you a copy last fall. Didn't you like it? She sends a great deal of love to you, and says that if you do not recover speedily under my treatment, she will undertake a journey to Virginia, as consulting physician. I wish she would! I should so like for you to know her."

"Your father will not be home to-night, my dear," said Mrs. Snowden, at her early bed-time. "He said at starting, that as you would be here, if it seemed expedient for him to stay at the Court House until to-morrow he should do so. He seldom leaves me so long."

"And the neighbours, mother—are they kind?"

"Very! particularly Mrs. Monmouth and Mrs. Berry. They often spend a morning or an afternoon—sometimes a day—with me; and send me many nice things to eat; but your father and Eddy fall heirs to them. I am obliged to be so cautious in my diet. Will you ring for Sarah to undress me?"

At any reference to her illness she became languid. Bella treasured up this symptom as a guide for her conduct.

"Let me do it, mamma."

"You! my dear! It will be so much trouble!"

"It will be a pleasure; and I am sure you will find me as apt a waiting-maid as Sarah."

She did not have to plead again. Her mother loved the touch of those gentle fingers, and the soothing words accompanying the fatiguing process of disrobing.

"I have not felt so strong for weeks, as I do to-night," she remarked, as the clean sheets were folded down. "I never had such a nurse before."

"You should have sent for me sooner," said Bella.

Mrs. Snowden looked troubled. "The truth is, my love, I would have done it, but we thought—that is, I was afraid that your home at your uncle's was so delightful, and you were so much occupied—but never mind! you are here now and willing to remain for awhile—are you not?"

"As long as you need me, dear mother."

This was Mr. Snowden's work; but she would not suffer his image to intrude upon the happiness of this evening of return and reconciliation.

"Mother," she said, "perhaps you would not object to hearing me read a chapter—as I used to do every night."

"'Object!' I wanted to ask it of you, but feared that you were too tired. I should enjoy it of all things."

With closed eyes she listened to the sweet cadences of the voice, so rarely heard of latter years. Bella read the twenty-third Psalm, and paused.

"One more! 'I will bless the Lord at all times,'" requested Mrs. Snowden.

She did not speak at its conclusion. An expression of holy contentment and tranquillity rested upon her features, like light from seraph pinions. Bella saw it fade into the dreamless quiet of slumber; then shut the Bible, and walked to the window.

There was no moon to shame the glimmering stars. They flashed at her from every crevice in the tent of foliage above her. Were they also beaming upon Isabel, and Jamie, and Maurice? With this question she neglected to watch them. Where were they—the beloved ones? But one, and she as lonely and heartsick as herself, inhabited the same continent with her who pined for them and home. Duty! duty! this has been the signet upon every order which had directed her wanderings—aimless removes—most of them, to her. As far as she could see into the future, she was ever to be passed thus from wave to wave—a waif upon the ocean of Time. O, for some calm mooring-place!

"*Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.*" It was a verse which Isabel had written upon the fly-leaf of her cousin's Bible, the last night of her stay in Philadelphia. It arose in her mind, a reproving whisper to unbelief. She knelt there under the studded heavens, and breathed her petitions; their only mention of herself, a prayer for aid and strength until her labour for others should be ended.

Mr. Snowden returned the ensuing day. Bella beat down the rising dislike which she would fain have believed a reminiscence of her childish days, and went to the door to meet him. He was a well-preserved man of his age. Portly and bland as ever, he imprinted a fatherly salute upon her mouth. She could not help wiping it off, as he stooped to kiss Eddy, who capered and shouted with glee at seeing him.

"Ain't you glad sister has come, papa?" he inquired, holding to her dress.

"I am, indeed, my son. We are most happy that you are again among us, my daughter. For years I have waited and hoped for this hour. The fatted calf and best robe are ready for you."

Bella inwardly resented the insinuated analogy between the prodigal's wilful exile and her enforced absence. The long, smooth fur still harboured the sharp claw.

"So, my love," he said to his wife, "you are perfectly satisfied now? Will you be cured by next week, do you think; I must say, however, that our dear Bella's arts have not achieved any decided improvement as yet. You are not so well to-day. Your eyes are glassy—almost filmy. Let me feel your pulse."

He rolled his eyes up to the ceiling, after the most approved mode of professed practitioners, working his lips with the throbs of the vein.

"Evident excitement! Put out your tongue. You talked too much last night," shaking his head at Bella. "For this once I forgive you, little nurse, but hereafter, we will conform to the doctor's rules."

"She retired at the usual hour, I believe, sir," said Bella.

"Yes, my dear," replied Mrs. Snowden, "and I fancied that I was better."

"So you have 'fancied' many times, my dearest Agnes, and been mistaken. I trust that no evil will accrue from this imprudence. Did you take your medicine punctually?"

He called for a glass of iced water; brushed his sleek locks, and settled himself for a chat with his step-daughter.

"When did you hear from the travellers, and where were they?" he inquired.

"A week ago, by the Atlantic. They had just arrived, safe and well, in Liverpool."

"What is their proposed route?"

"They will visit France, Switzerland, and Italy; but in what order I cannot say."

"Ah! the youths of this generation have more leisure for frolic than had their fathers. At their age, we were accumulating, instead of squandering money. What becomes of Mr. Oakley's congregation, while he is pleasuring?"

"It has a supply, sir."

"Is the pastor's salary continued meanwhile?"

Bella regretted that she had been told of this proof of their liberality and esteem for their minister. Reluctantly she gratified his meddling curiosity by a cold "Yes, sir."

"Well! well! I like generosity when it vents itself in a right channel. Do you feel the air, my dear?"

"Not at all," was the reply; yet a screen was drawn between the bed and the door.

"Your cousin Isabel is making considerable noise in the world," was the next attack. "She is, I judge, a genius—writes rather boldly, but with facility. Is she not something of a Die Vernon?"

"She is womanly in character and deportment, sir," returned Bella, galled against her resolution, by his adroitness in detecting her most vulnerable points.

"Unquestionably, my dear! and if hers *is* a precarious position for a lady, the sacrifice of feeling and false delicacy is counterbalanced by the fortune and notoriety she has acquired. Jamie, too, has espoused authorship? I feel a paternal pride in the dear fellow; suffer more from his deformity than he does. It is morbid sensitiveness, I dare say: but it is a revolting thought to me, that I shall ere long behold his masterpieces, headed by a notice of 'the lame poet.' My love, is not the light too glaring? Your colour is rising. Keep as composed as possible; excitement is ruinous to you. Your pulse denotes febrile action."

Bella was not perplexed as to the cause of her mother's sickness. Mr. Snowden was reckoned a "capital nurse." One such in a house never fails to convert it into a hospital. The invalid was not allowed to forget her malady for a moment. If she talked, or listened to others with the least show of interest, the softest of finger-balls were laid upon the ever-consulted pulse, and sugared tones warned her against the deleterious nature of "excitement." Draughts, from whatever quarter they proceeded, were

protested; and the unsubstantial diet, advisable in inflammatory diseases only, was served up to delude with the mockery of nourishment, the debilitated organs which were wasting for want of suitable food. A ban was put upon all "exciting" books. Bella hated the sound of that word, for ever upon his tongue—the bugbear of his patient's life. As her step-father, she was bound to pay him a decent outward respect, and if her mother or Eddy were by, concealed her contempt and repugnance; but her upright disposition wore the cloak negligently. He knew her true sentiments, and without abating one iota of his suavity, gave her to understand that eternal antagonism was the penalty of sedition, under his silken but unbending rule. She comprehended him; her will uprising resolutely in defiance of the detested sway; and the warfare commenced. Bella's female wit was the best ally of her determination. Her mother needed her; and no subtle sneers, no searching impertinence should move her from her place. The sick chamber was her province; and his laws were null and void by the time his shadow ceased to darken the doorway. The windows were opened every fair day, and the flower-scented zephyr revelled at its own wild will through the apartment. Tempting delicacies, manufactured and presented by her hands, were partaken of with a zest which was the surest evidence of their harmless qualities.

Dr. Graves was in Bella's confidence. He was a mild, humble man; and although, as he stated to his volunteer assistant, he "had ventured occasionally to ask Mr. Snowden's consent to the experiment of more exercise and richer food, he had not deemed it prudent to introduce the reform upon his own responsibility."

"The regimen of which you speak, Miss Conway, is recommended by many who are eminent in our profession. I should like to try it in your mother's case, but Mr. Snowden's opposition makes me hesitate. I cannot stake my reputation and incur his displeasure into the bargain."

Bella had no such fears. Mute and grave in her step-father's company, she astonished herself by her lively flow of nonsense to her desponding charge, when the Upas shade was thrown elsewhere. Mrs. Snowden submitted passively to the change. She had never possessed much strength of purpose, and had, since her second marriage, been the merest machine, subject, mind and body, to her master; but Bella imagined that his word had less weight than formerly; that instinct, if not reason, made her dimly conscious of wrong done to her offspring, and equivocation, if not falsehood practised towards herself. To this her daughter ascribed her recal and the decline which baffled medical wisdom to explain or remedy. To that loving heart the suspicion that she had trusted to a rotten reed, was a blow struck at the root of life. Cling and lean she did, notwithstanding this fear—but her soul was transfixed with a deadly shaft. Her love for Bella was a mingling of doting and remorse—its aim to obliterate the remembrance of past injuries by every salvo which affection could invent.

Bella found in the servants willing accomplices in any scheme to circumvent a master whom they cordially despised. Under other circumstances, her conscience would have arraigned her for setting at nought a man's authority over his menials; but the comfort, if not the existence, of the rightful head of the household was the price of co-operation with him. In a court of common law, "The Grove" would have been adjudged to

him— common sense and justice told her that it was her mother's—in the event of her decease, her children's. Acting upon this persuasion, before many weeks had elapsed she was the virtual comptroller of house and negroes; yet so unpretending was she in the exercise of her power, that the so-called lord but half-suspected that she had outwitted him. Mrs. Snowden improved slowly but decidedly, and the domestics, faithfully attached to their helpless mistress, adored the instrument of the blissful change. There was not one, large or small, who would not have worn the thumb-screw and the boot, rather than violate the trust reposed in him. Bella would not wean Eddy from his father. She managed instead, that he should be allured away by a hunting or fishing frolic, or a forest ramble at the seasons of her mother's meals and airings.

Ben had a smattering of the wheelwright's trade, and by Bella's instructions, had constructed a miniature waggon, rude in workmanship, but comfortable as a gilded chariot. Mr. Snowden's morning ride, never omitted except in stormy weather, was the signal for the appearance of his wife's equipage from its hiding-place in the loft of Aunt Hagar's cabin. Two of the most steady boys were drilled to work in harness, and pulled it up and down the garden walk for an hour; their recompence, the peaceful enjoyment of the pale face upon the cushions within, and the grateful glance of her who walked beside the car, chatting merrily, and, to the ears of her sable thralls, as musically as the birds in the rose and lilac thickets. The freshest eggs and ripest berries were sought for, and committed to Bella's especial pantry; but they were never tendered in their master's sight. Bella was diverted at overhearing a colloquy between a couple of her purveyors after one of these gifts.

"Why don't marster like mis' to have nothing good to eat, Jake?"

"Hush, Dick! You know jes' as well as me—'cause he's a great big greedy, and wants 'em all hisself."

Dick's query had often been silently made by herself; and she was disposed to accept his fellow's solution of the enigma. Mr. Snowden's conduct was the effect of gross ignorance or criminal selfishness. The former appeared impossible; the latter, not inconsistent with his character and policy. Yet a sickly helpmeet was not a desirable appendage to the establishment of a man who was fond of his ease. An awful thought darted through her brain—"Sickness leads to death—death, to his freedom and wealth!"

"God forgive me!" she said. "That must have been a direct suggestion from the Evil one."

If an imp of the lower regions, it was not to be exorcised; and a twin sprite gained a lodgment in Aunt Hagar's turbaned cranium. Bella walked by the kitchen that afternoon, and stopped to say a pleasant word.

"How ith your ma', honey?" questioned the old woman, rubbing the biscuit dough from her fingers.

"Better, thank you, mammy. She seems quite bright to-day."

"Um-*hum!*"

This was a most significant interjection in Aunt Hagar's mouth, pronounced with various degrees of emphasis and expression; but always eloquent. Her look, now, was so peculiar that Bella could not refrain from asking, "Why do you say that, mammy?"

"I knowth a thing or two, more'n folkth thinkth I doeth," was the ambiguous rejoinder, as she dipped her hands into the flour to loosen the sticky paste.

"Tell me some of them," said Bella.

The cook kneaded the contents of her tray, vigorously.

"I knowth that your ma', like a cherub ath the ith, would a' been out yonder in the grave-yard by your pa', if you hadn't come when you did; and there wouldn't a been any but *crockery* tearth thpilt in that houthe," nodding at the main dwelling. "He married hur for hur money"—another spiteful dig of the fists—"then he never rethted upon hith bed till he got rid of you, poor young lamb!"—working the dough into a lump—"he worried Marth' Jamie almoth out of hith thentheth"—throwing the ball upon the biscuit block—"and then he thot himthelf to work to teathe the life out o' hur. I heard onthe of a man whar tickled hith wife to death. I ain't got another word to thay!" and down came the rolling-pin upon the yielding mass and the hard wood.

Eddy's reformation was Bella's severest task. Happily for her and for him, he had inherited a heart from one parent, and when she had engaged this on her side, the most arduous labour was over. She was surprised that his father opposed no obstacle to his growing fondness for one whom he had never liked. He even acceded, with evident pleasure, to her proposition to act as his instructress while she remained at the Grove. In Mr. Snowden's estimation, a benefit was none the less acceptable that the donor was obnoxious. "Seize upon good where'er 'tis found," was one of his adages, and he rubbed his hands with more self-gratulation over that which was grudgingly bestowed, than when the favour was reasonable and cheerfully offered. His love for his child was the strongest passion of a heart otherwise ossified into indurate selfishness. His heir was one of its calcareous excrescences—bone of the bone. His aversion to his wife's daughter did not blind him to the salutary consequences of her influence; an ascendancy from which he dreaded nothing hereafter. The period of their intercourse would be limited to a few months, and it would be easy to erase the recollection of it from the memory of a child of Eddy's age.

Bella's routine of daily labour was more interesting, but scarcely less fatiguing, than when she had been employed as governess or sub-teacher. Suffering had not depressed her energies. Work, once her panacea, as it was Isabel's, was now essential to her mental and physical health. To keep a-glow the flicker of hope in her mother's bosom; to minister to her infirmities; to educate the young brother, beloved at first, because the dear name "sister," summoned up sweet thoughts of the absentee—cherished afterwards for his own sake—these were sacred duties—joyfully performed.

The neighbours were attentive—ever solicitous to assist or amuse her; she was too busy to be lonely; and all through the blossoming spring and the fervid summer, arrived constant messengers of love and hope from her Northern home, and the storied climes afar, where lingered and gloried Maurice and Jamie.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE Rev. Mr. Berry's church was six miles from The Grove. It was a small but commodious edifice, set back an hundred yards from the road; its white walls showing clean and cool through the trees. The benches, doors, and window-facings were painted in imitation of curled maple, and the pulpit was hung with scarlet damask; the aisles were uncarpeted, but immaculate from their weekly scouring. Bella had bowed in splendid temples, whose pomp and ornament did not inspire the reverence for holy things she felt as she took her seat in the congregation, one July Sabbath morning. The hickory and oak grew up to the very door-step, and stretched blinds of green tapestry over the windows. The interstices left by their trunks afforded glimpses of fragments of the landscape; wooded hills, corn-fields, the Parsonage, and a farm-house or two. The rumble of vehicles ceased; the "ladies' side" was filled, and the other sex were respectably represented by grey-haired and middle-aged planters and yeomanry.

Elder Snowden trod in the footsteps of the pastor up the aisle, to the right-hand side of the desk; deposited his hat beneath the bench; buried his face in his handkerchief for a decent minute; and then, his benevolent forehead ruddy with the reflection from the scarlet drapery, was ready to hear the invitations and admonitions issued from the sacred stand for the edification of his publican neighbours. At the heels of these ecclesiastical dignitaries, trooped a motley band, young and old; and the introductory hymn called in the remaining loiterers. Coachmen and footmen tethered their horses in the shade, and tip-toed into that end of the building which was railed off and marked for "coloured persons." The music was "congregational singing." A man, whom nobody ever styled the chorister, set and led the tune, and all, masters and servants, united in the song. The melodies were old, and not bettered by the gratuitous slurs added by the caprices of ten generations; but there was no want of spirit or volume.

Mr. Berry was not an orator, unless a sort of rugged eloquence, irrespective of rule or taste, and which generally succeeded in moving his hearers, could be deemed oratory. He broke to his people the unadulterated bread of the Word; the pampered epicure who could not digest it, must go on with his riotous living until, starving upon husks, he should bethink him of his Father's house. Bella had outgrown her girlish awe of him. She had seen his formality thawed at her mother's couch; had tasted the blessedness of the promises he spread for the refreshment of the sick and sorrowing; knew that there was generous sap in the heart of the harsh and knobbed tree.

He put himself to some inconvenience to speak with her after service. "Your mother is no worse, or I should not have seen you here," he said, with a grave smile. "Mary will be over to see her on Monday or Tuesday."

"We shall be happy to have her spend some days with us," answered Bella. "She has promised us a week's visit, for two months past."

"You must wait yet longer. I wish her to make some pastoral calls with me. There are a number of diseased and afflicted members to whom we must attend. Ah, my son!" as Eddy pressed through the crowd to tell

his sister that "Papa was ready,"—"you are growing up into a man. I hope you will likewise grow in grace."

Bella echoed the wish in her heart; but Eddy's stare of wonderment tested her command of her risibles. It was no trifling undertaking to get out of church. Mr. Berry extended his arm with stately civility; but their path was crossed at every third step by a parishioner, to pay his respects to the Pastor, or ascertain the state of Mrs. Snowden's health.

Mr. Snowden met them at the door.

"There are indications of rain, my daughter. Your mother will be uneasy if we are caught in the shower."

Concern for his own comfort was never expressed in that tone, or upon a public occasion.

"I have a word to say to you, brother Snowden," observed the minister, as they walked towards the chaise. "As you are in haste, I will defer it."

"By no means, sir. The clouds are not very near. I can spare a little time for you."

Bella was in the roomy chaise; Eddy upon his cricket in the foot; Mr. Snowden, reins and whip in hand, bent deferentially for the clerical communication.

"I may speak unreservedly in Bella's hearing," began Mr. Berry, in sincere compliment, "although this is a matter which I should dislike to have bruited abroad as yet. I have credible information, brother Snowden, that Miles Ray has fallen into intemperate habits, and that his disgrace is hooted at by the enemies of the cause."

The elder nodded a sorrowful confirmation of the report.

"You have no doubts as to the truth of the tale then?" said the minister.

"I grieve to say that I have had irrefragable proofs that he is a backslider, and upon a most slippery road."

"Is it probable that he can be reclaimed?" asked Mr. Berry.

