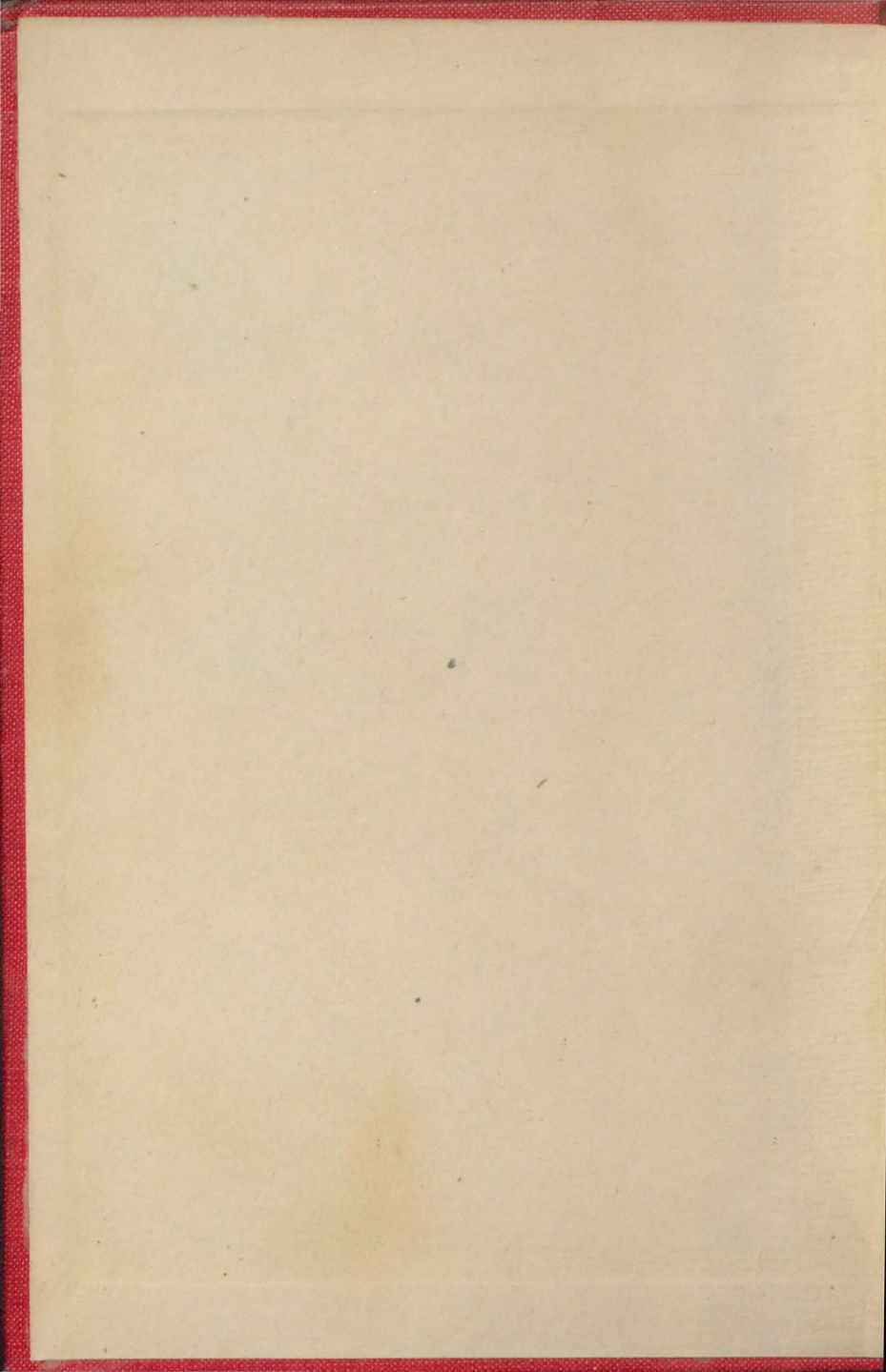


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GUESTS.





THE WEDDING GUESTS

OR

THE HAPPINESS OF LIFE

"I slept, and dreamed that life was Beauty.
I woke, and found that life was Duty."
"Was then thy dream a shadowy lie?
Toil on, sad soul, courageously!
And thou shalt find thy dream to be
A noon-day light and strength to thee!"

Love Chamber.

From D. Wynter

THE WEDDING GUESTS

Oct. 1923.

OR

THE HAPPINESS OF LIFE
FACHBIBLIOTHEK FÜR
ANGLISTIK und AMERIKANISTIK
an der UNIVERSITÄT WIEN

A Nobel

BY

Hume
MRS. MARY O' HUME-ROTHERY

AUTHOR OF "TWELVE OBSCURE TEXTS ILLUSTRATED," "THE BRIDE'S-MAID,
COUNT STEPHEN, AND OTHER POEMS," "NORMITON,
A DRAMATIC POEM," ETC., ETC.

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Dedication

TO

SOPHIA AUGUSTA COTTRELL

To thee, friend of many years !
From whom distance hath not parted ;
Whom time's changes, griefs, hopes, fears,
Have but left the truer hearted :

In remembrance of the days,
Which first taught my heart love's gladness ;
Of life's later-trodden ways,
Where love holier shone through sadness ;

Of the ties so closely twined,
Ere on severed paths we started ;
Of pure hopes yet unresigned,
And of all our dear departed :

As a pledge, that ever true
To the vows long since recorded,
—Still the goal to keep in view—
I have journeyed, well rewarded ;

That the seeds of truth then sown,—
Precious seed borne forth with weeping—
'Neath Heaven's mercy-beams upgrown,
Ripen toward the joyful reaping ;

That the dreams, dreamed long ago,
Dreams of joy and love and beauty,
Have borne fruit, e'en here below
Nourished from the soil of duty ;

That the heaven-lent staff and guide,
Lent when first life's storms assailed me,
Never since, though sorely tried,
Hath in joy or sorrow failed me :

Thus mine offering I make !
Prizing it no whit less lowly,
Though thou prize it, for my sake,
More than dear, scarce less than holy.

All Fame's triumphs missed, no less
Love may grant more dear ovation ;
Crowning, not the poor success,
But the worthy aspiration.

M. C. H-R.

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THE WEDDING GUESTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIDE AND THE BRIDE'S-MAIDS.

It is Baptiste and his affianced maiden,
With garlands for the bridal laden.

LONGFELLOW, *from the "Gascon."*

"THERE, Cissy; this is my last," said Lady Emlyn, throwing one of those delicate concoctions of orange-flowers and white satin ribbon yclept "favours," across the table to her pretty young sister,—almost too young she looked for a bride-elect.

"The smallest contributions gratefully accepted!" replied a young man, standing so close by Cissy that it was impossible to doubt his being the happy lover.

"See, Cissy, I just wanted this one for that side of my wreath," he added, arranging it so as to complete the bridal garland which he had for the last few minutes been employed in extemporising. A number of the favours wreathed into her pretty brown curls and braids, and others disposed as shoulder-knots, and clustered on the skirt and bodice of her pretty muslin dress, testified alike to the industry of the favour-maker, and the ingenuity of the decorator.

"Now come and look at yourself," he continued, leading her, laughing and blushing, to the nearest pier-glass. "I don't believe you will look half as well the day after to-morrow. You had much better take my advice, and send your fine lady's-maid about her business."

"So I would if I did not care to be fit to be seen," returned Cissy; "but"—

"Fit to be seen! I appeal to you, Lady Emlyn!" But

before he could take her hand to lead her into the middle of the room, Cissy escaped towards the open window, though she was, of course, overtaken before she had gone many steps; when, after a little make-believe quarrelling, and much laughing and whispering, they proceeded amicably to remove Cissy's adornments, and replace them in the basket from which they had been taken.

"Such a pair of children!" exclaimed Lady Emlyn, watching them with an amused, affectionate smile. "Such a pair of children, Horace! We ought not to have let them marry these seven years!"

The gentleman addressed as Horace raised himself slightly in the luxurious chaise-longue, from which, though pretending to read, he, too, had been watching the young pair. He was an elegant-looking man, a year or so older than Lady Emlyn.

But she, though really above thirty, might have passed for much younger, her bright eye and smile, and smooth, fair skin, bespeaking health and spirits as brilliant, still, as those of early youth. His face, on the other hand, wore a languid, half-dissatisfied expression, not wholly pleasing notwithstanding handsome features, and the air of refinement which springs from intellectual tastes and cultivation. He laid down his book as Lady Emlyn spoke, and taking a more undisguised survey of the lovers, replied, "Well, on the whole, I dare say they would have given us more trouble if we had not let them, Louisa!"

"To be sure we should," said the young Lord Castleton. "We should have had to run away, should we not, Cissy? And then Horace would have had to run after us. We must have let you into the secret, Lady Emlyn; we never could have frightened you; but I confess I should have enjoyed giving Horace a chase; he does grow so incredibly lazy!"

"My dear Frederick," said Mr. Horace Carysfort, rising to his full height, but lounging the next moment against the mantelpiece, as if it were quite too much trouble to stand upright, "when you are as old as I am, you will wait to exert yourself, till you find something worth doing it for, which is just the extent of my laziness."

"Yes," said Frederick, laughing; "but then I will take care that I do find something worth exerting myself for, at least just now and then—won't we, Cissy?"

"For instance," said Mr. Carysfort, pointing to the heap of favours by this time restored to their appropriate basket;

“perhaps I might exert myself so far as that, if I could persuade some charming young lady to stand block for me. Shall I try Miss Forrester when she arrives, Cissy?”

“Florence stand block for you!” exclaimed Cissy, indignantly. “I should like to hear you only talk of such nonsense to her! However, I am not afraid of your trying, when you see what she is like.”

“Why what is she like?” asked Horace. “Not so very ugly that I shall be afraid of her, I hope. I do not think I could take her in to the wedding-breakfast, if she is so very ugly.”

“She is not ugly; she is very pretty!” said Cissy. “And you shall not take her into breakfast, if you talk so of her beforehand.”

“But why shall I be afraid of her, then? Why should she not stand block for me, as well as you for Fred?” inquired Horace, with provoking coolness.

“Because Florence is not such a little goose as I am,” said Cissy, colouring, and almost with tears in her eyes, “Florence is so sensible and dignified,—no, not exactly dignified, but”——

“In short,” said the young lord, coming to her assistance, “likely to require more persuasion than Horace could ever exert himself to administer.”

“But a little of some people’s persuasion goes a great way, Cissy,” said Mr. Carysfort, affecting a coxcombical air; “and you have no idea how fascinating I can be when I try. Let me just show you. You shall be Florence—Miss Forrester, I beg your pardon!—and here, we say are the wedding-favours, which she will be pensively contemplating”——

“She will never be doing any such nonsense!” cried Cissy.

“Then I shall draw her attention to them,” persisted Horace, who rarely exerted himself so much for anything as for the sake of teasing his little “half-sister-in-law elect,” as he called her. “Fairest Florence, (I shall say)—no, forgive me! Miss Forrester—these fairy-like favours resemble yourself. Their elegance, their pure, unsullied beauty—the likeness is perfect! Let me only show you (then I shall take one up insinuatingly)—permit me for one moment, my dear Miss Forrester”——

Just at this moment—when Horace was approaching Cissy with one of the favours, repeating, as he did so, “For one moment only, my dear Miss Forrester!” she, watching him, divided between struggling laughter and the indignation she

wished to express, and the two others looking laughingly on,—the door was opened by a servant, whose lower-toned announcement of Miss Forrester, they were all too engrossed to hear; and before any of them were aware of it, a young lady had advanced into the middle of the room, and stopped short with a look of half-amused embarrassment.

"Florence," exclaimed Cissy, darting past the discomfited Horace, who retreated almost into the chaise-longue again. "Dear Florence, I am so glad you are come!" And a burst of merry greeting followed with introductions which Lady Emlyn tried to begin gravely, but failing egregiously, ended amid fresh merriment.

"It is really no good trying to look grave and proper, dear Florence, when you caught us all like a set of great babies at play, just now," said she, with the pleasant, cordial smile and tone which rendered her so universal a favourite. "Mr. Carysfort is so fond of teasing Cissy, especially about her being so fond of you; and he was just making believe to show her how he should set about persuading you to be as merry and ridiculous as the rest of us."

"I hope I am not often so ridiculous as I was just now, Miss Forrester," said Horace, recovering a little from the shock he had sustained, but still looking somewhat annoyed, partly, perhaps, at Lady Emlyn's frank explanation; "and if you will pardon me this time for taking your name in vain, I promise to behave better in future."

"Indeed," said Florence, conquering her shyness lest she should be thought to have taken offence, "I am ready to be as merry and ridiculous as any of you; and I heard no harm of myself, so have nothing to forgive any one for yet."

"There, Cissy," whispered Lord Castleton; "she will stand block yet, you will see!"

"She will not," exclaimed Cissy; and then looked round in alarm lest Florence should have heard.

But Florence had moved towards the open window, attracted, as a new comer from London could scarcely fail to be, by the lovely prospect of park and gardens, hill and wood, without; and in a few minutes they were all sauntering and chatting in the garden. Cissy went darting and skipping about like any young kitten at play, picking the prettiest flowers she could find to make a nosegay for Florence; her betrothed, of course, in close attendance, while the others walked and talked more gravely. For Mr. Carysfort was by no means inclined to be

thought "merry and ridiculous," and Lady Emlyn's ready good nature and tact seconded his wishes. If it must be confessed, she was very anxious he should like Florence (perhaps she might be the least trifle given to match-making, with the kindest possible intentions), and was, therefore, doubly desirous that the little awkwardness of their first meeting should be speedily effaced.

So they walked and talked, and had just sat down upon a shady garden seat, when they were saluted by Sir William Emlyn's cordial voice, inquiring what they meant by smuggling his guest out into the garden in this way, instead of either bringing her to see him in his library, or taking her upstairs to rest after her journey, like sensible people? Hereupon Florence, confessing, on cross-examination, to some slight degree of fatigue, was carried off to the house by the ladies, and the gentlemen were left to shift for themselves till dinner-time. For, once alone, there was no end to all that had to be said by the ladies, on the absorbing subjects of Cissy's wedding, and Florence's arrival. Louisa and Cissy had to rejoice over Florence, whom they had not now seen for some months, and to confide to her numberless interesting particulars, such as ladies are wont to confide to each other on such occasions, concerning the engagement, the impending festivities, and the wedding trip. And Florence, who had not seen the bridegroom elect before, had to submit to an examination as to what she thought of him,—not a trying one, fortunately, as he was not only very prepossessing in appearance, but so obviously devoted to his betrothed as to render it impossible not to like him. Then Florence had to unpack, in order to exhibit her bridesmaid's dress, and the final additions to Cissy's trousseau, which she had been commissioned to bring from town; and then the trousseau itself had to be inspected, and all in the midst of such laughing, kissing, and chattering, as would have been delightful to witness, had there been any disengaged spectator.

They were still deep in laces, satins, and orange-flowers, in Louisa's dressing-room, when Sir William put his head in at the door, to ask if that was what they called dressing for dinner, or whether they meant to dine upon finery to-day for a change?

All the ladies declared that Sir William seemed determined to leave them no peace on this particular day, and that they could not have been upstairs ten minutes; till, on looking at

their watches, they found it would be best to discuss that point no further; and, surrendering at discretion, dispersed to their several apartments. Sir William followed the two girls out into the passage, to see, as he said, that they did not go together, as otherwise they would certainly never be ready for dinner at all; upon which, Cissy declared that he was growing perfectly tyrannical, and he called her back to remind her, in a whisper, loud enough for Florence to hear, that she might as well begin to practise a little obedience beforehand. But Cissy protested she never meant to obey a bit. One only said that just for form's sake. Sir William might tell Frederick so, if he liked. And off she ran, with the prettiest look and smile of defiance imaginable, and disappeared from the scene.

"Ah!" said Florence, as she shut her door when the last glimpse of Cissy was lost, "what a child to be married! I wonder if she will be happy? Dear little Cissy."

For Cissy, though neither really little, nor so young by some years as she looked, being in fact, nearly twenty, was one of those pretty, playful creatures, whom everybody always calls little; and whose childlike manners and undeveloped minds render it hard to realize that they have become women in years. Petted and almost idolized by her sister, from her earliest youth, she had never felt the loss of the mother who had died in her infancy; and Lady Emlyn, having no children, had continued to concentrate upon her, after her own marriage, the same affectionate solicitude as before. Thus Cissy had known no trouble in her sunshiny life, to force upon her any thought for the future, or knowledge of the realities of life; and was now fluttering merrily into the most serious of all human engagements, with about as much conception of its importance or significance, as a kitten might have been burdened with under similar circumstances.

When we reflect on the countless marriages thus thoughtlessly entered on, and those entered on with still more culpable recklessness (for Cissy, at least, was marrying for love, childish and thoughtless love though it were), by the numbers of both sexes, who marry for money, or for position, or for marrying's sake, for anything, in short, but that which alone justifies marriage,—when we look round upon all this, we should be inclined to marvel that ninety-nine out of every hundred marriages do not turn out hopelessly miserable, did we not remember what infinitely better care God's Providence is ceaselessly

taking of each and all of us, than even the best and wisest can ever take of themselves. It is not, therefore, surprising, if many are guided to far safer anchorage amid the storms of life, than any to which their own wisdom or forethought could have entitled them.

Sir William and Lady Emlyn, however, were not only a happy pair, but, humanly speaking, deserved to be so. From the days when William Emlyn, the tall, sturdy son of the poor curate's widow, had been first permitted to shake down the mulberries and apples in the wealthy rector's garden for the rector's bright little daughter Louisa, a faithful attachment had grown up with their growth and strengthened with their strength, notwithstanding the apparent hopelessness which precluded its acknowledgment even to each other.

As Miss Louisa grew up, indeed, the village gossips—and perhaps the rector himself—set their notions on quite a different lover for her. The great house of the neighbourhood had, for some years past, been occupied by the twice-widowed Lady Castleton, whose eldest son, Mr. Horace Carysfort, inherited a sufficient fortune from his father to make him quite a great match for Miss Louisa; while the young viscount, some ten years younger than his brother, was by unanimous assent assigned to little Miss Cissy, the pet and plaything of the village. But notwithstanding the intimacy between the two families, years passed on, and no marriage came to pass to gladden and excite the expectant neighbourhood. William Emlyn had long since been placed in a merchant's counting-house in London, and only appeared at rare intervals, for two or three days at a time, to visit his mother and see his old friends; and Mr. Carysfort's university vacations, first, and then his residences with his mother, alternating with London seasons and continental travellings, slipped away one after the other, and matters still stood on the same friendly, but unexciting footing as ever.

Miss Louisa was positively five-and-twenty, and already considered by some alarmists in danger of becoming an old maid, when William Emlyn unexpectedly inherited a baronetcy and a fortune from a distant relative; and coming down to be congratulated by his friends—his mother was now dead—proposed and was accepted, on the very night of his arrival, as was known all over the village the next day. Whereupon everyone immediately declared that this was exactly what might have been expected; and that he, or she, had long felt

secretly convinced that a hopeless affection for the absent merchant's clerk, was the true cause of Miss Louisa's coldness to poor Mr. Horace. Of course, she could not marry them both, and had a right to take whichever she chose. Moreover, Sir William was a baronet, and probably much richer, too, than Mr. Horace, who suddenly fell fifty per cent. in the village sympathies; whereas the long-absent, but now successful suitor, was with equal suddenness discovered to have always been everybody's favourite, and rose to a height of popularity among his old neighbours, which would greatly have astonished him had he been able to spare time to think about it.

But now arose new perplexities. Instead of rushing off distractedly to the continent, or at least to London, to escape from the scene of his rival's success, "poor Mr. Horace" remained as composedly on the spot as if there were no rival in the question. And if he suffered at all from the unexpected turn of affairs, it was certainly more for want of knowing how to dispose of the spare hours he had been used to loiter away at the rectory, than from any of those acute pangs of disappointed love, under which the sympathising community were looking, if not absolutely longing, to see him pine and languish before their eyes. Whether, in fact, Mr. Horace had never entertained any warmer feelings towards Louisa than those of brotherly kindness, so likely to arise in their position of unrestrained intimacy; or, with the pride and *nonchalance* partly natural to him, and partly acquired in the world of fashion to which he belonged, had merely refrained from any betrayal of love, which he had the tact to perceive would have met with no response, the village-gossips could never decide. It was clear he intended to behave as if the former were the case, and acted the part of a brother, during the courtship and at the wedding, as naturally as if he had been born to it.

Six or seven years had passed since the marriage, and each found Louisa and her husband, if possible, happier than the preceding one. The life of a country gentleman afforded Sir William full scope for the activity congenial to his energetic and practically benevolent, rather than intellectual mind; and there was no kinder landlord, more active magistrate, or eager politician in the county. Louisa would have been happy with him in any position or circumstances; but none, perhaps, could have been so entirely suited to her tastes and character as that in which her marriage placed her—as the

mistress of a country residence, just fitted for the gratification of her warm-hearted hospitality, in a pleasant and social neighbourhood. The command, too, of an ample income, enabled her to exercise to all around her, that easy liberality which the kindness of heart dictated, without entailing those sacrifices of time and personal enjoyment, which might have demanded more energy and steadiness of self-denial than one who had known so little of trial and suffering in her own life could perhaps have been expected to possess.

The death of the rector had early settled the question whether he could best live alone, or the sisters apart; and transplanted Cissy to Emlyn Priory as her natural home. Nor did the lapse of time weaken old ties of friendship, or diminish the intimacy existing between Mr. Carysfort and his brother, and their old neighbours of the rectory. The brothers, too, by the death of Lady Castleton, had been uprooted from the quiet village neighbourhood in which so many of their early years had been passed; and now that one portion, at least, of the prediction of the village sages was about to be realized, in the marriage of Cissy with the young viscount, it was to be feared that the prophets might scarcely be enabled to enjoy this triumph of their sagacity, till its actual announcement in the papers should reveal the gratifying event. Such are the ups and downs of life! The match, which had been so long looked forward to, as the crowning glory and the twelvemonths' wonder of the quiet village of F——, took place at last, when it did take place, in a distant county, from whence the gossips of F—— had small chance of so much as hearing what might be the form and colour of the travelling-carriage, or how many bride's-maids there were at the wedding.

Their estimate of the grandeur of the match might have been somewhat lowered, however, had the humiliating fact reached them, that these latter were but two in number! Florence Forrester, the one already introduced to our readers, was an intimate friend of Lady Emlyn and Cissy, who were both inclined to believe there was no one like her in the world. And she was, indeed, truly lovable in disposition, gentle and deeply affectionate, but shy in her feelings, and retiring in her manners. She resided in London with her father, a man who moved much in literary and scientific circles, well calculated to develop her naturally intellectual and studious tastes. Her sisters being both married and in India,

she had for years past stood in the position of an only child ; and having but little intercourse among young people, her father's friends being chiefly of the older generation, her natural shyness had worn off but little ; and only those who knew her intimately even guessed at the intense capacities of affection, and the real superiority of mind, veiled beneath her gentle unassuming exterior. With her, as with Cissy, little had ever arisen to ruffle the surface of external life ; but the effect on their characters had been very opposite. As much thought and reflection had been crowded into every one of the four or five years of peaceful life, by which Florence was older than Cissy, as would have provided ample mental occupation for the latter during her whole past nineteen years and a half, and as many more to come ; and the somewhat dreamy tendency of her mind, encouraged and fostered by circumstances, threatened to render the former, perhaps, too theoretical and speculative, in the absence of such trials as bring theories to book by necessitating their reduction to practice.

She now sat musing over the child-like gaiety and thoughtlessness, doubly strange to a thoughtful mind like hers, with which Cissy was preparing to enter upon married life, till the dinner-bell startled her, just as her meditations had reached the point of wondering whether it would ever be possible for herself, under any circumstances, to contemplate so awfully serious a step, with any approach to confidence and satisfaction ? She thought it, to say the least, very improbable.

Who was to be the other bride's-maid ? was one of the first questions asked by Florence herself, when, dinner being over, the party were re-assembled in the drawing-room in that pleasant state of idleness and freedom from restraint, only enjoyable to perfection on a fine summer's evening in the country. There one may sit with open windows, moonlight without and lamplight within, and saunter in and out at will ; talking, not as if talking were a business, which must be energetically performed to keep up the credit of the establishment—as one talks at a party in a London drawing-room—but after a desultory, agreeable fashion, speaking when one has anything to say, and holding one's tongue if one prefers doing so ; feeling, in short, off duty, and at liberty to enjoy one's self as one likes.

"The other bride's-maid ? Oh did I not tell you ?" said Lady Emlyn. "Helen Montagu ; you must have heard us speak of her, I think."

"Helen Montagu, of whom Cissy used to be so afraid?" said Florence. "I remember her name very well, but I did not fancy you were intimate enough to ask her."

"Well, to say the truth, I hardly thought we were," returned Lady Emlyn; "but there was no one Cissy cared to ask besides you; and William likes Mr. Montagu very much, they are brother magistrates, and so on; and he thought it would be but friendly to ask Miss Montagu."

"And Emlyn likes Miss Montagu very much, too," said Mr. Carysfort; "do not leave that out, Louisa."

"So I do," said Sir William, no ways disconcerted by the imputation: "Helen Montagu is a very fine girl, and a very sensible one; about the only girl in the neighbourhood worth talking to; for she can not only talk sense, but knows how to listen besides."

"I never quite understood why Cissy should be so afraid of her," said Florence.

"Oh, she is *so* clever," said Cissy, in a tone of alarm.

"Very clever, indeed," said Lady Emlyn; "and though we have never seen much of her,—they live a mile or two on the other side of X——, too far off to allow of our meeting very often,—we have always fancied she cared more for clever men and clever books, than for the society of unlearned ladies like Cissy and me."

"Cissy is a little goose!" said Sir William. "How should Helen Montagu care for her society, while she looks frightened as soon as a sensible person comes near her? And the only reason for your not liking her, my dear Louisa, is just your never having seen enough of her. I will answer for your liking her very much before she has been a week in the house."

"I dare say you are right, dear William," said Lady Emlyn, with her sweet smile; "but I believe I am half a goose, too, for I feel rather afraid myself. She is to stay with us for a little while after the wedding, as well as you," she added, in explanation to Florence.

"But do you not like her only because she is clever?" said Florence. "I think that would be rather hard; or is she conceited or disagreeable in any way?"

"Oh dear no," said Lady Emlyn; "and pray do not think I dislike her, dear Florence; only I know so little of her. I believe many people think her extremely agreeable; especially gentlemen."

"Especially gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Carysfort. "That

depends on their taste in such matters. For my part, I think her extremely disagreeable. She sets up for being clever and sarcastic, and different from other young ladies."

"Very much so," interrupted Sir William, laughing. "I assure you, Miss Forrester, she was positively insensible to our friend Horace's attractions, a short time since, at our county ball at X——. He went there, I suppose, intending to patronize her, as a fine girl with twenty thousand pounds of her own, and a wealthy father besides, naturally deserved! and perhaps she did not like being patronized, for somehow the acquaintance did not prosper, and he has never been able to say a civil word of her since."

"Pshaw, Emlyn," returned Mr. Carysfort, reddening slightly, as he drew his chair a little nearer to Florence. "You must not believe me such a conceited fool as all that comes to, Miss Forrester; but I like to see a girl dancing like other girls, and not standing about, talking, in the middle of knots of gentlemen. And she talks politics like a man, Miss Forrester; and went about canvassing at the last X—— election."

"A libel! a pure X—— libel! Not a word of truth in it!" exclaimed Sir William. "I sifted the matter to the bottom, and it all resolved itself into her having imprudently gone into a shop to buy something she wanted, on one of the polling days. I could not allow my favourite to be slandered, Miss Forrester, you know; and pray don't believe a word Horace says about her; I am quite sure you will like her when she comes."

"Well, if she does not go about canvassing, she does talk politics," persisted Mr. Carysfort, "for I have heard her myself; and a woman may just as well do one as the other. I cannot bear a woman's meddling in such matters."

"But, Horace, did Miss Montagu talk politics to you?" inquired Lord Castleton.

"Of course not!" said Sir William. "The real grievance was, her preferring the society of two old politicians, like myself and her father, to his. It is nothing but jealousy; and to tell the truth, I think he is getting up politics on purpose to cut me out. I saw him very hard at the newspaper this morning."

"Horace get up politics!" exclaimed Frederick in ecstasy: "Just imagine such a thing!"

"Fred, don't be a goose," said Mr. Carysfort, good-naturedly,—"Frederick might say anything,—but I shall certainly never

do so for Miss Montagu's benefit. I hate a woman's pretending to understand such things, as I mean to let her know. I fancy, because she is an heiress and cuts a sort of figure in the neighbourhood, she thinks she may do or say anything."

"I do not believe she thinks much about it," said Sir William; "but I should like to hear you give her a lecture on the subject of talking politics, Carysfort! I doubt your getting far with it; she can hold her own."

"But when is she coming?" interposed Florence.

"To-night," said Lady Emlyn. "She was engaged to dine out with her father and mother, not far off, and they are to drop her here on their way home."

"So you will have a whole day to get over the shock of the first introduction, before you are called on to act bride's-maid in concert with so terrific a personage," added Lord Castleton.

"Mr. Carysfort's account is certainly rather alarming," said Florence, with a smile.

"Well, here comes some one who will be delighted to administer a composing draught, if you feel in any danger of a night of sleepless apprehension," said Sir William rising, as a lithe, active figure crossed a strip of bright moonlight on the lawn in front of the windows. "Always glad to see you, Frank!" he added, shaking hands with a young man who entered the moment after.

"Never safe from me, you mean," replied the new comer, in a voice whose sweetness instantly struck Florence's ear. "Lady Emlyn, I ought certainly to apologise for always taking you by storm in this way; but if people leave their windows open on such evenings as this, moths and all sorts of things will come in, you know!"

The speaker was about the middle height, but so slightly built as to look tall; fair complexioned, with almost golden hair, and delicate features which would have been thought very handsome, but that the beaming, sunshiny expression of his countenance, and the grace and animation of his bearing, made one quite forget whether they were handsome or not. His features might have been positively ugly and made little difference in him; the sphere and whole presence of the man was at once felt to be so delightful and enjoyable. After he had shaken hands all round, Sir William introduced him to Florence as "my friend Doctor Littleton," with a marked emphasis on the "Doctor," and the title surprised her not a little.

"How do you feel now, Miss Forrester?" pursued Sir William; "tolerably composed? Or shall Littleton administer? Carysfort has been giving Miss Forrester such terrific accounts of some of our neighbours, Frank, that we fear her constitution will scarcely stand it."

"I hope I was not one of the terrific neighbours described, or I shall have to prescribe—the speediest possible flight, and take it myself!" replied Frank Littleton, casting a glance of laughing alarm towards the window behind him.

"No, we had not got so far as you yet," said Lord Castleton, "or I would not have answered for the consequences. Horace is quite ferocious this evening, but happily it was only a lady he was attacking, so we may escape a duel this time."

"Oh! we shall have it," said Sir William; "substituting words for pistols. I will back my friend Miss"—

"Hush, hush!" said Lady Emlyn, nervously, and just in time, for Miss Montagu was announced the next moment.

Florence looked with some interest towards the subject of so much discussion. She was a fine girl, tall and stylish, with a very intellectual countenance, and decided expression; but, Florence thought, very cold, till she caught the bright smile which lighted up and quite changed the whole character of Helen's face, as she responded to Sir William's cordial "Very glad to see you here, Miss Helen!"

"My dear Sir William, very glad to find myself here, I assure you!" The tone was so frank and warm-hearted, Florence liked her immediately.

Her manner to Lady Emlyn and Cissy was not quite the same; she might not feel so sure of their welcome; and her bow to Mr. Carysfort was far from ingratiating. With Mr. Littleton she shook hands cordially.

"My sister-bride's-maid, are you not?" she said, with something of the same bright smile, and a frankly offered hand, as Lady Emlyn introduced her to Florence.

Florence felt quite relieved. She had begun to catch the infection of Cissy's fears; and enjoying, as she did so much, the society of warm-hearted people like Louisa and Cissy, whose affectionate, demonstrative natures drew out and expanded her own shy, deep feelings, had felt as if the presence of a cold, sarcastic, perhaps unfeminine, woman, would be a discord introduced into so congenial a sphere. But she was soon convinced, as she watched and listened to Helen Montagu, that she was not really cold. Her manner was lively,

but not in the least conceited, nor did Florence detect any tendency to sarcasm in her tone or conversation; and the frank, fearless self-reliance with which she seemed so naturally to take her place in a circle in which all but Sir William were comparative strangers to her, was rather attractive than not, to one whose own character was so opposite as that of the timid, retiring Florence. She was fast deciding that Mr. Carysfort was very much prejudiced, when a turn was given to the conversation which rather modified her impressions, and showed that Helen could certainly be sarcastic if she pleased.

Lord Castleton, who was not at all disposed to be afraid of Miss Montagu, and might, perhaps, be actuated by a mischievous spirit of opposition to his brother, had been doing his best to second Helen's efforts to draw Cissy, whom she was much inclined to like, if the latter would let her, into conversation. Finding it rather uphill work, he had recourse to a little teasing; which succeeded so well that, before long, the three were engaged in an animated dispute, in which the rest of the party joined, on the deeply interesting question, Whether ladies or gentlemen oftenest had their own way, and which ought to have it?

Lord Castleton said that as ladies always had their own way before marriage, gentlemen ought to after. Helen would not agree that they ought; but thought they generally did, because ladies were so much the more amiable and yielding. She was sure Sir William would confess that. But Sir William would confess nothing of the sort; he was sure Louisa would admit that he always gave up in everything. Lady Emlyn wondered at his audacity, and protested that husbands always had their own way; but Cissy, looking as prettily obstinate as possible, maintained stoutly, that ladies ought always to have their own way: and she meant to have hers. Mr. Carysfort came to her assistance.

"Quite right, Cissy, so they ought; and mind you do. Send for me to help you keep Fred in order, whenever he is unruly. Make him take you to as many balls as you please every night, or drive you in the park every day; in short, do just as you please. Turn fashionable, or musical, or literary, or — no, there is one thing I bar! If you turn political, I will never take your part again; for, if I hate anything, it is a political lady."

The conclusion of this speech suddenly enlightened the majority of its hearers, as to its real drift. Whether impelled by Sir William's defiance, or, perhaps, additionally nettled by

Miss Montagu's distant bow—for, however much he himself disliked her, he might not be quite prepared for her so cordially reciprocating his feelings—Mr. Carysfort had been lying in wait, in something of a malicious mood, for an opportunity of making his threatened attack. But Sir William had been right as to its probable success.

"Then, of course, you know nothing of politics yourself, Mr. Carysfort," said Helen, with a slight curl of the lip, but in the most careless, natural tone imaginable.

"May I ask why you suppose so?" returned Horace, colouring, in spite of himself; the observation had so exactly hit the mark.

"Oh, I have so often observed," said Helen, in the same off-hand tone, "that men cannot bear women to know more of anything than they do themselves."

"Now, Miss Helen," said Sir William, generously coming to Horace's assistance, though not without a sly side-glance of triumph towards him, "you do not mean to say you really think that?"

"Not of all men; not of you, certainly, Sir William," replied Helen, with her frank smile.

"Horace did not take much by that motion, did he, Miss Forrester?" whispered Lord Castleton, a few minutes later, stealing up behind her and Mr. Carysfort, who had taken refuge in conversation with her. But his brother, putting his hands on his shoulders, bade him go back to Cissy, which, having had his say, he was ready enough to do; and then Florence's observations on Helen came to a close for the evening. She could not do less, especially after his discomfiture, than give her attention to Mr. Carysfort's pleasant conversation on books, pictures, scenery, and the like, all of which he was well qualified to discuss. Lady Emlyn cast well-pleased glances at them from the larger and merrier group near at hand; and Frank Littleton, who sat near her, suddenly asked if Mr. Carysfort were engaged, as well as his brother.

"Oh, dear, no," said Louisa, with a smile. "He never saw Miss Forrester till to-day. Is not hers a sweet face, Mr. Littleton?"

"I was just thinking so," he replied, abstractedly.

"A very sweet face," he repeated to himself, as he walked homewards, across the park, an hour later. "I can hardly fancy Horace Carysfort the man to please her seriously, either."

CHAPTER II.

THE DAY BEFORE THE WEDDING.

And we talked—oh ! how we talked !

MRS. BROWNING.

"DEAR Florence," said Lady Emlyn the next day, in conclusion of a pleasant talk about Cissy and her prospects, "I shall be wanted now for the signing of the settlements ; so take your parasol, and explore that little path down the steep slope through the shrubbery. It leads to such a pretty glen and waterfall, and you can sit and read there till I come to show you the rest of the grounds ; or, if I cannot come myself, I will send one of the gentlemen."

"If there is a waterfall, I could stay there all day," said Florence ; "but ought I not to ask Miss Montagu to go with me, perhaps?"

"She is out already ; William told me, an hour ago, that she had set off on a long ramble when he came in," said Lady Emlyn.

"Well, I must confess I like best going alone," returned Florence ; "I never can help feeling shy of strangers."

"Only you always think first of what others like best, dear Florence ; you are so unselfish."

Florence turned away to pursue the path indicated by Louisa from the drawing-room window where they parted, thinking how pleasant it was to be among such kind, partial friends, who saw, or fancied, all possible good qualities in those they loved. Very pleasant ; but it would not do for long, lest one should begin to believe all that their partiality suggested. As to being unselfish, for instance ? How could she possibly be unselfish, who had known so few trials in her life, when yet so much of trial was needful to correct the inborn selfishness of human nature ? As to being unselfish here, where every one was thinking of her pleasure, there was no room for it ; and though it was different at home, where she was used to think of nothing but her father's wishes and convenience, that had nothing to do with unselfishness. How could one be selfish towards a father, or anybody one loved ? The difficulty would be, if thrown among those one could not love. Was that,

perhaps, to be her future trial—since trials there must come in life? at least, if the life were to be a long one—and so Florence followed the downward path in one of her dreamy, musing moods. She had yet to prove, by experience, that there is passive as well as active selfishness; a selfishness of the affections, as well as of thought and action. To the latter she was not inclined; the former she might hereafter need to combat seriously.

The path soon led her to a little glen, down which a streamlet came brawling on its rocky bed, between precipitous banks, with jutting boulders of grey limestone, between and in the crevices of which sprung luxuriant vegetation. Foxglove leaves almost hid many a block, and tall feathery ferns waved over their most ragged edges and boldest projections; and all beneath the shade of tall trees which crowned the banks on each side, broken here and there a little, to let in the sunlight upon the dancing water, the very sight of which almost persuaded Florence to feel thirsty, it looked so cool, so clear and refreshing. She followed the now reascending path to the head of the glen, and turning an angle of rock, came suddenly upon a little waterfall, a mere cascade in fact, but so beautiful; plashing full upon a large boulder and then rebounding again in a second fall, till down it went all foam and spray towards the clear, dark pool which formed the head of the stream. Florence could have stood there for hours, looking and listening. What a spot for a reverie!

But there was to be no reverie this time.

"Miss Forrester! oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed a voice from above Florence's head; and down bounded Helen over rocks and ferns, with a look of such bright welcome, that Florence could not find it in her heart to be disappointed. "I have been wondering if I might go back to try and bring you here, but I thought they might want you all to themselves," she added, smiling.

"Everybody is busy about settlements, so Lady Emlyn sent me here to explore," answered Florence.

"I am very glad everybody is busy, then," returned Helen. "Come up to my nest in the rocks; there is such a beautiful view of the waterfall from it." And with some scrambling, and a little help, Florence soon found herself on a sort of natural rocky seat under a ledge of the cliff, with ferns waving round and almost hiding it from the path some twenty feet below.

"Is not this delicious?" said Helen, when they had sat looking at the fall for a few minutes. "I always feel, here, as if I should like to spend the rest of my life as a wood or water-nymph. Is it not odd what different lives one is able to live in different places, among different people, and yet enjoy them all so much? Not exactly all though," she added, "for there are some not pleasant, of course."

"Mine are always pleasant, I think," said Florence; "or perhaps I have not come to my unpleasant lives yet," she added, smiling.

"I dare say not," said Helen; "you look as if your life ought always to be pleasant. Perhaps I ought not to say so, but I have a bad habit of saying what I think."

"Not such a very bad habit either; though, of course, one may carry it too far," said Florence, smiling again. She could not help liking Helen's frank, decided tone.

"I am glad you do not think it such a very bad habit," said Helen, "because I want you to like me. I have got no sisters or friends near my own age, and as we are to be sister-bride's-maids, I think we ought to be friends; don't you?"

"Indeed I do," said Florence, quite won by the straightforward question, and the smile which accompanied it. "I have no friend near my own age, either; and no sisters, at least in England."

"A sudden thought strikes me. Let us swear eternal friendship!" exclaimed Helen, laughing gaily, but looking very much in earnest, as Florence, amused and pleased, willingly shook her extended hand. "I am so glad," she continued: "I was sure I should like you; and you are just what I expected!"

Florence looked up surprised. She did not ask, as Helen would have done, "What made you expect anything about me?"—but Helen answered her look.

"I asked Lady Emlyn all about you the other day," she said, "and when I heard your name, I was sure it must be you—oh! I forgot to tell you that I fell in love with you first at a great party in London, in the spring of the year before last. We were all waiting for carriages, and I watched you talking to your father and brother, and settled in my own mind that you were just the sort of sister I wanted. Then when your carriage came, I found out your name; so you see I knew all about you."

"I have no brother," said Florence; "it must have been my cousin, Bernard Huntley, whom you saw with us. But I do not

remember seeing you in the least ; still," she added, smiling and hesitating, "you are not at all what I expected."

"Am I not?" said Helen, eagerly. "What did you expect? Tell me what they told you about me. Do, please!"

There was something so winning, so half-childlike, in her merry look and tone, that Florence did not know how to refuse, though she hardly knew what to say.

"They said you were very clever," she answered after a moment's hesitation.

"Clever!" said Helen indignantly. "Just what they all say! 'Miss Montagu is so very clever!' in a tone which just implies 'so very disagreeable!'" Why can they never say anything but that? If they would only say 'good tempered,' or 'agreeable,' or anything but that! And I do not think I look so very disagreeable, or ill-tempered either!" she added, with a half-vexed, half-merry look at Florence.

"No, nor do I," said Florence, with a smile, her reserve fast yielding to the infection of Helen's frankness; "but perhaps people think more of your being clever because it is less common."

"But, then, why should they dislike me for it?" said Helen, much more gently. "I assure you, dear Florence—I beg your pardon"—

"I like best to be called Florence, I assure you."

"Do you indeed? Then I shall always call you Florence," returned Helen. "I was going to tell you, if you will not laugh at my troubles, that three-fourths of the people here, the ladies especially, always look and talk as if they were afraid of me. Even that sweet Lady Emlyn, of whom I could be so fond, always seems as if she would rather talk to any one in the room but me. I should not mind the others very much; perhaps they think, as country people often do, that I must be conceited because I was in London so much while papa was in parliament; but with Lady Emlyn I do feel it hard. If I am clever I cannot help it; and besides, I believe it is much more that, having been a great deal with papa, I learned different things from him to what most girls are taught."

"But do you not think," said Florence, timidly, "that perhaps"—

"O please say it! I shall not mind anything you say."

"Well, then, that perhaps you yourself help to make people afraid of you?" said Florence, gently. "People are always so sensitive to anything like sarcasm."

"But am I sarcastic?" asked Helen in surprise. "I am sure I did not know it. Have you heard me say anything you thought sarcastic?"

"Do you not think that what you said last night to Mr. Carysfort was a little so?" said Florence, smiling.

"Was it?" said Helen. "You mean about his not liking ladies to understand politics. I was not meaning to be sarcastic; it was only just what I really thought must be the reason of his dislike. But I must own," she added deprecatingly, as if confessing a fault, "that Mr. Carysfort is the sort of man I cannot bear! A thorough idle, fine gentleman, who never does anything but amuse himself. I wonder what the use of such men can be?"

"I do not like useless men either, I assure you; but I think it is hardly their fault sometimes. Perhaps Mr. Carysfort was brought up to be a fine gentleman, and may have lived most of his life among others who were idle too, so that he could hardly help it,—any more than you can help being clever, you know," said Florence.

"Well, there may be something in that," said Helen. "But I think, if he were much inclined to be of use in the world, he would find out the way; and I have so often chafed at being a woman, and able to be of no use, that it makes me harder upon men, who might be and are not. And it is not only that; men like Mr. Carysfort always seem to wish women to be mere dolls and playthings, for fear, I suppose, as I said last night, of their being wiser than they will take the trouble to be themselves; and one feels such contempt for that petty sort of jealousy."

"Ah! you would like my cousin Bernard, then," said Florence. "He thinks so highly of women's abilities, and admires so deeply those who are superior and intellectual."

"Then I have no doubt he is a superior man himself," said Helen.

"He is," said Florence. "He is thought a great deal of as a writer, and writes very deeply and learnedly on many subjects. But I think it was owing to his mother, that he has such a reverence for women. She was a most superior woman; and when his father died early—under very melancholy circumstances, which made a deep impression on him, poor fellow—she was everything to him; comforted him and studied with him, and saved him, he always says, from all sorts of mischief; and he almost worshipped her."

"No wonder!" said Helen, with enthusiasm. "Who would not worship such a mother? Ah, if my mother had only lived! Is your cousin's mother alive?"

"No; she died about two years ago; and he misses her sadly," said Florence.

"I am very sorry she is dead," said Helen. "It would have done one good to know such a woman. I am very sorry she is dead!"

"No; you do not mean that," said Florence, gently. "Is it not wrong to grieve for any one's going to a happier and better world?"

"Wrong?" said Helen. "But one must grieve for the death of those one loves or admires!"

"One must suffer under their loss, and miss them deeply," returned Florence; "but only selfish love could repine, or wish them back here, to we know not what sorrow or pain."

"But how can one help it? Mamma died when I was quite a child, and I have never done wishing her back again, ever since," said Helen.

"Perhaps because you were a child, and had not learned to think seriously then."

"If you mean religiously," said Helen, with a sigh, "I am afraid I have not learned yet."

"But do you not think you would be happier if you had?" said Florence, timidly, but earnestly.

"Indeed I do," said Helen, sadly. "I often feel so at sea about everything; what one ought to do, or to think, and what is to become of one all one's life long, not to speak of afterwards. Of course I believe we ought all to be good, and that we shall go to heaven if we are; but there are such different opinions about what being really good is, that I hardly know how to set about it. For instance, I never knew any one before who thought that we ought not to grieve for the death of those we love."

"Yet I think you would agree with me, if you considered the subject seriously," said Florence.

"I dare say I should. I feel as if I could agree with you in most things," returned Helen. "But do you think that we *may* think for ourselves as to what we ought to believe?"

"If we did not," said Florence, "how could we know, among so many different opinions, if what we believe is true?"

"Just what I say!" exclaimed Helen, delighted. "I can-

not believe things because I am told I ought to ; I want to understand them. Ah ! we must have such long talks," she continued, eagerly. "I am sure you could help me so much, and I have no one to help me. I have no mother—no own mother, I mean," and a cold, somewhat antagonistic expression crossed her face as she checked herself, but resumed in an instant—"Do you know I have so often wished I had some old, wise person to tell me the exact truth about everything ; or else that I were different from what I am ; less clever, perhaps, and more content not to know."

"Are we not permitted to feel the want of some one to lean upon, to teach us to look up where we are sure of help?" said Florence. "And you must not wish yourself different from what you are ; everybody's gifts are those of which they can make the best use."

"Very likely," said Helen. "Of course there must be some reason why we have just those, and no others. So I will promise not to wish even my 'cleverness' away,—though I assure you it has been a perfect nightmare to me,—provided you will promise not to believe it is the best part of me ; for indeed, indeed, it is not !"

"I am quite sure it is not, now !" said Florence, watching with admiration the intense earnestness which lighted up Helen's face as she spoke ; for what is more beautiful in any face, or any character, than earnestness ? Those who do not possess the gift, we may pity, or even love, but can we ever trust them ?

Not Helen's earnest frankness only, but her unequivocal humility, so different from anything Florence looked for, had won more and more upon her, till, by the time they rose to leave their rocky nest, Helen's mirthful proposal of eternal friendship seemed to have taken effect, and they felt as if they had been friends all their lives.

"But I promised to wait here till Louisa came, or sent some one to fetch me," said Florence, stopping short.

"Oh, then sit down again ; I could stay here all day," said Helen ; "if only Lady Emlyn does not send Mr. Carysfort ! If she does I shall escape directly. You would say I have no right to dislike him," she added, laughing, "but indeed I cannot help disliking those fine gentlemen !"

"But if we always showed our dislike of every one we cannot in all respects approve," said Florence, "we could never exert any influence to improve them ; and I think we have a

very serious responsibility as to the influence we exercise in society. We should try and make everybody like what we think right, instead of making them dislike us."

"Well that is a responsibility, and a way of being of use, that I never thought of before," said Helen; "but I am afraid I could never influence anybody. One ought either to be very gentle like you, or else to have done something really to win people's respect, like—now there is a man I do admire—Sir William's friend, Mr. Littleton."

"Delighted to hear it, Miss Helen! You justify my high opinion of your discrimination. Frank Littleton is a man worth any one's falling in love with," called out Sir William himself from below. He had come down the glen by another path, unperceived by the two girls.

"Oh, as to falling in love," exclaimed Helen, laughing, as she sprang down to join him, "that is an amusement I never indulge in. But I do admire a man who does not think idleness and uselessness a necessary part of a gentleman's, or even a nobleman's, qualifications. I was just going to tell Miss Forrester about him."

"But is he really *Dr. Littleton*?" asked Florence, as she joined them. "He does not look like a doctor; is he a clergyman?"

"He is our country doctor here, I am proud to say," said Sir William; "and does as much good in the neighbourhood, young and gay as he looks, as a dozen clergymen, in my opinion. And yet he is an earl's son, Miss Forrester—the Honourable Frank Littleton—only just too honourable to live on his wits and his handsome face, or forswear himself for the loaves and fishes, as most men would have done in his position. He works away in this quiet place, as naturally as if he were a country apothecary's son; and I believe he is as happy at it as the day is long, as if he had never been flattered and courted by match-making mammas in fine London society. In short, I do not know his match—among men, at least!" He turned laughing to Helen,—“In the fair sex I might find a match for him. Could you not make an exception in Frank's favour, Miss Helen?"

"Certainly not," said Helen. "In the first place, he would never fall in love with me; I am not half good enough for him; and in the second place, much as I admire him, I do not think he is quite—quite *bookish* enough for me. I like a man to have read and thought a great deal; and should want a hus-

band who could explain everything to me that I do not understand."

"You are really unreasonable! I thought you understood everything already, Miss Helen. But as to the bookishness, I confess it is not Frank's gift; he feels and understands things by intuition, I always say. But now I know what sort of a man you would like, I shall be able to provide samples for your approbation. You shall see! Miss Forrester, where did you leave Huntley? Could you not extract him from his books after all, or did you lose him at a bookstall at any of the stations? And what are we to do for a groom's-man for Miss Helen instead of him? If he had only sent a large folio, or quarto, to represent him, it would have been something."

"He is coming to-day," said Florence, smiling. "Papa had asked him to go to a public dinner with him, and he did not like to refuse."

"A public dinner!" said Sir William. "I am afraid he will not be bookish enough after all. But I must decoy him into the library the moment he arrives, inveigle him into pulling down some hundred of the largest volumes, and then fetch Miss Helen in. There is no calculating the results of a first favourable impression."

"You are quite nonsensical to-day, Sir William!" said Helen, pretending to look dignified. "But they say a wedding always turns people's heads, more or less. I do not know what the effect may be on myself by to-morrow, when the excitement has had time to work, so I must not be hard on you to-day. Oh dear!" she exclaimed, as they reached a fresh turn in the walk along which they had been sauntering, "there come Lady Emlyn and Mr. Carysfort"—she glanced half-ruefully aside at Florence—"and—who is that with them? Some one I do not know."

"Huntley! bravissimo!" exclaimed Sir William. "Some one you shall know very shortly, Miss Helen," he added, in a whisper, as the parties met; and greetings and introductions being duly exchanged, they all proceeded together on a stroll through the grounds.

As a natural consequence of Sir William's raillery, Helen had firmly determined to keep as far from Mr. Huntley as possible; but such resolutions seldom come to much. Florence was drawn forward with Lady Emlyn and Mr. Carysfort, who led the way; and Sir William entering into conversation with Mr. Huntley, the latter unavoidably joined him and

Helen ; and before she had the least suspicion of his mischievous intentions, Sir William had contrived to shift the onus of the conversation on her, launched them fairly into a discussion on the subject of the first book that came into his head, and was off to join the party in front, leaving Helen already too eagerly interested to observe, or reflect on, his desertion.

Bernard Huntley was a man whom few could have overlooked, or passed without remark. He was tall and noble-looking, very dark, and might have passed for considerably more than his real age—some two or three and thirty—partly, perhaps, from the melancholy expression of his face when at rest. In conversing, however, it passed away ; and, then, the earnestness of his keen, dark eye, and the low tones of a peculiarly musical voice, rendered his countenance and manner attractive as well as impressive. His life had been chiefly that of a student ; but as a writer on various subjects, both social and philosophical, he had escaped the danger which besets great students, of becoming a mere bookworm, absorbing knowledge, but putting it to no use ; while, on the other hand, pecuniary independence placed him above the dangerous and irksome necessity of writing for a subsistence. His mother had been for years his sole and idolized home-companion ; and since her death, he had only drawn back the more into himself and his studies ; and the shade of melancholy natural to his countenance had deepened and darkened, and already a few silver threads might be traced in his rich black hair. Altogether, one could scarcely help fancying him a man somewhat prematurely aged by lonely study, or some secret grief.

The stroll was a long one ; but it came to a close before the conversation so adroitly initiated between Mr. Huntley and Miss Montagu had either dropped or flagged ; and as they chanced to be seated next each other at dinner, the conversation was renewed with no apparent diminution of interest, and lasted all dinner-time.

“What can Miss Montagu be talking about to Mr. Huntley, all this time ?” whispered Lord Castleton to Cissy, at dessert. “I do not think he is a great politician, is he ?”

“Oh, they are talking on general questions of human happiness and duty, I dare say,” said Cissy ; “Miss Montagu generally does.”

“Except when she talks politics ? Well, her society ought

to be improving," said Frederick. "We must certainly cultivate her, Cissy; ask her to pay us a visit next spring, and get Horace to meet her—though I doubt there is some one else he had rather meet," he added, directing her eye to another quarter, where Horace was making himself extremely agreeable, between Lady Emlyn and Florence. "What will you bet me we do not hear of another wedding by the time we come back, Cissy?"

"Horace is not good enough for Florence," replied Cissy, sententiously; feeling, with her woman's instinct, the wide gulf between two characters, neither of which she at all understood.

"Not good enough! Nonsense; Horace is a fine fellow; good enough for any one; besides, the use of a wife is to improve a man. You have no notion how delightful I shall be when I have been married a year."

Cissy's blue eyes sufficiently answered how delightful she thought him already; and Lady Emlyn rose from table at the moment.

"Miss Helen," whispered Sir William, as she passed him in leaving the room, "has the excitement begun to work?"

"Nonsense, Sir William," replied Helen, "we have only been talking!"

But she was conscious, for all that, that the talk had been an unusually interesting one. Like herself, Mr. Huntly preferred grave topics, and the similarity of taste drew them both out. Already he had told her of books which were to help her on various points that had been touched on between them; and she felt that they had far from exhausted the subjects, on which his superior powers and cultivation of intellect could throw new light for her naturally inquiring mind; so, perhaps, the pleasant anticipation of other such conversations during the next few days, had not a little to do with her peculiarly happy frame of spirits that evening.

She quite won Lady Emlyn's heart by the interest with which she entered into the examination of Cissy's trousseau, to which, after some hesitation, they had, at Florence's request, invited her; confessing herself fond of all pretty things, in an unaffected manner, which greatly diminished Cissy's dread of her. Lady Emlyn was already catching up Sir William's less formal "Miss Helen;" and on Helen's at last asking, in her odd, frank way, if she did not think she could say "Helen" to-morrow, laughed and kissed her, and promised to do so in

honour of the wedding ; and from that time forward, steadily progressed in the cordial liking for her which Sir William had predicted.

And another talk in Florence's room that night, confirmed the friendship between the two bride-maidens elect ; drawing out still more the warm feelings, almost childlike in their guilelessness, which lay concealed beneath Helen's decided and seemingly cold exterior.

Much of this was attributable to circumstances. Having early lost her mother, she had been chiefly educated by her father, who had highly cultivated and developed her intellect ; but seeking rather to draw her into his own life and pursuits than to enter into hers—as men in general are apt to do—had left her heart untrained and unawakened, except as to the warm affection for himself, cordially reciprocated, but little demonstrative on his side, which, therefore, remained but little demonstrative on hers. But he had carefully guarded her, on the other hand, from all mischievous influences and associations ; so that her heart, if untrained, had also remained untainted : and if all her young girl's yearnings and aspirations remained a sealed book to him, pent up as they were, and their place, in part only, supplied by intellectual excitements and enthusiasm, they had never been frittered away on unworthy objects, or drowned in the whirl of fashionable frivolity.

When she was just sixteen, her father achieved the great ambition of his life, by obtaining a seat in parliament ; and keenly did she enjoy the new and brilliantly intellectual world opened to her in London society. The enjoyment might have become dangerous, and resulted, perhaps, in making her too intellectual to be entirely feminine, but for one of those crosses which so often, impatiently endured at the time, are, later, gratefully recognised as blessings in disguise.

Her father married again, persuading himself, as fathers are prone to do, that it was, at least in part, for the sake of the "dear Helen," for whom Mrs. Marston manifested such strong partiality and admiration ; but towards whom Mrs. Montagu proved as selfish and as regardless of her feelings and likings, as though no such person had existed. She was, in fact, a selfish, worldly woman : nor was it long before Mr. Montagu found out his mistake ; but he was too sensible a man, and too attentive to worldly appearances, not to make the best of it ; and as he more and more absorbed himself in public and

private affairs, the brunt of it fell on Helen, as is usual in such cases. But, for her father's sake, she, too, endeavoured to make the best of it; and thus unconsciously learned more of the self-denial so essential to a lovable female character, than she had ever before had occasion to exercise, or leisure to reflect on.

She tried to find some compensation for the loss of freedom and peace her home-life had sustained, by more earnest study and more zealous participation in her father's pursuits, in so far as she was still permitted to share them. But here her step-mother's jealousy of her stronger influence with her father often interfered, and she was more and more thrown back upon herself and compelled to listen to those inner voices, which always speak, however lowly, in a woman's heart, of something higher and holier and purer than even the loftiest intellectual pursuits. Outwardly, she grew colder and more reserved, as to her feelings at least, in the uncongenial atmosphere around her; while her natural frankness asserted itself in the unrestrained expression of thought and opinion, which often tended to create a prejudice against her that nearer acquaintance would have dispelled.

But Mrs. Montagu by no means favoured intimacy on her step-daughter's part, either with her own friends, from jealousy of her, or with others, from dislike of any independence on her part; and so Helen had of late lived a very lonely life; especially since her father, disappointed perhaps in his expectations of distinction in a wider field, had retired from parliament to his old sphere of country politics and avocations. For two years she had known no more exciting change than the few weeks' visit to some fashionable watering-place, which Mrs. Montagu annually insisted on as a substitute for the gaieties of the metropolis, which her husband, for reasons of his own, denied her. But these visits were Helen's especial detestation; the more so as her father generally remained behind: and her present visit to Emlyn Priory—arranged to her surprise and satisfaction, between Sir William and her father—was her first taste of liberty for so long a period, that she felt like a bird escaped from the cage. No wonder, then, that she was ready to like everything and everybody who would let her; but most of all Florence, whose gentle, loving, yet thoughtful nature, just fitted her to afford all the warm sympathy for which Helen's heart longed, and, at the same time, to enter into her intellectual aspirations and difficulties, and to direct

her inquiring, energetic mind to higher things and surer guidance, than she had as yet been wont to ponder or to rely upon.

Helen, on her side, responded no less to certain wants of Florence's character. She had the fearless energy, the practical, progressive turn, which Florence's more clinging, quiescent nature lacked; for where the former might give offence by too unsparing condemnation of what she disapproved, the latter, though it should be better to speak, would perhaps be silent for fear of giving pain. Moreover, Helen could yield the intellectual companionship which Louisa and Cissy, much as she loved them, and they her, could not; and so in the space of four-and-twenty hours, the two had glided, insensibly, into a more genuine sisterly sympathy and relation than often subsists between less congenial characters, bound by all the ties of consanguinity and life-long association.

For if characters are uncongenial, mere proximity but tends to increased estrangement; and it is so much taken for granted, that the so-called natural affections must naturally grow of themselves, that their cultivation is too often neglected; and the plant withers and dies, or lives on, stunted and sickly, for want of the nurture so lavishly bestowed on far less important objects.

Helen's last reflection before she fell asleep that night, was, what a delightful phase of life this new one at Emlyn Priory bade fair to be. She did not know when she had felt half so happy!

CHAPTER III.

THE WEDDING.

Sages have said—and fools have found—
That life is but a joyless round.

MISS HALFORD.

It was but a small party which met for the early breakfast on the all-important wedding-day, which proved as lovely as such a day should be. Lord Castleton had been handed over in charge to Frank Littleton the night before, and positively prohibited from showing his face, till he met the wedding party at church. Cissy, of course was invisible; and Lady Emlyn

remained with her young sister to preside over the bridal adorning, and, if necessary, compose the spirits of the bride ; though, in truth, her own required it most. For to Cissy, her wedding-day was only the brightest and happiest of a bright, happy life ; she had as little fear, as thought, for the future.

"Happy !" she exclaimed, rising and executing a pirouette, to the manifest discomfiture of her half-arranged hair, in answer to the tender expression of her sister's hopes for her happiness—"Of course I shall be happy ! As happy as the day is long !"

The party below lingered meanwhile in the breakfast-room ; for as no one felt willing to intrude on the sisters, there was nothing to be done till the wheels of the carriages appointed to convey them to church should be heard. The marriage was to be quite private ; the festivities due to the neighbourhood being resolved into a ball in the evening, a dinner to the tenantry, and a tea-feast for Lady Emlyn's school-children.

"Charming, Miss Helen !" said Sir William, as she rose and crossed the room to stand beside Florence at the open window. "You look to great advantage side by side, I assure you ! Two bride's-maids could not be better got up ! I hardly know which to prefer, fair hair braided, or dark hair in curls."

Mr. Carysfort's eye rested approvingly on Florence's soft, dark curls ; and Helen rejoined gaily : "The misfortune of our being side by side, Sir William. If one were but out of the room, how easy it would be to flatter the other ! But both at once must of course be perplexing."

"Extremely so," said Mr. Huntley, mechanically ; for it had just crossed his mind, how fair and stately Helen looked in her simple white bridal dress, and how fair and stately a bride she would make. He wondered what the bridegroom would be like ? And feeling singularly inclined to assent to anything she might say, he did so, without at all knowing to what.

"Extremely perplexing it seems to you, Huntley !" said Sir William, laughing. "I lay any bet you did not hear a word Miss Helen said. Never mind ! She will excuse you this time," he added, as Mr. Huntley started, a dark shade crossing his face, as if suddenly awakened from a pleasant dream to some unpleasant consciousness ; "but pray be on the alert the rest of the morning, or you will hardly prove an efficient co-adjutor in her onerous and important duties."

"Duties ?" said Helen. "Shall I have anything to do ? I never heard that bride's-maids had."

"Miss Forrester has to hold the glove," returned Sir William, gravely, "assisted by Mr. Carysfort's sympathy. Having to look after the bridegroom, for fear of his running away, he cannot assist her otherwise till the evening; when, to make up, he will carry her bouquet during five-and-twenty dances, and be permitted the six-and-twentieth himself, as a reward."

"Six-and-twenty dances, Sir William! Must I dance six-and-twenty?" remonstrated Florence's sweet voice.

"Certainly," rejoined Sir William; "holding the glove is such light work, it cannot tire you. But Miss Helen will have to hold the book; and that being very heavy"——

"The book! What book?" said Helen.

Sir William paused for a moment. "There is a custom in this little village of ours," he then pursued gravely, "that the parish register-book should be held behind the bride and bridegroom during the ceremony; and as it is very heavy, Mr. Huntley is to help you—that is, unless he falls into another reverie."

"What an odd idea!" said Helen. "Sir William, you are making game of me!" she exclaimed, suddenly enlightened by a hint from Florence's eye, and flinging at him, in pretended wrath, a white rose-bud she had in her hand, ran out on the lawn.

"Don't be ungrateful, Miss Helen!" said Sir William, following her; "was not I making it as bookish as I could for you?"

"You will allow me some earlier dance than the six-and-twentieth, I trust!" said Mr. Carysfort to Florence, as they joined the others on the lawn; and Florence hardly knew why, but she blushed as she replied.

Mr. Huntly caught the white rose which Helen flung; but, though he looked after the rest, did not follow them.

But now the sound of wheels was heard, and the bride's-maids disappeared hastily from the scene; while Mr. Carysfort and Mr. Huntly, as groom's-men, hurried off to join Lord Castleton, and accompany him and Frank Littleton to church. The latter, as he had himself observed, could scarcely be considered a groom's-man, Lady Emlyn having shamefully neglected to provide a bride's-maid for him; but he announced himself ready to be generally useful, and to supply the place of bridegroom, or groom's-man, on a moment's notice, should either not be forthcoming at the right time.

But for all his gay spirits, there was not one of those who

witnessed the rite whose holy purpose is to make two one, who more deeply and sympathisingly felt its significance and seriousness, than did Frank Littleton. He stood a little apart, and his eye turned from the bright, blushing, childlike face of the bride, and that of the proudly happy bridegroom, to scan the countenance of the rest of the circle, as if he desired to read the feelings of each, seeking some in unison with his own.

Lady Emlyn's face was full of tender sympathy; but her own experience of married life had been very happy, and her nature was rather a bright than a serious one; and Mr. Carysfort, though he looked fondly and proudly at his young brother, with an expression of genuine feeling which rendered his countenance far more pleasing than usual, stole sidelong glances ever and anon at Florence, which somehow jarred upon Mr. Littleton. Mr. Huntley stood with folded arms, and a fixed, almost stern look, which he never removed from the clergyman's face; but Frank noted a white rose which he held crushed in one hand the while. Helen looked deeply interested, even excited, as if some new, delightful page of life were being freshly unfolded to her perceptions; but Frank Littleton's glance rested last and longest on the gently serious face of Florence, the deep composure of whose attention seemed to show, that she, at least, was fully impressed with the holiness and the supreme significance of the rite she was witnessing.

The unison of feeling seemed found at last; he fancied he could read the very thoughts within; at least he was sure they were as pure from selfish or earthly taint as he could wish his own wife's to be, if he ever married, and he felt as if she were joining peculiarly with himself in the solemn prayers which closed the service. But he started, with a smile at his own fancy; for the ceremony being over, Mr. Carysfort led Florence past him down the aisle, closely following the new-made pair, who, emerging from the church porch into the chequered shade of the lime-tree walk, passed down it through crowds of the neighbouring villagers, who strewed flowers before the young bride's feet; while a stray beam from above, every now and then alighting on her head, added a richer flush of beauty to her orange-blossoms and her blushes.

Of course, there had never been a lovelier bride, a happier bridegroom, or a prettier wedding!

And, in one respect, certainly, a country wedding has a

great advantage over a London one. Who has not experienced the ineffable sense of dulness and stupidity which descends on a family circle in London, when the breakfast is over, the bridal pair have departed, and nothing remains to be done but to sit and look at one another, amid faint struggles to keep up the conversation, to which reaction, after the morning's excitement, disinclines everybody? Then it is that the pleasant grounds of a country house are felt to be invaluable; and pleasant hours were spent in those of Emlyn Priory on Cissy's auspicious wedding-day—hours often reverted to in after-days, by more than one who had shared in them, with a smile or a sigh, as pleasure or pain might predominate in the picture retraced by memory.

The new married pair being fairly gone, the rest of the party sauntered out together, keeping up a desultory general conversation; and though Mr. Carysfort might have preferred a *tête-à-tête*, he was fain to content himself with walking beside Florence in the general procession, somewhat annoyed because Mr. Huntley walked on her other side, but, in a silent mood, seldom opening his lips. Frank Littleton, on the contrary, was full of fun and spirits. He had given himself a whole holiday, he said, in honour of the occasion; and he was determined to enjoy himself, by being as idle and nonsensical as possible.

"Something new to see you idle," said Mr. Rawdon, the rector, who had joined the party at breakfast; "but, I assure you, when you came among us first, I set you down as having more fun than work in you."

"Judging by appearances, Mr. Rawdon," returned Frank. "You are fitly punished, by the impossibility you have ever since experienced of extracting so much as a smile from me. I assure you, Lady Emlyn, I pass for a very Solon in this neighbourhood. Just observe me at your school-feast this evening, and you will see that I no sooner approach one of the children than a gravity overspreads the youthful countenance, which—will surprise you."

"It will indeed, Mr. Littleton!" said Helen. "I have not forgotten the tricks you played at the school-feast in the rectory-garden last year, till the children were half wild with delight."

"If you attack my character, I must retaliate," rejoined Frank, quickly. "Did you notice Miss Montagu's conduct that day, Mr. Rawdon? Lady Emlyn will hardly credit it;

but I give you my word, that I detected her in a shady corner of the garden"—

"A shady corner! Go on, Frank! That sounds interesting," said Sir William, maliciously.

"A very shady corner," continued Frank, looking gravely round; "and there was Miss Montagu, who arraigns my behaviour, actually making daisy-chains for a lot of the little ones!"

"Is that all?" said Helen, laughing. "I could not think what was coming. I believe you would give a great deal to know how to make daisy-chains yourself!"

"I think Miss Montagu is the last person I should have expected to see making daisy-chains for little children," said Horace aside to Florence.

"Why so?" said Florence. "Do you not think a woman may be very gentle and kind-hearted, as well as clever?"

"Indeed I do," returned Horace; "but scarcely in Miss Montagu's style. I dare say, however, you understand her better than I do." Not that in his heart he thought so, in the least.

"Mr. Rawdon," said Sir William, "what do you say to this charge against Miss Montagu? Must we not condemn her to some punishment, commensurate with the enormity of the offence?"

"Certainly," rejoined Mr. Rawdon, gravely; "she must be condemned to give Mr. Littleton lessons in making daisy-chains against the next school-feast." Mr. Rawdon was an old friend of Helen's, and grave and far from young as he looked, was always ready, when he left his books and his duties, to enter into any joke or amusement that might be going forward.

"Miss Montagu, you hear!" said Frank, with a solemn bow.

"I have no objection," said Helen, "on one condition; here is a delightful shady place under the lime-trees. I propose that we all sit down and make daisy-chains together; and Mr. Littleton shall pick the daisies, because they are growing in the sun. The seat will do for Lady Emlyn and Mr. Rawdon, this soft green knoll for Florence; I shall take this old stump, and the rest must get on as they can."

There is nothing grown-up people enjoy more, once in a while, than genuine child's play; so the whole party sat down, laughing, under the trees, while Frank Littleton submissively

proceeded to pick the daisies. Even Lady Emlyn, who had been looking somewhat grave since the parting with Cissy, brightened up to ask for a lesson ; and Sir William set to work with as much zeal as if he were acquiring a knowledge of some highly useful process. Mr. Carysfort, having speedily learned the rudiments of the art, proceeded to teach Florence, whom he would not allow Helen to instruct ; while Frank Littleton, having finished his gatherings, sat down and challenged Helen to try who could make daisy-chains quickest, and soon beat her hollow ; and, his duplicity in feigning ignorance having been duly commented on, he was crowned with a daisy-chain by Sir William in honour of his victory.

"As an antiquarian and classical scholar, Mr. Rawdon," said Helen, mischievously, "you can probably tell us whether a wreath of daisies be in strict keeping with the character of Solon ?"

"Miss Montagu," replied Mr. Rawdon, "if you have a fault, it is that of asking inconvenient questions. You must learn to repress your thirst for knowledge."

"Yes, Miss Helen," said Sir William, "take example by Carysfort. He never takes the trouble to ask questions, and represses his thirst for knowledge with the most admirable self-denial. Don't exert yourself to answer, Horace, Miss Forrester reads your modest disclaimer in your countenance ; but your humility cannot blind us to the praise you deserve."

"Of course," said Mr. Carysfort, who was lounging back on the grass beside Florence, the very picture of graceful laziness, "I am aware that few better examples than myself, in most respects, could be proposed ; but some unpleasant doubts of my absolute perfection have lately crossed my mind, and I think I must persuade some one to take me in hand and complete my education." These last words seemed, by a sort of side-glance which accompanied them, to bear peculiar reference to Florence ; but they elicited no response, except a quick, approving smile from Lady Emlyn.