"Barely possible. He has been reasoned with, prayed over, the end of his reckless dissipation displayed in all its terrors. He is wedded to his destroyer."

"So young and so hardened!" soliloquized the Pastor. "Is it, in your opinion, a case for the rigorous discipline of the church, brother Snowden?"

It was plain that it cost him a struggle to ask the question.

"The Scriptural directions for the treatment of offenders have been obeyed in all except the final letter," was Mr. Snowden's reply.

The minister, sterner in seeming than his confederate, still held back the sentence.

"If there were but a remote hope that he might be restored to the fold!" he said. "It is an awful responsibility to excommunicate one who has once borne and adorned the name of Christian!"

"It is, indeed, brother Berry; and the wheat and tares may grow together for awhile, without danger of infection. You are the better judge whether this is an exception to the toleration of the counterfeit until the harvest."

"You are convinced of his guilt, brother Snowden? Have you ever seen him intoxicated?"

"I have conversed with many who have," answered the cautious elder.

"So have I. Witnesses will be numerous. I thought that your observation might have adduced some extenuating evidence. I make the inquiry as a friend—not as the moderator of the judicatory which is to try him."

"Since you insist upon a reply, Mr. Berry, I must acknowledge that he was at my house last week, in a deplorable condition—quite beside himself."

The minister's countenance evinced his disappointment at the downfall of this trembling hope.

"Poor wretch!" he groaned. "'Not every one that saith Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom!'"

"If you do not hurry on, Mr. Snowden, you will get wet," said a gentleman in passing.

Mr. Berry drew back to let his elder mount the vehicle. He was standing in the same spot, downcast and thoughtful, when Bella glanced at him from the road. He was wounded to the quick by the apostasy of one who had given early and brilliant promise of useful piety. Bella's regret was tinctured with disapprobation of the proceedings against the erring. Miles Ray had been her school-mate. He was an impulsive, honourable youth, popular for his heart and talents. Society was about to spurn him now; but her seductions, more than his predilection to vice, were chargeable with the outrages for which he was to be ostracized. Bella's face tingled when Mr. Snowden alluded to the scene at The Grove. The cause of the visit should have protected young Ray from criticism. He was a noted Nimrod, and called by to leave some game for the invalid. He excused himself from alighting, upon the plea of fatigue and his sporting costume; but was overruled by the master of the house, and agreed to dine with him. Bella suspected that he had been drinking, although his behaviour was correct and gentlemanly. The host did not forego his customary glass of wine after dinner; and his urbane air—as he filled and refilled Miles's tumbler, smiling at his "queer fancy" of drinking it from the larger vessel—was as unlike the saint he looked and spoke to Mr. Berry, as the gambols of the cat about her thoughtless victim, are to the spring and growl with which she makes him sure. This idiosyncrasy of his felinity tormented Bella more than ever. Dark theories of the transmigration of souls encumbered her Sabbath musings. She even saw in his apprehensions of the coming storm the antipathy to water natural to the species. Mr. Snowden drove in the chaise his riding-horse, Selim, who was as portly and sleek as his master, and as much disinclined to indecorous haste. However, in consideration of this emergency, he abandoned his dignity and his jog-trot to such good purpose, that they were within a mile and a half of home when the shower overtook them. Mr. Monmouth's gate was just ahead, and the planter's stentorian lungs hailed them.

"Halloo! halt there! You'll get a precious ducking! Harry! Ned! John! scamper, you rascals, and take Mr. Snowden's horse!" He waddled out himself to carry an umbrella. A gentleman sheltered Bella with another, as she jumped from the chaise and ran into the house.

"Excuse my impoliteness in not speaking before, Clifford!" she laughed, shaking the spray from her dress.

She looked up. It was not Clifford Monmouth, but his elder brother! Surprise banished the blood from her cheeks; but a horde of memories drove it back.

"I did not know that you were here," she said. "When did you arrive? I did not see you at church."

Willard was equally embarrassed, although he was prepared for the meeting. "I came up last night, but did not go out. Are you very wet?"

Mrs. Monmouth ended the interview by bearing Bella off to her chamber. She was an amiable, motherly being, and loved her guest as well as if she had fulfilled the old contract and become her daughter. Her assiduities were the more tender now, because she magnified the pain she must feel at the encounter with her fickle son. Bella had oftentimes anticipated this event, and conjectured as to its effect upon herself; hoped and prayed that her strength might be suited to that day; but she had not expected the equanimity which superseded her confusion. She entered fully into Mrs. Monmouth's emotions, and embraced the first opportunity to assuage her fears.

Clifford, a lad of eighteen, knocked for admittance, while Bella was yet twisting her wind-blown ringlets into shape.

"He can come in," she said, as his mother bade him, "Be quiet, and not disturb a lady at her toilette."

"Did your brother tell you that I mistook him for you?" questioned Bella.

"A mighty compliment!" he returned, ruefully, "when there is a difference of seven years in our ages! I am a beardless boy, and he a careworn, yellow-skinned whiskerando, who, a stranger would take his oath, is forty!"

Mrs. Monmouth sighed unconsciously.

"But I did not see his face," said Bella. "He ran with me from the gate to the porch; and boots, especially when in motion, have no distinctive features to my eye. Besides, I was in an agony for the safety of my bonnet."

Mrs. Monmouth took courage by and by to impart further information.

"Adelaide is here," she said.

The words were in her mouth, as the auburn-aired Sultana sailed in. She made a deep courtesy to Bella, when her mother-in-law named her.

"I think we have met once before, Miss Conway. Have I the pleasure of seeing you well?"

"What have you been doing all day, Addie?" asked the lawless Clifford.

"Resting," she rejoined.

"And does a thirty mile journey fatigue you so desperately, that you must loll and sleep for twenty-four hours after it?"

"Clifford!" said his mother, "you must not suppose your sister capable of enduring as much as a strapping youngster like you. Your complexion is better than it was this morning, my love," she added to her son's wife.

Clifford laughed wickedly.

Some of Adelaide's colour, at least, was not artificial, and her voice arose with it.

"What do you mean?" she demanded of the boy.

"I said nothing," redoubling his merriment.

The incensed lady left the room.

"My son!" rebuked his mother, "you were very rude and unkind to your sister. You have no evidence that she paints."

"If she doesn't, Dame Nature is an execrable colourist. I did not require the peep into her window I had a while ago, to enlighten me as to the ground from which her carnations were transplanted to her cheeks. She was lounging on the bed, dressed in a wrapper, and reading a novel, when we got back from church. Willard spent the morning down at the old school house, Bob says. He was not worth 'fixing up' for; but when she heard that there were half-a-dozen beaux in the parlour, and saw Miss Bella's arrival, she bedizened herself for conquest."

"Clifford! Clifford!"

The humoured child was fearless. "I will hearken to you in most things, mother, but Addie's uppish ways wont go down with me. I never liked her, and there is no love lost. If you would speak out, you would confess the same. When I marry, my choice shall atone for Willard's misstep. Let me present to you your daughter-in-law elect."

He snatched a kiss from Bella, and ran out, his mischievous laugh ringing through the hall.

Again Mrs. Monmouth sighed.

"They will be inquiring for us in the drawing-room, dear," she said to Bella.

Not a vestige of Mrs. Willard's ill temper was traceable in the face whose artistically applied rouge challenged the full regards of Miles Ray and a more forward associate. She was ogling and flirting as recklessly as if her husband had never been created. He was conversing with other of the visitors; and Bella's furtive examination of him, effected while she talked to his father and brother, resulted in her subscribing to Clifford's portraiture. "Care-worn" and sallow he was; his eyes fierce and keen, or dull to apathy; his voice dry or peevish—the mother might well lament over the wreck of her eldest born. He and his lady were fashionably indifferent to each other; rather too distant, inasmuch as the first anniversary of the wedding-day was yet to be commemorated.

At table, some mismanagement stationed him opposite to Bella. Miles Ray separated him from Adelaide. Mrs. Monmouth and Mr. Snowden restrained the conversation within the range of legitimate Sabbath topics—a Puritanical restriction at which Adelaide cavilled sneeringly.

"And you really admire this tart, Berry? Barberry he should have been christened," she said to Miles.

"He is deficient in polish and tact, but is a man of parts and worth," was the rejoinder.

"I heard him once—when I was here Christmas—and dined at his house the same week. In public and in private he was alike odious to me," said Mrs. Willard, with a total contempt of good-breeding.

"And have you imbibed this dislike?" questioned Miles of Willard.

"I have not!" decidedly. "I esteem Mr. Berry's friendship—respect his intellect and character."

"You were not at church to-day."

"I did not absent myself because I considered his ministrations unprofitable."

His tone did not encourage inquiry.

"If you were more *au fait* to matrimonial polity, Mr. Ray, you would know that it is only necessary for me to advance a sentiment to elicit an adverse one from Mr. Monmouth," said Adelaide, bridling.

Miles was sophisticated enough to see that he was betwixt two fires, and to endeavour to smother the flames so long as he was in danger of being scorched.

"Your mother continues to mend, does she not, Miss Bella?" he asked, across the table.

She thanked him, and replied affirmatively.

"Many doubts and dreads are expressed about your valuable health," he pursued, "but your imprisonment leaves no marks upon you."

"I never saw her in better looks," remarked Clifford.

She was very pretty as she smiled blushingly at her admirer.

"I am perfectly well, and do not feel like a prisoner. I have as much freedom as I desire."

"Do you like nursing as well as you did teaching?" inquired Adelaide.

"When the patient is my mother, I prefer it to any other avocation," said Bella.

Bluff Mr. Monmouth interposed. "Bella is happiest wherever she can do most good. She always was so, from a wee thing."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Adelaide, scrutinizing her as she would have done a specimen of antediluvian fossil. "Is labour your Elixir of healing."

"One cannot be very miserable while busy," answered Bella.

"Then you were supremely happy in Richmond? You had no time for the horrors at Mrs. Bailey's?"

This unprovoked insult startled all at the board, who were acquainted with the history of the prior engagement.

Old Mr. Monmouth brought down his fist with an emphasis that made the dishes clatter, as he ordered a servant to "pass the decanters;" his wife's eyes filled with tears. Willard partly arose; but remembering himself, sat down, white to his lips with passion. Miles Ray spoke quickly to cover Bella's silence.

"Mr. Snowden—your lady's health."

In instant oblivion of self, Bella leaned forward to witness her stepfather's reception of the toast. The courtly Pharisee bowed to his "brother," and sipped the poison, which seemed to blush at the contact. Sonorous, through the red wine's leaping gurgle, the voices and the laughter, she heard the Pastor's measured accents. "'Not *every one* that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord!' shall enter the kingdom.'" She alone, of the whole company, refused the convivial cup. Mr. Monmouth rallied her upon her teetotalism, and Mr. Snowden dealt one of his felted taps.

"Bella is slightly strong-minded upon some questions; but we, hereabouts, believe in liberty of conscience, my dear sir."

The sun shone out after dinner. Mr. Monmouth had sent a messenger to allay Mrs. Snowden's anxiety; but her exemplary spouse would not remain from her, when he could conveniently seek her presence, and Selim was remanded to the shafts.

"You will come over very soon, Mrs. Monmouth?" said Bella. "The

sight or you invigorates mother; and you are the most intimate companion I have in the neighbourhood."

She was tying on her bonnet, and receiving no answer, she went on. "I should be low-spirited in my inexperience, but for the knowledge that you are near by—willing to answer my demands."

Mrs. Monmouth had dropped into a low chair, and, her head upon her knees, was sobbing bitterly. Bella sank down before her, and implored her to be comforted.

"You are the best, sweetest girl living!" cried the mother. "My boy, Bella! If he had known what wretchedness he was bringing upon himself and us!"

"There is hope still," said Bella. "She will be more mindful of his feelings when she sees how unhappy her petulance makes him. She has been caressed and flattered—and is so beautiful, that we must not complain that her head is somewhat turned. She will be wiser and better in time—if only to gratify you. Your love will win her to you."

"Never! None but a base heart could have insulted *you*—whom she had already injured."

"Not 'injured,' dear Mrs. Monmouth! The suffering she cost me was no disadvantage to me. I owe her no ill-will for it. Do not let a thought of me estrange you from Willard or from her."

"You are the dearest of peacemakers!" said Mrs. Monmouth. She took the serious, sympathizing face between her hands, and kissed it over and over.

"I must for ever love you as a daughter. May you be a thousand times happier than if you had married my son! But, O Bella! if you had, I should never have known this pang!"

Next to the devoted parent's, no heart bled more for Willard's domestic misery than did that he had exchanged for the bauble which disgusted him now. Her grief did not descry consolation in the recollection that his chastisement was deserved; the cloud enwrapping his life had no silver lining to reflect light upon hers. She could not forget that she had loved him; that hers was once the office of comforter. His name still found entrance into her prayers—not the old place—ranking above all the rest for whom it was her duty and delight to pray—yet to-night, she dwelt upon no other as long, or with such fervour of supplication.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Miss Bella! o-o-h! Miss Bella!" vociferated little Dick, scampering down the "Spring-lane," to overtake his young mistress, who was climbing the hill beyond.

She heard the pattering bare feet and panting breath, as distinctly as the call he laboured to make very loud. He shook a letter above his head, as an apology for his disrespectful halloo. Bella ran back to meet him.

"I am very much obliged to you, Dick! I should have been sorry to have missed it. How hot you are!"

"O, I don't mind dat. Marster, he jes' brung it home, and Mistis telled me to try and catch up wid you. You very welcome, ma'am," with a Chesterfieldian bow.

She dismissed him, and seated herself upon the rock above the bubbling spring, to inspect her treasure. It was the usual double letter, with the foreign post-mark. Jamie's was enthusiastic in its pictures of shrines, at which his poet-soul had paid its hoarded homage; of works of art and nature, visited and studied—always in company with "cousin Maurice."

"Without him, no pleasure would be complete," he wrote. "He is the wisest of Mentors; most congenial of comrades; the noblest and best of men! It pains me, dear sister, to think of my immeasurable obligations to him, and my inability to defray a millionth part of the debt. Heaven will surely reward him. We never can!"

And repeating, with moistened eyes, "We never can!" she broke the other seal. She read the letter once—cheek blanched, and limbs quivering; then a burning tide flooded her face; and hastily refolding the cause of emotions so conflicting, she bent her nervous unequal steps towards the trysting place of other times—the rustic tabouret by the waterfall. There, summoning all the memories of that early love; the outgushings of a heart, then unhackneyed by worldly pride or vanity; sitting where she had sat then—almost believing that she felt the pressure of his encircling arm, she read again the words which declared another's affection.

Maurice's letter was earnest, manly and sincere. He went back to the hour when a shy, frightened child, she became an inmate of his father's house, and gained love and esteem by her unobtrusive regrets for those she had left—and her sterling goodness. Passing over the intervening years, with a brief allusion to the destruction of hopes he had not owned to himself, until instructed in the truth by the anguish the intelligence of her pre-engagement had caused him, he touched upon the rupture of this, and his conduct in the affair.

"I excluded every consideration of self, dear Bella. You were suffering, and could relief have been bought by my life-blood, I would not have denied it. Placed by circumstances in a brother's capacity, I discharged the duties incumbent upon me, with a single eye to a sister's welfare. Had I never loved you before, the highest admiration and affection of my soul must have been excited by the spectacle of your heroism, since the passage in your experience to which I have referred. I do not ask you to forget that period. On the contrary, I would have you study faithfully, prayerfully, the tear-blotted leaves of the Past; and if the perusal awaken a solitary wish or sorrow, incompatible with the free bestowal of the heart upon him who woos its later love—let me be your brother still. Better thus, than that a sad ghost, although seldom and faintly visible, should wave apart those who, in name, are united."

The rivulet sang and gurgled at her feet, and its chant was of by-gone hours. Her imagination supplied the tones which blended with it then. The sunshine strung gems upon every leaf that bowed to the waters; lit up the bright gold tracery of the love-vine net-work. The oblique beams could be endured, since it had flourished all day in the damp shade. There

was a volume of unwritten poetry in Bella's nature, and she was hearkening to its teachings. She remembered the salt tears, showered into the purling stream of the girl's love; bitter tributes which, how tranquilly soever it might have flowed on through subsequent years, must have robbed it of its beaded transparency for ever; that the delicate plants of trust and holy joy had withered beside the turbid waters. She shuddered yet, at the remembrance of the bruised and blackened tendrils—sheltered so long with pious care, in the sanctuary of fresh and unpolluted breasts—flung forth into the glare of day, to be the jeer and pity of vulgar eyes.

The mourning for the "broken dream"* had been grievous and prolonged; but the heart! the heart! could not that be given in its pristine youth and integrity, into the firm guardianship of him who solicited it? Was it not his right? Oh! how like the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land," had been his protecting love to her dying spirit, from the moment in which he had cut away the poisoned flesh which had endangered her life, up to this very hour! As the aloe, planted near the perishing bread-fruit tree, causes it to revive, bud, blossom, and bear anew—so his affection had raised her to a new and more glorious existence. He had saved her body from sickness, perhaps from death—her heart from the living sepulchre of misanthropy and despair—this cheerful surrender of her all left her still in his debt. Thankfully would the wandering bird fold her wings beside so noble and dear a mate!

A sentence caught her eye.

"For four years, dearest, I have carried in my bosom a picture, copied from one you had given Isabel. The painted ivory would seem a cold companion for one who only lives for those he loves; yet it is more precious to me than the society of faultless beauties, or communion with the most cultivated genius. Unlike most men, I have never loved an ideal woman. I saw you before Fancy had portrayed mine, and have not found occasion to look for a more worthy model."

Had any man, except himself, penned those lines, she would have regarded them as extravagance or mockery;—he could neither exaggerate nor deride. She, the impersonation of his ideal! With his proud fondness for his matchless sister, he had elevated her—so inferior in her own estimation—to a level with himself!

The waves danced, and sang, and flashed faster and brighter—laughing and whispering to each other as they ran, of happy days to come; and the eyes, looking into them, beamed with love and gladness.

The farewell glories of the sunset were deserting the tree-tops, when a rustling in the copse behind her awoke her from her trance. The low boughs were roughly parted, and a man emerged from their shadow. He stopped in thought or perplexity, and she had leisure to observe him narrowly before he perceived her, standing as she did within the rose-hedge. He was young, tall, and so ferociously bearded, that only the upper part of his countenance appeared human. His dress was cut in the extreme of the Parisian mode; upon one ungloved hand was an enormous seal-ring,

* "It is not so much a broken heart you have to mourn, as a broken dream."
IK MARVEL.

and a flashy watch-chain crossed his vest. He was a gentleman-loafer, perhaps a gambler; and Bella drew further into the bushes as he approached her covert.

He made another pause at the brook.

"These confounded by-paths!" he said. "After all, I might as well have gone by the high road. They told me it was but two miles through, be hanged if it isn't five!"

He tried the mossy bank with his foot, but checked the intended bound to the other side.

"The old fox's den may not lie that way. Only let me unearth him—sha'n't I shell out his cash! Ha!" as he discovered the auditor of this singular soliloquy.

His hand went up to his hat, in involuntary courtesy. Something in the action and in his voice as he accosted her, was familiar to Bella. He eyed her, too, in curious recognition.

"I beg your pardon, madam; but can you direct me to the residence of Mr. Snowden?—The Grove, I believe it is called."

"If you will follow this stream to the spring, you will strike a path which leads to the house," she replied, in as self-possessed a tone as she could assume.

He bowed, advanced some paces in the direction designated, halted, and looked over his shoulder at her—the assured gaze of an acquaintance who is about to make himself known. A whoop and a bark resounded from the bank above him, and Eddy, escorted by Dick, Jake and his Newfoundland, appeared upon the summit. They stopped in surprise at the sight of the stranger, but he passed through the group without a word of notice, and disappeared at the bend of the brook. Bella was inexpressibly relieved. She welcomed the playfellows as deliverers, kissed Eddy, patted Carlo's back, and the hatless pates of the inseparable Ethiops.

"Who is that ugly man, sister?" queried Eddy, to whom such hirsute samples of creation's lords were rare apparitions.

"I do not know, my dear; some one who wanted to see your papa."

"I thought he was a be-yar!" said Jake, his eyeballs beginning their retreat into the sockets. "I tell you I was skeered!"

"He was more like a tiger," answered Eddy, taking his sister's hand to return home, "but I wasn't afraid, if he did frown at me."

"Oh! you are mistaken, I think," said Bella. "He would not harm you or any of us, but I should not like to meet him again, myself. He frightened me, coming out of the woods so suddenly. I was very glad to see my little brother running towards me."

"You know I wouldn't let him hurt you—didn't you?" cracking his whip, manfully. "I'd just like to see him try to scare you! I mean to ask papa about him, when I get to the house."

"It's most dark now," said Dick. "I reckon he'll stay all night."

Bella feared as much. If the exclamation she had overheard were any clue to his business, she judged him to be a dun, and one who was likely to be pertinacious in his requests. The nearest public-house was five miles off, and a pedestrian, unacquainted with the country, could not be turned out of doors at this late hour.

Aunt Hagar was waiting—tray and keys in hand, for Bella "to give out supper." The oracle was not in her finest humour.

Every minute increased the chances that Don Incognito Moustachio, as she dubbed him, would lodge that night in his present quarters; but she had a saying and a smile for each of the household; and actually broke out into a merry carol, while superintending the housekeeping and making her mother's tea.

"You have a fine bloom this evening, dear," said Mrs. Snowden. "I like to see you in such health and spirits. If I could only feel strong again!"

"You will soon, mamma. We shall be running races upon the lawn by next summer."

Bella stepped out upon the piazza, and confronted the stranger.

"My daughter, Miss Conway, Mr. Robinson," said Mr. Snowden.

He spoke hurriedly, without the pompous mouthing he affected in his ordinary speech.

Mr. Robinson made a profound obeisance, and indulged himself in a fixed stare, combining inquiry with what Bella regarded as unparalleled impudence.

"I trust that I did not alarm you this afternoon, Miss Conway. I should have been more careful in my movements, if I had dreamed of finding a lady in that romantic bower."

His mincing lisp was more disagreeable than the downright vulgarity of the soliloquy at the stream.

"It is unsafe for you to roam alone about the plantation, Bella," said her step-father. "In future, I desire that you take an attendant. Is supper ready?"

Bella's coldness and the host's compulsory politeness did not incommode Mr. Robinson. He ate a hearty meal, and apparently considered it obligatory upon him to remunerate his entertainers by his conversational charms. The Southwest—Louisiana and New Orleans, in particular, had, according to him, been favoured heretofore by his residence and patronage.

"The greatest State in the Union, sir! in soil, climate, civilization—everything that promotes man's wealth and contentment."

"But the yellow fever in the summer!" objected Mr. Snowden.

"A mere newspaper and traveller's bagatelle, my dear, sir! I have had it in its most malignant form, for three seasons in succession, and upon my word of honour as a gentleman, I never laid by for a day. 'Robinson!' the fellows would say to me—'you are a full-blown primrose to day'—and indeed I was as yellow as any lemon, and felt a little giddy, but the sickness was nothing to speak of."

"Ah!" said Mr. Snowden, afraid it seemed to smile incredulity at this outrageous fabrication. "We have been misinformed then. It is the prevailing notion here, that the ravages of the plague were never worse than those of the scourge which decimates our Southern cities."

"Entirely a mistake! The principal perils to one's life in those regions are street-fights and lynching. If a man defrauds another, the cheated meets him upon the pavement, in open daylight, and demands satisfaction, pistol or bowie-knife in hand. If the assailed party has pluck—which does

not often happen, Mr. Snowden,—I never saw a swindler who was not an infamous coward. If he has spunk, I say, he shows fight, and may be, empties his friend's skull, as he has done his purse. But it is a law-loving community, and if the affair gets wind, the survivor is swung up to the nearest lamp-post and his property confiscated to the wife and children of the plundered and murdered man. That is more rational than dancing attendance in a court of chancery for a dozen years—eh, sir?"

Bella thought that her step-father did not enjoy this story.

"Litigation is a tedious and uncertain process," he said. "Will you be helped to peaches and cream, Mr. Robinson? Our fruit is tolerable, although it may be flavourless to you, after tropical productions. My daughter, please send the cream to Mr. Robinson."

"'How dear to my heart is the home of my childhood!'" sentimentalized that individual. "This is my own, my native State, sir; and I retain a partiality for all that grows upon her soil. I was amazed to hear, in Richmond, that they imported peaches from Baltimore and New Jersey. You have many friends in town, Miss Conway?"

"A few, sir."

"Yet I was assured of your popularity with a large circle. I had the honour of an introduction to a lady, whose raptures when you were the subject were boundless."

He waited for her to inquire the name, but she said nothing.

Mr. Snowden was emphatically fidgety.

"What proportion of the population of New Orleans are foreigners, Mr Robinson?"

"Nine-tenths, sir"—then to Bella—"I speak of Miss Ellis. You resided with her for some time, did you not?"

'Yes, sir."

"She is a most original person"—with a little laugh—"she amused me prodigiously—but interested me in the end, when she rehearsed your transcendent virtues and—"

"The society of that city resembles that of Havana, does it not?" said Mr. Snowden, throwing the bait into his teeth, with an agonized jerk.

The wily fish would not bite.

"Very much, sir. Miss Seymour is a charming young lady, Miss Conway—vivacious, yet discreet. She will vote for your canonization at your death. She related several pleasing anecdotes, illustrative of your character and life."

"Eddy, my son—the Bible!" Mr. Snowden pushed aside his plate. It was his practice to have family worship immediately after breakfast and tea; and Bella rang the bell for the servants. They formed in a solemn row near the door. Mr. Snowden cleared his throat; drank a glass of water; glanced at his visitor in explanation or excuse, and commenced the chapter. Bella's eyes were also drawn towards Mr. Robinson. He had tilted his chair against the wainscot; was swinging his foot idly, the point of the varnished boot scraping the floor; and his teeth gleamed under his black moustache in demoniacal mirth. His look repeated the epithet she had overheard him apply to the saint-like host. He evidently relished the farce exceedingly—pleasure marred, in some measure, by the respectful deportment of most of the audience.

Bella escaped to her mother's room the moment she arose from her knees.

"Have you found out who your Don is!" asked Mrs. Snowden, as his laugh and voice sounded from the porch.

"A Mr. Robinson—an ill-bred man," answered Bella.

"What does he want here?" inquired the invalid of her husband, who had just entered.

"He is from Louisiana, and his visit relates to some of my speculations out there," was the laconic reply.

He did not wait for more questions.

"Louisiana!" said Mrs. Snowden. "O yes! your father has a sugar plantation there; and if I recollect rightly, his partner's name is Robinson."

The tale was plausible, yet Bella disbelieved it from beginning to end. There was some mystery in this matter. The stranger's significant notice of herself, his familiarity with the incidents of a life which, if he were the person he pretended to be—could have no earthly interest for him; Mr. Snowden's servile civility; his terror whenever she was addressed, or anything pertaining to Virginia was upon the tapis; Robinson's malicious delight in sporting with his alarms; his language at the creek—these were so many threads of a matted skein; but there was method and mischief there.

Mr. Snowden looked gratefully at his step-daughter, as she excused herself from going to the table in the morning. She would breakfast with her mother in her chamber, she said.

"You are a prudent girl, Bella. I would rather you shunned this Robinson—should be displeased were he to presume upon your casual acquaintance."

"But why did you invite him to stay all night, my dear?" was his wife's pertinent query.

"My dear Agnes! business men cannot choose their tradespeople. The ablest overseer is not the most finished gentleman."

Bella was at an upper window as the "partners" exchanged adieux.

"You don't ask me to come again," said Robinson with a leer. "That isn't over friendly."

"I shall be happy to see you, if you ever travel this way," replied Mr. Snowden, obsequiously.

"It is not just the thing to tell a man that he lies, when one is under his roof," retorted the other, "or I would comment upon what stuck in your throat as you delivered it. Don't be frightened. I don't think your urgency will entice me back shortly—if mine don't! When the trip shall be advisable for my health, I may repeat it. My respects and farewells to the ladies. I should have been pleased to have seen your wife. She might not have had such important reasons as her husband for cutting an old friend. *Bon jour.*"

Mr. Snowden trod the piazza unceasingly, until his horse was saddled for his ride. Forgetting, or purposely omitting his "Good morning" to his wife, he rode off, and was absent all day.

At nightfall he walked into Mrs. Snowden's apartment.

"O, my dear!" she exclaimed, "I have been dreadfully uneasy about

you. You behaved so strangely this morning, and were gone so long! I was certain you were sick—that you had fainted in the woods, or on the road."

"What a foolish thing it is!" he said, saluting her. His voice was thick, and Bella could see through the twilight that he was pale.

"Something ails you," sighed the wife. "If you are not threatened with the typhoid fever, you have a load on your mind."

"I am not well, my dear," he answered, pettishly, "and it will not help to cure me for you to fret yourself into a nervous attack. I will take some medicine to-night."

"I do hope Mr. Robinson never will show his whiskers here again," Mrs. Snowden said, leaning back in her husband's arms, soothed by his protestations and false composure. "I know he annoyed you."

So did Bella; she was pursued by a presentiment of evil. She ransacked her recollection for the features and name, which she could not but think were secreted somewhere in the archives of her brain; sifted every remark and word of the mysterious forerunner of the calamity, to determine what she dreaded. That his errand had reference to disreputable conduct in the master of The Grove, she did not doubt. His farewell had, to her perception, a latent menace of exposure, averted, but not repented of; and she trembled at his allusion to her mother.

That the sins of the husband might not be more wrathfully visited upon the head bending towards its final pillow, was the daughter's hourly prayer.

The speck upon the horizon did not enlarge; and all except Bella and him who would be most imperilled by its bursting fury, forgot it. He was never quite himself in her presence. He felt that he was watched, and, as if to purchase her forbearance, thwarted no more of her schemes; slackened, and eventually ceased his exertions to regain his domination in the sick room. He spent a great deal of time abroad, but the amendment in the consumptive's condition and the society of her nurse exculpated him from charges of neglected home duties. He was still an honoured guest at the boards of the leading men of the county; the chairman of political and benevolent meetings; the devout hearer of the Word, in his high place in the synagogue—for "man seeth not as GOD seeth."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE August day which was an era in Bella's history, was not without its event for our scarcely less beloved Isabel. Leaving her parents and Lilly contentedly established in Maurice's parsonage, she had come to pass the hottest month of summer in Mr. Finley's sea-side villa. Her sister chided her at their meeting, for her loss of colour and her reed-like figure, but had steady faith in the efficacy of the sea-bathing and exercise upon the beach, to restore the one, and strengthen the other. There was no repining sentimentalism about Isabel. Escorted by her nephews, sturdy urchins of six and four years, she drove out, acted the mermaid among the breakers, and climbed rocks—the nonpareil of playmates—until her face was as brown as

a nut, and the blood filled out her veins, in as pure and red a stream as swelled theirs.

She was writing on this afternoon. The window overlooked the ocean—purpled and gilded in long, slow-moving lines by the sunset, and dotted with white sails. The wind had breathed sluggishly all day, but as the "glowing axle" touched the water, a sudden breeze shivered the broad beams drifting upon the ridges of the waves, into bright-hued pencils, and sent the idle craft rocking through the brilliant confusion.

Isabel closed the desk. Her smiles, so frequent when there were those by who prized their light, never visited eye or lip in solitude. She had written earnestly—thought and feeling succeeding each other upon her countenance; but the sportive grace with which she had worn her priestess mantle, was no more. Wrapping it carefully over her heart, she wrought diligently—not joyfully. She maintained a stern guard over herself, lest one drop of the wormwood of her cup should ooze into those she brimmed and wreathed with garlands for others. She was not a sinless creation, impervious to personal woes. The mortal rebelled at the blight of its best hopes; the woman wept over the sadly-vacant pedestal in her heart of hearts. We have seen in a nature as noble as Bella's one love destroy every trace of a former; and this, by a merciful provision of Providence, is a general law of foiled or mistaken affections; but Isabel could not look forward to a similar consolation. Her attachment to Frank Lyle had incorporated itself with her character and being—a love as innocent and beautiful as an angel's; not concealed—because she saw not shame, but honour in it. She had never said—"The end—what shall it be?" As they had always loved one another more than all the world beside, they must continue the same through time and in eternity. A less refined or more prudent woman would have analyzed this feeling, and extirpated it before it had grown beyond her control—Isabel had rested, without question or fear, in the conviction that she was as dear to him as he was to her. She knew him for her soul-mate: the man's duller instinct erred. Upon her had come the penalty of his mistake, and she bore it in silent fortitude.

She did not delude herself with false philosophy—unfounded hopes. She knew that at the close of life—come when it might—the deserted chamber of to-day would be as empty as now; that upon the walls, the frescoes his hand had painted would glow as freshly—yet the world was not a desert. Looking to God for "strength to live," she threw herself, heart and mind, into the work of increasing the happiness, alleviating the woes of her kind. Her gift remained—spurned no longer that it had been fatal to her most cherished joys, but valued and cultivated as her comforter. Her writings gave no evidence of her changed life. She sang still—"There is hope and peace and blessedness in store for you"—and muffled the plaintive echo, wailed up from the deep recesses of the woman's heart—"but not for me!" She had no cause to waver in her trust in the truth and goodness of her brethren; and every page and line inculcated the enlarged charity, learned while sitting at the feet of Him "who spake as never man spake"—and oh! lesson fraught with reproof to thee, murmuring misanthrope! who suffered as never man suffered.

The world cried, "Happy and fortunate!" the hypercritics and jealots composing the minority, "only hoped her prosperity might endure." Even

the sharp-sighted and knowing ones, who make an author's published works the data from which they compute the trials and events of his personal history—who will have it, that this actual and private experience is the inkhorn which feeds the morbid curiosity of their narrow, credulous minds; who find no warrant within themselves for believing that one can estimate the depth and fulness of human love, by sounding the yet untroubled pool of his own capacity for affection—that a nicely-strung and sympathetic instrument may yield up strains of melting woe, if the sigh of another's sorrow is wafted across its chords—even they—the spiders among readers—surmised erroneously respecting the minstrel, upon whose harp-strings neither dust nor rust ever accumulated. They were as ignorant as the printer, who grumbled at the blur in the middle of a racy paragraph. What was it to him that a tear had fallen there?

The eagle was the eagle yet, although her wing might flag wearily ere the eyrie was gained. Such a season was the present. The blended beauties of sky and ocean saddened, instead of diverting her thoughts. Year after year Frank had viewed the scene with her; this summer his place was elsewhere. She imaged them both—himself and Alma—she, indescribably lovely in her childish glee at having him near her, hanging on his arm, gazing into eyes, full and radiant with the most ardent love of his soul—love she could only measure by hers, which was bestowed upon every petitioner, and in nearly equal bounties. And swift uprose the foe most inimical to man's contentment—the phantom that oftenest drives the haunted one to madness—"Might have been!"

Twilight fell with the dew; the stars shone in the blue above and beneath—but dew nor star-gleam blessed her spirit. At the foot of the hill upon which the house was erected, and within ten rods of the garden wall, ran the one unsightly object in the landscape—a railroad, along which the ponderous locomotive whirled its noisy train, morning, noon, and night. She watched for it now, as the sick man ceases his groaning to count the strokes that for him but herald another hour of suffering.

She heard the boom and rush reverberated from the rocks; saw the red spark, larger and brighter each second—but from the opposite quarter arose an answering roar; a second flaming eye glared defiance upon its gigantic opponent.

"O, mercy! they are lost!"

A deafening crash, and a horrible din of screams and yells rent the welkin.

Mr. Finlay was quickly at the scene of the disaster, to ascertain the extent of the damage, and render what aid he could to the victims. Isabel and her sister went with him as far as the garden fence, which overlooked the point where the collision had occurred.

"An excursion train passed this morning," said Mrs. Finlay. "Its return must have occasioned the accident. What negligence!"

Isabel stood upon the low wall, straining her vision anxiously in the direction of the tumult. Torches flared and tossed; there were hoarse shouts of command and shrieks of pain—a wild hubbub she never forgot. Two flambeaux parted from the crowd and ascended the hill. Behind them were four forms, stooping under a heavy weight.

"They are bringing some one up here," said Isabel, in an awed voice,

stepping to the ground. "We must go to the house and prepare to receive them."

The group tramped up the gravel walk in fearful silence.

"It must be a corpse," whispered Mrs. Finlay.

"Mary!" said her husband, from the lowest step of the piazza—"Isabel there? He is not dead—but go in—both of you."

"Isabel pressed forward.

"*Who* is not dead? Why am I not to see him?"

"The torch-bearers had thrown down their lights, and she followed the men as they bore their burden to a chamber. They laid him upon the bed. With one cry, she flung herself upon her knees at his side, and parted the hair upon the blood-stained brow.

"Frank! O Frank!"

Was this the answer to the selfish prayer which cried out against another's possession of him? In all the horror of the moment, this thought smote her heart.

Some one put her aside. It was the surgeon.

She grasped his arm. "He will not die! Say that he will not!"

"I hope not," was the reply; "but I cannot tell, if you do not permit me to examine him."

She waited without the chamber-door, listening to every sound. Twice the wounded man groaned, and her hand was upon the bolt. Another moan, and she would have risked everything to be with him; but instead, she heard the physician's voice,—

"His situation is very critical. Should fever ensue——"

She lost the rest. Upon the spot where she had grieved Heaven with her desperate demand for the love, "without which she could not—*would* not exist"—she knelt now to pray for his life—to vow to resign him without a murmur, to his betrothed; to walk on her solitary way cheerfully, gratefully—without a longing for the irrevocable Past, or aspiration after prohibited earthly bliss—if he were but spared!

Mr. Finlay called her.

"He does not suffer much now," he said, "but his senses have not returned, and there is danger of fever. I am obliged to go back to the station. Will you assist Mary in watching? I shall be at home by eleven o'clock."