"If you think my experienced tuition can be of any service to you, Mr. Carysfort, I shall be most happy to offer it," said Mr. Littleton. "Is it in daisy-chain-making that you propose to perfect yourself ? Or what other elegant accomplishment excites your ambition ?"

"I will tell you what, Littleton," said Mr. Carysfort, looking round at him, and speaking in earnest ; "if you could teach me one thing, I shall be infinitely obliged to you ! Where do

you find your sunshine? I would give anything to enjoy life as you always appear to do; but I confess, to me life seems a sorry enough affair, at best. One gets a bright day now and then, to be sure, like this; but how little happiness there is in the world, as a whole!"

"Why, Horace, you are surely not going to be misanthropical to-day!" said Lady Emlyn, in surprise.

"How *little* happiness, Mr. Carysfort!" exclaimed Helen. "Surely none of *us* ought to say that! I can fancy that poor people might, who have to work hard all their lives for a mere existence, and, perhaps, are half-starved at last; but those who have everything the world can give—you do not really mean it?"

Mr. Huntley's eye kindled at the feeling earnestness with which she spoke; but he remained, as before, leaning with folded arms against a tree, a listener only.

"I do not know if hard work is such a bad thing," said Sir William; "but starvation assuredly is; though philosophers have tried to persuade us that poverty is the happiest condition, and wealth ruinous to happiness—which, by the way, must have ruined Carysfort's; being, I imagine, about his heaviest affliction."

"I have certainly not considered the subject from your point of view yet, Miss Montagu," said Horace, drily; "but it seems to me that there being numbers of people still much worse off than ourselves, goes to prove my proposition of there being very little happiness in the world."

"How can you say so, Horace?" remonstrated Lady Emlyn. "I am sure there is a great deal!"

"You mean that you are happy," said Horace, smiling; "but then I suspect you, too, have a sunshine-recipe of your own. I want you to impart it for the benefit of us shady people."

"I suspect every one must find a recipe for themselves," said Sir William. "I doubt if one man's would help another. Now mine is—plenty of work to do, and Louisa to consult in all my difficulties; and it answers admirably, I assure you."

"A first-rate recipe, especially the last half," said Frank Littleton, bowing gallantly to Lady Emlyn. "I do not know that I have any precise recipe myself. I think, being happy comes natural to me, without my ever troubling my head about it."

"But I suppose we must not expect to be always happy,"

said Helen. "I think, what one wants is some great object in life; and then I can imagine intense satisfaction in bearing even all sorts of unhappiness in any good cause."

"But, dear H  len, three-fourths of mankind have to be content with small objects, have they not?" said Florence.

"Exactly so, Miss Forrester," said Horace, eagerly. "If I had any grand object for which to get up an enthusiasm, that might be the very recipe I want; but as I have not, what is to be done?"

"I think small objects are sufficient for happiness, if pursued in a right spirit," said Florence, gently. "It only depends on ourselves to be always engaged in a good cause—do you not think so?" she added, looking to Helen for assent, as if shy of speaking unsupported.

"Perhaps," said Helen, slowly; "but tell me how?"

"Everybody may be of some use in the world, however humble," said Florence, though it was evidently an effort to her to speak before so many people; "and if they do what good they can in an unselfish spirit, they are giving their mite towards the good of all."

"If we might always be engaged in a good cause, then," said Helen, "ought we always to be happy?"

"At least," said Florence, "I think"—but there she stopped short.

"Do not cheat us of your opinion," said Mr. Carysfort "pray say what you think."

"I think," said Florence,—with a hesitation which, implying as it did a fear of seeming to censure him, quite made up to Mr. Carysfort for the degree of blame it conveyed—"that when we are not happy, it is generally our own fault. I do not mean perfectly happy, but enough so always to feel that there is much more good than evil in our lot, even here."

"But things may happen to make any one—to make yourself, even—utterly miserable," said Horace, "without any fault of your own."

"I do not think so," said Florence, in a low voice.

"I think not, either," said Frank Littleton, with a bright, meaning smile; but Mr. Carysfort reclaimed Florence's attention.

"But, Miss Forrester," said he, "you might lose your health, your eyesight, all the friends you love, not to speak of the minor worries which often make life such a sorry affair. Would that be your own fault?"

"In one sense it might," said Florence; "and it certainly would be my own fault, if I suffered any loss to make me permanently unhappy, as I believe that Providence permits nothing to happen which is not for our good, and which will not make us happier in the end, if we use it rightly."

"I think," said Mr. Rawdon, rising with a good-natured smile, "that Miss Forrester's must have been a very happy experience of life so far. If she had seen as much suffering and misery as we sometimes see, Sir William, her theories would be less Utopian. But we can agree with her on one point; it must certainly be Mr. Carysfort's own fault if he is very unhappy to-day! I must be off now," he added, "to see all things in readiness at the school; and if you can tear yourself from the daisy-chains, shall be glad of your help, Littleton."

"Lady Emlyn and I will walk with you," said Sir William; and Frank Littleton followed, looking back reluctantly at the group left behind under the trees, talking earnestly.

"Yours is a delightful theory of life, dear Florence," said Helen, enthusiastically. "If we could only feel sure that nothing happens to us but for our good, for the sake of making us happier in the end, we could go through any suffering without its making us unhappy."

"Just what I think," said Florence, with her gentle smile.

"I am sure *you* could," said Mr. Huntley to Helen; but it seemed as if the remark had escaped him against his will, and he would have relapsed into his previous silence, but Helen looked up with such a bright, pleased smile, that somehow or other he found it impossible; and the conversation, to Mr. Carysfort's great satisfaction, was suddenly converted into a sort of double duet, between himself and Florence on the one side, and Helen and Mr. Huntley on the other.

Nor was the latter duet at all the least interesting. Mr. Huntley, if not positively a man of genius, was possessed of such scope and powers of mind, that Helen had never yet met with any man whose conversation so engrossed and satisfied her; while to one of his lonely and thoughtful habits, her eager interest in many subjects which but few minds care to approach, her frank expression of her own views, and a certain nobility of tone and thought which characterized them, could scarcely be less than fascinating. And though Helen would have been shy of holding such prolonged conversations with any other young unmarried man—having a horror of any imputation of

flirting, and somewhat of contempt for young men in general, which led her systematically to discourage their conceit, so as to earn, from many besides Mr. Carysfort, the reputation of being very conceited and disagreeable in return—she felt quite safe with Mr. Huntley. There was nothing of the young man, or of conceit, about him; and their talk was on such grave and abstract topics as naturally withdrew her thoughts from self, and everything but the earnest prosecution of the discourse which entailed so happy an oblivion of the rest of the world. But this by the way.

“I do not know what to say about suffering without being unhappy,” said Mr. Carysfort to Florence; “but you do think, then, that people may suffer very much for a time, without its being their own fault?”

“Is not all suffering, like all other evil, man’s own fault?” said Florence, timidly still, but speaking with less effort now her audience was lessened.

“I cannot say I have ever made all that out to my satisfaction,” returned Horace, shaking his head; “and I am afraid I never shall—unless I get some one to help me,” he added quickly, as he caught Florence’s grave look. “I wish I could; it might make life better worth having than of late years I have been inclined to consider it. Do not you think you might give me some instruction in the art of happiness, Miss Forrester?”

Helen would, in Florence’s place, have felt sorely inclined to suggest that idleness lay at the root of the worthlessness of Mr. Carysfort’s existence, and another girl might have blushed at the implied gallantry of his last words; but Florence replied, gently and gravely as ever, “I think one great requisite for happiness is unselfishness; for selfishness is the source of all our faults, which I regard as our only real misfortunes.”

“Our only real misfortunes!” exclaimed Horace. “But what of sickness, poverty, death—which surely are most real misfortunes?”

“I do not call anything a real misfortune which, like all you name, is permitted to befall us only for the sake of making us better and happier eventually,” said Florence.

“But how can we be sure of that?” said Horace. “And even if we were, surely they must make us very unhappy meantime.”

“Not if we form a right estimate of happiness, and learn to look above and through these passing shadows,” replied Flo-

rence. "I can imagine people being very happy in sickness and poverty, and even under the most painful separations death can entail. At worst, we can always look forward for comfort to our own death, which must end them."

"Look forward to death for comfort! I could imagine people's suffering so dreadfully in body or mind, that death might seem an escape; but that is my idea of despair, not comfort. Every human being has an instinctive horror of death—you will admit that—and we look at it as an inevitable evil, which it is no good thinking about to poison present enjoyment, and so we make the best of it. But can you really imagine any one's looking to it for comfort—hoping for it, as it were, Miss Forrester?"

"Not while they still feel that instinctive dread of death, which is very—though I am afraid it almost sounds rude to say so," added Florence, with a quiet smile—"very like a child's fear of the dark."

"Miss Forrester," said Horace, sitting very upright for him, "I beg your pardon for being personal, but have you no fear of death yourself?"

"No," said Florence, in a low voice, looking up to the trees, and the sunshine, and the blue sky, as if asking herself whether she could unrepiningly bid adieu to the beautiful world around her; "no, I do not think I have any fear of death."

"Well, if you can seriously say that!" said Horace, wonderingly. "But then, Miss Forrester," he continued, after a pause, "will you tell me how you define happiness? For if sickness and poverty—we will put death aside for the present—are not real misfortunes, I suppose you will scarcely admit that wealth, or any such trifles, can have much to do with happiness?"

"Has your experience proved that wealth and such-like trifles ensure happiness?" asked Florence, with a gentle, arch smile.

"No," said Horace, laughing; "Have I not confessed my doubts of there being any happiness worth having, notwithstanding my having a fair share [of those trifles?" (Horace felt a not unpleasant consciousness of possessing among other trifles, a very fair share of good looks and attractive manners.) "And as we agree so far, perhaps, if you were to instruct me as to what would ensure real happiness, I might learn to agree in that, too."

"There are so many kinds and degrees of happiness," said Florence, evasively.

"But your own kind of happiness?" pleaded Horace. "Your ideal would help me, I feel sure; and we can take other people's into consideration afterwards."

"My own ideal of happiness," answered Florence, thus pressed, and slightly colouring as she spoke, "consists chiefly in the exercise of unselfish affection, which is open to everybody; but to become really unselfish, I think one must first have strong religious convictions, and act up to them."

"A truly beautiful feminine ideal," said Horace, "such as I might have expected from you. But I fear it is almost too feminine to apply to men; and, besides, your conditions are so difficult of attainment."

"They might be attained with half the time and energy which many men devote to worthless objects," said Florence, earnestly. "But your idea of unselfish affection must be a very narrow one, if you regard it as peculiarly feminine. The love of one's country, of doing good, of searching out and diffusing truth, all come within my ideal."

"It is a far more comprehensive one, I see, than I supposed," returned Mr. Carysfort; "but the unselfishness is a great stumbling-block. Is not one's very wish to be happy, selfish, to begin with?"

"Yes, to begin with," said Florence; "so long as we only try to do our duty, and to be unselfish, for the sake of being happy; but by degrees we should learn to love duty and unselfishness for their own sakes, and to prefer the happiness of others to our own."

"Ah, I am afraid you expect too much of human nature," said Horace, deprecatingly. "No one can ever come up to your standard; I trust you are indulgent to those who fall short of it?"

"All must fall short of the true standard," returned Florence; "but the great thing is to have the standard, and to try to work towards it; for that supplies the great object amid the seeming trifles of daily existence, which may convert them all to sources of happiness."

"And how high do you set your standard of possible goodness and unselfishness?"

Florence coloured and hesitated. She was little used to speak so unreservedly with strangers: yet to withhold anything which might possibly influence another mind for good, would have been culpable in her conscientious view, and she therefore forced herself to speak.

"I only know of one standard: 'Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,' " she said reverently,—as such words should be spoken.

"Ah, a beautiful standard," said Horace; "if"——

But the "if," with its variations, might prove tedious. Suffice it to say, that before the conversation was interrupted, the gentle seriousness and high tone of Florence's character and views, made no slight impression on Mr. Carysfort's mind. He found himself wondering whether he might not have been a happier man, had he earlier adopted the standard proposed by Florence, and thus secured the "great object," the lack of which (little as he felt disposed to agree with Miss Montagu) he could not help suspecting might have something to do with that flatness and hollowness of life, which had of late begun to obtrude itself unpleasantly upon him. Indeed for nearly four-and-twenty hours afterwards, he went so far as to speculate upon turning over a new leaf even now; but then his thoughts drifted into a new channel, and turned towards another object, which, to him at least, seemed at once more definite, and easier of attainment.

The interruption came in the form of a message from Lady Emlyn, requesting Mr. Carysfort to pilot the rest of the party across the grounds to the school-house, where she would be awaiting them, if they felt inclined to look in upon her treat to the children: an invitation which they hastened to accept.

Such festivities were a novelty to all but Helen; and even Horace thought the long school-room, decorated with flowers and foliage, and the long tables, with rows of very grave, but very pleased, young faces on each side of such piles of cake and bread and butter as delight the eyes of children of all ranks, really a pretty sight. Sir William and Frank Littleton were quite in their element; the latter especially, whose presence, wherever he might be, proved, for the moment, an unfailing corrective of the gravity alluded to. Lady Emlyn had a kind word and a smile for all; and Mr. Rawdon cast well-pleased glances down the agreeable perspective, and said grace when tea was ready.

Then Mr. Littleton (nobody ever called him Doctor, he looked so little like it) distinguished himself highly by his extreme discernment and celerity, in supplying all the smallest children with a new piece of cake, as soon as the first had vanished; and Helen emulated his activity, chiefly confining

herself, as she remarked, to the tea branch, for fear of trenching on his privileges. After a time, she was agreeably surprised to perceive Mr. Huntley making himself similarly useful, and unconversant as he must be with child-nature, seeming able intuitively to adapt himself to the occasion. He was even reported by Frank Littleton to have deserved a medal from the Humane Society, for rescuing a small girl from a state of drowning—in tears—in consequence of having broken her mug. Mr. Huntley had consoled her by a profound suggestion, that the child sitting next her should let her drink in turn out of its mug, and by securing for them the promise of a double allowance of tea in consideration of the partnership. Two men, more different in most respects, than Frank Littleton and Bernard Huntley, could hardly have been met with; but they struck up an alliance on this occasion, which, commencing in jest, led to a friendship that exercised an abiding influence on the happiness of more than one of those present at its inauguration.

Florence was too shy, and Horace too much of the fine gentleman, to take any active share in the proceedings; but Florence found interest enough in watching others—envying a little, perhaps, Helen's happy freedom from shyness, which enabled her to make herself so useful—and Mr. Carysfort filled up his time to his own satisfaction, by paying her polite attentions, and encouraging her to thread the narrow passages between the tables, under his escort.

The more serious business of the tea being over, Frank Littleton was deputed to cut the Brobdignag wedding-cake, of which a piece was distributed to every child; and of which, as Helen to her great amusement discovered, a portion was reserved for dreaming upon by the greater number, of the girls especially, even down to those of five years of age. Then Sir William made a speech in honour of the bride and bridegroom in particular, and the festivities in general, interspersed with a few moral remarks suited to the capacity of his hearers, who all listened with deep attention, and eyes, if not mouths, very wide open; and Mr. Rawdon made a speech too, in his pastoral capacity; the chief tendency of which, was to enjoin the company to enjoy themselves as much as possible, and be very good children for ever afterwards.

The party from the Priory then withdrew, and were no sooner fairly out of the school-room, than the decorous silence which had hitherto prevailed, was succeeded by a universal

burst of chatter and laughter refreshing to hear—at a little distance, Mr. Carysfort thought.

But there was now no time to be lost: and threading the beautiful woods of the Priory once more, not without casting some “longing, lingering looks behind,” they soon regained the house, to hurry over dinner, and dress for the ball.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BALL.

The queen of these gay sports,
If not in beauty, yet in sprightly air.

EXCURSION.

What was I that I should love her, save for feeling of the pain?
MRS. BROWNING.

NOTWITHSTANDING Mr. Carysfort's insinuation, already on record, as to Miss Montagu's neglect of a young lady's duties in respect of dancing, she entered the ball-room with vivid anticipations of the pleasure she expected to derive from that unintellectual pastime. Moreover, the atmosphere of Emlyn Priory had already asserted its influence over her, and she looked far less cold and more attractive, than on her first appearance there, two evenings before. She was the last to make her appearance of those who had been present at the wedding, and hastened to excuse herself.

She had been looking everywhere for her wedding-favour, and could not find it. Could Lady Emlyn give her another? Or had Sir William stolen it to tease her?

Lady Emlyn had none left; her school-girls had had one each, to complete the felicity of witnessing the wedding from a side-aisle, and not one remained; and Sir William was loudly disclaiming the theft, and insinuating that Miss Helen had probably herself bestowed her “favour” on some fortunate individual, when Mr. Huntley came up and gravely handed it to her, with the assurance that he had not stolen, but accidentally picked it up after she had left the dining-room.

“Not stolen it! Pick up a lady's favour by accident! Oh, Mr. Huntley!” exclaimed Sir William; and “Oh, Mr. Hunt-

ley!" was echoed in jest by Frank Littleton and the others standing near.

"Never mind, Mr. Huntley," said Helen, as she restored it to its proper position; "*I* believe you did not steal it, so you need not regard the clamour of the multitude."

But Mr. Huntley did not seem to relish the jest,—or, perhaps, as Florence suggested, he hardly understood it, he was always so serious himself,—for he withdrew again to some little distance, where he stood looking so grave and pre-occupied, that Florence soon went after him, to tell him he must not be falling into brown studies at a ball. She had never seen him at one in her life before, but being there he must behave accordingly, that she might not be ashamed of her cousinship. Then he brightened up again, and promised, with a grave smile, not to disgrace her.

Other guests were meanwhile arriving, Mr. and Mrs. Montagu among the first; and Florence turned, on hearing their name, to see what the parents of her friend might be like. Mr. Montagu, the principal banker in X—, and possessor besides of large landed property in the neighbourhood, was a tall, fine-looking man, just such as Helen's father should be, and very like her. Mrs. Montagu's greetings to Sir William and Lady Emlyn, were in the extreme of fashionable politeness, so much so as to appear quite repulsive; and the profuse tenderness of her meeting with her "dear Helen," imparted such a sympathetic chill to Florence, that she could not wonder at Helen's cold reception of it. Mrs. Montagu was accompanied by a small, fair, stiff-looking young man, in uniform, whom she introduced to Lady Emlyn as her nephew, Captain Marston.

"Your cousin, my sweet Helen," she added, "is dying to shake hands with you in that most becoming bride's-maid's attire. Quite charming, Gerald, is it not?"

Gerald, however, might look his admiration, and his desire to shake hands, as intently as was consistent with his somewhat inexpressive countenance; Helen looked neither charmed nor admiring in return; but passing him, with a careless bend of the head, took her father's arm, and effectually baffled his determination to ask her hand for the first quadrille, by listening so intently to her father's conversation with Sir William and others, that he never got an opening for word or look till the music struck up.

"Miss Helen," exclaimed Sir William, as he heard it, "what are you about? Is this your notion of a bride's-maid's duties?"

Where is your partner? No, not this dance, Captain Marston, I regret to say," added he, as the young officer stepped hastily forward, flattering himself that his fair prey could not possibly escape him; "the bride's-maids are pre-engaged." And Helen was hurried across the room, consigned to Mr. Huntley, and placed *vis-à-vis* to Florence and Mr. Carysfort, before Captain Marston had recovered from the shock of his disappointment.

"Say you are engaged to me, the next time any one you very much dislike dancing with asks you," whispered Sir William slyly, as he left her; for he had observed with some amusement the young officer's fruitless manœuvres.

"I will, Sir William; thank you!" she replied, laughing; and she kept her word.

Between engagements to Sir William, extreme fatigue on one occasion, and dexterous evasion, or deep pre-occupation with sundry acquaintances, on others, she contrived for a long time to defeat poor Captain Marston's persevering determination to dance with the lady, who was, at least in his eyes, the decided belle of the evening. Florence, who had also noticed their first meeting, felt quite sorry for him. He seemed so impervious to Helen's rebuffs, or so determined not to resent them, and watched her dancing with more favoured cavaliers with such patient admiration, that, but for his looking rather stupid, and being intensely patronized by Mrs. Montagu, Florence would have felt inclined to be angry with Helen for so systematically slighting his attentions. But with such an aunt to puff and parade him, Helen might have good reasons for keeping him at a distance.

Helen, meantime, had no thought to spare for the young officer, beyond that necessary for avoiding him. She had never enjoyed a ball so much in her life; and danced and talked and laughed so gaily, that she completed the conquest of Lady Emlyn's heart, who was always delighted to see people enjoy themselves; and even Mr. Carysfort condescended to remark to Florence, that her friend Miss Montagu was certainly a fine girl, and danced remarkably well. Perhaps, however, Helen's enjoyment depended, unknown even to herself, less on the dancing and the gaiety, than on a secret consciousness how often one grave, seemingly absent glance rested upon her, whenever she came within its range. After the first prescribed quadrille, Mr. Huntley had indeed withdrawn from the ranks of the dancers, and made no further effort to attract

her attention; and was, himself, perhaps, unaware how much of his she engrossed. But, involuntarily, he listened as to some pleasant sound, when her voice reached his ear; and his eye kept following her with the sort of satisfaction one may feel in watching the course of a sunbeam along the hills, though the sunbeam bears no precise personal relation to the watcher.

"So you get on pretty well here," said Mr. Montagu to his daughter, as she stood leaning on his arm during an interval in the dancing.

"Pretty well!" said Helen, with her bright smile. "I do not know when I have enjoyed myself as I do here, papa. I hardly know which I like best, Sir William or Lady Emlyn; they are both so kind to me."

"And Mr. Carysfort? What do you think of him?" said her father inquiringly.

"Not much," said Helen; "I never could bear fine gentlemen. But my sister-bride's-maid, Florence Forrester, is charming—the very girl I should like for a real sister."

"A very pleasing, lady-like girl," said Mr. Montagu; "and her father is a man of mark in his own line. I have no doubt it will be a very desirable acquaintance for you. And Sir William, I think, introduced me to a cousin of hers; I did not catch his name."

"Mr. Huntley," said Helen; "such a superior man! you would like him so much."

"But not a man of Mr. Carysfort's position or fortune, I take it; and that always goes a great way in the world, you know, Helen."

A certain tinge of worldliness was the one point in her father's character, which, in spite of her warm affection for him, sometimes jarred painfully on Helen. For this is a foible to which men, even high-minded men, capable on occasion of great personal disinterestedness, are much more prone than women; partly, perhaps, because man's happiness lies, so much more than woman's does, in the external activity which narrow circumstances must tend to cramp. But this much is certain: many a man who, in his youth, married upon love and next to nothing a year, without a thought of "prudence" in his choice of a wife, is scandalized, in more advanced years of achieved prosperity, at the bare idea of his daughter's doing as his wife did; and turns a deaf ear to any suitor who has not "position or fortune" to offer to the lady of his love. The fortune of his first wife had, indeed, laid the foundation of Mr.

Montagu's own; but he was not, therefore, inclined that his daughter's should be required to render the same service to her husband.

"I do not find," returned Helen, in a tone of perceptible constraint, "that fortune or position makes a man more agreeable to converse with, or sit next to at dinner; and that being the extent of my acquaintance with Mr. Huntley and Mr. Carysfort, it would never occur to me to take these points into consideration. Besides, dear papa," she added, more gently, "I am sure you would not like a man better for being rich, or of aristocratic birth."

"No, certainly not," said Mr. Montagu, whose political views were strongly opposed to any undue predominance of the aristocratic element in our institutions. "And, besides, I can trust you not to commit yourself by any young-lady nonsense," he added, with a fond, proud smile at his daughter.

On any previous occasion, Helen would have felt flattered by the intended compliment. She had always piqued herself on keeping clear of all such affairs as prudent fathers are wont to stigmatize as "young-lady nonsense;" and, heiress as she was, had never given colour for even a surmise as to her probable matrimonial destination. But on this occasion, the remark fell unpleasantly on her ear, and she was hesitating what to reply, when her father went on:—

"Sir William and Lady Emlyn have been speaking to me about your stay here; they say they cannot possibly spare you while Miss Forrester is here, she would miss you so much; and I have promised that you shall stay as long as you and they like; so you may consider that settled."

"Oh, thank you, papa! how kind of you!" said Helen, really grateful for his having ensured her freedom for some time to come, at the expense, she well knew, of no pleasant acquiescence on his wife's part.

"And as that is settled," he continued, "just dance with that poor devil, Marston, by-and-by, like a good girl, even if he does bore you a little. A dance one way or other makes no difference; and unless you do, I shall not hear the last of it this long while," he added drily.

Without ever having exchanged a word on the subject, father and daughter understood one another perfectly in respect to Captain Marston. His regiment had lately returned from the Cape, and was now quartered at X—; and Mrs. Montagu, anxious to secure a fortune for her nephew, and

undivided empire for herself at home, had, from the moment of his arrival, set herself to compass a match between him and Helen, with that surprising want of tact into which very clever manceuverers sometimes allow themselves to be betrayed, when too eagerly bent on a given object. Her nephew, indeed, seconded her views to a wish. Whatever might be his object in the match, Captain Marston's devotion to his fair step-cousin was too undisguised to be overlooked; but Mr. Montagu regarded with contempt this insignificant aspirant to his daughter's hand; and though unwilling to embroil himself with his wife by openly thwarting her views, smiled with secret complacency at his own certainty that Helen was more than a match for her step-mother, let alone her step-mother's far less clever or dangerous nephew.

That he was her step-mother's nephew, was quite enough for Helen. She set him down as a stupid, conceited fortune-hunter—his stiff, awkward exterior certainly not belying the supposition—and troubled her head no further about him, than systematically to slight all his advances. Now, however, well aware to what exordiums on the subject of her scornful impenetrability to "dear Gerald's" devotion her father would have to listen, she condescended for his sake to accept Captain Marston's next invitation to dance, which no other consideration would have induced her to do.

Supper, however, intervened; and Mrs. Montagu, finding the attempt to interfere with her husband's arrangement for Helen's remaining at Emlyn Priory useless, determined to make the best of matters, by securing an invitation for Gerald Marston to visit her there.

"Ah, my dear Sir William," said she, as they went in to supper together, "it is really too bad of you and Lady Emlyn to steal our sweet Helen away for so long! I was proposing to drive over and fetch her to-morrow, and Mr. Montagu tells me you will not hear of it."

"Certainly not," replied Sir William; "we consider Miss Helen pledged to us for at least a fortnight or three weeks."

"Ah, you will be supplanting us entirely. I feel quite jealous of Lady Emlyn already," said Mrs. Montagu. "And I do miss her so dreadfully! Mr. Montagu's time is of course much taken up, and I feel quite lost without her."

"Miss Helen must be missed anywhere; but I am sure while she enjoys herself, you will feel amply repaid for your self-denial in sparing her," replied Sir William drily; "and at

the first sign of home-sickness, I shall drive her back to the Park on the instant."

"Home-sickness among the attractions of Emlyn Priory! No, no; I cannot flatter myself to that extent," returned Mrs. Montagu. "But there is one person who is really to be pitied in her absence, Sir William—my nephew, Captain Marston. Poor fellow! I really believe he thought of nothing on returning to England but making acquaintance with his new cousin. Of course I could not help writing to him what a sweet girl she was, and now he is always reproaching me for not having done her justice. I am sure he thinks her an angel; and when she is away, he mopes about as if he had eyes and ears for nobody. Poor Gerald!"

"Pleasant company the young man must be!" Sir William felt inclined to retort; but repressing the inclination, replied politely, "Lady Emlyn and myself will always be delighted to see any one whom it gives Miss Helen pleasure to meet—even were he not Mrs. Montagu's nephew."

And Mrs. Montagu's object was gained. But though she seized the first opportunity of communicating her success to her nephew, it did not exactly profit him as she intended. The waltz which Helen had condescended to promise him, arrived at last, and during their first pause in the dance, Captain Marston adverted to her intention of spending some time at the Emlyn Priory.

"Yes; I have no intention of leaving at present," she replied carelessly.

"Sir William Emlyn has been kind enough," said Captain Marston, colouring up to the roots of his hair as he spoke, "to ask me—I mean to say, he will be glad to see me, or any one it gives you pleasure to meet, at Emlyn Priory. May I—will you be angry if I avail myself of his permission?"

"What possible right can I have to be angry, because any of Sir William Emlyn's guests accept his invitations?" returned Helen, coldly.

"I—you know I did not mean that," said the young officer, reproachfully.

"Excuse me," said Helen; "I replied to what I understood you to say."

Her meaning, at least, was clear enough; and her partner bit his lips as he proposed to continue the waltz; but there was further mortification in store for him. He was not a good waltzer, and had only selected the dance because he had once

heard Helen say she liked it best ; and, disconcerted as he was by her ungraciousness, was now less equal than ever to steering through the perils of a crowded ball-room. They had made but a few turns before the shock of a collision with another couple flung them roughly apart and he measured his length on the floor, while Helen was only saved from the same fate by Sir William, who, happening to be standing by, caught her in his arms.

Helen joined, with perfect good humour, in Sir William's laughter, while he professed his gratitude to Captain Marston, good-naturedly wishing to divert him from his confusion, for giving him the opportunity of rendering her so timely a service. But Captain Marton was in no laughing mood. Extremely bashful by nature, he felt as if this accident had been expressly and maliciously designed to make him ridiculous in the eyes of everybody, but especially in Helen's ; and when she laughed, he thought she was laughing at him, which he felt as insult added to the injury of her studied coldness.

But Helen was far too well-bred to be capable of such rudeness ; and feeling really sorry when she saw his intense annoyance, declared herself quite ready to renew the waltz. "Accidents would occur, even on the best chalked dancing-floors !" But Captain Marston was not ready.

"If I could flatter myself," he replied, in a voice of suppressed passion, too low for any but herself to hear, "that waltzing with me could afford Miss Montagu the slightest pleasure, I should be only too happy. But as it is"—He bowed profoundly, and retreated, leaving Helen scarcely more surprised than indignant at his behaviour.

She had actually volunteered to continue dancing, and he had refused ! Was he imagining, in his stupid conceit, that she cared to dance with him, and intending to retaliate on her for the coldness which he, perhaps, supposed to be assumed ? She had heard that men, especially in uniform, could never believe a woman really indifferent to their admiration. It should be long indeed before he had the chance of rejecting any courtesy from her again.

"What—eh ! too much cowed to try again ?" said Sir William, as he gave her his arm, on her partner's sudden retreat. "That is what I call showing the white feather, do not you ?" But seeing that she was annoyed, and not quite understanding why, he proceeded to talk on other subjects ; and, in the course of a short talk with him, and a longer one with Mr.

Huntley, into whose charge he adroitly contrived to transfer her, Helen soon recovered her equanimity. And when, towards the close of the ball, the unlucky offender, having recovered from his momentary exasperation, approached to take leave of her, with a humble apology for his rudeness, she was pleased to ignore all cause of offence, and bade him good-night with precisely the same dignified indifference to which he was accustomed on her part. So he might at least flatter himself he had made matters no worse than they were before, which, indeed, as regarded his hopes of success, they scarcely could be.

It is strange and painful to reflect how often one human being's whole plans and hopes for future happiness are absorbed and centred in another, who bestows as little thought and sympathy in return as though the two dwelt on different planets, or belonged to different orders of creation. So often does the shell in which most of us live shut us out from each other, veiling from us the value of that for which, if we read it aright, we could not but feel deeply grateful, even at the cost of pain to ourselves; for what can be more painful to a true heart, than to recognise the existence of sincere love which it is unable to reciprocate?

Small thought had Helen of any such pain in store for her future, as she danced gaily on through the last few dances, always the most enjoyable, while Captain Marston rode slowly home to his quarters at X—, in a half-bitter, half-hopeless mood, in which the very idea of dancing was hateful. If there were a thought which interfered with her perfect enjoyment, it was one which had occurred to her several times during the evening—How extremely attentive Mr. Carysfort was to Florence!

A stranger in the neighbourhood, Florence knew but few people present, and not caring to dance as often as Lady Emlyn would have provided her with partners, she gratefully accepted Mr. Carysfort's assiduous guardianship when disengaged, feeling really obliged to him, in the shyness of her nature, for taking so much trouble to amuse her, when she must otherwise have been shrinking from absolute strangers. And not knowing, as Helen did, how little he usually exerted himself to be agreeable, she saw no significance in the attentions of one who, perhaps, like herself, knew few people in the room.

But Helen felt fretted every time she saw them together.

Much less in her eyes, than even in Cissy's, was Horace "good enough" for Florence; and she was jealous of her learning to like him, even as the companion of an evening. She was provoked that Mr. Littleton, who had been called away early in the evening, did not return; her quick eye had already noted how his rested on Florence; and it was only a small consolation to her for his re-appearance after Florence was already engaged for the final country dance, to find that she was about to dance it with her cousin, instead of with Mr. Carysfort. She afterwards observed, however, that being himself left out for want of a partner, Mr. Littleton stood watching Florence in the dance, as if he had something very pleasant indeed to look at.

Finding Florence already engaged, Mr. Carysfort had meantime yielded to Lady Emlyn's entreaties to ask Helen to dance; and Helen, satisfied at his separation from her friend, accepted his tardy attention with a better grace than she might otherwise have done. It must be confessed that he had yielded the more willingly to Louisa's suggestion that it would be quite rude not to dance with Helen at all, from the consideration that a country dance involves very little exertion in the way of talking, or making one's self agreeable to one's partner; a few fragmentary remarks, during the "hands across," or "down the middle," being the utmost that can be expected from the most determined votary of conversation. A few disjointed questions and answers, like the following, accordingly passed.

"Then are you really fond of dancing, Miss Montagu?" asked Mr. Carysfort, as right hands were joined for the first movement of "hands across."

"Very," returned Helen, as left hands were substituted, and the retrograde movement commenced. "Is that anything surprising?"

"I thought you would not condescend to enjoy such unintellectual amusements," he observed, during their temporary approximation in "poussette."

"Dancing does not *in itself* imply condescension," she replied, with emphasis; but happily they were safe landed on their opposite sides before she had time, if so inclined, to add more. When their next turn of duty came, it was she who spoke first.

"May I ask which is your favourite dance, Mr. Carysfort?"

"I think I prefer a quadrille, when I am obliged to dance," said Horace, not at the moment perceiving the very left-handed nature of his politeness as well as of his position.

"What a pity you should ever be obliged to dance!" said Helen. "I am quite sorry for you. But of course *you* would prefer a quadrille."

"Poussette" was so nearly over, that Horace had to lean forward from his place in the opposition to say, "Why should I 'of course' like a quadrille best?"

"Because it gives you the least trouble," said Helen; and they relapsed into silence.

"Glad to see you dancing with Mr. Carysfort, Helen," whispered her father, as he passed behind her. He had resisted all attempts to inveigle him into the dance, which Mrs. Montagu had been easily persuaded to lead off with Sir William.

"How go on politics, Carysfort?" whispered the latter, as the progress of affairs placed them next to each other; but Horace deigned no reply.

"Really, Sir William, standing next our sweet Helen makes me feel ashamed of dancing," said Mrs. Montagu, affectedly.

"Now, how very odd! I feel, on the contrary, quite proud of dancing so near her," returned Sir William, extending his hand to Helen, as in duty bound.

"It is odd how people's tastes differ, Sir William," said Helen. "Here is Mr. Carysfort dancing under compulsion; he has just been telling me so. But I will let you off 'poussette' this time," she added, to Horace, relapsing into her place as she spoke.

"You are most considerate," said that gentleman, by no means attempting to remonstrate. But he did not let the next "poussette" escape him, and said as it began, "I cannot think where you learned to make daisy-chains, Miss Montagu. Are they ever used at elections, or with a political signification?"

"Not that I know of," said Helen; "but if you will stand for the county at the next election, I will manufacture any quantity you may require for the decoration of your supporters, as emblematic of the useful and consistent services you may be expected to render to your country." They were now going down the middle.

"I am afraid I am not worthy of the honour," said Horace. "I am only sorry you cannot yourself represent the county, and plead the 'rights of women' in Parliament."

"It is not my idea of women's rights that they should do the men's work for them," returned Helen.

Several series of "hands across," "poussette," and "down the middle," had been achieved before either spoke again; but Mr. Carysfort was in a provoking mood, and presently he returned to the charge.

"But how are we to distinguish men's work from women's? For instance, I always thought talking politics was men's work."

"I always thought talking was no work at all," said Helen disdaining the allusion. "If you call talking work, I wonder what you call idleness?"

"There are two sorts of idleness," said Horace, too indolent to persevere in the line of attack which she ignored—they had now reached the bottom, and he was improving their interval of repose by leaning against the wall—"pleasant idleness, and unpleasant idleness."

"No, Mr. Carysfort," interrupted Helen, with eyes brimful of fun and mischief, "you do not mean to tell me that you think idleness can possibly be *unpleasant*?"

"Not absolutely unpleasant, perhaps," he replied, laughing, positively provoked into good-temper, she looked so bright and arch as she stood there; "but it may be more or less pleasant. For instance, it is not unpleasant idleness to stand here, watching the dancing and listening to the music; but you must admit it would be much pleasanter if we had two arm-chairs to sit in."

"Well, that is a matter of taste," said Helen; "and—oh,—there are papa and mamma going; I must bid them good-bye; and there, positively, is an arm-chair for you! How lucky!" And she was half across the room already. Mr. Carysfort looked after her for a moment, doubtful if politeness might now require him to follow; but then he looked at the arm-chair, and the question was decided; and he sat there watching Florence's graceful movements, till the cessation of the music announced the close of the country-dance and the ball at once.

When the guests had all taken leave, Sir William drew up the blinds, letting in the full daylight, to convince the young ladies, as he said, of the enormity of their conduct, in thus spending whole nights in dissipation; and Lady Emlyn, pitying them for the extreme fatigue she was sure they must both be suffering under, prepared to hurry them off to bed, regardless of Helen's suggestion that it was quite a waste of time to be

going to bed now. But the good-nights were not completed before Helen had heard another suggestion on the part of Mr. Huntley treated with equal disdain. Sir William would listen to no proposal of taking leave that night, in order to return to town by an early train next morning. Mr. Huntley might reside in the library, and write or deliver any amount of essays or lectures, on ethics, or metaphysics, or whatever "ics" he pleased—and might be tolerably sure of an audience, Sir William added, with a sly glance at Helen,—but as to escaping from Emlyn Priory for at least a week to come, he need not flatter himself. An early train! Sir William hoped Miss Forrester was ashamed of her cousin!

So Mr. Huntley was obliged to give in—not, perhaps, at heart, unwilling to do so,—and to bid the ladies "good-night," instead of "good-bye."

"Good-morning!" was Helen's reply, certainly with a brighter smile than had she been called on to answer good-bye.

Mr. Littleton seemed of Helen's opinion, in one respect; for he proposed to his new friend, Mr. Huntley, to come and take a lesson in fishing instead of going to bed, till such time as he should himself need to set off to visit his patients; and though Mr. Carysfort shrugged his shoulders, the invitation was accepted.

About an hour later, Frank Littleton awoke with a smile out of a long reverie in which he had been indulging on the banks of the clear, dark pool in the stream, in which he and Mr. Huntley were fishing in silence.

"I never thought much about such things before," he said; "I suppose the wedding must have put it into my head; but I really begin to think I want a wife myself."

"Ah," said Bernard Huntley, raising his eyes to the speaker's face, with a strange expression of sympathy and interest, "well, I have thought a good deal about such things, at one time or another, and have come to the conclusion"—a cloud settled down over his fine face, as he dropped his eyes upon the water again—"that I shall do without one."

CHAPTER V.

THE ACCIDENT.

An accident—to use the common phrase,
Although, in sooth, I deem what men call such
But links which catch the eye in Heaven's complete,
Though veiled, chain of Providential care.

COUNT STEPHEN.

WEEKS passed on at Emlyn Priory, as a dream of delight to Helen. The kindness of all around her, the freedom from so much which annoyed her at home, the pleasant life, such as one may lead in summer weather at an English country-house, removed from the restraints of town society, and enlivened by excursions and wanderings, boatings and picnics, as may please the fancy of the moment, might have sufficed to satisfy a far more fastidious disposition than hers; and yet these were among the shallower sources of her enjoyment.

Her friendship with Florence, and we may add with Mr. Huntley, not only answered all her anticipations, but acquired a deeper and more delightful influence over her with every succeeding day. Helen had one great want in life; and if her new friends could not precisely supply it, they were able to do better, by putting her in the way of finding what she wanted for herself.

She had not hitherto found the clue without which it is impossible for an earnest and thoughtful mind to thread, safely and happily, the mazes of life; the clue, namely, which a clearly defined faith and religious convictions afford. Not that we here allude to any specific system of religious convictions exclusively. Each varying form of faith is, doubtless, adapted to one of the many varying forms of human mind and character; but without a firm religious faith to bear us up, lest we dash our feet against the stones, life must too often be merely a labyrinth of suffering, error, and perplexity, to all but such as are content to skim the mere surface of existence.

There are, indeed, some happily constituted persons whose faith is of the heart; and who believing though they have not seen, do the duties and enjoy the blessings actually assigned to them, seeing the bright side of everything, and unassailed

by the doubts, the cravings, and the questionings, which have occupied the awakened intellect in all ages. But Helen was not one of these. Her naturally inquiring mind had been subject to none of the intellectual restraints usually imposed on female education, and it disposed her, as it developed, to search into, and require a solution for, every problem which presented itself to her observation or imagination, in the social, moral, or physical worlds. Such researches and speculations had long led her past the usually prescribed bounds ; and she had as yet met with no one who could enter into, and help her out of her difficulties.

The discords of her outer home-life had, on the other hand, awakened a deeper desire, of late, for some clearer light and harmony within, to atone for and to reconcile them ; and now, for the first time, she found kindred minds, who could not only sympathise in and understand her doubts and perplexities, but were able to open the way for her to the desired solution of them. For of every doubt which can perplex the creature, the Creator holds a satisfactory solution in the treasures of His wisdom. Happy they who, like Helen, are led to its discovery, before doubt degenerates into disbelief.

Florence Forrester and Bernard Huntley were the children of mothers who, having been warm friends as well as sisters-in-law, and both superior women, had brought them up in similar principles and views, which each imbibed with a difference, according to their respective temperaments and circumstances. Both, for instance, believed, as Florence had said, that it must be our own fault if we fail to attain happiness in life, notwithstanding the necessity of endurance under inevitable struggles and sufferings. But Florence knew little of these, except in theory, and her views and feelings were naturally tinged with the happiness attainable. Bernard's life had been very different from hers ; and his mind dwelt rather on the suffering and endurance through which happiness must be achieved.

Helen stood, as it were, between the two. Her naturally joyous temperament accorded, on the one hand, with Florence's sunny, or, as Mr. Rawdon had called them, Utopian views of life ; while, on the other, her enthusiastic admiration of all that was good and noble, of the martyr-spirit which suffers and devotes itself for high objects, led her to sympathise intensely with the deep and almost mournful earnestness of Bernard Huntley's tone of thought, which Florence was inclined to consider too gloomy. Helen felt that here was a man capable of

true martyr-heroism ; little foreseeing how much suffering was in store for herself, from that very self-devotion to his ideal of duty, which she so much and so justly prized in him.

With these two friends she experienced the deep happiness of that sense of moral progression, which has been said to be the most exquisite of human enjoyments, and is certainly one of the purest. In her conversations with them, in the books they lent her, and in the new world of thought so opened to her, Helen's real life was lived, amidst all the pleasant outward distractions which might have appeared to engross her. It generally happened that she and Mr. Huntley were thrown together in their walks and rides ; for though he never appeared to seek her society, Mr. Carysfort's inclination to monopolize Florence naturally led to such a result, which was often indirectly promoted by Sir William. For he liked Helen too much not, man-like, to consider her thrown away, because she was unmarried ; and if she would not be persuaded to fall in love with his friend Frank Littleton, he could desire nothing better than the apparently prospering friendship between her and Mr. Huntley.

Yet a deeper observer might have noted something in Mr. Huntley's manner, which was far from bespeaking a man likely to fall in love ; an unwavering, self-controlled restraint of tone and bearing, as of one who felt himself not wholly in his proper sphere ; among his present companions, but not of them ; and this even in his most animated conversational moods. Perhaps this sort of self-controlled energy, indicating a steadiness as well as strength of character, which Helen's enthusiastic temperament was peculiarly calculated to appreciate, was one of the points that most strongly interested her in Bernard ; while his inclination to melancholy awakened the softer womanly sympathy, which easily ripens into love.

Yet neither had she, as yet, any thoughts of love ; for it was scarcely a diminution of her enjoyment, when Mr. Huntley, resisting all further pressing to remain, took his departure for London at the end of about a fortnight. She only read and thought the more ; had a little more leisure, perhaps, for chafing at Mr. Carysfort's assiduities to Florence ; and if Sir William, at the close of one of the discussions on political and other subjects which they now held *tête-à-tête*, sometimes remarked : "We want Huntley back again to help us, Miss Helen," she answered, indeed, with a smile, but without any blush of awakened consciousness. Life was too full and too delightful

in the present, to leave much room to hope or fear for the future, or time to analyze all its sources of enjoyment.

There was, however, one little cloud upon Helen's horizon, which grew more threatening as the weeks passed on; and this was Florence's passive reception—acceptance it could scarcely be called—of Mr. Carysfort's devoted attentions, to which Helen was right in assigning a most decided significance. These attentions had originally, perhaps, been only prompted by that inclination for ladies' society which so often influences idle men of fashion, who, like Mr. Carysfort, possess a certain degree of refinement and intellectual cultivation, and who find that it adds piquancy to their enjoyment of it, to make some one lady the object of special gallant attentions. But Mr. Carysfort was not altogether wanting in higher aspirations and capacities than his idle, frivolous course of life had hitherto developed; and Florence's bright yet serious views of life, rendered doubly attractive by the sweetness and gentleness of her disposition, soon made a deep impression on him. For nearly four-and-twenty hours, indeed, after their conversation on the day of Cissy's wedding, he indulged, as has been said, in speculations as to the possibility of turning over a new leaf in life, and trying to act up to such a standard of duty and unselfishness as she proposed, in order to see whether such a course might prove more conducive to happiness, than the sort of struggle he had of late years been somewhat wearily maintaining, between ennui on the one hand, and the endeavour to avoid any superfluous exertion on the other. Then, however, it flashed convincingly upon him, that a shorter and far less troublesome road to happiness was open to him.

Florence's views might be visionary; but Florence herself was an unmistakable and most engaging reality; and he had quite sufficient confidence in the power of his own attractions, not to be troubled by much apprehension of finding it difficult to win her. Thenceforward his attentions had a definite object; and the very fact of his having something definite in view—an object in life, in fact—rendered him so infinitely more animated and agreeable than his wont, that Sir William smiled and wondered how long it would last: and his kind-hearted wife rejoiced in this corroboration of her belief, that Horace only wanted a wife like Florence, to make him everything he should be. She already regarded her favourite scheme as secure of success; and if Florence's invariable gentleness of manner sometimes betrayed a degree of almost painful constraint,

there was nothing in it that might not be ascribed to her natural timidity, or which need damp Mr. Carysfort's hopes and anticipations.

Helen looked on in a state of incredulous alarm. She could not, she would not believe, that so high and pure-minded a woman as Florence, could for a moment contemplate marriage with a mere fashionable man of the world like Horace; and yet there was a something in her grateful, passive reception of kindness from everybody, a clinging dependence on those she loved, which led Helen to dread whether she might have the firmness to withstand his suit if strongly urged, especially as preferred by the adopted brother of her dearest friend. Louisa would certainly use all her influence in his favour. Besides, Florence judged so leniently of everybody; might she not hope to improve him? Gratitude for his attachment and affection for Lady Emlyn, would naturally point to such a hope, and so induce her to commit the fatal error of marrying a man she could not either respect or love—that she possibly *could* respect or love him, Helen would not for a moment admit. Of course he might really improve, as candour suggested; but she felt as if Florence would be lost to her, as if Florence would be Florence no longer, should she unhappily consent to this dreaded proposal.

Helen felt quite provoked with Mr. Littleton. She was sure he admired Florence; whenever he joined their party, he looked and listened to her more than to all the rest put together; yet he scrupulously avoided placing himself in competition with Mr. Carysfort. He did not, as Helen indignantly remarked to herself, give Florence even a chance of knowing how infinitely superior he was to his rival, but usually joined herself and Sir William in conversation, even if his attention sometimes strayed to what the others might be saying. Things seemed verging towards a crisis, and still he made no sign; and day by day Helen grew more hopeless and more anxious on Florence's account. She had an inward perception that Florence was ill at ease, though all approach to the subject was scrupulously avoided in their own conversations; and she feared and grieved the more lest Florence should be yielding against her own better judgment.

Thus matters stood, when an incident occurred which trifling in itself, proved serious in its consequences, and altered the whole aspect of affairs at Emlyn Priory.

Sir William Emlyn returning from a ride into X—— one

fine day, about luncheon time, met Helen coming out of the library.

"Ah! Miss Helen, there is such a pleasure in store for you!" said he. "I met Captain Marston in X——, and he said he was coming this afternoon to pay his respects—he did not say to whom!"

"How unfortunate!" said Helen, gravely. "When I expect to be out all the afternoon!" And off she went to find Florence.

The result of her conference with the latter became apparent at the lunch-table, when she announced, that as Lady Emlyn would be busy this afternoon writing a long letter to Cissy, she and Florence were going on a private expedition to row and read upon the lake—a small piece of water artificially formed by the expansion of the stream running through the grounds, which, with its tiny boats and shady banks, afforded a pleasant resort in the sultry August weather. Lady Emlyn suggested some faint objection to trusting them on the water by themselves; but Helen asserted her perfect capability of taking care of Florence and herself too, and Sir William offered his guarantee of her "lakemanship." Mr. Carysfort tried to persuade Florence that it was not safe, and then that it would be too hot; and, lastly, spelled hard for an invitation to join the party; but Helen was inexorable. Go she would, and have Mr. Carysfort's company she equally would not; and laughingly inviting Lady Emlyn to come, when she had finished her letter, and see whether they were drowned or not, carried off Florence in triumph, to the secret amusement and satisfaction of the latter, who could hardly help sighing as she contrasted Helen's good-tempered, energetic manner of carrying her point, with her own tendency to passive compliance in the wishes of others. She had so carefully schooled herself against self-will all her life. Might not there be danger in the opposite direction?

But such reflections were soon merged in the pleasure of Helen's society, and of the beautiful afternoon. Mr. Carysfort's face, as he lounged in the arm-chair, would scarcely have worn an air of such unruffled, contemplative composure, had he known how much Florence was enjoying herself in her unwonted liberty. The lake, tiny as it was, was very pretty; with steep, rocky banks overhung by trees, and a soft stretch of turf on one side, which afforded the easiest approach, allowing a carriage-road to pass within a few yards of the lake,

for those who would avoid the fatigue of the pretty path through wood and dingle by which Florence and Helen found their way.

After rowing about the lake till they were tired, they moored their tiny skiff under the shadows of a rocky creek, and had sat for hours in the very height of enjoyment—in deep conference over some favourite author, with bonnets discarded for coolness' sake, and white hands dipping luxuriously into the clear, dark water—when the sound of wheels upon the road, and then of voices on the bank, warned them that their *tête-à-tête* holiday was over.

"Helen! Florence, dear!" called Lady Emlyn's sweet voice; and loosening the boat from the stump to which it had been moored, and taking up her oars, Helen paddled out into the lake into full view of Lady Emlyn and Mr. Carysfort, who had driven her down in his phaeton, which stood waiting close at hand.

"I am sorry to disappoint Mr. Carysfort," said Helen, when within convenient hearing, "but we are neither of us drowned yet! Do let me give you a row, dear Lady Emlyn; we have just got room for you."

"Pray change places with Miss Forrester, then, Louisa," said Mr. Carysfort; "that nutshell cannot possibly hold three of you."

"Will you, dear Florence?" said Lady Emlyn.

"Oh, certainly, if you wish it," said Florence, rising and colouring as she spoke.

How it happened nobody could say; whether Florence caught her foot in something as she rose, or forgetting where she was, rose more hastily than consisted with the equilibrium of so frail a vessel; or whether its movement, as Helen resumed her oars to row ashore, threw her off her balance, could never be decided; but the boat gave a sudden lurch, she endeavoured unsuccessfully to regain her balance, Helen, with a scull in each hand, could do nothing to help her, and, with a splash, she disappeared into the water. Lady Emlyn gave a little shriek, and, with Mr. Carysfort, ran hastily to the point nearest the boat; while Helen, with perfect presence of mind, sat quite still till the boat had steadied from the shock, and then leaning gently over, extended her hand just in time to catch Florence as she reappeared on the surface. The water was little, if at all, beyond Florence's depth; and Helen, exclaiming, "No harm done!" was considering what to do next,

when she was saved from further deliberation by Mr. Carysfort. Without pausing a second, he had made straight for the boat, and taking summary possession of Florence, half-assisted and half-carried her to the bank, where—Helen meanwhile pushing the boat hastily ashore—they all stood, in another minute, looking at one another in some slight bewilderment, till they suddenly joined in an irresistible burst of laughter.

"My darling Florence," said Lady Emlyn, checking herself, "what a shame to laugh! Are you sure you are not hurt? Are you sure you feel none the worse?"

"Quite sure that I only feel very wet," said Florence; "and I am afraid," she added, half-laughing, and blushing in spite of herself, "that Mr. Carysfort does too."

"But Mr. Carysfort must bear in mind, that it is not when young ladies are left to themselves that they tumble into the water," said Helen. "Now, Florence, dear, you must walk home as quick as possible, only let me wring a little water out of you first;" and she knelt down, laughing, to wring *not* a little water out of Florence's muslin flounces.

But Mr. Carysfort would not hear of Miss Forrester's walking home. His ponies would take her home in half the time; and she would catch no cold, if a dry cloak (which he hastily produced from the phaeton) were wrapped outside her wet clothes, upon well-known hydropathic principles. Helen protested in vain. Lady Emlyn, though half fearful of the consequences, did not like to vex Horace by opposing his wish; and Florence, still somewhat bewildered by the shock of her cold bath, was even less equal than usual to resisting, with any effect, the strong determination of another. She submitted to the cloak, faintly urging that she had better walk, but Horace was determined to have his way this time; and Lady Emlyn, having tenderly tied on her bonnet over her dripping hair, and put her own parasol into her hand, she was assisted into the phaeton, and driven off at full speed by Mr. Carysfort. Helen, shaking her head over men's ignorance and obstinacy, walked home quickly with Lady Emlyn.

Though the drive round was considerably longer than the footpath, the ponies went so well, that Florence was already half-dressed in drier garments by the time Lady Emlyn and Helen rejoined her; the latter had barely paused, as she crossed the hall, to observe, with sudden amusement, that Captain Marston's card lay on the table.

Florence laughed on receipt of a message from Sir William, who had joined them by the way, to the effect that had he known her intention of tumbling into the water, he would certainly have attended to witness the performance, and answered all Lady Emlyn's tender inquiries by repeated assurances that she was none the worse for it ; but the laugh and the answers required an effort, so preoccupied was her mind on a different subject. She excused herself from appearing at table on plea of the necessity of drying her hair, which hung in long, wet masses round her ; and prevailing on Louisa and Helen not to linger with her, lest they should keep Sir William waiting for dinner, dismissed her maid as soon as possible, and sat down to think. Lady Emlyn little divined the mental perturbation which she did but increase, as she paused, before she left her, to whisper with a smile—"Well, if you had to tumble into the water, I am glad Horace was there to help you out !"

For there had been something in Horace's eye and manner, as he handed her into the phaeton, wrapping coverings so carefully round her, and as he lifted, more than handed her out, trusting so earnestly, that though the first, this might be neither the last nor the pleasantest drive he should have the pleasure of giving her,—there had been a proud, gratified smile on his lip, as he accompanied her to the very foot of the stairs, watching the blush which would gather as she somewhat nervously thanked him at parting,—which was unmistakable even to Florence's unwilling perception. Irresistibly had the conviction forced itself upon her of that to which, for weeks past, she had—with culpable cowardice, she now admitted—been trying to blind herself ; the decisive significance, namely, of Mr. Carysfort's attentions.

What must she do ? It was too late now to do that, which, unless she intended to accept him, she should have done much earlier ; that is, to avoid the risk of the proposal she instinctively felt to be impending, by showing in her manner to Mr. Carysfort that his attentions were unwelcome. It was impossible to requite his services on occasion of this unlucky adventure by assuming an ungracious bearing ; and, short of positive ungraciousness, any slight change of manner would probably be ascribed to embarrassment arising from an opposite source. She felt, too, that her long passive acceptance of Mr. Carysfort's attendance and gallantry on all occasions, might well be construed into decided encouragement ; and if

it had before seemed impossible to vex him and Louisa, by shrinking back too markedly from the kindness for which she felt so grateful, and which she had tried to flatter herself did not mean what she knew the latter hoped it might, how far more difficult must it not now seem, to disappoint them both, with the added fear of blame for what must appear intentional coquetry on her part? How wrong, too, Helen would think it, who could never have been so weak herself!

But what could she do, then? Could she marry him? She certainly did not love him, according to her idea of what love should be; and to marry without love was against all her principles. But, on the other hand, would it ever be possible to feel, before marriage, all the love which ought eventually to belong to the chosen help-meet for life? How little was it possible really to know another before marriage! Might it not be safer to try and decide rather according to the standard of duty than that of feeling, certain that where duty led, love must follow? She was aware that she already exercised a certain beneficial influence upon Horace; he took such evident pleasure in drawing her into conversation on serious subjects, and regretted so frankly the frivolous habits of his past life. His attachment, too, must be quite disinterested; perhaps he felt she was the partner fitted to help him in becoming much which he was learning that he ought to be. Might not this be the turning-point in his life? And could she be doing right in throwing him back upon himself, perhaps to the permanent injury of his character? Besides, she certainly liked him, and, till some dread of his intentions had begun to trouble her in secret, had much enjoyed his conversation and society; and Louisa, who knew him so well, thought highly, and was very fond of him, too. Might all this not be sufficient foundation for a sincere and enduring affection? And perhaps it was not in her nature to fall deeply in love.

Yet, on the other hand, she could not ignore a secret consciousness of far deeper and more enthusiastic capacities of love within her than had ever yet been awakened. Her dreams, when she had indulged in such—and few women could say that they have never done so—had always been of a husband to whom she should look up with reverence as well as love; better and purer than herself; capable of raising her to a higher level, not in a worldly, but a spiritual sense. With Horace this dream must rather be reversed; and her timid nature shrank alarmed from the idea of being the one to lead,

to guide, to be looked up to. Still her dreams might have been the outbirth of an ambition more subtle than that of worldly elevation ; and the opposite lot might be the needful corrective of fears which sprang perhaps from weakness instead of humility. What was she to do ?

The more she thought, the more perplexed she grew ; till Helen's wish for "some old, wise person, to tell her the exact truth about everything," occurred to her mind, with a momentary thrill of regret at its impotence. But with it recurred her own answer also, as to the lesson such a want is designed to teach ; and Florence rose from her seat with a sigh of relief, feeling as if a weight had been lifted from her bosom. "To teach us to look where we are sure of help."

Florence's religious opinions were not theoretical alone, but formed the standard by which she really desired to guide her actions, little as she had yet encountered to put them to any severe trial ; the thought, therefore, brought her incalculable relief. She felt that she earnestly desired, above all things, to be guided aright, and to be guarded from any but a true marriage-union ; and the guidance of Providence, when sincerely desired, can never fail. Some ray of light would surely be sent to her aid before the dreaded hour of actual decision should arrive ; and with a lightened heart she passed to the open window, where she stood gazing dreamily out upon the trees and the sky tinged with the beauty of the summer sunset, forgetful alike of the late subject of so much perplexity, and of certain uncomfortable shivering sensations which began from time to time to creep over her. She was wondering how people ever get through the troubles of life, who seek no higher strength to lean on than their own. And truly, it is wonderful.

When Helen came up after dinner to fetch her, it was no longer an effort for Florence to talk, or even laugh, which they did gaily, over the afternoon's adventure, as they went down together. But the sound of Mr. Carysfort's voice, as they entered the drawing-room, awoke a nervous tremor at the embarrassing necessity of meeting him again ; and it was quite a relief to her, that the required courtesy of turning to shake hands with Mr. Littleton, who had joined the circle in her absence, cut short Horace's assiduous greetings, and hopes of her feeling none the worse for her mishap.

"Lady Emlyn is very anxious that I should prescribe an antidote against the effects of your cold bath, Miss Forrester,"

said Frank Littleton, with his bright smile ; "but I trust it is unnecessary, as you certainly look none the worse for your accident."

She certainly did not. A faint tinge of bloom on her usually clear, colourless complexion produced quite a contrary effect ; for Mr. Carysfort had followed her to the sofa, where she seated herself beside Lady Emlyn, and now took a chair in the closest possible proximity to them.

"Quite unnecessary, thank you," said Florence to Mr. Littleton ; though a recurrence of the shivering sensations before mentioned, raised a momentary doubt whether she were speaking truth. "But I do not," she continued—determined to resist the impulse to hold her tongue, and shrink, mentally, into the smallest possible corner—"I do not believe in accidents, Mr. Littleton."

"Nor I either, I assure you !" he replied with a quick, pleased glance of intelligence. "I carelessly used the common phrase ; but no one believes more firmly than I, that there is no such thing as an accident in life."

He spoke eagerly, and as if momentarily convinced that Florence would understand him, as though her remark had established a *rapprochement* between them ; and though he did not, when Mr. Carysfort seized the thread of the conversation, attempt to join in it, he sat by listening, and sometimes assenting by a word to Florence's observations, with a more undisguised interest in them than he usually betrayed.

"I do not quite understand," said Mr. Carysfort, "what you mean by not believing in accidents, Miss Forrester."

"I only mean that I do not think anything happens by chance," said Florence.

"Do you think, then, that we bring them all upon ourselves?" said Horace.

"No doubt we do, in one sense," said Florence, colouring uneasily, as she found herself drifting into one of the discussions into which Mr. Carysfort was so fond of beguiling her ; "but what I meant just now was, that I believe Providence directs and overrules all the things people generally think of as mere accidents."

"Providence?" said Horace. "Do you really think Providence interferes in all the trifles which happen to and concern individuals?"

"If Providence did not concern itself with little things," said Florence, "how could it help us in great things, when such

serious consequences often arise out of seeming trifles? How could Providence even overrule the destinies of nations, which are so powerfully affected by the acts and fortunes of individuals? Does not the greater include the less?"

"Perhaps——" said Horace, hesitating; "and yet how can one suppose—what would be the good of supposing that Providence had anything to do with such trifles as—for instance, your falling into the lake this afternoon?" he added, with a smile. "I think it would do harm, by making people fancy themselves special objects of Divine protection, 'elect vessels,' and so on, as some people really do; but I am sure you have no sympathy with them."

"If they believed the same care to be extended to all people, and to every moment of their existence," said Florence, "they could not suppose themselves to be special favourites, or any particular events to be special interpositions of Providence."

"But if we supposed such continual care to be taken of us," said Horace, "might it not, on the other hand, lead us to be very careless ourselves?"

"Not unless we supposed Providence to work in a merely arbitrary manner, without reference to our own conduct and actions," returned Florence; "but I do not think that. I only believe that the results of our actions are shaped and overruled as is best for us; and if we do wrong we must still suffer for it, though Providence may mercifully shape events so as to give us the least possible suffering; whereas, if we do right, Providence ensures our greatest possible happiness. And surely nothing could make us more careful, than to believe that everything, however trifling, which we do, is either right or wrong, and will inevitably contribute either to our happiness or to our suffering in the future."

"But there are so many things we have no control over, which have no connection with our doing right or wrong," said Horace.

"I think not," said Florence, gently. "If we could only see into the spiritual causes of such things, we might find strangely intimate connections between them and our doing, or our loving to do right or wrong."

"Spiritual causes?" said Horace.

"I mean causes existing in the states of our own mind, or spirit," answered Florence, blushing again, and secretly wishing him much less anxious to elicit her opinions. "I believe that events

and circumstances always bear a certain reference to ourselves, not as we seem outwardly, but as we really are, inwardly or spiritually; and that they are, therefore, the consequences, strictly speaking, not of other events or circumstances, but of causes within ourselves."

"Then you think there is a distinct cause, or reason, for every trifle that happens to us?" said Horace.

"Yes," said Florence, "because I believe that everything happens for our good; and how could that be, unless whatever happens to us were adapted to the peculiar things in each of us which need correction or development, in order that we may become better and happier."

"Just so!" said Helen, who had also been listening attentively. "And it is the most beautiful idea! One could never be afraid of anything that might happen, if one really believed that."

"I do not think you are much afraid of anything, as it is, Miss Helen," said Sir William, who, approaching to hand her some coffee, had overheard the last few sentences. "Miss Forrester, to what peculiar fault, or undeveloped excellence in yourself, do you ascribe your tumble into the water this afternoon?"

The fun in Sir William's eye was irresistible, and they all laughed.

"I did not say we could always discover the cause, Sir William," returned Florence, with her gentle smile, when the laugh had subsided; "but, perhaps, I may find out a reason for it some day, though I cannot just now."

"Well, when you do, be sure you let me know," rejoined Sir William; and the conversation, to Florence's great relief, passed off to lighter topics.

"I have no doubt you will discover a reason some day, even for your tumble into the water," said Frank Littleton to Florence, as he bade her good-night; and such a soft, sweet, quite radiant smile fell upon her as he spoke, that she involuntarily raised her eyes to meet it with a thrill of vague satisfaction, as though it were a ray of sunshine. But then Mr. Carysfort came up, and Frank was gone in a moment.

"Whatever reason there might be for your falling into the water, I trust there will be none for your catching cold; but I shall not feel quite at ease till I see you perfectly well to-morrow," said Horace, with a very different, but very meaning smile, and a slight emphasis on the last word, which drove

everything else out of Florence's head, and re-awakened all her perplexities. And despite her utmost efforts to dismiss them as before, they continued to haunt and distract her mind throughout a half-sleepless and feverish night, mingling even with her dreams in strangely distorted fashion.

For Mr. Carysfort was not destined to feel at ease, even on the morrow. Florence was so unwell the next morning, that though she rose as usual, she was obliged to lie down again before she was half-dressed; but, when Lady Emlyn proposed sending at once for Mr. Littleton, she would not hear of it, feeling sure she had only caught a bad cold, and should be better by evening. Condolences and hopes of seeing her by dinner-time, were duly transmitted to her by Louisa from Sir William and Horace, the hopes of the latter being expressed with much significance; but they were none the less doomed to disappointment. She felt no better by evening; and when, without consulting her, Lady Emlyn brought up Mr. Littleton to see her, he found her with so much fever, that she was at once ordered from her sofa to bed, with injunctions not to think of leaving it again till the fever should be subdued. So Mr. Carysfort was forced to content himself with hopes of her being better the next day.

But the next day she was worse; and Mr. Littleton began to look grave, and to talk of inflammatory symptoms on the lungs. There could no longer be any hope of its proving a mere cold; and Helen shook her head, and, in secret, laid all the blame on Mr. Carysfort. She had not as yet made much progress in practising, however she might admire, Florence's philosophy of looking for causes beyond the mere surface of events; one inevitable result of which is, that we must cease to resent the consequences of acts, however selfish or thoughtless in themselves, against their authors; who become mere instruments, in our eyes, of something permitted for good. Perfect love does not more surely cast out fear, than firm and enlightened faith the very possibility of resentment. Blind as the anger of a child against the table which hurts its head, is all vindictive feeling against those who may seem to have injured us, but who could "have had no power at all, except it were given" them "from above."

A few days, during which the usual remedies were resorted to, went by before either Lady Emlyn or Mr. Carysfort began to entertain anything beyond regret at Florence's indisposition, which deprived them so long of her society. Horace,

indeed, was like a fish out of water, and not in the best possible temper. Helen hoped this arose from self-reproach ; but, in fact, it had not yet occurred to him, that his insisting on driving Florence home might have anything to do with the matter. It was quite natural a lady should catch cold after a fall into the water, but it was very provoking just now ; and he fretted and fumed, till his favourite chaise-longue could hardly contain him. Helen might have enjoyed his discomfiture, but for the growing anxiety she fancied she saw in Frank Littleton's face after every fresh visit to his patient, and the increasing suffering, which all Florence's gentle patience was unable wholly to disguise.

At length one evening, after the third visit he had that day made to his patient, Frank Littleton, with obvious reluctance and hesitation, informed Sir William and Lady Emlyn, that he must suggest the propriety of sending for further advice from London, and communicating with Miss Forrester's relatives. Lady Emlyn's consternation and distress were extreme ; she had never dreamed of danger. But Sir William, who understood better the probable consequences of continuous fever and inflammation, assented instantly, and prepared to send off a messenger by the night train. But a difficulty arose as to writing to Mr. Forrester. They knew he was in Ireland, but nothing more ; and it must be learned from Florence herself. Lady Emlyn was more distressed than ever at the idea of asking her so ominous a question, and pleaded hard for delaying it at least till the next day ; but Frank Littleton shook his head, and Sir William, certain that he would not lightly urge such measures, supported him.

With a heavy heart, therefore, Lady Emlyn returned to Florence's room, where Helen was sitting beside her friend, and put the question as indirectly as possible, asking whether she would not like some one to write to her father, as she was unable to do so herself. Consternation was painted on Helen's face, and she retreated a step or two, lest Florence should catch its expression ; but that was not needed. The suppressed agitation in Louisa's voice would have told Florence her fears, even without the ready clue supplied by her own feelings. But she answered quite calmly, though the increasing difficulty with which she spoke, almost word by word, struck painfully on Lady Emlyn's awakened apprehension. She did not herself know where to write to her father, not having heard from him for some days. He had been attending

the meetings of the British Association in the North of Ireland, and was moving from place to place. But if they would write to her cousin Bernard, in London, he would find out the latest address from the servants at home charged with forwarding his letters.

Lady Emlyn was already leaving the room, hoping she had concealed the real motive of her mission, when Florence spoke again.

"Helen, dear," she whispered, "I must speak to Mr. Littleton again for a moment, before he goes."

"Oh no, dear Florence!" said Lady Emlyn, turning back hastily. "You had better be quiet, dearest."

"Afterwards," said Florence. "I must speak to him first, dear Louisa."

Louisa could say no more; and hastening from the room to hide the tears gathering in her eyes, returned in a few moments with Mr. Littleton.

"I want you to tell me," said Florence, in the same slow, painful whisper, "if you consider me in danger. You need not be afraid of its hurting me; I am not afraid of dying."

Frank Littleton did not shun the sweet, serious glance fixed upon him, but his lips quivered visibly as he replied, "Yes; in danger, undoubtedly."

"Tell me the exact truth, will you?" said Florence. "Is it hopeless?"

"Certainly not," he returned, quickly. "But your state is serious; and unless the inflammation yield in a day or two, the danger could scarcely be greater than it will then be. I tell you the exact truth," he added, with a look that spoke volumes to Helen's observant eye, and in a voice almost lower than Florence's own, "because I should feel it wrong to deceive you, and I know it will not hurt *you*."

"Thank you," said Florence. "Helen, dear, please open the curtains a moment. I should like to look out at the sky and trees—before it is quite dark—in case I am worse to-morrow," she added, word by word drawn out more slowly and feebly, but not less calmly.

Helen and Mr. Littleton quickly withdrew the curtains, and tears gathered in Helen's eyes, but a sharper pang tightened at Frank Littleton's heart, as they watched the half-wistful, loving glance which Florence raised to the clear blue sky, from which the last hues of sunset were slowly fading.

"How strange!" she said, in a few moments. "Mamma died of the same illness." And again her eye fixed and dilated in its earnest gaze on the blue heavens, as if rather yearning to the bright home beyond, than fearing the shadows that lay between.

Frank Littleton dropped the curtain somewhat hastily. "Life and death are equally uncertain," he said, "and we must neglect nothing in our power. You must, therefore, let me enjoin complete quiet now."

"Yes," said Florence, "thank you." But her thoughts were elsewhere; and Mr. Littleton leaving the room with Lady Emlyn, Helen resumed her seat beside the invalid.

Florence had said truly, that she was not afraid of dying. She had early learned to realize the existence and perpetual proximity of that spiritual world, which death must sooner or later open to us; and regarding it as the home where the desires of all hearts shall be granted, was not dismayed at the prospect of an early close of her journey thither. And to the young, who have yet taken but slight hold on life, it often seems easier to detach themselves from earthly ties, than it might prove at a later period. Their faith, if unconfirmed, is also unclouded by trial; and, without effort, gilds the future with the bright hues dear to youth and hope. Just now, too, this seemed to Florence the answer to her earnest desire for guidance, the release from her perplexities; and a sense of deep thankfulness was her predominant feeling as she recomposed herself to rest. At another time, regret for the sorrows of others—her father, Louisa, Helen, Mr. Carysfort—must have intruded to ruffle the peace which no clinging to earth of her own disturbed; but stilled by the exhaustion of bodily suffering, and the semi-bewilderment of intense fever, her thoughts travelled no farther than to what was forced on her notice; and holding Helen's hand, pressing it every now and then instinctively as she felt it tremble in hers, she sank by degrees into a half-slumber, half-stupor, still seeming to feel Frank Littleton's look upon her, with a vague sense of enjoyment in the feeling.