Frank's features were placid, and, but for his irregular respiration, he might have appeared to be sleeping soundly until near morning. The surgeon had looked in again, and appointed a third call at daylight; Mrs. Finlay had retired to her chamber, and her husband slumbered upon a lounge in the sick-room. Only Isabel was awake as the patient stirred and spoke. At the first movement she was upon her feet, and bending over him.

He muttered, with a frown of pain or distress. She laid her hand upon his forehead.

He smiled. "Alma!" he said, softly—and then a whispered "Darling!"

"'I have vowed, and will not go back!'" uttered the girl's ashy lips, as she lifted her eyes to heaven.

Fever and delirium had set in. They raged day and night, until with the sinking of the angry fire, life seemed ready to go out also. He dwelt

continually upon his recent visit. While the hot current pulsed most frightfully, menacing brain and heart with overflow, he was roaming through odorous meadows and beside pleasant waters—ever with Alma, the name repeated oft and again, coupled with every phrase of endearment. Isabel was not forgotten.

"I must not neglect her, dearest," said he. "She has been a faithful sister to me; I love her next to yourself. She is at the sea-side now, and misses her brother—the dear, noble-hearted girl! I must rob you of one day, that I may give it to her."

And again—"Hers is a glorious gift. She merits the fame she has won—and more; yet, my precious one, your heart-letters, filled with stories of your simple joys and peaceful home, whose beginning and whose end is—'I love you!' are more interesting to me than the finest passages from any other pen. She reigns—queen of song and eloquence—adored, beautiful sovereign! In my home will live a loving wife—worth an hundred empires!"

A wan creature—her large eyes hollow with watching and weeping, bathed his head; shook up the heated pillows; administered patiently the nauseous potions he refused to swallow, except after much coaxing and stratagem. If a "Queen," she wore sackcloth, and for him.

One morning, the dispersed bands of thought sought and regained their citadel. Isabel had just returned to her post, after an hour of broken slumber. At her kiss upon his emaciated hand, he opened his eyes—clear with rational, affectionate light.

"Isabel!"

O! was not this ample recompence for agony and toil? Her name his first utterance upon his awakening to reason and life!

He had manifested a perverse preference for her above his other nurses in all his wanderings—sometimes addressing her as Alma, sometimes by her proper name; and from the commencement of his recovery, was never quiet if she were away. Her versatility of talent admirably qualified her for the solace of a convalescent. She read, sang, sketched, and, what he liked best, talked for him. As his amanuensis, his correspondence—his letters to Alma not excepted, passed through her hands. She had written to Illinois shortly after the accident, communicating the intelligence, but so guardedly as not to raise unavailing fears. "He had received an injury which disabled him from using his right hand for a while," she said; and although Alma's epistles expressed concern and sympathy, they contained proof of her happy ignorance of his danger. The love whose care had, under Providence, rescued him from death, saved the one dearest to him from anguish and suspense more insupportable than bereavement.

His paper was ably conducted. She wrote the leading editorials, from his dictation, generally—or, if he were overpowed by debility or slumber, she dashed off the required article—vigorous and pungent as he could have made it—with a felicity of figure and expression all her own.

"My good genius," he fondly termed her. In "the world which sets this right," perhaps this was to be her office.

Frank's easy-chair stood by the seaward window of his apartment. He sat there one day, his eager regards fixed upon some object without; but it was not ocean, or beach, or fertile hill-side. Isabel was gone to the post-

office; and with an invalid's unreasonableness, he had begun to expect her back before she was fairly out of sight. He tried to read, to sleep, to lose the recollection of her errand in the survey of the grand panorama he was never weary of studying; his eyes turned from all to the foot-path winding down the rocky descent. His impatience was pardonable, it being the day for Alma's letter, in answer to one he had written himself; an effort of his slender stock of strength, which his nurse would not have allowed him to make for any one else. She would not have mailed it, had she known that its principal topic was herself; that two and a half of its three pages were covered with praises of her, who he averred, "If of earthly birth, was untainted by a mortal fault or weakness; whose heart was the sea, whose intellect the sun."

"My gratitude," he said, "is above the reach of pen or language. If you love me, darling, love and respect her as I do—more, you cannot."

The heads of Willy and Maurice Finlay at last appeared above the bank. Frank stood up to catch a glimpse of their aunt. She glanced at his window as soon as it could be seen, and held up the tiny packet. Speeding over the lawn with the step of a gazelle, she was in the chamber, smiling and breathless."

"Did you not think me an intolerable laggard?"

"No; I fear you have fatigued yourself by your haste."

"Not in the least. I should have been here a quarter of an hour ago—but the mail was not open when we arrived at the office. I am pleased that your letter came punctually."

She untied her straw hat, and put it away with her scarf; closed a shutter through which the sun was making bold advances, and seated herself at her work-stand.

Frank was attent upon his reading. Alma's epistolary style was a trifle more stiff than her conversation, but in spirit and matter resembled it.

"PRAIRIE HOUSE, September 15th, 18—.

"MY OWN BEST, DARLING LOVE:—

"Your dear, *sweet* letter was handed me on my return home yesterday. I was so delighted to behold your handwriting again. I shall be easy about you now that you are able to write to me yourself, for although Isabel was very kind and good to act as your scribe, her letters did not seem as *natural* and *precious* to me as yours, my love. I have been spending several days in Chicago, dear one, at my uncle's. You know you saw him while you were here. Although the town is said to be so unpleasant and unhealthy in summer, I had a *charming* time. Uncle lives upon the outskirts of the city, in a most beautiful place, and has a lovely garden, stocked with the best fruit and most beautiful flowers. My cousin Emily and myself enjoyed each other's company *exceedingly*. She is a very dear and intimate friend. I am so sorry she was away from home while you were with us. I have told her of our engagement, dearest, in the *strictest confidence*. We sat up one night until twelve o'clock, talking about you. She is perfectly *captivated* by my description of your manners and mind. I showed her your likeness, but told her that it *did not begin* to do you justice—as indeed it does not, love. Of course, we had beaux in abundance every

evening; and who do you suppose was among the most devoted of mine? I know you are laughing already, for you guess at once that it was Harry Eaton. He has altered *very much*, is now absolutely handsome, and very gentlemanly in his manners. He teased me a good deal about my 'Philadelphia beau,' as did all the others, but Em and I contrived, without positively denying my engagement, to blind them *completely*. Harry is doing very well, uncle says. I wonder if he ever sends any *Valentines* now-a-days. How could I ever have thought that *ridiculous* one such fine reading! I found it in my portfolio the other day, and had a hearty laugh over it all by myself. Then, I liked Harry as well as I did you, darling. Does it not seem strange to think of it, now? I have rode on horseback frequently since you left us; but have not enjoyed my rides as I did those taken with you. Indeed, dear one, *nobody* can ever take your place with me. I cried myself to sleep every night for a fortnight, after Isabel wrote to me about that *dreadful* collision. I thought then, my love, that I would have given *anything in the world* to be with you and nurse you; but as it has ended so happily, I dare say it is as well that I was here, especially as you had such *excellent* nursing. I should have been so *terrified* and *distressed*, that I should have needed care as much as you did, dearest. I have neglected my books somewhat lately, but you are too good to scold at me for it, and if you will forgive me *this once*, darling, I will be very studious in future. I am half through Longfellow's Poems, and think them very *sweet and pretty*. I finished the 'Essays of Elia,' the week before I went to uncle's. I met with a gentleman there, who talked to me about the book. He said it was rather an uncommon one for a young lady to read; that we generally liked trashy novels best. I thought to myself that my reading was advised by a *very uncommon man*—as you are, darling, in spite of all you may say to the contrary. I get your paper regularly, my love, and read it through from beginning to end—the editorials, I mean. You say that they have been written, during your illness, by Isabel—dictated by you or composed by herself. I am *so much* obliged to her for her care of you, my own precious one! Thank her for me, and kiss her, too—*if she will let you*.

"It is almost time for papa to go to town, dearest, so I must conclude this *immediately*. Write again very soon, and believe me for ever your own constant, devoted, affectionate, ALMA."

Isabel was covering a ball for one of her nephews. Frank looked at her for some moments before she was aware of the cessation of his interesting employment. She was paler and not so robust as she had been a month previous, but with a chastened expression, which gave a higher cast to her beauty.

"To suffer and be strong!" What whispered the words to the observer? The sweet, grave composure of each feature, told of all feminine tenderness united to elevating thought; there were no lines upon forehead or cheek; yet he could not divest himself of the impression, that the chisel of Sorrow had retouched the pure contour of the profile; and the slight compression

of the lips, reminding him of crushed roses, suggested an exquisitely painful image, that of broken, trampled affections.

She caught his eye, and noticed that the letter lay folded upon the table. She smiled. "What does Birdie say?"

"She sends love and thanks to you. Like myself, she cannot find words to say how grateful she is. She says I must give you something else, which she doubts whether you will receive kindly."

"If my conjecture as to the gift is true, I will take it second-hand from her, next Spring," was the laughing response.

She stitched together the gores of red and black cloth; the smile playing like a sun-ray over the roses. She sang as she sewed—hummed in low tones as musical as the song of the breeze over Eolian wires—

> "Long, long be the heart with such memories filled,
> Like the vase in which roses have once been distilled;
> You may break, you may ruin the vase if you will,
> But the breath of the roses will linger there still."

The murmur of the deep, lifting its million hands to its Maker in its noon-day prayer, filled up the pauses.

Frank listened and sighed. "Cannot you suspend that sewing for a little while, Isabel?" he inquired, wearily.

"Willingly! Maurice knows nothing of his present; therefore an hour earlier or later can make no difference."

She pushed a stool to his feet. "Now, what shall I do for your Highness' divertisement? Will you have a chapter of Corinne, or some less barbarously pronounced English?"

"Give me your hand," said he.

She obeyed; smiling still; her sisterly eyes resting unabashed upon his. Their quiet was disturbed as she marked the changes in orbs which ever bore to the surface truthful reports of the heart's hidden main.

"Isabel!" he said, finally. "Do you remember a conversation we had last Spring, shortly after Norah Moore's death?"

The roses were lilies—crushed pitilessly for a second. "I do," she answered.

"To-day, dearest sister—noblest of women! this hour I could again bow before you, a suppliant for pardon—not for an unknown offence—but because then and since I have so slandered the richest heart that ever moved to the breath of grief or love. I was a dreamer then, Isabel—puffed up with my own happiness; conceited in my theories of mortal bliss and the means of obtaining it. I wished to see you happy. In all my egotism and blind folly, this was the moving principle of my action"—

"I am sure of it, Frank!" she interrupted. "Say no more. If you failed then to sympathize with one of my many phases of emotion, the fault was mine—not yours."

"No! dear one! My accusations and warnings recur to me now with the sting of scorpions. I said—I could wish my tongue had been palsied ere it framed the lie! I said, Isabel, that you were killing your heart with your intellect!"

"You thought so, Frank."

"Yes! like a besotted fool, whose meaner spirit could not breathe in the

ether in which yours lived. This lesson has been cheaply bought. I should have lain in the jaws of Death twice as long, and then my punishment would have been too lenient. Isabel, can you forgive me?"

"No, Frank! I cannot forgive a crime, when I deny that any has been perpetrated. I do not find a bill against you upon this indictment."

She spoke playfully, but he could not reply. Sheltering his eyes with one hand, while the other enclasped hers, he was still.

The roses were crushed—crushed! until life appeared to forsake them. The moan of the sea, with its swelling and dying cadence, flowed and ebbed through the room. Was it to either of them an emblem of the gulf which divided their lives? To her it may have been; but it was spanned by a bow of promise—built of the "lovely dreams lifted into Heaven."

"Frank!" The sisterly eyes were all tranquil once more. "Are you grieving for me? Do you still imagine that your words inflicted a wound which has not yet closed?"

"How harsh and unfeeling I have seemed, Isabel! You have been unhappy. Something of my old skill in reading your heart has returned to me. Your garments are whiter, but because they have passed through the fire. You have had some secret grief which I have been too stupid—too selfish to see. If I could but hear you say that it is removed!"

She disengaged herself, and went into the adjacent apartment.

"Here is my answer," she said, coming back, and placing a manuscript volume in his hand. "You shall peruse this leaf of my heart-history, since it will quell your doubts."

The book was her journal, the only confidante of her every thought. Her hand was upon his; that holy smile shed lustre upon the record of the preceding evening:

"A pearly mist, like a young bride's veil,
Folds softly o'er the sea;
And sportsome waves, that all the day
Have flashed and danced in glee—
Each rippling smile now passed away
With the autumn's sun's red glare—
Lie hushed—as happy children bow
At their mother's knee in prayer.
The same sweet calm is on my heart;
The gently heaving tide
Bears now no trace of storms that swept
O'er it in angry pride.
The surface sleeps all tranquilly
O'er earth-born passions' grave,
And a gleam, like that of Heaven's first star,
Is trembling on the wave.

Father! I thank Thee! though this light
Be not the roseate hue
That tinged with fresh and changeful shade,
My soul, when Life was new.
Though the foamy billows bound no more
In sunbright revelry;
Nor echo back the tempest's shout
And wild wind's anthem free;
'Though in the deep, I look in vain
For youthful visions fair—
Let the rich pearls of Faith and Hope
Lie fondly cradled there.

Oh! may Thy love, as twilight dews,
Upon my spirit rest,
And still that ray of heavenly light
Be mirrored in my breast!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Your letter must contain very agreeable news, my dear.'

Bella looked up from its perusal. "It does, mother. You have heard me speak of Marion Herbert. She is to be married next month to another excellent friend of mine—Powhatan Norwood. I am delighted."

"She will do well," remarked Mrs. Snowden, who had formed a strong liking for Powhie, founded upon Bella's descriptions.

"And so will he," returned her daughter. "Marion has a great deal of character, and of the right sort. I wish I could see her again to thank her for her kindness to me during my miserable winter in Richmond. I felt her goodness then, but I appreciate it better since I have seen more of the world. She has written me a very affectionate letter, to ask me to act as her bridesmaid."

"And why not do it, my love?"

"Mamma! and leave you. No, no; it is not to be thought of."

Mrs. Snowden was interested for Marion's proposition.

"I do not see that it is impossible," she argued. "You need not be absent more than a week, and Sarah can attend to me very well now that I am so much better. I could get on comfortably. I wish you would take some recreation. It worries me to see you buried in this lonesome place, tied to the chair of a peevish old woman."

"Neither peevish nor old!" contradicted Bella, "but my own dear mamma, who finds fault with nobody except herself. I should never forgive myself if you were to grow worse while I was away."

"I should send for you without an hour's delay," said her mother. "You will please me exceedingly by accepting this invitation, Bella. And Miss Maria and Kate! would you not like to see them?"

"What a cunning tempter you are, mother! I will take the matter into consideration."

Mrs. Snowden would not put off the decision to a more convenient season, and Bella had to yield. Her refusal would do her mother more harm than her absence. Mrs. Snowden was highly pleased. No woman, however unfortunate her own has been, is indifferent to a prospective marriage. Bella was called upon for all she knew of the antecedents of this, and related them at length, suppressing Powhie's proposal to herself.

"An early attachment, then, I suppose," said her mother. "I am always glad to hear of the happy consummation of one. They are so often broken off——"

Bella noticed her abrupt pause and glance at herself. All reference to Willard had heretofore been shunned by both; and she resolved to set her parent's mind at rest upon a subject which must have cost her much anxiety.

"It is best that unsuitable engagements should be broken off, mother.

Usually the parties are so young when they enter into them, that they either mistake their feelings at the time, or change afterwards. I, for one, do not regret the dissolution of mine."

The poor invalid's face flushed with joyful surprise.

"You have taken a load from my heart! I could not bear to see you unhappy for life, as I feared you might be, although you concealed it."

"No, mother. I am happy—far happier than I had a right to expect to be, or than I would have been had I married Willard. If I had not been assured of this before our meeting at his father's, in July, I should have thanked a merciful Providence, then, that my apparent destiny had been altered. The discipline was sent in goodness and wisdom."

"Yet," resumed Mrs. Snowden, after a thoughtful pause, "it would be a great comfort to me to see you the wife of one who was worthy of you. So good a daughter deserves a kind and good husband."

Bella's heart beat audibly. She had not yet informed her mother of Maurice's letter and her answer. Her diffidence mastered her whenever she tried to speak of her secret emotions, the changes and designs of her inner self, and, mingled with the delicacy natural under the circumstances, hindered the communication it was her duty to make. The tone of the last observation determined her. She would plant this one flower beside the pillow of languishing. Laying aside her work, she sat down upon her mother's foot-cushion; and grasping her hands tightly within her own—her lips trembling and eyes dewy—she told her all. At the last she produced Maurice's miniature, received the day before. Mrs. Snowden looked at it long and intently. It was a face that won upon the regard of the beholder with every minute spent in its examination. The truthful eyes were not a deceitful gloss for sinister purposes and selfish desires, and therefore bore the keenest gaze without quailing; the brow, though intellectual, was not stern, and the mouth had the winning sweetness of a woman's. He was a man to be loved as trusted—without a fear.

"I have but one earthly wish ungranted now, my dear," she said, giving it back. "It is, to see him and Jamie with you by my bed-side when the Master calls."

As Marion requested, Dr. Ford's was Bella's home while she stayed in the city—but not a day had elapsed after her arrival when she found herself in Miss Maria's back parlour. Meditating a surprise, she sent up no name, and the worthy lady's toilet afforded her time for retrospection. That little room! unchanged in table, chair, or curtain—what associations thronged it! One figure was there more vividly seen than even at the trysting waterfall. Shorn of the beams in which imagination and affection had once decked him, how had he fallen from his high niche in the temple of her heart! how did he shrink into nothingness, when compared with the love of her more matured age! *He*, too, was there! the strong, gentle hand sustaining her weakness; the strong, gentle heart upbearing that which had cast itself fearlessly upon it.

Miss Maria rustled in, dressed in a well-remembered green silk, and her inevitable black apron.

"Good morning, madam! I owe you a thousand apologies for having kept you waiting. Did you wish to see my niece, Miss Seymour, or myself?"

Bella turned to the light. "Both of you, Miss Maria!"

"My dearest!" and the stage scream preluded a rapturous embrace. "How could I be so blind as not to know you were here, even before I entered the room? Kate! Kate! run down and see who is here! And when did you come, and from what quarter of the globe? Philadelphia? No? from the clouds, then—and I can assure you a celestial visitant would not be more welcome—but what a wretched fire! The weather is so changeable that Polly—you remember Polly? She suffers from rheumatism occasionally; and the doctor will not consent to adopt the Thompsonian practice—not that I have much confidence in it myself, but Mrs. Williams, our neighbour—they have moved into the street since you left us—was it one or two years ago? How time flies! When I was young, my old grandfather—he was a Revolutionary soldier, my love, and was wounded at Bunker Hill. Have you visited Boston yet, my dear? Ah! Kate! now say whom you would rather see than our beloved Bella?"

"Nobody!" said Kate, heartily.

Bella was installed in the rocking-chair; her bonnet removed, and not restored until she declared that she ought to call upon her aunt, Mrs. Conway, in the course of the morning, as Marion had bespoken her for the afternoon.