Very different, meanwhile, were Helen's feelings as she sat beside her; at first, almost in despair. What if Florence should really die?—as her seeming willingness to depart made Helen shiver to think too probable. It seemed as if the whole new, bright life she had been enjoying so intensely, must be lost, too, for ever. Not that this ought to be. All Florence

had taught her, by example and precept, must do her good, make her lastingly happier. But how little good in comparison ! She wanted so much more help and love ! Florence, she knew, would have assured her they could not be parted unless it were for the good of both, and that other help would be sent her if needful ; and with that the image of Bernard Huntley flashed across her, as one through whom the help might come. That was a brighter thought ; but she wanted Florence, too, oh, so much ! She had so far imbibed her friend's views, that she did not think of regretting the impending change on her account ; but as she could not persuade herself to feel that their separation could be for her own good, she by degrees took refuge in hope. The danger might be averted. Florence had youth and a good constitution on her side, and Mr. Littleton had said it was not hopeless. And with youth's natural shrinking from a painful present, she turned presently to dreams of the future, when Florence should be quite well again ; and found some comfort in reflecting that she could not really be attached to Mr. Carysfort, or the prospect of parting must be more painful to her. So, perhaps, after all, Frank Littleton—— but there she suddenly checked herself, trembling at the rashness of her anticipations.

The danger was not over yet !

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRISIS.

Moon of the summer-night !
Far down yon western steeps,
Sink, sink in silver light !
My lady sleeps ! sleeps !

LONGFELLOW.

LADY EMLYN and Mr. Littleton silently rejoined Sir William below ; and while the former poured out to her husband all the grief and alarm she had with difficulty repressed so long, Frank Littleton paced the room in a state of agitation which it required all his efforts to wrestle down. That look Florence's upwards, haunted him with the most painful of

presentiments; and it was well for his self-control that some minutes elapsed before Lady Emlyn appealed to him on the subject.

"And oh, William," said she, "the worst of it is, that she seemed so—so—not the least afraid, I mean. Surely that is a bad sign, Mr. Littleton."

"It might seem so, in one sense," he replied, pausing in his walk, and speaking in the low, constrained voice which betrays great inward emotion. "But yet, if it prove so," he continued, fixing his eyes in deep thought on the blue sky on which Florence's had rested so lovingly, "who dare wish it otherwise?"

"Not wish it otherwise!" exclaimed Lady Emlyn, the tears starting again as she spoke. "You surely cannot mean anything so unfeeling as that. My poor dear Florence! I thought every one must wish her to get well."

"Unfeeling, Lady Emlyn! Surely you must misunderstand me," said Frank, starting, and turning absolutely white. He had spoken his thoughts unconsciously, forgetting that they might sound strange to others, unaware of the train of feeling which prompted them. But instantly recovering himself, he added, "I only meant, dear Lady Emlyn, that, should Providence see fit to—to realize our worst apprehensions, we dare not be selfish enough to wish back from heaven to earth, one seemingly so fit for higher than earthly happiness. But if you knew," he continued, in a less steady voice, "what it cost me to say so, you would hardly consider me unfeeling."

His words sounded cold in Louisa's ear; for, good and lovable as she was, she was naturally of an unreflecting turn, and had enjoyed too much of the happiness of this world to have been led to realize any very clear perception of the superior happiness of another, her religious convictions being, though sincere, passive rather than active influences in this respect. Full of her own anxiety, moreover, she did not catch the purport of his last words; but Sir William, who was better acquainted with his friend's turn of thought, and the deep feelings hidden beneath his joyous, playful exterior, understood in a moment. He put his hand kindly upon Frank's shoulder, and with a look and tone of the warmest sympathy, said quickly, "Never mind, Frank; Louisa will understand you better another time. Besides, I must protest against your either of you looking on the black side of things in this way. Our business is to get our patient well again, not to take it for

granted she is going to die, whatever she may fancy herself, dear Louisa."

Louisa looked up with a grateful smile and a heart lightened already : hers was naturally a hopeful disposition.

"And now about further advice," said Sir William. "You had better write for your friend Sir Charles Alton, Frank ; there is no better man,—you will find pens and paper on that table,—and Louisa must write to Mr. Huntley. Well, well, then," he added, seeing by her countenance how she shrank from the task, "I dare say Helen Montagu will do it. They were great friends, and she will do it better than I should ; women always do such things best. Go up yourself, and ask her ; she will know what to say ; and tell her I will come to the library for her note in a few minutes."

"Poor Horace !" said Louisa, stopping short as she left the room, after lingering a minute or two beside her husband, whose hopefulness comforted her so much, "what will he say ? Where is he ?"

"Never mind Horace just now ; I will look after him presently, when I have got these notes off," said Sir William ; and Frank Littleton, who had meanwhile been writing in silence, rose to hand him his, which was glanced over and pocketed approvingly, and a hand laid on his arm to detain him. But Frank shook his head, and silently grasping his friend's hand, passed out, turning back to mention at what hour he should return, if not previously sent for.

"I don't see what is to come of this business," said Sir William, half aloud, when left to himself. "I took it for granted, Louisa and Carysfort knew what they were about ; but if Frank wants her, Frank must have her—that's clear ; she must like Frank best. Louisa will be sadly disappointed. However, we must get her well again to begin with." And off he went to make sure of his messenger's being ready in time.

The idea of writing to inform Mr. Huntley of his cousin's danger, and of the necessity of immediate communication with Mr. Forrester, threw Helen back from hope to fear ; and her face was so pale and serious as she entered the library, that its expression struck Mr. Carysfort, who, deserted by the rest of the party, was lounging away the time there over a book.

"Is anything the matter ? Is Lady Emlyn in the drawing-room ?" he asked, somewhat unconnectedly, it may seem ; but there was so little sympathy between himself and Helen, especially as regarded his inclination at all times to monopolize

Florence, that he always addressed his numerous inquiries concerning the latter to any one else in preference.

"No," replied Helen, somewhat abruptly.

It would be painful to give utterance to the fears weighing so heavily at her heart; yet, harbouring a vague feeling of resentment against Horace as the cause of all the mischief, she was not inclined to spare him from participation in the general anxiety, and forced herself to speak.

"Lady Emlyn is in Miss Forrester's room. Mr. Littleton thinks her in such danger, that a messenger is to be sent off directly to London for further advice, and to inform Mr. Forrester."

Her voice trembled in spite of herself; and without looking up, she seated herself to begin writing.

"Miss Montagu!" said Horace's voice at her elbow, "do you really mean what you say?"

Helen looked up. She had never believed, perhaps because she disliked him, that he entertained any feeling for Florence deserving of sympathy or consideration; but she could not resist the appeal made to her own really warm feelings by the distress and dismay conveyed in his voice and countenance.

"I do indeed," she said, with tears in her eyes; "and oh! I am very sorry, Mr. Carysfort!"

Her precise meaning was regret for the abrupt, not to say unfeeling, manner in which she had conveyed such painful intelligence; but the manner had been quite lost in the matter. He walked away to the window without saying a word; and Helen wrote her first letter to Mr. Huntley, explaining, in a hurried manner, the untoward state of affairs, and the necessity of his communicating with his uncle as speedily as possible. Before she finished, Horace had come back, and sat down near her, watching her write, but without speaking. Unable to withstand the impulse to console him a little, she said, as she laid down her pen:—

"Sir Charles Alton, who is to be sent for, is a very clever man; and of course everything is to be hoped from his advice."

"Of course," said Horace, so testily that one might have thought he felt himself personally injured in the matter, by the world in general, and Helen in particular. "Why was he not sent for days ago? I dare say Littleton knows nothing about it." Having said which, he got up and walked straight out of the room.

But he left Helen more in charity with him than she had ever felt before. He must care for Florence very sincerely, to forget all his usual languid nonchalance so completely. But it was uncomfortable to be obliged to feel sorry for him. She could not think him worthy of Florence, and must still wish him to be disappointed. Perhaps, however, a little salutary disappointment might do him no harm, provided only it did not come in the one way she could not bear to think of.

Horace betook himself to the consolations of a cigar, his feelings divided between dismay and half-petulant irritation; and first combated, and then rejected, the idea of any serious eventual danger to Florence. She had become interwoven with all his future plans and prospects; he had begun to love her, as for years past he had not believed he could love any woman; and give her up he could not. No doubt Littleton had been croaking. They would hear a very different story when the London physician arrived. But, in the meantime, he could not help feeling extremely uncomfortable and out of sorts with himself and everybody else.

Frank Littleton, meanwhile, was walking homewards in a very different frame and temper of mind; such as few men, perhaps, could have commanded, in face of the impending overthrow of their most cherished dream of happiness. But his was no common character. Gifted by nature with a gentle, affectionate disposition, and that refinement of mind which, if less striking than great intellectual powers, is far rarer and more valuable, he had, through early training and later opportunities rightly used, developed into a man possessed, not of good natural gifts alone, but of those higher qualities of heart and soul, which win the affection and respect even of those who, not having themselves cultivated, can but inadequately appreciate them.

Nor was his history a common one. He was the son of a spendthrift peer, who had perverted, and wasted in dissipation and profligacy, naturally fine qualities and endowments. His beautiful countess-mother was weak and self-indulgent, and had early learned to seek excitement abroad, to compensate for the lack of happiness in her married life. But the extreme delicacy of his health in infancy saved Frank from the evil influences of the neglect to which the children of such parents are unavoidably exposed. It rendered him a burden and a source of anxiety to his mother, in the brief intervals of time

and thought which she devoted to her nursery ; and she was too happy to allow him to be adopted by an invalid maiden aunt, who resided wholly in the country, and who, estranged as she was by habits and sympathies from his father, her brother and only near relative, welcomed the charge of her little nephew as a godsend. She was a gentle, pure-minded woman ; and, in the peaceful atmosphere of her retirement, the delicate, sensitive child strengthened and thrived in bodily, mental, and spiritual health ; repaying with interest her care and solicitude, by grateful love, which became the sunshine of her existence. He never went to school ; for his gentle Aunt Mildred dreaded the influences of the public school his parents would doubtless have insisted on ; and her means were sufficient to enable her to provide the best of tuition at home for her darling (without needing to have recourse to her brother, of whose growing embarrassments she was well aware), till the time came for him to go to Oxford. For in her heart she had always destined him for the Church, and hoped he might eventually succeed to the family living long held by the friend who was her constant aid and adviser as to Frank's studies. But her wishes were not destined to be realized.

His three years at Oxford passed away uneventfully and happily. His was a sunny disposition, which seemed to be fitted to imbibe the good and the brightness of every sphere ; and his aunt's ever-watchful influence assisted in guarding him from the temptations of college life. Without highly distinguishing himself, he won a sufficiently honourable standing to gratify her, and somewhat surprise his parents ; who, suddenly reminded, as it were, of the existence of the son they had not seen for years, summoned him, on leaving Oxford, to present himself in the family circle in London, that they might see, as his father said, if he were likely to turn out fit for anything after all.

Great was the delight and surprise of the countess, at the grace and refinement of her son's address and manners—the very perfection, as it seemed, of aristocratic breeding, though it sprang in him from a very different source. His personal beauty, too, even enhanced by the appearance of delicacy which remained to tell of the ill-health of his childhood, was a powerful additional recommendation in the eyes of one whose own beauty had unfortunately remained her greatest attraction. Moreover, she had a heart which still at times yearned to her children ; and her daughters, though handsome,

and admired in the world, were nothing at home, or to her—she had always lived for herself, and they had learned to live for themselves; and her eldest son was an apt follower in his father's footsteps. Frank's gentleness and unselfishness, therefore, might well achieve the conquest of all the affection she was still capable of bestowing. Blended with vanity and selfishness, it doubtless was, in no small degree; but it was much more than he had looked for; and he returned it with all the warmth of his amiable and loving disposition.

His aunt's death occurred shortly after, during the first visit he paid to what he could not but feel to be his true home; so that her last days were made happy by his undiminished affection, and by the renewed conviction of his having grown up to be all that her fondest hopes desired. And for the future, she was not afraid to trust him to the same Hand to which she tranquilly commended her own departing spirit.

Frank was thus thrown back entirely upon the new-found home, which now became his only one. For his mother's sake, he soon learned to find amusement in her amusements, and pleasure in the happiness his society and attendance so obviously afforded her; and for a couple of years he was her constant companion in the fashionable, butterfly-life she led. His light-hearted, joyous temperament disposed him to enter gaily into it; but he enjoyed it innocently, as mere amusement,—which becomes pernicious only when it degenerates into vice, or is exalted into the business of existence. Every sphere affords scope for the exercise of unselfishness and self-denial, and Frank found it even in this, which also offered him opportunities of cultivating those refined, artistic tastes so congenial to his nature.

How long this might have lasted—whether such a life must not eventually have lowered his standard of excellence, and enervated, if not perverted, the high principles he had imbibed from his aunt, it is difficult to say; but before the influence of her early training, and of his abiding love and reverence for her memory, had at all lost their hold upon him, a long-impending crash in the earl's affairs again changed the current of Frank's fortunes.

The earl's estates fell into the hands of his creditors, and an annual allowance made by these was all that remained to support his family in the life of fashionable retrenchment abroad, to which they decided on betaking themselves. The family living, formerly alluded to, having lately fallen vacant

and been given to a distant relation to hold for a time, Frank was informed by his father that the best thing he could do would be to go back to Oxford, and prepare for orders. There would be no possible provision for him but this living. His weak mother urged her utmost against a plan which must separate her from her favourite, but Frank eagerly welcomed the reminder that life must not be spent in mere amusement; feeling that the opportunity of securing a sphere of permanent usefulness, that, too, which his aunt had so earnestly desired for him, ought not to be rejected, even to please his mother. After doing all he could, therefore, to smooth for her the annoyances attendant on the breaking up of all her old associations, and on her removal abroad, he returned to Oxford, to enter earnestly on his career.

But his was not a mind to take up serious things lightly; and the studies to which he now turned, led him in a different direction from that which he intended. That which he was to inculcate upon others, he desired first thoroughly to understand and make his own; but he soon found that the heart-religion instilled by his aunt's teaching and example was quite compatible with great intellectual doubts as to many of the doctrines of the Church to which she had unquestioningly belonged. The farther he went, the greater his difficulties became; till he at last laid aside the studies undertaken with a view to ordination, to commence a vigorous search after truth, wheresoever it might be found. Believing firmly in the promise, that all who seek shall find, it happened to him according to his belief; and through a train of circumstances needless to record, he was led to a satisfactory solution of the mysteries which had perplexed him. But the solution came from "without the pale"; and when, fully satisfied in himself, he turned again to the affairs of outward life, he wrote to inform his father, that, having been led to adopt views dissenting from the Church of England, he must give up the idea of taking orders.

A storm of family indignation, ridicule, and remonstrance followed. His father was furious at his methodistical folly; his mother lamented and entreated, equally incapable of comprehending the principles which actuated him. Even his elder brother, who had seldom bestowed much notice on him, from the moment he had found it impossible to draw him into his own circle of dissipated and vicious associates, exerted himself to write a curt fraternal lecture, entreating him not to make

a fool of himself, by throwing up fifteen hundred a year; but just to hold his tongue, take orders and the living, and then keep a curate and do what he liked afterwards.

Nor was there wanting more specious advice from other quarters, as to the doubtful expediency of rejecting a charge, the spirit of which he was so well fitted to act up to, on account of mere difficulties as to the letter. The signing of articles was but a form; the real engagement entered into by a clergyman was to minister, to the best of his abilities, to the spiritual instruction and welfare of his flock. If prepared to fulfil the latter, it was surely supererogation to make a stumbling-block of the former.

This might, perhaps, be regarded as the great temptation of Frank Littleton's life. Not that wealth, in itself, was any temptation to him; but a life of ease and refined luxury could hardly have been enjoyed so long without inspiring some desire for its continuance; and though the line of remonstrance adopted by his family was not calculated to effect its object, other considerations must carry weight with one of his earnest, affectionate nature. He was really grieved at the necessity of paining his mother, the only surviving relative to whose happiness he seemed of importance; and, though he could not sacrifice duty to her wishes, it would have been no small relief to be persuaded that duty did not oppose them. And the idea that he might, on the whole, do more good by securing the elevated sphere of usefulness which lay open to him—that he would, after all, only be giving up the letter to preserve the spirit of what conscience dictated,—that forms were, in truth, of no moment,—was to him a most alluring one.

But, happily for him, his long habit of simply doing what he believed he ought to do, had kept the sight of his inner eye too single to admit of its being thus blinded. Forms might, indeed, be of minor significance; but form and substance, letter and spirit, must be duly appreciated and both preserved; neither sacrificed to the other. It is precisely by acquiescing in false or faulty forms that these are rendered valueless, because meaningless. What the spirit dictates must, indeed, be done; but the injunctions of the letter not be "left undone." And how could he hope to be of use in the diffusing of truth, if he began by doing an untruth himself? He remembered, in brief, the injunction, to "do no evil that good may come."

The announcement that his decision was irrevocable pro-

duced an almost entire breach with his family, his father's anger being exasperated by the reflection that had he not been keeping it for Frank, he might have been some thousands of pounds the richer by the sale of the presentation, which he could not now with decency withhold from the temporary incumbent. Greater still was the family indignation when they heard a few weeks later, that Frank had repaired to London, to fix himself there for the study of the medical profession, which he selected as affording, next to that which he had abandoned, the most congenial field of usefulness. His sisters, one of whom had just contracted a flattering alliance with a German nobleman of numberless quarterings, vehemently joined in the earl's wrath at his son's devoting himself to so plebeian a profession; and the breach became irreparable. His mother, indeed, continued to correspond with him for a time, but her death severed the last link which united him to his family, none of whom deigned to hold any further communication with him. This, however, could scarcely be matter of much regret to him. Loving and light-hearted, he made friends everywhere, and was the last man to feel himself alone in the world.

Among the friends he made during the years he gave to the study of his profession in London, was the Sir Charles Alton already spoken of, who took first a personal, then a professional liking to him, and augured so well of his future success and eminence, that he took him cordially by the hand, intending to push him forward under his own auspices in the metropolis; for though not in all respects a man of striking abilities, Frank Littleton possessed the sympathetic temperament and almost feminine quickness of perception, which, in a physician, are gifts beyond price, and their more general possession of which would so peculiarly fit women for the profession of that healing art which—in times of old their almost exclusive privilege—it is deeply to be regretted should ever have been closed to them. In the next age, however, the one or two noble examples we already possess of women defying false conventionalities, to re-conquer some share in this wide field of usefulness for their sex, may not, it is to be hoped, any longer form exceptional instances.

To return, however, to Frank Littleton. His health, never robust, interfered, after a time, to prevent the accomplishment of Sir Charles Alton's kind intentions. Hard work and close confinement in London air told seriously upon him, and it was

at a time when relief had become imperatively necessary, that Sir William Emlyn—a friend made in earlier days, when the earl's son had availed himself of an opportunity of showing some kindness, never forgotten, to the poor merchant's-clerk—suggested, after much hesitation, that if he did not consider it too much beneath him, Frank should for a time take up a practice lately fallen vacant in the neighbourhood of X—. The mild climate, combined with the comparative freedom of a country life, might, perhaps, save him from the alternative of throwing up his profession altogether, at least for the time. Frank adopted the suggestion unhesitatingly. He was loth to resign his hopes and means of usefulness, and the small private income—his aunt's bequest—which had enabled him to pursue his medical studies without the aid his father withheld, rendered him also, in some degree, independent of mere profit in his practice.

And he soon found himself happier in his new life than he had ever been since the days when his home was with his aunt in her quiet country retreat. He recovered his health; his benevolent disposition, and love of making others happy, rendered the closer contact with patients and neighbours which country life involves, peculiarly congenial to him, and he soon found as many friends among both classes as even Sir William could desire. With Emlyn Priory, too, as a second home, whose inmates were always eager to welcome him, it had never occurred to Frank that his own home wanted anything, till the new idea dawned upon him—which he had imparted to Mr. Huntley on the morning after the wedding—that he wanted a wife. The idea, it may easily be imagined, sprang from a feeling that Florence Forrester was precisely the wife he wanted.

Day by day in her society, the feeling had strengthened upon him, though he refrained from placing her in a position which, with instinctive delicacy, he felt must be painful to a pure-minded, sensitive woman; that, namely, of being the object of open attentions from rival suitors. For to a mind duly impressed with the sacred unity of true married love, the mere thought of two in reference to such a possible future tie, must be painful. And he could afford to wait; as all can, whose idea of love is of a mutual affinity inherent in the very warp and woof of two characters, fitted by their integral constitution to harmonize and blend in one. If she were really what he deemed her, she could not love, and would not marry, Mr. Carysfort. If, on the other hand, she could really love

him, or marry him from worldly motives without love, she could not be the Florence he loved and believed in. But this last "if" he had little dwelt on; he *felt* that it was otherwise, and waited patiently for the disentanglement of the relations between them, looking forward with pure delight to the time when she should be free for himself to approach openly.

But now a sudden cloud, at first "no bigger than a man's hand," had overspread and darkened his entire horizon. For the first time in his life, he felt as if all his hopes, wishes, and aspirations were centred in one object, and that one about to be taken from him. He could not even, as he sat alone that evening in the pretty little drawing-room overlooking the Priory grounds, which of late he had so often filled with her imaginary presence, find comfort in the hope that such sorrow would be averted from him. In such emergencies a hope beside which its opposing fear stands in threatening contrast, involves the distraction of suspense, but can afford no substantial relief. His very love, too, for Florence made him rate her danger the higher. Why should one so fit for heaven be held back to earth for him? But what then? Did he, or Providence, know best whether the fruition or disappointment of his wishes might prove good for him? He had enjoyed so much happiness in life already; now, perhaps, it was needful he should suffer in his turn, and prove himself worthy of what he already possessed. Was his life, alone, to be all sunshine? And how could he be selfish enough, as he had said to Lady Emlyn, to repine, if she were called away to be far happier than he could have made her? or ungrateful enough to be miserable, amid so many blessings, at any dispensation of that Providence which bestowed them all? Perhaps so much happiness as he had dreamed of might have bound him too closely to earth, or rendered him, in selfish enjoyment, a less careful and active labourer in the field assigned to him. And, at worst, her memory and her image would be one blessing still added to what had hitherto sufficed for his happiness—one hope the more in the future! For the love in which Frank Littleton believed was not "of the earth, earthy," born and nurtured below to be banished from above; where, if there be indeed no "marrying or giving in marriage," it is rather because there two are already one, "as the angels" are, than because the most holy and blissful of all human ties is banished from the resurrection-sphere of all true human happiness.

So when he at last rose, and looked out upon the pure,

calm, moonlit sky, the stillness around was not deeper than the stillness within him. He had resigned his dream of happiness into the keeping of Infinite Love and Infinite Wisdom, and he knew, as those only can know who are capable of similar self-abnegation, that, come what might, his future path would not lack sunshine to bless it, whether or no *the* sunshine his heart desired were seen to be such as he might safely enjoy. And Frank could sleep now, undisturbed by fears for the morrow.

The morrow brought no improvement. Inflammation was passing rapidly into congestion, and danger increasing rather than diminishing. Anxiously did all await the arrival of the London physician, but Frank less hopefully than the rest. He knew that nothing more could be done than he was already doing, though it would be a certain relief to his feelings especially on account of Florence's friends, to have Sir Charles's opinion in confirmation of his own.

It was still early in the afternoon when the physician arrived, accompanied, as Helen had unconsciously half-expected, by Mr. Huntley. The latter had been greatly shocked and startled at the news of his cousin's danger; and, prone to forebode the worst, had hurried down, almost expecting that on his arrival he might need to start off in pursuit of her father (whose letters might take days to reach him), to convey the worst intelligence to him in person. He was relieved to find things no worse; and he brightened a little at Sir William's hopeful prognostications that they would soon be all right again, now Sir Charles Alton had arrived.

It was some time before the opinion of the latter could be ascertained. First there was a conference between him and Mr. Littleton, then a joint visit to the patient, then another long conference; and the opinion, when at last given, could convey but little satisfaction. The danger was undeniably great, and nothing more could be done than Mr. Littleton was already doing. All depended on the patient's strength of constitution; but she had youth, and, it would appear, general good health in her favour. Her present state of alternate stupor and wandering might last for hours or days; it was impossible to say; but if it did not prove fatal, it might be hoped that her recovery would prove rapid, when once the congestion passed off. And having given some trifling directions, and with great kindness of manner, which won the liking of all, exhorted the ladies not to despond, as it was always a duty to hope for

the best, he walked off with Frank Littleton, declining all invitations at the Priory, to spend an hour with him before his return to London.

"Your patient will get over it, Littleton," he said, as they walked across the park; and then as Frank looked up in surprise, added: "I do not mean that she is less ill than you think her; but I often have a sort of intuition, which of course I cannot announce professionally, whether my patients will get well or die; and it seldom deceives me. So, take my word for it, ill as she is, she will get over it yet."

Frank owed much kindness to the speaker; but he had never felt more grateful to him than for the few words thus spoken.

"Littleton, why do you not marry?" said Sir Charles, half an hour later, after declaring that he envied him his pretty, quiet country nest. "Every man ought to marry as soon as he can afford it, especially in the country. What on earth do you do with your winter evenings? Take my advice, and look out for a wife directly."

"Perhaps I may," said Frank, in a low voice, "if—if you should prove right, Sir Charles."

"Oh!" returned the physician. "So blows the wind!" And he turned and looked out of the window with his hands in his pockets for some minutes, in deep thought. "Never mind, Frank!" he added, turning suddenly round on him again; "she will get over it! And now give me some dinner and let me be off!"

Mr. Huntley had, meanwhile, acceded without opposition to Sir William's suggestion that he had better remain at the Priory. It would save the trouble of sending him perpetual bulletins to forward to Mr. Forrester, which he might just as well remain and himself despatch upon the spot; and he would be at hand should a personal express unhappily prove necessary.

Two or three days passed, in intense anxiety, without any change, either for better or for worse. But to Helen their suspense was much alleviated by Mr. Huntley's presence. Though she spent many hours of each day in Florence's room, there were hours, too, during which Lady Emlyn took her place and insisted on her seeking refreshment and air elsewhere; and too utterly restless and anxious to do anything, she was also less inclined than usual for Sir William's cheerful society. Horace was perfectly unapproachable. Even Lady

Emlyn hardly knew what to do with him ; and was fain to leave him to himself, to spend best part both of day and evening, in a state of perverse self-aggravation, in a boat, or on the banks of the little lake, which he declared he hated the sight of. Helen he avoided to the utmost ; for it had dawned upon him now, that had her sensible advice, that Florence should walk home after the accident, been followed, all might have been well.

But for Mr. Huntley, therefore, Helen would have spent many weary hours, and their common anxiety was a new link between them. For though Bernard and Florence were not so closely united by sympathy as their relationship might have warranted, they had been used to look on each other in a brotherly and sisterly sort of way ; and besides his mother had been fond of her ; and—as he said to Helen, so mournfully that it made her heart ache—if she were taken, it would yet be one thing less in the world to care for and cling to. Her illness and danger, too, naturally reminded him of the sad days of his mother's last illness ; and so by degrees he began to talk to Helen about his mother, her matchless goodness, and the bitter blank her loss had made in his life ; till the sort of constraint which had formerly marked his manner, quite vanished as regarded her ; and Sir William would smile, as he watched them pacing the lawn side by side, in deep converse, with such serious faces as if both were wholly unconscious of the spell which was weaving, so visibly to his eyes,

Love's bright enchantments round them.

And so indeed they were. The one pressing anxiety was too absorbing to leave leisure for reflection on any secondary subject ; and, if it ever flashed upon Helen's mind, how changed from its former, purely intellectual footing, was now her intercourse with, and interest in, Mr. Huntley, she explained it to herself as the natural result of seasons of sorrow, which inevitably bring out people's better and warmer feelings, drawing them out of mere conventional life, and thus nearer together. At present, at least, she could look no farther into the future, than to the issue of Florence's illness.

At last a crisis came. One whole night, the terrible suspense of which Helen never forgot, there lasted a struggle between the apparently reviving powers of nature, and the enemy

which had so long held them in subjection. At intervals Florence would talk rapidly and incoherently, sometimes to her mother, as if she were standing beside her; and then fits of exhaustion would follow, during which the others held their breath, lest the sound of hers should fail. But towards morning the long-hoped-for, now almost-despaired-of, signs of improvement became apparent. The incoherent talk, the seeming struggle subsided; the breathing became gentler and more regular; and at last, after a lengthened interval of almost breathless silence and suspense, Frank Littleton lifted his eyes with a look which would have made his meaning clear without words, and breathed rather than said, "Asleep! Safe!"

It may be imagined with what feelings Lady Emlyn and Helen, obeying Frank's signal, followed him noiselessly out of the room; and leaving safe watch by the sleeper, went down together—their common gladness forbade the idea of their separating—to look for Mr. Huntley, who, as Helen knew, had been sitting up, like themselves, all night, awaiting the issue.

They found him pacing the lawn in front of the windows, and, emerging gladly into the fresh morning air, met him as he turned hastily on catching sight of them. But the expression of his countenance betrayed his sudden alarm lest a different cause had released them all from their watch.

"Oh! no," exclaimed Helen, answering his look; "she is better! She is asleep; out of danger, Mr. Littleton thinks." And these first words which had been spoken since Frank Littleton's magical "Asleep! Safe!" were followed, whether she would or no, by a gush of tears, in which Lady Emlyn heartily joined.

"Yes," said Frank Littleton, recovering his powers of speech, and drawing a deep breath, "I trust the danger is over now. A few hours of such sleep will be worth all the doctors in the world."

And the spell of silence once broken, there ensued a burst of mutual felicitations, questions, and recapitulations of the past night's alarms, such as might naturally be expected in the circumstances.

But Lady Emlyn's weary looks soon attracted Mr. Littleton's attention, and he earnestly insisted on her going to bed at once, lest he should have, as he said, more patients on the morrow; and she yielded to his advice, on his promising not

to leave the house, and to let her be called instantly should Florence awake.

"How glad I am I did not tell Horace last night that she was worse!" said she to herself as she went upstairs; but she took care, before she retired to rest, to provide for his hearing the good news as soon as he should awake.

But it was useless to try and persuade Helen to follow her example. Helen had no power of rest in her; and so for a time the three wandered up and down the lawn, in a state of intense, though chiefly silent, mutual sympathy and enjoyment, such as can only follow on a similar sudden release from some great common anxiety. Then Frank roused himself, and said he must go in again, in pursuance of his promise to Lady Emlyn: and Helen would fain have returned to resume her place beside Florence. But this was so strongly opposed by both of her companions, as utterly inconsistent with a due regard for her own health, that she was obliged to yield.

"Then you must take me for a walk till breakfast-time," she said, turning to Mr. Huntley; "for as to sitting still anywhere, except in Florence's room, I am perfectly incapable of it."

Nor could Mr. Huntley find it in his heart to regret her disregard of needful repose, as they rambled away through the dewy glades of the park, which had never before seemed half so beautiful in Helen's eyes. She told him, light-heartedly now, all the particulars of her expedition with Florence, and of the incident which had given rise to such serious consequences; and then of their first meeting and contraction of eternal friendship at the waterfall, expressing the deep admiration and affection which had since been gradually awakened in her, by Florence's purity and sweetness of character; and rendered as expansive by joy as Mr. Huntley had been by anxiety, she unconsciously allowed him to see so far deeper into her real warm-hearted, single-minded self than he had ever before done, that on their return to the house—just in time to join a more cheerful breakfast circle than had, for days past, assembled at Emlyn Priory—he awoke with a sigh, as from a happy dream. He had been dreaming of one brighter ray of sunshine left in the world than he had ever before hailed, and that one shining, in some mysterious way, on and for him. Alas! that it should be only a dream!

And as he took a seat beside her at table, a shade of the old

constraint returned to his manner ; but Helen was too full of other thoughts to notice it then, and gradually, like a shadow, it passed away.

CHAPTER VII.

DAY-DREAMS.

—A time, when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light ;
The glory and the freshness of a dream !

WORDSWORTH.

SMOOTHLY and swiftly now sped on the days of Florence's convalescence. The physician's prediction of her rapid recovery was fully justified ; and life was even brighter than before for Helen.

It now comprised two specific phases of enjoyment. The one consisted in tending Florence, reading to her, decking her room with flowers, and employing all the numberless devices for rendering a sick-room agreeable in which female ingenuity delights ; the other in long rides and walks in the freshening autumnal atmosphere, sometimes with Sir William and Mr. Huntley, always with the latter as escort. For this time, Mr. Huntley lingered on at Emlyn Priory, needing no pressing to detain him. Perhaps he fancied that, in the absence of his uncle, it was only right he should remain till his cousin could be declared quite convalescent ; or perhaps he yielded consciously to the fascination of Helen's society. At any rate he stayed ; and Sir William would have been ready with a very good reason why, had any one expressed surprise on the subject to him ; but other people were taken up with other things, and did not trouble their heads about the matter.

Lady Emlyn was taken up with Florence, and with her hopes for Horace when Florence should be well again ; and her thoughts of others were chiefly in relation to these two ; as when she sometimes wished that Mr. Huntley and Horace, likely to be so closely connected, could draw a little more together ; and grew daily fonder of Helen for her affectionate

devotion to Florence. Horace, restored to equanimity and his beloved chaise-longue, was taken up with his own affairs, and the perpetual sending, through Lady Emlyn, of books, messages, or flowers to Florence. He now and then exerted himself to write a few lines to Fred or Cissy—from whom pleasant accounts were regularly received—but most often indulged in a state of luxurious, meditative indolence, such as an Arab, according to Eastern travellers, designates his “*kaif*,” while the less dignified Italian undisguisedly characterizes it, in his lazily-musical tongue, as “*il dolce far niente*.” Nor, though Frank Littleton went in and out, with a serene satisfaction in his countenance, which might well have given rise to a suspicion of his feeling some more than professional interest in his fair patient, did any idea of danger from that quarter intrude, to disturb Mr. Carysfort’s meditations. His noble birth and marked personal attractions notwithstanding, Horace somehow looked on the country doctor as quite out of the pale of possible rivalry; nor did any diffidence as to his own qualifications, trouble him with doubts as to the success he anticipated.

Letters had meanwhile been received from Mr. Forrester, expressing his satisfaction at the favourable turn in his daughter’s illness, the news of which he had fortunately received simultaneously with that of her danger. He expressed himself deeply indebted to Lady Emlyn for her kind care of his daughter, and much distressed at the trouble and inconvenience her illness must have occasioned to her kind host and hostess; and trusted that by the time he returned to London, some weeks hence, she would be well enough to join him there as originally intended. But the letter conveyed little idea of the deep affection and solicitude which Helen fancied Florence’s father must certainly have felt; though it was apparently as much as Florence was used to, for she seemed perfectly satisfied, and eager to write in return as soon as she could possibly sit up to do so. So Helen concluded that all fathers were not so fond of their daughters as was her own.

Visits of condolence and inquiry respecting Lady Emlyn’s interesting young friend, had of course not been wanting from residents in the neighbourhood; and on occasion of one such paid by Mr. and Mrs. Montagu, Captain Marston, accompanying his aunt, achieved the meeting with Helen, to cheat him of which the memorable boat-expedition had been planned. But Captain Marston might, save for looking at Helen, have

spent his afternoon quite as profitably anywhere else ; so dutifully did she sit by her father in the house, and walk with him in the grounds,—an excursion into which Mrs. Montagu contrived, for the sole purpose of giving him a chance of making himself agreeable. Helen did it so naturally, that Gerald could not but admire her filial affection even at his own expense, till Mr. Huntley happening to join the party, he found that even while hanging on her father's arm, she could sometimes have ears and eyes for other people. Then he drew at once into the background, never, however, taking his eyes off them during the remainder of the visit. Nor had Helen more thought to bestow on him after his departure, than on a previous occasion.

The day at length came on which Florence could safely be promoted, for a few hours, from the sofa in her own room to the sofa in Lady Emlyn's boudoir ; and great was the rejoicing thereupon. The usual order of proceedings was abandoned, and the party having dined early, adjourned for coffee to the boudoir, where they found Florence, looking sweet and calm as ever ; her extreme paleness, and the almost transparent whiteness of her hands, bearing witness how severe had been the illness which had kept her so long from her place in the circle. But this was not the only effect of her illness which an observant eye might trace. A change he could scarcely define, was yet distinctly felt by one, at least, who thus saw her again for the first time.

There was less of the shrinking passiveness of manner, the manifest timidity, which had before been so obvious, especially of late. It might seem as if the near presence and contemplation of death, had elevated her into a higher region, in which the petty embarrassments of inexperienced womanhood found no place. With the gentlest self-possession, she received the greetings and congratulations of the three gentlemen alike. Mr. Carysfort could not even flatter himself that a rising colour on the cheek, or a tremor in the voice, betrayed the peculiar satisfaction in seeing him which he wished to discern. He felt for a moment as if a veil had fallen between them ; but soon recovering from his momentary disappointment, attributed it to her still evident weakness ; and taking, as usual a seat near her, bore part with a good grace in the general hilarity ; Helen, in the highest possible spirits, talking all imaginable nonsense, partly to amuse Florence, partly for very glee, till even Mr. Huntley was inspired by

her gaiety, and for the first time in his life grew positively merry and amusing.

"I cannot think what you have been doing with Bernard while I have been ill, Sir William," said Florence; "I never heard him make a joke in my life before."

"All the air of Emlyn Priory! Nothing else, I assure you!" he replied, with a mischievous glance at Helen, which, however, she was too much occupied to see.

"I am sorry to tell you, dear Florence," said she, sitting down beside her friend, and pretending to look grave, "that we shall never be able to visit our lake again. I do not know if it was done on purpose, but Mr. Carysfort has smoked so many cigars there lately, that the last time I went by, the smoke hung in wreaths about the rocks, and quite hid the water; and I am afraid the place will never recover from it."

"Now, dear Helen," exclaimed Lady Emlyn, "you are joking!"

"Well," said Helen, gravely, "it certainly was rather a damp morning, and it might be a mist from the water. But then, what became of the smoke?"

"If any number of cigars will keep Miss Forrester from the lake in future, I will smoke as many there morning and evening as may be necessary, with pleasure, even at the risk of a reprimand!" added Horace, with what his brother would have called one of his insinuating glances at Florence; but it elicited no answer.

"I am surprised at your want of consideration for my wishes, Carysfort!" said Sir William, "when you remember my desire to see a young lady tumble into the water?"

"William, how can you?" said Lady Emlyn. "I am sure we have all had enough of tumbling into the water!"

"Quite enough!" said Horace, energetically.

"Sir William!" said Helen, rising to approach him, with a confidential air, "would my tumbling into the water do as well? I dare say I could manage it to please you, and I promise not to catch cold, unless you wish to get rid of me; but then, to be sure, you need not pull me out!"

"No doubt you could manage any mischief you were inclined for, Miss Helen," returned he, with an eye as full of mischief as her own. "And, of course, I should be delighted to see you tumble into the water, and to leave you there, moreover; but then, you see, there might be dissentients to such a proceeding. For instance," he continued, lowering his voice, to

restrict the circle of his hearers, "there is Mr. Huntley; and young men are so positive when they are in love! Just listen to Horace about Miss Forrester!"

"Sir William!" exclaimed Helen, struggling to repress her intense confusion, for Mr. Huntley sat close by, and her first impulse was to hide that such a jest could in any way affect her feelings; so, drawing herself up, she continued, "I am not in the habit of consulting Mr. Huntley, or any young men, as to my proceedings. I am surprised!"

And with a gesture of dignified astonishment she turned away, feeling more provoked than she could have thought it possible to be with kind Sir William, yet hardly able to resist a smile of delight, as the conviction irresistibly flashed upon her, that he had, nevertheless, hit the truth as to the nature of Mr. Huntley's feelings towards her, which suddenly enlightened her, also, as to the nature of hers for him. Her heart bounded within her, coldly as she, to appearance, turned away; and when Sir William, fearing that his remark might somewhat have passed the bounds of discretion, followed to the opposite side of the room, to make sure she was not really angry, she could not find it in her heart to be so, and only reiterated, in laughing reproof, that she was quite ashamed of him. But she was glad of the diversion occasioned by Mr. Littleton's entrance, and hastened to greet him and join in the gratulations on Florence's being so perfectly able to bear the change of room and scene, to which his coming, to judge of the fact for himself, had given rise anew.

Nor was it by Helen only that Mr. Littleton's coming was felt to be opportune. Mr. Huntley had heard Sir William's jesting remark; and even Helen's confusion was trifling compared to his. He had started up in a state of perturbation, which could scarcely have escaped observation long; but Frank entering at the moment, he turned hastily to shake hands with him, and evading the glance of inquiry which the dark cloud on his brow called up, retreated to the most distant window the room afforded. From thence, unobserved, he stood, with compressed lips, watching the others, or rather Helen, as she stood by Frank Littleton and Florence, gaily proposing a testimonial to the former, as instrumental in the recovery of the lady all were so glad to see again among them. There was a smile on Helen's lips, strangely compounded of the new, inward joy she was doing her best to smother, and of the sympathy she wished mirthfully to insinuate to Frank, in

the feelings she was sure he entertained for Florence ; and Mr. Huntley thought bitterly that he had never seen her look so bright, so irresistibly attractive. His thoughts wandered back to the wedding-morning, when he had so admired her in her white, bride-like dress, and had wondered what the bridegroom would be like, when she in her turn became a bride. What mattered it ? He knew whom the bridegroom would *not* be like. Why had he suffered himself to forget it, even for a moment ?

He neither spoke nor moved till Mr. Littleton took his leave,—observing, with his sunshiny smile, that Miss Forrester's court was large enough, for this first day of her reception, without him,—and then, saying he would walk with him, Mr. Huntley joined Frank, and they left the room together.

Helen was not sorry. It was impossible they should look one another in the face again just then ; and was she not herself longing to be alone, to calm and disentangle the strange, pleasant tumult of thought and feeling within ? She rattled on, indeed, for a few minutes, more gaily than ever with Sir William, making Florence and Lady Emlyn laugh till the latter declared herself quite tired ; but when, reminded thereby that Florence must be tired too, Louisa pronounced that the three others must go and walk, or drive, as they pleased, but leave her alone with their invalid, it was a positive release to Helen. She evaded Sir William's offer of giving her a drive, and slipping out by herself, stole away to her favourite retreat at the waterfall, to try and bring her ideas and sensations into something like order again.

Mr. Carysfort lingered behind in the boudoir a moment, to say to Florence how deeply he regretted, how earnestly he entreated her to forgive, his so foolishly insisting on driving her home, which had caused such terrible mischief.

Nothing could be kinder than Florence's tone and manner, as she assured him that there could be nothing to forgive. Knowing her opinion, that all things are overruled for our good, he might feel doubly sure that she could not regard him as responsible for any untoward consequences of what had been so kindly intended, to save her from an unpleasant walk. She begged he would never again think of it in that light.

Yet, kind as her manner and answer might be, Horace felt chilled and disappointed as he took leave of her, trusting she would be none the worse for the afternoon's exertions. It was

not the kind of answer he desired or expected. Her habit of referring everything to higher causes might be very beautiful, theoretically; but it was provoking to find himself and his agency thereby set aside, as of mere secondary importance, just where he wished to be of the very first. He had calculated on being very gently and blushinglly forgiven, and did not relish being assured there was nothing to forgive him for. He had smoked two cigars and a half before the consoling idea occurred to him, that it was only natural the impression made by all his former attentions should have worn off a little during so severe and depressing an illness. A few days would, no doubt, soon set all right again, especially as she regained her strength and spirits.

But whatever might have been the *cause*, jestingly inquired after by Sir William, of Florence's immersion and subsequent illness, the *result* was clear to her mind; at least as regarded the perplexities of that memorable evening. The guidance she so earnestly desired had not failed her. The needful light had dawned upon her, through suffering indeed, mental and physical; but her path was now clear before her. Whether the presence of the great reality, Death, had alone sufficed to sweep away the seemings of duty and kindness to others which had before bewildered her; or whether light from another quarter—the light of that look and smile, which, long after they were withdrawn, always seemed to dwell on her, in suffering or in slumber, like sunshine—had aided in quickening her perceptions, matters not for the moment to inquire.

But as soon as she could think coherently, she became aware that the question which had perplexed her was a question no longer. She did not, and felt sure she never could, love Horace Carysfort; and no sophistry could now blind her to the profanation of the holy marriage-tie involved in marrying without love.

She had been wrong, no doubt, in so long yielding a tacit encouragement to his attentions, by passively accepting them, but that would not be mended by committing a greater wrong; and she was most thankful for the long seclusion of her illness, which must render less striking the unavoidable change in her manner towards him. Sensitive, and deeply averse to giving pain, she would have given much to ensure the hoped-for possibility of his having himself changed, or cooled in his intentions meantime: and at worst she must trust that it would prove no lasting disappointment. Enlightened perhaps by un-

conscious comparisons, she could not help fancying that his was not precisely that ideal of devoted, unselfish affection, which it would be the most painful to wound.

Lady Emlyn, meanwhile, had no suspicion of the disappointment which awaited her; and sorely it grieved Florence to think that such must be the return for all her love and kindness; but she knew her too well to doubt that, once convinced it would really not make her friend happy, Louisa was too truly kind-hearted to cling to her own wish; and consoled herself meantime by being doubly affectionate and grateful for all her care.

"Dear Louisa, how good you are! you really quite spoil me," she said, when Lady Emlyn, left alone with her, proceeded to arrange pillows and shawls for the repose she prescribed.

"Well, I think the least we can do, after making you ill, is to make you well again," said Lady Emlyn. "And it was quite as much my fault as Horace's, you know, for letting him drive you home."

"No, indeed," said Florence, earnestly, "it was nobody's fault at all,—except my own," she added, in a lower tone. But Lady Emlyn was drawing down the blinds, and did not hear this last remark, from which she would have strongly dissented.

Helen's undertaking, meantime, of bringing her ideas into proper order,—which implied a summary condemnation and rejection of the nonsense, as she tried to consider it, which Sir William had put into her head,—proved more difficult than she anticipated. She had always entertained a sort of half-contempt for the "falling in love," which she regarded as something sentimental and missy-ish, never indulged in by sensible people; and though, of late, among other new ideas imbibed from Florence, she had begun to think that it might not be love, but only its counterfeits, and the habit of trifling and toying with so serious and beautiful a reality, which should be held unworthy of sensible people, she had not yet quite shaken off her old feelings. Her first impulse, therefore, on escaping into the open air, was to scold herself for being so silly, and try to laugh at it as a mere joke. But it was too late for that now. Do what she would, that strange, new feeling of uncomprehended, incomprehensible happiness would rise again, putting all her self-chidings to flight, till, fairly vanquished, she resigned herself unresistingly to the bright dreams which forced

themselves upon her, blending present and future in a maze of delight which excluded all fear, and all distrust of their realization.

And hers, to do her justice, were unselfish dreams. Her new joy was the joy of loving; of feeling, for the first time, how willingly, how trustfully, she could resign all other blessings—home, friends, country—for the one friend whose love she exultingly felt could never tempt her to sacrifice duty, which alone, as Florence had said, must be preferred even to the holiest of human affections. For Bernard was so noble, so self-denying, so infinitely better than herself. Her future, too, was an unselfish one. Her thoughts dwelt on the happiness she was to afford, rather than that she was to expect. She was to brighten Bernard's home, chase the sadness from his brow, help him in his labours, cheer him in his weariness,—filling the place of the mother whose loss he had felt so bitterly. For the first time, she rejoiced in her possession of wealth. It would be Bernard's, and help to save him from all those harassing and petty cares by which one so often grieves to see men of high gifts and genius fettered, or diverted from their true sphere; though the grief is doubtless a mistake; such harass and struggle being the discipline appointed by Providence, for purifying and developing to the highest excellence the gift Itself bestows. Her father, too, if perhaps a little disappointed at first, how fond and proud he would be of Bernard when he knew him! and Bernard would appreciate her father—new happiness for each. And then Florence—but that involved a whole fresh chapter of dreams and delight. She had observed the change of manner towards Horace, and had interpreted it rightly; and now all would be sunny for her friend as for herself. In short, she had never believed there could be so much happiness in the world; it was quite too good to be true. But she sat and dreamed on, none the less, to the choral music of the waterfall.

Happy they who, in the after-struggles of life, when deepening trials and temptations shake and threaten to overwhelm their early faith in the beauty and brightness of life, can look back to such hours of pure, unselfish joy as Helen thus dreamed away, to revive their conviction that the bliss and harmonies of heaven hover ever above and within all the discords and miseries of our earthly probation; and that it needs but the agency of a pure, unselfish affection to bring them vividly forth to our perception, and for our enjoyment. Even

should such dreams have proved delusive, who but would willingly have paid the price of all after-disappointment and anguish, for the actual experience, the sure knowledge, that a capacity of love lies within us, of which such bliss is the natural element and life-sphere, even as splendour is of the sunshine, and fragrance, of the flower? None, certainly, who believe with us, that every capacity of the human soul, unless perverted by its possessor, must ultimately find free scope for the exercise of that activity which is at once the perfection of its powers and the fruition of its felicity.

Such dream-hours, however, are the rare and costly luxuries of life, seldom to be enjoyed, and then but for a little space; and the time soon came when Helen must emerge into the outer world again. But she doubtless carried with her some faint gleams of the inner sunshine which had entranced her; for when she met Sir William and Mr. Carysfort at the door, just returned from the drive they had been taking, for the lack of other companions, by themselves, the former exclaimed, "Radiant as Hebe, Miss Helen! I shall insist on your making tea to-night, convinced that it will taste like nectar. But Hebe never had a taste for solitude; don't tell me you have been out all this while by yourself."

"Not by myself, but by the waterfall," returned Helen, gaily. "Other company—alas! for the gallantry of Olympus—have I had none. But my own company is not so very disagreeable that I cannot put up with it for a couple of hours."

"Well, that is odd," said Sir William, with one of his quiz-zical glances; but Helen would not see it, and laughingly replying, "Very odd," ran upstairs, leaving him no time for another word.

But Helen herself thought it rather odd, when the evening passed away without Mr. Huntley's making his appearance. He might, indeed, as Lady Emlyn suggested, be spending it with Frank Littleton; but why need he have done so this very evening?—which wore somewhat heavily away in contrast to the gaiety of the afternoon meeting. Whatever she might think or feel, however, Helen rallied the others on their dulness, and maintained an appearance of perfect unconcern, which puzzled Sir William, who was no less surprised than herself at Mr. Huntley's absence. He began to be afraid he had done mischief.

Mr. Huntley had not yet returned when all retired; but

Helen consoled herself by inventing all sorts of good reasons for his freak. Perhaps he was dreaming, too, as she was quite aware she could have been content to do for many more hours; and men care so much less for appearances than women; he would not be afraid, as she was, of staying out beyond the proper tea-hour. Or, if he had stayed with Frank Littleton, perhaps—she wondered what they would be talking of. And then her thoughts glided off into dreamland again, till she found herself speculating on their meeting next morning; upon which she roused herself with a start, scolded herself once more for being silly, and went to bed and to sleep; but with a smile still hovering on her lips, as if her waking-dreams retained their sway even in slumber.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUINS.

We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well,

* * * *

The trouble grew and stirred.

BROWNING.

HELEN awoke next morning with that vague consciousness of something new and delightful, which it is so pleasant to trace to its source as full wakefulness returns. She lingered before she left her room, and again in Florence's before she went down; with the unwillingness to face the reality of that her imagination was delighting in, which is so often experienced and so variously interpreted: either as a presentiment of evil, or a shrinking from almost too great joy, according as the one or the other may prove to have been in store.

As to which was in store for Helen, she was not kept long in doubt. When she entered the breakfast-room, Mr. Huntley was not there, which of itself gave her an uncomfortable chill; and when he came in a few minutes later, there was that in his face and his morning greetings, which told her in a moment that something was wrong. Instinctively she braced herself to maintain a semblance of unconcern, though conscious of such a tumult of feeling within as dismayed and astonished her. If

this new, delicious dream should prove but a dream? The question shot such a thrill of pain to her heart, that she felt it could be faced only in solitude; and resolutely silencing it, she forced herself to attend to what was going on.

Mr. Huntley had not shaken hands with her, as during all this second visit it had been his morning custom to do; but had merely bowed as to the rest, and was now sitting opposite, instead of beside her at the breakfast-table, with a heavier cloud upon his brow, and a sterner expression on his lip, than she, at least, had ever seen there. He conversed as usual, however, evading Sir William's raillery on the subject of his last evening's desertion, with a slight apology to Lady Emlyn; and Helen was trying to persuade herself that his not shaking hands with her might have been unintentional, when at the close of breakfast he said rather abruptly to Lady Emlyn, that now his cousin was so much better, he could not longer trespass on the kind hospitality of Emlyn Priory; and that he proposed returning to town the next day.

Sir William glanced quickly at Helen, to see if she looked in any way cognizant, or guilty, of this sudden move; but whatever she might feel, her face betrayed nothing; and Sir William commenced a vigorous remonstrance in aid of Lady Emlyn's kind dissuasions. It was ridiculous—it was impossible! Miss Forrester was but just recovering, and her cousin was in duty bound to stay and see her quite well again. Besides, who ever heard of returning to London at such a time of year, when there was nobody there, and nothing to be done? If he said another word about it, they would have to hold a commission "de lunatico;" and Sir William was on the verge of asking Helen, what lady present would charitably undertake the office of keeper, when the strangely darkening expression on Mr. Huntley's brow warned him to desist; and he suddenly stopped short.

Mr. Huntley hastened to avail himself of the pause, to thank him warmly, though hurriedly, and rather as pained than annoyed by such friendly importunity; but his business, he added, with a slight touch of bitterness in his tone, lay at home, at all seasons of the year; and he had already neglected it too long.

Further pressing was evidently useless. Sir William was sure now that Helen must have been refusing him; but what could she mean, after the way they had been going on these last few weeks? He felt quite provoked to see her looking so

unconcerned, and a little uneasy lest his foolish joke of the day before should be at the bottom of some misunderstanding between them ; for he was quite sure she loved Mr. Huntley ; no one could doubt it who had watched them as he had done. There was evidently no hope of doing anything with Mr. Huntley, but he must try and get some light upon the subject ; so he contrived to intercept Helen, when—breakfast being over at last—she was slipping out through the library into the garden, and said reproachfully, “ Miss Helen, what have you been doing to Huntley ? What is this new freak of being off to London all of a sudden ? ”

“ My dear Sir William ! ” replied Helen, affecting extreme surprise, “ what should I have to do with Mr. Huntley’s going to London ? ”

“ Why you might have a great deal,” returned Sir William, staggered, but not convinced, by her manner. “ Now don’t scold me, Miss Helen ; you know I never *mean* mischief, though I do like to tease you now and then ; but I was afraid I might have *made* mischief between you somehow yesterday, though how, for the life of me ”——

“ No, no ! ” exclaimed Helen, catching his drift, and guessing well enough what he supposed her to have been doing to Mr. Huntley ; “ you are all on a wrong tack, my dear Sir William, and must not take such romantic ideas into your head ! Perhaps Mr. Huntley had letters from town this morning, which oblige him to go to London. At any rate, if it will make you easier, I can assure you I know no more about it than you do ; for I have had no communication of any sort with your refractory guest since we were all laughing and talking together yesterday afternoon. So pray do not fancy you have made mischief, or that there is any. I declare, men are more curious than women, after all ! ”

And, forcing a smile, she was off into the garden, leaving Sir William thoroughly mystified.

But she did not stay long in the garden ; she dared not trust herself to think just now. Bernard was going the next day, and going, she felt certain, without a word to her. He seemed to have retired to an unapproachable distance ; and she was sure, now, it was intentional. Her dream, she said bitterly, had been only a dream ; and all she had now to do was to prevent any one suspecting that it had ever existed. She was too proud and too much used to conceal her feelings, to find the task as difficult as some women might have done ; but, as she

nerved herself to do so—gathering flowers, meanwhile, in full sight of the windows, that no one might suppose her to be seeking solitude—she was conscious of the actual physical pain which makes a heart-ache no figure of speech, and of the nervous tension of brain which a prisoner may be supposed to feel, when unflinchingly awaiting sentence of death.

When she rejoined the others, she found Sir William organizing an expedition—which had been talked of earlier, but put aside by Florence's illness—to visit a beautiful ruin at some considerable distance; and though he met but little support, and some slight remonstrance, he carried his point, as the master of a house usually does when determined on anything. It was already getting full late in the season, and postponement was, therefore, not to be thought of; besides, Mr. Huntley, who was—or ought to be—something of an antiquarian, must not leave the country without seeing the ruin; and Sir William was sure Miss Forrester, if appealed to, would say she was quite well enough to spare her nurses for a few hours. In short, Helen found they were to go, and to be ready in half an hour. They were to ride there on horseback, lunch among the ruins, and be back again to a late dinner.

So Lady Emlyn and Helen went to announce the proposed plan to Florence, who quite justified Sir William's confidence, and was eager they should all go. Had she not spoiled every one's pleasure long enough already?

Lady Emlyn protested she had not; and then added, "Do you know, your cousin insists on running away from us, back to town to-morrow?"

"He did not tell me so," said Florence; "but I am not surprised. He hardly ever leaves home; and I think it must have been a great effort of self-denial which has kept him away from his study and his books so long; but he is always very kind."

Helen had lingered a moment, as she left the room, on hearing Bernard's name; but now she walked quickly away. She had heard nothing which could throw any light on the subject, and must not allow herself time to think till he should be fairly gone. Gone! How her heart sank at the idea! But she hastened to prepare for her ride, and was the first to join Sir William in the hall.

"Frank is coming with us," he said; "he is going to cut his patients for this one day; and I have sent him up for a minute to see Miss Forrester, that he may make Louisa easy

as to her being well enough to be left. They will be down directly.

But Sir William refrained from adding, that he and Frank had with difficulty been overruling Mr. Huntley's attempts to excuse himself, on various pleas, from joining the party. The last thing Sir William intended was to take Helen out for the whole of the day, and leave Mr. Huntley behind.

The party assembled and mounted. They had some fifteen miles to ride; the day was fine and cool, the roads still good, the horses in spirits, the country beautiful; everything, in short, seemed combined for enjoyment, and yet hardly one of the party set forth with any idea of real enjoyment. Frank Littleton was the exception. The long leisure day among pleasant companions was a rare treat to him, and though the companion he might have chosen was not of the number, he was now quite free from anxiety about her; while the few words he had exchanged with her before starting, and her sweet voice and smile, dwelt so pleasantly on his remembrance as to render the sunshine without, doubly brilliant. Mr. Carysfort, on the contrary, voted it a decided bore; and wondered, as he rode on beside Lady Emlyn, what could be the use of people's riding all those miles to look at a stupid old ruin, and eat lunch on damp grass, instead of at home comfortably? Lady Emlyn could hardly help smiling, when she thought of his alacrity in promoting similar expeditions a few weeks before, when Florence could join in them; but though she understood his ill-humour, it vexed her, nevertheless and she could not help wishing William had not set his heart upon this excursion, which nobody seemed to care about.

Helen was certainly not in a mood for enjoyment; but anything to pass away the time was a relief; and a tremor would now and then threaten her self-possession, at the idea of the possible *tête-à-tête*, which had so often before fallen to her lot and Bernard's on similar occasions. Mr. Huntley's looks left no doubt as to his indifference, to say the least, to the proposed pleasures of the day; and Sir William was vexed at the outset by his inability to effect the arrangement of the party, with a view to which he had in fact planned it. He had meant to take Frank for his riding companion, and so leave Helen and Mr. Huntley at full leisure to clear up the misunderstanding which he supposed to exist; but when the ladies were mounted, and Helen, who must not seem to be waiting for her usual

companion, rode off after Lady Emlyn and Horace, who led the way, Mr. Huntley hung back; and, Helen looking round to inquire "if her society was so disagreeable that Sir William meant her to ride by herself?" he was obliged perforce to join her, and leave the two younger gentlemen to follow. Nor throughout the ride, in the various changes that took place in the order of the cavalcade, had he once the satisfaction of seeing the pair he was so anxious to throw together, riding side by side.

But Helen did her best to afford no colour for the idea that she, at least, was dissatisfied with existing arrangements; and more than once did she and Frank Littleton make the lanes ring with laughter and gay voices, from which no one could have discerned that one heart was as heavy as the other was light. Still Sir William, firm in previous impressions, concluded that she must be acting a part. They had quarrelled, perhaps, and she was braving it out; but if so, a lovers' quarrel would surely not outlast such a day as this! If even Mr. Huntley had been offended, or misled, by Helen's mock-indignant reply the day before, to suppose he was really indifferent to her—though, if it did not deceive Sir William, why should it deceive him?—surely no man who really cared for a woman would take off on such a trifle as that, without trying whether it had been really meant! Sir William was rapidly getting quite cross with both of them, when they came in sight of their destination; upon which he consoled himself with reflecting on the proverbial incomprehensibility of lovers, and determined to trouble his head no more about them. But he hoped for better things on the ride home.

The ruins they had come thus far to visit were very extensive, and were beautifully situated on the crown of a steep, wooded hill, up which the riders wound by a tortuous forest-path, and emerging at the top, found themselves on soft green sward, before the ruins, which, partly buried in trees and partly open to the sunshine, almost covered the summit of the hill. On a shady spot commanding a beautiful view, they found lunch laid out for them on the grass, and the grooms, who had ridden on before, ready to hold or picket their horses;—all unromantic enough, as Lady Emlyn observed, but practically viewed, both useful and agreeable, as was unanimously decided. Having dismounted, they held a consultation, whether to begin by taking lunch, or by exploring the ruins—a question which Sir William settled, by observing, that as a bird in the hand was

worth two in the bush, they had better eat their lunch while they were sure of it, and take their chance of a second edition later, should they be much exhausted by their explorings. This idea of a second edition was scouted by every one as a degree of voracity not to be contemplated; however, they proceeded to eat the first in accordance with Sir William's suggestion.

It was a lovely spot at which they were seated, commanding a view of alternate hill and valley, down and wood; while the sound of the stream in the hollow beneath, rushing musically over its rocky bed, concealed by the luxuriant vegetation which partly clothed and quite encircled the base of the hill they sat on, lent its charm to the prospect, which every one acquainted with our beautiful south-western counties will readily picture to themselves. The pleasant influences of the scene were felt by all; and a greater degree of harmony and enjoyment diffused itself over the party, as they ate and talked, and rose ever and anon, one by one, to admire or point out some new feature in the landscape. Mr. Huntley alone, stretched on the grass at the farthest extremity of the group, remained immovable, and as silent as was consistent with the claims of courtesy. But even his sternness of brow relaxed, and a more peaceful expression replaced its painful contraction, as he gazed dreamily over the prospect, losing consciousness, perhaps, of the discords jarring within, by absorption in the harmonies of sound and sight without.

Helen, meanwhile, appealed to Sir William for the tradition attached to the ruins. She knew there was one, but had forgotten it; and Sir William told how, at the fatal termination of the last siege of the castle,—which had once stood where these more modern ruins now remained to tell of later vicissitudes,—two brothers, its last lords, and last scions of an ancient house, resolved to die rather than surrender or be taken by the foe, with the fortress which had so long been the pride and stronghold of their race. Embracing each other, and mounting their horses, they flung their swords over the ramparts, and leaping their steeds after them, were dashed to pieces at the foot of the hill, on whose precipitous summit the party now sat. A little to the right, the hill was bare of trees, and the smooth turf sloped down so steeply, that they might easily imagine this to be the very spot from which the ill-fated brothers took their last look of all they had so long gloried in, before urging their horses to the desperate leap, which was to bear

them for ever beyond the reach of relentless foes, dishonour, and captivity.

The story seemed to impress Mr. Huntley's imagination; for he roused himself from his reverie to listen, and when it was told, rose and walked to the very edge of the steep descent, where he stood with folded arms, lost in thought; as if realizing to himself what must have been the feelings of the brothers as they stood there, side by side, for the last time.

"And yet," he said, returning to his former position, but speaking to himself rather than to his companions, "it was a sort of cowardice after all. They could not face what life might have in store for them, and they fled from it. They might as well have fled from their enemies."

Helen's eye kindled as she listened; but what had life in store for Bernard, that he should speak in tones of such concentrated, gloomy energy, as if prepared to endure to the end, and conscious that his powers of endurance would be taxed to the utmost? Her heart swelled, and her eyes filled with tears, so that she was forced to rise and look out over the landscape, in her turn, to hide them. Only the day before, she had dreamed of making his life all happiness—and now? What cloud was it that had fallen between them? But she dared not stand to indulge in such reflections; and in a minute she turned round, proposing herself, with forced gaiety, as leader of an exploring expedition, to all who would follow her guidance.

So they started, together at first, but scattering by degrees, to explore the ins and outs of the ruins, and then of the surrounding woods, for new points of view; having agreed, should they miss each other, to meet again at the spot where they had been sitting, in time for the start homewards. Mr. Huntley, indeed, only made a faint show of accompanying the rest, and soon turned back to the edge of the steep slope, which seemed to possess strong attractions for him; for he might have been seen standing there with folded arms, long after the others had disappeared in the woods.

In the scattering process, which by degrees took place, owing to the diversity of tastes, as to shade and sunshine, climbing and descending, Helen,—having quarrelled in jest with her last companion, Sir William, and really given him the slip, while pretending to do so—found herself alone in a densely wooded dell near the base of the hill they had been rambling over. Her watch warned her that it was time to be thinking of the

rendezvous ; and making her way upwards to the summit, from any point of which it would be easy to get round to the appointed spot, she emerged, sooner than she expected, close to it, before any of the rest had arrived. Too restless to sit down and wait patiently, she wandered along the open brow of the steep slope already described, and her eye was presently caught by a tuft of fern, of a kind she had heard Florence admire, growing beside a stone some way down the side of the hill ; and eager for anything to occupy herself with, she commenced the descent to gather it.

She proceeded slowly and cautiously at first, but her thoughts were wandering, and inward restlessness involuntarily quickened her movements. The grass grew slippery as she descended. She had chosen, as she thought, the easiest portion of the slope, but it grew more abrupt lower down ; and by degrees, she found herself slipping, sliding, running almost, towards the little boulder of rock by which the fern grew. But a slight change in the incline deceiving her eye, she missed the stone on which she had counted to stop and steady herself, and had lost the power to do so by any effort of her own. She caught a glimpse below of a stone-quarry, along the edge of which a tiny sheep-track led ; but would that suffice to arrest her descent ? A little to the right she saw a tree, by a low knoll overgrown with underwood. If she could direct her steps to that, she would be safe—but could she ? It did not, in the confusion of the moment, occur to her to try and throw herself back against the hill ; and probably her downward impetus was too great already. The knoll was too far to the right ! She would miss it ! Her head swam, her eyes dizzyed, and involuntarily she uttered a faint cry.

Suddenly a dark shadow seemed to start up between her and the precipice, emerging from the bushes which fringed the knoll. In another moment she was clasped by powerful arms, and it seemed for a second as if both must go down together ; but when she was able again to collect her thoughts, and look up, she was safely leaning against the tree at the foot of the knoll, and Mr. Huntley was standing by her, with lips sternly compressed, and a face pale as death.

For there was no trace in his countenance, of the tenderness, the joy, which a lover, or even a friend, might be expected to feel and to evince under such circumstances ; and Helen felt a chill creep over her beneath his dark, strange

glance. But for her woman's pride, she must have covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. What had she done that he should look so coldly on her, even at such a moment! It was hardly worth saving her for that!

But a woman's self-possession rarely deserts her in such emergencies, much less that of a woman like Helen; and though her lip quivered, that might be from her recent alarm; and she was ready to speak calmly quite as soon as he.

"I fear you must have been greatly alarmed," Mr. Huntley said at length, very gently, but in a tone of painful constraint. "I trust you feel none the worse for it?"

"O no, indeed!" replied Helen, hardly knowing what she said, or what to say. How could she thank him, with those stern, dark eyes upon her, and with such feelings as she was conscious of within? "But I fear I should have been much the worse for my silly whim of gathering a fern up yonder, if you had not been"—

"Just in time," said Mr. Huntley, trying to force a smile, but with very poor success. "You must not try such dangerous experiments again. Are you able," he added, as Helen moved from the tree she had been leaning against, "to attempt the ascent of the hill? There is a little path by the edge of the wood there, by which I came down"—

"O yes," said Helen, "thank you; I am not frightened now, and I fancy it is getting late."

"Take care—this way—you see the track bending up towards the wood—the grass is slippery," said Mr. Huntley, unable wholly to silence the anxiety which the tremor of his voice also betrayed, and keeping jealously between her and the edge of the stone-quarry till they reached the edge of the wood, at a safe distance above it. But he neither offered his arm, nor endeavoured to assist her, though her knees trembled under her as she went. She concealed it as best she might; to claim unproffered assistance would be humiliating indeed; and they wound up through the wood in silence, broken only by occasional suggestions from Mr. Huntley, when the path offered any difficulty. They stood, at last, on the top of the hill, in sight of the open sward and the ruins beyond, where the party was to meet.

"You are safely landed now," said Mr. Huntley, pointing to the ruins. "You will not venture near the slope again?"
And without waiting for an answer, he turned suddenly and

disappeared in the wood, leaving Helen to proceed alone to the rendezvous.

Had it come to that? Was he afraid even to be seen in her company, or ashamed of the service he had rendered her? Half stunned, and divided between indignation and pain, she stood rooted to the spot where he had left her, till the sight of some one moving near the ruins reminded her of the increasing need of self-control. Then she walked on to meet Sir William, slowly at first, but gathering strength, as she proceeded, from the feeling of desperation which was stealing over her.

"O Sir William, I am so tired!" she exclaimed, as they met, in order that the paleness she was conscious of might not excite surprise.

"Serve you right, Miss Helen!" said Sir William, giving her his arm. "If you had not run away from me, I would have brought you back the shortest way; and now, I suppose, you have been all round the hill. But you had better adopt my proposal of a second lunch, to restore you; Louisa and the others are here already."

"I must confess that I punished myself this time," said Helen, seating herself by Lady Emlyn, and really thankful to sit down, she still trembled so much. "I was only pretending to run away from you, Sir William, and lost you in reality."

"And lost your way too, I suppose, dear?" said Louisa kindly, as she gave her some wine to refresh her.

"Yes," said Sir William; "Miss Helen always wants to make out that young ladies can take care of themselves. But I hope she will know better now."

"I certainly did not make much hand of it to-day," said Helen, and she could almost have shrieked at the picture which rose before her of the danger she had escaped; "but I dare say gentlemen lose their way too, sometimes."

"Oh, sometimes, Miss Helen! I dare say everything happens sometimes. But to be sure," added Sir William, looking round, "Huntley seems to have lost his. Did you not come across him in your wanderings?"

"Now do you think," returned Helen, in a tone the involuntary sarcasm of which passed for jest, "that if I had, one of the gentlemen, whose protection you think so precious, would have left me to find my way back by myself?" But her heart smote her for indulging even a feeling of bitterness, when she recalled Bernard's pale, agitated countenance, as he had stood beside her at the foot of the tree.

"No, certainly! That would have been impossible," returned Sir William. "Well, he must find his way back for himself, for we cannot wait for him. It is late now, so we must leave his horse with one of the grooms."

"Shall I stay for him?" said Mr. Littleton. "We could soon overtake you."

"No, no, Frank; come along," said Sir William. "You and Huntley must have had talk enough all last evening; and I am not going to let you be unsociable, if he is. Now then, Louisa, let me put you up; one of the grooms shall stay."

Helen saw by Frank's surprised look, though he was discreet enough to say nothing, that Mr. Huntley had not spent the previous evening with him; but she was past surprise on the subject; and, all mounting their horses, they set off homewards.

They had not long disappeared in the woods through which their path led, when Mr. Huntley might have been seen standing once more on the edge of the green slope, which had lured Helen to her perilous descent. But he was not now looking out upon the prospect, gilded though it was by the slant rays of the sinking sun, but down upon his folded arms, with a mournful tenderness in his eyes, as if they still dwelt in fancy upon some treasure which had lately rested there.

"Never again!" he muttered; "never again!—But I will be no coward," he added, raising his eyes and fixing them on the scene of the tale Sir William had narrated. "Who would refuse to bear his share of humanity's great burden of struggle and sorrow? I, at least, will not shrink from mine."

When he rejoined the party, which he did before they had ridden far, it seemed as if some weight had been lifted from his spirit; some hard battle fought and won. His brow was clearer, and he apologized frankly for having overstayed the time of meeting; and conversed on various subjects, as was his wont. But he did not join, or address Helen; and she felt that whatever cloud might have passed away, it was not that which had withdrawn him from her. Still the conversation carried on between him and the other gentlemen, relieved her from the necessity of exerting herself to talk; and she rode home almost in silence, thankful for the bodily fatigue which dulled, and half-overpowered, the painful thoughts and feelings oppressing her.

CHAPTER IX.

LEAVE-TAKINGS.

And is it thus we part ? Enough, enough !

Philip van Artevelde.

Farewell ! A word which must be and hath been ;

A word which makes us linger—yet, farewell !

Childe Harold.

“How tired you look, dear Helen,” said Florence, as Helen followed Lady Emlyn up to her sofa, with kind inquiries as to how she had passed her lonely day.

“Oh, so tired,” said Helen, seating herself, and leaning her head against her friend’s pillow, with that faint-hearted desire for rest and oblivion which young, untried spirits feel, when some prospect of deep pain and struggle first opens before them. Then, fearing to betray herself, she started up again, adding, “But we have had a charming day. Will you not be able to come down this evening, to hear all about it ?”

“If it would not be too much for you. And after your quiet day, dear,”—said Lady Emlyn, never forgetful of Horace’s interests.

“Oh, I shall certainly come down,” said Florence ; “it will not tire me in the least ; and I could not let Bernard go without bidding him good-bye.”

“I must go and dress for dinner,” said Helen, turning hastily away. Bernard would not go, it was true, without her seeing him ; but she had almost rather he should, than meet him again under the miserable restraint his changed manner imposed upon her. She had half a mind to pretend fatigue, and not go down at all, and he would be gone in the morning, the train he was to travel by being an early one. But when it came to the point, she could not bear really to miss seeing him, and went down, wearing, as best she might, her usual disengaged and lively air.

The evening passed away, though it seemed to her that it would never end ; nor was Mr. Carysfort much better pleased with it than she. Of course it was quite natural that Mr. Huntley should, on this last evening, sit by his cousin’s sofa, and that she should be chiefly occupied with him, in the

intervals of more general conversation. Still he felt fretted at not being able to monopolize her, and could only hope for a clear field the next day.

Helen, meanwhile, played at chess with Frank Littleton, and allowed herself to be shamefully beaten, in absence of mind which did not escape her antagonist, though he was far too considerate to notice it. She grew desperate, as the hours passed away, and Mr. Huntley maintained the same unaccountable reserve and distance towards her. It was poor consolation that, since her adventure on the hill, she felt sure he must be suffering as well as herself. That only disarmed the pride which might have risen to her aid, could she have persuaded herself that she only had been dreaming a dream of love. How could she part from him thus, uncertain when they might meet again, without so much as having thanked him for saving her from such imminent danger, from worse, perhaps? She could not. She would at least thank him; and if they did not part friends, it should not be her fault.

Accordingly, when the time arrived for retiring, and during the stir occasioned by Mr. Carysfort's insisting on wheeling Florence's sofa to the foot of the stairs, that she might have less far to walk, though she assured him it was unnecessary, Helen approached Mr. Huntley, who, having bid his cousin good-bye, had drawn as usual into the back-ground.

"I have never yet thanked you, Mr. Huntley,"—she began, holding out her hand that she might seem to be only bidding him "good night," should Sir William's lynx-eyes be upon them.

"Never do!" interrupted Mr. Huntley, earnestly, taking her hand for a moment, while his lip quivered with some irrepressible emotion. But instantly controlling it, he added in a lighter tone, with a courteous smile, which, however pleasing it might have been in the earlier days of their acquaintance, now seemed almost like mockery to Helen: "You would not, I am sure, humiliate me by supposing I claim thanks for assistance which any churl must have rendered you. I only trust you will avoid such risks in future."

"Good-night, then," said Helen; chilled and repulsed, she yet could not bring herself to say, "Good-bye."

"Good-night," he returned, as their hands again met, but with cold, constrained touch; how different from the cordial pressure which they had of late been wont to exchange! "And good-bye!" he added internally, as Helen, turning

slowly away, crossed the room, feeling like one in a painful dream, and hardly conscious of the smiling good-night she instinctively bestowed on Sir William as she passed him at the door. Mr. Carysfort, indeed, she passed in the hall without seeing him; but that was not a circumstance calculated to distress his feelings, so he never paused to reflect on it.

Mr. Huntley watched Helen till she was out of sight; and then, with something like a sigh of relief, moved away to take leave of Sir William and Lady Emlyn, and make his acknowledgments for their hospitality to himself, and their extreme kindness to his cousin, for which he assured them his uncle would feel deeply grateful.

Sir William would fain, even now, have pressed him to remain; but feeling it would be useless, could only impress on him how extremely happy they would be to see him again at any future period, and trusted that something pleasanter than his last summons might bring him next time. "But all is well that ends well, you know," he added, and was somewhat surprised at the gravity of the rejoinder.

"Yes," replied Mr. Huntley, abstractedly, "all is well that ends well; life as well as the rest. But I am detaining Lady Emlyn," he added, checking himself, and, shaking hands, was gone in a moment.

"What a queer fellow that Huntley is, Louisa," said Sir William to his wife, when they were alone that night; and then proceeded to confide to her his perplexities as to that gentleman and Helen, and his misgivings lest he should have been the cause of their apparent misunderstanding.

Lady Emlyn was quite surprised at the idea of any sort of attachment between the two. They talked a good deal, to be sure; but Helen's manner was so off-hand, not the least like a girl in love; and Mr. Huntley, from all Florence said, was a most unlikely man for anything of the sort. She was sure William might be quite easy as to his saucy speech; for if Helen did not mind it, Mr. Huntley was not likely to. She felt sure he had only been in one of his melancholy fits, and that all the rest was a little romance of William's. Could Helen possibly remain so unconcerned if anything had gone wrong between the two? And Lady Emlyn passed on to the subject of the little romance she was herself interested in; and when her husband warned her not to be too sanguine as to Horace's success, she declared she was quite glad Mr. Huntley was gone; he had certainly been infecting William

with his low spirits, for here he was croaking about everything ! However, she promised to observe and report whether she could detect any traces of low spirits in Helen ; but this, it may be imagined, she failed to do. For not only Helen's pride, but her real affection for Sir William, were interested in disguising, at whatever cost, mental suffering for which he might certainly seem in some degree responsible ; and she succeeded so well in keeping up the semblance of her usual spirits during the remainder of her visit, that Sir William was obliged to admit Louisa might be right. But he long retained a feeling that there was something which required explanation.

Mr. Huntley's secession proved the prelude for other departures. A fortnight, indeed, passed away, during which Florence recovered her health, if not as yet quite her usual strength ; but to none of the party did this seem at all like a continuation of their former pleasant phase of life. A damp had fallen more or less on all. Louisa, since her husband's warning, could not feel quite satisfied as to the prospects of her pet scheme ; and Mr. Carysfort was daily growing more dissatisfied, though he tried to persuade himself there was no real cause for it. It was natural, as autumn came on, and she had less company for out-door exercise—for not only was Mr. Huntley gone, but Sir William and Mr. Littleton were unusually engrossed by their respective avocations—that Helen should be more within, and thereby interfere with his desired monopoly of Florence. And it was natural that one so shy as Florence should be well-pleased to be protected, as it were, by her friend's presence ; but it vexed him none the less. Day by day, he resolved to speak the next ; but when the next came, some new trifle put it off. Then he took counsel with Lady Emlyn, who did not know what to advise. Florence was so reserved, it was impossible to guess her real feelings ; and it might only be that her illness had somewhat withdrawn her thoughts from such things, she was serious-minded at all times ; and Louisa certainly knew of nothing that could have changed her feelings in the interim ; Horace had perhaps better wait a little longer : and so he did, but very impatiently.

Over Florence, too, there hung a feeling of constraint, though she flattered herself that, after all, her fears would prove to have been groundless ; and, to Helen, the constant effort of simulating a gaiety, as repugnant to her real feelings as was dissimulation to her truthful nature, was becoming so

painful that she was already talking of the necessity of returning home, and not trespassing too far on her father's indulgence, when a letter from Mr. Forrester to Florence sealed the dispersion of the party.

He announced his arrival at home, and his wish that, as she reported herself quite well again, she should join him in London in a day or two. There was a general feeling of surprise that he did not propose coming down to fetch his daughter, and express his thanks to Sir William and Lady Emlyn personally, instead of merely by polite messages; but Florence did not seem to share it. She arranged to comply with his wish the next day but one; would not hear of Sir William's accompanying her; and, perhaps guessing the impression made on the rest, alluded to her father's not having been quite well, and needing rest, and her desire to take care of him. But Lady Emlyn still hoped she might have an escort to town, for all that.

For while Florence was secretly congratulating herself that her departure from such kind friends would, at least, relieve her from her lingering uneasiness about Mr. Carysfort, in whose society she could never breathe quite freely, a note was brought to her, which instantly sent her off to seek Lady Emlyn in a state of perturbation which, to the latter, needed no explanation. It was, in fact, a note from Horace, requesting a private interview; and Louisa, at first, augured favourably, from the agitation it roused.

But her kindness soon encouraged Florence to confide her real feelings to her, and her earnest desire to avoid this proposed interview, which could only be painful to both. To that, however, Louisa could not agree. Dear Florence must, of course, consult her own happiness first; and if she really could not feel that Horace was likely to make her happy, of course she must refuse him. But she was sure Horace would take no answer except from her own lips; and she thought his warm attachment deserved thus much consideration. He ought to know why he was refused; and who could tell him so well, or so kindly, as Florence? Lady Emlyn was, in truth, the firmer on this point, because she fancied Florence's gentle, tearful resistance to her pleadings in Horace's favour, no bad augury for the still possible success of his own, if he only got a fair opportunity of speaking. So with a half-smile, and a tender kiss of sympathy and encouragement, she left Florence in her boudoir to await the dreaded interview.

It proved, however, little more satisfactory to Mr. Carysfort than to Florence herself. Some demur and hesitation he was prepared for, both by her own manner of late, and Louisa's report on leaving her; but not for the immovable, though gentle resistance which all his protestations and remonstrances encountered. Her womanly self-respect, and the consciousness that now, at all events, she was doing right, gave Florence more firmness and composure than she could manifest to so tender and sympathizing a friend as Louisa; and her very gentleness was in itself a shield against too great urgency in pressing his suit, at least from a man of really gentlemanly feelings like Horace. Still, it rather consoled him for present failure with hopes of ultimate success; so much gentleness must eventually yield to a persevering lover; for he, not unnaturally, flattered himself that it was from some idea of duty, and not from inclination, she was refusing him. He did, indeed, take the precaution of asking, with many excuses for his presumption, whether he ought to attribute his rejection to her having met him with pre-engaged affections; but her hasty disclaimer satisfied him on that point; and he overlooked the half-uttered, blushing "but," which a secret consciousness brought, involuntarily, to her lips, and which might have thrown a new light upon the subject, had her suitor been less pleasingly impressed with his own immeasurable superiority to any of her late associates.

He took his leave, therefore, vexed and disappointed indeed, but as determined as before to succeed ultimately, and as convinced that he should; and greatly did it distress Florence, that while humbly submitting to his present rejection from one of whom he owed himself far from worthy, he still persisted in expressing hopes that she would hereafter see cause to look more favourably on his suit. She could only hope they might not meet again, before he had had time to change his mind; and was partly right in not supposing his to be a character from which very deep or constant love under discouragement might be expected. But she did not estimate the strength of the self-love, which blends largely with, and sometimes gives stability to, the feelings of spoiled children of fortune like Horace Carysfort, who are so used to have their own way in things they care little about, that they cannot realize the possibility of disappointment in anything they have really set their hearts on.

But Lady Emlyn felt far less sanguine as to the future than

Horace did, when she heard the result of the interview. She had hoped much from his personal appeal to Florence's feelings, and could not now repress some secret misgiving lest an incipient preference for Frank Littleton (whose opinions and character, she could not but feel, were more in accordance with Florence's own) might have something to do with her rejection of Horace. It was a great disappointment to Louisa. Horace had long been like a brother to her, and she perhaps felt the warmer interest in his happiness, from a consciousness that it had formerly been in her power to influence it more closely. She had always felt grateful to him for sparing her the pain of an open breach, by the tact with which he acquiesced in her choice of another. And this match with Florence was to have made up to him for all! It was really very unfortunate!

Once convinced, however, that for the present, at least, there was no help for it, she set about smoothing matters with her usual sense and kindness. She comforted Florence with assurances of her being quite right in adhering to what she really felt to be a necessary decision, and with the welcome advice to try and forget all about it. Distressing herself could do Horace no good, but only grieve him the more at having given her pain. And Horace she persuaded to go on a visit for a couple of days to the other side of the county, which he agreed to do; but not till the next morning; that, meeting Florence at dinner and in the evening, he might demonstrate in his behaviour how far he was from either taking offence, or relinquishing his attachment.

So all went to dinner as usual; and Helen, who guessed well enough what had been going on, could not but admire the gentlemanly self-possession of his manner to Florence, from which no uninitiated observer could possibly have divined that anything had occurred to ruffle the stream of their long-established intercourse. But Florence, to save her life, could not have looked as usual, so thoroughly had the events of the morning discomposed her; and few were the words, and fewer the looks which Horace, or any one else, so long as he was present, succeeded in extracting from her.

Sir William, while apparently ignoring it all, and speaking of Mr. Carysfort's intended departure as a matter of course, a long-promised visit, and so on, was secretly by no means so disappointed as would have gratified Louisa's desire for sympathy. But he could not help wondering to himself what

could have become of Frank, and what he would say when he heard Florence was going? Happily, however, at least for Florence, who needed no addition to her present embarrassment, Mr. Littleton did not make his appearance that evening; and she contrived to make her escape before the "good-night" hour arrived, so as to elude any farther leave-taking on Mr. Carysfort's part, from which she felt she must fairly run away, should he refer, ever so remotely, to hopes of seeing her again. Horace flattered himself that this evident embarrassment looked by no means like indifference, and was not altogether displeased at her evasion.

Helen could not help feeling some degree of triumph over Mr. Carysfort, especially as he did not seem entirely overwhelmed by his disappointment; for she had always felt—not unnaturally, considering his far from friendly disposition towards her—that his winning, would be her losing, of Florence. And as he, on his side, by no means felt sure that her influence might not have had some share in Florence's rejection of him, it is needless to say that their mutual farewells were as cool, and on his part, at least, as expressive of well-bred dislike as they could have been even on occasion of the famous X——ball, to which Sir William attributed Helen's loss of his good graces.

The next day was chiefly spent by Florence and Helen in preparations for their respective departures (Helen having arranged to leave the same day as her friend), in which last walks and talks, and plans for future meetings, bore a large share. It was rather a melancholy day, as last days often are, but to Helen, at least, it was quite a relief to have so good an excuse for relaxing the effort to keep up appearances, which grew day by day more irksome; for the reaction of weariness becomes by degrees even harder to bear than the more acute, active pain of the first days of suffering. At home she would have leisure to brood over the past, and extract from it what hope she might for the future. Besides, she was of late years so little used to indulge her natural buoyancy of spirits, that at home no comparative depression would be likely to attract observation; whereas, here, the perpetual struggle not to think, not to seem unhappy, made her more wretched inwardly than she well knew how to bear. She was but a novice, as yet, in the school of real endurance.

Florence, on the other hand, relieved from Horace's presence, had recovered her composure and cheerfulness, and was

disposed as usual to look on the bright side of things. She scolded Helen affectionately for her depression ; argued that the pleasure of their friendship was by no means to terminate because of this separation ; and reminded her playfully what numberless good resolutions she had to work out, and books to read, before they should meet again. She was sure Bernard had long ago prescribed a list of the latter, which would last for a twelvemonth.

Helen winced at Bernard's name, but admitted that it would be very ungrateful of her not to be happy when she had so much to make her so : "And cowardly besides," she added, with a flash at the remembrance of his words on the subject of cowardice.

"But the real fact is, dear Florence, one feels it hard to have to bring down all one's fine resolutions, and romantic imaginings, to little every-day duties and matter-of-fact trifles."

"But is it not just for want of that bringing down of romance to reality," said Florence, "that the former, which embodies such high ideals and aspirations, gets looked upon and scouted as visionary, dear Helen? Unless we practise self-sacrifice in little things every day, we shall fail in great things ; and then people may well say, 'See what their romance was worth !'"

"Yes," said Helen, "and I mean to do my best, and to be happy in doing it, for fear you should scold me," she added, trying to force a smile, while her brow contracted as she measured in thought the seeming impossibility of feeling happy, or even contented, under present circumstances. "For it is so pleasant to believe that one ought to be happy, and that everything is ordered for our good," she continued, after a pause, "because then one may always hope that, if we only try to do right, we must get happy in the end,—which is a great thing."

"A great thing, indeed !" said Florence ; "and when we are sure of being happy in the end, surely it cannot be so very hard to be happy in the meantime?"

She smiled brightly and playfully as she said so, half-chiding Helen, as it were, for her inclination to sadness ; little dreaming how "very hard" it might yet prove in practice to be "happy in the meantime," even though her faith were fixed on the true happiness which cannot fail us ; whereas Helen's idea of happiness "in the end" pointed to an earthly object. If she did her best to deserve it, surely her "true love" would

some day be permitted to "run smooth" once more ! How many, like Helen, while sincerely resolving henceforward to sacrifice happiness to duty, pleasure to principle, yet set their hearts secretly on some special happiness or pleasure as their eventual reward ! It is well for us that the habits of obedience to duty thus formed, often lead us much farther than in the outset we could have endured to contemplate.

Helen was not, however, too selfishly absorbed to look forward with some interest to Frank Littleton's probable evening visit ; but though he came, as he usually did when leisure allowed, and seemed rather surprised on hearing of Florence's impending departure, he neither spoke nor acted as if that departure peculiarly affected himself. Perhaps Florence's pained, conscious look when Horace's absence was alluded to, enlightened him sufficiently as to its cause ; and he might appreciate the awkwardness it would involve for her to receive even welcome addresses from another, so immediately on her rejection of her friend Lady Emlyn's especial favourite. At any rate, he went, and "made no sign."

Only when he took leave at night, he said to Florence, "I trust we shall have the pleasure of seeing you again in this part of the world before long, Miss Forrester ; or we shall certainly have to invent some unanswerable reason for visiting London."

The look which accompanied his words, bore perhaps some secret meaning to Florence ; for she looked up as she replied, with such a sweet, half-shy, half-grateful expression, that Helen could feel no doubt that Mr. Littleton's visit to London, should he decide on making one, would prove of no unsatisfactory nature. So there was one bright spot, at least, to look to in the future.

Early the next day, Florence parted from Helen and the Emlyns at the neighbouring railway station, and Mr. Montagu drove over the same afternoon to fetch his daughter. It was a relief to her that he came alone ; it ensured her two hours more of freedom from the annoyance she must expect, in returning to the society of her step-mother and Captain Marston. She left Emlyn Priory with a far heavier heart than she had brought there, little cheered even by the warm hopes her friends expressed of seeing her soon and often again. One word of the sort, had Mr. Huntley uttered it at parting, might have had a marvellously stronger influence. But she forced herself to conjure up a parting smile and jest for Sir William,

lest, even at the eleventh hour, his old suspicions should revive.

"What has become of Mr. Carysfort?" said her father, as they drove home.

"He went away yesterday, to pay a visit at some distance," replied Helen.

"Yesterday?" said Mr. Montagu. "Well, and how have you got on with him all this time?"

"Not at all," said Helen, unable to repress a smile at remembrance of their formal adieus; "but then it was quite unnecessary. I suppose I may tell you—you will not let it go farther—that he proposed to Florence Forrester the other day, and was refused."

"To Miss Forrester?" said her father in a tone of extreme surprise, which unmistakeably implied his wonder that anyone should have bestowed much attention on another young lady, when his own highly appreciated "Miss Montagu," was in the way. "Well, that strikes me as odd! And she refused him? Such an agreeable, gentlemanly man, with such advantages in every way!"

"I do not think his proposing to her was at all odd," said Helen. "If I were a man I should fall in love with her directly; but I should have thought it odd had she accepted him. You would not like him so much if you knew more of him, dear papa;—however, we are never likely to, so it does not signify."

"No, certainly; in that case it does not signify," said Mr. Montagu, reflectively; "but—but it would be a great comfort to me to see you well married, Helen."

"Me married, papa!" she answered hastily; "pray do not set about wishing that! I dare say I shall never marry at all. You know how fastidious I am in my likes and dislikes; and besides, I am sure you could never do without me, papa."

"Not for my own pleasure, you may be sure," returned her father; "but I should wish to see you in a suitable and assured position before"—he paused somewhat gloomily.

"You have not been well, papa!" exclaimed Helen, looking anxiously in his face.

"No, no, I did not mean that," said he; "but one never knows what may happen."

"Oh! 'sufficient for the day is the evil thereof,' papa," said Helen, with a heavy consciousness that she had at present as much on her hands as she felt able to cope with. "You have

been getting out of spirits for want of me to amuse you." And she exerted herself to carry on a lively conversation during the rest of the drive; thankful that her father's inquiry had not been as to how she had got on with Mr. Huntley instead of Mr. Carysfort, and glad that she had had the opportunity of putting the latter out of his head, for good, as she supposed.

But neither father nor daughter had quite done with Mr. Carysfort yet.

A few days later Mr. Carysfort returned to Emlyn Priory, but he could not long endure what he was now pleased to term its stupidity; and though Louisa quite forgave his ill-humour in consideration of his disappointment, she was not sorry when he one morning set off suddenly, talking of going abroad, but mentioning that letters might, for the present, be directed to his chambers in London.

And thus one by one, the Wedding Guests departed on their several ways, uncertain when or where, any, or all of them might meet again; but pretty certain none of them to forget the brief period, checkered for each with sunshine and shade, which they had spent together beneath the roof of their kind hosts at Emlyn Priory.

CHAPTER X.

WINTER AND SPRING.

'Tis past, new prospects rise.

Night Thoughts.

First came the genial, hopeful spring,
With bursting buds and birds that sing.

* * * *

What next!

Philip van Artevelde.

WHAT sudden changes a few days sometimes bring forth! Not a fortnight after Florence's departure from Emlyn Priory, Lady Emlyn was journeying hastily to join her in London, in consequence of a letter she had that morning received from Mr. Huntly, informing her of his uncle's sudden death from apoplexy; which, he added, had thrown Florence into such a state of nervous distress and bewilderment, that he was quite uneasy about her. If Lady Emlyn could possibly come to her, he should feel more grateful than he could express; and

Louisa needed no second entreaty to hurry to town, in order to bestow all the comfort her presence might afford.

She found Florence in the state Mr. Huntley had described ; he doing his best, but fruitlessly, with almost womanly kindness, to persuade her to eat or sleep, both of which seemed beyond her power. It was more the suddenness of the blow, than the event itself, which had, in her still delicate state of health, so overwhelmed her for the time. The loss of her only surviving parent would, indeed, at any time have been deeply felt by the gentle, affectionate daughter, who had always entirely devoted herself to him ; though Lady Emlyn was inclined to agree with Mr. Huntley, that the removal of one who had always been absorbed in himself and his own pursuits, could not eventually prove as deep a trial as the separation from some fathers might have been. But under ordinary circumstances, Florence's sorrow, like herself, would have been gentle and patient. Viewing death, moreover, as she did, her suffering would have been additionally chastened by the knowledge that grief for the departed is only selfish.

But besides the shock which Florence inevitably sustained from this her first recognition of the physical aspect of death, always calculated to make so deep an impression, her whole system was unhinged by the momentary nature of the alarm, her father's illness and its fatal termination having been communicated to her almost in a breath. Much has been said and written on the awful impressiveness of sudden death, but there is, to sensitive natures, a more painful view of it ; a sense of startling incongruity in the hasty, and, as it were, almost irreverent, accomplishment of that holy and awful transition, fraught with such transcendent significance, both to those who depart, in peace or in pain, and to them that are left, clasping the closer those cords of love which the strong, still hand of death seems,—but, praise be to God, ONLY seems,—to wrench in twain for ever. For it is never death which parts us, even when the death-parting is a final one.

But for the timely arrival of Lady Emlyn, who knew better than her cousin how to cope with her present state of nervous suffering and distress, Florence would probably have suffered severely from the nervous fever, which, as it was, she narrowly escaped ; but under Louisa's gentle and soothing care, she became, in a few days, so much better that, though still ill and extremely weak, she could begin to consider the arrangements which her friend proposed, and, in which Mr. Huntley was

most anxious she should acquiesce. Had his mother been still alive, she would have found a home and the warmest of welcomes under his roof; but now it was, of course, out of his power to offer it; and as the idea of joining either of her sisters in India was one which neither she nor her friends could be inclined to entertain, there was no present plan for her half so desirable as the one Lady Emlyn urged; namely, that she should make her home with her, to make up, as she kindly put it, both to herself and her husband, for the loss of Cissy.

Florence's grateful acquiescence could scarcely be a matter of doubt. To her Louisa's affection was in itself a home, and she would have agreed unhesitatingly to almost anything her kind friend might have proposed; so the affair was quickly settled. Mr. Huntley undertook to relieve his cousin of all trouble in the breaking up of the establishment, and other matters of business, which, as her father's executor, he could the better do. The funeral, therefore, being over, and Florence having been duly informed of the disposition of her father's affairs, which, when settled, would leave her and her sisters ten to twelve thousand pounds each, she was carried off by Lady Emlyn to her own house, in Grosvenor Square, where Sir William, who had, meantime, followed his wife to town, met her with as warm a welcome as even her sensitive nature could require to make her feel really at home.

"Only I must insist on your getting well; I can *not* allow people to be ill in my house," he added, with so cordial a smile that Florence could not refrain from an answering smile, as she faintly promised to do her best.

But notwithstanding all that kindness and perfect quiet could do,—for, in spite of Mr. Carysfort's remonstrances, Lady Emlyn kept her promise that Florence should not even be asked to see any one but herself and Sir William till she felt quite equal to it,—she gained strength so slowly, and seemed so shaken, both in health and spirits, that it was soon decided to take her abroad for the winter, as a more entire change than returning to Emlyn Priory. A scheme for meeting Cissy and her husband in Italy had been previously formed, and was now revived, with the additional inducement it offered in the probable benefit to Florence. Sir Charles Alton, whose advice Lady Emlyn called in, strongly recommended the plan, as complete change of air and scene were the best possible remedies for her present merely nervous debility.

"Unless Miss Forrester prefers a return to Emlyn Priory : inclination has great influence in nervous ailments," Sir Charles considerably added ; recalling, perhaps, certain passages of conversation between himself and Frank Littleton, on the occasion of her previous illness.

But Florence really preferred going abroad ; though, had she not, she would certainly never have owned it, knowing with what pleasure Louisa looked forward to joining her sister. She shrank from thus early a return to Emlyn Priory, where she had lately passed through so much agitation ; and though secretly conscious that there might be in store for her that which would eventually more than compensate for past suffering, she felt the urgent need of rest and refreshment both for body and mind, before she should be called on to face any fresh changes or excitements in her life, even were these to result in her highest possible happiness.

One cause of excitement, of no pleasant nature, was indeed forced upon her notice. Mr. Carysfort was eager to seize the earliest opportunity of renewing the attentions which he fancied her late bereavement and consequent depression would dispose her to receive more favourably ; and when the going abroad was decided on, he became so urgent to be permitted to join the party, that Louisa could not bear to refuse him. Better acquainted than he was with the shrinking sensitiveness of Florence's feelings, and not wholly blind to the want of delicacy evinced by his eagerness to forward his personal views at such a time, she wished him to accompany them as a matter of course, as if merely availing himself of their society on the journey to meet his brother, which had previously been contemplated. But, like most men, Horace was wilful ; and, secretly persuaded that, let her own it or not, Florence must be flattered by his constancy and perseverance, he insisted on Louisa's definitely asking, as from himself, Florence's permission for him to accompany the party.

When she, at last, with great reluctance, yielded to his wish, and conveyed the request, even Florence could not overlook the inference to be drawn from it ; and her distress and confusion satisfied Louisa, that either she was right in considering Horace's move very premature, or that his case was entirely hopeless.

"My permission, dear Louisa !" exclaimed Florence, with tears in her eyes, and colouring deeply. "How can he?—what right can I have—and to keep him away from his

brother, too? Oh, dear Louisa, could I not stay at home—anywhere?”

“Dear Florence, please do not say that. You know ‘at home’ is to be with me,” returned Lady Emlyn, kissing her tenderly; “and pray do not distress yourself about it, dear. You have the best right in the world to settle it as you please. It is not—Horace would make me say it,” she added apologetically—“it is not to see Frederick that he cares to go.”

“Then please say, I had rather he should not go, Louisa,” said Florence, in a low, constrained voice, deeply alive to the selfishness of an attachment which could prompt him to disregard the claims of her already sufficiently suffering state; but instantly repenting the slightest implied reproach to Louisa, she looked up quickly to add, “Pray forgive me—I am sorry—but I really could not bear it.”

“Forgive you, my darling Florence! I am sure you ought to forgive me, rather,” said Louisa, penitently, as she tenderly smoothed the soft, dark hair, which made the pale face before her look paler still. “I am so sorry I should have teased you about it. Please forget all about it, dear, or I shall not forgive myself.”

And, rather than pain Louisa, Florence forced a smile, and promised to forget its having even been named.

Mr. Carysfort was deeply mortified at the result of his manœuvre, and, paying little heed to Louisa’s gentle reminder, that she had warned him of the mistake of renewing his advances to Florence till the latter had recovered from her present debility and depression, he determined to drown the sense of his discomfiture by a hasty move in a different direction. Starting off to Liverpool forthwith, he took ship for a tour in the United States; and, to the great relief of all parties, was heard of no more for several months.

Relieved from the prospect of his dreaded society, Florence began to look forward with pleasure to her winter abroad. Nor did it tend in any way to damp her anticipations, that, on the eve of departure she received a few lines from Frank Littleton, expressing the gentlest sympathy in her loss, and his hope that she would derive benefit from her journey abroad, in the society of friends, the value of whose kindness he himself had such good cause to know; and just hinting at the pleasure with which he should look forward to seeing her on their return to Emlyn Priory, in the spring. She did not answer the letter, nor had the writer expected any reply; but

it is nevertheless certain that throughout her foreign tour, which was extensive and varied, she always retained a curious sensation, as if she were constantly travelling in one direction and towards one place, and that one precisely the pretty country residence in the neighbourhood of X——, alluded to, as above mentioned, in Frank Littleton's letter.

With Helen Montagu, meanwhile, the winter passed away, if somewhat sadly, by no means unprofitably. At first, indeed, it was a perpetual struggle and weariness to her to maintain the semblance of ordinary interest in her own and her father's usual pursuits; and she felt as if (under the temptation to alternate depression and irritability which arose out of her secret causes of unhappiness) it would be harder than ever for her to exercise that greater self-denial and more conciliatory behaviour towards her step-mother, to which one of the good resolutions discussed in her last talk with Florence pointed. But she struggled to do her best, and found, by degrees, that her own unhappiness was in reality an assistance to her. It was much easier to give up in trifles, now that a serious cause of anxiety absorbed her; and she soon learned that, unless it clashed with selfishness in herself, her step-mother's selfish and dictatorial way of indulging her own inclinations, let who might be thwarted by it, had not the power to chafe and gall her as formerly, though she could not be blind to its unamiability. And it was a pleasure to know that, whatever might be the unavoidable discomforts of her father's home, she was no longer increasing them by needless irritation of her step-mother's temper.

For her father's sake, too, she struggled hard against the temptation to feel life all a blank, which follows so inevitably on a first severe disappointment. She sincerely loved her father, and could not bear to think her trouble should be reflected on him by any want of the cheerful interest in his pursuits which he had always been used to find in her; especially as he still seemed to be by no means in his usual spirits—whether owing to annoyances in the way of business which he did not confide to her, or to some physical depression, she could not tell. And by degrees she earned somewhat of the comfort and satisfaction which always flow from a conscientious endeavour to persevere in the course dictated by duty; and found it easier to feel contented, if not happy, in the present, and to entertain something of hope for the future.

For there was ample leisure, when all other duties were dis-

charged, to brood upon, and think over in every possible light, the unaccountable change which, from the moment of Sir William's unlucky jest, had come over Bernard Huntley. But Helen could arrive at no plausible conjecture as to the cause of that change. His agitation on the occasion of her adventure on the hill, excluded the humiliating idea she might otherwise have entertained, that he, at least, was guiltless of any dreams of love, and had therefore adopted his abrupt change of manner to discourage, either in her or others, expectations which he was not prepared to justify. Nor could she believe that her hasty answer to Sir William—made, as it was, in the confusion of the moment—could have been taken by him as personal, or at least decisive, in regard to any feelings he might entertain towards her. Besides, reserved as she might generally be in the expression of her feelings, and far as he might therefore be from guessing how warmly she returned his attachment, it was impossible he could doubt the friendly regard, and the high respect for his opinions and abilities, to which the whole tone of her intercourse with him testified. His abrupt rejection of her proffered thanks, too, sounded rather as if he were afraid to receive, than doubtful of the sincerity which prompted them.

He was, moreover, incapable of the false pride which might have deterred some men from seeking the hand of an acknowledged heiress. His estimate of the real treasures of life, of the dignity of true affection, was far too exalted for him to have acted, even for a moment, as if her money were worth more than herself. Nor would she admit any supposition derogatory to her high estimate of his character. Whatever had influenced him, she was certain it was nothing he need be ashamed of; and was fain to fall back on conjectures of some misunderstanding, though of what nature she could not imagine. Some, however, there must have been; and with the natural tendency of youth's unbroken spirits, and especially of energetic characters, she, ere long, began to dwell on the hope that the future would clear up the mystery, and that all would come right at last. As Florence's cousin, she must surely be brought in contact with him again, before so very long,—though even a few months seemed long indeed to look forward to, in her present suspense and uncertainty,—and then the misunderstanding, whatever it might have been, could scarcely outlast many meetings!

With this gleam of hope to dwell on, the winter and early

spring passed away less heavily for Helen than she could, at the outset, have believed possible ; and she daily realized the new value imparted to life, the wider significance infused into all its duties and aspirations, by the views she had imbibed from Florence and Mr. Huntley, which became clearer and more satisfactory the longer she dwelt on them, and the more she applied herself to work them out, both intellectually and practically.

Mrs. Montagu, meantime, herself unchanged, was by no means conscious of any change in Helen, especially as the latter remained immovable on the one point she had so much at heart, her project, namely, for her nephew. Indeed, things seemed more unpromising than ever ; for though, on Helen's first return home, Captain Marston redoubled his former attentions, yet, when he found them treated with the same slighting indifference,—Helen persisting in ignoring all his advances, and often his very presence at her side,—a change came over his manner towards her. He remained, indeed, little less assiduous than before in his visits to his aunt's house ; but there was a degree of bitterness in his tone, and sometimes even in his words, which indicated, to her experienced eye, that he was well-nigh weary of his ladye-love's disdain. Moreover, if he hoped thereby to pique her vanity, his change of tactics availed him nothing : for Helen never seemed conscious of any alteration.

But, to do him justice, he had no such intention ; and had it occurred to Helen to look at her relations with Captain Marston from the new point of view in which she was learning to regard things in general, she might, perhaps, have perceived a field for self-improvement in her studied and almost scornful indifference to him. Pride and preconceived prejudice might have a share in dictating it, no less than the conscientious principle she believed herself to be acting on ; that, namely, of not encouraging attentions from a man she could never think of marrying. Self-improvement, however, especially at first, often proceeds piecemeal ; and this was a branch of her conduct she had not yet dreamed of scrutinizing.

It need scarcely be said, that one of her greatest pleasures consisted in corresponding with Florence ; and it was pleasant, in her occasional meetings with Mr. Littleton, to be able to give him more minute information as to the proceedings of the travellers, than Sir William's brief, business-like letters could be expected to afford ; and Frank well understood, and gratefully appreciated, the sympathy in his feelings, which dictated her

free communications on the subject. He did not, however, requite it in kind, as Sir William would probably have done; for, possessing more delicacy of tact than his equally kind-hearted friend, he felt unwilling even to name Mr. Huntley to Helen, while doubtful, from observations he too had made, whether his doing so might not give more pain than pleasure. It was, therefore, merely by a chance remark that she became aware of the correspondence he maintained with Mr. Huntley; for the friendship, which Mr. Carysfort had once declared they must have struck up for the sake of contrast, had not dropped; and Helen was glad to think of it for Bernard's sake. Besides, it might prove another link between herself and him, if—as she more than hoped—Frank and Florence were eventually to blend their fates and interests together.

About the beginning of April, having remained in London only long enough to see Cissy and her husband established in the pretty Belgravian residence which was in future to be their home, the Emlyns and Florence returned to the Priory; Florence with restored health and spirits, looking sweeter and lovelier than ever in the eyes of one, who was not long, it need scarcely be said, in welcoming the party on their arrival.

“Well, Frank, here we are again!” said Sir William, greeting him, if possible, more cordially than ever. “We saw your friend Sir Charles the other day; and he says neither he nor you need be ashamed of your patient now, we have taken such care of her abroad.”

“*I* never was ashamed of my patient,” replied Frank, shaking hands with Florence with the old sunshiny smile; “but I shall be delighted to take a long farewell of you in that capacity, Miss Forrester.” Neither his looks nor his tone conveyed the idea of his feeling inclined to take a long farewell of her in any other capacity.

The days of opening spring were now spring indeed to Florence.

It warmed Helen's heart each time they met—which was not seldom, though Helen self-denyingly resisted all persuasions to pay another visit to Emlyn Priory at present, feeling herself wanted at home—to watch the dawning tinge of colour on Florence's usually pale cheek, telling of a warmer and richer spring of life within, than had ever before been her portion. And Florence, though she would sometimes say how much she had lost by never passing the spring-time in the country before, well knew that the real source of her happiness lay far

deeper. The love, the confidence, which she had once thought it impossible she should ever feel strongly enough towards any man, to enable her to contemplate, with calmness and satisfaction, the knitting of the sacred tie which she had seen Cissy contract so lightly and thoughtlessly, were deepening and strengthening within her day by day. Day by day in unfettered intercourse with Frank Littleton, she grew more susceptible to the influence of his tenderness and refinement of feeling, his steadfast earnestness of purpose and principle, which rendered him as deserving of admiration and respect, as did his winning manners, and sunny, loving disposition, of the liking and affection of all who knew him.

Nor was the influence of his love for herself—now no longer disguised—unfelt or unacknowledged. If his presence was hailed as a sort of moral sunshine by all, what must it not be to her, on whom he had centred the deepest and holiest affections of his nature? And often, after they had parted of an evening, she would sit dreamily by the window, where she and Helen had been wont to talk of life's trials and realities, feeling as if this deep, new happiness could not possibly be true and real, and almost dreading anything that might break in, even to heighten it, upon the bliss of this sweet, dreamy spring-time of love, in which it would have seemed bliss enough to live on for ever.

It was additional happiness, meantime, to find, from her undiminishing kindness and affection, that Louisa was prepared to acquiesce in that to which she could not be blind. For whatever she might feel, Lady Emlyn was much too kind-hearted to betray a shade of regret which might have given pain to her dear Florence. Secretly she could not help grieving over Horace's prolonged absence. If he had only joined them in Paris, instead of arriving there from New York just after their departure for London, or had followed them at once to England, instead of lingering on, talking of coming, she fancied that gratitude for his attachment might still have secured to him the warm response of feeling which Florence, in the elasticity of renewed health and spirits, was yielding so unresistingly to a rival he little dreamed of. For dearly as she loved Florence, Louisa did not quite appreciate the depth and steadiness of feelings, somewhat slow, perhaps, to awaken, which her gentle yielding disposition and manners veiled; and little used to analyse even her own feelings, she had not realized the truth, that love, such as her own for her husband,

or such as she now saw awakening in Florence for Frank Littleton, must spring from a deeper source than mere gratitude. But days and weeks passed on, and Mr. Carysfort had still not made his appearance.

At length one evening in the end of May, when Sir William and Lady Emlyn and Florence, taking their usual evening stroll in the grounds, to enjoy the sweet spring twilight out of doors, had been joined, as usual, by Frank Littleton, the latter suddenly proposed, that as it was long since Lady Emlyn had honoured him with a visit, they should come and see how pretty his garden looked in its spring dress, try whether a bachelor could give ladies tea fit to drink, and walk home by moonlight.

Nobody seeming inclined to dissent, Sir William quickly ruled acceptance of the invitation, observing that it was quite necessary he should go and see in what repair Frank kept his premises, and whether he had been making any improvements, upon which one might raise the rent.

"Two new flower-beds, a path through the shrubberies, and a new summer-house besides! Quite time you should come and look after me!" returned Frank, gaily; and proceeded to marshal them along the little path through wood and lawn, which he so often traversed, to the pretty little house and garden, situated on the edge of the Priory Park, which Sir William had provided as a residence for his friend, when the latter first came to the neighbourhood. It was in order not to have too far to send for his doctor when he chose to be ill, that he located him so near at hand, Sir William averred; but really, in order that Frank might feel as much as possible that his true home was by his friend's hearth.

"Much too pretty for a bachelor," Sir William now maliciously declared both house and garden to be; adding, that he had a great idea of turning Frank out to make room for worthier occupants.

"Very good, Sir William," returned Frank. "But I shall make a point of going at least ten miles off; and as your health is so very bad, you had better think twice about it."

"And he has actually got vases of flowers in his drawing-room!" exclaimed Sir William, as they entered, by the window, a room which, in all its simple arrangements, betrayed the taste and refinement of its owner. "Pretty habits for a bachelor, Louisa. I believe it to be all a plot to entrap us, and he has made the nosegays on purpose."

"Not a bit of it!" said Frank. "I could not live without flowers for company; I always have them when I can persuade any to blow. But now, Sir William, as my house is my castle till I am turned out, and I did not invite you in yet, you must all go round the garden, and inspect my summer-house, while I see if I can manage anything like tea for Lady Emlyn and Miss Forrester."

It was not long before he joined them, and escorted them back to the house, where much pleasantry ensued, on the neatness, and, as Sir William declared, the unwarrantable luxuriousness of Frank's bachelor arrangements; and Lady Emlyn assured him she should have invited herself to tea long ago, had she thought he could do the honours so well. She should certainly set Sir William to make tea at home, to see how he could manage it. But Sir William said he had had enough of that in his bachelor days in London lodgings. Then he and Frank recurred to old days, and their first acquaintance, when Sir William was a poor merchant's clerk, and Frank was an earl's son, and a fashionable young man in aristocratic circles.

"Well, Frank," said Sir William after awhile, "it is something, for *both* of us, to be able to say, that we would not exchange these times for those, even for the sake of being eight or ten years younger."

"Most certainly not," said Frank. "I, at least, am ready to concur in the opinion of a great divine, that the best time is *now*, the best place is *here*;" he added, with something very like a blush on his handsome, delicate features.

"Oh!" said Sir William, with mischievous emphasis, as he rose from the table. "I dare say the divine was quite right; I wonder if he spoke prophetically?"

"Truth is always prophetic, because it never grows old," rejoined Frank; "but, Sir William, how about the dilapidations?" And Florence inwardly thanked him for the delicacy which sought to spare her even the slight confusion of Sir William's kind raillery.

"I have been keeping my eyes about me," returned Sir William, looking round with a business-like air; "and seeing things, on the whole, not in such execrable order, I have been speculating on certain improvements. Come here, Frank. What should you say to a little conservatory out here? Just the thing for a bachelor!"

Frank rose to join his friend, and drew him outside the window, but soon stepped in again to tell Lady Emlyn she was

very much wanted, as Sir William had got all sorts of wild ideas into his head. He turned to apologise to Florence for the rudeness of leaving her alone; but she, dreading nothing so much as the possibility of a *tête-à-tête* with him,—just there and then, at least,—hastily begged that he would not think of her for a moment.

“Well,” said Frank, pausing to look back at her with his joyous, playful smile, “for one moment, I will try!”

How different were the musings in which Florence, left alone, sat there indulging, quite unconscious how time might be passing, from those with which Frank’s head and heart had been busy, when he sat, almost in the same spot, struggling to resign her, if such should indeed be God’s will.

She was summoned, in due time, to the garden, to observe the effect of the rising moon through the glades of the park; and Sir William, suddenly discovering how late it was, walked off homewards with his wife, at a rapid pace, leaving the others to follow as they pleased.

Frank immediately offered his arm to Florence, and, somewhat more slowly, they followed the others; but before they quite reached the garden-gate, he stopped, and asked if she would not gratify him by picking a flower in his garden.

“Which shall it be?” said Florence, without a thought of opposition.

“There, that one, any one,” said Frank; “and one for me, too?” Which being done, he thanked her by a smile only, and they pursued their way in silence.

They had proceeded some little way into the park, and were threading a glade in the wood that bordered it, chequered with alternate moonlight and shadow, when Mr. Littleton suddenly dropped Florence’s arm, and taking a quick step in advance, so as fully to face her, said, with a smile which, on Florence at least, fell warmer and brighter in its loving, human radiance, than sunlight or moonlight of earth could ever fall,—“Will you tell me what you think of my little nest, Miss Forrester? Do you think one might live happy in such a home?”

“I dare say one might,” returned Florence in a low voice, and unable to refuse an answering smile to the infection of his, though she trembled so that the moonlight seemed to quiver as it rested on her.

“Will you try?”

The answer was longer in coming this time, and then was so low as to be scarcely audible; but no doubt it was satisfactory,

for Florence found her hands suddenly seized in both of Frank's; and the strangest possible sensation came over her of having given herself away, and of possessing no further right of dissent, let what would happen.

But whatever might have been his first impulse, when Frank felt how excessively the imprisoned hands trembled, he only kissed them very gently and tenderly, and then drawing one to its former resting place on his arm, allowed her, nothing loth, to resume the walk which had been thus briefly interrupted, merely observing that he should have a great many things to say to her the next day.

He probably managed to say some of them on the way home, for they did not arrive for a good half-hour after the Emlyns; and Florence had recovered from her trembling fit, at least for the time.

"Lost your way in the woods, of course," exclaimed Sir William as they entered. "Moonlight is very deceptive, to be sure!"

"On the contrary, I flatter myself that we found it!" said Frank, gleefully. "But everybody cannot go ahead at your pace, Sir William."

"Good, good," replied his friend; "whatever pace you find answer best! Sit down; Louisa has been providing more tea; and I am sure Miss Forrester must want some, for she seems quite tired—of you, I mean, Frank!"

Florence gladly accepted the tea, and shrank into the smallest possible space on the sofa beside Lady Emlyn, feeling deeply indebted to Frank for talking to everybody just as usual. Only, in taking leave, he whispered to her, that he should go on his rounds as early as possible next morning, and be with her between eleven and twelve—if he might?—and receiving a silent assent, added "Good-night," and was gone.

"Well, Frank?" said Sir William, following him into the hall for that especial purpose.

"Begin the improvements to-morrow," said Frank, laughing, and extending his hand for the hearty shake of congratulation he immediately received.

"To-morrow at day-break!" returned Sir William; and Frank observing that he had better walk back part of the way with him, and have a talk, especially as Florence—he called her by her name with a touch of such proud happiness as was pleasant to hear—would certainly want Lady Emlyn to herself for a little, the two friends sauntered away again across the park.

"Then I am to wish you joy to-night, darling?" said Lady Emlyn when they were left alone, all her womanly instincts so roused to sympathise in the rich new happiness which even Florence's shyness could not entirely veil in her looks and her voice, that she felt quite glad, for the moment, Horace was away, to relieve her from the necessity of feeling sorry for him.

"Dear Louisa, I did not think it possible to be so happy," said Florence blushing, but looking up brightly in her friend's face without rising from her seat. "But are you sure," she added, with a slight change of countenance, "are you sure that you are pleased, dear Louisa?"

"Naughty girl, for asking me such a question! You did not think I could help being pleased that you are happy, did you?" returned Louisa, seating herself beside her with a most convincingly loving embrace; and thus relieved from her last fear, Florence could unreservedly share her new joy with her kind friend.

They were still sitting side by side, deep in pleasant talk, when Sir William returned.

"I have the pleasure, Miss Forrester," he began, with a good-humoured smile; and Florence started to her feet, prepared to escape from the first sound of congratulations, but Sir William was not to be escaped so easily.

"No, Miss Forrester," said he, still smiling, and backing before her to the door, barring her way; "no, Miss Forrester; I have got something to say, and I am going to say it. I have known Frank Littleton these many years," he continued, closing the door without taking his eyes off her, and standing right before it while he spoke, "and I have reason to know him well; and there is no man on earth for whom I have so warm a regard, such deep respect and admiration. I am not sure that I think any woman in the world quite good enough for him; but since he is going to be married—as I understand—now do you think, Miss Forrester, that I am *not* going to wish his wife—that-is-to-be joy? Very likely!"

And walking close up to her, and extending his hands, he waited for a moment with an air of comical, half-indignant determination, till Florence, thoroughly won by his cordial tone and warm appreciation of Frank, voluntarily placed both her hands in his, trying not to blush as she answered, that she quite agreed with him as to Frank's deserts; whereupon, wishing her all possible happiness, and kissing her with a cordiality

it was impossible to shrink from, he released his prisoner, and opened the door for her escape. She made it quickly; not, however, without another voluntary shake of the hand, and a "Thank you, Sir William!" which said much more than the mere words implied.

If men be indeed attended by an evil genius on the one hand, and a guardian angel on the other, prompting and influencing their thoughts and actions, it must surely have been compliance with the promptings of the former which brought Mr. Carysfort to Emlyn Priory that night!

CHAPTER XI.

MR. CARYSFORT'S RIDE.

Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!

Excursion.

THAT very night! And so late, too—having spent some hours at a friend's house half-way from London—that all the family had retired before he arrived; and not being very early in his morning movements, he consequently joined the assembled party at the breakfast-table, without Louisa's having had an opportunity of enlightening him as to what had occurred. Florence's natural nervousness at this unforeseen appearance of her former suitor, was not diminished by his manner towards herself, which said, as plainly as manner could, that he had returned unchanged in his determination to persevere in making himself agreeable.

For though he had at first been deeply mortified by the ill-success of his second attempt, he had soon found consolation in Louisa's suggestion, that he had been over-precipitate in making it; and had only been lingering on his return, divided between eagerness to rejoin Florence, and fear of again periling the success he still reckoned on, by too hasty a renewal of his suit. Louisa saw enough at a glance to destroy her faint hope that his lengthened absence might possibly arise from a discovery of some new object of preference; and earnestly did

she wish that he had either come some weeks sooner, or kept away just then !

Florence made her escape as soon as possible after breakfast ; and Sir William sympathising in the embarrassment, and dread of inevitable explanations, which he read in his wife's face, kept up a vigorous conversation on the subject of Mr. Carysfort's American tour, questioning him as to the different parts he had visited, and as to his opinion on many more points than Horace had taken the trouble to form one upon. But a pause must come, and Horace was not slow in availing himself of it, to express to Louisa his delight at seeing Miss Forrester look so well ; better, he thought, than he had ever seen her.

Then, in pity to his wife's imploring glances, Sir William came to her assistance.

" Ah ! yes, Miss Forrester is looking remarkably well," he said ; " but there may be a reason for that this morning." Louisa felt positively angry with Horace for the faint smile which seemed to imply that he took the remark as a compliment to himself ; but, without looking at him, Sir William went on, " You have come just in time to hear of our prospects of another wedding."

" Indeed !" said Mr. Carysfort. " Has Miss Montagu taken compassion on Captain Marston, or has Littleton been caught in the daisy-chains ! I would have wished him better luck !"

" I do not know that any man need have better luck than that of winning such a wife as Miss Montagu," returned Sir William, drily, by no means pleased by the allusion to his favourite Helen ; " but I am not aware that she has taken compassion on any one yet. Littleton is going to be married, however,—to Miss Forrester."

So saying, Sir William gathered up his papers, and left the room. He had spared his wife the unwelcome announcement, but Horace's surprise or disappointment she must make the best of.

" Louisa !" exclaimed Mr. Carysfort, in a tone of mingled amazement and incredulity, rising to his full height in a way he seldom took the trouble of doing, " what does Emlyn mean ? or is it one of his jokes ?"

" No, it is no joke," said Louisa, in a tone of distress ; " it was only settled last night. Why did you stay away so long—though I am not sure you were not better away—I am so sorry—I mean, on your account."

There was an indescribable confusion of feelings painted in Mr. Carysfort's face, as he looked at her for a moment without speaking or moving a muscle, and a darker look gathered there than she could have believed him capable of, nonchalant and indifferent as he generally was in everything, even in the selfishness for which she always found such kind excuses. There was so much good in Horace at bottom! And perhaps she was not wrong; but when good and evil are too closely blended in a character, by the bad habits which pervert naturally good dispositions, the results are sometimes more disastrous, for a time, than where there is less latent good to redeem the acquired evil. Horace's best and worst feelings—his capacity of appreciating what was pure and admirable in others, and the self-love which was set upon the carrying of his point—were alike enlisted in the success of his suit to Florence; and this sudden blow to all his hopes and schemes aroused such a storm within, as only its very intensity restrained from outward expression.

"I must see Miss Forrester!" he said, in a tone of smothered vehemence, and turned to leave the room.

"Oh no, Horace! why should you? Not just now, at least; she is expecting"—

"Mr. Littleton, no doubt!" he rejoined, haughtily. "I will see her, Louisa."

He left her, half in consternation, and half in grief; but when a man *will* have his way, few women have the moral courage to oppose him, and Louisa was not one of them. She feared it would distress Florence; but still Horace was too much of a gentleman to say anything that could really wound her; he could only wish to make sure of her decision from her own lips. And then she was so grieved for him; she had not thought he would be so very bitterly disappointed!

Mr. Carysfort walked straight upstairs to the boudoir, where he rightly divined that he should find Florence, who started up, as the door opened, with a smile and blush which clearly betrayed whom she was expecting to see, and with a proportionate change to surprise and confusion, as Horace, closing the door behind him, walked resolutely up to the table behind which she was standing, without any attempt at apology for his intrusion.

"I have to congratulate you, I understand, Miss Forrester," he said, in a tone of haughty self-possession, which however could not disguise the effort it cost him.

"Yes," said Florence, very quietly, even her gentle nature somewhat stirred to womanly indignation at the tone and bearing of her questioner.

"And I may not even flatter myself"—the quiver of suppressed emotion in his voice went far to appease her momentary feeling of anger—"that my return some few months earlier might in any way have influenced your decision?"

"No!" said Florence, so low that it was scarcely more audible than her "Yes" of the previous evening, and scarcely daring to lift her eyes from the table, lest her self-command should forsake her.

"Then I have only to wish you all possible happiness!" he rejoined, in a tone of suppressed bitterness, which gave his words all the import of a sneer; and, with a formal bow, he turned on his heel and left the room. He strode downstairs, snatched up his hat in the hall, with a fierceness of manner which it would have terrified Louisa to witness; then, seeing Sir William's horses at the door, mounted one without a word, signed to the groom not to follow him, and rode off at full speed, without caring in what direction.

Florence, left alone, had hard work to restrain her tears; but Frank was coming, and these were early days to be confiding her troubles—at least, this trouble—to him; so put aside it must be, that he might see no traces of it on his arrival; and she succeeded so well, that when Louisa looked in, uneasily, some few minutes later, her answering look and smile sent her friend away quite relieved, under the impression that Horace had relented in his purpose.

"Louisa, my dear!" cried her husband, as she went down, and on her joining him, went on in a low tone of more than surprise,—“Philip tells me that Carysfort rode off just now on my horse, which was waiting for me to ride into X——, and that without a word of explanation. Philip thought, that as his own horses have not come yet, mine might have been ordered for him; but how he could think so, when he knows I never let any one ride Snowball!” added Sir William, quite in a fidget; for like most good riders, he was very chary of his own horse.

"How very strange of Horace!" said Louisa, uneasily. "He could not have been thinking—he left me quite in a—I mean he is very"—

"Oh! he is in a great way, is he? Serve him right for being so conceited!" returned Sir William; but added, good-

naturedly, perhaps in consideration of Louisa's feelings: "Still I am very sorry for him. It must be uncomfortable enough to find himself cut out in this way; but why need he have taken my horse to ride off this disappointment? There are plenty of others in the stable!"

"Yes, I am very sorry," said Lady Emlyn; "but he was—sadly put out."

"Well, well, never mind; I will take another horse," said Sir William. "I only hope he is not off on any fool's errand to call Frank out; for, on my honour, I won't stand it! Frank shall not be meddled with; and I will bind them both over to keep the peace, if I hear a word—to be sure, I don't believe Frank would fight, for any man; that is one good thing."

"No, I do not think he would," said Louisa, much relieved by the idea, for her husband's suggestion had not a little startled her; and, on his leaving her, she composed herself to her morning's avocations, trusting that Horace would return from his ride in a more manageable mood.

Frank Littleton, after getting through his most pressing visits, and postponing the rest till the afternoon, started early to cross the park, in anticipation of a spell of such pleasant, confidential communion as becomes the privilege of betrothed lovers; and had not got many steps from his own gate, when he saw, as he supposed, Sir William on his favourite white horse, reined up by a knoll a little aside from the path, and turned off through the underwood to join him. But pre-occupied with pleasant thoughts, he did not look up, or narrowly observe the rider, till, laying his hand on the bridle, and exclaiming gaily, "Come to look after the improvements? Hardly by daybreak though!" he looked smiling up into Mr. Carysfort's face.

"Mr. Carysfort!" he exclaimed, hardly noticing at first the frown which gathered almost to fury on Horace's brow at Frank's unlucky and suggestive word "improvements?" "I had not heard of your arrival; I took you for Sir William!"

Few things more exasperating could, it is true, have been encountered by Mr. Carysfort—who, having in his headlong ride come suddenly in view of Mr. Littleton's house, had checked his horse to gaze with bitter feelings on what would henceforward be Florence's home—than this sudden apparition of his rival, radiant with exultation in his new happiness. Frank's very unconsciousness of the feelings his presence excited seemed a fresh insult; and maddened beyond all re-

collection of gentlemanly self-restraint, he raised his whip with a fierce gesture and exclamation; but, as Frank instinctively drew back in amazement, he brought it down vehemently on his horse's shoulder, and dashed off at a gallop, almost brushing Frank as he passed.

Frank Littleton reddened for a moment to his very temples, but the next, the secret of such passionate indignation flashed upon him; and he, of all men, could afford to be generous. So he resumed his walk, in a frame of spirits sobered and really saddened by the knowledge thus forced on him, that his own joy must be productive of bitter disappointment to another, the friend of his friends, too, and one with whom he had always been on friendly terms. For Horace, like every one else, had been unable to resist the liking Frank universally inspired, and was sure, in calmer moments, to regret what had passed.

Sad thoughts, however, could not long absorb a lover hastening to visit his newly betrothed bride; and Frank's step and smile were lighter and brighter than ever as he entered—though not without awaiting her gentle “Come in,” in answer to his tap—the pretty boudoir where Florence awaited him.

They were still too happily engaged to notice sounds denoting some unusual stir both within and without the house, though a couple of hours had already elapsed, when the door was hastily opened, and Sir William appeared.

“Here, Littleton! I want you—quick!” And seizing him by the arm, as he started instantly to his feet, Sir William whispered something in his ear, which sent him out of the room and downstairs with more than professional speed, and was following almost as fast himself, when Florence sprang forward to detain him.

“Sir William—pray! What is the matter? Louisa?” she exclaimed, almost breathless with alarm.

“No, no, nothing is wrong with Louisa,” he replied, turning round. “Do not alarm yourself,” he added, kindly, then first remembering how startling his unceremonious summons of Frank must be; “Mr. Carysfort has met with an accident, that is all. Go back quietly, and don't come down just now, there's a good girl.” And Sir William was off and downstairs in a second.

Florence went back, as she was bid, to the boudoir, with a weight of terror and distress upon her, all the harder to bear for its following on so different, so happy a mood. She hardly

knew why an accident to Mr. Carysfort should so distress her : but Sir William himself looked much disturbed, even pale, and she had caught the expression of grave alarm on Frank's face, as he hurried off, without waiting for a word, or adieu to her. Something very serious must be the matter. Was Horace dead ? What sort of an accident had he met with ? Terrible surmises, dimly connected with the state of suppressed passion in which she had last seen him, flashed across her mind ; and though she dismissed them with a shudder, she was haunted by the undefined fear, that whatever had happened, it was somehow her fault. With the sensitive scrupulousness of her nature, she had deeply reproached herself for the too long encouragement, however passive, which she had given to his preference for her, and which might, in some degree, justify the sense of ill-usage he had so clearly betrayed that morning ; and she remembered the dark look in his face, from which she had inwardly recoiled.

Even were the accident entirely fortuitous, would it not be terrible to think of his having been killed, entertaining such feelings as that look and his tone had revealed ? And Louisa ? —But Louisa's grief at such a catastrophe she could not bear to think of, so tried to hope he was only hurt. She paced the little room in a state of almost intolerable suspense, listening to every sound below. There was an opening and shutting of doors, a shuffling of many feet in the hall. Once she heard Sir William's voice ordering some one to ride off to X——, for what, she could not catch ; and then Louisa's voice in tears, and Frank's assuring her—but there the sound was lost again. And so more than an hour passed by.

Mr. Carysfort was not dead, though when Sir William fetched Frank, he thought so. Sir William, having been detained a couple of hours by a person on business, had met, just as he got outside the park-gates, a party of labourers, headed by a respectable farmer of the neighbourhood, carrying home Mr. Carysfort, apparently lifeless, on a hastily constructed litter ; and all he had time to learn was, that an accident having happened to the gentleman riding Sir William's horse, and there being no surgeon nearer than Mr. Littleton, they had thought it best to bring him home to the Priory at once. Sir William rode hastily back to break the intelligence to his wife, and to order some room on the ground-floor made ready for Horace, in case he should prove to be still alive. In her distress and his confusion, they had forgotten

Frank's being in the house; and were sending messengers off right and left for him, till some one suggested that he had been seen to come in and not to go out again; when Sir William fetched him down just in time to see Horace carried in.

Mr. Littleton soon assured them that Horace was not dead, but only insensible, either from a concussion of the brain, or from loss of blood—which had been great, from cuts about the back of his head and neck; he having apparently been thrown on some sharp stones. There were also fractures and contusions of a serious nature, but no injury that seemed necessarily dangerous to life; and if there proved to be no concussion, the whole affair might turn out less alarming than it at first looked. But nothing could be done, beyond administering occasional stimulants, till the arrival of another surgeon with such appliances as the hospital at X—— could afford.

In the dreary pause which now ensued, while the three watched and waited,—Louisa hanging in tears over the death-like face resting on its blood-stained pillow, and refusing to leave the room lest Horace should die in her absence, notwithstanding Mr. Littleton's more hopeful assurances,—Sir William naturally betook himself to learn all that he could about the accident, which proved unsatisfactory enough.

The house of the farmer above alluded to, looked down into one of the deep, narrow lanes common in the neighbourhood, standing perhaps some twenty feet above it. The proper entrance to the house was from behind, but a narrow zigzag foot-path led up from the lane to a stile at the top of the steep, rocky bank, and formed a side-entrance to the farmhouse garden. Up this bank, and at this stile, Mr. Carysfort was seen riding, by a child, who ran in, frightened, and called her father, out just in time to see horse and rider go clear over the low boundary hedge, and roll over each other on to a heap of stones, prepared for mending the road below. The farmer naturally concluded that the horse had run away, and shied in leaping the stile, when the rest would follow as a matter of course; but though all were glad enough this should be taken for granted, it by no means explained matters to Mr. Carysfort's friends.

That any horse, at least his horse, should have run away up the bank instead of along the lane, was more than Sir William could believe; even setting aside the antecedents to this un-

fortunate ride. Mr. Carysfort's taking the horse was in itself extraordinary; nor could Frank Littleton now withhold the particulars of his meeting with Horace in the park; and forcibly and desperately must his horse have been urged, Sir William felt sure, to take that track up the bank, which he well knew. And then to go leaping into a farm-house garden! It would seem that Horace's passionate resentment must have transported him for the time, beyond all bounds of self-guidance, if not of sanity. It was well, perhaps, that nothing worse had happened.

It may be thought strange that a man of Horace Carysfort's habitually careless, indolent disposition, should thus be thrown off his balance by resentment and disappointed affection. But when passions merely slumber for lack of excitement, instead of being steadily held in subjection to principle, and when the moral rein over the whole character is slackened and enervated by a long course of self-indulgence and self-exaltation, there is no saying whither the moral tempest may hurry us, which, unforeseen and unguarded against, we have no power to control on its sudden outburst. That Horace committed no crime, as men of more violent passions might have done, was consistent with the tenor of his faults and follies; which, on the whole, were rather those of omission than commission—of carelessness as to doing good, than love of doing positive evil, to others. The fatal weakness of self-will had poisoned the springs of true manly strength within him, and this first severe shock to his self-esteem, as well as to his ardent though selfish passion for Florence, sufficed to work him to a pitch of uncontrollable excitement, the only redeeming feature of which lay in its being as nearly aimless and purposeless as the general course of his existence.

It seems humiliating, indeed, that human reason and powers of self-control should hang by so slender a thread; but if men will palter with their true human dignity, enslaving themselves to self-love, and frittering away life in frivolities unworthy of rational and immortal beings, neglecting the truth and the strength which alone can set them free, what wonder if their degradation *should* bear bitter and humiliating fruits?—still happy, as we must consider them, beyond their deserts, if the very bitterness of these supply a tonic for their spiritual healing, before “the night cometh, in which no man can work.”

But no such thoughts as these mingled in Louisa's affectionate sorrow over the companion of her girlhood, and adopted

brother of her maturer years. In her eyes, it was but the intensity of his love for Florence which had led to the catastrophe, for which she therefore only pitied him the more; and, reverting to her previous impressions, and forgetful of Frank's personal interest in the matter, could not refrain from expressing what she so strongly felt.

"O William, if he had only come to us directly he returned from America! A few weeks sooner, and all this might never have happened. And now, if he should—she would never forgive herself—poor Florence!"

The colour rose slowly in Frank's face, but he said nothing, nor did his eye lose the expression of sympathy with which he regarded Louisa's unfeigned distress.

"My dear Louisa," exclaimed Sir William. But it was impossible to expostulate with her just then; and he turned to Frank with a deprecatory look, which the latter perfectly understood, and answered by a quiet nod, which quite satisfied his friend. Moving a step nearer to the couch where Mr. Carysfort still lay without signs of consciousness, though he mechanically swallowed the stimulants administered, Frank stood watching him intently for a minute or two. Then he turned, and said to Sir William, "If you will not leave the room, I think I ought to go and speak to Miss Forrester for a moment. She must be uneasy."

"By all means," said Sir William, holding open the door for him; and slowly and gravely Frank took his way to the boudoir which he had entered a few hours before with such different feelings.

"Is he dead?" was all Florence could say, with white lips and involuntarily clasped hands; for Frank's grave face re-awakened her worst fears.

Frank hastened to reassure her. He was certainly seriously hurt, but not dangerously, he trusted, unless the brain should prove to have been injured in the fall.

"His fall!" said Florence, somewhat relieved; "pray, tell me what happened to him, and how?"

Frank considered for a moment; but if unbroken confidence were henceforward to subsist between them, why begin by concealing any portion of the truth? So he told her, in as few words, and as gently as possible, all that was known of the matter; and though he did not allude to the supposed cause of Horace's excitement, that needed no explanation to Florence's distressed perceptions.

"O Frank," she said, with lips whiter than ever, "how terrible!"

But it was towards him, not away from him, that she shrank, as, for the first time, unasked, she called him by his name; and his eye lighted with a glow of gratified feeling, as he put his arm round her in token of the mental support she seemed instinctively to seek from him. Perhaps, in spite of himself, Lady Emlyn's words had awakened a faint echo of doubt in his own heart, as to what might have been the result of Mr. Carysfort's earlier return; but, if so, the echo, now died away for ever.

"But oh, Frank," said Florence, unable to resist the impulse to confide to him what was to her the worst part of the matter, "do you know why—Mr. Carysfort was angry? He came up—before he went out"—The recollection of his fierce, dark look quite overcame her, and she burst into tears.

"Yes, I know," answered Frank, very gently, compassionately letting her cry in peace for a minute or two; "but, dear Florence, I do not think you ought, therefore, to feel as it this were in any way your fault. Mr. Carysfort had no prescriptive right to you, you know," he added, trying to extract a smile from her.

"No," said Florence, faintly; "but I have always felt I was so wrong last year, to—I think you know what I mean." She paused, blushing deeply.

"Yes," said Frank, "and no doubt it was a pity; but as you refused him afterwards—did you not?"

"But he would not believe me," said Florence; "he thought it was only from some idea of duty. And when I had been so weak in the beginning, he might naturally think I should be weak in the end, too."

"Well," said Frank, "I would not say or think anything unkind of him now for the world; but I cannot feel that this could have happened, had he been used to take things in a right spirit. However, dear Florence, even if you feel you have had some share in this misfortune, you must remember that consequences are not in our hands, but are overruled for good; and, having regretted and done your best to repair your error, you must trust for the rest. *We* do not believe in arbitrary punishments, even for errors we *have* committed."

It was so strange, but so pleasant, to hear Frank counselling and reminding her of what was right, instead of merely soothing her distress, as most lovers would have done, that

Florence looked up greatly comforted. This, surely, was the partner she had dreamed of—better and purer and more trustful than herself. And when Frank left her, after a few more words of tenderness and sympathy, promising to bring or send her further intelligence as soon as possible, her heart was much lightened, though still sad; and she thought more of Frank than of Mr. Carysfort, during her next spell of solitude.

On the arrival of the surgeon from X——, Sir William presently brought up Lady Emlyn to bear Florence company, with earnest entreaties to the latter not to let Louisa go on croaking. Horace was better already, had opened his eyes, and spoken; so there could have been but a very slight concussion of the brain, *if any*; and as the fractures were now going to be set and it would be long before Louisa could be allowed to return to him, Sir William begged them both to go into the garden, and try and look a little less like ghosts. If they did not, he declared he would go directly and put on mourning for his horse, which had had to be shot, all because Horace chose to ride up a sheep-track; and he was not sure that would not prove the worst part of the business! They knew, indeed, that he only talked in this strain to cheer them, and make them think more lightly of the matter; but it had its effect all the same; and they went out together to recover something more of composure, and to try and hope for the best.

But neither Sir William nor Louisa told Florence what Horace had said when he opened his eyes, looking full up at Frank, who was bending over him.

"Littleton!" he said with a painful contraction of the brow, "what lid I do to you?"

"Tome! Nothing; nonsense!" said Frank, in a cheerful voice. "You have been tumbling off your horse, and frightening Lady Emlyn, that is all! but we shall do now."

"I'm glad of that!" muttered Horace, his brow relaxing; and, his eyes closing again, he swallowed the draught Frank offered him, as mechanically as before.

But this was a good sign, showing his recollection, though slightly confused, of his meeting with Frank, with sufficiently awakened consciousness to regret whatever might have been his feeling towards him. He had, in fact, ridden off towards X—— with some vague idea of fetching Captain Marston, whom he knew slightly, to call out Frank; but in the despe-

rate wrath which might well, in his case, be called short madness, he missed the road, and found himself riding along the deep, narrow lane already described. A feeling of suffocation in its damp, confined atmosphere, impelled him to urge his horse up a track which he caught sight of on the bank, and he thought he remembered its rearing at something, as he afterwards told them; but that was all he did remember, except a shriek, probably that of the child; and he awoke with an impression—to which he never confessed—that it was Florence who shrieked, and that he must have killed Frank Littleton.

The insensibility into which he had relapsed was not lasting; and long before the weary business of moving him, setting fractures, and dressing wounds, was completed, he was quite himself again, and aware of what was going on; as appeared from occasional muttered, impatient exclamations, as to what they could be bothering about so long—a relief to his feelings, under the pain he must be suffering, which nobody grudged him. But he kept his eyes closed, and asked no specific questions. His predominant feeling was that he had made an egregious fool of himself, though he did not quite know how, and was far from inclined for any elucidation.

He was so much exhausted that he fainted again before they had done; but the surgeon from X—— agreed with Mr. Littleton, that the great loss of blood sustained would probably be of material benefit, in keeping down the fever which must be expected with such fractures and injuries as he had received; though none of these appeared necessarily dangerous, if fever could be kept under.

Sir William's report to the ladies was therefore on the whole favourable; and the surgeon from X—— being gone, after appointing the hour for the next visit and consultation, the four friends were left to themselves to talk over all minute particulars of the accident—which talking-over always seems a great consolation in such circumstances—and to make all those minor, indispensable arrangements for attendance, etc., in the sick-room, which when instituted, as now, with forethought and precision, tell plainly of the lengthened need of them expected, or at least hoped for, as the most favourable of prospective contingencies.

CHAPTER XII.

CONVALESCENCE.

Yet his moods of pain
Were keen as those endured by better men ;
Nay, keener, as his fortitude was less.

Excursion.

Two days passed over, and no cause for increased anxiety supervened.

A degree of fever had indeed set in, but not enough to be alarming, though it involved an amount of delirium most distressing to Lady Emlyn's tender heart. Possessed, apparently, with the same delusion as before, in regard to Frank Littleton, Mr. Carysfort, in his wanderings, was constantly addressing Florence, entreating her to forgive him, and assuring her he had not meant to hurt him ; all of which impressed Louisa more and more with the intensity of his attachment, and with the fear that its disappointment would prove a life-long grief.