"Give her the hat, Kate!" said Miss Maria. "I see she is the same resolute creature when duty orders. Mrs. Bailey has often remarked upon that trait. Have you seen her, dear? O! I forget that it is school-hours, and, as Miss Herbert used to say of you, my love—'I presume that Bella is still invisible, Miss Ellis.' And Mr. Norwood was probably engaged to her then! The wedding is on Thursday. Kate has an invitation. I own I was surprised, for Miss Herbert's circle of friends is so large; and I have said, again and again, how nonsensical it is for people to take offence at being overlooked or left out upon such occasions. Miss Marion is a most considerate lady. She sent Kate word that she hoped for the pleasure of her company, particularly, as you were to be her bridesmaid. I remember perfectly what my dress was when I stood up with dear sainted Mary—white brocade, dear, and hers was satin, so thick that it would stand alone—none of your slazy textures, such as they call satin, and wedding satin, now-a-days. Mary's veil was genuine Brussels—dear me! times have changed, for my father was wealthy, but I say nothing of that. I have learned, I trust, to be content with my lot, and not to put confidence in riches. It is all for the best, love—I have not a doubt of it—not one doubt! Kate's robe is very pretty; it is at the dressmaker's, or you should see it. And"—continued the dear old creature, tapping Bella's shoulder, mysteriously, "although the child may cry and blush her eyes out, I cannot resist the temptation to whisper to you——"

"Now aunt!" ejaculated Kate.

"I can guess it, Kate." Bella wound her arm about her waist. "Is it Mr. Scott, Miss Maria?"

"Yes. How very sagacious you are, my dearest! It is a secret as yet, for it will not 'come off' for six months. Kate is young, dear Bella, and, as I told Mr. Scott, she must serve an apprenticeship in housekeeping before I can consent to lead her to the head of her own table. This branch of girls' education is shamefully neglected. Dear life! I remember to what

a dinner I once sat down, in the house of a man of some distinction—a doctor, my love—of medicine or divinity, I forget which, or maybe it was of law. There were twenty of us, invited guests, and if you will believe me, my child, the bill of fare was a shoulder of bacon before him, a ham before her, and between the castors and the salt, a plate of sliced cucumbers, topped by a raw onion. I never shall forget how forlorn that poor onion looked. But Mrs. Robinson was a literary character——"

Bella was guilty of the rudeness of starting, and the further enormity of interrupting the good lady.

"There was a gentleman of that name at The Grove last summer, who said that he knew you. Who is he, Kate?"

"Robinson?" said Kate, "I don't recollect him. O yes! was he a small man with light hair?"

"No—tall and dark. He spoke of having spent an evening in your company."

"It was rather a common name," Miss Maria observed, and straightway reckoned up a score of Robinsons and Robertsons, supplying lithographs of each from her inexhaustible memory. Bella's unknown might have been any, or none of them. She went away, no wiser than she came.

Mrs. Conway was yet the proprietress of a showy boarding-house, a position she preferred to being the mistress of a frugal private establishment. Such she might have had, for her second and third sons were doing well in business, and had offered, she told her niece, to rent a house in partnership, if she would keep it for them.

"But the girls are growing up, and as they can have greater advantages of dress and company here, I think it my duty to slave on, until they are off the carpet. You knew that Thomas came home, last July?"

"I heard of it," said Bella, swallowing a yawn of weariness. "It must have been a great joy to you."

"Don't speak of it, child! when we had mourned him as dead for four years!" and she launched into another channel of domestic affairs; swinging herself in her rocking-chair; talking on and on; ringing the changes upon Thomas and Julia and Richard and Albina, unheeding Bella's flagging attention and ingenious attempts to find a loop-hole of escape.

"The dressing-gong, I declare!" she exclaimed, as the unearthly sound clashed and roared through the passages. "Now, do stay to dinner. We have some nice young gentlemen here—a returned Californian amongst them; and although the girls are out, the rest of your cousins will be charmed to have you with them."

Bella declined as promptly as politeness would allow. She met several gentlemen upon the stairs—and at the front door, Mr. Robinson. He bowed with offensive freedom, his white teeth glittering through the moustache which was thicker and blacker than ever. She was certain that he would have spoken, and more than a common salutation, had she not averted her eyes and quickened her gait. She did not feel safe until Dr. Ford's door shut after her, and Marion's chiding at her protracted absence greeted her ears. She and the bride were busily engaged in the chamber of the latter, that afternoon, when a servant announced that there was a gentleman below to see Miss Conway.

"Who is it?" asked Marion, impatiently.

"He did not give me his name, ma'am."

Bella's only thought was of her mother, and she hastened down with a fluttering heart.

"Mr. Robinson!" she uttered, in extreme astonishment and annoyance.

"Your cousin, Thomas Conway, at your service," rejoined the gentleman, "who is willing to forgive your unflattering reception, in consideration of the hoax which has been played upon you. Will you shake hands?"

Bella did so, reluctantly.

"Are you really my relation?" she said, incredulously.

"I can produce credentials, if necessary," replied he, "or, if you will walk some four squares with me, can furnish my mother's testimony. Your memory is less faithful than mine. I knew you at our meeting at the creek."

Bella's coldness remained. Her dislike of the man was so fixed, that the discovery of his identity with her cousin could not shake it.

"My visit, however," he pursued, "is of a business, rather than a friendly character, and if I have any skill in reading countenances, you are not ready to receive me upon the latter footing. To the point, therefore. Have you any suspicion of the nature of my recent transactions with your honoured step-father?"

"None," she answered.

"Then, I may as well tell my story from the beginning. You may recollect that at the settlement of my late father's affairs, a certain sum, which had been paid to him as your guardian, could neither be found nor accounted for. If you will cast your eyes over this paper, its disappearance may not be so much of a marvel. Excuse me, but I cannot let it go out of my hands for a single minute. I have treasured it too long to risk now the possibility of its loss."

It was a certificate of a loan made by James Conway, guardian, to Edgar Snowden, of five thousand dollars, belonging to the estate of Henry Conway, deceased, and held in trust for his daughter Bella, by the said James Conway. Underneath was Mr. Snowden's bond in due form, for the amount stated above.

Bella was astounded and dumb.

Mr. Conway replaced the document in his pocket-book.

"You observe that there were two witnesses. My father, although lamentably careless in his own business, was a man of integrity, and guarded jealously the interests of his wards. Mr. Harrold, whose name with mine is appended to the instrument, died before his friend; and Mr. Snowden believed, with the rest of the world, that your humble servant had joined them in the land of shades four years ago. Then, as now, nothing was further from my intentions. Your step-father wanted money to assist him in the purchase of his Louisiana plantation, and this loan, being made upon good security and at a large per cent., was only imprudent with regard to the individual thus accommodated. He is an unmitigated scoundrel, a sanctimonious villain. I saw through his sheep's clothing then, and I will strip it off before he twists himself loose from my clutches. My father deposited the certificate in a drawer of his secretary—one in which I was in the habit of keeping papers. You need not look so horrified—I did not purloin it wilfully, nor was I aware that it was among my effects, until I

had been a resident of South America for several months. I was a wild youth, and having left home in a fit of pique, and caused a report of my death to be transmitted to my family, I could not conveniently return the document. It was valueless to me there, but I foresaw a day when it might be used to my advantage. I landed in the United States as poor as when I left their shores; found that my father had died, leaving poverty and a sullied name as his children's inheritance, and that the man who had brought this last curse upon them was living in affluence and respectability. I was anxious to cleanse the stain from my father's memory, but I preferred doing it in my own time and way. Money I must have immediately. Hence my visit to The Grove. Its proprietor dreads but one thing more than the loss of his dollars—the forfeiture of caste; and by shaking this whip over his head, I extorted a tolerable sum of hush-money. I believe he would have paid me the entire amount of the bond, if I would have delivered it up; but I had read of the goose's golden eggs when I was a boy, and have seen something of the world since. Exposure would be death to the time-serving churchman, and I have no idea of ending his punishment so soon. The torture comes first."

The audacious coolness of the fellow was surprising. Bella was provoked into speech.

"And what, may I ask, is your motive in taking me into your confidence, sir, since you reserve the right of action to yourself?"

He settled his bold eyes upon hers. "Suppose that I wished to confer with you as to the probable effect of a disclosure upon your mother?"

The question was shrewdly contrived. "It would kill her!" responded the sinking heart. The tongue would not articulate the words.

"You may give me credit for a touch of humanity presently," he said. "Justice shall be done to you in the end. It is but fair that I should be paid handsomely for my job of unmasking the wolf and righting the orphan. Not that I doubt your liberality, but I choose to dip my fingers into other coffers. Mr. Snowden thinks me in Louisiana. The draft he gave me was payable in a New Orleans bank. Thither I proceeded after leaving him, and only returned to Richmond three weeks since. To-morrow I shall set out for The Grove, to dangle my empty purse before his eyes, and croak, like Oliver Twist, for 'more.' Do not be alarmed for your mother. To her I shall still be 'Mr. Robinson,' who will not again trespass upon her hospitality for a night's lodging. I have no ambition to awake in the morning with my throat cut, or drink coffee spiced with arsenic for breakfast."

He ceased for a moment, but Bella continued mute.

"And now," he said, twirling his handkerchief around his hat, "I will avow my reason for troubling you with this story. Mr. Snowden would never have ignored the existence of this paper, but for his belief that with my father perished all chance of its reappearance. The latter had, doubtless, spoken of having lost or mislaid it, and the wily debtor, having himself inspected the papers of the deceased, and failed to discover even a memorandum of it, considered that his obligation to pay it was annulled. He crouches like a whipped hound before me, who am not a full-fledged saint in morals. I shall inform him of your knowledge of the fraud persisted in for years, at the expense of your home, ease, and happiness, and thus

secure your revenge with my own. You do not deserve this at my hands —I will be candid with you—but in the remembrance of our relationship I will do it,"—with a swaggering magnanimity. "I have no fears respecting your secrecy. Were you less discreet than your reputation authorizes me to believe you, respect for your mother would enjoin silence."

"I must beg you not to refer to her again," said Bella, painfully.

"I appreciate your feelings," was the rejoinder. "I, too, have a mother, Miss Conway, and readily understand your repugnance at the thought of having yours mixed up in such a business as this. Rely upon my prudence and honour. I hope to see you again some day at The Grove."

Powhie called late in the afternoon, and entered without ringing. Espying a figure in the corner of a sofa, he walked up to it. The head was bowed upon the cushions, and he touched it lightly.

"Bella! pardon me!" he said, as she sprang up with an exclamation of affright. "I thought you were Marion."

"She is up-stairs;" and she would have gone for her.

"Stay!" entreated the almost bridegroom. "She will be down directly —besides, I want to talk with you."

But her bewildered intellect imperfectly comprehended his hearty thanks for the good she had done him in days past, by example and precept; failed to see the train of reasoning by which he made his present happiness the consequence of her influence. At length, she heard one remark distinctly.

"I have disposed of Sprucedale to George Herbert. For the present we shall reside with him, but I am looking out for a place nearer Richmond. Marion does not like C—— any more than I do."

"I wish you could get The Grove," said Bella.

"The Grove! is it for sale?"

"Mr. Snowden has often spoken of selling it; sometimes of removing to Louisiana. My mother's health might be restored in a warmer climate. He is restrained principally by her fondness for the place and servants. His is not so strong."

"Would you be content to see me the owner of the homestead and family negroes?" inquired Powhie.

"As they cannot be Jamie's, I know of no master whom I would select for them sooner than yourself. Ours is a broken household, never to be re-united upon Virginia soil, I fear."

He was moved by her melancholy tone. "I will bear this project in mind," he said; "I know the merits of the plantation from report; and should it come into the market within a year, I shall at least make an offer. The situation suits me exactly. Then, be your home north or south, you must make us an annual visit."

"Do I interrupt a tête-à-tête?" asked Marion, looking in.

"Yes," replied Powhie, "Bella and I are building castles in the air, to be tenanted by us—granting outsiders, like yourself, the privilege of peeping, once a year, at our felicity."

Bella's secret weighed heavily upon her. She had not time to think it over calmly and, deliberate upon the best course to pursue; but it was a spectre in every festive scene, a jarring chord in the music of gay and

affectionate voices. She accompanied the bridal pair to a party each night of the wedding-week; to church on Sabbath, and on Monday, within five miles of the Grove, where stood a tavern before mentioned, at the fork of the road leading to C——. Ben and Eddy awaited her there. Her anxiety was partially allayed by the coachman's assurance that his mistress "'peared to have endured no discommodation from her distracted absence;" but Eddy increased the shadow by his report.

"Sister? what do you think? That ugly Mr. Robinson has been to our house again! He was on horseback this time, although he sat in papa's study till dark, he wouldn't stay all night. Papa was *so* fretted! I just asked him what he kept coming for, and he told me to 'hold my tongue!'"

The guilty man's eye fell at the meeting with his step-daughter; and his carriage had a fawning servility, more odious, if possible, than his previous condescension. She had been at home three days, when he introduced the revolting topic. His bold falsehood took her by surprise. Confessing that the bond was genuine, he yet affirmed that he had paid it, before her uncle's death.

Bella had been ashamed to look at him; for mean as he was, she pitied the confusion of detected crime, until this assertion.

"The dead cannot defend his reputation, Mr. Snowden," she said. "Happily, it is not entirely at your mercy. Limited as is my experience in these transactions, I have heard of receipts. If the bond could not be cancelled, you acted very imprudently in relinquishing so large an amount without demanding some offset to the paper, should it be hereafter produced. This would have silenced Thomas Conway more effectually than your bribes have done."

"It was unpardonably careless, my dear, but I trusted to your uncle's integrity"—

"Which always secured others from danger, however much his easy good-nature may have brought upon himself," interposed she.

"He meant well, my daughter—he meant well—but we are all liable to err."

Bella despised him with an intensity which frightened her;—it seemed so wicked! He lolled in his capacious arm-chair; his hands meekly crossed; every individual hair smooth and shining above the brow he thought so fine; a white cravat bounding his fleshy chin;—a large-sized picture of sanctimoniousness or hypocrisy; an over-fed, church-going Oily Gammon.

"That last observation was unnecessary, sir. *Just now*, I do not need it to remind me of the depravity of human nature."

A redder hue suffused his cheeks at this home-thrust, but his solemn modulations betrayed no agitation.

"Charity—that 'charity which thinketh no evil,' is of inestimable value," he said.

"You cannot complain that it has not been exercised towards you," interrupted Bella. "My uncle has been dead more than three years."

"Does it dwell within your bosom at this moment?" he inquired, in sorrowful reproof.

"'There is a point beyond which forbearance ceases to be a virtue,' is a

maxim I have heard you quote," retorted she, irritated at his continued deceit. "I realize its truth at this moment as I never did before."

Mr. Snowden grew whiter.

"I ask nothing for myself," he said, submissively,—"do not plead for the character earned by years of irreproachable conduct; I even forbear to point you to your brother—for such is his relation to you, although my blood runs in his veins. You have it in your power to blast his prospects; to turn upon him the finger of scorn—the hiss of contempt. Do it! ruin the son for the father's unwise confidence in his fellow-man? but in yonder chamber is a dying woman! Admit it, or close your eyes obstinately to the true—it *is*, nevertheless, truth! Death will overtake her, ere her tottering feet can bear her much further. Will you accelerate her march to the tomb? She loves me—trusts me with all the devotion of her soul"—a flourish of white cambric. "She would never credit your tale of my 'guilt,' but she would fall under the consciousness that the world defamed me."

Bella arose.

"I am tired of this, Mr. Snowden. I know what are my duties to my mother and to myself. No effort of mine can hasten or delay the exposure of your 'error.' I shall remain here while my services are required; but I desire that this shall be the last allusion to this unpleasant affair."

She had never gone with her sorrows to Willard. He "had so many trials of his own," she reasoned, "that it would be the extreme of selfishness in her to weary him with her petty grievances." She was wiser now; knew that perfect confidence cannot exist where concealment is practised—how praiseworthy soever may be its motive. She could not sleep until she had written a long letter to Maurice, disclosing everything, and appealing to him for sympathy and advice. Many weeks must drag their length along before the reply could arrive; but the confession and the transfer of responsibility eased her mind, and aided her to wait the result with patience.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Low clouds, which the loftiest pines appeared to pierce, had brooded over the Grove for two days. On the morning of the third, they were falling to the earth in great, feathery flakes. By noon, the ground was covered to the depth of several inches, and the storm was steadily gaining in strength. But for the curling smoke from the chimneys, the plantation might have been supposed to be uninhabited. The cattle were sheltered; the poultry housed by careful Aunt Hagar; even the watchful Carlo snored by the kitchen fire. Not a bough or twig stirred to disturb its snowy burden, and the brown trunks, gaunt sentinels, kept doleful guard over the desolate scene.

Huge logs were piled upon the kitchen hearth, surmounted by pots and overhung by kettles. Aunt Hagar vibrated between the various points of interest, lifting a lid here and introducing a spoon there.

On a stool in one corner sat Sarah, sewing, and opposite Ben whittling at a set of seasoned hickory sticks.

"What upon earth ith you making now?" questioned Aunt Hagar, querulous at the sight of the "litter" upon her clean floor.

"Winding blades for Mistis, similar to them Miss Bella secured is Philadelphia," replied he of ornate phraseology.

"Um—*humf*"

"You had better wait to see its consult before you cast inflections upon my work," said Ben, nettled.

"Bleth your thoul, boy! I ain't a-cathting 'flectionth upon your work—no moren I don't believe it will ever be uthed much. The one you ith making it for ith bound for the land whar thar'th no more labour."

"You said that a year ago, mammy," observed Sarah.

"What ef I did, chile? Ain't the a year'th journey nearer to the kingdom? I tell you her feet ith motht teching the edge of Jordan. I went in to thee her thith morning, and 'peared to me the light from the other thide wath thining 'pon her fathe, and hur eyeth wath ath bright ath ef the could behold the King in glory."

"Miss Bella don't think she is going to die," said Sarah, stoutly, "and she ought to know best."

"The poor thing didn't think tho for a mighty long time, but the doeth now, I'll be bound. Don't you thee how the hangth 'round her, trying to put the betht foot foremotht, laughin' and chattin' and fit to cry all the time?"

"Mr. Snowden begins to appreciate the alteration in her circumstances," remarked Ben. "He is very gloomy, formerly. I cannot help feeling compunction for him, for he will never have another wife equable to this one."

Aunt Hagar tossed her turban.

"*I* don't pity him! He ought to git down upon hith kneeth the minute the ith gone, and 'turn thankth for having had her tho' much longer than he detherved. But he ain't a-gwine to do it. He ain't tho thorry ath you make him out. Whothe work ith it all? I athk you. He don't fool *me* with hith pitiful lookth. Don't thay nothin' to me 'bout that man. It maketh me thick!"