Her husband vainly argued that it must be rather anger than love which could have so exasperated him ; and that when once he was well again, he would soon find some one else who would suit him quite as well as Florence : few men were inconsolable in such matters ; least of all a man like Horace. But Louisa was one of those women, who feel too acutely to listen to any reasoning which runs counter to their excited feelings : though no one would be more candid in owning how unreasonable she had been, when the temporary excitement should have passed away. So her husband was fain to wait till time could convince her ; doing his best, meanwhile, to guard against her hurting the feelings of his friend, by excess of her compassion for Horace.

But of this there was no fear. Frank Littleton was one of those who, when they love and appreciate the main features of a character, cannot quarrel with, and carp at, its minor defects, even when these jar upon themselves ; and he knew enough of Lady Emlyn's kind-heartedness and feeling nature, to be sure that had his and Horace's position been reversed, she would have bestowed, if not quite as much sympathy and tender care upon him, yet more than enough to satisfy any reasonable man. And being quite sure she now intended no

unkindness to him, he let pass whatever might appear as such, as if it had no existence.

Nor could Louisa herself be gentler or more tenderly considerate towards her sick friend than was Frank Littleton. It has been said, that the practice of the medical profession must tend to make men callous to the suffering which is constantly before their eyes; a theory which would go to prove that benevolent occupations make men hard-hearted, and which forms a fit pendant to the proposition, that the profession which binds men to commit bloodshed and murder, and to destroy the dwellings and the very existence of defenceless families, when called on to do so by their commanders, tends to render them more tender-hearted and more noble-minded. Were this the case, we must recommend habits of drunkenness as the best means of promoting temperance; and a constant indulgence of every selfish inclination, as the true mode of fostering unselfishness. Happily for humanity, nothing can be more delusive than either of these ideas.

That a hard and unfeeling man may become still more so, notwithstanding the pursuit of a calling especially calculated to awaken commiseration for the woes of fallen humanity, because it involves the privilege of affording them relief; or that a man may become better, and even more tender-hearted, amid the deeds and scenes of horror which attend upon war, is no doubt true; and results from that law of Divine permission which enables the human will to bend and dispose to its own aims and purposes, things in themselves incongruous, or even antagonistic. Just so does the bodily organism assimilate to its own living uses, dead substances which are in themselves dust, and, if left to themselves, must shortly become corruption.

But as there is no good which may not be turned to evil, so is there no mercy of God's Providence which may not be abused; and because He, in the exercise of Love's Omnipotence, deigns ever and anon to bring good out of evil, therefore men, in their ingenious perversity, bow down and worship the evil, ascribing to it that good which was worked, through it indeed, but in despite of itself. In the same way, when good is turned to evil by man's misuse of it, it is too often not the man, nor yet the misuse, they blame; but they lay the fault on the abused blessing, and thus indeed convert it into a curse.

But Frank Littleton had been so far from abusing the privileges of his calling, that few women could have been so

tender of pain, mental or physical, in a sick-room, or out of it, as he; and Lady Emlyn, in after years, often recalled, with affectionate gratitude not unmingled with some self-reproach, his unwearying patience and kindness to herself, as well as to Mr. Carysfort, during this trying time of the illness of the latter.

A happy lover, newly accepted, he was called on to give up almost every moment he could spare from other professional duties, to attendance, night and day, in conjunction with Lady Emlyn,—who could not bear to leave Horace unless Frank were with him,—upon a rival who had long stood in his way, and whose irrational indulgence of passion had brought, for the time at least, so heavy a cloud upon the joy of her, whose happiness was dearer to him than his own. Yet no one would ever have guessed, from his manner or bearing, that he was not attending on a friend as dear to him as to Louisa herself; nor did he hesitate to sacrifice even more than his own feelings, where he thought it could possibly be of use.

It was on the third evening, that Horace's delirious talk about Florence inspired Lady Emlyn with the idea that it might possibly do him good to see Florence, and be assured by her of her entire forgiveness for whatever offences, either real or imaginary, appeared to weigh so heavily on his mind. Sir William strongly combated the suggestion, saying that he would not know her,—besides it might distress Florence, and it was not right to consider Horace only,—his real objection, however, being, that he thought it could not be pleasant to Frank. But the latter at once said, that it might be worth while trying, and went himself to propose it to Florence; Louisa calling after him repentingly, "Not, oh! not if it distresses dear Florence!" and Sir William muttering that Frank was certainly the best of fellows.

"Oh, Frank, I cannot! indeed I cannot!" exclaimed Florence, shrinking and trembling, when he had explained the object of his mission.

"Dearest Florence, you may believe that I would not wantonly cause you a moment's pain," he replied, with a look of such earnest tenderness as it was impossible to doubt; "but I really think you ought to." There was a faint emphasis on the last words, which conveyed full confidence that the argument would be irresistible.

"Do you?" said she, with a trusting, inquiring look, pleasant to see; for these last few days of trouble had linked them

more closely than weeks of uninterrupted, happy intercourse might have done.

"I do, indeed," said Frank. "It might possibly calm this excitement, which would be of great use; and besides, if it only satisfied Lady Emlyn that everything possible had been done"——

"Oh, how selfish of me not to think of that before! Pray do not think me very selfish. I will go directly!" said Florence, earnestly.

"I knew you would, because you are not 'very selfish,'" said Frank, smiling; and listening to his explanations and advice as to what it would be best to say should Horace recognise her, Florence nerved herself to an effort as severe as any which could have been required of her.

But, so far as Mr. Carysfort was concerned, the experiment proved fruitless. He did not recognise Florence in the least, or heed the mention of her name by Lady Emlyn; still talking on as incoherently and much to the same purport as before. But Louisa's thanks and praises made Florence rejoice to have been able to do something to gratify her friend, towards whom, as towards Horace, she could not help feeling a sense of secret guiltiness, for having disappointed them. And the delight of realising, during the lonely hours that ensued, how wholly she might henceforward trust to Frank, not for love only, but for that guidance and help in life's great struggle against evil and selfishness for which her timid nature so yearned, was more than compensation for any pain which the sight of Horace's pale, suffering countenance, and the touching helplessness of his shattered frame, stretched motionless on "the couch of his unrest," must unavoidably have inflicted.

The next day brought Lord Castleton, in great concern for his brother. No one had remembered, till the day after the accident, to write and inform him of it; and, when informed, he had to go cautiously to work, for fear of alarming Cissy, who was in delicate health. But he had dreaded lest Sir William's assurances of no immediate danger might be attributable to Louisa's fears for her sister, and was greatly relieved to find matters going on favourably.

He was soon prepared to hope for the best, and only trusted there would be no eventual lameness, which he was sure Horace could never stand. Lady Emlyn scolded him for thinking his brother would be so foolish; but Frederick maintained there could be nothing more galling than being a marked

man all the rest of one's days. Such a fine elegant fellow as Horace, too! And by-the-by, what did Miss Forrester say to this accident?

"Say? What should she say, dear Frederick?" said Louisa. "Of course she is very sorry, as we all are; but I may as well tell you, perhaps—but only tell Cissy, for it is scarcely more than settled yet—that Florence is engaged to Mr. Littleton." The trouble in her voice spoke volumes.

"Whew!" whistled the young lord, drawing a long face: "Then that was what set Horace off riding Snowball like mad, was it? I could not imagine—when he knew it was against all the laws of the Medes and Persians! But I know, when he came down, he had just as much idea of Miss Forrester's being engaged to any one as of flying. And when he *does* explode—which is not often—poor Horace! What a confounded nuisance it is, two people cannot always agree about marrying one another!"

"My dear Frederick!" said Lady Emlyn, with tears in her eyes, "pray do not think of saying that had anything to do with this accident! Nothing could be more unpleasant than to have it known—supposed, I mean"—

"No, no, dear Lady Emlyn, I am not quite such a scatter-brain as that," he replied. "You know I say things to you I would not say to any one else, even to Cissy; and you may be sure I will take care. Besides, Horace will soon enough get over the love part of it; and I never thought much of that match myself, though I used to tease Cissy about it. I want him to marry Miss Montagu; she would shake him up, and do him all the good in the world."

"Helen Montagu, my dear Frederick! What could put such a strange idea into your head?"

"Not such a bad idea either," said Sir William, who had just joined them; "that is, if she would have him. But we may wait a bit yet, before making matches for Horace, poor fellow! Littleton says you may come in now; and he is better to-day, wandering less, so perhaps he may know you."

"Why, old fellow," said Frederick, in true fraternal fashion, as his brother opened his eyes and looked up at him; "what have you been about here, tumbling off your horse, and breaking your bones in this way?" But there were tears in his kind, bright eyes, for all his unceremonious greeting. The answer was in much the same strain, but in a very different tone.

"What on earth are you doing here, Fred?" said Horace in

no amiable voice. "Go back to town, and take care of your wife!"

"Well, well, I shall go back and take care of my wife, of course," said Fred, good-naturedly; "but I thought I might just come and see that you had not broken your neck outright, old fellow; and I am glad you have not quite managed it this time."

"More's the pity, Fred," returned Horace, relaxing in spite of himself; for he was very fond of his young brother, though the sense of humiliation which haunted him, made him wish Fred anywhere but within reach of his sick-bed. "If I had, I should be out of the way, instead of lying here, with every one wishing me at Jericho for the botheration I give them."

"Oh Horace!" exclaimed Lady Emlyn.

"Well, not you perhaps, Louisa," he replied with a bitter smile; "I did not know you were there. Now, Fred, just oblige me by going home and looking after your wife, and leave me alone, there's a good fellow! I'll send for you when I want you; good-bye." Nor could anything further be extracted from him.

So Fred went back to town; and Lady Emlyn's perplexity, as to whether it would be worst to leave home under present circumstances, or to be away from Cissy on the occasion of an important event shortly expected, was speedily set at rest, by the arrival, two days afterwards, of the son and heir sooner than had been looked for. The event was duly announced by Lord Castleton, with a message from Cissy to her sister not to think of leaving Horace, as Frederick was such a good nurse, she really wanted no one else; and another to Horace, begging him to get well as soon as possible, to stand godfather to the baby.

This intimation was received most ungraciously by Horace. Such nonsense as godfathers and godmothers were! And if they must have them, could they find no one but him? And such a name as Horace, too!

For as Horace's state improved, so it must be owned, did not his temper; and it often needed all Lady Emlyn's patient tenderness, and all the allowances even she could make, to enable her to bear with, without blaming him. As for Frank Littleton, Louisa, and still more her husband, wondered at the unruffled kindness with which he put up with all Horace's ungracious and ungrateful sallies. Yet by a strange perversity, perhaps because his sunny, kindly presence was really irresistible,

in the oppressive stillness of the sick-room, there was no one Horace was so glad to see there, and to be tended by, as Frank. If he was absent rather longer than usual, Horace grumbled and scolded even more than had it been Louisa herself, though he carped at and quarrelled with everything Frank said or did when present.

But even this ill-humour and captiousness distressed Louisa less than the long fits of silent depression, which showed that deep thought and suffering were at work within.

How should it be otherwise? If, in full command of health and strength, with every path of pleasure open to him that he might fancy to pursue, he had already begun to feel the hollowness of life, and the paucity of real happiness in the world, what must it not now appear to him, under the combined influences of bitter disappointment and mortification, and of that bodily suffering and humiliating helplessness, which so few men know how to bear? What was the use of getting better, with only the prospect of the old, hollow life to return to, the more hateful now because of late he had been looking forward to such a different one? And then not even to have been able to swallow his disappointment like a man! To have made such an utter fool of himself, not only in the eyes of Louisa and Emlyn, but of Florence,—and even Littleton! And then he would be so savagely cross to the latter the next time he came near him, that he felt more ashamed of himself than ever; and would relapse into another fit of depression, in which it was scarcely possible to get a word out of him.

There was, moreover, a deeper and bitter conviction dawning on his mind, that it all served him right. How should life seem of any use to him, who had never made any use of life? And as to Florence, how could he ever have expected her, with her high standard of duty and principle, to care for such a careless, idle, good-for-nothing fellow as he?

He should have looked out for some simpering miss, who would have married him for his fortune, and his handsome whiskers! And then he would startle Louisa with a bitter laugh, and such a writhe in his bed as terrified her lest he were in great pain, or moving so as to do himself harm.

Truly those were sad weeks poor Horace passed on his uneasy bed, in his sick-room, notwithstanding the unwearied kindness of all around him. Many a long review or newspaper article would Sir William read aloud to him to beguile the time, often interrupted before he had half done, by

Horace's testy exclamation, "Do for any sake, Emlyn, leave off that stuff! It's enough to bore one to death!" And good-natured Sir William would go away, shrugging his shoulders, and wondering whether he should make no better an invalid himself. But he always came back the next day, as if nothing had happened.

Florence, meanwhile, greatly comforted by the steady progress of Mr. Carysfort's recovery, and happy beyond expression in her new prospects, did not find the time hang heavy on her hands, little of Louisa's or Frank's society as she could enjoy. Perhaps it rather eased her conscience that some of her pleasures should be sacrificed to Horace; and a half hour's walk with Frank, morning or evening, and brief occasional talks, on the staircase, or in the boudoir, as might befall, afforded pleasant anticipation and retrospection for the rest of the day. The delight, too, of feeling that she had a right to Frank's leisure, was so deep, that the precise amount of the leisure could not very much signify. She, in her turn, could afford to wait till he should be at liberty to bestow more time upon her.

Besides, Sir William took great care of her; as indeed he would have done of any young lady in such circumstances, but Frank's betrothed was doubly sure of his kind attentions; and he was always taking her for rides, or walks, or to inspect and pronounce upon the improvements he was carrying on at the Priory Cottage. With Helen, too, she spent many pleasant hours, sometimes with her at the Park, her father's beautiful residence, and sometimes at the Priory. For though Helen had declined staying there, on her father's account, she often drove over in her own especial little pony-carriage—her masculine practice of driving which had been one of Mr. Carysfort's old grounds of accusation against her—and spent with Florence the hours which her father devoted to his banking and other business, which now engaged him much. She would have driven over still oftener, but for Mrs. Montagu's displeasure; who, having once met with a "not-at-home" on calling, would not understand why she should be less welcome there than Helen; and as it did not suit her to quarrel with Lady Emlyn, she, of course, vented her ill-humour on her step-daughter.

But Helen was less sensitive than usual to the annoyance. She was the first, and almost the only person to whom the engagement between Florence and Frank had as yet been con-

fided ; and she was so happy in her friend's happiness, present and future—without very much compassion to spare for Mr. Carysfort, for she thought it very tiresome of him to come down, tumbling off his horse, and putting everything in confusion just then—that these few weeks glided away much more cheerfully for her than any since the previous autumn. Besides, she was to be Florence's bride's-maid, and must not she meet Mr. Huntley at the wedding ? Might not something occur to set things right between them ? And thus some dawn of spring seemed to have come to Helen's heart, as well as to her friend's, though somewhat later, and, like the spring of our insular climate, uncertain and still chilly at times.

But when six weeks had passed, and, the fractures having safely united, it became desirable that Horace, who was now able to be moved on to a sofa for some hours at a time, should have further change, things could hardly go on as heretofore ; and to avoid any suspicion of the real reasons for such a move, it was arranged that Florence's engagement should be duly announced in the neighbourhood, conjointly with her intention of paying a long-promised visit to Cissy in London,—to make indispensable preparations being, of course, taken for granted. It was also conditionally settled that the wedding should take place in September, from Lady Emlyn's house in town, provided Mr. Carysfort were able to leave the Priory by that time ; for as Frank was to bring his bride home at once, consideration for him would not allow them to think of it otherwise.

So Lord Castleton came down to fetch Florence ; and was at first much more graciously received than before by his brother, who inquired with considerable interest after Cissy and the son and heir. But when Lord Castleton,—by agreement with Lady Emlyn, in order that Horace might at once learn Florence's departure, and deem his brother innocent and ignorant on the subject,—let fall that he had come to fetch Miss Forrester to pay Cissy a visit and arrange her *trousseau*, then Horace grew, if possible, more ungracious and captious for the rest of the visit than Louisa had yet seen him. To do him justice, however, it was with himself he was angry. But for him, he well knew that Lady Emlyn herself would have been in London long since, and Florence would have had her company and assistance, which she must now miss so much ; and her going reminded him how he had spoiled for her the pleasure of these weeks, which should have been among the

happiest of her life. With every such reminder, his bitter mortification at having "made such an utter fool of himself," returned in double force; and then, to mend the matter, of course he was cross! It is wonderful how many persons adopt a similar expedient!

It was two or three days after Florence's departure before he could be persuaded to leave his room; but the ice once broken, he improved rapidly, and spent daily more and more hours in the drawing-room; though still unable to rise from his sofa. But if Lady Emlyn flattered herself that the change of room and scene would improve his spirits and temper, she was grievously disappointed. He felt his helplessness as even more humiliating, now that he returned to the accustomed family apartment; and he was beginning to awaken to the probability—none the more palatable for his vowing that he did not care a pin's head about it—that he might always remain more or less lame; one fracture having been too near the knee-joint to leave much hope for the latter remaining quite unaffected. Moreover, the pleasant prospect of the lawn and park in the beautiful summer sunshine, on which Louisa had counted for him as so refreshing and cheering, awoke anything but pleasing recollections in his mind; and half the times he insisted on having his sofa turned with its back to the window, till, weary of the prospect of the opposite wall, he would declare he might as well be in his own room. And poor Louisa, with tears in her eyes, would have him wheeled round again, too gentle to remind him it had been his own doing.

Then, too, the more hours he was able to spend out of his room, the heavier the time hung. He did not choose to be read to, and could not well hold a book himself, his left arm, which had been broken, being still too weak to use; and Sir William having contrived a reading-desk for him, attached to the side of his sofa, he was always managing to upset it, and throw it down upon his face, and then abusing it as the clumsiest thing that ever was; yet was beyond measure indignant, if Louisa offered to turn over the leaves for him. Occasionally, indeed, he would try to express his contrition to her for being so cross; but such concessions were always followed by one of the fits of silent depression which made her heart ache, and which mostly lasted till Mr. Littleton's next visit, when he woke out of it as cross as before.

Poor Louisa was at her wits' end. She was as far as ever

from feeling aggrieved by his ill-temper ; and, indeed, he generally contrived to vent it upon something or some one else, even when quarrelling with what she herself had done ; but the less she blamed, the more she grieved over him. Sir William, indeed, was less indulgent, and, especially when his wife looked more harassed than usual, would sometimes lose patience ; and more than once walked fuming into the invalid's room, resolved to read him a lecture on his unreasonable and intolerable humours and caprices. But somehow there was a settled expression of pain in the lines about Horace's brow and lip that always disarmed him, and it invariably ended by his offering to read the newspaper to him instead.

On one occasion, Lady Emlyn bethought herself of trying the effects of a little society, and began the experiment with Mr. Rawdon, one of whose frequent calls she contrived to receive, as if by accident, in the drawing-room, while Horace was there ; but the result was discouraging, for he could scarcely be prevailed on to open his lips, not only during the visit, but all the rest of the day.

At length one morning, when Louisa had been caught by her husband escaping from the drawing-room in tears, Sir William, after meditatively pacing the library for some minutes, turned to her abruptly, and said, "I'll tell you what, Louisa, I can't stand this any longer ! I am going to act on Castleton's idea, and ride over at once to see if I cannot get Helen Montagu to come and stay with us. At any rate, she will be company for you. I will not see you worried and moped to death in this way any more ; and by-and-by," he added, with a smile, "perhaps we may contrive to put your patient in better humour with himself and young ladies in general."

Louisa shook her head at the implication conveyed in the last words ; but it would be delightful to have dear Helen, if she could be persuaded to come. She would be quite a treasure, with her good temper and liveliness ; that is, if—would Horace like it ?

"Like it ! I am not going to ask him ! I shall tell him I will not keep my house empty any longer on his account, if he says a word !" retorted Sir William. "As to her coming, I am sure I can manage it with her father ; and you need only persuade a woman she is wanted on a charitable mission, to get her directly—that is, a woman worth anything. I don't know about its being 'the whole duty of woman,' but I am sure it is their especial pleasure and recreation, to nurse

sick people and babies ; and, upon my word I begin to think there is not much difference between the two ! ”

So saying, Sir William took his departure, and riding off to the Park, prospered in his enterprise. Mr. Montagu, as he expected, was easily won ; he would have been anxious to gratify the Emlyns at any time ; and Mr. Carysfort's share in the matter did not probably render him less so. It was quickly settled that Helen should come to the Priory the next day ; and Sir William could not help fancying, as he rode home, that there had been a much brighter look and smile on her face than he had lately seen there, as she ratified her father's acceptance of the invitation, with the assurance that she should be most glad to be of any use to Lady Emlyn. What did that bright smile mean ? Surely he had not been wrong all the time as to the object of Helen's liking ? Had Frederick seen farther than himself through her apparent dislike of Mr. Carysfort ? It would certainly be an odd Benedick and Beatrice sort of affair should these two eventually make a match of it ; but Shakespeare was deeply read in human nature ; and his Benedick and Beatrice *did* make a match of it !

But with all due deference to Shakespeare, we cannot forbear remarking, by the way, that, however amusing a courtship between such a pair as Benedick and Beatrice might be, it may well be doubted whether the frequent encounters likely to arise between two such keen wits and ready tongues, would be remarkably conducive to harmony in married life. The dramatist, however, has discreetly left the married life that followed to the imagination of his readers.

The especial ray of sunshine which had indeed fallen on Helen Montagu that morning, emanated from an innocent little paragraph in a letter received from Florence, which ran thus,—“ Bernard is very kind, and has undertaken all the unpleasant business with the lawyers about the settlements, which Frank insists upon. But do you know, dear Helen, he was so surprised when first I told him. He had always fancied *you* would marry Frank ! So I told him what you said about Frank's not being bookish enough—that first day, do you remember ? ”

It would have been a picture to see Helen's face, as she involuntarily started to her feet, on reading these words ; and then she sat down again, and covered her face with her hands, while the bright rosy hue might have been seen rising to her very temples.

"Was that it? Oh, for September!" was pretty nearly the upshot of her musings, till she began to retrace in memory many trifles which might have inspired Mr. Huntley with such an idea. Above all, she remembered how she had forced herself to talk and laugh with Frank Littleton, that unlucky day as they rode to the ruins, with such an ache at her heart the while! No wonder poor Bernard did not care to be thanked! And yet he had always so liked and appreciated Frank all the time—just like him! But never mind! He knew all about it now! No, not all, Helen suddenly remembered; only one half of his mistake had been explained to him; but surely he would soon contrive to unriddle the rest when they met. And down went the bright, blushing face upon the hands again; and Helen dreamed on—for the second time.

No wonder she seemed to move in the light of a sunbeam that morning, and looked so bright as she expressed her delight in being of the slightest use to Lady Emlyn. She would have been delighted to do anything for anybody. But as to Mr. Carysfort, she never gave him a second thought; she could think of but one person in reference to her last year's visit to Emlyn Priory, and that one was not Horace.

Mr. Carysfort was far from receiving the news of her proposed visit with such indifference; it gave him something new to rail at for at least half an hour. All his old allegations against her, and some new ones, were raked up with a seeming of malice prepense which quite distressed Louisa, who gently defended dear Helen, assuring him he would like her so much better when he knew more of her. No! Horace declared; the more he saw of her, the more he should dislike her; he always had, and he always should. And he was not obliged to like everyone Louisa did, especially when she took them up just to humour Emlyn's fancies!

Sir William, who was sitting by, pretending to read, but really listening in great amusement, could, at this side attack upon himself, refrain no longer.

"Never mind, Horace! You know what Mrs. Malaprop says, 'It is best to begin with a little aversion!' And it may not be a bad plan; at any rate it might be worth trying."

It was worth while to see the look of indignation on Mr. Carysfort's face. But he vouchsafed no answer, and Lady Emlyn hastened to change the subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAKING FRIENDS.

Stripped as I am of all the golden fruit
Of self-esteem, and by the cutting blasts
Of self-reproach familiarly assailed,
I would not yet be of such wintry bareness,
But that some leaf of your regard should hang
Upon my naked branches.

Excursion.

HELEN had certainly not been three days at the Priory, before the beneficial results of her presence became apparent. A new face is always a new amusement to an invalid; and the shock to his feelings, occasioned by being seen by Miss Montagu in his still invalid, half-helpless state, once over, Horace could not help feeling less dull while she talked away to Sir William and Lady Emlyn, or even moved about at her ordinary avocations, drawing or working, which she had the tact to pursue at first, without paying much attention to him. Besides, when she was there, he must perforce restrain his ill-temper. Who has not observed the difference of a man's behaviour to his own, and to "other people's sisters"? And Helen, dislike her or not, stood in the latter position, as did Louisa in the former. Soon seeing, too, how affairs stood, and that Lady Emlyn was, as she considered, spoiling Mr. Carysfort dreadfully, Helen took quite a different line, as they began to get more at home together, and it became her tacitly understood occupation to help to amuse him.

If he was ungracious, so was she. If he was unreasonable, she argued with him, and persisted in demonstrating how entirely in the wrong, or how whimsical, he was. If he quarrelled with what she was reading, she would reply that she was reading to Lady Emlyn, or for her own amusement, and read on all the same; but having a better idea than Sir William of the kind of reading that would amuse him, she was more often politely asked if she felt inclined to read a little more. Withal she was really so good-tempered, and so kindly desirous of making his time pass more pleasantly—in the philanthropic spirit engendered by her own secret happiness—that Lady Emlyn could not feel sufficiently grateful to her. It did Louisa's

heart good to hear Horace laugh again, as he soon learned to do, in spite of himself, at Helen's remarks and sallies, even when they told against him; and by degrees he would begin to admit that she was right and he wrong, and to promise better behaviour.

Then she would beguile him into arguments, by expressing opinions diametrically opposed to his, till before long he began to count on his daily skirmishes with her, with more pleasure than, a few weeks earlier, he would have believed he should ever feel in anything again. Lady Emlyn could take her walk or drive now, with a heart at ease, satisfied that Horace would be well entertained if Helen only stayed with him the while; and Sir William looked on in silent amusement; but if he ever alluded to a little aversion, it was only to his wife now.

Thus, in the space of one fortnight, affairs had assumed a surprisingly more cheerful aspect. Horace was already beginning to walk from room to room with a crutch, instead of being wheeled in a chair; and to be assisted into the carriage for a drive when the day was fine: and though he was still "cantankerous"—a word too expressive to demand an apology for its use—it was generally half in fun. He would now, too, watch Lady Emlyn's gentle little attentions with a more grateful eye, and often say—if they happened to be alone—"How can I ever thank you enough for all your kindness, dear Louisa?"

But if he ventured to say to Helen how deeply indebted he felt for her taking so much trouble to amuse him, her answer would be something to the effect, that he need not take the trouble to be so very grateful; she would do anything for Lady Emlyn. Which, indeed, was true, but not very complimentary; and Horace would feel proportionably insulted, till, finding she took no notice of his sulks, and beginning to grow amused again, he forgot all about it.

One day, when sulking over one of her unceremonious replies, he said discontentedly to Lady Emlyn, "I wish girls would let alone marrying!" And on her looking up in surprise, he added, "There is Cissy now; she could sing at any rate, and if she were here she might do something to amuse one; but now she has got a husband, and a baby, and heaven knows what, to worry about."

"But, dear Horace"—remonstrated Louisa.

"Oh, of course," said he, "I know they will marry; and I

suppose it can't be helped ; but it just makes them of no use, for all that."

"Except to the husbands and babies ; but that, of course, is not worth mentioning," said Helen, gravely. "Lady Emlyn, you used to be fond of singing ; shall I give you a song ?" And sitting down to the piano, she sang a lively ballad, in a sweet soprano voice quite pleasant to hear, though her singing betrayed no great cultivation or finish.

Horace had listened, at first, determined to find fault, and with a malicious hope that she would sing out of tune ; but he had heard no singing for a long time, and, pleased in spite of himself, applauded very politely at the close.

"I never knew you could sing, Miss Montagu !" he said, when she rose from the piano.

"When did you devote yourself to the investigation of my accomplishments ?" she returned, trying not to smile.

"Really, Miss Montagu, you are too"—— He paused for want of an adjective, colouring at the reminder. Special little had he devoted himself to her, or her accomplishments either ! Recovering himself, however, he added : "Well, remember you provoked me to say it ! The fact is, your politics frightened me."

"My politics !" said Helen, in a tone of partly affected surprise. "What do you know of my politics ? I am sure I never confessed my political creed to you."

"No ; but I heard you talking politics," said Horace, "and"——

"Well !" said Helen, determined not to understand.

"Well, if you will have it," said Horace, reluctantly, and wondering if she had really forgotten his speech on the subject. "It seems to me—I always think it sounds so unfeminine—I mean, that ladies have nothing to do with politics !"

"Do you mean," cried Helen, suddenly enlightened, "that a certain speech of yours on that subject was made at me ? I never guessed that !"

"Really ?" said Horace, looking incredulous. "I confess it was very rude—but"——

"But now that I do know it, let us argue the point," said Helen, settling herself, with a determined face, at a convenient distance from his arm-chair. "Allow me to request you, Mr. Carysfort, to define your idea of 'woman's mission.'"

"Why, I suppose," said Horace, slowly,—for he had very

little idea on the subject, and was obliged to fall back on the hackneyed commonplaces which every one has heard laid down—"I think my ideas are very ordinary ones: that women should chiefly cultivate the affections in themselves and others, and be good mothers and wives"—

"Why, I thought you objected to their marrying, just now!" said Helen.

"Now, Miss Montagu, you know I was not in earnest!" said Horace, laughing.

"Oh, indeed!" said Helen. "Still there is often an interval between their growing up and their marrying, and some never do marry. What especial duties do you assign to unmarried ladies—beginning with the young ones?"

"They should be good daughters and sisters," said Horace, growing bolder; "and"—for he had a flickering idea that Helen's political accomplishments had not made a bad daughter of her—"and make themselves agreeable in society."

"Good!" said Helen again. "I was my father's only companion at home, and he was intensely interested in politics, especially about the time I grew up. I will not say, how could I help getting interested in them too, but as a good daughter, was I not bound to interest myself in what engaged him, to make myself as pleasant a companion as I could?"

"Well—certainly," said Horace, somewhat posed; "still, Miss Montagu, that might be all right at home, but"—it was very awkward this carrying on of a personal attack upon a lady; but he was in for it, and was far from deficient in argumentative pertinacity, so he went on—"but still I think—young ladies should not talk politics in company." He bolted out the last words with desperate determination.

"You probably think, that, by way of making themselves agreeable in society, young ladies should be seen and not heard?" said Helen.

"Quite the contrary!" returned Horace. "I should prefer the plainest girl who could talk agreeably, to the prettiest mute in the world!"

"I suppose, then, that to talk agreeably, young ladies should have some tact in conversing on such subjects as are likely to interest those they meet?" she inquired.

"Exactly! You could not express my meaning better!" said Horace, approvingly.

"Very well, then," said Helen. "If I chanced, as was the

case, occasionally to meet in society persons who took more interest in politics than in any other subject, was I not acting in precise accordance with your views, in talking politics with such persons when I met them?"

Horace was fairly caught, beaten with his own weapons. In former days, had he found himself so worsted, he would never have given in, but would have retired into a shell of formal politeness, with a sarcastic admission, that Miss Montagu must always be in the right; but those were former days, and he now laughed at the defeat he would then have borne with a very ill grace.

"Miss Montagu, it is quite too bad of you," said he. "You are always making me out to be in the wrong!"

"How can I help that," said she, "if you will be in the wrong? But you have not answered my question; shall I state it again? Was I not acting?"——

"Oh no, please!" said Horace, with a rueful air. "If you will have an answer, I suppose I must admit that you were."

"And that it is not necessarily unfeminine to talk politics even in company, provided"——

"Oh, I shall admit everything now!" interrupted Horace.

"And, therefore," persisted Helen, "that you had no right to be afraid of me, because you might hear me talking politics with persons interested in the subject?"

"None in the world!" Mr. Carysfort confessed. "But why do you lay such an emphasis on 'afraid'?"

"Because that was the word you used. I never saw any symptoms of fear myself," said Helen, smiling in most provoking amusement.

"Miss Montagu, you have no mercy on the conquered!" said Horace, too conscious of his former dislike to doubt her meaning. "But I will submit to any penance for the past; only do not be obstinately unforgiving."

"Oh dear, no," said Helen carelessly; "but I never inflict penances. Indeed, I will candidly confess now, that no investigation of yours could have discovered my vocal accomplishments earlier, for I never tried to sing till last autumn; some one put into my head that I could sing if I tried, and I have picked up a few little songs in the winter. Shall I sing you another?"

She turned away to the piano, to hide a faint rising colour which set Horace wondering, who "some one" might be; half tempted to wish it had been himself, which he knew it had not.

If only he had not been so obstinately blind when Florence first refused him, as to overlook the significance of that ominous "but," which he well remembered! And then, perhaps,—but what was the good now? No doubt Miss Montagu knew what a fool he had made of himself,—which indeed, she did, for Sir William had let it all out, perhaps with a view to excite her compassion,—and, of course, looked down on him with twofold contempt. He was not going to make a fool of himself any more, that was certain. So Horace relapsed into a fit of moodiness, while Helen sang little German songs, one after the other; and very affectionate little songs some of them were, too, had either of her hearers understood the words; but Helen's thoughts had never been less with Horace, than while she sat singing those tender little songs, nominally for his amusement.

But though Horace was so determined not to make a fool of himself any more, his old habit of making himself lazily agreeable to the young lady he might like best for the time being, was strong; and now that his old dislike had vanished—Sir William had not been far wrong in guessing its cause—he could not help endeavouring to win her to a little warmer friendliness, and a rather more gracious reception of the attempts at gallantry which it was not in his nature to repress.

"Miss Montagu," said he, the next day, on returning from his first attempt at a walk on the lawn, aided by Sir William's arm; "I think you owe me some reward for my humble confessions yesterday. You drove Emlyn in your pony-carriage twice last week, and it would be so conveniently low to get into!"

"Sir William does not consider it unladylike of me to drive my own ponies," returned Helen.

"Really, Emlyn, I must call you out for telling tales, when I get strong again!" exclaimed Horace. "Did Emlyn tell you that, Miss Montagu? Why do you believe him? Why not suppose he invented it? You never have the least charity for me!"

"But the invention bears such truth on the face of it;" said Helen.

"Then I recant," pleaded Horace.

"Very good," said Helen.

"And you will give me a drive?"

"Certainly not!" And say what he would, she remained inexorable.

Not that she attached any importance to the fact of giving him a drive in present circumstances; nor had such an idea as Lord Castleton's ever crossed her mind. She was merely acting on Florence's principle, of exercising a good influence on all with whom she came in contact; and as Horace had been spoiled all his life, it followed that nothing could be so good for him, as learning that he could not always have his own way. So she persevered in keeping him in order, as she phrased it; and, after all, he liked her none the less for it.

August was now rapidly passing away, and Mr. Carysfort, if not very strong, was certainly well enough to move; but Lady Emlyn, though very anxious that matters should be arranged so as to enable Florence's marriage to take place as planned, could neither bear the idea of sending Horace away alone—for Sir William could not be absent from the wedding, nor would Cissy like Frederick to be—nor even of opening a consultation with him as to what could be arranged. And she was lingering on in some perplexity, when, one morning, Mr. Carysfort suddenly announced that, Littleton having pronounced him well enough to travel, he intended to go abroad early in the ensuing week. He had needed no enlightening as to the expediency of his absence.

"But, dear Horace, I cannot bear your going away alone," said Louisa; "and quite lame still."

"That I may always be," returned he, somewhat gloomily. "However, I do not consider myself hero enough to travel without my valet yet, so I shall not be quite alone, Louisa."

"William and I were thinking if you would like us to join you afterwards?" said Lady Emlyn, unable further to oppose the only feasible arrangement.

"Thank you," said Horace; "tell Emlyn I feel it most kind of him to propose such a thing, Louisa; and pray do not let him fancy I am really such an ungrateful fool as he well may from my behaviour—though as to the fool he is right enough," he added, bitterly. "But probably he found that out long ago, whereas I have only lately been making the discovery; and a confounded discovery it is to make, I can tell you, when a man has grown full old to change! And that has, I know, made me very unbearable of late"—

"Dear Horace," said Lady Emlyn, quite touched by the tone of deep and painful feeling in which he spoke, "how can you talk so? Who expects a man to be always wise and good-tempered, especially when he is ill? I am sure"—

"I am sure you have been a good angel to me, Louisa ! But about your coming abroad—do not think it ungrateful of me—but I had rather be quite by myself, and play misanthrope for a little."

"Play misanthrope ! Oh, Horace, I am sure you have no right to do that," pleaded Louisa ; "and only because of one disappointment, when"—

"Well, never mind," said Horace ; "I dare say I shall be none the worse for my misanthropy when I come back. I indulge some vague idea of trying to turn over a new leaf, and see if I can turn out worth something one of these fine days. But though I know what you mean, Louisa, by only one disappointment," he added, colouring, "take my word for it, Miss Montagu would no more have me than she would fly. And besides, though she is a very fine creature, she is not Flo—— Ah ! there is Emlyn ; tell him what I have arranged, will you?"

And, possessing himself of his crutches, he hastened off ; for he was always shy of unfolding himself in the least to Sir William, who was too downright and practical for him, and, moreover, not intellectually refined enough to command his fastidious sympathies.

But Sir William was pleased with Lady Emlyn's report of their conversation, and declared Horace was a good-hearted fellow after all ; it was only a pity there was not a little more stuff in him. And as to what he had said of Helen, Horace must indeed be coming to his senses rapidly ! Louisa might scold him, but he asked her, had Horace ever before been known to entertain a doubt of a young lady's susceptibility to his attractions ? Sir William himself was not quite so sure of Helen's hard-heartedness, but that Horace should believe in it ! If he went on improving at this rate he would certainly turn out good for something after all ! Wonderful effect that tumble must have had !

Happily as Helen's head and heart were engaged in anticipations of her approaching visit to London—she was to accompany Lady Emlyn—she could not help feeling sorry for Horace when the day was actually fixed for his departure, though it was only a preliminary to her own. She had not spent these weeks in constant intercourse with him, in the exercise of kindly attention towards him, though bestowed after her own independent fashion, without acquiring a real interest in and regard for him ; though it might be only that half-compassionate regard, which is not the most flattering to

its object. And it seemed very sad for him to be going away alone, still lame, and perhaps always to remain so, just while they were all going to be happy at the wedding, in itself such a bitter disappointment to him. He was in such low spirits, too, that she really had not the heart to tease him during the last few days, and relaxed somewhat of the severe order in which she prided herself on keeping him. So when, after thanking Louisa, on the last day, for divers of those trifles which ladies are so handy in making for travellers in whom they take an interest, he turned to Helen and asked whether she would not give him something; she answered quite amiably, "Well, what is there Lady Emlyn has not given you already? Shall I give you a sketch-book? or my last sketch of Emlyn Priory?"

"I shall remember Emlyn Priory without the sketch," said Horace; "give me that drive you were so relentless about the other day."

"Very well; I will," said Helen. "Perhaps I was rather vindictive; but consider the insult my feelings had received."

So Mr. Carysfort had his afternoon drive that day in Helen's pony-carriage.

It was a very quiet, uneventful drive, though Helen, in compassion to her companion's depressed spirits, made as much talk as she could, discoursing eloquently about a continental trip she had made years ago, with her father, and which she had enjoyed exceedingly; but Mr. Carysfort could not be lured to express any expectation of enjoying his. The drive was nearly over, before he originated a single remark; but then, after a pause in the very one-sided conversation, he said, "Miss Montagu, you never permit me to express any gratitude for your kindness; but I wish I could persuade you that I am capable of feeling grateful; and that the infinite contempt with which you look down on me—though I may deserve it in some degree"—

"Contempt! That is a hard word," said Helen, reddening. "Pray do not think that; I only answer you saucily sometimes, because I never like fine speeches."

"But you have looked down on me with contempt ever since you knew me, Miss Montagu; ever since that ball at X—," replied Horace.

The accusation was so near the truth, that Helen hesitated for a moment what to say; but her natural frankness conquered.

"I am afraid you are partly right," said she, gravely and

apologetically. "I know now that it is very wrong; but I have a tendency to look down on those whose habits and characters differ from the standard I have learned to look up to. And I was brought up so entirely among hard-working, business people, that I am afraid I did learn to look down on fine gentlemen and idle men—I beg your pardon—men without a profession."

"And right enough, too!" said Horace, in his bitter tone. "Fine gentlemen are contemptible enough!"

"But I forgot," pursued Helen, "that, had I been differently brought up, I might have been as idle and frivolous as any one; and besides, that I have no more right to look down on other people for their faults than they to look down on me for mine, though mine may be different. So, as you 'confessed' the other day," she added, with a smile, "it is only fair I should confess that I had no right to look down on fine gentlemen, and I promise not to be so conceited again. Will that do?"

"Do, Miss Montagu? You do not, surely, think I imagined myself entitled to an apology!" said Horace, more surprised at her frank admission of being in the wrong, than flattered by finding how little personal to himself, either her original disparaging estimate of him, or her present modification of it, had been. "But supposing it was really rather the contempt than the politics that I was afraid of?"

"Then it was my fault that we were not good friends before," said Helen, frankly; "but no! we never could have got up such a very cordial and polite dislike quite all on one side!" She laughed so archly, with such a sparkle of mischief in her eye, that Horace was obliged to laugh too.

"I shall be quite content if I may hope that we shall be good friends in future," said he, "and if you will believe how gratefully I shall remember these few last weeks."

"Good friends! It would be hard if we were not good friends, after all our fighting and quarrelling of late," said Helen. "And have I not given you a drive after all? I expect you to be deeply grateful for that, I assure you."

She sprang lightly out, as they reached the hall-door, where Sir William and Lady Emlyn met them; and Sir William, helping Horace out, inquired if he was duly grateful for Helen's not having upset him, in revenge for his former strictures on her driving.

"By the way," exclaimed Helen, turning round before he had time to answer, "there is another thing I expect you to

be deeply grateful for, Mr. Carysfort! Would you believe it, dear Lady Emlyn, I never talked a word of politics the whole way!"

"Miss Helen, you really are vindictive; I shall be quite afraid of you myself!" exclaimed Sir William. "There, come and take a walk with me, and repent of your ill-nature. I want you to look at the improvements," he added, in a whisper.

"Oh, Mr. Carysfort knows I am only in jest," said Helen, holding out her hand to Horace, fearing lest in his present mood he might possibly think her ill-natured.

"I am not ungrateful enough to pretend to doubt it," he replied, shaking hands with a smile and a sufficiently good grace, though he would certainly have preferred a less off-hand friendliness on Helen's part. However, he had expected nothing else—that was one comfort—he reflected, with some slight bitterness, as he followed Lady Emlyn's kind advice to come and rest himself in the drawing-room before dinner.

But the bitterness merged in a graver feeling, while she busied herself in making him comfortable in his chair, with cushions and footstools, as naturally as if it were nothing but what he had a right to expect. And then Sir William followed them in to observe, that, as he had some little business in Southampton, he had made up his mind to go so far with Horace next day, and to meet Louisa and Miss Helen in London. For even Sir William had not, in the long run, escaped the infection of that inclination to make much of the invalid of the household, which is so irresistible among kindly-natured people; and though he had not the faintest belief that Horace would long prove inconsolable, he was quite alive to the probability of its being extremely unexhilarating for him to be starting off alone in present circumstances.

And as Mr. Carysfort was acute enough to perceive that the business was a pretext, it so happened that the idea, which had of late been dawning upon him, now flashed fully and clearly upon him for the first time in his life,—how infinitely kinder than he deserved was everybody round him; and how little right he could have to feel even a shade of bitterness, let what might be withheld! That it must really, after all, be his own fault if life seemed so empty and worthless to him, was certainly no very consoling train of thought; but the pleasantest trains of thought are not always the most wholesome; and Horace might have carried much worse ones away with

him, to brood over and work out in his solitude, than that on which he now entered.

Mr. Carysfort took his departure next day ; and having been seen safe on board at Southampton by Sir William, was next heard of from Paris, whence he despatched a christening-gift for his little nephew and godson (whose christening had also awaited Lady Emlyn's presence), and a splendid wedding-gift for Mr. Littleton to present to his bride, the intention of which was warmly appreciated by all. A few weeks later, letters received from him stated that he sent his address—at a village on the banks of the Lake of Geneva—in case of any necessary communication ; but only on condition of being let alone. He was quite well, and able to take care of himself ; and when he was tired of solitude would come home. After which, months passed away without his reappearing on the domestic horizon of his friends in England.

Before Helen accompanied Lady Emlyn to town, she went home for a couple of days, and found things there much as usual, only her father looking, if possible, still gloomier than of late, though he would not listen for a moment to the proposal it cost her such an effort to make, of remaining at home for the present, instead of going away again directly. She found, moreover, that Mrs. Montagu would shortly follow her to town, and proceed to spend some weeks at Brighton, whither she was to accompany her after the wedding. She would have remonstrated as to her father's remaining at the Park by himself, but he shook his head, when she proposed returning to join him, with the peculiar expression which she knew referred to her step-mother's certain opposition to such a plan ; for "a little society for dear Helen," was one of Mrs. Montagu's standing pretexts for resorting to watering-place gaieties. Helen wondered if her father's depression could arise from an increasing sense of the want of congeniality between himself and his wife.

She found Mrs. Montagu rather more gracious to her than usual ; for, in the first place, that lady was always in a better temper when she had for a time been freed, by Helen's absence, from the tacit condemnation of her own frivolous and worldly-minded habits and ideas which her step-daughter's very different tone of thought and conduct conveyed ; and in the second place, having awhile lost sight of Helen's inexorable indifference to Captain Marston's devotion, she was again flattering herself that "things might be brought round," espe-

cially as Helen had evidently not succeeded in "catching Mr. Carysfort," as she phrased it; and was greatly astonished at the burst of indignation her remark to that effect, in his hearing, elicited from her nephew. The Brighton scheme had, indeed, been devised chiefly with a view to throwing him and Helen more exclusively together.

"And if I were you, Gerald," she continued, after talking on for half an hour, with but little response from him, after his vehement repudiation of her insinuation about Helen, "I should pluck up a little more spirit, and talk of exchanging to India, or something of that sort. It is often the best way with these saucy young ladies."

"Exchange to India!" said Captain Marston, turning sharply round. "I might do that! Anything better than"—— And he knitted his brows and compressed his lips, with a mingled expression of pain and determination.

"Yes, yes, my dear Gerald, take my advice, and we will manage matters yet!" Gerald smiled a bitter smile, but he said nothing.

But the shade of bitterness in his manner to Helen had passed away during her long absence; and he was constantly at the Park during the two days of her stay, hovering about and following her with his eyes, and honoured by even less notice than usual. She really hardly knew if he were in the room or not, occupied as she was with her bright dreams of such different society before long. Poor Gerald!

She was moving about in the drawing-room on the last day of her stay, selecting and arranging songs and music to take with her, Captain Marston meanwhile standing by the window, watching her every movement with an earnestness of expression which quite redeemed his face from its usual insignificance. At last she sat down, to correct a few notes in some manuscript music, at a little writing table, not very far from where he stood; and as she did so, he moved nearer and sat down opposite her. But, though inwardly annoyed, she took no notice of him.

"So you are going to town to-morrow, to be bride's-maid at your friend Miss Forrester's wedding, Cousin Helen?" said he, in so sad and earnest a tone as must have touched her kinder feelings, but for the obnoxious "Cousin Helen," which from the first she had steadily resented, and never reciprocated. He had innocently adopted the familiar epithet at his aunt's instigation; and even when he found that it displeased,

he could not bear to give it up—it seemed to afford a sort of link between them, though an imaginary one.

“I am, Captain Marston,” replied Helen, not looking up to see the expression of pain called up by her formal rejoinder.

“And you will doubtless meet Mr. Huntley at his cousin’s wedding?” he pursued, in a tone of suppressed eagerness, and with a searching look which Helen involuntarily raised her eyes to meet.

“Excuse me, Captain Marston!” she rejoined, colouring indignantly, and too much thrown off her guard to maintain her usual baffling coolness, “I cannot conceive why it should interest you whom I meet!”

“You cannot conceive!” he exclaimed, almost fiercely; but then, rising from his seat, with a look of mournful intensity which must, had she met it, have entirely altered the impression his words made on her, he added, in a low tone—“Do not, for Heaven’s sake, say what you know to be so false! Leave me, at least, my ideal!” and he strode out of the room.

Helen started to her feet, crimson to her very temples. False! To tell her to her face that what she said was false! If her words were not strictly true, as conscience hinted, he knew quite well what she meant, and that was truth itself! She did not choose he should interest himself in her concerns! She could really bear it no longer; she would speak to her father! But again conscience whispered, “Dost thou well to be angry?” and soon cooling, she reminded herself that patience was of no value till provocation arose; and that if she could not help disliking Captain Marston, and reprobating her step-mother’s want of delicacy and consideration for her feelings, in exposing her to this system of silent persecution, she could refrain from resenting their conduct, and learn to bear with them patiently, especially when she had so much happiness to be grateful for, and to look forward to!

And therewith Helen’s anger was gone; and even her remembrance of the offence and the offender. She had a fairy-land of her own to retreat to; and took leave of her step-mother on her departure with even more than usual cordiality and good-humour.

CHAPTER XIV.

MEETING AGAIN.

And sometimes I am hopeful as the spring,
And up my fluttering heart is borne aloft,
As high and gladsome as the lark at sunrise ;
And then as though the fowler's shaft had pierced it,
It comes plump down, with such a dead, dead fall.

Philip van Artevelde.

HELEN seemed suddenly to have emigrated to another planet, when she found herself the next day, waiting for dinner in Lady Emlyn's London drawing-room. Florence was sitting beside her, looking deeply, calmly happy ; Cissy frisking about, looking as pretty, and almost as childish as ever ; Lady Emlyn eagerly sympathizing in Lord Castleton's rapturous affection for his baby-son ; and Frank Littleton—who was now taking a fortnight's holiday before, instead of after, his wedding—was deep in conversation with Sir William, on matters of import to himself and his bride, if one might judge by the occasional references made to her opinion.

It was as happy and bright a little party as need be ; and Helen tried to scold down the feeling of unrest fluttering at her heart, which spoke of something yet wanting to make her enjoy it like the rest. It could not be long before she would see Bernard ! Perhaps this very evening. And if there were really such happiness in store for her, as—each in her own degree—Florence and Louisa and Cissy seemed already to have found, how earnestly would she not endeavour to deserve it, to make a right use of it ! In sight of the happiness of all these friends, it seemed hard, almost impossible to live on alone, with no one to lean upon and to look up to.

In spite of herself, she was so absent all dinner-time that, on the ladies rising, Sir William, seeing her start as they moved, inquired whither her thoughts were flown, as he was anxious to send an express to fetch them back ; and Florence and Lady Emlyn, on the way upstairs, agreed that it was most suspicious to see a young lady disappear into cloud-land in such a way. Lady Emlyn then observed that she could tell tales about pony-carriages, and gentlemen driven in

them, whereat Helen opened most innocent eyes, and laughed merrily at Florence's look of feigned concern ; and so they lovingly teased her back from cloud-land to earth again.

Much talk followed as to the arrangements for the wedding, which Florence wished to have as quiet, Cissy as grand and gay, as possible. A ball in London, in September, was of course impossible ; but a dinner-party there must be, and a wedding breakfast, and veils and orange flowers, too, or Cissy would never believe there had been any wedding at all ! She seemed likely to carry the day, Florence, as usual, being more anxious to please others than herself ; and if she could win the faintest assent from Frank Littleton, her victory was certain. So as soon as the gentlemen joined them, Cissy seized on Frank and carried him off to a corner, where she kept him in consultation till Lord Castleton interfered, and summoned them before Sir William as judge, on a charge of flirting ; and much laughing ensued, when Sir William acquitted her on the ground of her extreme youth and foolishness, and sentenced Frank to be married, in sight of all present, within fourteen days at farthest.

Helen could not tell why, but the merriment seemed to jar upon her, and she stole away upstairs to be quiet, and to dream a little more, and scold herself for being so silly and restless.

A few minutes after she quitted the room, Mr. Huntley made his appearance ; and having shaken hands with all present, looked round gravely, as if for some one else. It was with an expression of relief in his countenance that he sat down at the close of the scrutiny ; but as he did not ask for Helen, no one observed her absence. Some half hour later, however, she came down again, armed with some work, in case of an attack as to her desertion ; but when she recognized Bernard's voice, she would have given the world to escape the meeting she had been expecting so eagerly. It was not in her nature, however, to yield to such weakness ; and no one could have divined the tremor within, as she walked straight into the room, looking as dignified as ever.

Sir William was just saying : " Why, dear me, Louisa, where can Miss Helen be flown ? Not off into cloud-land bodily, I hope ? "

" No hope of getting rid of me so easily, Sir William," said Helen, with a thrill of strange music in her voice ; and though she could not possibly look up at Mr. Huntley, she passed on

to where he was standing, and shook hands with him with perfect self-possession.

But even that passing shake of the hand, and the few words of common greeting exchanged between them, had been enough ; and as Helen seated herself—as far off as possible from Bernard—the clouds of life closed round and over her again, chilling and stilling with their frigid influence, the pulses of love and hope which had been bounding so high within her but a moment before. The touch, the tone, the very sphere of Mr. Huntley's greeting had told her, plainly as words could have spoken it, that it was the Bernard of the hill-side she now met again, not the Bernard of those happy days ere the cloud had fallen between them. Thankful for the resource, she instantly applied herself to her work, with such apparent zeal, that the keenest observer could have detected no sign of emotion in her countenance, unless it were in the compression of the lips, which she felt as if no effort could have enabled her to open ; but, happily, others were too much engaged to notice her.

She felt at first as if she must leave the room, should any one so much as look at her ; but after a time, when the occasional sound of Mr. Huntley's voice would force itself upon her attention, and the sudden strain on all her faculties, of the first effort of self-command, relaxed, she became conscious of such a dull, deep aching of heart and head, as it seemed almost impossible to sit and endure passively—her very ears aching with intensity of listening for Bernard's words—and she looked round for some one to talk to, something to do, to deaden the sense of misery which oppressed her. But as she raised her eyes from her work, she met Mr. Huntley's fixed upon her, with a mournful earnestness which vividly reminded her that the suffering was not hers only, whatever might be the mystery of the cloud between them. She dropped her eyes again upon her work, with such softened feelings, that the worst sting of her disappointment seemed removed. Her sorrow for self seemed merged in sorrowing sympathy for him ; and the hardness of wounded pride, the bitterness of the moment, was gone.

"Miss Helen !" said Sir William, planting himself before her with a determined face ; "I must know what you have left behind you ! Your tongue only, or"——

"Not my tongue certainly," said Helen, trying to force a smile, and unconscious, till she saw the surprise in his eyes, of the tears which had gathered in her own.

"Really, Miss Helen," said Sir William, with a look of serious reproach, which made her smile more naturally, "I can scarcely find words to express my opinion of your conduct this evening! First you spend dinner in cloud-land, heedless of my brilliant conversation; and now—you sit working away as if for your livelihood, without opening your lips," he added, forbearing allusion to her tears in compassion to her deprecating look.

"I am very tired, Sir William," returned Helen, humbly; "shall I make tea as a punishment?"

"Certainly; and I hope it will rest you," said he, placing a chair for her at the tea-table. He was quite astonished; he had never seen her with tears in her eyes before. Was some secret regret for her parting with Horace troubling her?

To be hidden behind the urn in a quiet corner was some relief; and presently Frank Littleton came to talk to her, and to hand the cups, which prevented her listening so painfully to Bernard's voice, as he sat talking to Sir William; and she felt really grateful to him. But her misfortunes this evening were not yet over.

After tea, Cissy made Florence sing; and Frank looked so happy as he sat listening, that Helen almost forgot her private distresses in watching them. Then Cissy sang too; but after that Lady Emlyn turned suddenly round to say:

"Now Helen must sing. Did you ever hear her sing, Mr. Huntley? She pretends she never did till last winter, when she took lessons, because—Florence, was it you said, dear?—told her she would certainly be able to sing if she tried; but I have a great idea that is only an excuse for having cheated us before. I mean to make her sing all the more now!" she added playfully.

At the beginning of this unlucky speech, Helen had risen and looked up eagerly, hoping to stop what she knew was coming; but she only met Mr. Huntley's eye involuntarily turned on her with a keen glance of inquiry; and, hardly knowing whether to be provoked or pleased, she sat down again in a state of conflicting feeling which absolutely choked her utterance. She could not get out the words that she was too tired to sing.

"No, I never had the pleasure of hearing Miss Montagu sing," replied Mr. Huntley, gravely; but he said no more. Could he not even say that he wished to hear her, when he knew whose wish had prompted her learning?

"Nor I either, dear Helen ; how naughty of you !" said Florence's sweet voice. "You must really come and sing directly."

Not knowing how to refuse, Helen passed Mr. Huntley by a great effort, and without a look in his direction ; and sat down at the piano, determined that sing she would, though she felt "as if the notes would never come out. But after a somewhat lengthened prelude, she dashed off into a lively French ballad, which everybody applauded at the conclusion—except Mr. Huntley.

"Not so very tired, I see, after all !" said Sir William, mischievously.

"Not nearly tired enough to be let off yet !" said Florence, playfully intercepting her retreat.

"Oh ! dear no !" said Lady Emlyn. "Dear Helen, you must sing that pretty little German song we used to like so much. I cannot repeat the words, but"—

"Or shall I give you an English one ?" said Helen evasively.

"No, no, Louisa's favourite !" said Cissy and Florence.

"Which *we* used to like so much," added Lord Castleton.

What could Helen do but try, at least, to sing the song thus urgently required of her ? But not only was it a touching, melancholy song, which she felt as if it would be impossible to sing now without the tears of which it spoke, in a simple, though not highly original refrain about parting and pain ; there were other reasons why this was the last song she would willingly have sung in Mr. Huntley's presence. Begin, however, she must ; and she accomplished the first verse, and its sad little refrain, with a real, tremulous pathos, which admirably suited the melancholy music. But when she came to the second refrain, a full, manly voice chimed in, with such a swell of mournfulness in its deep, rich notes, that her fingers trembled, her voice faltered. Not another note could she bring out, but hurried through the closing accompaniment, too thankful that her defalcation passed unnoticed amid the general surprise at Mr. Huntley's beautiful singing.

"Yes, he sings beautifully when he chooses," said Florence, smiling kindly up at him, pleased to hear him praised.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Huntley, bending forward to Helen as she rose, and colouring deeply ; "it was, I assure you, an involuntary rudeness on my part ; but—I was fond of that song long ago."

Did he need to tell her that ? Was not that the very reason

why she had welcomed the discovery of it in an old collection of German songs so eagerly, and sung it so often? He had sung a snatch of it in one of their rambles in the happy days of Florence's convalescence, having fallen into a reverie after talking of his mother; and then, too, he had apologized when he caught himself singing, telling her it was a song his mother had loved, especially in the days of her last illness; but touchingly as he had sung it that day, the feeling it then conveyed was poor and cold to that which he had now thrown into the few simple words, which seemed to Helen's excited feelings to be bidding her an eternal farewell. She could really bear no more; and passing him with merely an inclination of the head, she stood silent beside Lady Emlyn, while Mr. Huntley was steadfastly resisting all solicitations to sing again. But when Florence at last sat down to the piano instead, she whispered a hurried request to Lady Emlyn to take no notice of her departure, as she was really very tired, and slipping away, hurried to her own room; where, covering her face with her hands, she sat down and cried as she had never cried since the days when she was a little child, crying brokenheartedly for her dead mother.

For there was little weakness in Helen's character; and even now she soon rose, and choking down her sobs, opened the window which looked out upon the green square-garden, where the lamps glimmered like glow-worms among the trees; and leaning her forehead in her clasped hands against the window-frame, she stood there forming high resolutions to endure and be happy through endurance, since the other happiness was denied her—such happiness as breathed in the sweet notes which floated up to her from below. Was she to murmur for lack of that which human love could afford, while Divine love watched over her, and withheld only what might prove hurtful, since it bestows all that can be helpful upon its creatures? Could she be so ungrateful—or, as Bernard had said, so cowardly? The thought of him, and of the strange, impalpable, but impassable barrier he had raised between them, almost unnerved her again; but she would not give way. Florence would be coming presently for one of their wonted evening talks; and Florence must not see, must never guess her trouble. Florence's happiness she would not cloud for the world; and when Florence did come, to pity her for being so tired, and to unfold the fulness of her loving heart, which seemed to grow less shy with its growing happiness, they had a long talk

without Florence's gathering a suspicion of the grief which lay so heavy at her friend's heart ; betraying itself only in a gentler and more serious sympathy, which was doubly congenial to one whose own happiness was no less still and chastened than warm and bright.

But the effort of self-command was not over for Helen with that night. How long and torturing in prospect did the days now look, which must elapse before Florence's marriage could relieve Helen from that unceasing guard over word and look, that studious dissimulation, which felt so wretchedly like hypocrisy, towards so true and loving a friend ! Yet the more she saw and felt of the sunshine which seemed to be expanding Florence's whole nature with its pure warmth, the more she felt that it would be sacrilege to cloud it, even for an hour, by betraying that a cloud had fallen upon herself. Sir William's keen, partial eyes must be blinded, too ; the more so, because she had nearly betrayed herself to him already ; and she well knew that if he perceived any further signs of her being ill at ease, he would not rest without trying to unravel the cause, and to help her in her trouble. And who could help her ? He must not perceive it !

Fortunately, so much was going on around her, that there was little time for others to observe her, or even for her to sit down and think ; and when, with the restlessness of misery, she entered eagerly into all Cissy's schemes of amusement for passing away the time, it passed with her friends for genuine high spirits and enjoyment, and Sir William was pleased to find that his favourite was all right again. It must have been a little tender reminiscence surely !

Mr. Huntley was graver, and more taciturn than usual with all, so that his being the same with Helen excited no remark ; but his constant presence was Helen's worst trial. Never to have seen him, or heard his voice, would have been nothing, compared to the necessity of meeting and greeting him with such hypocritical unconcern, doing her best to seem to ignore both her trouble and his, while it yet was torture to imagine that this seeming might really deceive him too. Had he perhaps taken some morbid idea into his head that she disliked him ? Yet, if she relaxed towards him, and watched, as she sometimes did, an opportunity of giving him a kind word or look, though he might sometimes eagerly respond for a moment, he invariably drew back more nervously than ever afterwards. Then Helen would feel indignant, both with her-

self and him, till she caught the next stray look resting on her sadly from the opposite side of the room or of the dinner-table, to which he so carefully kept that she often wondered nobody remarked his strange avoidance of her.

With natural inconsistency, too, while doing her utmost to conceal from every one what absorbed her, she would, sometimes, feel so bitterly the want of sympathy, as to be tempted to ascribe to indifference and self-absorption the unsuspecting blindness of all around her, and to feel so utterly desolate among the kind, bright faces always haunting her with their happiness, that she would steal away alone, to scold herself for her ingratitude. But then, unable to keep away—especially if Bernard were there, or likely to be—she soon restlessly returned to rejoin the circle as before.

At times, however, especially if they chanced, as would sometimes happen, to be unavoidably thrown together, there would be momentary flashes, on Mr. Huntley's part, of the old, confidential, unguarded tone and manner, which, though they seemed involuntary, and were always quickly repented of, were delight to Helen, as proving that, whatever might influence him to repress it, he did, nevertheless, feel that towards her which he felt for no one else—a conviction to which she tenaciously clung. Yet the relapse, after such moments of hopeful excitement, was worse than all.

One day they had all driven to Richmond. Mr. Huntley had, indeed, declined joining them, as he often tried to do; but Frank, at the last moment, had walked off and brought him round, declaring that he should not be unsociable in these days of general festivity. So Helen somehow found herself walking with him under the beautiful trees of Richmond Park; and though, at first, they talked less than they walked, it was pleasant and soothing to be walking together in the sweet, sunny air, as she had feared they would never walk again. Mr. Huntley seemed to feel the influence equally, for his brow relaxed a little of its sadness, and by degrees they fell into something of the old strain of talk.

"It is indeed a refreshment," said he, lifting his eyes from the sunny park to the free blue sky through the leafy screen above them, "to escape from the bustle and turmoil of a great city to peace and stillness like this. If we could only leave behind us, as easily, all the doubts, the struggles of our inward life!" He spoke as rather wishing to find it possible, than as feeling it hopeless.

"Struggles, I suppose," said Helen, "we must not hope to leave altogether, till we leave earth, behind us ; and there is a something noble in struggling on perpetually, without which, life, after all, might be poor." She felt at the moment stronger and worthier of Bernard, for all her late suffering. "But surely doubts do not trouble you, who believe so firmly?"

"Not doubts in the widest sense," replied Mr. Huntley, earnestly ; "nor yet doubts that the surest road to happiness lies in the fulfilment of our duty to God and man, at whatever cost. But at times," he continued, and a shade of pain crossed his brow, which drew Helen a step nearer to him, as if in sympathy—"at times doubts will trouble us, whether we may not have been mistaken in laying down this, or that, to be our duty? Head and heart sometimes fall out ; and I own it does perplex me, how far we may allow our feelings to influence our judgment, or may be wrong in allowing the latter absolutely to silence and sacrifice the former?"

"I think," rejoined Helen, promptly—always quick and decided in her opinions, she little dreamed what question in his mind she was answering—"that our feelings must and ought to influence us in forming our judgments ; we often feel, better than we can see, what is right. But our conviction once deliberately fixed, I think we should never reverse or renounce it under the influence of excited feeling, because that, in fact, only blinds us as to the sufficiency of the grounds on which our calmer judgment was based."

It was strange to see the change which passed over Mr. Huntley's countenance, from the suppressed expectancy which had hovered there a moment.

"You are perfectly right ; I ought to have seen that before," he answered, in a low, almost stern voice, after a marked pause ; and as he folded his arms, and walked on again beside her in silence, the cloud settled down on the two more heavily than ever. Perplexed and pained almost beyond endurance, it was a relief to Helen to join some of the others at the next turn, and make a feint of sharing in the gayer talk carried on amongst them.

Some half-hour afterwards, they were rowing up the river, in one of the pretty awned boats well known to metropolitan pleasure-seekers, when Lord Castleton, sitting beside Helen, directed her attention—which had he known it, was quite superfluous—to Mr. Huntley, who sat at the farther end of the boat, watching the lovely river-bank, but obviously seeing

nothing of it, with a look on his face which her heart ached to see.

"Miss Montagu," said Lord Castleton, "what is the good of a man coming on parties of pleasure to look like that? Why can he not stay at home?"

"I fancy Mr. Littleton would not let him, to-day at least," said Helen, defending him instantly, though a moment before she had been asking herself, what was the good of his coming to torture her in that way?

"Ah! great mistake!" said Frederick. "When you want to arrange a party of pleasure, Miss Montagu, be sure you always select pleasant men, like me—or Horace. Now confess we do want poor Horace, do we not?"

"I hardly know what to say about 'we,'" returned Helen kindly, for the mutual affection of the two brothers was one of the things she liked best in them; "of course you do, but"—she paused, not knowing how far he might be initiated into matters relating to Horace, and others of the party.

"Might be awkward, no doubt," said Frederick, shaking his head sagely. "Well we must get this pair married out of hand; and then get Horace back for some more water-parties next year."

"Is he so fond of water-parties?" asked Helen, without the remotest idea of the young lord's drift.

"Well, I fancy it might depend a good deal upon who composed the party," he returned, with a comical smile; but Helen did not look up to see it.

"I dare say; the pleasure of parties often does," said she; reflecting, however, that the presence of wished-for companions might not always suffice.

"And so you find this a very dull one?" said he, in a tone of jesting sympathy.

"I! What can make you fancy that?" exclaimed Helen, with a start and look of confusion which delighted him; for she forgot, as one often does for a moment, that he could not read the thoughts and feelings which absorbed her.

"Oh! nothing, nothing! Lady Emlyn," said he, leaning forward and whispering loud enough for all to hear, "I am sorry to tell you Miss Montagu finds the present party very dull; so I am going to do my best to cheer her, by gathering some forget-me-nots, and presenting them—not on my own account, of course!"

And in spite of Helen's disclaimers, and Lady Emlyn's dis-

suasions, Lord Castleton ordered the boat to be pushed to the bank, and gathering a handful of forget-me-nots, presented them to Helen on bended knee.

"Don't be jealous, Cissy!" he turned to her to say; "an absent spirit animates my form!"

"An absurd spirit seems to have taken possession of you, I think," said Helen quickly, wondering if he dared to be making game of Bernard to his face in this way; and yet unwilling to refuse what was even feigned to be offered from him. However, Mr. Huntley was anything but absent just then, had she dared to look towards him as she took the forget-me-nots.

"Yes, I really think we shall have to give Fred a fool's cap to wear at the wedding, if he goes on like this," said Lady Emllyn.

"With plenty of *belles* round it, I can have no objection!" he replied, bowing gallantly.

"Oh! yes, a cap and bells! Fred shall wear a cap and bells! It will be so becoming!" cried Cissy, clapping her pretty hands; and to Helen's relief the tide of conversation drifted away from her, and left her in peace for a time.

She had quite forgotten the flowers which she was twisting in her fingers, till on leaving the boat, the last of the ladies, and pausing a moment for Sir William, who was dismissing the watermen, she saw Mr. Huntley stoop and pick up some that she had dropped on the bank.

"Let me keep them!" he said hurriedly, as their eyes met; but instantly checking himself, he added: "There are some days one likes to remember; and I do not often take such holidays as this."

"Whose fault is that, Mr. Huntley?" said Sir William, catching the last words as he turned round to give Helen his arm. "We will not pity you a bit. Did not Frank fetch you by force of arms even to-day?"

"Nobody's fault, Sir William," he replied, in the firm, deep voice, which Helen always felt to correspond so well with the steadfast earnestness of his character, "or, indeed, misfortune either. Some men's paths lie one way, some another; and I was not complaining of mine; I know it suits me best." But firm as his voice might be, his countenance, at which Helen could not refrain from stealing a glance, paled with the intensity of some repressed emotion. He might acknowledge the path allotted him to be the best, but he was certainly not then feeling it to be so.

That evening Helen felt really desperate. On their return home, she sat before her dressing-table, unable to command herself sufficiently to finish her toilet for the evening. To hear Bernard talk in this way, and not dare to ask him why his path must be so different from that of other men! Had Sir William not been by, she must have made some effort to pierce the mystery which involved him, even at risk of betraying herself; yet how could she? No, she must bear it! Oh! that this were over, and she were away, away, never to see or hear of him more, and to forget—drown, this passionate longing to brighten his lonely path with the sunshine and music of love! But it would not be over, even with the approaching parting—it would never be over! He was Florence's cousin, and meet they must! Her thoughts flew back to the evening when she had prayed so earnestly that Florence might be spared to her, and spared to be happy with Frank, with scarcely a dream of Bernard in the distance, feeling as if that would be happiness enough for a life-time. And now it had all come true, and was all as nothing; the very relationship then so prized, between Florence and Bernard, seeming only one drop the more of bitterness in her cup. The dream had overshadowed it all!

She started as Florence's sweet face looked in.

"What, not ready yet, dear Helen? And looking so grave there with your face on your hands? I shall begin to think Lord Castleton was right as to your missing some one from the party to-day?"

"Oh no, dear," said Helen, not moving, but smiling back, perforce, in answer to the loving, playful smile upon her. "I assure you I missed no one; but you know, dear, I shall have to be going away all alone so soon—you must let me be sad a little bit," she said, wearily.

"Naughty child!" said Florence, tenderly smoothing her fair hair, "I shall not let you! And you must not say alone, though your dear father will not be with you."

"No, I mean to be a good child," said Helen, looking up with a strange, pleased, yet patient look in her eyes. The soft, tender chiding was pleasant, though it could not reach the real trouble of her heart.

"And you will not be away long," continued Florence; "and when you come back to the Park, I know a pair of ponies that will soon be scampering across the country to the Priory Cottage; and do you expect that people there will have forgotten you naughty child?" and she lovingly kissed the upturned

face ; half-hypocritically, though, to hide her own blush. Still Helen did not move ; but when Florence exclaimed, in real uneasiness at the sight of tears she could no longer keep back, she started to her feet.

"No, no, dearest ; I am only a little bit silly, doing my bride's-maid's crying beforehand. To tell the truth, too, your coaxing makes a goose of me, dear ; I miss a little making much of me so bitterly sometimes," said poor Helen, truthfully enough, though it was not Florence's tenderness only that she missed. "But if you will go down now, I will be a good child, and come after you in two minutes in first-rate spirits."

"You promise ?"

"Yes ; I promise !" And she kept her word. Though she stood for a moment after Florence was gone, with her hands clasped on her head, feeling as if it must burst if she choked down the bitter tears struggling to find way, she did choke them down ; and, when she joined the party below, exerted herself so vigorously to share in the general merriment—Mr. Huntley's absence was a measure of relief—that Florence's uneasiness was quite dispelled, and she whispered to Frank, what a treasure dear Helen's elastic spirits and lively temper would be in any household. But perhaps he saw somewhat deeper, for he only nodded, and said nothing. And Helen went to bed that night weary to the heart's core, yet conscious that she had made some progress that day in one of life's great lessons—namely, in the learning to bear, bravely and unselfishly, that which we must suffer, whether we will or no.

And ask those who have learnt that lesson best, whether in sufferings on the world's wide stage, or in the noteless obscurity of their own hearts and homes, what they would least willingly spare from their past lives ? Ask, and they will tell you :—those very sufferings, that very endurance. For to them the tree is known by its fruits ; and if the root struck deep in darkness and in pain, God sent His sunshine and His rain upon the foliage and the flower, and ripened the blessing in His own good time.

CHAPTER XV.

JOINED AND PARTED.

Go forth upon the sea of life,
Oh, gentle, loving, trusting wife !
And safe from all adversity,
Upon the bosom of that sea,
Thy comings and thy goings be !

LONGFELLOW.

Oh, there is healing in the bitter cup !
Go forth then, and, beneath the unerring Will,
Bow, and have comfort !

SOUTHEY.

BUT two days now remained: the third would be the wedding-day, and the last, also, that Helen would pass with the Emlyns; for Mrs. Montagu had so timed her movements as to arrive at a friend's house at Clapham the day before, in order to proceed to Brighton the day after the wedding. She had even proposed to send in her friend's carriage to fetch Helen on the afternoon of the wedding-day; and Helen would have passively consented; but such a universal outcry was raised in the circle at Grosvenor Square, at the bare idea of the only bride's-maid's leaving before the dinner-party given in honour of the wedding, that she was obliged to relinquish the idea; and the matter was compromised by the Emlyns arranging to send her out to Clapham in their own carriage at night, when the wedding festivities should be duly accomplished. Sir William's proposal to accompany her, or, if she would stay, to take her down to Brighton himself in a day or two, she steadily declined: for, on the one hand, she was longing to escape, to free herself from the torture of present associations; and, on the other, she was desirous of thwarting Mrs. Montagu's arrangements as little as possible.

Mrs. Montagu, indeed, had framed these latter with a view to securing an invitation to the wedding, or wedding dinner-party at least; but though at another time Helen might have seen, and perhaps secured the accomplishment of the object of the manœuvre, she was now too much absorbed even to give a thought to such things. It was all lost on her, and, therefore, on the Emlyns also. Nor did she pay more attention to the

innuendos of its being all her fault, which accompanied Mrs. Montagu's announcement of Captain Marston's exchange into a regiment now quartered at Brighton, but under orders to proceed, in two or three weeks, to Portsmouth for India; the ostensible reason for the peremptory necessity of going to Brighton so soon. She barely took in the fact, which, by the way, her step-mother unwittingly told truth in communicating; for Mrs. Montagu believed the intended exchange to be merely the feint she had suggested.

On the wedding-day, therefore, as the last she would pass in Mr. Huntley's society, Helen now began to concentrate all her thoughts and expectations, with a feverish excitement which she tried vainly to reason down by asking herself what she expected from it? It was no good; *what*, she could not tell, but something might, *must* happen! It seemed impossible that this state of terrible suspense should end in nothing; that this intense strain on all her energies, this pitch of wretched excitement to which the last fortnight had wrought her, should be destined to exhaust itself without vent, without relief. Surely something must happen, if not to make her and Bernard happy in each other, at least to throw some light on the cause of this miserable estrangement. If there were some insuperable barrier between them, she only desired to see it—it would be so much easier to submit then. If, only, it were nothing to Bernard's discredit! But the idea was instantly rejected. She was not ignorant enough of the world's ways and vices to be unaware that such things might be—often, too often, were. Only not with Bernard! But why, then, could he torture her thus? Surely he must know! or must find it out before they parted! They could never part in this way. It was impossible but what something must happen!

And whose heart has not sometimes felt, and desperately clung to, such an impossibility?

Florence, meanwhile, in happy ignorance that anything beyond a somewhat keener feeling than usual of the discords of her home-life, lay behind the momentary depression her friend had betrayed, saw her wedding-day approach with feelings of such deep and unalloyed happiness, as she gratefully marvelled should have been bestowed upon her. She had been happy all her life, in her calm, loving way, and now this greas happiness was added to all the rest! She felt—as many othert have felt, when life's trials were in fact still to come—as if all

possibility of deep grief or trial were over and gone. Were not she and Frank heart-linked beyond all possibility of parting, since all that is truly joined on earth is more perfectly joined in heaven? And with such a source of deep, indestructible happiness within, must it not be easy to bear even the sorest trial she could picture to herself, the external transient parting which death involves?

And comparatively easy, no doubt, it is—far easier still it ought to be—to part, whether for earth or heaven, from those we love, in the possession of that sure faith in the undying blessedness of pure human love (as derived from the one Eternal Fount of love and bliss) in which Florence rejoiced; but even such faith needs trial to make it sure. That which to most men seems difficult or impossible, *may* be easy to some; but it only *seems* easy to them, till they have conquered its difficulties, its impossibilities, in practice as well as in theory.

As for Frank Littleton, being sunshine at all times, what could he be now but “sunshine double-distilled,” as Lord Castleton jestingly called him; and the deep seriousness, more than ever perceptible beneath the joyous light-heartedness of his natural disposition, might bear out the comparison, as parallel to the deep shade which is proportioned to the brightness of the sunbeams. Helen used to think, as she watched the serene, thoughtful smile on his face,—when, seated beside Florence, he would look round upon the rest, talking and laughing gaily, himself perhaps joining in the talk and laughter a moment later,—that there was something almost angelic in its expression, so bright and yet so still. And if man would dwell hereafter as an angel in heaven, must not the angel be born within him on earth?

Knowing far more than Florence of the realities of human suffering, he was far more alive than she to the probabilities of trial in store for them. Perhaps, a monitor within might already whisper from what quarter the cloud was likely to arise; but if so, the presage did not dim, rather, perhaps, enhanced the brightness of the present joy. “As thy day, so shall thy strength be,” was a promise which, tried and proved already, he had not found wanting: he could trace, step by step, in looking back, the help and guidance ever at hand; not, indeed, superseding the necessity for efforts of his own, but sustaining, seconding, and bringing forth fruit of them. Then how should he fear for the future?

And if we only knew *how* to look back, we, too, must look forward with the same just confidence.

The eve of the wedding-day had come at last, and Frank Littleton, Florence, and Helen, were sitting together in the back drawing-room, between light and dark; Florence and Frank side by side and hand in hand; Helen, as she loved to sit, on a footstool at Florence's feet: sometimes looking up and joining in their talk, sometimes leaning her head against Florence, whose arm was twined lovingly round her neck, weary indeed at heart, but yet feeling more at rest than she ever now felt, by day or night, in any company but theirs. There was something so soothing, so refreshing in the sphere of their pure, deep happiness; for when deeply suffering ourselves, the sight of happiness in others keeps up our faith in happiness in the abstract, and our hopelessness does not weigh so heavily, or seem so absolute. It was a comfort, too, to feel that she could rejoice with them, notwithstanding her own grief: and her sore, chilled heart felt doubly grateful for the friendly affection which was always blending her with their future plans and prospects.

But little was said this evening among the three. There are times and seasons when words are well-nigh superfluous; and Helen was half-wishing that this could last for ever, and that she could dream out her life in the soft, tranquil shadow of her friends' happiness—she could almost be content then, without any of her own—when Cissy peeped in from the front room, the doors of which she had not long before mysteriously closed, and catching sight of Helen in the bright ray of lamp-light now admitted, danced fearlessly in to say they were all wanted now. She had been setting out the wedding-presents for everybody to see; and they must come and look at them with the rest.

"And Mr. Huntley has just brought his," said she, "such a splendid diamond bracelet, which he says was his mother's; and there he is, looking like a bad boy put in the corner, because I would make him stay till you had seen it. I suppose he is afraid of being thanked; so I told him it was very ugly, and you should not thank him much."

Helen's dream of oblivion was over, and she would have slipped away upstairs; but Cissy, who had grown much less afraid of her since she found she knew how to nurse the baby and was very fond of it, seized hold of her hand, whispering that Florence and Mr. Littleton must go in together, so there was nothing for it but to submit.

The presents were very numerous and beautiful ; for both Florence and Frank had some few friends beyond the present circle, intimate enough to make bridal offerings on the occasion ; among them Sir Charles Alton, who had not failed to pay his respects to his former patient, and congratulate her on the complete cure he and his friend Littleton had effected, "between them." Cissy, too, had really been disposing, with great taste, all gifts which could be considered in the least degree ornamental ; and conspicuous, on a gilt fire-screen, hung the beautiful lace veil, and wreath of orange flowers, which, to settle the question of the bridal toilet, Cissy herself had brought home, as a present, one morning. Sparkling among the rest, and almost more valuable than any, lay Mr. Huntley's diamond bracelet.

Sir William's wedding present was not in the ornamental line, being no less than a deed of gift of the Priory Cottage and the little Priory Farm which from time immemorial had been attached to it ; and as Frank Littleton was free from that fierce pride of independence, which resents, even from the nearest and dearest, a favour which can, by any ingenuity, be construed to imply a pecuniary obligation, he never dreamt of grudging his friend the pleasure of making him somewhat more independent than could his own small means. So when Sir William, on occasion of the settlement-signing, proffered his gift, it was accepted as frankly as offered, with a smile and a grasp of the hand, which fully recognized the deep obligation Frank was not too proud to owe his friend, for thus enabling him—according to the tenor of the papers just signed, in which he had settled all he possessed in the world upon her—to secure to Florence, whatever might be their future circumstances, the home which must surely be dear above all others to a happy wife ; the home which had been the scene, and remains the abiding witness, of her early married happiness.

"There now, Miss Helen !" said Sir William, when the presents had been duly admired, "see what a young lady loses by neglecting her duty !"

"Who has been neglecting any duty, Sir William ?" said Helen, not inclined to understand the allusion.

"England expects every young lady to do her duty," replied Sir William, gravely ; "that is—to get married !"

"Yes, Miss Montagu," broke in Lord Castleton, "only imagine the satisfaction with which we should prepare a second edition of all that you see before you, if only"—

"Only the lace veil must be bigger," said Cissy, in a half-whisper, not quite clear yet if she might venture to help tease Helen a little; "and I wonder if you have got another diamond bracelet like this, Mr. Huntley?"

"And lace veils are most becoming, Lady Castleton says," interposed Frank Littleton, most opportunely. "She has a vision of something she saw in her looking-glass about this time last year."

"I have not, Mr. Littleton!" exclaimed Cissy, indignantly; "but a vision of something I mean to see in a lace veil this year, and very soon, too!" And catching up the veil with a merry laugh, she made for Florence; but Florence drew back behind Frank and Lady Emlyn.

"Then I must put it on you! I must put it on some one!" said Cissy to Helen, with a pretty, beseeching look it was impossible to refuse.

So the beautiful lace veil was thrown over Helen as she stood there in her white summer dress, and Lady Emlyn playfully added the orange wreath; and then a cry was raised, half in jest, half in earnest, by all present, Mr. Huntley excepted.

"Most becoming! Charming! Perfect!"

"If you could but see yourself in the glass," added Frederick, "your natural obduracy, Miss Montagu, would melt away like snow in the sunshine."

"Come and look!" said Cissy, growing bolder as Helen remained passive, and catching up a candle to light her to a mirror. But when Helen had moved a step, she suddenly stopped short. She had caught Bernard's eye fixed on her with its saddest, tenderest look, and there was a quivering about the muscles of his mouth, the sight of which made her heart almost stop beating.

"Please take them off, dear Cissy!" she said, very humbly.

"Oh! not yet," said Cissy, who, seized with a new idea, had set down the candle. "I must put you on some more pretty things, you look so nice in them."

"Yes, yes; we must make quite a bride of you!" said Florence; and little dreaming of the pain she was inflicting, she lifted the rich lace veil to clasp a pearl ornament round her neck, while Cissy substituted a splendid seigné for Helen's simple brooch, and then began clasping on one bracelet after another.

"That is enough, dear Cissy!" pleaded Helen once more,

"No, no; we must show off Mr. Huntley's, it is the handsomest of all!" said Cissy.

But the clasp was old-fashioned and peculiar, and Cissy could not manage it; while Helen stood there, feeling Bernard's eyes upon her though she never lifted her own, and trembling internally till she felt as if she could bear it no longer.

"Mr. Huntley," said Cissy, suddenly, "you must come and show me how this fastens."

Little did those who stood round, laughingly applauding the completion of the bridal toilet, dream of the feelings with which Bernard Huntley, who had no pretext for refusing, bent over Helen's hand to fasten on her arm the resplendent bracelet, which as a child he had often clasped, by way of amusement, on his mother's. Yet it was no regretful emotion stirred by memory of her, which made his hand tremble so that he could hardly hold the familiar clasp; and by an irresistible impulse, when the bracelet was clasped at last, he suddenly bent and kissed, as if in homage, the extended hand which was like ice to his touch. Both he and Helen started, and their eyes met for a moment, but as Mr. Huntley drew hastily back—with an expression on his face that petrified Helen, so different was it in its dark consternation, from that she had for the moment half hoped to see there,—Frank Littleton started forward and followed the example; and then one by one the others took up the cue, and pressed forward to kiss Helen's hand, Lord Castleton, doing it twice over, for himself and "somebody else," as he took care to mention. And as Helen's hand was warm enough again by this time—and her cheeks too, but luckily the veil screened them—no suspicion was awakened that Mr. Huntley's homage had been paid otherwise than in sport; and Florence was pleased to think Bernard should have been in such good spirits that evening. How often lookers on see no more of that which passes before their eyes!

A full minute elapsed before Helen regained power of speech or motion; but roused to the perception that it passed as a joke, she suddenly, in the midst of Lord Castleton's second genuflection, flung veil and wreath together over his head, and in the burst of laughter that ensued, escaped to the farthest corner of the room, leaving him kneeling in comic surprise, and calling for Cissy to come and unveil him, or some one would take him for the bride, and marry him by mistake!

And before the chase which they then gave Helen—pretending that she was feloniously making off with Florence's pretty things—and her consequent imprisonment in a corner, while she gave them up one by one, had terminated, Mr. Huntley had taken leave of Lady Emlyn, and was seen no more that evening.

For the rest of the evening, Helen might talk and laugh with the rest; but she felt stunned, and did not know, five minutes later, a word she had said. She dared not steal a look even to Frank and Florence's quiet sofa; the very thought of quietness was terrible. A moment's check to the false excitement she was keeping up with such inconceivable effort, and she must have broken down utterly; and in the strange contrast between the outward and the inward, she felt imprisoned, as by a spell, in some unreal world of enchantment, and was only conscious of an absorbing wish that the spell would break and leave her alone.

She was really alone at last, and dawn still found her struggling sleeplessly with the bitter certainty that last look of Bernard's had forced upon her. He had recoiled, as if in terror, from the mere passing suspicion, flashed on him by her appealing eyes, of her attaching importance to the involuntary betrayal of his feelings; and never must word or look of hers awaken such a suspicion again! Now, indeed, there was nothing left but to bear it. Nothing more could possibly happen now!

And so the wedding-day came at last.

All passed off auspiciously. No bridal pair ever looked happier, or to better advantage, than Florence and Frank Littleton were universally adjudged to do. Helen sat and watched Florence's sweet face, so blushing, yet gravely, happy; while Lady Emlyn was lovingly arranging wreath and veil, and Cissy was dancing round them to help, darting off every now and then to bestow a kiss and a toss upon the baby, which thus early in its little life was assisting in its nurse's arms at the bridal toilet. Helen herself looked fair and stately as ever; and being habitually pale, her pale cheeks would attract no attention; nor could the keenest observer have detected in her face anything but a deeper shade of thought than usual. But she was quieter than even Florence herself; and though she too kissed and smiled on the baby, when it was brought near her, she could not, to save her life, have tossed and danced it as usual.

But she could still listen, with the deepest sympathy, to the solemn words which made one, in the eyes of the law and the world, those whom love and mutual consent had already united, and must continue to unite, more and more closely, day by day and year by year, and would re-unite in a better world, to grow more perfectly one through progressive ages of eternity. For Helen, at least, felt no doubt that the union she was now witnessing was a true one, calculated so to endure; and what earthly blessing, she asked herself, could equal the felicity of such a union? what earthly trial possibly mar it?

But such happiness would never be hers—never! Then she would be content with the lesser blessings assigned to her lot, not counting at least the privilege of sharing their higher blessings. She would never repine! And a high and noble spirit of acquiescence in her lot raised Helen's heart for the time above the consciousness of pain; and if her face were serious, almost to sternness, while the ceremony lasted, she could relax to the tenderest, if not the brightest of smiles, in her greetings to the newly-married pair at its close. Nor could any but herself divine the intense effort it cost her to refrain from stealing so much as a glance at Bernard; though she somehow knew he had all the while been standing with folded arms, and a depression in his very attitude which her heart long afterwards ached to remember, though at the time she was simply conscious of it as a fact.

The wedding breakfast, too, was over at last; and the unavoidable contact it involved with Mr. Huntley had been passively endured, and Florence and Helen found themselves alone for a few minutes, when the former went up to change her dress. Helen remembered afterwards, as if it had passed in a dream, Florence's tender embraces and loving words; while she herself stood smiling down upon her, and stooping her head for Florence to kiss her, and smooth her bright, fair hair, with a composure she herself wondered at, and which might well deceive her friend. Then that, too, was over—being alone with Florence was almost harder to bear than anything,—for Lady Emlyn and Cissy joined them, and after a few more minutes of bustle and stir, the adieus had been made, and the pair had departed. Then Helen's heart sank indeed, feeling that her one ray of sunshine was gone from her. And foolish as it seemed, it was, nevertheless, additional pain to see Mr. Huntley take leave of Sir William and walk away, as soon as he had seen his cousin into the carriage. It was true Sir

Charles Alton did the same; but was Bernard's time so precious? She would see him again at dinner, indeed; and resist it as she might, the miserable restless feeling stole over her anew. There must be still some hours passed together; and was it not possible? No, it was *not* possible! She would not so much as give it a thought! It was all over.

She forced herself to join in Lady Emlyn and Cissy's employment of despatching wedding-cards and cake, and laughed when she could at Lord Castleton's nonsense, as he lounged beside them, getting scolded perpetually for playing with this or that between his fingers, while it was being looked for everywhere, and then inventing some ridiculous excuse.

"Miss Montagu gave it me to hold, I assure you! She is not quite herself again yet, you know, after witnessing the awful ordeal through which she will herself one day pass."

"How do you know? Perhaps I shall be an old maid!" said Helen quickly.

"Miss Montagu!" exclaimed Frederick, with a face of horror, shrinking into the farthest corner of his chair. "If you use such a word again, I shall be obliged to leave the room, or send off an express for some one to bring you to your senses. Only I don't exactly know where to send," he added, in a tone of confidential perplexity.

"Frederick! Frederick! what are you doing with that envelope?" exclaimed Lady Emlyn; but she need not have feared Helen's perceiving his drift. Helen only now and then heard what he was saying; and when, with a demure face, he promised to behave better, she had no idea the announcement affected herself. For all the while her ears were straining at every step or sound, though she knew Bernard would not return before dinner-time; and she caught herself perpetually looking at the clock, though there were hours still to spare.

By the aid, however, of their various occupations, visits from the baby, and an afternoon tea, the long day was got through at last, and, with a sigh of relief, Helen escaped to dress for dinner. She would have given the world to lie down and hide herself from everybody till the carriage should come at night to take her away: but the beating pulse must be stilled and the aching heart dissembled for yet a few hours more. Yet, by a strange perversity, as she went down, she stood still and positively trembled at the idea, that after all Bernard might possibly not come!

He was there, however, as well as several other guests, when

she entered the room; and her thoughts reverted to the evening on which she first joined the Emlyn Priory circle. Little more than a year ago! And yet she seemed to have grown old in the interval, old with the suffering which at that moment might well outweigh all the rest in memory. Yet would she, if she could, efface that year of her life, or even that portion of it with which Mr. Huntley had been blended?

There he stood, talking to Sir Charles Alton and another gentleman, as she had often delighted to hear him talk, with all the eloquence of earnestness, and the flash of intelligence in his eye, which for the time banished his melancholy. His whole presence corresponded so well to the noble sentiments and high thoughts of which she had learned to regard him as a living embodiment. Would she give up the having known him, having loved him—the having been loved, as her heart whispered—for all the world could give? No; come what might, she could *not* wish that last year of her life un-lived, or Bernard unknown.

Meanwhile, the rest of the party had assembled; and Helen could hardly help starting, though she might have known it would occur, when she heard Mr. Huntley desired to take her down. She almost hoped he might contrive to escape to the other side of the table, as he had always done of late; but in a formal party it was not so easy, and they were soon seated side by side, to get through at least a couple of hours as best they might. Mr. Huntley made no attempt at conversation, though he was scrupulously attentive, as indeed, except in an absent fit, he always was to every one; and she felt that he watched her slightest movement, so that neither word nor look escaped him. Her neighbour on the other side began to worry her. He was a young acquaintance of Lord Castleton's, who had been amusing himself before dinner by impressing on Lord Drayton, what a very charming, elegant girl the bride's-maid was, not to speak of her being an heiress. For Lord Castleton loved teasing, and had manœuvred to place his friend beside Helen, and himself directly opposite, to watch the result of his promptings.

Helen might, at another time, have enjoyed the opportunity of putting down a silly, conceited young man, but she was in no mood now to listen to inane compliments and condescending attempts at conversation; and after a time, feeling she could stand it no longer, she turned resolutely away, and plunged desperately into conversation with Mr. Huntley, on the first abstract question which presented itself, quite un-

conscious of the ineffable astonishment and disgust of her other neighbour, which threw Lord Castleton into a state of delight for the rest of the evening.

By degrees her conversation with Bernard flourished. Perhaps it was a relief to him, as well as to her, to talk, instead of sitting, feeling every minute of silence; and the infectious congeniality of their ideas drew them on into one of their old talks, so that for a time Helen almost forgot all but what they were talking of, though still feeling dumbly at her heart the weight which would be conscious suffering if she but permitted her thoughts to turn to it. But even this sort of truce with her trouble was not destined to last.

"I am grieved to interrupt a lady so agreeably engaged," Lord Castleton leaned across the table to say, with a provoking smile, "but my friend, Lord Drayton, has been waiting these five minutes to offer you some wine, Miss Montagu."

Helen turned hastily to decline the attention, which her neighbour had, in fact, been sulkily deliberating with himself whether he should pay her, or merely push on the wine; but before she could resume the thread of the sentence in which Lord Castleton had interrupted her, he leaned forward again:

"I really ought to apologise for the word I used so thoughtlessly just now, Miss Montagu. I assure you I meant nothing; but on such festive occasions people's heads run so naturally on weddings and engagements, that I confess one cannot be too careful to convey no false impressions."

It was a mere random joke; and, delighted to see Helen colour and look confused, he turned away to devote himself to the lady next to him, without perceiving that it was not only Helen who coloured, or detecting the deeper feeling which contracted the brow of Mr. Huntley, who threw a fierce glance across the table as if he would have annihilated the speaker. But Helen caught the look, and to speak another word was impossible, if she had to sit there for an age. She leant back in her chair, and felt positively faint with the effort of self-command.

It seemed as if Lady Emlyn would never rise from table; and when at last they rose, it was fresh pain to feel that her going must be a positive relief to Bernard. Yet she must walk upstairs, and talk and smile as if nothing were wrong with her. Lady Emlyn affectionately whispered how becomingly she was dressed, and how much she was admired; while her heart sickened within her, as so many young hearts have sickened in

their anguish, at the idea of having to live out years of life amid these "vanities of vanities," with this dreary aching within, the more intolerable because it must be dissembled.

But the time for dissimulation, at least, was drawing to a close ; and a sense of exhaustion began to steal over Helen, to struggle against which taxed her powers to the utmost. She went through the talking to the ladies, and then afterwards the singing, and the turning over leaves while others sang, all in that state of mental tension which precludes the reception of impressions from without, unless they strike the one chord strung to such a pitch of racking susceptibility. She listened impassively to Lord Castleton's jests, and his friend's renewed attempts at civility ; for Frederick had maliciously been persuading him it was all shyness on Helen's part, and her monosyllabic answers might seem to justify the assertion ; for Bernard was in the room now, and her whole faculties were again absorbed in the miserable suspense into which his presence now always threw her. He did not come near her, even when she sang, but remained in the back room, listening to the talk of the other gentlemen. But he was not talking himself now, and his eyes were constantly following her, though instantly withdrawn if she chanced to meet them.

At last it was all over, and Helen found herself taking leave of Lady Emlyn, and Cissy and Lord Castleton pressing round her, and Sir William offering his arm to escort her downstairs. But Bernard stood immovable at some little distance, not even making a pretence of not watching what went on. Would he really let her go without the ordinary courtesies of leave-taking ? She felt faint and dizzy as the minutes went by ; and when there were no more last words to be said, and she must perforce take Sir William's arm to leave the room, there was a cloud before her eyes as she moved to do so.

But just as they reached the door, near which Mr. Huntley was standing, she stopped by a sudden impulse, and as if just observing him, held out her hand. "Good-bye, Mr. Huntley," said she, wondering how she could speak so calmly.

He started forward, just touched the hand she extended, bowing low as he did so, and fell back to his former position. Helen passed quickly out, leaning on Sir William's arm.

"Huntley in a brown study again !" said he, but she did not hear him. It was all she could do to walk downstairs, trusting to his guidance ; she could see nothing for the mist before her

eyes. Without a word she let him wrap her carefully in the shawl with which her maid was in waiting, and it was with the greatest possible effort that she said faintly, as they reached the carriage-door : " Good-bye, and thank you, Sir William."

" Ah ! I don't believe you are so very glad to leave us, Miss Helen, though you would go to-night ! Are you sure you would not like me to drive out with you ?"

" Oh, no, indeed !" said Helen much more energetically, and the carriage drove off.

It was fortunate that Miss Montagu's maid had preferred a seat outside with Sir William's own man, who was deputed to see her young mistress safe to her destination ; for thus Helen was at least alone, and tears must have their way now, if never again. A gentleman on horseback, who met the carriage as it turned the corner of the square, could see by the lamp-light which streamed in upon her, that her head was bent upon her hands, and her whole form drooping in the unconscious abandonment of grief. The sight affected the rider strangely, to judge by the working of his features, as he put spurs to his horse, with a flash, not wholly of displeasure, in his eye. But before he had ridden far he turned his horse's head, and followed the carriage, at some distance, but constantly keeping it in sight.

The carriage reached its destination ; one of those pretty suburban residences, whose small plots of ground in front, with the smaller green plot for the drive to sweep round, are so thickly encircled with trees as to render the house almost invisible till you pass within the guardian screen of foliage. In the deep shadow of such a screen, Gerald Marston reined up his horse to watch Helen alight. She paused at the door for a moment, and turned round to look up at the clear, high moon. She was perfectly calm both in bearing and feature now, but so pale, with a countenance of such utter weariness and dejection, that in the real warmth of his honest affection, Gerald would have given his right hand to spring to her side, with words of the humblest devotion and tenderness. But how would he be received ? A bitter smile replaced the expression of fond admiration and sympathy with which he had at first regarded her ; and as Helen turned to enter the house, he vehemently turned his horse's head, and spurring fiercely, as a relief to his excited feelings, galloped off on the road to London.

Helen, meanwhile, went wearily upstairs—it had been

settled that, as she might be late, no one should sit up to receive her—and dismissing her maid as soon as possible, was no sooner freed from her unwelcome presence, then she threw herself, half-dressed as she was, upon her bed; and utterly worn out, by mental suffering and sleepless nights, sank heavily into the deep sleep of exhaustion, which sometimes comes thus opportunely to our relief, when our overtaxed powers of endurance must inevitably fail us, but for the blessed interval of refreshment and oblivion thus afforded.

And such refreshment comes most often to novices in suffering. It is when sleep fails us, though most deeply needed, that a more interior phase of suffering is entered on, and the necessity of a higher strength and fortitude realized, than we have any conception of in our earlier trials.

There was no sleep for Bernard Huntley that night. In his lonely study, in his desolate home, he sat hour after hour, with teeth set, and folded arms, and brows contracted, like a man in some extremity of physical agony; battling with dark thoughts, and terrible suggestions of the evil voice within, which threatened to overwhelm all better counsel of the still small voice that speaks ever of peace and comfort, even in darkest hours, would men but listen and hearken to it. Happily for him, he had long been used, not only to listen, but to hearken: and though the large drops rolled down his forehead as he sat there, outwardly rigid and motionless as a rock; though his spirit might quail and shiver in its anguish, before the gloomy, spectre-haunted loneliness of the path his inner eye was shaping and dwelling on amid the mists of the uncertain future; though the struggle might be fierce—the victory was sure. For he knew where strength alone lies,—who it is that treads down our enemies, in the bitter conflicts which teach us how far harder it is to live bravely on, than to welcome “the beautiful angel, Death,” so falsely named the king of terrors.

It was over at last; the dark hour had passed away, and he could think calmly again, though with a pang at his heart the while, of Helen, as she had stood the previous evening in all her maiden queenliness, drooping her head beneath the light weight of the bridal tiring they had decked her with in sport—drooping, till she felt the touch of his lips upon her hand, and gave him—that look! He held his breath to think of it. No! it was only surprise; she might well be surprised. How should she dream of the anguish it had cost him to stifle—no, to hide

—his love ; resigning all hope, without seeking so much as a look of love or sympathy from her ?

He thought he could have been content with sympathy. If she could only know all that he had suffered and must suffer, and feel for him, and speak comfort to him, as he knew she would—did he not remember her sympathy when he told her of the blank his mother's loss had made in his life?—he fancied it would be comparatively easy to submit and to endure. If she could but know how he loved her !

He snatched up a pen to write ; but it was soon flung down again. What sort of love could it be which thus urged him to pain her with even an echo of his misery ? Selfish ! And what if she—— The deathly pallor of his countenance, as the thought suggested itself, proved that his misery might be even deeper yet ; but he must face the question. What if her answer should betray that the suffering was not his alone ?

With convulsive energy he tore the paper to shreds, and flung them from him as if he would fling away, for ever, the thought which involved a temptation he might not be able to bear. There must be no looking back from the plough, no paltering with temptation. If, as he trusted, as he *would* trust and believe, the suffering were all his own, let it remain so ! Suffer he must himself, but God forbid that he should add a grain of sand's weight to the burdens of another, much less to hers ! Would he not rather die—no ! that were a poor sacrifice—rather live out a life of thousandfold suffering, if so he might add one day of happiness to her life—his Helen, his darling, his white rose !

He laid his hand with a sort of reverence on the withered white rose, which he had caught as she flung it the morning of the wedding at Emlyn Priory, and which now lay before him with the forget-me-nots—she had not so much as given him those, either—and vowed deeply in his heart yet once again, that, with God's help, he would be no coward.

For Helen was not mistaken when she deemed, in her enthusiasm, that Bernard Huntley bore within him the spirit of a martyr ; a spirit no less needful and admirable now, though somewhat differently exercised in our day, than when men were called on to endure martyrdom at the stake, in defence of a persecuted creed.

CHAPTER XVI,

GERALD MARSTON,

God be praised, the meanest of His creatures
Has two soul-sides: one, to face the world with;
One, to show a woman when he loves her.

BROWNING.

THE next day Helen accompanied Mrs. Montagu to Brighton; but she was too utterly depressed to notice the extra ungraciousness of that Lady's manner towards her, occasioned by the discovery just made, that her nephew was negotiating his exchange in earnest, a step which would destroy her last hope of compassing the match she was so bent on. But when a few days had betrayed to Mrs. Montagu Helen's unmistakable depression of spirits, her hopes revived. Something had gone wrong. Perhaps Helen had been expecting Mr. Carysfort to return to the wedding, and was thus disappointed in that and other expectations. A disappointment often brought a young lady to her senses, however saucy she might be; so Helen might, after all, prove more manageable now. She only trusted Gerald would soon join them; and, doubtless, the exchange might easily be cancelled.

So Mrs. Montagu suddenly became most affectionately considerate to her step-daughter, pitying her tenderly for the bad headaches which she pressed her to acknowledge as the cause of her apparent indisposition. She had been doing too much, Mrs. Montagu said, and knocking herself up in town; but quiet and the sea-air would soon strengthen her! Driving up and down the parade would do her good!

How Helen hated the very sight of that parade! She felt, indeed, rather grateful for Mrs. Montagu's unusual kindness, and did her best to respond to it; for in Captain Marston's absence it did not occur to her to connect it with him; and she ascribed it to that sympathy for illness, which some women feel who have but little to spare for other more grievous ills. But she had much rather have been left to herself. She was sickening for rest, for solitude. Fields and woods to roam in by herself—there to face and fight out the struggle between her crushed affections, and her earnest desire to accept and acquiesce in the lot assigned her—would have been luxury,

happiness in comparison. For the dreary monotonous routine of a place like Brighton, in society like Mrs. Montagu's, was absolute torture heaped on her previous wretchedness. Morning walks and afternoon drives; visits to and from watering-place idlers, no peace, no rest, no shade, either for soul or sense, in that remorseless glare and bustle, by which, above all other fashionable English watering-places, Brighton stands pre-eminently distinguished.

Helen's only hours of freedom were before breakfast; and how she rejoiced now in Mrs. Montagu's love of late hours! Rising early herself, from restless and broken slumbers, she would steal forth to her favourite resort, that lower storey among the piles at the head of the chain-pier, where only she was sure of being able to sit alone, and listen to the plashing of the waves at her very feet; undisturbed save by the dulled sound of steps and voices overhead, and that only when the waves were at the stillest. When they dash and foam among the piles, even but a little, thunder would scarcely be heard there, much less steps and voices. But for the hours she spent there, Helen felt as if she could never have got through the weary wretchedness of the rest of the day. At ten o'clock, or even later, she could return to the hotel, not far from the head of the pier, at which they were staying, without meeting many idlers, at least of the class among which Mrs. Montagu's acquaintance lay, and still be in time for breakfast. And what company so good as the plashing waves for a struggling, heavy heart like hers? Especially in the gales prevalent at that season, when the waves roared like thunder among the piles, and the wind well-nigh took away her breath if she faced it, it was almost pleasure, it was certainly balm to pain, to sit there in a somewhat sheltered nook, yet within reach of the dash of the spray, which seemed to cool her forehead as it fell there, and almost lose sense of her inward disquiet, surrendering herself to external impressions, soothed by the tumult of winds and waves.

But one morning, as she was languidly returning along the pier, she met Captain Marston. He had, no doubt, come to join the regiment into which he had exchanged; and now that he had found her on the pier before breakfast, there would be no more peace! She would have to stay at home! She was feeling too depressed to be angry, or provoked; but her heart sank like lead within her, though this was but a straw added to her burden. She could not help herself. Walk home she

must, with him beside her, taking all the care of her that an escort can take of a lady, who will not honour him by accepting his arm ; and that Captain Marston had long since learned it was in vain to offer. He troubled her, however, with little conversation, and her words, when compelled to speak, were the fewest possible ; but it was humiliation and bitterness to be compelled so to walk on beside him, when the one she would have given worlds to see guarding her with the same jealous attention, was far away, and severed from her by more than earthly distance.

Then his question as to Mr. Huntley's presence at the wedding recurred to her, with the exasperating idea that he might now be come to observe the effects of their meeting in London ; and her pride rose in arms at the possibility of his perceiving that she was unhappy. So she tried to harden herself to the inward consciousness of suffering, that she might wear her old semblance of haughty indifference ; and Mrs. Montagu flattered herself, when the two came in together, that Helen was really looking in better spirits already. Charming ! It would do, after all !

But Mrs. Montagu was reckoning without her host ; and great was her dismay on learning from her nephew, when Helen, at the earliest possible opportunity, left them to entertain each other, that he had not only completed the exchange, but, having obtained leave to join in India, instead of accompanying the troops out, intended to pass the interval in travelling, and was going to leave England in a week. Remonstrance was useless ; and when, in her wrath, she declared he was a fool, to be taking off in this way, just when the best possible chance of success offered, he answered bitterly, that he knew he was a fool ; but it was for having stayed playing the fool so long, not for being sick of it now ! Nor would he allow her to relieve her feelings by abusing Helen. She might call him a fool or what she pleased ; but not a word should she say against Helen in his hearing, or he would go straight off to London, and not come back again. And as this was the last thing Mrs. Montagu wished, she immediately took the other tack, assuring him it was only her affection for himself which could prompt a feeling against their charming Helen. Gerald must stay as long as he possibly could. She was sure Helen was relenting in her heart. Gerald listened with something between a smile and a sneer, and replied hoarsely that he was fool enough to intend to stay as long as he could, if she

would but let him and Helen alone, which she was fain to promise she would.

A few days passed, and Captain Marston's presence affected Helen but little. She was too much engrossed by her heavy sorrow to mind his mere presence, and it even enabled her to escape some of the wearisome walks and drives on which he could now accompany his aunt, who, with the dread of Gerald's threat before her eyes, was forced to let Helen's defection pass, however little she might like it. And when, after much debate, she had ventured forth again to her favourite resort, and passed her interval of self-indulgence undisturbed, she felt once more comparatively at ease. But when, morning after morning, she met him, as the first, upon the pier on her return, she merely rejoiced that he had not discovered her retreat: little dreaming how he followed, and watched, and waited, all for the sake of that brief walk home by her side, or what it cost him not to follow her to the retreat which he had discovered the very first day, before she suspected his vicinity.

The week went by, and one morning at breakfast, Captain Marston abruptly observed that he should return to London that evening; and to his aunt's deprecating inquiry when they might expect him back, he replied, even more abruptly, "Not at all."

Mrs. Montagu could scarcely contain herself till breakfast was over; and then, not caring to trust to Helen's leaving them, which she might safely have done, told her nephew she would take his arm for a stroll on the parade, and hurried off to prepare for a walk. Helen took her usual seat by the window; and though she opened a book, her eyes strayed away to the white-capped waves, and she longed for the rocking and tossing upon them, which might lull and deaden the strife within. She wondered whether she would be frightened if she were on them in a storm—in great danger? Why should she? A brief struggle—and scarcely that—it would be pleasant to sink into the cool, white waves—and then peace, rest! For *beyond*, there could surely not be this desperate clinging to forbidden happiness; there, surely that must be *felt* to be good, which here is only *known* to be so, because permitted by Goodness Divine. Yet must not the unrest, the repining, be conquered, the heart-trust in Providence be realized here, before peace could be attained even in heaven?

She had so lost herself in thought, that she had been unconscious of Captain Marston's leaving the room, and of sundry

sharp words interspersed in the colloquy carried on, in an under-tone, between him and his aunt outside the door.

"Be satisfied! I am going to speak to her!" were his last bitterly-spoken words as he turned to re-enter the room; but even then Helen did not look up as the door closed, and he had placed himself close in front of her, before she awoke to the consciousness of his presence. Then she started and coloured with surprise, but said, as carelessly as she could, "I thought you were gone out with mamma."

"My aunt is gone out," replied Captain Marston, colouring far more deeply than she had done, with the effort of speaking calmly; "I remained to request the honour of a few minutes' conversation with you."

Helen did not colour this time; but the change in her face as she rose hastily to her feet! She could not now summon at command the haughty coldness, behind which, a few weeks since, she would have sheltered herself; and besides, she had felt as if that danger were over.

"Do not be alarmed, Miss Montagu!" said Gerald, with a glance in which a half-bitter triumph was strangely blended with passionate admiration. "Pray resume your seat for a few moments! Do not be afraid! You have taught me my place!"

He spoke in such bitter earnest, pointing so resolutely to a seat he had placed for her at a little distance from her former one, which was all too much exposed to the scrutiny of passers-by, that she involuntarily yielded to the strength of his will, and seated herself, almost bewildered between the reverie from which she was still but half-roused, and the strangeness of Captain Marston's looks and manner. He remained standing on the other side of the table, looking her full in the face.

"I am not going to annoy you, Miss Montagu, with protestations of the love it has pleased you to scorn so supremely," said Gerald, his features working convulsively with the injured and passionate feelings which must be kept down, that he might for once give them vent in words. "I have no wish to excite either your compassion or your anger. I am going away—to forget my dream," he added hoarsely, in a lower voice. "Grant me only the poor indulgence of knowing why my love should have been deemed so utterly contemptible—or should I say, so utterly beneath contempt? Why you, who can be an angel of goodness and patience to every one

else, should, from first to last, have treated me—like a dog! Yes, like a dog, Miss Montagu! Me, who would have died to please you!”

Helen was petrified.

“I dare say I am not worthy of you,” he continued, vehemently; “I never thought I was! I never thought about it, till your scorn half-maddened me, and set me measuring my own worthlessness to justify you if I could. But I have never disgraced my station or calling as an officer and a gentleman, and I was not such a fool but I knew your worth, and your indifference to the baubles which the world makes its gods. And I loved you, Helen Montagu; no man on earth could have loved you better; and you have trampled on my love, ignored it as beneath your very notice, disdainng even to reject it!”

What could Helen say? She was growing paler every moment.

“Is love so superabundant in the world?” he went on; “are a man’s feelings so utterly unworthy of consideration, as never to have deserved one gentle thought, or word, or look, in return for the life’s devotion you contemned? Even now,” he added, his voice softening involuntarily, “when I was weak enough to hope your own unhappiness might inspire some shade of sympathy for mine—— Did you suppose I did not know you were unhappy?” he continued, more gently still, moving nearer to her as she dropped her face upon her hands. “Did you think you could be unhappy, and I not feel it? I dare say you will not believe it; I thought myself that nothing could have been worse than to see you—as I would give my right hand to see you now—radiant with happiness of your own, if ever so careless of mine; for, believe me, Fate does not wreak her worst spite upon a man, till she shows him the woman he loves *unhappy*—he knowing that the consolation he would lay down his life to offer is not only out of his power to give, but that the very wish would be scorned, despised”——

His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper, and Helen raised her head with an exclamation.

“Oh, Captain Marston, pray do not say that! I am so sorry! I never knew, I never believed, that you really cared for me!” But she could not bear his look, and hid her face in her hands again.

“You never believed I really loved you! Perhaps you

thought I wanted your money?" returned Gerald, in a low tone of intense bitterness.

"Pray forgive me—it was very wrong—but—mamma—your aunt"—was all Helen could say.

"Mercenary enough, I grant you," said Captain Marston, his voice softening again at her evident distress. "But must I be like her? Could you not have judged me by any more merciful standard—by yourself, for instance? But never mind, it is all over now! Only, for God's sake,—and for your own sake, too, for it was not worthy of you, Helen!—never treat another poor fellow as you have treated me; and God bless you, notwithstanding!"

He was standing quite close to her now, looking down on her with such deep, sorrowful tenderness, as if waiting for some answer, which the tears she was struggling to choke back would not allow her to make.

"You will say good-bye to me? You are not angry with me now, Cousin Helen?" said Gerald, very humbly; for his resentment had exhausted itself, and he loved her so deeply!

A desperate temptation flashed across Helen's mind, to say the word, to give the look, which her woman's instinct told her would suffice to bring him to her feet, and then to marry him, and go away—away,—and forget all this wretched dream! She felt so inexpressibly desolate at heart, and to be loved is so alluring! But happily hers was too upright a mind to be blinded to the treachery of deceiving, with the mockery of a loveless marriage, the man to whom she had already given such just cause of upbraiding—even had no vision of Bernard risen up between them—and the thought was rejected as soon as recognized. But speak she must; and offering him her hand, while tears trembled on her downcast lashes, she said, even more humbly than he himself had spoken:—"Can you forgive me all my unkindness, Cousin Gerald?"

"Cousin Gerald!" What would he not have given in past days to win her to such a concession? And, even now, though he knew just how much it meant, she could hardly have made a more welcome atonement to his feelings.

"Forgive you! As if I could help it!" he exclaimed, passionately kissing the hand she extended, and imprisoning and pressing it all the more tenderly, because Helen, unable in her present state of mental and physical depression longer to control her agitation, had covered her face with her other hand, and burst into tears.

"Cousin Helen! Do not—pray do not! I would not trouble you for the world! Indeed, I did not mean"—

"Cousin Gerald," said Helen, recovering herself by a great effort, "you make me more ashamed of myself than ever; and the worst of it is, I can do nothing to atone to you. I cannot even say, 'Do not go away, and I will behave very differently in future;' for it is best you should go. But if you come back years hence, and will let me, I will be a good cousin and sister to you then, if you will forgive and forget all you have known of me this time."

She looked up steadily now, with such a deprecating expression in her clear, truthful eyes, that even a man less adoring in love than Gerald Marston, must have forgiven her for not being able to love him in return.

"Thank you, Cousin Helen," said he, very gratefully; "I dare say that will be best after all. I am not fit, I know, for an angel like you; and not to have made you happy, would have been worse than anything. But I could not forget you if I tried; and I am not going to try. I shall be quite content if you will only think kindly of me sometimes. And there is one thing more"—he hesitated, but Helen's eyes encouraged him to go on: "if—if ever you should be—very happy"—his voice dropped and trembled painfully—"will you let me hear it from yourself? I could bear it better that way."

"Oh, Cousin Gerald, I would indeed!" said Helen, turning red, and then white again; "but—it will never happen!"

"Yes, it will; I know it will!" returned Gerald. "Good-bye, then, and God bless you again and again, and for ever!" He had seized both her hands, pressed them to his lips, and was gone, before she could articulate a word in reply; and entirely overcome, she buried her face in her hands, and sobbed long and bitterly.

She saw no more of Captain Marston, though he did not leave Brighton that evening till he had hovered about for hours, vainly trying to catch a glimpse of her. No more was seen of Helen that day, either at the window, or on the staircase, or on the esplanade. When Mrs. Montagu returned from her walk, she was informed that Miss Montagu was lying down, with a bad headache, and had given orders not to be disturbed; nor did she face her step-mother again till she had braced herself to the effort by her usual morning walk next day.

Gerald contented himself, therefore, by vowing to his aunt that if she annoyed Helen after he was gone, he would never come back to England at all; and mystified her by darkly intimating that he would be sure to hear of it, though when she hastily caught up the hint, inquiring if he meant that Helen had promised to write to him, he only retorted that he meant nothing, except that she should treat Helen properly. He took his departure, consoling himself, as best he might, by the reflection, that, after all, he had rather remember her as he had last seen her, with tears in her eyes, calling him "Cousin Gerald" so kindly and gently. Since he could never be more to her, even that was something; and he would try and think of her as "Cousin Helen," in return. No, it was no good! If he lived a hundred years, he should always feel the same to her. How could he help it? Who in the world had he ever known to compare to her? And how was it to be expected she should ever have cared for an insignificant fellow like him? Though if she had not cared for some one else, who could tell? But she did; and he knew for whom!—Poor Gerald!

The effects of Gerald's threats and mystifications,—somewhat increased by Helen's bad headache,—lasted for a day or two; and Mrs. Montagu forebore, at first, to annoy her step-daughter by covert innuendoes or direct reproaches; but failing to extract from her the remotest allusion to the mysterious last interview, she gradually worked herself into a worse fit of ill-humour than usual, which added, as much as it was possible for such trivialities to add, to Helen's aggravated mental distress.

For it needed no unkindness or reproaches from without, to sharpen the sting which the remembrance of that parting scene with Gerald Marston daily and hourly renewed to Helen's feelings. She saw clearly, now, how unjustifiably she had acted; and that, moreover, it was not only prejudice against her step-mother's nephew, which had blinded her to the honest warmth of his feelings, and to what was due to them. It had been quite as much a tacit resentment of what she regarded as his presumption in seeking her; looking down on him, as she was now conscious she had always done, for his lack of intellectual superiority, and insignificant exterior; never deigning to inquire if he might bear a true, warm heart beneath it? Had she really dared to despise—to treat like a dog, as in bitterness of spirit he had told her—a man capable of such ardent, humble, unselfish love as his parting words betrayed? She

who had prided herself on the warm feelings and sympathies, which, in her eyes, were—what she had entreated Florence not to believe “cleverness” to be,—“the best part of her!” She who had flattered herself, as she told Horace Carysfort, that she had seen and abjured the error of undervaluing others because they did not come up to her standard! She who had fancied herself for months past to be emulating Florence’s gentleness and kindness to all around her! That she should all this while have been pursuing, towards one thus invariably and patiently devoted to her, such a system of behaviour as fully to justify the bitterness of upbraiding which it wrung her heart to recall! She was shamed, humiliated beyond expression.

And he would never even know how her heart ached in its loneliness for the misery she had caused him! If only he had not loved her! If he had but told her that her haughtiness, her heartless injustice, had cured the infatuation which first made her lovable in his eyes; instead of welcoming her slightest, her first and only words of courtesy and kindness, as something for which to be as grateful as most men would have been for a return of their attachment. Was it surprising her own love should not have prospered? Had she not, perhaps, thus wrecked Bernard’s happiness too, since her punishment must necessarily involve his suffering?—how she clung to the belief that he did suffer like herself!

And further, if she were capable of such supercilious, unfeeling conduct towards one, might she not have given others also just cause of complaint, in a less degree? Might there not have been reason for that fear or dislike of her in society, which she had attributed solely to her reputation for “cleverness”? Might not Miss Montagu have been justly considered “so very disagreeable,” as she had once complained to Florence that the wonted remark, “so very clever” seemed framed to imply?

Little did Gerald Marston dream, in his humble, self-abasing sorrow over his lost love, of the powerful and salutary effect upon Helen’s character, which the indignant outburst of his bitter sense of her injustice was destined to work. Could he have rightly estimated it, he need scarcely have grudged the bitterest moments he had known, during the period of his hopeless, but thus not wholly wasted, devotion at the shrine of his heart’s idol. It requires, indeed, no ordinary elevation of mind and feeling to be susceptible of genuine, sincere hu-

miliation ; but when really experienced and accepted, as now by Helen, there is no balm in Gilead so powerful for the healing and purification of the soul's sicknesses and corruptions, which all spring from the one root—inordinate self-love. For this requires only to be seen and felt in its reality, stripped of the false glosses which habitually invest it, to be abjured and battled against with that sincerity and earnestness, which, under God's blessing ensure the victory. Not that any of us see, or that Helen now saw, this wholly at once ; but the true light once let in, she, at least, was not one to shun or turn from it. Yet such lessons as she was now learning are a heavy tax upon the spirits ; and when, some fortnight later, her father came to spend a couple of days at Brighton, he was struck by her pale and altered appearance. He was not a man of many words, and his own natural reserve of feeling indisposed him to inquire openly what ailed her. But he watched her anxiously, and finding his wife in no gracious mood after her nephew's departure, came to the conclusion that Helen had been annoyed on that score. His determination was soon taken and announced to her the same day, during an afternoon walk.

"Helen, you are not looking well," said he. "I should think Brighton cannot agree with you. Do you like being here?"

"Like it!" said Helen. "I should say I could not bear it, only of course one can bear anything," she added, forcing a faint smile.

"Good ; then I take you home with me the day after to-morrow."

"O papa," exclaimed Helen, "I should be so thankful to go ! And I think you must want me at home ; I am sure I want you!" Her eyes filled with tears at the thought of the desolation of spirit, to which his arrival had brought the first glimpse of relief.

"I want to see you without such pale cheeks, child !" said her father, but there was a sound in his voice which instantly recalled Helen's anxiety about him ; and perceiving for the first time how careworn he looked, she reproached herself for her absorption in her own troubles.

"Oh ! do not mind my pale cheeks, dear papa," she returned, trying to speak cheerfully. "I shall be all right when I get home to the Park with you. I am so fond of the dear old place."

"Are you?" said Mr. Montagu, smothering a sigh: and then added quickly, as if to change the subject: "Can you be ready by the day after to-morrow?"

The announcement of Helen's intended return was far from pleasing to Mrs. Montagu. She always professed that solicitude for Helen's amusement was her reason for exerting herself to go so much into society; and must now resign either this favourite fiction, or else any further Brighton dissipation for herself. But a hint that she also could return home, if she really expected to feel her solitude at Brighton too oppressive, had the desired effect, and Helen's release was no further contested.

When fairly seated in the train, about to leave Brighton, Helen felt, though she could hardly tell why, as if the worst were over.

CHAPTER XVII.

HELEN AND IDA.

All through life there are way-side inns
Where man may refresh his soul with love,
Even the *saddest* may quench his thirst
At rivulets fed by springs from above.

LONGFELLOW.

WHAT a welcome refreshment both to body and mind even a single day's journey often proves, especially, as was now the case with Helen, when it removes us from the scene of some painful occurrence, over which we have brooded till the very air seems identified with the nightmare of suffering that oppresses us.

Debarred from all sympathy, and struggling vainly with the bitter and sorrowful feelings which for the time completely overwhelmed her, Helen had been in danger of adopting a morbid view of things; and the first beneficial result of the welcome change of scene was a somewhat lightened sense of the wrong inflicted on another, which is to a generous mind, of all burdens the most crushing.

Wrong and unkindness she had, indeed, recklessly, culpably, inflicted; but to reproach herself as having wrecked Gerald Marston's happiness in life, had been an exaggeration of excited feeling. Under no circumstances could she have returned his love, and for his unfortunately fixing his ardent

affections on her, she could in no way be held responsible. For his ultimate happiness or unhappiness in life, moreover, who, indeed, could be responsible but himself? And might she not hope, that, endowed with such capacity of warm and generous attachment, with such a humble estimate of his own merits, he must eventually meet with some adequate compensation for present suffering?

That she had needlessly aggravated that suffering, and erred from a conceit of her own fancied superiority, must indeed remain a humbling remembrance, though a salutary lesson also; and it would be long, no doubt, before she could hear the name of Gerald Marston without a pang of painfully acute self-reproach. But this was, after all, not the question for her future; not the real sorrow and struggle of her life; and it was clearly a case in which regret for the past could only safely be manifested by a better performance of all her duties henceforward; the first and dearest of which—to do her best towards contributing to her father's happiness—was now restored to her. She entered with him the home which she had left a few weeks before, with a sharp pang indeed, at remembrance of the bright hopes she had then carried with her, yet with a heart somewhat lightened of the load she had since been well-nigh sinking under.

As to Bernard Huntley, she could no more cease to love, than penetrate the mystery which hung over him. She could not even try to *unlove* him—if the expression may be permitted—for she had learned nothing to show him less worthy of love, less congenial to her ideas of true manly excellence. But since they were thus severed, she could school herself to accept the trial bravely and uncomplainingly; nor would she even dwell upon vague hopes for the future. She must achieve contentment, nay, happiness, amid the realities, the many blessings of her actual life; not seek false solace from dreams and imaginings, destined, in all human probability never to be realized, and the disappointment of which might make her ungrateful for whatever should be granted in their stead. The struggle might be severe, but, if she persevered, it must surely prove successful.

A few days passed; but, truth to tell, each weighed heavier than the preceding one, as the first renewal of energy springing from change of air and scene wore off by degrees. With her father, indeed, she could exert herself to be cheerful, and it was a rest from her sad thoughts to exert herself for his

sake ; but she saw little of him, save at breakfast and dinner. All day long he was at the bank in X—— ; and even in the evenings, despite her persuasions, he would retire, wearied and jaded as he looked, to his library, and bury himself in business-papers, assuring her that she could not help him ; and then Helen would see no more of him till she stole in to bid him good-night, and beg him not to sit up too late.

The whole long days at least, therefore, she was alone ; and though at first it was a relief to wander about solitary in the beautiful grounds which contrasted so refreshingly with the detested parade at Brighton, yet now that there was no further change or aid from without to look to, her depression soon returned with increasing weight. The question began to force itself upon her, whether it were practically possible to achieve, under such sorrow as hers, the happiness, or even the contentment and serenity, which she had learned to regard it as a duty to attain ? She could endure, of course ; she was enduring : but while the very sunshine brought tears to her eyes by its contrast to the gloom of her spirits ; while she *felt* as if she could never again know a moment of true heart-happiness, how could she *believe* in reality what she had been so ready to accept in theory, as to suffering and yet not being unhappy ; enduring, and finding recompense in the very discipline of endurance ?

This doubt which threatened the whole foundations of her faith—for if the yoke of duty prove not easy ; the burden of those who take it freely upon them not light ; if, in brief, one promise fail us, how may we trust any ?—this doubt became so torturing, that Helen was forced to rouse herself to seek distraction from without. She was beginning to feel almost afraid of the lonely brooding over her sorrow, which seemed leading to worse than sorrow itself.

The Emlyns were still away ; but were there not Frank and Florence at the Priory Cottage, little dreaming of her being near them ? She longed for a glimpse of their happiness, yet shrank from meeting Florence, partly from her distaste to the sort of hypocrisy towards her, which the continued concealment of her feelings seemed to involve ; partly from the opposite dread of betraying them. Go, however, she must, since it would be high treason indeed to friendship, to let them hear by chance of her being at home ; so one day, when she had been more than a week at the park, the ponies were ordered at twelve o'clock, and Helen smiled sadly as she

found them fulfilling Florence's prophecy of their "scampering across country to the Priory Cottage."

She found no one in the pretty little drawing-room she was shown into ; but all looked so lovely and home-like, with the signs of its young mistress's occupation scattered about—work, books, music, and even a letter, just begun, to "Dearest Helen"—and the little garden so bright in the soft October sunshine, backed by the woods of the Priory Park, rich in autumnal hues and opening glades dim in the distance with soft, faint purple mists, that Helen felt as if transported to some little fairy paradise. Penetrated with the atmosphere of peace and beauty diffused around her, she stood looking out, while tears involuntarily gathered in her eyes, when arms were thrown gently round her, and the "Dearest Helen," was uttered in tones of surprised but unfeigned delight.

"Naughty child ! not to let me know you were coming, and give me the pleasure of expecting you !" said Florence.

"Dear Florence, it does my heart good to see you ! You look like happiness itself !" returned Helen, kissing her again and again ; and they were still standing, entwined in most loving embrace, when another pair of arms was thrown round them both, and Frank's beaming face looked in between them.

"I must see who can be kissing my wife at this rate !"

Had any other man in the world, her father excepted, greeted her in such fashion, Helen would certainly have bowed him back into his proper place again ; but there was no resisting the appeal of Frank Littleton's playful tones and sunny smile, and she turned to offer him both her hands, with a smile almost as bright as his own.

"Dear Mr. Littleton ! I am so glad"—she began, but Florence's hand was placed playfully on her lips, and Frank rejoined, laughingly threatening her with his eyes—

"We have already been passing laws to regulate your future behaviour. There is no knowing what I shall do, unless you call me 'Frank' directly. I cannot allow my wife to have a sister who is not my sister too !"

"Well, Frank ! I am sure I have no objection," said Helen, smiling ; and Frank, suddenly kissing and releasing her hands, clapped his own in triumph, and then putting his arm round Florence, whispered, quite loud enough for Helen to hear—

"I think we shall be able to manage her, do not you ?"

"Who is to manage you?" replied Florence, pretending to scold him. "Dear Helen, you must not be shocked at him; he is just like a boy at home for the holidays. Now come and sit down, and let me make you at home."

So Helen was led to a sofa, and Florence began to take off her bonnet, kissing and rejoicing over her meanwhile; and Helen let her do it, it was so pleasant.

"What may I take off?" said Frank, pretending to help.

"Why you must take yourself off, and have the ponies put up directly," said Florence, looking up at him archly and lovingly, though half-shyly still.

"*La reine le veut!* and I am her slave!" exclaimed Frank, bowing profoundly, and disappearing instantly, followed to the door by Florence, who whispered a few words, probably of household import; while Helen looked after them with swimming eyes and a full heart. Oh! the blessing of such life-sunshine as theirs!

She was no longer afraid of betraying herself. She still, indeed, felt conscious of her unhappiness; but it seemed to have retreated before their loving, joyous smiles and greetings into the deep recesses of her heart. No fear of its obtruding itself now on the pleasure of their meeting; the spell was too potent which had charmed it to rest.

They were both back again in a moment; and she must face their surprise, and Florence's gentle chidings, when forced to confess how long she had been near them without coming to see them. She could only apologise humbly, and promise better behaviour in future, allowing them to suppose that she had felt fearful of intruding on them too soon; a distrust of their friendship, for the heinousness of which Frank confessed himself unable to devise adequate punishment; so as Florence suggested, they must perforce forgive her this time.

Then she was introduced anew to the "estate," as Frank called it with an air of comical importance, and lunch followed, and the hours flew so swiftly, that all were surprised when five o'clock arrived, and she must needs return home, to be in time for her father's dinner-hour. She was not allowed to depart without faithful promises to come again soon, and often; and tender admonitions from Florence not to catch cold on the way home; and hints from Frank, that if she did not come often enough, he knew where to fetch her from now; and good-bye was said many times over, and then rendered fruitless by more last words. Her last look left the two standing arm-

in-arm at the little garden gate, Florence looking up at her husband with such a fulness of loving satisfaction, as must alone have assured Helen of the realization of her highest wishes for her friend's happiness.

But as she lost sight of them and their happiness, the cloud of her own sorrows seemed to close round her in deepened gloom; the torturing doubt and question awoke more distractingly from its transient charmed slumber:—Was it possible to struggle through life, to be happy, even content, without a hope of similar happiness?—that one happiness which, to a woman's heart, is the central object of all its best and purest aspirations and yearnings.

No; their happiness might soothe her trouble to sleep for a season; might warm her heart with unselfish sympathy and gratitude for the blessings vouchsafed to them; but it did not help her to solve the question which weighed upon her spirit like a night-mare, till she felt afraid to face, while unable to banish it. And yet she needed help sorely.

Nor did help fail her.

A few more days passed, and though she kept her promises to her friends at the Cottage, each successive visit only renewed the impressions of the first; and day by day, the effort of wearing the semblance of cheerfulness to her father, became more difficult and more exhausting. The weary hours dragged through, she hardly knew how. Unable to apply her mind either to study or recreation, she was still less able to rest, struggling faintly and desperately with the despondency which she was ashamed to yield to, yet powerless to overcome.

One day she made a great effort, and went to pay some duty-visits in X——; more especially to some of the unfashionable acquaintances of her father's early life, on whom the present Mrs. Montagu looked slightly, keeping them as much as possible at a distance. One of these, a Mrs. Smith, a good motherly woman, had shown Helen kindness in the days of her motherless childhood; and the cordial, grateful feeling the latter retained, led her to persist in keeping up for herself the acquaintance her step-mother disdained.

As Helen entered Mrs. Smith's parlour—suggestive in appearance of its liability to the presence of a large family of children—a young lady, but very few years older than herself, was taking leave; and Mrs. Smith seemed perplexed between her desire to receive the one with all possible honours of

welcome, and to part from the other with all imaginable kindness.

"So delighted to see you, my dear Miss Montagu! Must you really go, dear Ida?" Then turning to Helen again: "It is only too seldom I do see you, but I know whose fault that is *not*; though I mean no disrespect I assure you!—Well, if you really must, dear Miss Merton, tell your good mother I shall be round to see her some day very soon; and I hope she will spare you to-morrow evening."

"She will be only too glad that I can be of the least use to you. I will come by six o'clock. Good-bye."

She shook hands and was gone; but it was such a pleasant voice that spoke, such a bright, pleasing, sensible face which was turned towards Helen for a moment as she left the room, that Helen could not forbear remarking on it.

"What a sweet, bright face and voice!" she said, as Mrs. Smith sat down beside her. "Who is she? I surely never saw her at your house before?"

"I dare say not, dear Miss Montagu," returned Mrs. Smith; "I did not know her in the days I had the pleasure of seeing most of you; but she is, as you say, one of the sweetest, brightest, pleasantest creatures in the world, though she was but a pale, drooping bit of a girl when I first knew her; and she has gone through a great deal since then, and has but a hard life of it still, dear Miss Montagu, I am afraid."

"A hard life?" said Helen inquiringly.

"Yes, she is a music-teacher, poor girl," said Mrs. Smith; and willingly yielding to Helen's curiosity, proceeded to explain that Ida Merton was the daughter of a minor canon of X—, who had died suddenly a few years before, leaving this daughter and his wife, quite an elderly woman, almost destitute among comparative strangers; they having come, only a year or so before, from a distant part of the country,—Lincolnshire, Mrs. Smith believed; and why the father should have left his living there, she did not know; but perhaps on account of Ida's health, who looked very delicate then. When he died and they were left quite unprovided for, however, Ida had eagerly caught at Mrs. Smith's practical suggestion, that she might turn her beautiful singing to account; and though she had had a hard struggle at first, she had contrived, with what little they had in hand, and what little help friends could give, to support herself and her mother all along; and now she had plenty of pupils, and they were pretty comfortable.

"And she is always bright and cheerful as you saw her just now," added Mrs. Smith; "and quite a treasure when anything is going on—like my little girls' party to-morrow, for instance. She will come and help to amuse them all, and sing to them—though of course it can be no amusement to her; for she was very well educated and connected, and her father was a proud man and a very superior one. I wonder what he would have said to her getting her livelihood by music-teaching, poor thing! I have heard her mother hint that he broke off some grand match for her, because the gentleman was rather too gay; but Ida cannot bear it to be alluded to, so I do not know the rights of it. However, as I was saying, there she will come to-morrow, and seem to enjoy herself as much as any of them. I do assure you she is quite a pattern, Miss Montagu!" concluded good Mrs. Smith, quite out of breath.

"Indeed she must be!" said Helen, warmly. "How I should like to know her! Do you think she would give me some singing lessons?"

"You, my dear Miss Helen? No doubt she would be delighted; but are you serious?"

"Indeed I am," said Helen; "you have made me quite wish to know her, and that will be the best way of making acquaintance."

Nor did she leave Mrs. Smith's without obtaining the needful direction; or X——, without paying a visit to the neat, quiet lodgings in the Close, where she found Ida Merton with her mother; a quiet little old lady, primitive and countrified in her dress, but unmistakably a lady, and apparently very proud as well as fond of her daughter.

Ida Merton looked pleased, as well as surprised, to receive her visitor, and Mrs. Merton looked highly gratified when her errand was explained; for it was no small tribute to her daughter's talents that Miss Montagu, of the Park, who could, of course, command the very first instructors, should select her as a teacher.

"Oh! Ida will be delighted," said the old lady, in a tone slightly fluttered, as well as dignified; for she had never quite got over the idea that it was beneath Ida to give lessons, and tried to regard it as a favour to her pupils. "Ida, my dear, look to your engagement-book, and see what hours you have to spare; and I am sure if they should not suit Miss Montagu, you would make any exchange to accommodate her."

"Almost any hours would suit me," said Helen, bowing to Mrs. Merton, but speaking to Ida, and they settled it between

them in a few words, very little assisted by Mrs Merton's lengthy observations.

When Helen rose to take leave, and Ida followed her to the door to open it for her, the former stopped and said, rather abruptly, awkward at offering a favour, "It is a long way for you to walk to the Park, may I send my pony-carriage for you?"

Ida looked up surprised, with frank, inquiring eyes. "You are very kind—but"——

"Let me!" said Helen, cordially. "It must tire you walking to give all your lessons; and why should I not save you the extra fatigue of coming so far to me?"

"If you are really so kind, I shall be very much obliged," said Ida, frankly. "I do get very tired sometimes."

"Thank you! Good-bye!" said Helen. And they shook hands with a pleasant cordiality, which boded well for the acquaintance Helen desired.

"Is Ida Merton meant as a lesson to me?" thought Helen as she drove homewards. "If what Mrs. Smith hints be true, what have I to bear compared to her? And yet she cannot be unhappy with such a countenance!"

The singing lessons and the acquaintance prospered. Naturally open-hearted, and cut off in a great measure by her position from congenial society, how could Ida Merton but respond readily to the frank kindness proffered by Helen, and requite it with grateful, warm regard? Mrs. Montagu's absence left Helen free to show kindness and attention as she pleased, and the services of the pony-carriage soon ceased to be confined to taking Ida to and from the Park. Pleasant drives with Helen followed, when Ida could spare an hour; and game and fruit and flowers found their way to the lodgings in the Close, so that good Mrs. Merton could not sufficiently rejoice over her daughter's last new friend and pupil. She always looked anxiously for any possible opening for Ida, into such society as she had earlier been accustomed to.

"Who knows, Ida," she would say, "seeing how very, very kind Miss Montagu is—Mrs. Smith always did say she was neither cold nor haughty as people called her, I remember—who knows what may come of it? I dare say, now, she will ask you to some of the dinner-parties at the Park, and to sing in the evening; and then who knows—I always thought your poor, dear father quite wrong about that, but to be sure he always managed things his own way—who knows but you may meet Mr."——

"Mother ! pray !" exclaimed Ida, colouring crimson ; but checking herself, added more gently : "pray do not think of such a thing, dear mother. I should be very sorry to meet him, there or anywhere."

"Well, well, I will not, then," said the old lady, in a disappointed tone ; "though I never could make you out about that, Ida dear ; you and your father settled it as you pleased. But any how, there may be other people worth meeting at the Park ; and then, who knows ?" It was pleasant to see the mother's look at her daughter, whom it needed no mother's partiality to admire ; for she was more than pretty in face, and pleasing, and lady-like in manners ; but now her bright countenance was slightly clouded, and she hastened to change the subject.

Several singing-lessons had been given and taken, diversified, indeed, by much talking, walking in the grounds, and the like, when Helen, on receiving her young instructress one day, observed that she looked unwell ; and on her confessing to a bad cold, instantly shut up the piano, and carried her off to her own sanctum, where settling her in an arm-chair by the fire, and giving her some work, to ease her conscience, as she said, on the score of idleness, she seated herself opposite, and declared that they were now going to be comfortable.

"Comfortable indeed !" said Ida, smiling gratefully. "I am afraid you think more of my comfort than your advantage, if I may flatter myself that my instructions help you."

"I care very little about the singing, Ida," said Helen, leaving her chair and sitting down on a low stool before the fire. "Shall I confess—or have you never guessed—that the singing-lessons were only a pretence to get to know you ?"

"No, indeed !" said Ida. "What could make you wish to know me ?"

"I fancied—was it very selfish of me ?—that you could help me more than by teaching me to sing," said Helen, looking down.

"I help you ? Only tell me how !" said Ida, warmly. "I would give much to do something in return for your kindness ; only tell me how I can help you, dear Helen !" For Helen had already proscribed "Miss Montagu."

"I will tell you," said Helen, not without effort, "what it was made me wish to know you, Ida." Looking away from her, she went on speaking, in a low, resolute voice. "I have been fighting over a question in my mind lately. I believed

firmly, that it is a real duty to be happy and content, in whatever circumstances; because Providence knows best, and always sends what is really good for us. And I meant to be very brave when any trial came to me—and then the trial did come," she added, her lips quivering with the effort to speak calmly.

"It was sure to come; and I tried—but when it comes to looking forward to a whole life-time without happiness, I mean *the* happiness one's heart is set on, it seems, it feels so impossible ever to be anything but miserable again. And I was growing quite frightened at myself—it seemed so wicked of me—when I saw you that day at Mrs. Smith's, and she told me about you—what made me think you had gone through the same, perhaps worse. And I felt that if you had, and can yet be so bright and happy, it would help me; because then I should know that it *is* possible to be happy, even when utterly, hopelessly separated—Now you know how I thought you could help me, Ida," said Helen, colouring, and springing to her feet. "Is it possible?"

"Yes, Helen, dearest," said Ida, taking her hand, with the elder-sister-feeling naturally excited by the appeal to her experience. "But then I have so much else to make me happy!"

"So have I, dear Ida," said Helen, reseating herself, but leaving her hand linked in Ida's. "But the great thing would be to feel sure it was possible under any circumstances. It was the doubt which was worse than anything. I wonder, dear, if you would mind"—she hesitated to ask what she could not give in return.

"I would not mind anything for you!" said Ida, gently.

"Because I should not like you to do it if it would pain you," said Helen, earnestly; "but if you really would not mind telling me your history?"

"Mind telling you!" said Ida, with tears trembling in her bright eyes. "Do you think that after being shut out for years from sympathy—such sympathy as I could accept, I mean—it is not like new life to meet some one capable of entering into my feelings, whom I may confide in?"

"Dear Ida," returned Helen, "I was afraid it was selfish to ask you to call up your old sorrows."

"When we have got over our sorrows, as the phrase goes, I believe we should be sorry to forget them," said Ida, with a smile. "And if our experience can in any way lighten the troubles of others, it would indeed be selfish to grudge sharing

it with them. I do not know that mine is worth much, but such as it is I will gladly give it to you."