While this free discussion was going on, the person last-named was at his study-table, surrounded by account-books and files of papers. It was not strange that Ben's compassion was aroused by his altered mien. He had lost spirits and flesh together; his cheeks were growing flabby; grey hairs peeped out of the locks above his ears; and his motions had a nervousness entirely at variance with his natural and studied deliberateness. His occupation harassed or angered him. He knitted his brows, bit his lips—finally, dashed down the pen upon the balance-sheet—his morning's labour, and stamped up and down the room.

"Everything has gone wrong since that confounded fellow turned up!"

Mrs. Snowden's chamber was a more pleasant picture. Her lounge was heaped with pillows, hardly indented by the light form reclining against them. She was pretty yet; the fair hair shaded features disease could not despoil of symmetry and mildness, and the hectic painted them with a youthful bloom. She was netting a purse; the slow movement of her fingers contrasting mournfully with her expression of interest.

"Where is Jamie's, dear?" she inquired of her daughter.

Bella handed her one wrought after the same pattern, but in different colours.

"How beautiful they are!" she said, as her mother spread them out side by side.

The invalid smiled—a look of infantine delight.

"I hope they will like them! Maurice's is gravest, because I thought that a minister would not care to use a gay one. Would you believe it, Bella? I take as much pleasure in making his as I did my own son's."

"Thank you, mother!"

Mrs. Snowden worked on industriously.

"I will finish this to-day. To-morrow I can begin Eddy's. When are they coming home, my love?"

"Their last letters say the middle or last of April. They will then have been a year abroad," answered Bella.

"The middle of April! This is March 10th, is it not? Poor Jamie!"

Two months ago this exclamation would have caused Bella but a momentary pang. The physician had buoyed her up with sanguine hopes of final if not speedy recovery, until within three or four weeks back. He shook his head portentously now, when she remarked to him in their private consultations upon her mother's increasing debility.

"Nurse her through February, and the first mild day in March we will send her South," was his prescription. "The Spring is a most trying season for pulmonary affections."

"Are her lungs hopelessly diseased?" Bella asked, with a mighty effort.

"I do not say—would not give it as my opinion that they are diseased at all," replied Dr. Graves. "Keep up her spirits and your own, and hope for the best."

She tried to do this; but it is a bootless expenditure of resolution and nerve to fix one's eyes upon a phantom "Best," when the spirit is chilled and darkened by the near approach of the real "Worst."

The purse was completed by dinner-time. Mrs. Snowden's fever having subsided, she dozed away the short afternoon. Eddy was in his attic play-room; his father still in his study. Bella issued her orders for supper; and looked out from the porch upon the landscape.

At the wood-pile a Herculean negro was burying his axe to the helve in a log, the strokes dull and sullen upon the soft earth. She watched him until he staggered off to the kitchen with a quarter of a cord of fuel upon his shoulder. Then a black cat—Mr. Snowden's pet and to her his familiar—came prowling through the drifts on his way to his bed by the fire-side, after his predatory warfare upon the snow-birds. Bella shut the door with a shivering sigh, and went back to her mother's room. As the night crept through the windows, sparing only the circle of radiance around the hearth, she was overcome by a horror of loneliness. More than once she checked her own to listen to her mother's breathing; imagining now that it fluttered—then that it stopped. She walked to the casement repeatedly, but by pressing her face against the glass could see but a little way into the snow, descending like ashes from the blackening sky. Weary and depressed, she seated herself upon the carpet, and rested her forehead upon her mother's pillow.

"What do I dread?" she asked, seriously.

The conclusion that her fears were irrational and absurd, did not dispel them. Thomas Conway had not been to the Grove since her trip to Richmond; but she had reason to suspect that he had written once, if not oftener; and Mr. Snowden's perterbation was daily becoming more apparent. Her mother was as yet mercifully hood-winked by her innocence and her ignorance of others' crimes; but this bandage might drop off at any moment. A slighter cause than her dismay and grief at such a disclosure might hasten her end. For herself, Bella felt that her hands were tied. She could not prevent any calamity arising out of a matter so nearly concerning her welfare. All her trust was in the Providence manifest in every event of her past life—and murmuring—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed in Thee," she dropped asleep.

She was lonely no longer. Isabel's warm breath fanned her brow, and her voice flowed over her soul in rich melodies; and proudly regarding both, Maurice stood up before them—a tower of refuge and strength; then advanced Powhie and his bride—tried and true friends; Jamie ushered in Miss Maria and her adopted child. Ah! there was a goodly company in that cloud-wreathed chamber of Fancy! Winter and tempest without—the Summer of Love within. Her cheeks were rosy, her lips curved in a happy smile.

Dream on, awhile, young sleeper! The vision is doomed to be short. Toiling over the untrodden road, pelted and coated by the inhospitable flakes, there are those coming who will break thy slumber.

"Miss Bella! Miss Bella!" whispered Sarah, in her ear.

Bella gazed at her vacantly.

"Somebody's coming?"

"Who is it?"

"I don't know, ma'am. Don't you hear the carriage?"

Startled by the sudden summons, and overwhelmed by a rush of her late presentiments, she could not hear the rolling wheels for the beating of her heart. She had the presence of mind to close her mother's door after her, as she followed Sarah into the hall. A vehicle was at the gate, and Ben's tones sounded shrilly through the air. 'Mr. Robinson' could not be the recipient of his welcome! The snow crushed and creaked under footsteps. A voice spoke.

"There she is!" it said—and bounding through the porch—out into the storm, she was clasped, first in Jamie's—longest in Maurice's, arms.

He was so like the Maurice of old, as he lifted her into the hall, brushed the snow from her hair and dress, and slipping his hand under her chin, smiled down into eyes streaming with joyful tears! Jamie was more changed. His crutch was still his companion; but his figure had acquired breadth and manliness, and his complexion, bronzed by southern suns and his sea-voyage, detracted somewhat from the feminine beauty which had distinguished him before he went abroad. His sister was gratified at the change. He would not be sickly and helpless in the prime of life, after a languishing infancy and boyhood. The noise of the greetings drew Mr. Snowden from his closet. He came hastily—not without trepidation—his spectacles pushed up upon his forehead, where the wrinkles of vexed thought yet lingered. Bella was curious to note Maurice's manner towards her stepfather. Not a tincture of haughtiness or resentment was per-

ceptible; his salutation was all that one gentleman could ask of another; yet she knew that it was not what it would have been had the soul of the man before him compared in nobility with his.

Jamie was naturally impatient to see his mother, the report of whose declining health had abridged their absence by more than a month. Bella steadied her spirits and undertook to prepare her.

She was awake. "What is the meaning of all this bustle, my dear?" she inquired.

"Some travellers have arrived, mother, who were belated by the storm."

"Who are they? strangers?"

Bella was lighting the lamp, her back turned to her mother, lest her face should speak too soon for her.

"No, ma'am. They are old friends of mine—very dear friends!"

"Your school-mates or scholars?"

"One of them was a school-mate many years ago. I was once a pupil of the other. You, too, will be rejoiced to meet them."

"I! do I know them?"

"Mother!" and she granted her a view of her countenance—"I am about to play fairy and fulfil every wish of your heart. You are to have visitors. Let me straighten your cap, and arrange your shawl. Now! can you bear to be very happy? Whom had you rather see of all the inhabitants of *both* continents? Ah! you know who the stranger is. Jamie! come in!"

The interview was too touching to be gazed upon, even by her, and she retreated, leaving the son upon his knees beside his mother. Mr. Snowden, reinstated in benevolent dignity, was prosing to Maurice of his "paternal affection for the brother and sister," and his "thankfulness for this family reunion—at the eleventh hour, though I fear it is," he said, as Bella unlatched the door.

She did not catch a syllable of his croaking, for Maurice arose to set her a chair by him. His eyes and thoughts were all hers; and Mr. Snowden stole out of the background to which he was condemned by "excusing himself for awhile. He had left valuable papers loose upon his desk."

"At last!" exclaimed Maurice, pressing her anew to his breast; and again there was a bright gush of bright, happy drops, as the tired head sank upon what was for ever after to be its support.

"Safety and rest at last!" replied her heart.

They seemed to have been together but a minute—much as had been said—when Jamie signified his mother's desire to see "her new son." She had always been timid and self-distrustful, and notwithstanding Bella's representations of Maurice's exceeding gentleness, was embarrassed at his entry. The scarlet spot in her cheek came and went with each short breath. He led Bella up to the couch, but let her go as he spoke. It was beautiful to see him in the vigour and glory of his manhood, bow reverently to receive a blessing from the faded lips of a dying woman. His profession had instructed him in the observances of a sick-room, but mere practice could never have taught him the charm by which he quelled the fears and won the love of the subjects of his ministrations.

Bella and Jamie sat on either side of their parent; Mr. Snowden and

Eddy were at the foot of the lounge; Sarah and two other sable handmaids stood near the chimney, looking on in delighted interest. Maurice was the cynosure. With rapid ease he diverted the conversation from the exciting event of the evening, and without doing violence to the subdued solemnity of emotion experienced by most of the party, was so unfeignedly cheerful—so hearty in his relish of his and their happiness, that sad memories and forebodings were driven from the bosoms of all. Mrs. Snowden regarded him as a superior but beloved presence; and was amazed that he awed her no more than did Jamie—not half so much as did her smooth-tongued lord.

"You will pay me another visit to-night—will you not?" she said, as he arose with the others, for supper.

"I was about to ask permission to do so, if it will not fatigue you too much, my dear madam," he rejoined.

"I am rather dubious, my love," interposed her husband.

Maurice glanced at Bella.

"It will not hurt you, I think, mother," she said. "You are better already for our company."

"Then prepare yourself for a repetition of the infliction," concluded Maurice.

He it was who broke up the coterie after tea. He saw that the reaction of debility was not far off, unless immediate repose were allowed. Mr. Snowden was scandalized at the "unseemly brevity of the Rev. Mr. Oakley's evening services." No one else was insensible to the appropriateness of the psalm of praise or the beauty of the fervent petition.

The short week that ensued! short in its flying joys, so eagerly tasted—long in its train of ever-to-be-remembered incidents; hallowed spots in time, to be reviewed through tears of grateful recollection.

On the Sabbath, an unusual stir ran through the plantation. Troops of tidy negroes wended their way to "the house,' and betook themselves, with grave decorum, to the large parlour. It was an impressive scene. Beside the fire-place, at the upper end of the apartment, was deposited their mistress' couch, her serene face looking with motherly affection, for perhaps the last time, upon her dependents; yet illumined by such divine joy, Aunt Hagar might truly say that her undimmed vision beheld the King in His glory. "Not many wise, not many noble are called"—but O! a countless multitude of guileless souls like hers; those who receive the Word in simplicity and in truth, and having lived out upon earth the blameless lives of little children, are gathered, unsullied and fragrant flowers as they, into the kingdom of Heaven.

Her children were close to her; Eddy between the brother and sister he had learned to love so dearly. Few bestowed much notice upon their master. He was an alien—partaker neither of the blood or breeding of "the family." It was currently reported and believed that the "strange preacher was to marry Miss Bella very soon," and this established him upon the footing of a friend. He had never addressed a congregation composed of similar materials; but they belonged to the universal brotherhood; the same human heart pulsed within them, that throbbed mightily in his bosom. Wherever he found that chord of union he could play upon it. Noisy demonstrations of feeling were suppressed in the remembrance of the

weakness of the sufferer; but big tears and bursting sighs bore witness to the melting hearts and answering spirits of the audience. There were occasional verbal interruptions which but made the speaker more sensible of their lively sympathy.

"I see many of you to-day for the first time," he said, "and it is not probable that we shall, all of us, ever meet together again. I cannot tell who of you will be happy and who miserable; whether any one of you will die this year or the next, or in ten years—whether the man beside him will not lie down in the grave until his head is as white as frost with old age;—nor do I, or you know more of myself. We are mortal alike—weak, and foolish, and perishing; but there is an Almighty Arm that leads us forward; an All-seeing Eye that marks every step we are making now, every inch of the road before us. We have the same Father, and those of us who love Him, the same glorious home. We may walk in different ways, yet they all lead in one direction; we are 'inquiring the way to Zion, with our faces thitherward.' It is not every traveller who finds his journey pleasant. The path of one may lie along green pastures and still waters, or upon sunny hill-sides, from which he can now and then get a glimpse of the walls of the New Jerusalem; while another, whom the Good Father loves quite as much, is obliged to travel through thick darkness, stumbling among the rough rocks, and crying for help, out of the horrible pit and the miry clay. We cannot see why this is. We know, however, for our comfort, that each trouble makes His child more dear to Him; that His wisdom has determined that it is good for us to be afflicted. As when one looks upward from the bottom of a deep well, he beholds the stars shining down upon him—lights which those who are enjoying the day above, cannot perceive—so from the deepest, most frightful pit of sorrow, the Christian sees the stars of God's promises, fixed and bright, cheering him to endure to the end—assuring him that he *shall* receive the crown of Life."

"You never thaid a truer word than that, my marther!" said Aunt Hagar, audibly.

"You have seen a child just able to creep about the floor!" continued Maurice, "whose mother, before leaving him, has tied firmly in his chair. There is a fire blazing and crackling not far from him. How he would like to play with the red and yellow flames! Upon the table lies a shining knife. He tries to seize it, but it is out of reach of his fingers. He is thirsty, and a great pail of water is in yonder corner; and the little fellow struggles and pulls at the knot which holds him, and screams out angrily because he cannot do as he pleases. When he is heated with fretting, the kind mother comes in with the food she has been preparing for him, and taking him upon her lap, tells him that the fire would burn, and the knife cut, and the water drown. Are we wiser than this silly babe when we grumble at our lot, and stretch out our short puny arms continually towards things our Father does not choose for us to have? Believe me, my brethren, or I would rather say—believe His word, that a time is certainly coming when He will gather His own into His arms, and not only wipe away all tears from their eyes, but show them that what they called evils here were blessings. The inhabitants of that land never say 'I am sad,' or 'sick.' O! let us bear our burdens patiently until he grants us leave

to put them off. Let us encourage each other and ourselves with the words of our text—'*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*'"

"Bless the Lord for that!" said a white-haired man, his eye resting upon his mistress.

She was revived instead of wearied by the exercises. During the singing of the last hymn she beckoned to Jamie, and whispered a request. He demurred, and Maurice and Bella, to whom it was referred, appeared to doubt its propriety. She insisted, despite their discouragement and her husband's prohibition. Before the congregation was dismissed, Jamie arose.

"My mother thinks herself able to speak to you to-day. After the blessing is said she would like to have you come up, one by one, and shake hands with her."

He could not say—"Tell her 'good-bye,'" as she had bid him do; but they understood it in the sense she intended.

Mr. Snowden's pompous cautions spoken and signed to the advancing line, "not to excite her," and "to restrain their feelings if possible," could not destroy the effect of the solemn farewell. To every one she said a cheerful and kind word—thanking some for their years of fidelity in her service; exhorting others to remember her and be obedient to their future guardians. The delicate hands pressed their horny, black palms, in friendly, not condescending grasp. Obeying an impulse, which in the higher walks of life would have been lauded as admirable and graceful, every one paid his respects in like manner to the children, so soon to be left motherless. Aunt Hagar, who headed the file, paused in indecision at Maurice, and made a courtesy. His frank smile and extended hand settled the question of his claim to a more familiar salutation, and the precedent thus established was strictly followed. Mr. Snowden was forgotten. In this hour of real feeling, there was no thought for the false in heart and in deed.

By another Sabbath, she was dying. And hanging about her, in a daughter's agony of solicitude, was the bride of a day. Bella's nuptial benediction had been spoken at her mother's death-bed. South winds and blossoms had succeeded the snow. The bed was drawn into the centre of the room for the benefit of the breeze, but its odorous breath brought no relief to the failing lungs. By the window bloomed a peach-tree, diffusing a pink light over the pillows, and the very features of the departing; and the bees hummed in its branches. The beauty without rendered the desolation within more sad. From a world so fair, now awakening to a renewal of its glad and busy life, a soul was passing into what was, to other eyes, an impenetrable void. Each breath was a gasp, and the tiny thread stirred feebly in the shrunken wrist; but without a murmur, she listened for the call which was to sever the silver chord.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee," repeated Maurice.

"They are not deep," replied a calm whisper.

One sigh—a single beat of the pulse—"the pure in heart *saw* God!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

On the morning after the funeral, Bella had been out to the kitchen to order some necessary household labours. She recrossed the yard with an inelastic step, her eyes bent upon the ground. The great joy of her life was eclipsed by the dense and nearer sorrow. There were no scenes of future pleasure drawn upon the mind-canvas—nothing but the image of one grave, and the pale form within it; and these she was to leave.

Maurice met her upon the piazza.

"This warm weather is producing its effect upon you, dear one," he said, drawing her to the bench beside him. "A stiff 'north-easter' would soon restore your strength and colour."

"We will find such in Pennsylvania," answered she, forcing a smile, while the tears rushed up unbidden. She brushed them away.

"I want to speak with you of our movements. Your people will be dissatisfied if you remain longer from them—and there is nothing for me to do here, now"—falteringly.

"My brave wife!" He held her yet nearer to him. "It is true, darling, that I am compelled to go, and I cannot leave you. Does my Bella wish to stay?"

"No. My work is ended. It will cost me a struggle—a hard one—to part with Eddy and the servants; but this can never be my home again, and every day passed here will make the final rupture more severe." Fearing that her regrets might wound him, she added, "Not that it has any attractions left. The chief are the melancholy pleasures of association. Philadelphia and Mooresville, in themselves, are dearer."

A caress thanked her. "I am interested in Eddy," said he. "Cannot Mr. Snowden be prevailed upon to let him accompany us? This is not a fit place in which to rear a child of his years, abandoned as he will be to the cares and society of domestics."

"I know it; but his father would never consent to the parting. His soul is wrapped up in his son."

"It is strange, then ——" he checked himself.

"That he should have manœuvred so sedulously to separate our mother from her children," finished Bella. "Yet the event has proved that it was for our happiness."

"Thanks are due to Him alone, who can 'make the wrath of man to praise Him,'" returned Maurice. "We will say no more of Mr. Snowden, while in his house, dearest."

"Only let me remind you of a verse which I like better than that which you have quoted—'All things work together for good unto them who love God.'"

Mr. Snowden's foot-fall sounded in the entry.

"Papa! Papa!" called Eddy, from the staircase. "Where are you going? Take me with you!"

"Down to the low-grounds, my son; but I shall be on horseback. Had you not best stay at home?"

"Selim will carry double, Papa. Please let me go!" entreated the boy.

"Well! well! we will consult sister," said his father, in the fawning tone which was Bella's particular aversion. "What do you say, my dear?"

"He will like the ride, sir. It is for you to decide as to the inconvenience."

"Get your hat then, my boy. This is lovely weather, Mr. Oakley," sighing from the bottom of his chest; "I feel it to be *too* lovely! Nature has little sympathy with a mourning heart. Duty commands me to work, or I should not quit the solitude of my chamber."

"Active employment is sometimes the best cure for grief," observed Maurice, seeing himself called upon to say something.