Ida's story was soon told. The only daughter of a clergyman whose noble patron and friend was also his near neighbour, she had early been used to mix in the brilliant society which at certain seasons of the year assembled at the Castle. One autumn, when Ida was scarcely eighteen, a young man of family and fortune came to stay there, who was attracted by her singing, and—though Ida did not say it—by her beauty and winning openness of manner. He soon became attached to her, proposed and was accepted; for Ida, in the first glow of youthful feeling, could scarcely but respond with grateful enthusiasm to the flattering devotion of a man possessed of all the qualities likely to charm a youthful imagination: good-looking, good-tempered, with the peculiar polish and cultivation so doubly fascinating by contrast with the men of the country circle she moved in; and above all, so disinterested in his love for the portionless daughter of a poor country clergyman. How happy she then was, as a betrothed bride, in this her first young dream of love, Ida could not, if she would, have told; but what she did not say told Helen more than words might have done.

For once, it seemed, the course of true love had really run smooth; and in three months they were to be married. But Mr. Merton's views were extremely strict—narrow, many would doubtless have called them—and, on closer acquaintance, he soon discovered his intended son-in-law to be too much a gay man of the world, to square with his ideas of what a Christian gentleman should be. His opinions were, to say the least, latitudinarian; and though he certainly came to church once, at least, every Sunday, Mr. Merton was shrewd enough to guess it might be the daughter rather than the sermons which brought him there. But when he endeavoured, possibly with more zeal than discretion, to impress on the mind of Ida's lover—to whom Ida, by the way, gave no name—that system of faith which he held to be the only true and acceptable one, he found him by no means disposed to accept a creed as his bride's dowry, or to brook interference with his own free habits of thought and action. Naturally good-humoured, he tried at first to laugh it off, but that made matters only worse, with a man of stern, uncompromising seriousness, like Mr. Merton; and graver admonitions led to cold or angry retorts. Ida did her best to conciliate; but deeply in love, on the one hand, and, on the other,

almost a child in years, still greatly under the influence of her father, whose conscientious though rigid training had not failed to secure deserved respect as well as love from his children, what could she do—but suffer? Before many weeks had passed, an open quarrel was followed by Mr. Merton's withdrawal of his consent to the match, and positive commands to his daughter to think no more of it, on pain of his utmost displeasure.

Then came Ida's bitter trial. Her lover thought lightly of parental sanctions, and tried to persuade her to elope, and marry him in defiance of her father's wishes. But Ida had been trained in strict ideas of filial duty. Moreover, she could not blind herself to the justice of some of her father's grounds of censure on her betrothed; and though, in the pure confidence of woman's love, she would gladly have married him, trusting to time and influence to correct errors which she deemed merely those of habit and education, yet to do so in the face of a positive paternal prohibition appeared too sinful in her eyes to be hazarded with even a hope of the Divine blessing on their union. But might they not wait, and trust to her father's relenting? And, sincerely attached to her, her lover would probably have acceded to her wishes, had he dreamed of the strength of principle veiled by her child-like openness of feeling and manner; but believing himself sure of his point, and influenced partly by man's lordly impatience of opposition, partly exasperated by further harsh interference from her father, he insisted that there was no middle course; long engagements were only productive of mischief, and it must be "Now or never."

Distracted between her father's anger, and her lover's alternate entreaties and upbraidings, Ida could only cling, in her desperation, to what she believed her duty; and herself pronounced the "Never," which was to part, and did part, them finally. Even now Ida covered her face at remembrance of the terrible struggle it had cost her, to seal her own misery by her own act. That had, at least, been spared to Helen!

"But Ida, dearest," said Helen, tenderly pressing the hand which returned to hers after the lapse of a few moments; "he could not really have loved you, to give you up so!"

"I do not know," said Ida, sadly; "he would not believe that I could love him, if I did not prefer him to the feeling of duty he did not understand." She could not yet have outlived her love; she excused him still.

The rest was soon told : her own failing health and spirits ; the loss of a younger brother ; her father's removal to X—, relinquishing, by permission of his patron, the larger living he held to his remaining son, in hopes that change of scene might revive his drooping girl ; her more utter depression and rejection when thus removed from all old associations ; a year or two of wearing misery ; then her father's sudden death, her mother's helplessness, their almost utter destitution. Her brother, burdened with a large family, was ill able to afford them assistance, and Mrs. Smith's suggestion as to music and singing-lessons, seemed the only available resource. Roused by these later misfortunes to a sense of ingratitude, in having yielded to her previous apathetic dejection while so much still remained, Ida thankfully exerted herself, for her own and her mother's sake, beginning by teaching her friend's little girls ; and though, at first, it had been a mere hand-to-mouth struggle, she had succeeded by degrees, till she had plenty of pupils and was enabled to raise her terms ; and was now, with her mother, as tolerably comfortable as their moderate habits and wishes required.

"And oh ! the blessing of having had to work, and learning to feel that I was of use to my mother ; that I had something again to live for !" said Ida. "First I forgot to be wretched ; then I enjoyed an hour's leisure as I had not enjoyed anything for years. A walk in the sunshine became positive happiness ; a kind face and welcome like dear Mrs. Smith's, and other friends whom we had found in our trouble, such a blessing as one could hardly be grateful enough for. Not to speak of the Sundays, of which I always say no one knows the blessedness who has not worked hard the six days of the week. And now," concluded Ida affectionately, "that I have found you, or rather that you have found me out with all your generous kindness, I hardly believe that there is a creature on earth who is, or ought to be, happier than I am."

And her grateful, heartfelt looks and tones could not have left even the most sceptical listener in doubt as to the sincerity of her words.

"But, Ida, have you never seen him again ?" said Helen, who for the time, at least, had forgotten everything but sympathy in her friend's sorrows.

"Never !" said Ida quickly ; and colouring, added in a lower tone : "But I have heard enough to know that he is not much changed, and that he has quite forgotten me."

When Helen was alone that evening, her father having, as usual, retired to his library, looking harassed and careworn, and she had sighed and wondered what could be weighing so heavily on his spirits, she sat down to think over what Ida had told her.

Yes, Ida had helped her ! Her torturing doubts were set at rest. It *was* possible, practically as well as theoretically, to struggle through, as well as under, the bitterest heart-sorrow ; to resign the heart's chosen happiness, and yet be content, happy ; able to enjoy gratefully all the good, as well as to accept without murmuring all the ills, which life might day by day bring forth. Now she could struggle on again bravely ; could bear the weary aching at heart, the weight upon her spirits, even the desperate craving for impossible happiness, since she might hope to subdue them all at last, and realize the beautiful creed she had learned to cling to : that all are created to be happy, and that all may be happy, even here, if they will. Not perfectly happy of course, *here* ; but happy enough to feel, with trustful gratitude, how greatly the blessings outweigh the trials of earthly life, if both be accepted in a right spirit.

Nor was it only hope for the future she had gained with Ida. Another human being to love, is a new treasure to a warm, hungry heart ; and one whose comfort and happiness she might have it in her power to promote so greatly, was a tenfold blessing. She would not indeed be able to do it as much, or as openly, when Mrs. Montagu returned ; but Ida would understand how that was, and she would still be able to do much towards lightening the various hardships of her life. And to make any one happier was something to look forward to, bitterly as she must feel her inability to do anything towards promoting the happiness of the one dearest to her, who seemed, moreover, most deeply in need of light upon his path.

As for Gerald Marston, she was already dreaming that he and Ida might console one another, when he should return from India.

Her present and more practical plans for Ida's benefit, however, received a shock, but a few days later, from a proposal, too eligible to be refused, for Ida to accompany abroad the parents of one of her pupils, who were about to spend the winter in Italy. The mother was in delicate health, and unable to take the entire charge of the youngest child

she was unwilling to leave behind ; and appreciating Ida's amiable qualities, made the most liberal arrangements for enabling her to join the party on the footing of a friend or sister, and, at the same time, to provide amply for her mother's comfort during her absence. Mrs. Merton, always looking to her daughter's position in society, was eager for the plan ; and Ida could feel no reasonable fear of her suffering during her absence ; the landlady of their lodgings being very kind, and engaging to look to her comfort in every way. The temptation to Ida of a holiday with kind friends after years of suffering and labour, and of seeing Italy, perhaps Switzerland on their return, was so great, that it needed only Helen's decisive—"Yes, Ida, you ought to go ; it will do you good in every way"—to settle the question. But little did Ida guess, when, all her doubts and fears being kindly scolded down by her firmer friend, she set out at last on the journey—the delight of which in prospect, to one so situated, it would be difficult to estimate—what a sense of loneliness and depression sank down upon Helen's heart, when all the leave-takings, and grateful thanks for kind assistance in numberless trifles which Ida's limited means could ill have afforded, were really over, and her new friend was gone.

But this time Helen was better able to cope with her depression. Her doubt, her question, whether it were possible to realize permanent consolation and cheerfulness, had been answered ; and it was now only a question of time and her own exertions. She fancied, too, that she could see why it was that Ida should be removed for a time. It was, doubtless, within the sphere of her own home duties that the struggle must mainly be fought out ; and Ida's presence and grateful sympathy might have tempted her to lean too much on this new pleasure, too little on the real stay of duty. It might be worse for the time ; but suffering and loneliness of spirit would only last till she had extracted from them the blessings of which they were designed to be the channels ; then peace would come. That more than peace should come, in the life of separation from Bernard Huntley to which she was schooling herself to look forward, she did not even yet compass in imagination ; but to those who have known the restless misery of such mental conflicts as Helen's of late had been, who can measure the relief which a prospect of eventual peace affords ? And to those who, like her, have felt the very foundations of their faith trembling beneath them in time of trial, the comfort

experienced, when these are once again felt to "stand sure," is something far beyond any mere happiness.

And had she not indeed much to be thankful for, even in the meantime? Her father, her beautiful home, and such unnumbered blessings; and then the sight of Frank and Florence's happiness to refresh her, when her own heart should be weary with its constant struggle?

She only felt tempted to desire some more stirring calls upon her for exertion and self-denial; for there are times when the smooth flow of life, to which the prosperous of this world are condemned, becomes an additional burden. She could even realize, now, that to work hard day by day for daily bread might not be so wholly pitiable a lot. What would she not have given for any drudgery, during the hours of the day, which should have forced her mind from dwelling on its sorrows, and secured rest and oblivion during the hours of the night?—for even her sleep was broken and haunted by a consciousness of the suffering which had laid its stern grasp on all her hitherto comparatively untried energies of mind and body.

Nor was this instinctive yearning for external coercion to aid in her efforts against yielding to morbid and selfish despondency, destined to remain unsatisfied; though the necessity of working for bread, like Ida, was not her allotted portion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

“ And for this it was
Thou wouldst have weaned me from thee ?”
Duties, paid
Hardly at first, at length will bring repose
To the sad mind which struggles to perform them.

TALFOURD'S *Ion*.

ONLY a few days after Ida's departure, Mr. Montagu stood watching his daughter, as she moved about the room, one evening after dinner, getting ready her work and her music.

in order to sit down, at a moment's notice, to whichever might seem most likely to detain him from his library.

"Helen," he said at last, "if you are not busy this evening, come to me in the library—in five minutes," he added, as she turned quickly to accompany him; and left the room as he spoke.

There must certainly be something the matter! But with that strange pre-occupation which often blinds us, she could, at the moment, connect the something only with Bernard Huntley, and shivered at the idea of something wrong with him; though how her father should have heard of it, or guess her interest in him, she could not so much as conjecture. Even when she recalled the improbability of such a supposition, oddly enough it did not occur to her, that her father's late extreme pre-occupation and depression must have some definite cause, which she was now about to learn; and having been used from her childhood to regard him as a man of large and assured fortune, no suspicion of the truth crossed her mind.

"Well, dear papa?" said she, with growing uneasiness, when she found him in the library, standing as before, and watching her fixedly as she advanced towards him. There was certainly some anxiety about her in that look.

Mr. Montagu seated himself in his easy chair, and looked hard at the fire while he spoke.

"Do you remember, Helen," said he, speaking slowly and with effort, "my surprising you, last year, by wishing to see you well married?"

"Yes, papa," said Helen, in a low voice, looking into the fire herself now, her first idea only confirmed.

"I had a reason for wishing it," he continued, speaking with increased effort. "I wished to see you in a home, and an assured position of your own, before"—

"Oh! before what, dear papa?" exclaimed Helen, turning pale with alarm.

"My dear Helen," said Mr. Montagu, rising and speaking more freely, "it is of no use to mince the matter. This is Friday; on Monday the bank must stop payment; and, though I trust no one will eventually be a loser by me, it will swallow up my whole fortune, estates, the Park, and all, to meet the claims upon me. My unremitting exertions have, I trust, availed to avert disgrace, but"—

"Oh! dear papa, then *that* has been troubling you all this

while, and I never guessed what it could be!" said Helen, keenly alive to what he must have suffered in looking forward to this catastrophe. "But, dear papa, if there is no disgrace, never mind! We shall have enough, no doubt, to live on somehow, and what does it signify how or where?"

"But I thought you would be so sorry to lose the Park?" said Mr. Montagu, looking at her doubtfully.

"Oh, yes; sorry in one way," said Helen; but, if it be necessary, I shall never think twice of that. What are places in comparison to people?" It was with a mingled feeling, much as she strove to banish all thought but of him, that she put her hand through her father's arm, and looked up to him for assent.

"I am very glad you feel it so," said her father; "I feared it might fall heavily upon you. For myself the worst is over. One's mind once made up as to what must be done, and the decision taken to do it, the rest is little in comparison. But the prospect, the suspense, has, I confess" — he paused, and re-seated himself wearily, as if the remembrance exhausted him.

"Dear papa," said Helen, kneeling down by him, with tears in her eyes, "do not look back then, now it is over. But to think that you should have wished me away from you for that! I only wish I were a son to be able to help you!"

"Well, it was a foolish idea, at least as far as I am concerned," said her father, smoothing her hair lightly with his hand, and forcing a faint smile. "I would not exchange you for a son, Helen; one wants daughters more than sons as one gets old." It was quite true, as Helen had sometimes thought, that her father looked years older for the last few months.

"Do you? I am very glad," said Helen. "But though I am a girl, papa, please tell me now how it all happened, and all about it, and what there will be left. There will be—my money left, will there not?" she asked; hesitating, not for fear he should misinterpret the question, but because she knew how it would pain him if the answer must be in the negative.

"Yes, of course," replied her father; "yours cannot be touched, nor your mother's jointure; but the settlement I made on her—I am afraid that will be a sore point, Helen; but go it shall if the liabilities require it; for I have great doubts if the bank was solvent even then. I had been used to trust everything to that fellow Smedley, and, till he died, I had no

idea of anything wrong : and then I found he had been speculating with my capital, and all sorts of things—however, never mind that now.”

“ But, papa, we shall be quite rich still, at that rate,” said Helen. “ My own money, I have heard you say, gives more than a thousand a-year; and the jointure was surely seven hundred ? ”

“ We have been used to spend nearer seven thousand than seven hundred a year, Helen,” said her father ; “ at least till within the last two or three years, when I have kept expenses under as much as possible, without doing what might rouse suspicion.”

“ Is it possible ? ” said Helen. “ Well, never mind what we used to spend. No doubt the Park is enormously expensive to keep up, with all its gardens, and hothouses, and buildings and improvements always in hand ! ”

“ I meant it for you, Helen, hereafter,” said Mr. Montagu, with a sigh.

“ Oh, never mind me, papa ! ” said Helen, eagerly. “ Houses and lands make no one happy ; and we should be most thankful there will be so much left. Why Frank and Florence have not above half as much ! ”

“ Yes, if it were only you and I,” returned her father, with a heavy sigh. “ However,” he added, rousing himself, “ we must just make the best of things as they are. To-morrow I go and fetch your mother home, that we may set about doing what is to be done. I have had time enough to think about it, and I have arranged all in my own mind—I reckoned you would be safely married first, you know—to live on the seven hundred a year ; and I still mean to do it ; for, when you marry, your fortune must be entirely free ; and, if we began on a scale to require that, the second change might prove harder than the first—not to me, you understand ”——

“ Papa, papa ! ” exclaimed Helen, “ you cannot, you must not live on seven hundred a year, and leave all my money accumulating for nothing ! For I shall never marry,” she added in a low voice, turning her head away ; but clearly realizing, for the first time, some admixture of blessing in the cloud which had seemed to darken life so utterly. Of what use could she now have been to her father, if——

“ Never marry ? Why not, Helen ? ” said Mr. Montagu, laying his hand on her head, and gently turning her face towards him ; but, when he saw tears in her eyes, he let her

turn it away again, and sighed with the feeling of oppression with which the discovery of some new source of trouble weighs on a mind whose burden is already hard to bear.

"I do not think I ever shall, papa," said Helen, rousing herself to speak cheerfully, for she instinctively felt the effect produced on his mind; "you know I always said I should not; and now I am only too glad that I shall be able to be of some real use to you—and mamma," she added, not without an effort. "You must use my money, papa, for my sake; that I may feel of use to somebody. And now tell me about your plans."

Mr. Montagu was not easily persuaded; but, eventually, he gave in to a certain extent; reserving, however, a much larger sum to Helen's personal account than she could possibly require; and only on condition that in case of her marriage the whole should revert to her absolutely, without question. On the other hand, she did not leave him that night till she had forced a promise from him that should his own fortune not suffice to meet all the claims against it, he would allow her to make good the deficiency out of hers. He was too sensitive as to his mercantile reputation, to resist her urgency; but secretly trusted that no such sacrifice would be called for.

Strange as it may seem, when Helen retired to rest at a late hour, she felt, if we may not say happier, yet far less unhappy, than she had felt for long. The prospect of being of real use to her father, of cheering him by open sympathy, of smoothing the domestic difficulties and annoyances which were certain to arise from the way in which her step-mother would too surely meet this reverse of fortune, was something to look forward to living and working for; and feeling deeply for her father's trouble, her own seemed to weigh the lighter. She might hope, too, for much real, if not very congenial occupation, in assisting her father to carry out his plans, since domestic retrenchments and economy were about the last things for which Mrs. Montagu could be expected to condescend to exert herself. Worldly and selfish in no small degree, she had sacrificed that large portion of her fortune, of which, by her first husband's will, her re-marriage deprived her, for the sake of the still larger fortune and somewhat higher position Mr. Montagu had to offer. The latter he had already, to her great displeasure, abandoned, by his retirement from Parliament and fashionable London life; and her feelings at this new degradation, especially if the settlement made on her should be

given up to her husband's creditors, it was easy to imagine. Helen might well grieve for her father.

His plans were simple enough. He still owned a small house close on the outskirts of X——, which he had inhabited during the earlier years of his first marriage, and there he intended removing at once, it being just such as he could occupy with that diminution of establishment and expenses which his nice sense of honour dictated; at least, till such time as the winding up of his affairs should show whether any surplus of his once splendid fortune would remain after the satisfaction of all his creditors. As a large portion of the difficulties by which he had become entangled, depended on the panic at that time created in the money-market by the failure of railway speculations, in which the bank had been involved by the confidential manager alluded to, and as some of these concerns might eventually recover, there was still hope that such should prove the case. Many a man, indeed, would have pushed on, and bolstered up his business at whatever risk, for the bare chance of some such turn in the scale; but Mr. Montagu was too conscientious to play such a desperate game at the expense of others—of his own he had nothing more to lose—preferring peace of mind in his declining years, even amid comparative poverty, to the perpetual fear of still deeper entanglements, and of the irremediable disgrace of inflicting wrong on others.

Helen's equanimity under the misfortune was a great relief to her father. For the deep mortification, if not resentment, he had to expect on Mrs. Montagu's part, he felt, it must be confessed, comparatively little concern. It had not taken him all these years to teach him for what she had married him, and she had done but little since to deserve his sympathy; and selfishness like hers hardens not only those who indulge it, but those also who come in contact with it; with this difference, that, in the latter, the life-springs of love and open-hearted kindness are but crusted over with ice, which may thaw at any moment in a more genial atmosphere, but in the former, they are frozen at the very source, and dried up, too often, for ever.

Next morning, when her father had started for Brighton, with a weary look in his face, which went to her heart to see, Helen's natural impulse was to drive over, and confide to Florence the intelligence of the impending disaster; and she realized more vividly some of its probable effects, when it

occurred to her, as she drove along, that her beautiful ponies and independent equipage, to which she was indebted for so many hours of relief from home-worries, would have to be given up. But such things were all trifles now; and when the visit had been paid, and the communication received, Florence marvelled at the calm, brave spirit in which Helen seemed to face all contingencies, even the possible sacrifice of her whole fortune, should affairs turn out worse than her father at present expected.

"I cannot make myself unhappy about mere money," she said with a faint smile, in answer to Florence's praise of her equanimity. "Papa's trouble is the only thing that troubles me. At worst, there would always be mamma's jointure while papa lives, and afterwards, no doubt, I should get along somehow; but that is, I trust, too far off for me to need to think about it now."

It all seemed to Florence the very acme of heroism; but Frank shook his head. There must have been some heavier trouble beforehand, to cause this to fall so lightly; a year since, the loss of fortune and position would not have been quite such trifles in Helen's eyes. But when Florence hastily took up the remark, inquiring what he imagined or suspected, he turned it off again, reluctant to cloud even one hour's sunshine for his sweet wife, by awakening fruitless anxiety for her friend.

"Only an idle fancy," he said, "because she has not seemed to me in quite her usual spirits of late. But it may probably be only, as she says, anxiety for her father, who must doubtless, feel this very severely; so I am not going to make you doleful over 'Miss Montagu's distresses as imagined by Mr. Frank Littleton,'" he added, with his playful smile, "especially now that I find this real one had escaped his brilliant powers of divination."

"Real enough," said Florence. "How fond she is of her father! and though we might not mind it much,"—no one, who had seen the glance exchanged between the two, could have doubted that wealth had but little to do with such happiness as theirs—"Mr. Montagu must feel it dreadfully. Poor Helen! I am so sorry!"

And thus it came to pass, that neither then, nor for long years after, did Frank breathe even to his wife his strong conviction that something between Helen and Bernard Huntley had caused her, at least, much bitter suffering.

On the Sunday evening, as pre-determined, Mr. Montagu brought home his wife, in a state of suppressed wrath and dismay easier to imagine than describe. That anybody but herself should need or deserve commiseration under the present untoward circumstances, never so much as occurred to her ; and though she dared not say it to her husband, of whom she stood in some awe, she felt as completely victimized as though he had swindled her out of the fortune she had sacrificed to marry him. Helen's comparative immunity did not, as may be supposed, mend matters ; and it did not need her father's stern looks and tone to his wife, to tell the daughter how needlessly embittered his painful errand had been. How thankful she felt once more that she was still beside him ! She had fancied indeed that she could make Bernard's desolate home so much happier, but it was no matter of fancy how infinitely more comfortless her father's must be without her ; and if she must still grieve and suffer in secret under her estrangement from the former, she could yet most gratefully rejoice in the privilege of sharing and lightening the burdens of the latter. She was beginning to learn, practically as well as theoretically, that that which Providence does is well done.

Great was the excitement in X—— when the bank next day stopped payment ; but Mr. Montagu's character stood so high among his fellow-townsmen, that, even at first, there was less indignation and more sympathy expressed than is often the case on such occasions. The sympathy was of course increased after the first meeting of the creditors, when it became known that there was every prospect that all claims might be paid in full, in the course of two or three years, and that the crash was mainly owing to the treacherous dishonesty of the late confidential manager, and not to rash speculations on the part of the principal. The immediate surrender of the marriage-settlement, moreover, which was open at least to litigation, afforded a just theme for eulogy ; and circular letters of condolence and respect, expressing the fullest appreciation of his honourable conduct, afforded Mr. Montagu the soothing assurance that disgrace, at any rate, had, as he hoped, been averted.

Nor was sympathy for Mr. Montagu's reverses confined to his creditors. The residents in the neighbourhood in which he had so long played a leading part, hastened to testify their concern by visits and letters of condolence to himself, his wife, and daughter ; and some even by offers of assistance, none the less gratifying because he was able to decline them. Sir Wil-

liam Emlyn, indeed, came straight from town to do his best to persuade Mr. Montagu to make use of him in any way. If any sum of money he could command would enable Mr. Montagu to hold over for some two or three years, till matters might mend, it was at his service; and five years sooner the offer might probably have been accepted. But now, in the wane of life, and greatly worn by the last two or three years of intense harass and anxiety, Mr. Montagu was only anxious to get quit of the business entirely, and far more alive to the risk that would be incurred, than sanguine as to the possibility of reinstating matters. Sir William's invitation for Mrs. and Miss Montagu to pay Lady Emlyn a visit in London, or to make the Priory their home, during the unpleasant period of the sale and giving up of the Park, Mr. Montagu also declined. He had taken care that Hawk's Nest should be quite ready for their reception, and had no wish that Mrs. Montagu should have the opportunity of figuring in the London gaieties she was so fond of, at such a time.

Sir William's remark, that Helen looked pale and worn, elicited, indeed, immediate permission for her to accept the invitation; but she would not hear of it. Her ostensible reason—that she could not think of leaving her father under present circumstances—was a true and sufficient one. To do so would, indeed, have been to throw away the one substantial consolation to which she clung, the being of use and comfort to him; but had no such reason existed, the invitation would equally have been declined. After suffering as she had done during her last stay in London, how could she voluntarily put herself in the way of similar suffering again? And much as she loved the Emlyns, she felt almost glad they were to spend this winter in London, so closely were they associated with the days and hours of mental torture endured under their roof, the sting of which time and patience were still only beginning to soften.

Sir William, therefore, went back to town alone, admiring his favourite more than ever for her filial devotion, as she soon learned by a letter from Lady Emlyn, full of affectionate praises, which she put aside with a weary smile, thinking how little others can judge of the motives which actuate us. They praised her for self-denial, while she was simply clinging to that which, under the circumstances, was capable of affording her the most satisfaction, or perhaps the least possible suffering.

Yet Sir William was not wrong, either; for, had she not already made some progress in unselfishness, Helen could not

now have found comfort in trying to forget herself and her sorrow in that of her father. It has long been admitted, that "honesty is the best policy;" when will it be recognized, that unselfishness is the truest practical worldly wisdom? Yet how can Christians doubt it, who are enjoined to do good and lend, hoping for nothing again; nay, to do good to those who cannot requite it, if they would be rewarded of their heavenly Father? Is it supposed that he *can* not, or *will* not, give the reward here, as well as hereafter?

The winter that followed was indeed a trying one for Helen; but who can estimate how incalculably more so it would have proved, had she met its calls upon her patience in a selfish, instead of an unselfish spirit? She had not over-estimated the difficulties and annoyances likely to arise from her step-mother's unamiable disposition. Every successive step that had to be taken in the carrying out of the needful sacrifices, and the removal to their smaller abode at Hawk's Nest Mrs. Montagu opposed and contested to the utmost, with angry or tearful remonstrances, or both, as the case might be. What she absolutely refused to do herself, she was then indignant beyond measure at Helen's doing by her father's direction; and when she took matters into her own hands, constantly arranged them in a manner so opposite to her husband's declared intentions that all had to be undone. Her indignation at the surrender of her marriage-settlement, was a standing grievance, on which the changes were wrung perpetually; and every fresh reminder of Helen's exemption from such calamities as the sale of horses and carriages, jewels and pictures, made matters ten times worse. It was a marvellous relief, when about a fortnight after her return from Brighton, she took to her room with real or feigned indisposition; whereupon Helen and her father, having the field clear, so rapidly completed all necessary preparations that, on her recovery, she had nothing to do but to step into the vehicle which conveyed her to her new residence. It may easily be imagined what endless resources she found in quarrelling with all they had done; with Helen's ignorance and presumption; her father's weakness and injustice in setting her up to manage affairs; and, finally, their utter want of consideration for her feelings—so devoted, too, as she was to both of them, and caring for nothing on her own account.

More and more Mr. Montagu withdrew to the retirement of the study, which he had been careful to reserve to himself, as a retreat from the ceaseless irritation of his wife's ill-

temper ; and it was comparatively seldom that Helen dared join him, to help in his endless and wearisome labours of correspondence and accounts, for fear of making matters still worse with her step-mother ; one of whose standing themes of worry was Mr. Montagu's making a favourite of his daughter.

Still, Helen had the comfort of feeling that her presence and her efforts were not wholly useless ; and there was real pleasure to be enjoyed, whenever, by some act of self-denial or conciliation, she had chanced to soothe Mrs. Montagu into good humour, and thus produced a temporary calm, in which her father's brow never failed to brighten ; or when some trifling act or word from him would give her to feel how much he felt his happiness and comfort to depend upon her. Even when things had gone worst throughout the day, and she went to her room at night weary and sick at heart, there was still some comfort in feeling, that, but for her, things must have been still worse for her father. And if her own secret sorrow remained a burden still, it was a burden she would not have parted with for the world's wealth. It was luxury to dwell on past happiness ; on thoughts of Bernard's noble character, and dreams that hereafter, if not here, they might meet at last in full confidence and love ; luxury, indeed, to retreat to such an inner sphere of pure affection, and though deep, yet submissive regret and suffering, from all the miserable dissonances, the petty jarrings and selfishness which filled her outer life with discord.

Of Frank and Florence she could see but little ; for though her father had insisted on the retention for her use of her own pony-carriage, yet practically she profited little by it. She was but too happy, by ceding it almost daily to her step-mother, to remove one cause of displeasure and lamentation ; and weary work though it was, often submitted to the long rounds of gossiping visits, which, unable to live without excitement, Mrs. Montagu very soon resumed.

It was no longer possible, indeed, to carry on such extensive visiting in the county society ; but there were still many within a smaller compass, and many town families whom formerly she had scarcely deigned to notice, among whom she could still play the fine lady, and receive the deference she expected ; and except on the point of entertaining, every approach to which he positively interdicted, her husband interfered with none of her proceedings. She was welcome to

accept invitations as she pleased, if she did not expect him to go with her, and provided she kept, as to expenses, within the limits he had fixed; and then for the sake of peace, Helen must accompany her; for how else could Mrs. Montagu have enlarged, to all who would listen, on the sacrifice she made in leaving Mr. Montagu so much of an evening, to keep up a little society for their dear Helen?

Still, however, there were days when Helen could refresh her spirit with a few hours spent at the Cottage; and Frank could look in pretty often on his rounds, with a note or a message from Florence; and even a glimpse of him was enough to brighten Helen's day with thankfulness for the happiness which had fallen to her friend's lot. Even Mrs. Montagu owned the influence of Frank's genial presence, and always received him as graciously as if he were still moving in aristocratic circles, instead of having descended to the position of a hard-working country doctor.

There were pleasant letters, too, from Ida Merton, which often beguiled hours that might else have hung wearily on hand. Helen could not but sympathise in her friend's vivid enjoyment of the pleasures of continental travelling, enhanced as they were to Ida by contrast with all she had gone through for years; and with such sympathy a vague hope must awaken, that some day the sunshine might still return to her own lot, as now to Ida's; even if it were not *the* sunshine she most yearned for. Nor did Helen forget, among the duties which she really now felt to be her best pleasures, to show such kind attentions as she could to Ida's mother; which, as shown for Ida's sake, were received with twofold gratitude.

Thus the winter passed, and the opening spring brought a sense of peace and subdued brightness to Helen's mind, such as none can appreciate till they have passed through winters of real suffering like hers. Her previous winter had not been wholly a bright one; but in looking back, its dreamy, hoping, fearing sadness, seemed, by contrast with that which had succeeded it, more like a child's playing at being unhappy, than like the stern reality. But such reality, though stern, is strengthening; one such winter endured, made her feel stronger for all winters to come and doubly susceptible to all spring beauties and blessings, which had been well-nigh overlooked in days of more abundant prosperity. She would not now, if she could, have called back the days in which the deepest feelings and best energies of her nature lay yet un-

stirred, like waters on whose face the Spirit hath not yet moved.

Spring was verging to summer—it was June already—and Helen could now look forward without shrinking to the approaching arrival of the Emlyns at the Priory. Sir William's society would do so much to cheer her father; and having begun to wish for them on his account, she was soon able to do so on her own. Besides, Florence was looking anxiously for Lady Emlyn, who could now be spared from town—Cissy's second baby being already a fortnight old, and both she and it thriving. Helen was, therefore, daily expecting tidings of Louisa's arrival; and when Frank Littleton called in to see her earlier than usual one morning, Helen's first question was, whether Florence had heard from town.

But she had not; and not being very well, Frank said Florence wanted Helen to come and spend the day with her, as he himself was obliged to be absent for a good many hours; and as his patients lay chiefly in the opposite direction, he had got Mr. Rawdon to give him a lift into X—, and wanted Helen to drive him back in her pony-carriage—that is, if Mrs. Montagu could spare her for so long.

Mrs. Montagu, propitiated by the appeal, acceded graciously; and the ponies being ready almost as soon as their mistress, Frank and Helen drove off towards the Cottage, Helen's spirits rising, at the prospect of the unlooked-for holiday, till her heart felt lighter than it almost ever did now.

Mr. Littleton also seemed in unusually bright spirits, even for him; and leant back in the place of idleness Helen assigned to him—she would drive herself—with every appearance of enjoying it extremely.

"See what one gets by being a married man!" said he. "I could never have got a young lady to drive me in her pony-carriage this time last year!"

"No doubt as to the advantages of being a married man," said Helen, laughing; "but as to the drive, I do not know, if you had asked at a propitious moment. I did drive Mr. Carysfort once last year!"

"And do you know the consequences?" said Frank, with a comical smile.

"No; were there any?" said Helen, surprised.

"Why, only reports on the best foundation throughout the neighbourhood, that Miss Montagu and Mr. Carysfort were

—engaged !” said Frank, looking up at her with playful sauciness.

“I engaged to Mr. Carysfort ! Nobody could have imagined anything so ridiculous ! I believe you invented it yourself !” said Helen.

“I assure you, it was all arranged,” said Frank, “and I am still sometimes asked, in confidence, if the match has gone off since the failure of the Bank, or when Mr. Carysfort is coming back ?”

“Poor Mr. Carysfort ! If he could only guess how his name was being taken in vain behind his back ! But there might be more mischievous reports ; one may afford to laugh when a story is absolutely devoid of foundation, like this one,” said Helen.

“Well, I would not advise you to give him another drive when he does come back, or you will have it in all the county papers, I give you warning,” said Frank ; “meantime, I shall contradict the rumour, ‘on authority ;’ and now I can add : ‘Besides, Miss Montagu gave me a drive the other day, and she cannot be engaged to me.’”

“How can you be so ridiculous !” said Helen. “Florence does not half keep you in order ; I must begin to look severe and dignified.” But for all that, they laughed and talked most of the way, Frank now and then relapsing into a reverie, from which he quickly roused himself, as if unwilling to betray preoccupation.

Towards the end of the drive he grew restless, kept looking at his watch, and even asked Helen to drive faster, as he was in a hurry to be off for his day’s work. And he seemed in a hurry, indeed, as he hastened her alighting on their arrival, preceded her into the house, and saying, with a glance at the vacant drawing-room, that Florence might, probably, be in her own room, ran noiselessly upstairs, never pausing a moment for her to detect the suppressed smile on his face, till he turned short round, with his hand on the lock of Florence’s door, his finger on his lips, and a look of such ineffable delight and pride as made Helen’s heart bound in sudden sympathy, understanding it all in a moment. The next minute she was standing at Florence’s bedside, in the darkened room, bending breathlessly down with clasped hands, to see, as her eyes accustomed themselves to the half-light, the inexpressible peace and happiness on Florence’s sleeping countenance, and a tiny something wrapped in flannels beside her.

Helen was so absorbed, that for a minute or two she forgot that Frank was standing by eagerly awaiting congratulations; but when she did look up, her look fully satisfied him, and the silent grasp of the hand they exchanged spoke volumes.

"A girl!" he whispered, leaning over Helen to open a crevice in the folds of flannel. "I shall have two Florences now! She would have it beside her. Do not let her talk much if she wakes; she must be as quiet as a mouse; but I promised to fetch you if she would go to sleep like a good child, and I thought you would like to sit beside her, even if she sleeps most of the time. I shall be back the first moment I can, you may be sure."

And after a few low-voiced words with the nurse in attendance, Frank was off again, and a mile away, before Helen had so much as removed her charmed eyes from the face of the sleeper. Frank's instinctive sympathy had rightly divined that to one whose inner and outer life had of late been fraught with so much of suffering and discord as Helen's, he could afford no richer enjoyment, than the quiet watch in the atmosphere of deep peace and pure happiness breathed around the sleeping forms of the mother and child, both shielded, for the time at least, from all earthly sorrow and trouble; the one by the adamant shield of the highest and holiest earthly felicity; the other, by infancy's blessed unconsciousness of coming good and ill alike.

It seemed to Helen as if she had never before known what peace meant; as if it would be impossible for evermore to doubt or to despond as to the future, since life held such hours as this in store, to be shared and rejoiced in with others; even though their highest happiness were denied to herself. And the tiny creature beside Florence seemed to re-open a future for her, from the dreaded blank of which she had of late painfully shrunk. Frank and Florence's children—children, of course, would follow, now that this first little one was really come—would be something to cling to and look forward for, in that vague, distant loneliness, which must one day be hers.

It hardly needed Florence's wakening and Frank's return, and the sight of their deepened love and joy, to fill her heart with such gladness and thankfulness, that when she met her father at the door on her return, he asked, with an involuntary smile, where she had been to pick up a sunbeam by the way.

"To see Florence—and her baby, papa!" said she, feeling the answer sufficient to account for any degree of sunshine.

"Ah! I heard of the event from your friend Mr. Rawdon, who inquired most kindly after you, by the bye; but I had forgotten what a strong interest young ladies always take in babies," said her father.

But it pleased him to see her look so pleased; and even Mrs. Montagu—conciliated by Frank's diplomacy, in confiding the secret of the surprise to her while Helen was putting on her bonnet—seemed propitiously affected by the occurrence which had so raised Helen's spirits. She thought, however, the latter must have found it very dull, sitting there while Florence was asleep and her husband out; and soon proceeded to a narration of the several visits she had received in Helen's absence, and which had not a little contributed to keep her in good-humour. But Helen could listen without any sense of weariness this evening; and it passed off more harmoniously, for all, than any they had spent together during the last six months.

A couple of days brought the Emlyns down; Louisa almost as eager about Florence's baby, as though Florence were Cissy herself; and two or three weeks brought Ida back, looking years younger and prettier, Helen delightedly declared; and strengthened and refreshed for the labours to which she returned, though had all her pupils been like Helen, they would certainly have been labours of love.

And now, with Ida close at hand, the fine weather, which enabled her to see Florence more frequently; and the frequent society of the Emlyns, whose friendly and delicate attentions did so much to lighten the gloom which still hung over her father's spirits,—things had greatly brightened for Helen. She could not, indeed, hear without a pang, that Mr. Huntley steadily declined all invitations to the Priory or the Priory Cottage, on plea of absorption in literary pursuits; but she felt that he was right. Unless the barrier between them, be it what it might, should one day be removed, she could not even wish to see him again; at least, till she should have grown older and wiser, as she phrased it to herself.

But, notwithstanding this one abiding sorrow, she had enough of other happiness to enable her to look forward with hopeful contentment to the coming summer and autumn; and beyond that, she was learning not to look. Sufficient to the day is the good as well as the evil thereof.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. CARYSFORT'S RETURN.

If time past

And time possest both pain us, what may profit ?
Time used. *Night Thoughts.*

MR. CARYSFORT had, meanwhile, spent his autumn, winter, and spring in solitary musings and wanderings by the lake of Geneva. He gradually regained his strength ; and after the confinement of his long illness, began to find more enjoyment in the healthful activity of out-door exercise than he had had any idea it could afford. He remained, indeed, slightly lame, but not enough so to occasion much inconvenience ; and riding and boating offered pleasant resources when his pedestrian powers were exhausted. Being, moreover, a man of literary tastes, reading whiled away many hours for him, when bitter reflections and comfortless reminiscences might else have become almost intolerable company. He was not, however, disposed to banish these ; and more and more clearly the conviction forced itself upon him, that his previous life, if not a positively vicious, had been certainly a worthless and wasted one.

It had not so much as secured his own happiness, still less promoted that of any of his fellow-creatures ; since for years past, though in possession of all which the majority of mankind toil life-long to attain, he had been simply battling with growing dissatisfaction and ennui, and learning to doubt the existence in life of anything worth living for. And this, he had learned to suspect, must, in some way, be his own fault.

Pehaps idleness lay at the root of the evil. Helen Montagu's respect for *working* men might have something in it, after all ; and he was much inclined to try whether setting to work at something in real earnest might not make him happier, if only by relieving him from the humbling sense of uselessness and worthlessness, which had been forcing itself painfully upon him ever since his nearer acquaintance with her. Suffering and disappointment having made him at once more sen-

sitive and more candid, he had perceived how unconsciously and half-compassionately, she looked down on him; and though she might apologise for it as a fault, Horace knew very well by this time, that it was by no means all her fault. What had he ever done to win respect from any one, much less from Helen, whom he had been guilty of the littleness of disliking—he could admit it to himself now—on account of that elevation and energy of character, which contrasted so unfavourably with his own indolence and self-indulgence. He must do something to rid himself of the feeling that he deserved her contempt, and probably that of others, too.

What he should do, remained the question. Two courses suggested themselves. Many years ago, he had thought of going to the bar, and nearly “eaten his terms,” as the phrase goes in preparation. He might now complete his terms, and set to study law in earnest. He was too old to have much chance of distinction before him; but that was not so much his object as the restoration of the self-respect which had been so rudely shaken of late, and the acquisition of a claim to the respect and better opinion of others, among whom Helen Montagu by no means ranked last. Not that he was by any means in love with her; but he could not help thinking about her a good deal, and had a dim idea that if he could some day make her think better of him, he could be very proud of such a wife. But there would be much to do first; he was utterly sick of the weary aimlessness of the idle life which had become so laborious to him. In the law, he would want neither for friends nor interest; and he was conscious of abilities which had too long been wasted. No doubt the drudgery of it would be hateful; but, in his present mood, he felt a cynical inclination to be nailed to something disagreeable, just to have the pleasure of hating it.

On the other hand, Louisa Emlyn had often urged him to buy an estate, and sit down as a useful landlord upon it, like her own husband. But Horace hated the idea of a country life, and the contact with unpolished people it must entail, even more than the prospect of dusty law-books and tiresome precedents. Only Lady Emlyn’s partiality, indeed, which led her to believe he could fill the position which, as being her husband’s, she preferred above any other, could have so much as contemplated the transformation of the refined, fastidious, unpractical Horace, into an active, useful, dignified country gentleman. Still this wish of Louisa’s afforded an excuse for

yielding a little longer to his natural indolence and indecision—faults more difficult, perhaps, to overcome than others far more actively obnoxious; and so Horace lingered on, dreaming away the lovely spring weather on the Lake of Geneva, oblivious of the fact that doing nothing for so many months was an odd way of beginning to set to work in earnest.

But one day, returning in his boat from a long day's idling on the lake, a trifling incident roused him to action. His boat, floating lazily homewards—propelled by the soft breeze which was almost lost in the large white latteen sails, and by the occasional languid oar-strokes of a boatman, little more inclined for exertion, after the heat of the day, than Horace himself—drifted near another boat.

A sweet feminine voice, singing an English song, suddenly attracted his attention. He had surely heard both voice and song before! Many years before—in times of which the remembrance slumbered so deeply, that its sudden awakening thrilled him like pain. He leaned over, and fixed his eyes on the approaching boat, slouching his broad straw hat over his face the while, that he might see unseen; at least should it so please him. The boat came near enough for him to discern faces and features perfectly. In the stern sat a young lady, whose sweet, fair English face must anywhere have attracted admiration. She might be five or six and twenty; but, as English girls often are, was probably more attractive and lovely now, than she might have been seven years before, from the deepened and softened expression which flows from the maturing of heart and mind. A stranger might have guessed all this: Horace knew it.

He slouched his hat still more over his face, and extended his survey. A pretty fair-haired child, not many summers old—how many he was not learned enough in children to guess—stood nestling beside the fair singer, with one little hand lovingly clasped in hers; and opposite them, on one of the cross-benches, sat a gentleman, verging on middle age, thoroughly enjoying, to all appearance, the sailing, the sunshine, the singing, and all. Horace had seen enough. He drew hastily back behind the white sail, and asked the boatman, somewhat sharply, if he expected to reach the land by midnight or not? Startled from his pleasing conviction that the gentleman was in no hurry, the boatman applied himself with alacrity to his oars, and soon reached the landing-steps.

“Married too! Years ago!” muttered Horace to himself,

as he paced the little terrace in front of his hotel in the soft summer-moonlight that evening. "Every one can take root and flourish in life except me!" he added bitterly; and betook himself, no less gloomily, but far more seriously than in days of old, to his cigar and his musings.

But this time the result of his musings was practical, being no less than an order for a conveyance to Geneva next morning; and, there arrived, he started at once for Paris and London, which he reached in a shorter space of time than he had ever before been known to accomplish such a journey in.

Having taken possession of his own chambers at the Albany, his first expedition was, of course, to his brother's. Being told that Lord Castleton was not at home, he asked for Lady Castleton; and, being shown into the drawing-room, found Cissy on a sofa wrapped in delicate muslins and ribbons, looking prettier than ever; with her four-weeks-old baby asleep beside her, in a bassinet all mother-of-pearl and blue ribbons and lace. It was quite a pretty picture; but somehow it conveyed the impression, that the pretty young mamma was little less of a child than the babe in the bassinet beside her.

She sprang up delighted at seeing Horace. They had really thought he never meant to come back at all; and it was quite shameful that he had never seen his godson yet; and little Horace was out just now. But he might look at the baby. The baby's name was to be Louisa Emlyn, and it was to be christened at the Priory, as soon as Fred was ready to take her and the children down. The Emlyns were gone already; Louisa could wait no longer when she heard—ah! Horace had, perhaps, not heard yet—that Florence's baby was born. So nice for Florence to have a baby, too! The dear little, soft, pretty playthings!

Where was Fred? Oh! gone out somewhere; he had been out more than usual the last few days; he was busy about something, she thought. She had no idea about what, though he did say something about railways, or railway meetings the day before, when she wanted him to stay at home; but she wondered why he should go, for he did not look as if it had been at all amusing when he came back. But he would be home to dinner, and of course Horace would stay. Oh, there was little Horace just come in, so his god-papa should see him at last.

So Horace sat for some little time talking and listening to Cissy, and admiring his god-son to the best of his very limited bachelor-abilities; but it kept running in his head: What could Fred have to do with railways, or railway meetings? It made him feel uncomfortable; and at last he said he would go down to the club, and see if he could find Frederick there; if not, he would return to dinner at any rate.

When he got downstairs, however, he noticed that the door of his brother's library—his smoking-room, it might better have been called—was shut; and suddenly remembering that the servant had probably not known him from an ordinary visitor, proceeded to investigate for himself. On opening the door, he found that his brother was indeed at home; sitting, with a perplexed and worried look, quite strange on his face, among business papers over which he was poring, cigar in mouth; but just as Horace entered he flung his cigar away, as if suddenly exasperated by the conviction that it was not helping him in his dilemma. His face brightened instantly at sight of Horace, and he sprung to his feet with his usual boyish alacrity.

"Horace, old fellow! Is that really you? Are you quite well again? So glad to see you!" But there was a doleful cadence in his last words which confirmed his brother's apprehensions.

"Perfectly well, Fred," said Horace, taking the chair which the former perceiving his slight lameness, had instantly placed for him; "but what is the matter here? I know by your face there is something wrong. What have you been about? Out-running your income, and getting into debt, and wanting me to help you out?"

"Something wrong, confound it!" said Fred, dolefully; "I should think there was! Talk of debt, and out-running of incomes, why it's a perfect joke to the infernal hobble those rascally fellows have contrived to let me in for! And as for helping me out, old fellow, why I am afraid that's more than you can manage, or any one else either!" Fred leaned back in his chair with a rueful look, twisting a lock of his curly hair, extended to its utmost length, between his fingers, so as to convey a forcible impression of his feeling himself at his wit's end.

"But what sort of a hobble; and what could you be at to get into the hands of rascally fellows?" said Horace, drawing his chair nearer to get a side-look at the ominous papers.

"Cissy said something about a railway meeting; but surely, Fred, you never went speculating in shares?"

"Wish I had, or anything but just what I did do, like an ass as I was! There, never mind those confounded papers," said Lord Castleton, gathering them all in a heap and tossing them across the table; "I can tell you all about it in two minutes, and you shall have as much of the papers afterwards as you like. And I'll tell you what, Horace, though you can't help me, I don't know that I ever was so glad to see you before, as I was when you came in just now."

"Instead of settling that I cannot help you, just tell me what is the matter," said Horace; "and then, if you will not be helped, you shall not."

"Will not!" said Frederick with a grim smile. "Just look here then! Do you remember hearing about a branch line, two or three years ago, that was to run near Heathlands?"

"Yes," said Horace; "and I remember asking at the time, what it could signify to you, as you never lived there, and Cissy was not likely to take a fancy to a place in Yorkshire?"

"I know you did," said Lord Castleton penitently. "But some time after that—I suppose I forgot to tell you about it—when I went down there, just before I was married, there was a great fuss in the neighbourhood about it, and some of the fellows got hold of me, and got up a deputation from A——, and palavered about the good of the neighbourhood, and the value of my name, and the little the line was to cost, and how it would amalgamate with the main line, and a lot of stuff; and they actually followed me up to London, and I was in a hurry to get down to Cissy, and so at last I let them put down my name as a director, and took a few shares to get rid of them."

Mr. Carysfort began to look very grave.

"Yes, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself," said Fred, ruefully; "knowing I knew nothing about it, and didn't mean to learn; no one need tell me that! Then I forgot all about it again till I heard last autumn that it was not flourishing; and then I wrote and desired my name to be taken off the list of directors, and thought, of course, I was clear of it; and now the whole thing has gone to smash, and they come down on me as a director—nobody ever received my letter, of course; infernal rascals as they are!—and I may say what I please, it seems they can make me responsible—for any amount!" concluded he desperately.

"But Fred, how long have you known this? Whom have you consulted?" said Mr. Carysfort, anxiously.

"I laughed at them at first," returned he, "and told them they might whistle for anything beyond the purchase-money of the shares they had swindled me out of already; but when I found it was getting serious, I went to old Savage, and he has been at it tooth and nail, and got the very first opinions, and it seems there is no help. I have not got so much as a copy of the letter I wrote, and if I had, I believe it would be no good. And of course the shareholders must get some satisfaction out of somebody; and as half the directors have nothing to pay up with, and the rest have bolted, they pounce upon me and one or two others; and the liabilities are perfectly frightful!"

"What does Emlyn say?" inquired Horace aghast.

"He does not know; I did not want Cissy or Louisa to know, and I knew no one could help if old Savage could not."

"But Fred, Cissy must know! What do you propose—what does Savage advise? The estates are all entailed; you cannot sell if you would!"

"Sell; no! But they—the creditors, the shareholders, I mean, or whatever they please to call themselves"—said Fred, in a tone of exasperation, almost amusing in its boyish petulance, "generously propose to take charge of my estates for me—a thing done every day, as they kindly assure me, when noble-men get into such little scrapes—and allow me a thousand a year till the claims are liquidated (which will be never), or till the heir comes of age and we can cut the entail! A thousand a year! Their generosity really!"—

"But what on earth does Savage say?" asked Horace in a tone of growing dismay.

"That I can't help myself! That is just the worst part of the business!"

"A bad business, indeed!" said Mr. Carysfort, musingly. "It seems I did not come home before I was wanted, however little use I may be now I am here, Fred; but we must see what we can do!"—

"Do! I shall emigrate to Australia, and see what I can do there, I think," returned Lord Castleton. "Though to be sure, Cissy"—The ludicrous contrast between the idea of Cissy and of Australia overcame his trouble, and he fairly laughed. His brother was glad he could laugh still.

"No, I am afraid you will not manage much in that line," he said, kindly; "but don't be down-hearted, Fred. We must

go and have a long talk with Savage to-morrow morning, and see if there be no possible way of managing matters; and if the worst comes to the worst, we must set up house together. I should think we might get on with a thousand a year of yours and what I have, which is a great deal more than is of any use to me."

"No, no, Horace; you are a good fellow!" said Frederick, gratefully; "but that will never do. I am not going to stand in the way of your marrying and doing as you like"—

"Well, never mind just now; we will see what Savage says to-morrow," returned Mr. Carysfort, pursuing some thread of reflection in his own mind apparently; for after a minute or two's thought, he looked up suddenly, and said, "But now, Fred, don't sit worrying over those papers any more; you look so fagged and bothered"—

"Well I may!" he replied despondingly. "I am sick of the very sight of them!"

"Then come down to the club with me; Cissy thinks I am gone there to look for you; and you shall bring back some excuse for my not returning to dinner: and I will go to see Savage this evening, and learn if there be really no glimpse of light to be got into the business. And then to-morrow we will have a grand consultation with him and his 'very first opinions.' Come along, Fred."

So the two brothers went out together; and after they had parted, as proposed, at the club, Mr. Carysfort went straight to the chambers of the old family solicitor, who had managed the Castleton property for many years—for many generations, Frederick always asserted. Mr. Savage received his visitor with a face scarcely less dismal than Lord Castleton's own, and a doleful, "Oh, Mr. Carysfort! A pretty mess you have come back to find us in!"

It was not easy, at first, to bring him to the point of explaining his views of the said mess, and the hopes and possibilities of extrication that might remain. He feelingly lamented Lord Castleton's extreme imprudence in ever letting his name be made use of without first taking legal advice, which would have hindered all the mischief; and his inconceivable carelessness in not making sure of the withdrawal of his name: but young men always would go trying to manage their own affairs—the last thing they ought ever to think of! Mr. Carysfort's cordial assent to the implied proposition that it would have been much better for all parties had Mr. Savage been consulted, smoothed

matters considerably; and proceeding to business, the old lawyer soon put the whole case before him in very few words, like the shrewd, clear-headed man of business he really was. It was pretty much as Lord Castleton had stated it. Enormous liabilities incurred by reckless management, if not absolute swindling; and no escape from legal responsibility, several similar cases having lately been decided against nominal directors in the same situation. It would be throwing away money to go into court against the claim.

But when questioned as to the necessity of assigning over the estates, that, Mr. Savage said, was decidedly open to consideration; only he had never been able to get Lord Castleton to listen to reason. Horace could not help smiling as he thought with what degree of patience poor Fred, in his present mood, was likely to listen to reason prefaced by homilies on his own imprudence and carelessness.

There was another expedient, Mr. Savage said, which might possibly save the estates and the family from this *infra dig.* sequestration. The offer of a large sum of money down might possibly be accepted as a compromise by the creditors, in the present desperate position of affairs; but it would need to be a very large sum indeed, and being raised on mortgage, the interest would reduce Lord Castleton's revenues almost as much as the sequestration, till the entail could be cut, and something done in that way—though Mr. Savage shuddered at the thought of such a sacrifice as any sale of the time-honoured acres of the Castleton property. Still the property would meantime remain in the hands of its rightful owners, and any improvements that could be effected on it—a good deal might, perhaps, be done in that way, if Mr. Savage's advice were listened to—would redound to their advantage, and something might still turn up before it came to cutting the entail.

Mr. Carysfort caught gladly at the idea of a compromise, and a long conference ensued as to the means of raising money, during which Mr. Savage was induced, by suggestions of Mr. Carysfort's, to open his eyes very wide indeed; yet there must have been something satisfactory to his mind in the turn the consultation took, to judge from the placid, benevolent glance—very different from the doleful, business face with which he had received his visitor,—with which he at last took leave of him.

"Well, really, Mr. Horace, I can only say that I shall feel—that is, if Lord Castleton can be induced"—

"Leave me to manage Lord Castleton," said Horace; "only keep counsel to-morrow, and I will answer for the rest. Good night." And with a pre-occupied, somewhat gloomy expression of countenance, Mr. Carysfort returned to his chambers at the Albany.

The next morning, when his brother came by appointment to breakfast with him, and eagerly inquired the result of his interview with the lawyer, Mr. Carysfort assured him that he thought matters did not look quite so black as he had feared, and dilated on the advantages of the proposed compromise, if it could be effected, which would at least keep the management of the estates in their own hands.

"No great thing, either, with nothing left to manage them on!" said Lord Castleton, grimly.

"We will see about that afterwards," said Horace; "let us get out of this scrape first. What I want you to do is this. Savage thinks he would have a better chance of dealing with these people, if you would leave the matter entirely in his hands for a little while. He thinks you get a little excited sometimes, and that does harm"——

"I should like to know who wouldn't," said Frederick, trying to speak sulkily, but smiling, in spite of himself, at the remembrance of Mr. Savage's efforts to restrain his excitement on more than one occasion.

"Cissy wants change of air," proceeded his brother, "and if you will take her and the children down to the Emlyns', and stay a week or two, leaving Savage and me full power to act, I believe we shall have mended matters by the time you come back. Will you let us try? At any rate, we can hardly make things worse."

"No, I defy you to!" returned Lord Castleton; "and if you like to try your hand at mending them, I am sure I shall be very much obliged to you, and, moreover, think it very good of you to bother your head about my business, when I know you hate trouble so."

"Oh, Savage shall have the trouble," said Mr. Carysfort; and they proceeded to further arrangements.

Immediately after breakfast, Frederick returned home, and delighted Cissy by telling her he should be ready to take her down to her sister's the next day, and then hastened to Mr. Savage's to meet Horace, who had thus secured another private conference before his brother's arrival. All was then speedily arranged according to the proposed plan. The affair

was to be left entirely in the hands of the lawyer and Mr. Carysfort, Lord Castleton giving them full powers to act for him, and promising not to interfere or return to town till they should have fairly tried the experiment of managing the opposite party in his absence. Mr. Savage took leave of his noble client with sanguine predictions of a more promising state of affairs at their next meeting; and considerably relieved by these and his brother's assurances, though he could not himself see how they were going to mend matters so greatly, Lord Castleton proceeded, with rapidly rising spirits, to assist Cissy's preparations for their departure next day. This being happily accomplished, Mr. Carysfort, with the field clear, proceeded, in concert with Mr. Savage, to carry out the plans they had in contemplation.

Two or three weeks elapsed, during which Lord Castleton was constantly informed that matters were progressing favourably: and with the natural carelessness of his disposition, he bore the suspense lightly enough, betraying only a little extra restlessness, which caused Lady Emlyn to remark that she did not believe Frederick could be still for half an hour together if he tried. Then he was summoned back, and went up to London to look after Horace, as he averred. He left Cissy and her babes with the Emlyns, and was charged to bring Horace down on his return.

His sense of the gravity of his position increased in proportion as he approached the scene of action, and he reached London in very low spirits indeed. He went straight to Mr. Savage, and was somewhat relieved to hear that the compromise had been effected, the creditors having agreed to accept a given sum down, in lieu of all claims present and prospective; but the sum was so large, that his countenance fell again when he heard its amount. The Castleton property was by no means large for the position of its owner, and of late only disencumbered; the accumulations of a long minority having barely sufficed to counterbalance the extravagance of the last possessor. And what would be left when the interest of such mortgages as must now be laid on it was annually provided for? Or how else was the money to be raised?

That, Mr. Savage said, was a point for future deliberation. The present question was, whether Lord Castleton would ratify the compromise made in his name. He could talk matters over with his brother, who was in possession of all the information necessary, and then, if no objection arose, they

could proceed to further business when they all three met next morning, as Mr. Carysfort had appointed. Finding that, for some reason or other, no more was to be got out of the lawyer at that sitting, Lord Castleton drove off to his brother's chambers in a very desponding mood. He supposed, as he went along, that he and Cissy must go and live abroad, as it would be impossible for them to exist in England on anything he could hope to save out of his income; and truly it was a poor look out both for them and their children, the only possibility of ever bettering their position lying in the unpromising prospect of improving estates, almost the whole revenues of which would be irrecoverably tied up. And all through his own reckless folly!

By the time he reached the Albany, he felt as much repugnance to approaching the distasteful subject as he had felt anxiety to enter on it before. Nor did Mr. Carysfort show any alacrity in opening it, and dinner had been over some time before either adverted to business. At last, after fidgetting restlessly on his chair, and wishing Horace would have the charity to begin, Lord Castleton took the plunge himself.

"I saw Savage on my way up this afternoon."

"You did?" said Horace, on his side rousing himself to meet the emergency. "And I suppose he told you"——

"Yes, he showed me the terms agreed on," continued Lord Castleton, "and I have no doubt you and he have made the best possible of a very bad business. Do not think me ungrateful for looking so black on it; but, you see, it is such a frightful sum of money to have to raise, and I do not see what is to become of us—Cissy and the children I mean—while I am paying such interest as there must be on the mortgages. And I am sure Savage thinks it a very bad job; I could not get a word out of him as to what the money could be borrowed at,—in short, it seems such a look-out as a fellow must take some time to get over!" he wound up, growing desperate again.

"My dear Fred!" Mr. Carysfort began,—but there he stopped, and Frederick had to look very hard at him for a full minute before he went on—"the fact is, there will be no need to borrow the money at all."

"No need!" echoed Lord Castleton, in amaze.

"None at all," replied Mr. Carysfort, quickly. "You must only leave me to arrange matters as I told you. I have for some time been intending to go to the bar—I am sick of doing nothing, Fred!—so several thousands a year would be utterly

useless to me now ; and my money having always been in the Funds, is easily got at, and, in short, the sum required is placed at Savage's disposal, and you have only to sign the papers to-morrow morning."

"Horace!" exclaimed Frederick, springing to his feet, "you do not imagine I would allow"—

"Be quiet, Fred, and sit down," interrupted his brother, in a tone of suppressed irritation, which forcibly recalled to Fred his ungracious reception when he went down to see Horace after his accident. "I tell you you will allow it, if you are not an obstinate fool, which I do not take you for. Just tell me what good wealth has ever done me since I had it? Has it made me such a particularly happy man, or have I made such a first-rate use of it that you should thwart me when I have found a satisfactory way of applying it? Besides, I shall still have quite as much as I want. I have no wife and children, to say nothing of a peerage to keep up!"

There was a touch of such bitter emphasis on the word "wife," as it quite grieved Fred to hear.

"But, Horace, old fellow, though you have not got a wife now, you may have some day ; and I doubt you need not go so very far to look for one, who would be well worth having, too—politics and all!" said Frederick, with a smile. "And I cannot—you must see yourself that I could not possibly let you ruin yourself in that way! It is not even as if I could hope to repay you in any reasonable number of years"—

"I see no impossibility in the matter," returned Mr. Carysfort, more gently ; "besides, you gave us *carte blanche*, and you cannot help yourself. And I mean you to repay me in part. That is, you will every year set aside so much, to be employed—with other money we purpose to borrow, as Savage will tell you—to improve the estates, which have been sadly neglected ; and as the improvements pay, you will get a considerable increase on your present income, which you may write off to me as fast as you please. If I should ever marry—which I have no idea of doing at present ; I should not like having a wife to look down on me as an idle, useless fellow—I may, perhaps, want money by that time ; if not, it will revert to little Horace, or go towards a provision for the younger children—you may look out for a dozen now, Fred!"

"And if it will ease your conscience," he continued, seeing his brother about to interrupt, "you may give me a mortgage over the property to any amount you please ; but I will take no

interest beyond the thousand, or perhaps two, a year, which I mean to invest in the improvements. And I shall put several disagreeable stipulations into the agreement, as to your living down at Heathlands at least half the year, learning to manage your own estates, and so forth. I am afraid I have a good deal to answer for, Fred, in bringing you up to be as idle and good-for-nothing as myself; and I vote we both turn over a new leaf, and do better in future."

"Good-for-nothing as you! The oddest sort of good-for-nothingness I ever met with, then, I can tell you," said Fred, huskily. "But, on my word, old fellow, I cannot think it can be right"——

"Then think no more about it," said his brother. "I never was a very peremptory elder brother, but I must have my will this time. I am quite in earnest about going to the bar, and shall have quite as much left as I can want to get on with, till I make something for myself; so it is positively only turning money to account which would be of no earthly use to me."

"All very well to say that," muttered Frederick, wringing his brother's hand, with tears in his eyes, deeply touched by the generosity which tried to make light of the obligation conferred; but, contest the point as he might, he was forced to give in at last, and walked home that night to his empty house, with a heart strangely full, and yet strangely lightened.

The brothers had always been warmly attached to each other; and Frederick was more alive than any one, unless it were Lady Emlyn, to the kindness of heart and native generosity of character which the idle, frivolous life of a man of fashion had tended to obscure and suffocate in Horace; but even he had been far from imagining how strong his brother's affection for him really was, or how unselfishly and energetically, once thoroughly roused, Horace might be capable of acting.

"Ah! I told Cissy once that Horace was a fine fellow, good enough for anybody," said he to himself. "She will believe it now."

Nor was the sacrifice thus made, so slight to Mr. Carysfort's feelings as he tried to make it appear. He had, it is true, no idea of marrying at present—perhaps the feeling stirred by his encounter on the Lake of Geneva helped to disincline him to it for the time—but that was quite another thing from putting it absolutely out of his power to do so for years, at least, to come. And, though several thousands a year would indeed be of no special use in forwarding his present views,—of

getting on at the bar, so as to acquire some definite root and occupation in life,—it would be neither so very easy, nor so very pleasant, to live on but few more hundreds a year than he had been used to squander thousands, he really did not know how. Still it was something to have had his previous indecision thus overcome by the force of circumstances; and however distasteful the results might practically prove, nothing could be worse than his past mode and habits of life, which the experience of the last year or two had led him to regard with positive disgust; so he was determined, somewhat cynically perhaps, to make the best of it. The impulse from without had indeed come opportunely, and naturally too, through the channel of his really sincere affection for his brother; for in transition-epochs, such as Mr. Caryfort's mind was now passing through, the value of any good and unselfish point of character is sure to make itself felt.

The compromise was carried out: the money realized, and paid over; and, grievous as Mr. Savage pronounced the sacrifice, it hardly went to his heart so much as the sale of a single acre of the Castleton property, had sale been possible, would have done. Mr. Carysfort, in concession to his brother's scruples, accepted a mortgage over the property to the full amount laid down—but privately assigned it on the spot, by will, to his god-son—and promised really to consider as his own, and draw as much as he should require of the two thousand a year, which was all even Frederick could persuade himself he might be able to set aside from his income. But Horace took care it should still be applied as originally proposed.

It was settled, also, that the Castletons should give up their town house, and reside at Heathlands, at least for the present. Nearly ten years younger than his brother, and endowed by nature with much more physical energy, there seemed no reason why Frederick should not settle down into an active, practical, resident proprietor; and though Cissy's inclinations had not yet been consulted, neither of the brothers had much uneasiness on her account. It might cost her a few tears to give up her pretty London house; but notwithstanding her occasional assumption of wilfulness in trifles, she was too childlike and pliant in disposition, and much too fond of Fred, to offer any serious opposition to his wishes; especially as both her sister's and Sir William's influence was sure to be exercised to the utmost in support of the plan. And with her

flower-garden and her country neighbours to take the place of London gaieties, she would soon be quite as happy as before.

So Lord Castleton, when he found that Horace could not be induced to go with him, went down alone to Emlyn Priory, to communicate the state of affairs, before proceeding to Heathlands, to put it in order for the reception of his family. For Horace might talk as he liked of the inexpediency of publishing such strictly private family arrangements, Frederick was determined that Cissy and the Emlyns, at least, should be fully informed as to Horace's noble conduct. He journeyed down with a strange new sense of duties and responsibilities upon him. He felt as if he had suddenly turned a corner in life, and found himself face to face with its realities. And deeper still, though not oppressive, to his affectionate heart, was the sense of obligation to his brother. He had always been fond of Horace; but now, for the first time, he felt really proud of him.

Lady Emlyn's gratification at Horace's vindication of her good opinion was unbounded; and Cissy's gratitude amounted almost to awe, when she was made to comprehend the extent of the sacrifice. Sir William declared that the effect on Horace's character of that fall from his horse had been marvellous; but he looked very grave on Frederick's recklessness, which had brought matters to such a pass; and begged him to remember that it might not be so easy to get out of a second scrape, as Horace had made it for him with this first.

When Helen Montagu heard the story, which Frederick took care she soon should, she frankly confessed to having done Horace great injustice in her former opinion of him; and applauded his conduct far more warmly than she would have done had she felt any of that peculiar interest in him which his brother wished she might, and, in his masculine ignorance, thenceforth flattered himself that she did.

While his brother proceeded to his preparations at Heathlands, Mr. Carysfort meanwhile exchanged his chambers at the Albany for chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and addressed himself seriously to the new mode of life he had chosen. It might not prove either agreeable or prosperous; but, at any rate, he was now setting earnestly to work, to solve, after his fashion, the problem which has perplexed, and doubtless will perplex, so many, before and after him; whether, namely, there be, after all, happiness in life worth living for, to be found by those

who set about seeking it, to the best of their several abilities, by aid of such light as each may possess?

Of Florence Littleton and her husband we have said little. It seems superfluous to dilate on happiness such as theirs; happiness as pure and cloudless as can be looked for on earth. Not, indeed, that they possessed all earth can give; and Frank might sometimes wish for a moment that he could surround his Florence with some, or all, of the luxuries which graced the lot of her wealthier friends; or that he had more leisure to devote to her and their child; and Florence might sometimes sigh that Frank should have to work so hard, or come home looking pale and weary at times; but these and other trifles no more obscured their happiness, than bright, white clouds in a summer-evening sky dim the beauty and radiance of the sunset which gilds them. Perhaps they rather enhanced it, by contributing that something to wish for and look forward to, which—doubtless as indicative of the progressive element in finite human nature—seems inseparable from the full relish of any actual enjoyment.

And should it be asked whether such happiness as we have here indicated (to describe it were impossible) be not the figment of our own imagination—whether such may really be found on earth—we answer: But too seldom, truly, and never for long together; but found, nevertheless, it sometimes is, like a green oasis, cheering the hearts, and confirming, with a foretaste of heavenly bliss, the faith of human wanderers, in the deserts of their earthly pilgrimage. And found more often it would be, and enjoyed more widely, if men but knew how to estimate more rightly, and to seek more steadfastly, the true and imperishable happiness of life.

CHAPTER XX.

CANVASSING

Time passes on;
The healing work of sorrow is complete;
All vain regrets subdued.

SOUTHEY'S *Roderick*.

MORE than three years had elapsed, without bringing forth any striking events to chequer the fortunes of those whom

we left addressing themselves, with more or less of hopefulness, energy, and contentment, to their various paths of life; some rejoicing in the brightest blessings of life's sunshine; others winding their less-favoured way in the shadow of such clouds and trials as must beset all paths at one time or other.

And surely it is one of the most beautiful laws of Divine Providence, which so breaks and chequers both clouds and sunshine, that neither can fall unbroken on the life-horizon of any. However gloomy our own path, we can still—if we have learned to look beyond self—always find some sunny spot in other lives within our ken, to remind us that the sun is still shining, if not immediately on ourselves; whereas, if our own lot be cast in pleasant places, we can never—unless selfishness have hardened our hearts to the sorrow of others—lack the wholesome reminder that all earthly happiness is uncertain and fleeting; and that it will be well to be laying up against our own day of need, that treasure in the heavens which faileth not.

Helen Montagu's life had flowed smoothly on, with as little of outward change as could well be. Her father's affairs had gradually been wound up; and, shortly before the date at which the thread of our story is resumed, the last dividend to his creditors had been paid; leaving still some surplus for his private benefit, which might yet, there was good hope, afford at least an equivalent for the marriage-settlement, the relinquishment of which had been such a grievance to Mrs. Montagu. Mr. Montagu had declined more than one advantageous opportunity of re-entering business, which the high respect entertained for his character and abilities procured him; and occupied himself chiefly in the local politics and magisterial business which he had gradually resumed, as he freed himself from the harass of his pecuniary entanglements. Sir William Emlyn's friendship and society had proved an unfailing resource; and now that the Priory was seldom unoccupied—the continued residence of the Castletons at their own seat removing Lady Emlyn's former attractions to London—there were few days that the two gentlemen did not meet, either on the bench, or at some of the local boards at which they sat together, or at the home of one or the other. Helen's intimacy at the Priory had likewise far from diminished; and though it was not possible any real intimacy should subsist between Lady Emlyn and Mrs. Montagu, the former always contrived,

for Helen's sake, to keep up such a show of attention and cordiality, as satisfied both the expectations and the vanity of the latter lady. Mrs. Montagu had of late been, or fancied herself, in somewhat delicate health; and had taken to beguiling her time by the close attendance, now growing fashionable, on cathedral services; and by mixing herself up with divers of the charitable societies and sisterhoods, with which X—— and its neighbourhood abounded. Helen steadily resisted every attempt to draw her into similar circles and occupations; but as they tended greatly to her father's peace and comfort, by occupying Mrs. Montagu's mind, and gratifying her sense of importance, she could submit, with a good grace, to the strictures which not unfrequently reached her, directly or indirectly, on the worldly and frivolous turn of mind, "natural enough, to be sure, in so young and attractive a person as dear Helen."