"True, sir, true! but time must be vouchsafed to the afflicted soul, in which to collect its energies. 'The heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and mine is surcharged with its woes. I am constrained to cry out, with the patriarch—'All these things are against me!' Are you ready, my son? It is some consolation to know that he is too young to understand how grievous and irreparable is his loss—dear child!"

Eddy held up his pouting mouth for his sister's farewell. She strained him to her bosom, kissing brow, lip, and cheek.

"Have you not one for me?" asked Maurice, catching him, as he was about to run after his father.

"Two—if you want them, and wont carry sister away," he rejoined, pulling down the tall head to the level of his own.

"Beautiful boy!" said Bella.

The laughing eyes were beaming upon her from his snug perch upon Selim's back. He took off his hat to bow as she had taught him, and the golden-brown curls fell about his face. The horse carried his double load very good-humouredly and the three jogged down the lane on the best terms possible with one another.

"It troubles me to think how soon he will forget me," said Bella. "Yet this is nothing to the idea of his growing up to be like his father."

"A tabooed subject!" interrupted Maurice, laying his hand upon her mouth. "Some lambs are miraculously preserved from infection. Remember your text, my sweet preacher, and fear nothing."

Eddy had cried bitterly when told that his mother was dead, and could never see or speak to him again; and while the closed doors of her chamber kept alive the recollection of the cold white face and sealed eyes, whose unnatural aspect had terrified him, he moved about on tip-toe, with an air of sorrowful amazement, which affected the beholders to weeping. At the grave, he screamed wildly that "she should not be put into the ground," and would attend to no coaxings or arguments but those of Maurice. He carried him back to the house, and talked to him of his mother's new home with God and the angels; whither he might go when his Heavenly Father was ready for him, if he lived like her. Eddy went to sleep in his arms; and on his awakening to the myriad beauties of the Spring morning, forgot his bereavement, or did not feel it poignantly. A ride with his father was a luxury whose frequency never satiated him. Mr. Snowden replied indulgently to his exclamations and inquiries.

"O Papa! wont you get me some of those flowers as we go back?" pointing to a dogwood in full bloom, "I want them for sister."

There are plenty upon the hill by the creek, my dear. Speak to me

about them when I have given Jerry his orders, and I will cut you an armfull."

"Cut them with my knife—the one brother Jamie gave me! Brother Maurice ground off the point because he said it was dangerous; but the blade is ever so sharp! And, Papa! just see those red ones growing in the water! May I have some of them?"

A young maple hung a scarlet banner across the stream below Bella's waterfall, and its gaudy attire attracted Eddy's most intense admiration.

"You will be a florist when you are a man," answered his father "If the red ones will make you happy, you shall have them. Papa would cut off his right hand for you, Eddy."

"I don't want it!" laughed the child. "There is Jerry with his wagon, hauling brush. Now, I mean to *try* to wait until you are ready, Papa."

His emphasis was copied exactly from his mother and sister, and winning as it would have been to unprejudiced ears, caused a contraction of his parent's brows. Eddy wandered about, patting the wide foreheads of the oxen, cracking Jerry's whip, and filling his hat with wild violets, sorrel and the frail, azure Innocents. His father's instructions appeared endless, but he persevered in his resolution of patience, and was rewarded by the approving,

"Well, my son, you deserve your nosegay. Come!"

"Are you going to leave Selim here, Papa?"

"Yes. I could not ride him in those woods; but you and I can scramble through the bushes."

The dogwood grew upon a cliff, jutting over the creek, and opposite to the pine grove, before described as one of Bella's haunts.

Eddy's arms were already piled, and Mr. Snowden was reaching up for the "just one more" tempting branch, when his elbow was touched from behind. He turned as pale as the frightened child, at beholding the glittering teeth and keen eyes of Thomas Conway.

"A charming rustic picture, upon my word!" said the tormentor.

"I arrived in the neighbourhood yesterday, but forbore to intrude upon your domestic affliction. Accept my condolences, and likewise my congratulations that your distress is not so unbearable as the uninitiated might imagine. How many weeks before you expect a new mamma, young man?" tapping Eddy's head. "Ha! ha! what an affectation of offended dignity! I say, Snowden, we'll cure him of that flummery before he has seen as much of the ropes as we have."

"My son," said Mr. Snowden. "Carry your flowers down the hill, and ride home in the wagon with Jerry."

Conway looked after him.

"A handsome boy! like his mother, too. What is his age?"

"Seven."

"Rather diminutive for that, but he seems healthy and active. It was to make his purse heavier, that you filched so cleverly from his half-sister's—wasn't it?"

"Will you go up to the house, Mr. Conway, or state your errand here?"

"Thank you. As there are visitors up there, to whom you are not over-anxious to introduce me, I guess I will defer my bridal call, and we

can chat comfortably here," taking an easy position against a tree. "I feared that I should be obliged to annoy you by my appearance at your door, but I happened upon one of your men in the road, who told me where to find you. These frequent journeys are fatiguing, not to hint at so vulgar an item as expense. I want to make a 'ten-strike' this time, and cry 'quits!' I am almost sorry that I revealed our little secret to your step-daughter. Her marriage has lessened my interest, personal and philanthropic, in her cause. She is not liable to dependence or want now; and no married woman, however pretty, has the same hold upon one's gallantry as a distressed maiden. Her knowledge of the bond might be awkward for us, in the case of its destruction. She has told her husband, of course. The dear creatures can't keep a secret to save their lives—or tongues. Has Oakley said anything on the subject to you?"

"Nothing."

"But he will be down upon you as soon as decency will allow. Yet, as a parson, he ought to be careless of filthy lucre, and if he is like the majority of those who belong to the cloth, is a blockhead in mercenary matters. He had common sense when he was a boy, but as he exhibited none in selecting a trade, we will hope that he has lost it all. For a consideration I will hazard the relinquishment of the paper into your hands, and if he ever makes inquiry for it, stain my immaculate soul with a lie or two, such as declaring the whole affair, writings and all, to have been a figment of mine to raise the wind. If he is anything short of a downright fool, he wont believe it, but he can't disprove it."

"What sum?" asked the other.

"Well?" and he stroked his moustache, "I don't wish to be hard upon you, old fellow. You have had some vexation lately. I have worried you considerably, and I hear your bad luck in Louisiana has compelled you to sell out your part of the sugar plantation. Stocks have depreciated awfully, and your wife was buried yesterday. To be sure, you'll get another before the crape upon your arm is rusty, but that does not alter the fact of your present bereavement. By the way, my fine chap! I could tell the girls a funny story which would make them look with less favour upon 'the blessed elder.' I wont spoil your prospects unless you drive me to it. I am not a brute. My chicken-heart has always been in my way in making a bargain—so, if you will pay down half in cash, or in paper that will bring the ready, and give me your note at sixty days for the balance, I will hand over the bond for the five thousand—interest off. Isn't that deuced liberal?"

"I could not do it, if my salvation depended upon it," said Mr. Snowden, whose agony had forced great globes of perspiration through the skin. "I came out of that Louisiana scheme some thousands of dollars behind-hand"—

"The wages of iniquity shall not prosper," drawled Conway. "I beg your pardon. Proceed, sir."

"You forget," pursued the humbled man, "the large amounts I have advanced upon that bond"—

"None of your truth-smothering business cant! Call it hush-money at once!" broke in his companion, with an oath. "Your salvation *does* depend upon your lightening your pockets to the tune I have set. All the

heaven you believe in is worldly respectability. If you can live a rich saint upon earth, you don't care a fig for any hereafter. Your character is in my power. By a snap of my fingers I could pulverize it into dust, which would throw your church and community into a sneezing-fit. If you would rescue it from me, unfractured, you must do it by means of the almighty dollars, and not a small heap of them either."

He whistled a stave of a popular melody.

"True," he said, breaking it off—"you have tarnished my father's name; but he has, nevertheless, rested in his grave for three years, and if he is the sensible ghost he should be, cannot object to his hopeful son's handling this money—especially as he left him none. What do you say? When will you have the bond upon my terms?"

"I assure you, Mr. Conway, that at present it is impossible for me to close with your reasonable offer—"

"Your whining cant again! I am sick of this foolery! If you wont pay the money to me you shall to Mrs. Oakley's lawyer. There's Lumsden, her brother's guardian—he's the very man—sharp as a needle and tight as a vice! Take your choice; plank up on the spot, or at least give me your written promise to do so within a week, or hear from him by the next mail. I give you five minutes for decision—Ha! what was that?"

An echo from the other bank caught his attention. He faced it, and seemed to listen.

The trodden reptile writhed and thrust out his hidden sting. The man who had, in cold blood, avowed ability and intention to ruin him, stood unguardedly upon the brink of the cliff. The place was lonely; the water swift and deep. A stroke from his loaded riding-whip would stun and precipitate him to certain death—would free himself! A bunch of dog-wood flowers danced about Conway's head, and he sprang up to pluck them. The idle whim saved his life. The blow which fell upon his shoulder would have dashed him into the current below had he not clutched the stem of the tree. Recovering his balance, he flew upon his antagonist, bore him to the ground, set his knee upon his breast, and put a pistol to his ear.

"Liar! coward! assassin!" were the most complimentary epithets with which he upbraided him; while the abject wretch prayed for his life.

"Your life! your pitiful life! what do I want with it?" mocked Conway in scorn. "Your punishment here is not ended. Give me your pocket-book!"

"Let me get up, then!" begged the prostrate man.

"Yes! to fling me over into the creek! I am a match for you in cunning while I have you under my heel. Lie still! You have one hand at liberty. No trifling!"

With the deadly barrel upon his temple, Mr. Snowden saw every compartment of the wallet ransacked. The papers were rejected as worthless and dangerous, and the money lodged in the pocket of the robber.

"Now," said Conway, rising, "if you dare to stir before I am out of sight, I'll send a ball through you. I don't know why this twinge in my shoulder doesn't enforce upon me the propriety of doing it, anyhow. You shall hear from me shortly. Revenge is worth more than gold—and I mean to glut myself—will riddle your soul well if I ruin myself by doing it. A

grand tragedy you can make of this hair-breadth escape at the next church-meeting! *Brother* Snowden, good morning!"

He walked backwards towards the spot where he had tied his horse, keeping the couchant figure covered with his weapon. His derisive shout and the trampling of his steed informed Mr. Snowden of his release. Crushed in spirit and sore in body, he made his way to the lower clearing. Jerry and Eddy were gone. He had no interruptions in his disconsolate ride homewards.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BELLA commenced packing early in the forenoon. She hoped to forget sadness in incessant occupation, although the body, reduced by watching and anxiety, demanded rest instead. Maurice found her thus engaged, bending over trunks, and almost concealed by mountains of wearing apparel; her head aching and limbs trembling.

"I shall not trust you out of my sight again to-day!" he exclaimed; and ordering the amused Sarah to "clear away trunks and clothes, and hide them where Miss Bella could not find them until she had leave from him to work," he lifted his wife in his arms as though she were a child, and bore her into the parlour.

"You are condemned to this sofa and my company until dinner, or a cessation of head-ache, sets you free," he pronounced magisterially.

Conversation on her part was confined to monosyllables. He "was fond of hearing himself talk," he said, and Bella thought, as he charmed away pain and gloom, that vanity of such gifts would have been very excusable. The last effort of her waking senses showed her the mild, hazel eyes of her father's portrait, fixed benignantly upon her, and a dear, living face, as she had seen it in her dream on that snowy afternoon, watching her with greater fondness. She slept, clinging to his hand, in half-unconfessed fear lest this vision should elude her as that had done. Maurice did not move until dinner was announced. Then laying the fingers, unlocked by slumber, upon her heart, he kissed her lightly, and joined Jamie in the dining-room.

"Mr. Snowden has not returned, then?" said he to the servant who waited upon them.

"Yes, sir; but he has a bad misery in his head, and don't want anything to eat. He begs you, gentlemen, to make yourselves at home, and 'scuse him, as he is lying down."

"Headaches are prevalent at this season," remarked Jamie; and a discussion upon climates, their causes and changes, ensued.

Next to Jamie's was a high chair, and he missed the merry prattler who usually occupied it.

"Where is Eddy?" he asked.

"I b'lieve Marster left him out on the plantation with Jerry," was the satisfactory reply.

"Have you been sitting there ever since I went to sleep?" inquired Bella, in tender reproach, seeing Maurice still beside her.

"No, little one. I have had my dinner and promenaded for an hour upon the portico with Jamie. How is the head ?"

"It does not ache at all—thanks to you. May I get up ?"

"You must first drink a cup of Aunt Agar's coffee. She charged me to call her when you awoke. Afterwards we will have a stroll. The air will refresh you."

"That man wath thurely 'tended to be a woman!" said Aunt Hagar, who had served her celebrated beverage with her own hands. "He don't know how to be rough. Mith Bella ith got a pattern huthband; and none of your thnake-in-the-grath kind, neither."

Mr. Snowden never appeared upon the field raked by her mental sight, without getting a shot.

"I telled you all how 'twould be. I ith thankful hur troubleth ith ended. Merthy knowth the hath had 'nough of 'em—the perthecuted lamb!"

The three were ready to walk, when Bella called Eddy.

"His father did not bring him home with him," said Jamie.

"Why not?" she asked.

"He consigned him to the care of some one—Jerry, I think."

"Uncle Jerry come up too, long ago!" observed Jake, who was loitering near, uneasily. "And he say he 'aint seen Mars' Edgar sence he went up 'Dogwood-hill,' after some posies for his sister, he say."

"What do you fear, love ?" said Maurice, as Bella changed colour. "If not left with Jerry, he must have been confided to some other guardian equally trusty. The absence of a frolicsome boy is no reason for disquietude. He may be playing with Carlo, at no great distance, this very instant."

"He locked Carlo up in he kennel, 'fore he went to ride with Marster," contradicted Dick, over the shoulder of his ebon shadow. "He say he didn't want him to follow him."

"If Carlo had a' been wid him, he would a' come home 'fore dis time of day," concluded Jake.

"You two are determined to 'make out a case!'" said Jamie, vexed at their pert objections. "Sister, the worst and most probable evil that can have overtaken him, is that he has been sleeping for an hour or two in the open air, and has sacrificed his dinner to his siesta."

"There is Jerry!" said Maurice. "We will soon settle the question. Here, Jerry! Where is your young master ?"

"Lor' knows, sur! *I* don't!" His skin had an ashy hue. "I was jes' coming to 'quire 'bout him. Jim, he say Marster lef' him down in de low-grounds wid me—but he never, sur! He went wid his pa' arter some dogwood flowers for Miss Bella, and I ain't laid eyes 'pon neither one of 'em sence."

"How dare you say so, you rascal ?" said Mr. Snowden, wrathfully. "I sent him down to you in ten minutes after we started up the hill."

"I comed away 'most as soon as you did, sur," returned Jerry, sturdily, "and never saw nor heard nothin' of Mars' Edgar."

Mr. Snowden reeled against the wall.

"That villain has stolen or murdered him!" he gasped. "I saw it in his eye! O, my child! my child!"

"I'd kill myself 'fore I'd do it!" cried poor Jerry, aghast.

"Of whom do you speak, sir?" inquired the astonished Maurice. "You cannot suspect this man of such a deed! Have you any ground for apprehension beyond Eddy's absence?"

"Every reason! every reason! Jerry!" he commanded, like one bereft of his senses, "call all the men together! Saddle Selim—saddle all the horses on the place, and ride after him! He has stolen your young master—and let some search the woods for the—— O, Heavens! This is the revenge with which he swore he would glut himself!"

By fragments, Maurice and Jamie extracted from his incoherent ravings the events of the morning. The most striking evidence of the weight of the calamity was his utter want of caution. He left untold nothing—not even his guilty attempt upon the life of his foe. The young men conferred apart. The idea of abduction or murder would never have occurred to them, but for the parent's anguished conviction of his child's fate. But neither could deny that there was room for suspicion of Conway.

Six hours had gone by since Eddy left his father's eye. None of the field or house hands had seen him during that period; and he had never been known to stay away from home so long, unless when accompanied by his body-guard—Carlo and the negro brothers. If, as was most likely, he had followed the cart-track into the public road, the horseman must have passed him, and no deed of darkness was impossible in a character so desperate—infuriated as he was at the recent attack upon himself.

Jamie mounted and rode over to Mr. Monmouth's, the nearest magistrate, to procure a writ of arrest; Ben galloped off for the sheriff; and Maurice appointed several parties to search the plantation and its environs. For himself, he dared not leave Bella alone with the distracted father. He strode the piazza, weeping, praying, and calling down vengeance upon the head of the supposed infanticide.

"Begone!" he thundered, as Bella approached him. "You were the means of his death. The money was yours! But for you, I should never have seen your hateful cousin. The same black blood is in you both—together you murdered my boy!"

"I loved him as my own brother!" cried Bella, bursting into tears.

"Your brother! Yes, he called you 'sister!' It was the last word I heard from his sweet lips."

Maurice held his arm.

Mr. Snowden, we have no proof of Eddy's danger, much less of his death. My candid opinion is, that he has strayed into the woods and lost his way. Doubtless, they will discover and bring him back before night. Let us hope!"

"Lost his way! when he knows every foot of the fields and woods better than I do myself! No! he is dead, I tell you! I feel it!"

The hopes of others diminished as time rolled on, without tidings of the missing heir. The discouraged search parties came in, one after another, as the darkness precluded further quest. The prints of a horse's hoofs were distinctly imbedded in the clayey bank of a pond by the road-side; but though dragged with the utmost care, it afforded no confirmation of their dread.

Mr. and Mrs. Monmouth were acting hosts of The Grove. Miles Ray,

shunned now by most "respectable" people, had shaken off the fumes of his week's potations, and unmindful of the injuries and slights offered him by one who should have been a spiritual guide instead of a tempter, stood with Clifford Monmouth—both armed to the teeth—awaiting the appearance of the last scout, ere they attended the sheriff upon his night ride. Mr. Snowden, his eyes blood-shot and voice quavering—questioned every one of the unsuccessful hunters—cross-examined them jealously, fiercely—but it was obvious that their zeal, if not as frantic, was yet equal to his. Lanterns were provided, and torches of pitch-pine flared from cabin to cabin. All were willing to go forth again after a short halt for refreshment. The sheriff and his friends departed. Alive or dead Conway would be brought to trial. Mr. Snowden retired to his apartment; Mr. Monmouth, who really trembled for his intellects, remained with him, preaching up hope, while his own stout heart was failing him for fear.

Jamie was wandering about the yard, when he detected the gleam of some sparkling substance among the grass. By the moonlight, he picked up and recognized a silver whistle, generally attached to Eddy's coat-button, and which he had perhaps lost on his way to the gate that morning.

Maurice and Bella were in the porch. Fatigued and faint, she would not withdraw to seek repose; but resting upon his shoulder, heard his exhortations to faith and resignation. Together their souls ascended in unspoken supplications for the safe restoration of their darling. Jamie shewed them the toy.

"It was his, dear boy!" said his sister, kissing the relic.

"*Is* his, love!" corrected the sanguine Maurice. "The more I think of this kidnapping in broad day-light, the wilder appears the conjecture——"

A long, hoarse howl appalled them. Another echoed nearer—a dark body leaped the fence, and a dog dripping with mud, sprang upon Maurice.

"Carlo!" shrieked Bella. "O, Maurice! he has found him! he is drowned!"

Mrs. Monmouth ran out at the cry; and placing the insensible form of his wife in her arms, Maurice dashed down the hill in pursuit of Carlo. Jamie's lameness would not have allowed him to keep them in view, but at his shout, a dozen men were flying over the path taken by the dog. Maurice was in advance, his fleet limbs heavy and lagging in comparison with the speed of the faithful animal. Over fences and ditches, ploughed fields and through thorny hedges, he led by the most direct route, to the meadows and the creek. He had drawn the child from the water—it would seem with violent and reiterated efforts, for his clothes were torn and marked by the bloody teeth, but the body was uninjured. He might have been in a peaceful sleep, so calm and fair he was in the moonbeams. One hand thrown above his head, yet clenched the knife, his brother's gift, as if he had been surprised by drowsiness in the midst of his play, and was now dreaming of the morrow's sports.

Maurice raised him tenderly—uncontrollable tears raining upon the marbled face. The grief of the servants was unbounded. Groans and cries made the quiet temple of Nature a house of mourning. Maurice would have been the bearer of the precious remains, but Jerry interfered, his giant frame shaking with sobs.

"It was meant that he should a' gone back with me, sur. I'se a *right* to him, Marster!"

Maurice walked at his side; a silent, mournful band followed. Not an eye was closed at The Grove that night, except those of the bereaved master. Mr. Monmouth had fortunately administered an opiate before Carlo appeared. He slept until the morning was heated into noon. It was a noisy vigil which others kept. An inquest promptly collected, repaired at day-break to the spot where the body had been found. It was a "bamboo" brake; the prickly branches intertwisted so closely, that those engaged in the search of the preceding day, were not to be blamed for having neglected to pierce its recesses. Eddy had evidently crawled under the thicket. Upon a grass-plat, the border of the brook, lay his hat, filled with withered crowsfoot, blue-eyed grass, and violets. The fatal scarlet flag flaunted over the pool, which was partly bridged by a dry log. The print of Eddy's muddy shoes was visible upon this to the farther and smaller end, which was freshly broken. The maple boughs had been pruned as high as the little fellow could reach them, and a half-severed spray yet dangled within arm's length of where he must have stood when his footing failed. In an eddy of the stream was tossed up, like blood-tinged foam, a mass of white and red blossoms. A jostle, the start caused by a word unexpectedly and quickly uttered, might have plunged him into the waves, but there was no evidence that either of these had led to his death. The verdict of "accidental drowning" was completed sustained, moreover, by the want of any sign of violence upon the corpse, and the fact that no foot of horse or man was impressed upon the moist soil, which retained the child's track.

By eight o'clock the sheriff was upon the ground with his prisoner, against whom there was now no accusation. The hardened man exhibited some alarm before he was assured of his acquittal; then the sense of mortification and insult lashed into fury his hatred of the prey of his extortion.

"I never believed in an Almighty Judge until now," he said. "While this scoundrel was plotting my destruction, his child was drowning. Had his blow been delayed a second, I would have asked the meaning of the scream, which I know now was a death-shriek. *He* murdered the boy—not I?"

Unrestrained by the presence of the dead; in defiance of the indignant rebukes of those around, he told the disgraceful story of wrong done to the orphan, and to the memory of an innocent man; of years of fraud and hypocrisy; of cowardly bribes and falsehoods; finally, of the attempted assassination, and with a vow of unsatisfied vengeance left the house.

One sentence pealed upon the ears of his electrified auditors—an apostrophe to the wretched parent, spoken above the ruins of his idol—"BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

ISABEL read a letter at the alcoved window.

"I am spending this night at your sister's, dearest; in the room to which, four years ago, was conveyed a wounded—they thought a dying man, bleeding, and senseless even to the hand that tended him, the love that gave him life. It is a wintry night; the wind sighs piteously at the casement, and the sea moans like a human thing in pain. At its voice, the curtain is raised above another picture than this lonely scene. In yonder chair—which I have placed just where it stood then—on a September day, sat a slight figure; the raven hair put back from the thought-crowned brow, the head bowed over her needlework. She was much to me then—the world would be nothing without her now. She sang—a murmur as soft as the song of an ocean-shell—

'Long, long be the heart with such memories filled.'

"Through my soul the plaintive burden sounded, and a hollow echo replied, Isabel! *Then* I knew that my heart was not full, that the deep within the deep was yet void. I repelled the thought as disloyal—as false. I spoke of you, and you alone; of the pain I had inflicted; the heroic fortitude which you had opposed to your sorrows. I held Alma's letter, telling me that I was all in all to her, yet my spirit longed more for your forgiveness than for her devotion. That same page had mortified and wounded me by its careless mention of you—token of her insensibility or ingratitude. I loved the child—as a child. You have heard most of this before, beloved, but I am thinking it all over to-night, and when had I a thought that you did not share? I say that I loved Alma. I believed that I had discovered in her the embodiment of that that is pure, artless, and affectionate in woman. I was moved by her preference for me; and in the pleasing delirium excited by her beauty, innocence, and partiality, I said to myself—'You are a captive! Bow to your destiny!' I acted impetuously; but others—men with cooler heads, have done likewise, and by a life of disappointment expiated the error of feeling and judgment. I see this in looking backwards; I did not acknowledge it then, or so long as my engagement continued. I was to marry Alma. That was fixed; and of course my love must be sufficient for the occasion. I wrote warmly and sincerely to her; thinking of her as the dear, unsophisticated girl who doted upon me; with whom books, nor accomplishments, nor society could ever be my rivals; who would, in due season, make me supremely happy by her smiles and caresses. Then came a blow which none of us had anticipated. She also, had a duplicate heart, and the genuine had not been bestowed upon me. 'Harry Eaton had loved her so long and truly,' she wrote, the page blotted with tears—'and she trusted that I would forgive her for speaking so plainly—but she fancied there was more congeniality between them than us.'

"It was the old story, 'out of sight, out of mind.' Upon the shallow runlet, one ripple destroyed another. In Philadelphia Harry was an object of indifference; to the telescope of affection, when its stand was Chicago, I was a star of the sixth magnitude. I had often felicitated myself upon my good fortune in possessing her love and your companionship. This reverse in my prospects proved which was more essential to my happiness. There was a shock, an ebullition of injured self-esteem, construed into the pang of deceived trust, and—my own best, truest one! I turned to you! O! need I say—after more than two years of such bliss as cynics and misanthropes say is never the boon of mortals—need I repeat what you know so well? that the fancy of the 'undisciplined heart' was a glow-worm to the beams of a love which has never deviated from its orbit, or withdrawn its shining; as the channel to the sea; a span of time to eternity! My glorious—my peerless wife! As your name, that word has a meaning my tame pen cannot shadow forth.

"If men, ay, and women, too, would record their heart-lives with the fidelity manifested in jotting down the above, we should hear less of 'Love's' first unchangeable 'young dream.'"

The reader smiled. "I have never had a later," she said.

"But in this age of attachment to ancient fallacies, people would laugh at my theories, as would your lady-friends at my reverie-letters; as did Mary this evening, when in answer to her query, 'What news?' as I folded up your last, I said 'None.'"

"'None in four pages!'

"'No. Isabel never writes newsletters to me.'

"And lest Bella should make a like enquiry, with a like result, let me conclude this with a scrap of intelligence, which you must not let afflict you too sorely. I lecture in Boston to-morrow night, and not, as I wrote you, on the one following; so this epistle will be our avant-courier to Mooresville, preceding us by a single mail. Do not say, as I know you will—'If I had known this, I would have been at home to meet him!' My joy at seeing you will not be damped by such friends as the dwellers at the Parsonage."

Piétro began his evening chimes as Isabel finished the perusal of the lover-husband's heart-message.

She looked upwards. The sky was canopied with leaden clouds. She did not perceive them. The blessing, too fond and solemn to be read by any eyes but those for which it was penned, seemed to have brought her the peace it invoked. Her prayer was a thanksgiving; a hymn of praise as free from dissonance as were the bird-vespers.

"Here she is!" said Bella. "She has a letter, too. That accounts for her love of solitude."

Alma was with her. Mr. Eaton had business in Philadelphia and Baltimore, and had indulged her in a long-planned visit to her relations—the first she had paid them as a married woman. The strawberry lips, the languishing eyes, the blonde ringlets, were unchanged; but her figure had lost its aërial grace, and the peachy tint had, in deepening, spread from

the cheeks over the rest of the face. Whereas she had formerly been plump and rosy, she was now—it must be written!—fat and ruddy. She was a matron, fair to behold; but one would have scrutinized the round, eternally good-natured countenance in unavailing attempts to find the attraction which had enslaved the imagination of a fastidious, intellectual being like Frank Lyle.

"Will you exchange?" asked Bella, holding out an envelope.

"No!" smiled Isabel, "yet I should be delighted to read yours, if, as I suspect, it is from Marion Norwood."

After some bantering, Bella surrendered it unconditionally.

"This is our third winter at the Grove, dear Bella," wrote Marion. "I cannot realize it, for the time has winged happily by, without important events; yet each day has its duty and its joy. Mr. Norwood—'Powhie' I must call him to you—is the model-farmer of the county. In his indolent bachelorhood, you and I could discern the germs of great and useful qualities—so nobly developed now. I am very proud of my husband, and do not blush to say it. His influence as a citizen and a master is remarkable, for he entered upon the shady side of thirty but six months ago. His servants appear to be devoted to him; more than to their former owner—and I cannot but approve their taste. 'Marion Herbert for ever!' I hear you say. I cannot help it, Bella! This habit of speaking out my mind is too stubbornly rooted to be unlearned in less than a lifetime. And, as I have touched upon your respected stepfather, let me, as Ben says, 'construe the object' a moment longer. Have you heard of his recent marriage? Adelaide Monmouth showed me the notice in a Tennessee paper. The bride is the daughter of a wealthy planter, and is not over twenty-five years of age—so says Adelaide's sister. Mr. Snowden met her last winter in Memphis, where he has fixed his residence. But the blood burns in my face when he is named, and I experience an involuntary twitch of the muscles of my upper lip, which, Powhie tells me, is not becoming; therefore, we will lay the arch dissembler upon the shelf—with this ticket affixed to his dustless coat—'*Given over as past cure.*'

"Mrs. Willard Monmouth is at her husband's father's. Willard came up with her, but remained only a day. He looks crest-fallen since the failure of 'Merton and Monmouth.' Their bankruptcy excited general wonder. They were doing an extensive business, and report says the senior member's better judgment was outweighed by his partner's overweening desire to get rich. Be this as it may, it is a sad affair, and it is to be hoped, will teach them a lesson for the future. Adelaide is as gay as of yore, and—as amiable! Do not frown! I have no disposition to talk scandal of my neighbours. Time was, when their discomfort would have given me a malicious pleasure. It grieves me now—more than ever, since our visit to Mooresville last summer. Whenever I see Willard, I sigh to think what a home and wife he might have had, and I am certain that from the locked chamber of his soul comes a dreary response. Yet you are far happier for the wreck of your girlish dreams. Powhie, who ought to be a competent judge in this case, says that after making the acquaintance of your husband, he was convinced that it would have been a flagrant violation of the designs of Nature and Providence, had you been sundered,

even by himself. And Miss Maria, whose northern tour, as she styles her journey to Pennsylvania—was fresh in her mind at my late trip to Richmond, 'assured' me, in her confidential under-tone—'if I had seen so unexceptionable a gentleman in my young days, my dear, and the attachment had been mutual, as might have been, my love—for I was esteemed passably pretty, and was more voluble then than now—time and care have left their trace. I see by the glass, to-day, that there are three more grey hairs in my left curl. I never pull them out—Oh, no! 'the hoary head is a crown of glory'—but I think it is more than probable that if dear Bella's husband had sued for my hand, thirty years ago, I should have been Mrs. Oakley!"

Isabel laughed at this climax.

"Are you jealous, Bella?"

"Of good Miss Maria? Not quite—although Maurice gives her an honourable place in his gallery of portraits. Now for the payment at which you intimated, when pleading for Marion's gossiping communication."

"It is the tidings that Jamie and Frank will sup here to-night," returned Isabel.

"To-night! that is a pleasant surprise! What has altered their plans?"

Isabel explained.

"The train is due in half an hour," she said, consulting her watch. "They will have a wet ride."

The day had died gloomily, and the clouds were shedding large, slow-falling drops of grief. Isabel fastened the shutters, and lowered the curtain, while Bella lighted the lamp.

"Still afflicted with the crotchet-mania, Alma?" remarked the latter, seeing Mrs. Eaton draw up to the centre-table with her netting.

"Yes, and I love it as well. Harry says it makes him nervous to see me always pulling at one thread, and that tidies are the most *un*tidy things that ever were invented, but I can't give it up. It is so nice to have some fancy-work on hand; for you know, in a boarding-house, one has an immensity of spare time."

"I thought you were keeping house," said Isabel.

"I was—but now that I am free from the harness, I will never be caught again. *My!* I would not undergo the troubles of another such year as the one in which I sat at the head of a table, for the grandest establishment in Christendom. I lived at home for a while; but it was inconvenient for Harry to ride so far night and morning, and papa made me a present of a house—all furnished. That was the beginning of tribulations. It wasn't only that I had to labour so hard, and was in a perpetual worry with the cookery-books and servants, but Harry complained of me. He is the kindest fellow living, but he has his notions like all other men, and one of these is a dislike to boarding out. He held out against breaking up until the second anniversary of our wedding-day, when I told him that this life was wearing down our constitutions and spoiling our tempers—and he submitted. I am sure," she added to Bella, as Isabel went singing up the stairs, "it would craze me to have as much on my brain as she has on hers. Does she hire a housekeeper?"

"No. She makes time for every employment. She has a sweet home; neat, convenient, and tasteful."

"I dare say she is obliged to me for having left Mr. Lyle for her," said Alma, complacently.

Bella was amused at her naïveté. "Perhaps so. They are a well-matched couple."

"I wonder how he will feel when he sees me!" mused Mrs. Eaton. "Just to think? when we parted we were engaged! This life has some crooked turns in it, Bella, but I believe they generally come out straight at last."

Which could not be affirmed of all the ideas to which she gave articulation. Bella comprehended and sympathised with this sentiment.

"I am glad that Isabel is not an old maid," continued Alma. "I used to be terribly afraid that she would be. The difficulty with literary ladies is, that the men they would have, usually pick out beauties or fortunes instead. Although clever themselves, they appear shy of smart women; and no girl will marry her inferior—so they are abandoned to single blessedness. I have a pious horror of old maids. By the way, what has become of Dr. Merton?"

"He is still living in Philadelphia."

"Is he married?"

"No."

"Does he love Isabel yet?"

"In a certain way, I suppose that he does. He is an intimate and constant visitor at Frank's."

Bella sighed softly. The blind path is not always lighted in this life. Lewis pursued his bravely and trustfully, but its intent was hidden still.

"What are you going to do, Isabel?" questioned Alma, as her cousin came in with two dressing-gowns upon her arm.

"They are for Frank and Jamie. They will be cold and wet from their journey."

"You will spoil your husband," cautioned the matron of three years.

"I am willing to abide the consequences," was the confident answer.

She disposed each wrapper upon a chair at the fire, and set a pair of slippers in front of it. Maurice descended from the study a few minutes before the scraping of feet at the door proclaimed the arrivals. Without a word of preparation for the meeting with his old love, Isabel drew Frank into the parlour.

"Alma!" he said, hurrying across the room, and giving her a right cousinly greeting. "This is an unexpected pleasure! When did you come?"

"Yesterday."

He shook her hand again. "And Mr. Eaton? Is he here?"

"No. He went on to Baltimore this morning."

Jamie was, even now, known as a poet and reviewer of mark; and although a hopeless cripple, commanded respect by his dignified deportment and prepossessing countenance. He was still the pet of his sister and cousin, and while the Parsonage was his home, asked for no other.

"This is comfort—home-comfort!" said Frank, rubbing his hands

before the blaze. "This warmed dressing-gown has waved alluringly before my eyes ever since the sun set and the rain came on."

Alma was secretly disappointed. She had hoped that he was happy with Isabel; but her womanly pride would have been gratified if his manner had not been quite so unembarrassed and cordial; if his face had been less expressive of perfect contentment, and those rare, eloquent eyes had dwelt longer upon her and less lovingly upon his wife.

"There is a book for you, Isabel," he said. "It was given to me to-day, and in glancing through it, I thought it above the common run of modern light literature. I promised to notice it soon, so we will give it a cursory examination after tea. There are some passages which I shall enjoy reading to you."

"'Reveries of a Bachelor,'" read Isabel. "I have heard of it."

"And I!" said Bella. "No monopolies, Mr. Lyle! I move that we all participate in the feast of reason. It is just the evening for fire-side reading. And now for the 'cup that cheers but not inebriates!'"

"Miss Brown is a practical satirist," said Frank, aside to Isabel and Bella, as a plate of "drop-cakes" was put upon the table. If Alma had associations connected with them, she was selfish in their enjoyment.

The storm was loud when the family gathered round the library fire. Frank was a fine elocutionist. His rendering of the humorous passages was merrily received, and there were tears in other eyes besides his, when the ashes of desolation thickened upon the cooling embers of the lonely hearthstone. He had purposed selecting a paragraph or page here and there, but his hearers vetoed the omission of a line. Then came the exquisite tissue of mirth and pathos which has hung with beautiful thoughts and fantasies, the homely "city grate." The variously-tinted sea-coal was succeeded by the intense, long enduring glow of the anthracite, and the hearts of the listeners waxed warmer with every word.

"A home!" read Frank, his soul in his eyes and voice. "It is the bright, blessed, adorable phantom which sits highest on the sunny horizon that girdeth Life. When shall it be reached? When shall it cease to be a glittering day-dream, and become fully and fairly yours? It is not the house, though that may have its charms; nor the fields carefully tilled, and streaked with your own foot-paths; nor the trees, though their shadow be to you like that of a great rock in a weary land; nor yet is it the fireside, with its sweet blaze-play; nor the pictures which tell of loved ones; nor the cherished books—but more, far more than all these—it is the PRESENCE. The Lares of your worship are there; the altar of your confidence there; the end of your worldly faith is there; and adorning it all, and sending your blood in passionate flow—is the ecstacy of the conviction that *there* at least, you are beloved; that there you are understood; that there your errors will ever meet with gentlest forgiveness; that there your troubles will be smiled away; that there you may unburden your soul, fearless of harsh, unsympathizing ears—and that there you may be entirely and joyfully—yourself!

"There may be those of coarse mould—and I have seen such, even in the disguise of women—who reckon these feelings puling sentiment. God pity them—as they have need of pity!"

"Amen!" said Maurice and Jamie in the same breath.

Frank looked up.

Bella—her head laid against her husband's arm, was listening with tenderly smiling mouth and earnest eyes.

Isabel's midnight orbs sparkled with fire and dew.

Alma was asleep!

THE END.

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