Helen's remaining unmarried, and her steady avoidance of every acquaintance which might seem to threaten matrimonial overtures, did not, of course, pass without the usual amount of wonder and remark, among her private friends, and in the neighbourhood in general. Sir William, indeed, when her recovered spirits had quite removed his uncomfortable idea that something had gone wrong with his favourite, could not always resist teasing her on the subject; and, one day, confidentially announced that he had at last discovered her secret to be no less than a hopeless attachment, of many years' standing, to their respected rector, Mr. Rawdon; and the joke remained a standing one against her for many a day.

The neighbourhood was divided in opinion as to whether the engagement to Mr. Carysfort had really existed, but been postponed, or broken off, by his own, as well as Mr. Montagu's loss of fortune; or whether Miss Montagu's heart had been secretly given to Captain Marston, though pride might have prompted her to reject him, when her father's prosperous position seemed to entitle her to a more brilliant match. Mrs. Montagu secretly countenanced the latter theory, till she almost believed in it herself; and nothing but the reflection how inconvenient it might be to lose the benefit of Helen's fortune, prevented her writing to urge her nephew's return from India, to avail himself of the advantages afforded by present circumstances.

As often happens, the truth remained unsuspected, except by the one or two persons who had far too much respect and

affection for Helen to take part in such gossiping speculations. She had never seen Mr. Huntley again. While he declined all invitations to the Priory or the Cottage, she had as sedulously avoided any such stay in London as might have brought them in contact; nor had they as yet been thrown together by any of those seeming chances which so often defeat all such prudent precautions. She heard of him occasionally from the Littletons and the Emlyns, and had learned to hear his name mentioned with more pleasure than pain. It was with deeper pleasure that she met himself, as it were, in the writings which, from time to time, abundantly testified that his secluded life was not spent in idleness or aimless self-absorption; and each of which seemed to strengthen and vivify the hidden links between them, by the expression of thoughts and feelings which spoke so home to hers, that it almost seemed, for the moment, as if the old days had returned, in which Bernard had been wont to unfold himself to her as to none other. She had never seen anyone who could so much as tempt her to transfer her love to another; and vague and visionary as any lingering hope must be, that time would yet solve the mystery and prosper her affection, she had nevertheless learned to feel her life the richer for the disappointed love which, unprosperous as it was, remained a well-spring of happiness within her, cheering many a heavy hour. For the giving of love—of such love, at least, as deserves the name—is happiness in itself; and unselfish love for a worthy object refines and softens; awakening a deeper susceptibility to all tender and generous sympathies, in the exercise of which so much true happiness may at all times be found.

This softening and refining influence might have been traced in the indefinable softening of countenance and manner, which made Helen, if not absolutely younger, far more winningly attractive and feminine, in appearance, than of old; and so much less obviously self-reliant, that society in X—— and its neighbourhood had begun to forget how “very clever” Miss Montagu was, and more often remarked on her sweet smile, or her elegance, or her affectionate devotion to her father. Lady Emlyn now positively disbelieved that she ever could really have felt doubtful about liking dear Helen; and on occasion of a late visit to the Priory, Lord Castleton had taken the opportunity of writing to his brother, that he did not believe Miss Montagu could talk politics now, if she tried. To be sure, if he really did not, he must have strangely shut his ears to some of the

conversations in which she joined with Sir William and her father; but as, on the other hand, he assured Helen that Horace was growing quite a politician, he was probably not much in earnest in the assertion.

Mr. Carysfort, shortly after his call to the Chancery bar, had obtained the appointment of secretary to one of the law lords, which at least effected his object of getting something to do, by way of contrast to former idleness. No one was much surprised that he had not yet revisited the neighbourhood of X——, the scene, for him, of such unpleasant reminiscences.

"Well, papa?" said Helen, one afternoon, early in the autumn, on Mr. Montagu's entering the room where she sat, with a somewhat unusual alacrity of step, and a face which betrayed that he had something pleasing to communicate.

"I have been hearing some news," said her father, placing himself in front of her, and looking at her with a peculiar gleam of satisfaction in the smile with which he answered hers. "Who do you think is coming down to contest the borough, after all?"

"How can I guess, papa?" said Helen. "It cannot be Sir William, as we wished, or you would not say 'coming down.' Nor yourself, for the same reason."

"No, no,—I have had enough of it; and Sir William is obstinate. Quite a mistake—just the man we want—but he vows he would as soon hang himself as go sitting in that House night after night. But, Helen, it is an old friend of yours."

"I cannot think of any one likely," said Helen; for the only name which—always at hand—presented itself, was one which she could not commit to speech to risk an astonished negative.

"Have you quite forgotten Mr. Carysfort?" said her father, smiling.

"Mr. Carysfort!" cried Helen, springing up with a laugh. "Now, papa, you are joking."

"Not in the least," said her father, with a shade of disappointment in his tone; "why should you think so?"

"Oh, you do not know how he used to hate politics, papa," said Helen. "Poor Mr. Carysfort! To think of his being reduced to such extremities! Why, do you know, he took a vehement dislike to me, because he had heard me talking politics; but I suppose he has reformed on that point too. I have great respect for him since that affair of Lord Castleton's."

"If you mean as to his dislike, he reformed on that point some time since, I imagine," said Mr. Montagu, with the same odd smile, and an inquiring glance at his daughter, which made her feel uncomfortable. Was her father beginning again with his old fancy about Mr. Carysfort?

"Yes, we got pretty good friends together after his accident," said Helen, carelessly—her father must *not* take those fancies into his head again. "But now tell me, papa, how it happened. I thought the borough was not to be contested, when Sir William declined."

"Well, it had very nearly fallen through," said her father; "but when Sir William positively declined, some of Mr. Carysfort's London friends suggested that he might have as good a chance, if Sir William would back him. He was not very willing; but being strongly urged, both on personal and political grounds—it will be a good thing for him, you know, put him in the way of employment, and so on—he wrote down to Sir William, who caught at the idea instantly. One does not like the seat to go without a struggle, and we are going to set to work immediately. Mr. Carysfort comes down to-morrow night, and we are all going to dine at the Priory to meet him the day after."

"Well, papa, he is quite sure to be beat," said Helen, shirking allusion to the dinner engagement. "Sir William might have carried it; but nobody else has a chance, I believe."

"Now, my dear Helen, how can you say so?" remonstrated Mr. Montagu; and proceeded to a long exposition of all the prospects and chances of the contest.

"Well, he will not be long in suspense," said Helen, in conclusion; "there is just a week to the polling-day, and that is all."

Mr. Carysfort's arrival at the Priory next evening was duly notified by a special messenger to Mr. Montagu, who instantly rode over to join a conference preparatory to the commencement of operations; and next morning, after an unusually early breakfast, he again started off to meet the other gentlemen, and to commence the canvass in earnest. But beyond the interest she took in the proceedings on her father's account, and on public grounds, Helen had, at the moment, none to spare for any subject but one. A letter received that morning had touched the string of the one growing anxiety, which formed, at this time, the rising cloud on her horizon.

This was caused by the delicate—she could not bear to call

it, even to herself, the dangerous—state of Frank Littleton's health. He had never been strong, and once, as has been mentioned, had been in danger of total loss of health; and though the removal to the milder air of the neighbourhood of X——, and the less arduous duties of his country practice, had, for the time, availed to check the symptoms of pulmonary disease, yet, even from the earlier days of his married life, his delicacy of constitution had again made itself apparent. For a couple of years, indeed, there was nothing to warrant any peculiar anxiety on the part of his friends, till the third winter he had sustained a severe attack of illness, from which, however, he rallied so completely, as to deceive all around him as to its nature. But the fourth winter, without any definite attack of illness, his health had failed so much as to compel him almost entirely to relinquish his practice to an assistant; and he had now, with Florence and their two children, been spending some months in the Isle of Wight, preparatory to trying a winter abroad, should the first change not sufficiently restore him.

Yet Florence had no fears for him, or none that she had ever owned even to herself. Her intense and absorbing devotion to her husband made it, perhaps, impossible for her to dream of a separation. She thought him very delicate; urged all possible care; herself first proposed the gradual relinquishment for a time of the professional fatigues, of which their united private means, small as these comparatively were, enabled them to dispense with the emoluments; and pressed the project of spending the next winter in a milder climate. But she never seemed to admit a thought but that all this care and precaution would result in a complete restoration of health; and her own hopefulness so influenced all around her, that neither the Emlyns, nor any one else, seemed as yet to indulge any serious apprehensions; and Helen, too, always spoke like the rest. But in her secret heart, there was of late a pang of fear, especially when there rose to her mind a certain look of Frank's which rested at times on Florence, when her eyes were not upon him. It haunted Helen like a spectre, fraught, as it was, with not more of love than of tender, half angel-like compassion, stirring the fear, the question which she *felt*, without venturing to ask herself,—What would become of Florence if—she lost him?

The letter she had now received from Florence, hopeful as ever in its tone, informed her, nevertheless, that Frank being,

on the whole, not materially better, she had persuaded him, when they should leave the Isle of Wight in two or three weeks to go up to town, to take his friend Sir Charles Alton's advice, as to the winter abroad, which she was sure would do him so much good. Was she really feeling so sure? thought Helen. Not better—and not better! Helen, at least, knew that must mean worse; and the thought pained her so, that towards the lunch hour she set out in hopes of finding Ida,—her usual confidant in all her anxieties, except the one she confided to nobody—who was generally at home about that time.

Ida and her mother still resided in the neat lodging in the Close, and Ida still gave music lessons; though a small legacy, lately left by a distant relative, now enabled her somewhat to curtail her labours and choose her pupils; an improvement in circumstances, which gave Helen almost as much pleasure as it gave comfort to Ida. Their mutual friendship had remained a source of much happiness to Helen; for though Ida was not one to whom she could look up, as in many respects she did to Florence, but was, on the contrary, one who must herself cling and lean, still she had always loving sympathy to give, and there were few of Helen's thoughts and feelings which Ida was not permitted to share. To no one else had Helen ever breathed her uneasiness about Frank; but this time she was disappointed of her expected sympathising listener, for Ida had been detained at her friends' the Singletons, and only the old lady was at home.

Helen chatted with her for a few minutes, feeling rather surprised at the great interest Mrs. Merton seemed to take in the proposed new member and the coming election. What could make her so curious about Mr. Carysfort? Had the foolish old report, of which Frank had once told Helen, been revived by Mr. Carysfort's re-appearance, and reached the old lady's ears? She really hoped not, it would be too stupid to have such ideas afloat; but she was too much engrossed with a weightier anxiety to give this more than a passing thought as she walked slowly home.

She found Mrs. Montagu in high good humour, having just been propitiated by a flying visit from Sir William and Mr. Carysfort—"to secure the vote and interest of the ladies," the former had charged her to tell Helen—and a request not to wait for Mr. Montagu, who would be late, and go straight to the Priory with the other gentlemen, but to drive over in good time, as Lady Emlyn would be alone all day. Helen

felt little in tune for the delightful evening her step-mother was so eagerly anticipating; but when the time came, she did her best to wind herself up to be pleasant company during the drive, and appropriately interested in electioneering matters afterwards.

They found Lord Castleton with Lady Emlyn. He had come poste-haste from Yorkshire at the first intimation of his brother's intention of standing for X——; and his lively talk and obviously brilliant spirits did much to dispel Helen's pre-occupation. He was delighted; it was the very thing for Horace! Would give him such a standing; and probably open the way for official employment, which would suit Horace admirably. Lord O—— had been very kind already, and this would put it in his power to do much more for him. Lord Castleton was determined Horace should win the election, "and all sorts of things besides," he added, with a sly, saucy glance at Helen, which suddenly recalled his habit of teasing her at the time of Florence's wedding, which had then so puzzled her. Was it possible he had then been aiming at Horace, and the famous *tête-à-tête* drive? Surely *he* could not think of such nonsense!

"By the way, how do you think Horace is looking, Miss Montagu? It is some time since you saw him before, I believe," was Lord Castleton's next remark.

"I have not seen Mr. Carysfort," said Helen.

"Not seen him! Why, dear Lady Emlyn," exclaimed Lord Castleton, turning hastily to his sister-in-law, who was meantime occupied with Mrs. Montagu, "I thought you told me Horace was especially bent on canvassing Miss Montagu when he started this morning? Why we may as well give up the election for lost at once, if Horace is to neglect his interests in this fashion!" he added, turning again to Helen, without waiting for an answer from Lady Emlyn, his eyes sparkling with suppressed fun, notwithstanding his tone of grave concern.

"I should certainly advise Mr. Carysfort to give up the election for lost, unless he wishes to be disappointed. I do not believe he has a chance against his opponent," said Helen, as unconcernedly as might be, but secretly wishing Lord Castleton would not be so ridiculous.

He looked sharply at her for a moment, perhaps to see if she, like himself, meant more than she said, but seeing nothing suspicious in her face, went on: "Not a chance! Do not

say that, Miss Montagu! Do not dash our hopes at the very outset! And I am sure more wonderful things happen every day. Just to think now of Horace's taking to politics after all!"

His merry laugh and the reminiscences he called up were irresistible, and Helen laughed with a gleam of the mischief of old days in her eyes, as she replied: "You remind me, Lord Castleton, that I once made your brother a promise of valuable assistance, in the event of his standing for the county. Do you think it binding now he stands for the borough?"

"Unquestionably," replied Lord Castleton; "but I shall not tell poor Horace that you needed me to remind you of your promise! Such a confession for a lady to make!"

Helen was quite glad to see her father and Sir William enter; she was tired of this: but Sir William's first words scarcely mended matters.

"I must really quarrel with you to-day, Miss Helen; not on my own account, of course; an old married man like myself does not expect a young lady to stop at home for him; but when I brought such—well, such an old friend of yours, Miss Helen!—hoping to see you after all these years, I did expect to find you at home!" Sir William's smile was scarcely less provoking than Lord Castleton's.

"My dear Sir William," said Helen, gravely, excessively annoyed at the apparent conspiracy to insist on her taking peculiar interest in Mr. Carysfort, "I assure you, had I known that you were coming"—

But her conscience pricked her. With her present feelings, had she known who were coming, she would certainly have gone out, as she had done; and first she hesitated, and then, confused at having done so, could get no farther.

"Your apology is perfectly satisfactory, Miss Helen," said Sir William, with a good-natured air of coming to her assistance, which provoked Helen more than ever; and it was at this unpropitious moment that Mr. Carysfort, who, with other guests, had meanwhile joined the circle, advanced to claim the recognition to which old acquaintance entitled him.

She felt sorely tempted to draw herself up, and give him one of her old stiff bows, to annihilate Lord Castleton and Sir William's nonsense on the spot; but she was conscious that it would be both childish and unjust, on such a score, to ignore the friendly terms on which their later intercourse had placed them; and so perforce shook hands, with a smile from

which, under the influence of Lord Castleton's mischievous eyes, she could not banish some shade of confusion.

"How I wish Cissy were here!" said Lord Castleton to himself, walking off highly delighted, but sadly in want of some one with whom to share his glee.

But Mr. Carysfort was far too well bred to increase, if he noticed, Helen's involuntary embarrassment; and, notwithstanding the marked cordiality of his greeting, she felt perfectly at ease the moment his brother was at a safe distance, and could even be glad to see him again. For it was impossible to forget the kindly feelings their companionship during his recovery had awakened between them, and his subsequent conduct had greatly raised him in her opinion; his steady application to a profession, not less than his unlooked-for generosity to his brother.

Horace was called off again directly to join in discussions on the absorbing topics of the impending election, the result of the day's canvass, and the like; and then Helen had leisure to observe what change these three years had made in him. He was decidedly improved. He had, in a great measure, lost the look of languor and indecision which had formerly marred the expression of his otherwise handsome features, and the listlessness and indolence of his movements was gone; the barely perceptible lameness which remained from his accident, by no means interfering with a more erect carriage than he had been wont to assume. A touch of cynical expression might betray itself at times, but that was excusable in a man whose path had, of late years, lain more in the shade than the sunshine of life; and Helen concluded with a smile, that a little disappointment had certainly done him good. It was only when, escaping from the politicians, Horace lounged back in his favourite arm-chair beside Lady Emlyn, that he looked like the Horace of old; and then he might safely carry on the low-toned conversation with Louisa, which, from various stray looks at a fair face opposite, did not seem to be on political matters; for the irresistible reminder of old days, had called up in Helen's mind the image of another, more indissolubly connected with them; and all present were for the time forgotten in crowding thoughts of the absent. Was Bernard changed too, and how?

Helen roused herself with a faint, smothered sigh, when Mr. Carysfort offered his arm to take her in to dinner, without so much as a thought whether it were strictly according to etiquette,

or whether Lord Castleton's mischievous eyes might be upon them.

Mr. Carysfort's first question pleased her ; it was an inquiry after her friend Mrs. Littleton. She felt that it showed good feeling, and it led them into friendly talk directly ; and seated near Sir William, whose near neighbourhood was always a pleasure, she soon brightened to a fair degree of her usual vivacity.

"By the way, Carysfort," said Sir William, presently, "I trust you have not neglected to secure Miss Helen's 'vote and interest,' now we have been fortunate enough to catch her. I need not remind *you* how influential ladies always are—especially when they are so well versed in politics."

"Now really, Emlyn, is it not barbarous of you to be reminding Miss Montagu of all my ancient impertinences?" said Horace, with perfect good humour. "Especially as I recanted, and was forgiven long ago ; was I not, Miss Montagu?"

"Yes," said Helen ; "and Mr. Carysfort has evidently made such progress in his education since those days, Sir William, that I think we may forget, as well as forgive, some of those early delusions of his."

"I am very glad *you* think so," said Horace, in a low voice, which Frederick would have called insinuating ; but he was safe at the other end of the table.

"Then we may consider ourselves secure of your interest, Miss Helen?" said Sir William, gravely.

"Of course ; you do not suppose I am going over to the enemy!" replied Helen. "But, Mr. Carysfort, I really *am* inclined to exert myself on your behalf," she continued, unable to resist the tempting allusion to old antagonism, "*Have* you calculated the amount of daisy-chains likely to be required? I once promised Mr. Carysfort"—she turned to Sir William, with a grave, explanatory air—"that if he would only stand for the county, I would myself manufacture any quantity of daisy-chains needful as colours for his adherents ; and, though it is only the borough, I must keep my word."

"As emblems of the useful and consistent services I might be expected to render to my country, I think you were pleased to add?" said Horace, with a smile, gratified at her recalling the jest, unflattering as it was.

"Miss Helen, you really deserve condign punishment ! Talking of forgiving and forgetting, too !" exclaimed Sir

William, laughing with infinite relish of the joke notwithstanding.

"But may I not hope," continued Horace, "that you may now adjudge me worthy of some more honourable colours?" There might, perhaps, be a faint tinge of colour on his cheek as he spoke.

"Yes, indeed," said Helen, frankly; "or I should never have reminded you of my old sauciness. But I really could not help it! I behave better now—at least, generally. One grows older and wiser by degrees—and truly one had need!" she added, gravely, for the thought of another person connected with the ball at which the promise of daisy-chains had been made—poor Gerald!—crossed her mind.

"Yes, one had need, truly!" answered Horace, with a very vivid appreciation of the inconceivable folly of his early dislike for Helen, and a sincere wish that that might be one of the delusions she was disposed to forget.

"But, Mr. Carysfort," said Helen, waking from her momentary reverie, "I am really afraid you will be beaten. Even from what papa tells me, it seems to me that things look much less promising than he thinks."

"I am not so sanguine as Mr. Montagu and Sir William," he replied; "though, of course, I mean to expect to win till I lose; but I believe I should take a defeat much more philosophically than they. For one thing, they would feel the disappointment much more by remaining on the spot, and talking it over perpetually with everybody, till it grows a standing grievance; whereas, if I am beaten, I have only just to go up to town again, and leave it all behind me."

Mr. Carysfort little suspected the pleasing effect on Helen's mind of his random remark about just going up to town again. She did not care a pin now about Lord Castleton's nonsense or Sir William's smiles; Mr. Carysfort was innocent of any intention to justify them; and before she left the dinner-table, she felt perfectly safe on the old footing of friendly intimacy on which they had parted years before. She would not be disconcerted at Lord Castleton's ostentatious retreat, when Horace and himself happened simultaneously to advance to turn over her music during the evening, nor by Sir William's sly look of intelligence on finding Horace thus occupied a few minutes later. It did trouble her, for one moment, to catch the pleased expression of her father's countenance at the same instant; but that was simply for his possible disappointment

when he should find it was a mere fancy of his own ; however, no doubt he would then soon forget it again, as in old days.

Neither did the constant invitations to the Priory during the week that followed, surprise or annoy Helen. These were days of general excitement and festivity in the neighbourhood, and, interested in the cause, she herself shared in the excitement which rendered it natural that all so interested should meet as frequently as possible. And, though Mr. Carysfort and herself were a good deal thrown together, and often talked of old times, it was always on the same friendly footing, without any approach on his side to the sort of gallantry which might have disturbed or embarrassed her.

Unconscious how much this depended on herself, and on the simple, frank, friendly manner, which rendered it impossible for him to approach her with those little gallantries and insinuating politenesses to which he might otherwise have resorted, she remained perfectly at ease under the satisfactory impression that it was really pleasant to extend her circle of friends ; among whom she would certainly, henceforward, number her old antagonist and quondam aversion, Horace Carysfort.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEFEAT.

I cannot !

“ Whither my heart has gone, there follows my hand, and
not elsewhere.” *Evangeline.*

HELEN'S prediction was verified. Mr. Carysfort lost his election.

He bore the defeat with great equanimity ; observing that, after all, it would save him a deal of trouble, and he might just as well stick to the bar and his secretaryship. But Mr. Montagu and Lord Castleton were terribly disappointed ; and though the former was by degrees drawn over by Sir William and the general supporters of the cause, to console himself with them by the consideration that it was all owing to their candidate's having appeared in the field so late, and that they

were sure of success at the general election, which could not be far off, yet that by no means comforted Lord Castleton, whose vexation had little to do with political enthusiasm. When, however, after a long conference with his brother, the day before his return to Heathlands, he rode over to take leave of the ladies at Hawk's Nest, he puzzled Helen by the apparent recovery of almost more than his usual spirits; and though Mrs. Montagu's presence precluded his giving vent to them in his usual manner, he added, when he bade Helen good-bye, with one of his sauciest smiles—"I dare say we shall soon meet again."

Helen took it as a mere remark of course, at the time; but, before many days she wondered, with an uncomfortable feeling, whether it could really have meant anything? Time was passing on, and there were no signs of Mr. Carysfort's "just going up to town again;" and, what was worse, not a day elapsed without his somehow or other finding his way to Hawk's Nest, either to call on Mr. or Mrs. Montagu, or with a note or message of invitation from Lady Emlyn, or with that lady herself, who really must have had a great deal of business in X—— about this time, she so often called "just on her way in." Moreover, invitations to the Priory increased rather than diminished; and Helen was constantly finding herself drawn into conversation by Horace; which, but for fears of visionary "consequences," she would really have enjoyed. His more active life, of late years, had improved him mentally, as well as externally, and he was a pleasant intellectual companion, setting aside the kindly feeling which her old compassion for him had first awakened, and which could not be diminished by the grateful remembrance in which he held her kindness, as he took care she should know.

But she could not dismiss a consciousness that in these conversations he was covertly letting her into the secret of a great many of his modified views and aims in life, as if to show her that he was much changed since the days when, he could now admit, he had justified her dislike; and an uneasy feeling grew upon her. She tried hard to argue it down, with plausible considerations of old acquaintanceship, and agreeable society during vacation-time, and at times almost scolded herself for vanity in encouraging such apprehensions; but she never succeeded for long together.

One day, after a vigorous fit of determination against dwelling on such foolish fears, she was most disagreeably startled

by a fragment of conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Montagu, which reached her ears, as, walking in the garden, she passed the open study window.

Mrs. Montagu was peevishly remarking that she really could not see Mr. Carysfort's wonderful superiority to "dear Gerald," whose pretensions had been so scouted.

"Possibly not—but I do;" was Mr. Montagu's dry, decided answer; and Helen heard no more.

But that was too much already; she could not doubt what matter was under discussion, and the mere fact of its being discussed was disconcerting in the extreme. She could only trust that it arose simply from some unwary betrayal, on her father's part, of the fancy she knew he entertained; and further, she reminded herself how extremely absurd it would be for a man who had been devotedly in love with Florence, even to think of marrying one so very unlike her.

But when, a day or two after, Mr. Montagu announced at breakfast, that Mr. Carysfort would dine with them that day—he had asked Sir William, too, but he was engaged—Helen felt as if things were really growing serious. She did her best to secure some company for the occasion, feeling a vague desire for protection as from impending danger, by pressing Ida to dine and spend the evening with them; but Ida excused herself. She was very busy, and her mother was not quite well, and she had rather come some other day; and as Helen could not explain the feeling she was half ashamed of admitting even to herself, she was obliged to let it pass.

But when the evening had come and gone, she was again ready to laugh at herself for her dread of it. Mr. Carysfort had been just as usual, friendly and pleasant; but his attention to Mrs. Montagu had been fully more marked than any shown to herself; and he had talked politics as earnestly with her father as if he came for that express purpose, which no doubt he did; for they had stayed so long below, probably talking over election matters that Mrs. Montagu had almost taken umbrage at their incivility. So Helen bid her father good night, and went up to bed, humming an air in the liveliest manner; he looking after her, meanwhile, with a peculiar, proud, pleased smile, which it was quite as well for her lightened spirits that she could not see.

But next morning, when conning over another letter from Florence, conveying similar intelligence to all the former ones, her father called to her from his study, to bring him the news-

paper from the breakfast-room ; and when, after hastening to do so, she was about to leave him again, he called her back.

"No ; shut the door, my dear ; I want you for a few minutes."

In sudden dismay, Helen did as she was bid, and returned to where her father was standing. He did not leave her long in suspense.

"I had some conversation last night—sit down, my dear,"—Helen obeyed ; there was no help for it now !—"with Mr. Carysfort, on a subject for which I think you cannot be unprepared ; and I have only to say, Helen, that—I shall be only too pleased to receive Mr. Carysfort as a son-in-law." He looked at her with an inquiring smile as he said these last words.

"Dear papa," said Helen, with tears in her eyes, so vexed was she to think of her father's disappointment, "I am very sorry. I hoped it would come to nothing"—

"But why, Helen ? I hope quite the contrary," interrupted her father, earnestly. "I always liked Mr. Carysfort, and now that he has settled down to a profession—I admit that his being an idle man was an objection—I cannot see why any young lady should not be proud of such a suitor. And I imagine that you would hardly like him the worse for having once been attached to your particular friend, Mrs. Littleton, as you told me ?"

"Oh, no !" said Helen ; "not that"—

"I thought not," proceeded Mr. Montagu ; "and I know that, considering the cause of it, you will only like him the better for the comparatively small income he can now offer you—which might have staggered me some years ago, Helen ; but I believe we men of business are apt to think too much of mere money as the means of happiness. Moreover, from what he tells me, I gather, that with his own, and what he need not now scruple to draw from his brother, on the mortgage reserved to him over the Castleton property, and your own fortune, you need not reckon on less than a clear three thousand a year ; so there is not much to be said on that score. And no man could speak more handsomely in every way ; if anything surprised me, it was the diffidence with which he spoke in regard to yourself. I can see no reason—I told him so—why it should not prove a most happy match in every respect ; and I am sure, my dear, you are too sensible to let any silly pique about former dislike stand in the way of it."

"O yes, papa," said Helen, who had listened in patient resignation to her father's long speech; "besides, that was as much my fault as his. But—I am very sorry to disappoint him, and you too, papa—but I really cannot marry him. I"—

"My dear Helen," said her father, "I confess that I, years ago, suspected some fancy or attachment—though I could not understand for whom, as I cannot imagine that poor Marston was a man"—

"Oh no, poor Gerald!" said Helen, colouring.

"Well, but whatever it might be,—and I have no wish to distress you for a moment by inquiring," proceeded her father, "that was years ago; and you will not, I am sure, be childish enough to sacrifice your real happiness, which I cannot imagine safer in any hands than Mr. Carysfort's—you have no idea how highly he thinks of you, Helen—to a dream, or fancy of that sort?"

A dream or fancy of that sort! The words struck Helen with a pang. If it should be but a dream after all? She covered her eyes with her hands for one moment, as if to shut out all disturbing influences while she asked herself the question; but it was only for a moment.

"It is more than that, papa. I like Mr. Carysfort, and have had a sincere respect for him these last few years, but I could not marry a man unless I could really love him, and look up to him; and I cannot feel that I could do either with Mr. Carysfort."

"Why, as to that, Helen," said her father, with his fond, proud smile, "you must remember that few women might be so little able as yourself to find a man they could look up to intellectually; and as to love—I do not suppose you are ever likely to be violently in love like some sentimental young ladies; I think you too sensible for that; but if you like a man and respect him, and he is attached to you, and places you in a suitable and congenial position, I imagine that all the rest follows very naturally, Helen."

Helen shook her head. How could she, without confessing her secret attachment—a thing few women, and Helen less than most, would willingly do, where it subsists unjustified by the certainty of reciprocal affection—even hope to make comprehensible to her father the impossibility of her acceding to his wishes?

"But, my dear Helen, do not imagine I wish to hurry your decision. Mr. Carysfort by no means presses for an imme-

ciate answer; in fact, he only wishes for the opportunity of overcoming the hesitation which he fully expected on your part; and I think you should give him some credit for his diffidence; men are rarely given that way. Take time—take time—and I am sure that, after a little, you will see, as I could wish, that this match has everything for and nothing against it. There—I must be off to meet Sir William at the board of guardians, so good-bye for the present.”

“But, papa,” said Helen pleadingly, rising to detain him for a moment, “if, at last, I should not be able to see it as you wish—you are not tired of me at home, papa?”

“Helen!” said her father quickly. “You have not got any romantic ideas into your head about my not being able to do without you—your fortune, I mean? Because that would be too absurd; now especially”——

“Indeed not, papa,” said Helen earnestly; “besides if that were all, I would as soon marry on two thousand a year as on three, or on less than either; but if I really cannot—promise me not to be very much disappointed, papa!”

“I do not know that I can promise that,” said he; “still it is your own happiness I wish you to consult in the first place, and we can settle about the rest afterwards. But all in good time—all in good time! You need think no more about it just now, my dear!” and stooping to kiss his daughter, Mr. Montagu hurried off to the board.

Not think about it any more just now! That was all well enough for her father to say, but quite impossible for Helen to do. Not that she thought of it, in his sense, as a question for decision; it offered no question to her mind; but think of it she must with so much of mingled and painful emotion, that more than once, as she sat there, her arms resting listlessly on the table before her, tears rose to her eyes, which were fixed unconsciously on the quivering leaves of the sycamore in the garden, and more than one drop forced its way, and fell unheeded over her cheeks.

For, in the first place, she was thinking of Bernard Huntley—which might seem, indeed, to be needless and irrelevant, but was to her feelings by no means so,—and of the different sensations which such a proposal from him would have awakened. What a strange waste of happiness there seemed to be in this substitution of what she could not accept, for that, the very thought of which thrilled her with such undefinable emotion! How thankful she felt to know that it could be

only seeming ; that there can be no waste, either of happiness or suffering, in the economy of Providence.

Then she was vexed about Horace. More vexed than grieved ; for she had an intuitive perception that this would not be the bitter disappointment to him which the loss of Florence had been ; but yet it would both disappoint and mortify him, and she was very sorry to have to do either. Besides, she liked him well enough to want to keep friends with him, and she feared that would hardly be possible now. She did not exactly wish he had never left off disliking her ; but she did wish he had not taken it into his head to want a wife just now, or, at least, to want her as such.

She was most troubled about her father ; he appeared to have set his heart on the match ; and it must seem hard that his only daughter, of whom he was no less fond than proud, should persist in thwarting his wishes, without being able to assign any reason for it, which might appear rational or satisfactory to a man of his practical way of thinking.

It was natural that Helen's affection for her father should thus characterize that, in her father's views, which was uncongenial to her own ; but none the less is the too frequent misuse of the word "practical," as thus applied, to be protested and guarded against. It seems commonly taken for granted that those only are to be honoured as "practical" men, who labour successfully, because with well adapted means, for the attainment of worldly objects, fortune, position, and such like "substantial advantages." But, be it remembered, there are other objects, other realities, patent and tangible to human perception, moreover, though not indeed to the perceptions of mere *sense*, entirely apart from and above the sphere of those just alluded to. Such are the spiritual health, wealth, and peace, without which the former remain as a body without a soul ; and those who labour wisely, with well-adapted means, for the attainment of these, though they should sacrifice in the pursuit, as Helen was doing, much, or even all, which the world deems worthy of possession, are no less truly, not to say more wisely, practical—let the world flout their visionary aims the while, as it may—than the most thorough-going man of business who ever made his way in the world.

Visionaries enough we meet with, Heaven knows ; but they are confined to no one class of seekers or labourers, whether for earthly or heavenly blessings and realities. Too many deem they can compass by a single effort, or a single prayer,

that which requires long years of self-denying labour, or self-discipline to attain ; and if disappointed in their first expectation, will turn faint-heartedly to seek some other "royal road" to that success which they have not the practical wisdom to achieve. Visionaries, too, no doubt there are, who mistake phantoms for realities, and pursue them as such ; but when we meet with men who deny all realities, but those which appear as such to their own limited and imperfect vision, and who look with contemptuous pity on the earnest striving of all who are toiling towards any goal but that which they have themselves in view, how can we refrain from applying to them the words of the dreamer born of Shakespeare's genius? "There are more things in heaven and earth," truly, "than are dreamt of in *their* philosophy !"

All honour, therefore, to practical men, in whatever sphere, or for whatever ends they labour ; but let us not be told that those only are practical men who labour for objects which would fail, *we* know, to secure our happiness here, to say nothing of the hereafter. For what, in fine, must we say of the practical wisdom of those, who labour life-long in pursuit of things of which death must for ever despoil them, and held so little the things of that life, which Revelation, reason, and intuition alike assure us will—and which the most sceptical must admit may—endure eternally?

Without conscious reference to her father, Helen's thoughts had wandered into some such train, rising above the fleeting things of the present, into that region of inward peace and trustfulness which she would not now have exchanged, if she could, for the brightest dreams of happiness she had ever framed in the days of her undisciplined youth ; and time had passed more quickly than she guessed, when the door of the study opened, and Mr. Carysfort was announced.

The frame of mind into which her musings had led her was too deeply serious to admit of the embarrassment she might otherwise have felt, and she received him only somewhat more gravely than usual. The real question was, how to guard against the continuance of things on their present footing, which, now that she knew Mr. Carysfort's intentions and wishes, she felt to be impossible and unjustifiable.

She could see, at a glance, from his manner, that he had, as her father said, no intention of claiming any immediate answer to the proposals made through Mr. Montagu. He had brought her a book, which had been mentioned the previous evening,

and a note from Lady Emlyn, containing some invitation for the next day ; and spoke with his usual pleasant cordiality, to which it would have been most agreeable to respond, but for the knowledge of what lay beneath it. But go on in this way, now, she could not ; if he did not approach the subject, she must, contrary as it might be to etiquette. To Horace's gentlemanly feeling she knew she might trust ; and he would surely appreciate the motives which prompted her to put the speediest possible termination to hopes and expectations that could never be realized.

Yet how to begin ? She stood with her head bent slightly over Lady Emlyn's note, which she had risen to take from Horace, reading the words with her eyes without taking in a glimmering of their sense, while Mr. Carysfort sat watching her covertly, wondering if it contained any allusion which called up the faint tinge gathering slowly on her cheek. But she was even paler again than usual when she raised her head, putting the note aside, as something impossible to attend to then.

"Mr. Carysfort," she said, in a voice which, despite her utmost efforts, was not quite steady, "my father has been speaking to me—telling me"——

"Miss Montagu !" exclaimed Horace, on his feet and close beside her in a moment, "pray do not ! I know quite well what you would say now, and I must have a little time to persuade you to think better of it !"

"Mr. Carysfort," said Helen, looking up frankly, for she had quite made up her mind they must part friends, and was not at all afraid of him, "I am very sorry it should be so ; but however long I think about it, I shall only be able to think one way, and it would be both unjust to you and painful to myself, to go on"——

"Do not, pray, speak of any injustice to me," said Mr. Carysfort, contriving to insinuate that she had better sit down, which she did ; "I need not say that it is quite out of the question, though I could imagine it might be painful to yourself, if"——

"But Miss Montagu," he broke off, drawing a chair near her and sitting down, twirling and inspecting his riding-cane very intently, "I wish you would allow me to look on it as not so utterly hopeless. I know you had every reason for thinking me a great fool formerly ; but I hope you have discovered that I found out as much myself about the same time, and have

done my best to turn over a new leaf since. I know I have no very brilliant fortune or position to offer you—not even a poor M.P.-ship,” he added with a smile, and a side-look at Helen; “but I always fancied that you valued that sort of thing very little”——

“It is not that, indeed, Mr. Carysfort,” said Helen earnestly. “Your fortune and position are more than adequate to any wishes of mine; but—I dare say most people would consider me foolishly romantic—but I could not think of marrying without some very different feeling than I have for the rest of my friends—without real love, in short,” she added, dropping her voice.

“But, Miss Montagu,” pleaded Horace, “would it be quite impossible for you to feel anything of that sort—if you were to try?”

“Love does not come for trying,” said Helen, very gently, and shaking her head as she spoke. “Besides, do not think I mean to impute the least insincerity, but I am sure you do not yourself—I have no doubt you like me, think highly of me, perhaps”——

“Perhaps!” echoed Horace, twirling the riding-cane very hard indeed. “Have you not taught me to love and admire in you all that I was most foolishly prejudiced against? To see”——

“But for all that,” continued Helen, steadily, though the colour on her cheek was deepening again, “I do not think you have for me—and I know,” she added, in a lower voice, “that I have not for you—the sort of feeling necessary between husband and wife, if they are really to make one another happy, to influence and improve each other”——

“Nay, indeed!” interrupted Horace. “I am sure your influence has already had a greater effect than anything else in the world in improving me, if, indeed, you give me credit for any improvement.”

“Not my influence,” said Helen. “I may have piqued you by my sauciness and unjust depreciation of you, but that, alone, improves no one; and, but for the results of a far deeper feeling than any I ever stirred in you, I should probably have done you more harm than good.”

“No, indeed, you would not!” said Horace, eagerly. “You cannot yourself estimate the influence of energy and frankness of character like yours. And as for the deeper feeling you allude to,” he continued, colouring in his turn, “I only know

it led me to make a greater fool of myself than I ever did before, or, I hope, ever shall again. And as to my present feelings—I know it would be no good my setting to making you violent protestations; you would only laugh at me, and it would serve me right—but if a very deep sense of your superiority and the infinite good you would do me, not to speak of the happiness you would confer—for you cannot imagine, Miss Montagu,” concluded poor Horace, “what a lonely, miserable wretch a man is who has no one to care for him; or to keep him up to the mark when he is tempted to fall back into old, bad habits; or to take interest in what he is trying and working for—you do not know how hard it is!”

“Indeed I do,” said Helen, kindly; “and it makes me the more sorry that I cannot help you.”

“But you could, indeed you could!” said Horace, persuasively. “And—do not think me very presumptuous—but I have sometimes fancied I might, in some respects, make you happier than greatly superior men might do. It would often be a pleasure and a positive relief to me to be guided by your judgment and opinions, where others would prefer to assert their own. I do not believe you would repent it, if”——

Helen turned suddenly to give the answer his eyes were seeking. She could not now pause to analyse the feeling stirred by his last words; the feeling which lies, however deep hidden, in every true woman’s heart: how infinitely more delightful it is to yield than to be yielded to, to be guided than to guide; even though duty may sometimes necessitate the reverse. Her resolution was taken. She could not close the matter with a cold “I will not,” to one who was so thoroughly in earnest, let the precise nature of his feelings be what it might; and she had failed to convey to his apprehension, as to her father’s, the deep though subtle distinction between his ideal of love and hers. There remained but one conclusive answer to give; and give it she must, at whatever cost to her own feelings.

“Then Mr. Carysfort,” said she, speaking quickly to veil her agitation, “I must tell you the truth. There are reasons wholly unconnected with yourself”—her cheeks, forehead, and throat dyed crimson as she spoke—“why I cannot, now or ever, even try to feel as you wish. I have no love to give you, because”—— Turning paler than ever, she rose suddenly, and turning towards the mantelpiece, leaned her

clasped hands upon it, rigid with the effort to preserve her composure.

Horace had at first looked up surprised ; but as he caught the full meaning of her words, he started up, and walked hastily to her side.

"Miss Montagu !" he said, in a low voice of real concern, looking down, with a feeling of some awe and much very brotherly compassion—for Helen was quite right ; he was certainly not in love with her—on the fair, drooping head which trembled so visibly, "I—I am very sorry to have forced you to such an answer ; and, indeed, I am not insensible to your generosity in giving it. Had I so much as imagined"—

He took a turn or two up and down the room, for the moment almost forgetting his own disappointment in sympathy with her, and wonder that one who seemed always so calm and stately, and so bright withal, should secretly love, and as it seemed unhappily—for else why had she not long since married ?

"But, Mr. Carysfort," said Helen, turning round again, when she had recovered herself, "if you will not quarrel with me on that account, I should be very sorry not to remain good friends—now that we have got used to it," she added, forcing a faint smile. "I never could see why people should not, if unhappily they cannot do more."

"Indeed," said Horace, "I am only sorry thus to have pressed an unwelcome subject, Miss Montagu ; and should I ever have an opportunity of showing my sense of the friendship you are and have been kind enough to honour me with—but I know you do not like fine speeches, so I will say nothing about that."

"Thank you !" said Helen, looking up with a smile and a tear, feeling really grateful both for his indisposition to quarrel with her, and his consideration for her feelings in respect to fine speeches. "And there is another thing," she continued, hesitatingly : "papa has no idea—I should not wish"—

"Certainly—of course not !" he replied quickly. "But do not forget your promise of keeping good friends, if it should be some little time before I see you again ; for I must be off back to hard work again now, I suppose," he added, with something very like a sigh. "Good-bye, Miss Montagu."

"Good-bye, Mr. Carysfort," returned Helen, frankly extending her hand ; "and, indeed, hard work is at least the second best thing in the world !"

"I will try to think so," said he ; and with a cordial shake of the hand, Helen was left to muse over the contrasts presented between life as it is, and life as our wishes might shape it. Yet she would not now have stretched out her hand, could that have availed, to substitute the latter for the former. She had learned, that what is, is best.

It was in no very brilliant spirits that Mr. Carysfort returned to the Priory ; but his disappointment was undoubtedly much softened by the manner of it, and by the sympathising speculations he could not help indulging in, as to what could have stood in the way of Helen's own happiness, and who could have acquired so powerful an influence over feelings apparently always held in such steady control ? It really seemed as if everybody were destined to be disappointed in life, thought Horace, reverting to his cynical mood ; and as he had brushed on for the last few years, he supposed he could brush on still. Helen was right in that : hard work was something to fall back on ; and, at any rate, he was evidently no worse off than many other people, and he did not know that he had deserved anything better.

"I am going back to London to-morrow, Louisa," said he, somewhat abruptly, on her asking him if he had brought an answer to her note.

"To-morrow ! Dear Horace ! You are not—you have not," — said Louisa, in a voice of concern.

"Yes I am, and I have," he replied, allowing some degree of vexation to betray itself in his tone, for he could bear a little sympathy from Louisa. "It can't be helped ; and do not take huff at her on my account, Louisa ; I do not like her any the worse for it myself. I am not going to make a fool of myself this time ; so never mind ! I dare say I shall do very well without a wife. Fred will be in a great way ; I think I shall have to go round by Heathlands to pacify him."

So Mr. Carysfort went off to Heathlands the next day ; and when a sufficient period had elapsed without his return, to show the gossips of the neighbourhood that his supposed suit could not have prospered, they fell back with double force on their romantic theory about the long-absent Captain Marston—one of those dragoon officers always supposed, in country neighbourhoods, to exercise so transcendent an influence over the hearts of young ladies.

Mr. Montagu was greatly disappointed when he received Mr. Carysfort's friendly note of leave-taking, which informed

him, with many acknowledgments of his kindness, both in public and private matters, that the latter had found his wishes so adverse to Miss Montagu's feelings, that he felt it impossible to press them further,—disappointed too, perhaps, that Mr. Carysfort had not tried the effects of a little more perseverance. But, on the whole, when he came to realize the blank Helen's loss would have made in his home, he could not long feel sorry to keep her; and with a "Well, well, child; it was only on your account, and of course you ought to know best!" he resigned himself to her decision, and dismissed the subject. Mrs. Montagu might wonder, and predict that if Helen went on refusing every offer in this way, she would never be married at all—certainly a probable consequence; but, on the whole, she was not displeased that Mr. Carysfort should have fared no better than her own nephew, and allowed the subject to drop sooner than one could have ventured to hope.

But, anxious as Helen might be that the affair should pass unnoticed and be forgotten as soon as possible, there were one or two friends from whom she had to meet, and could not possibly feel hurt by, allusions to it. Lady Emlyn, indeed, carefully avoided any approach to a subject which she knew must have given dear Helen pain; but not so Sir William. He was quite vexed at his favourite's still remaining unmarried; and, now that Horace had turned out "worth something after all," he had been reckoning eagerly on the match; and he felt himself fairly cheated, moreover, out of the pleasant excitement of making wedding-presents, and getting up wedding-festivities, to which he had been looking forward with all the alacrity of his kindly, mirth-loving nature.

"Well, Miss Helen!" said he, with a vicious little cut of the whip at his horses' ears, the first day he got her safe out, alone with himself, for a drive. "So I suppose you never mean to marry at all! I wonder what else you suppose the use of young ladies to be."

"I suppose it must be to take drives with their friends," said Helen, laughing and colouring; "and I think it very ungrateful of you to be so anxious to get rid of me."

"I shan't contradict you, Miss Helen! You don't deserve it!" said Sir William. "You need not have been in such a hurry to get rid of some one else! Poor Horace!"

"I do not think he cared very much about it," said Helen, involuntarily uttering the thought with which she always consoled herself on his account.

"You don't think! Well, if that is not the coolest speech!" exclaimed Sir William, whose own observations had, however, led to the conclusion that Horace was not absolutely desperate. "The next thing will be that you don't think any of your friends care much what becomes of you, I suppose?"

"You know better, Sir William," said Helen warmly. "But you need not flatter yourself you will get rid of me easily," she added, mischievously.

"Very well. Then I suppose we must make the best of you!" said Sir William, in a tone of mock-heroic resignation; and they finished their drive the best of friends, as usual.

The first day Helen went to see Ida again, she was immediately struck with the anxious look in her face, and soon inquired, affectionately, what was wrong?

"I have been—do not be angry, dear Helen," she answered very meekly, colouring as she spoke; "I have heard so much talk about you, and—but I thought you would surely tell me if there were any truth in it—still it is longer than usual since I saw you——"

"Dear Ida!" said Helen, tenderly, thinking her friend was hurt at an imaginary want of confidence, "of course I would have told you if there were anything to tell! I wish people would give up gossiping! Anything pleasant to tell, I mean, you know, dear; but I could not—did you not guess what I must say?—That there was a reason why I am not likely to marry—at least Mr. Carysfort:" she added, dropping her face and her voice together.

A strange expression of pain flitted across Ida's face; but she commanded whatever emotion gave rise to it, and stooped to kiss Helen's forehead, bent forward in mournful thought—but not thought of Horace, or Ida either.

"I am very glad—no, you know I do not mean that, dear Helen, for I am truly sorry there should be any reason——" Ida stopped short; she must not tell untruths, even in self-defence.

"No, no, I know what you mean, dear;" said Helen, affectionately, rousing herself from her abstraction. "But you need not be sorry for me, either. I have learned that one *can*, as you told me, be very happy, even without that on which one has most set one's heart; and the lesson is worth the learning!"

"Indeed it is," said Ida, doing her best to steady her quiver-

ing lips ; but, perhaps, at that moment she doubted whether, for her, the lesson were not still to learn.

"Why should I be glad?" said Ida to herself, when alone again. "Why should I grudge him, or her, happiness because, I cannot look for it myself? What can it signify to me?"

And yet, in her secret heart, Ida was glad, was deeply grateful, even, to Helen, for having refused Mr. Carysfort.

Had Helen done wisely?

The question will receive a different answer according to the different views of marriage, and estimates of happiness, adopted by those who reflect on it.

From those who regard marriage as a civil and social contract, to be entered on for the sake of any, or all, of the external advantages it affords,—viewing as a romantic delusion, such exclusive and undying love as can be given but once, and but to one; and who look on any happiness to be expected beyond and above the sphere of present earthly good, as so indefinite and problematical that it becomes the part of wisdom to snatch as much as possible from life's favouring hours as they fly—the question will probably receive an answer in the negative.

But from those who regard marriage as a holy and spiritual tie, designed to unite two souls for eternity, not merely to fetter hands, or even join hearts, for a time; who believe in the existence of a love sacred and inviolable above all human affections, forming this bond of union between two spirits fitted by creation to blend with each other, and with each other only; and who further believe that the largest measure of happiness here is ensured by that strict adherence to duty which most rigidly respects the claims of the hereafter,—from all such the question will receive a fearless and unqualified affirmative.

Helen *had* done wisely; wisely for her present and future happiness, even though it should prove her lot—as she was fully conscious that prove it might—never, on this side heaven, to see Bernard Huntley more.

CHAPTER XXII.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Let us be patient ! These severe afflictions
Not from the earth arise ;
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise.

LONGFELLOW.

“Do you think it would be of any use? Or may I stay at home with a clear conscience?”

Sir Charles Alton shook his head sadly. His negative was obviously given to the first question.

“Do not scruple to tell me if you think I ought to go,” said Frank Littleton, slightly raising his head from the crimson sofa-cushions which contrasted painfully with his extreme pallor, relieved only by that faint hectic tinge which spoke, even more clearly than the paleness, how fast he was travelling on his way to another home.

“I will not deny,” he continued, sinking his head again upon the cushions, “that when I first realized the certainty, I was coward enough to wish it over as soon as possible ; but that is past now. Perhaps time may help her to face the prospect ; and I would not rob her of a moment that might in any way soften the parting”—— He had spoken slowly throughout, pausing at intervals, and now it seemed as if he could go no further, yet scarcely from failure of physical strength.

The physician did not speak. With a strange sensation of pain at his heart—strange it might seem, in a man daily and hourly inured to the contemplation of sickness and death in all shapes—he stood steadily watching the countenance, so beautiful in its fading brightness, of the man, young enough, almost, to be his son, and whom at one time he had learned well-nigh to regard as such, who was thus asking only the assurance that the approach of death was certain and inevitable ; in order that, without incurring the blame of curtailing his earthly sufferings, he might return to die in peace in the happy home to which his heart still clung ; though he was more ready to depart than many who have nothing left but life to cling to.

“But if you could conscientiously say,” resumed the invalid,

"that the wear of mind and body the journey would entail would probably counterbalance any benefit from the climate—it would be a great comfort to me, Alton!"

"I cannot say but what it probably—humanly speaking, I may say certainly—would," returned the physician, in a tone which spoke far deeper sympathy than his words would imply. "Years ago it might have answered, but now it is too late, Frank—too late!"

"Thanks, Alton!" said Frank Littleton, extending his hand, with a grateful smile, which went to his friend's heart.

"Thanks to me! for what? For signing your death-warrant?" said he huskily, grasping the offered hand.

"No; that comes from elsewhere!" returned Frank reverently; "but for much, much kindness, both now and in past days," he continued, turning his head to look his friend more fully in the face. "And do not look as if you thought it so sad a thing to be lying here, knowing that it is but for a short time. Believe me, I would not wish it otherwise, and but for the thought of my poor Florence——"

"God help her!" muttered the physician.

"But it is something," continued Frank Littleton, slowly and calmly, after a pause, "to feel that life's work is done, and the haven already in sight, at a period when most men have their life's battles before them. And never, I truly believe, had man a happier life to look back on than mine has been—and is—yes, is, Alton, believe me!"

"I believe no man ever deserved to be happier," returned the physician; "but I confess it seems poor happiness to me—at an age when you might reasonably have looked for thirty years of life and health to come in such a home—as you deserve!" he broke off abruptly.

"Happiness would be poor at any time," replied Frank Littleton, "if there was nothing better to look to than thirty years of life, in any home this world can offer, Alton!"

"I don't know; this world is about good enough for me," said the other, with a sigh, half-doubtful, half-regretful. He was wondering how life and death would look to him, if he were lying in the place of his younger friend.

"You will not say so when we meet again," returned Frank; and there was another pause, which the invalid was once more the first to break.

"I shall not see you again *here*," he resumed, "so let me thank you once for all for all your kindness to me, Alton."

The physician turned and grasped the speaker's hand in silence. "You may not see your way as clear as some do, but you work in the right direction, as many besides myself can testify. And I know, should it ever fall in your way, you will be kind to my poor Florence and our children——" Again he paused with a spasm of pain upon his face, which seemed more than even he could wholly master.

"I would go far out of my way for the chance!" responded the other, earnestly.

"And—if she should speak to you," pursued Frank, faintly, "do not deceive her, Alton! I hardly feel as if I could tell her," he added, raising his hand to his brow, wet with the dews of exhaustion.

"I will tell her—God help her!" answered the physician.

"God will help her," rejoined the husband, in a tone of the deepest, most tranquil conviction. "Good-bye, and God bless you, Alton! Even the parting is not so hard as you think it!"

The physician made no answer: perhaps his voice failed him, unused as he was to betray emotion; but holding Frank's hand for a moment, he bent suddenly over him and kissed his forehead, received in return a renewed pressure of the hand, and a quick, bright, grateful smile, which haunted him for long after, and left the room without looking back.

But outside the door he paused. He must redeem his promise, and see Florence; and he had scarcely paused a moment, when another door opened—how Frank's ears were straining for the sound!—and Florence appeared in the doorway, inviting him to enter. He did so, and the door closed after them.

Florence sat down, looking anxiously towards him; but as he did not speak directly, she began.

"It was very kind of you to come so soon, Sir Charles," said she, with all her wonted sweet cheerfulness of tone and manner; "and it is not a good day to see him, he is over-tired with his journey yesterday. But I was so anxious to know your opinion about our going—abroad!" She shrank unconsciously from using the name of Madeira. "He is not much inclined for it, as I dare say he would tell you?" She looked up, a little surprised at his still saying nothing.

"He did," said Sir Charles, clearing his throat; "and I should advise consulting his inclinations first of all."

"But would not the sea-voyage, the milder climate, be of

service to him?" said Florence, quickly, in a gentle, pleading voice, whose tremulous eagerness betrayed how much she built on the hope.

The physician shook his head. The wife's heart caught the alarm in a moment.

"Why?" she asked, breathlessly, and her hands quivered as she clasped them tightly together on the table before her.

"It—would be of no use." The reply was scarcely more audible than the question, and Florence's face grew white and rigid as she bent it over her clasped hands.

"Would to God that, or anything on earth, could be of service to him or you!" said the physician, compassionately, coming a few steps nearer; "and if at any moment I can be of the slightest use or comfort, send for me as freely——"

"Thank you, Sir Charles," said Florence, rising, and speaking as one in a dream; "but—I must go to him!"

"Then I will not detain you now; but remember, you may always command me." And feelingly he pressed the cold hand which neither resisted nor returned his grasp, and left her.

"Poor child! poor child!" he muttered as he descended the stairs; "now she will cry her heart out, and wish she were going too! This is indeed a bitter world for some of us—if one were only sure of anything better yonder!"

Florence stood still on the spot where he had left her, but no burst of grief followed; the shock was too terrible for that.

She had never looked, never, perhaps, allowed herself to look at the possibility of any result but one of the remedial measures she urged; and had the physician warned her not to be too sanguine, to bear in mind that the result of all remedial resources must be uncertain, she would doubtless have wept bitterly over the fears such warnings must have awakened. But now hope and fear were alike crushed and silenced by the certainty, which countless words and looks of Frank's, during the few last months, started to remembrance to make yet more sure. Frank was dying, and nothing on earth could avail to save him.

She stood realizing with fearful clearness the full significance of the words which made earth as a blank before her; and then, as if in mockery, there floated in upon her brain the words years ago spoken to Helen: "Is it not wrong to grieve for any one's going to a happier and better world? Only selfish love could repine." And clasping her hands on her

forehead, she recalled to mind all the teachings of faith, duty, and acquiescence in the Divine will, which she had so often dwelt on, so ardently revered, and—alas!—was now called on to act up to. Could she?

“Impossible!” was the first despairing cry of her stricken heart. “Impossible!”

But Florence’s faith, though hitherto it had been little tried, and, therefore, as yet not fully realized, was nevertheless sincere: and the second and more chastened impulse of reply was struck from another chord. “I must! I will try!”

Moving as one in a dream, she unclasped her hands from her forehead, and passing out of the room—she felt for the handle of the door, as if she were blind—entered that where Frank lay waiting for her.

Waiting—with the large drops gathering on his brow, while he measured the seconds of the physician’s stay as a man might measure the seconds till his beloved should be stretched on the rack of the persecutor—and what physical anguish were not easier to bear than this?—and then counted every step of his heavy tread as he descended the stairs, though without thought of any but her the door had closed on. Waiting—straining every sense, forehearing, almost the noiseless step across the neighbouring room, the opening of the door which might have been deemed inaudible; and then—would she—was she coming straight to him? The second door opened and closed.

He raised his head, and turned on her a look so sorrowful—for her sorrow—so tender in its speechless compassion, that the spell which had controlled her anguish was broken. She forgot all but the impossibility of parting; and throwing herself on her knees beside him, she burst into a flood of tears, burying her face in his bosom.

“My own!” said Frank, mournfully folding his arms around her; “God knows, had it been His will, I would rather have borne the parting than that you should!”

“O Frank! Frank! take me with you!” she sobbed; “I cannot—cannot let you go!”

“But the children, my own?” said Frank, half raising himself, and bending over to kiss the drooping head pressed in such bitter anguish to his faint-beating heart.

“The poor children!” murmured Florence, shivering self-condemned at the consciousness that the children, and all that might be left to her, were as nothing compared to the one

cherished idol of her heart. All, everything but him, she could yield without a murmur ! Was it therefore the sacrifice was claimed ?

"God knows how I have grieved for you, dearest !" continued Frank, tenderly. "It has been the one bitter drop in a cup that would else have been too sweet ; but God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and has given us the children to comfort you. Little treasures in trust to train for heaven ; you would not leave them to strangers, my own ?"

Florence smothered a sob, but made no answer.

"And when you think how happy we have been,"—the shiver passed again over the kneeling form, and Frank's lips paled and quivered fearfully as he again pressed them to the drooping head—"and what a comfort it will be to go home together once more"—He stopped short, utterly exhausted ; his arms relaxed their hold, and he sank back half-fainting on the sofa.

"Frank ! dear Frank !" exclaimed Florence, springing to her feet in an agony of alarm ; and calmed in a moment, she was raising his head and bathing his brow, almost before the look could be lifted to her face, and the hand held out for hers, to re-assure her.

"It was nothing, dearest," he said, in a moment ; "talking to Alton had tired me."

"Selfish love indeed !" murmured Florence, swallowing the sobs that almost choked her.

"And I shall be better again in a day or two ; I have not got over the journey yet," he added, soothingly.

Florence only kissed his forehead in reply. How could she have been so blind till now ? And *now*, so selfish as to torture him, and exhaust his failing strength, with the sight of her uncontrolled grief ? The fond, anxious glance that rested on her, while the wearied lids struggled with the exhaustion, mental and physical, which seemed pressing them down with a hand of lead, was the keenest reproach that could have been inflicted.

"Dear Frank, you are quite worn out, and you never slept last night," she said humbly, pressing her burning forehead to his chill brow ; "do try and sleep now, and I will sit beside you—and pray that I may learn to be as good as you"—she added in a whisper, for indeed her voice well-nigh failed her.

"God bless you, my darling !" was the answer, with a sweet, faint smile, which told how differently he estimated her merits

and his own; and then the weary eyes closed, and hours passed before the hands were moved or unclasped which folded one of hers so tenderly to his bosom.

When, after some time, she knew by his more regular breathing that he was indeed asleep, Florence, too, closed her eyes, and leaned her forehead against the cushions beside his; but who will imagine that she slept? The suffering of years seemed compressed into those hours; suffering too intense, almost, for thought, and far too intense for utterance. No sympathy, even of those she best loved, could have comforted her then; she felt dimly thankful that even the children were away—sent home already—for only in the deepest stillness and solitude can such dispensations be faced and accepted, as had thus fallen to her hitherto favoured lot. It was well for her that the struggle could be still in some measure fought out by her husband's side, with his love to comfort her, and his presence and example to shed over her some faint reflex of the peace his own spirit had achieved.

For as he had earlier faced, and answered in the affirmative, the question then forced upon him—"Could he resign her, if such were indeed God's will?"—so also in the sterner struggle now forced upon his maturer faith, he had come off victorious. He could *leave* her, trustfully and unrepiningly, to his Father's care, to complete in loneliness—and that Father only knew in how much of sorrow—the earthly pilgrimage which his heart had yearned to make a path of sunshine and delight alone. And, therefore, Frank could sleep tranquilly and wake peacefully, feeling the happiness of his earthly lot sobered and chastened, indeed, but neither embittered nor poisoned, by the knowledge that earth and earth's joys would soon be of the past for him. The one bitter drop in his cup had been, as he had said, the fear whether Florence might be able to bear up under the parting, which must fall with such tenfold bitterness on the one left behind; and this it was which remained for her to soften to him, if she would indeed prove that her love was worthy of his.

Happily for her, though the blow might therefore be the more crushing, hers was not a nature prone to struggle against and aggravate suffering by those searchings and questionings as to the why and wherefore, which torture more energetic and more thinking, but therefore more restless, minds. Two things mainly, more as feelings than thoughts, were present to her during her motionless vigil by Frank's couch: Frank,

her husband, her all, was going from her, and for his sake she was to command her sorrow, bear it patiently, nay cheerfully, as if she felt it not. No more question if she could—she must! The deeper her love, and consequently her anguish, the more impossible it became to permit any signs of an unchastened or repining spirit, to torture him with anxieties for either her temporal or spiritual future. Now, if ever, must she live only for him, while still she had him; and to the *afterwards* she must not, durst not look. Again and again the shiver passed over her, bespeaking the intensity of emotion suppressed—frozen, as it were; but suppressed it was and must be, mentally and physically. The whole force of her will was concentrating itself on one subject: to close her eyes to the inexorable future—for his sake!

Not that, in a character like hers, higher motives could be wanting; but she was not now capable of consciously realizing them. Unconsciously, too, her love for her husband had become too exclusive, too absorbing a feeling, to leave full scope for the proportionate growth of a higher ruling love; and thus it had incurred the risk of becoming too selfish, too merely natural an affection, of standing between heaven and her—instead of drawing her nearer to heaven. And this most subtle and dangerous, because seemingly lovable, selfishness, which consists in loving others better than self, *for the sake of self*, is the peculiar temptation of those gifted with the deepest capacities of affection. Yet in the very temptation—as, indeed, in all temptations—lie the elements of cure, the grounds of strength for successfully resisting it. If a man love better than himself “his brother whom he hath seen,” he is at least in the way of learning to love “his Father whom he hath not seen” better than either, and will surely, if he resist not the teachings and chastenings of Providence, attain to the unfailing result of such love; not mere submission—submit we must—but a more heroic spirit of genuine acquiescence in all the dispensations of that Father’s will.

To this acquiescence, in theory so alluring—for what more inspiring to the young life-pilgrim than to be told, that no sorrow, no trial awaits us but must lose its sting and bring forth blessings proportioned to its severity if we but accept it as God’s messenger?—but in practice so difficult,—so impossible, as many besides her have felt it in their anguish,—Florence had long since intellectually attained. It remained for her to realize it in actual experience. It would be too much to ex

pect that she should at first see the sunshine in the cloud, the blessings which this bitterest of trials was destined to bring forth ; enough if she could cling to a belief in their existence till the tyranny of grief should be overpast. And thus much she could do ; not dwelling on her belief, in the idea of drawing comfort from it now, as some might, but rather burying it in the depths of her consciousness, lest she should be tempted, in her despair, to fling it from her ; and trusting, with the instinctive wisdom of humility, that if she struggled to perform the duty she could see before her, the more distant struggle, which she dared not now contemplate, would somehow be rendered possible and endurable—then !

The hours passed on, and it was with a pang, strangely blended of joy and pain, that she started at last, in answer to the pressure of her hand, and lifted her head to meet Frank's own beaming smile, which sickness had failed to rob either of its sunshine or its tenderness, and to hear the assurance, which his tone did not belie, that he felt more refreshed than he could tell her. She had him still ; he was not gone—yet ! Thank God for that !

From that moment, it would have been difficult to say which of the two was the more tenderly watchful to guard from all possible pain the feelings and existence of the other. If for her sake he exerted himself to dwell upon the future, striving gently to lead her thoughts to all that might hereafter yield her comfort and support, no less did she school herself, for his, to live only in the present, even while treasuring up all that he so tenderly sought to impress. It was to come home to her and be of use some day ; but she would not allow herself to think *when*.

They remained yet a day or two in London, that Frank might recover from the fatigue of his first journey ; and, as he predicted, he rallied considerably, and bore the second much better. Perhaps the removal of the suspense he had endured while the truth still remained unknown to Florence, told favourably on his physical frame ; and the feeling that he was now returning home, to enjoy in peace all that remained of life, in the spot inexpressibly endeared to him by grateful enjoyment of life's richest blessings, shed such sunshine of tranquil joy over his spirits as soothed even Florence's aching heart ; and softened, if it could not still, the pang of re-entering her cherished home—for the last time *with him*. Maternal affection, too, must assert its claims, when little

voices greeted "mamma," and soft, rosy cheeks were pressed to hers; and, if she embraced her little ones with more tears than smiles, a feeling of self-reproach, for having counted such treasures as naught, bore its full share in her emotion. And if she slept that night with fresh tears wet on her pale cheeks, and that expression of suffering on her lips which, when at rest, they must alone bear for long, still she did sleep that deep, refreshing sleep, so needful to nerve both body and mind for the mission of the coming morrow.

The morrow would bring Helen, perhaps the Emlyns; how should she meet them—tell them? For she had only written a line to Helen to say they were coming home, and not going abroad; she could not force herself to write more,—and how say it? But she would not think of that; Frank would be glad to see them; and she turned to more immediate duties. Domestic affairs had accumulated in her absence; and, between them and Frank, she was fully occupied till the hour when she generally walked with the children and their nurse; and Frank urged her to go, saying that she might report if it would be warm enough for him to try a turn by-and-bye,—but really hoping that the fresh autumn air and sunshine might exercise their blessed influence upon her.

"And I want to read the book Bernard gave us"—they had seen him in London: and the meeting had sent him, too, home with a heavy heart—"before we lend it to Helen." So Florence went, though she knew the book was a pretext to persuade her he could spare her.

She had not long been gone, when the well-known pony-carriage drove up, and Helen entered the drawing-room. Frank did not even attempt to rise from his easy-chair to meet her; and that, and the change the last two months—almost summer months—had made in his appearance, struck her painfully. Not going abroad! Surely he looked as if he needed it! But she had too much self-command to betray her impressions, and greeted him as usual, inquiring for Florence.

"She is gone out with the children," he replied; "so you must put up with only me for a little."

"Well, I will try," said she, with a bright smile, which it yet pained her to give; she felt sad at seeing him look so ill. But taking off her bonnet, and making herself, as she said, at home as usual, she sat down with her work beside Frank, whom she had long since learned to regard wholly as a brother.

"I am so glad you are come home," she said, after a few minutes, in which neither had said much beyond a few matter-of-course inquiries and answers; "I felt quite lost while you were away. But, dear Frank, are you really going to stay at home now? Did not Sir Charles Alton think the winter abroad would do you good?"

"Did it never occur to you, dear Helen," said Frank gently, and looking at her to see if it ever had, lest the question should be too startling, "that it might be too late for anything to do me good, in the sense you mean?"

Helen dropped her work, and leaned forward on the arm of his chair, grieved far more than startled; and looked up with eyes of tearful inquiry.

"It is so, dear Helen," he said, putting his hand gently on hers; "and I am, I cannot tell you how thankful, that I may close my life here, where I have been so inexpressibly happy."

"Oh, Frank, Frank!" whispered Helen, while tears dropped fast but quietly on the hand she held, "But what will become of Florence, my precious Florence? How, how will she bear it?"

"You must take care of her for me, she looks to you as a sister—a dear sister to both of us," said Frank, kindly; "and she will be taken care of—but God knows, for her it is—— You must not make me faint-hearted about her," he added, pressing Helen's hand when he found she did not speak.

"Indeed I will not," she answered, looking quickly up, and restraining her tears in answer to the appeal. "And I am sure she will be taken care of, and will—bear it—" the words seemed to choke her, but she would not be less brave than he—"better than any one else in the world could, she is so good: and Heaven, we know, never sends any of us more to bear than we can bear, or than we need. And, indeed, I will do all I can, little as it may be, to love and comfort her—but oh, Frank! I shall miss my brother too!"

"Dear Helen," said Frank, "if we missed nothing here, when should we turn elsewhere to look for it? And, though I may not be much for you to miss, it is pleasant to think I may be one link in the chain of love drawing your heart heavenwards."

"Yes; I have often thought it would not do to be too happy here," said Helen, sadly.

"And you must find a brother for Florence some day, you know," said Frank, but checked himself suddenly, doubting, as he recalled old suspicions, lest the allusion should pain her;

but it did not, from him. Perhaps the halo which surrounds those whose days are already numbered, as well as an intuitive perception of his long-felt sympathy, might invite her confidence; at any rate she answered more frankly than she could have spoken to any other living being on the subject.

"No, dear Frank, that is past; and I have ceased to regret it. It was just what might have made me too happy; and I have learned that I may be quite happy enough without it. And one of my first great comforts—after papa—was the idea that I might be of use to you and Florence, for the dear children's sake. Oh! do you remember, Frank, the day you fetched me to see little Florence? You never dreamed how it warmed my heart, and made me feel almost happy again! And now that dear Florence will want me more than ever, I would not wish it otherwise for the world! I *see* that it is all right, now."

"It must be all right with you, dear Helen, while you take things in such a spirit," said Frank; "but we cannot read the future, and it may turn out other than you look for."

Helen shook her head.

"But never mind me!" she said in a moment. "And I dare say I ought not to let you talk so much; can I do anything to amuse you till Florence comes back? Read to you, or sing to you, or anything?"

"Talking will not hurt me," said Frank, with a grave, sweet smile, which made Helen's heart ache; "but if you would like to read to me a little, here are Huntley's last essays; he gave them us the other day."

Helen took the book silently, but Frank could see her hand tremble, and he knew that his old suspicions had been well-founded. What could have come between these two? And while, as she read on, Helen's thoughts wandered, even from what Bernard had written, back to Florence and Frank again, Frank's thoughts were wandering, even from his Florence, to ponder on any possible means of promoting the happiness of these others. But what could he or any one do, that might not be doing mischief?

Half an hour, perhaps, had passed, and Helen was still reading on, almost mechanically, when Frank put his hand upon her arm.

"She is coming," he said, anxiously; "will you not go and meet her?"

Helen rose and left the room; and outside she met Florence,

who drew her into another room, and hid her face upon her shoulder.

"You have seen him?" she whispered breathlessly.

"Yes," whispered Helen, laying her cheek softly against Florence's head, and Florence was answered.

"I—I could not write, dear Helen," she said, still in the same breathless whisper; and Helen could only kiss her, tearfully, in reply.

"And, dear Helen, would you tell—ask Louisa—I do not think I can bear to speak of it," she continued, after a few minutes, pressing Helen's hand convulsively.

"To-day, as I go home, dearest," returned Helen.

"She must not think it unkind—but I really"—

"Unkind! my darling Florence. Who could?" exclaimed Helen.

"She has always been so kind to me," said Florence apologetically, for she could hardly help blaming herself for her instinctive consciousness, that, tender and sympathising as Lady Emlyn was, she could not look to her for the strength she so sorely needed, and felt sure of in Helen.

"Yes, much too kind to dream of thinking you unkind, dearest," said Helen, comfortingly.

"And you must come to us very often, dear Helen; it may be months they say"—she shivered from head to foot, as she breathed rather than spoke it—"and we have no sister but you, you know—and we can talk *afterwards*," she added, shivering as before. "But now we must go to him."

Her voice changed with the words, and she raised her head as with some new strength; and exchanging a close embrace, the two went back together to Frank.

Helen marvelled to see Florence's self-command in Frank's presence; she seemed almost like herself again; all love and gentleness, only much stiller; and she asked if Helen had taken good care of him, and if he were ready for some lunch now, without a trace of anything but tenderness in her tone; and moved about the room, and waited on him, as if there lay no weight at her heart the while. Helen could only trust, that, beneath the magic of Frank's smile, it weighed at least less heavily.

At lunch they were even cheerful, though that was mainly Frank's doing; but the presence of the children at their early dinner was a great help too; and Helen did her best, and afterwards drew the little ones out into the garden, to help her

to gather flowers, to make some nosegays for "dear papa's" vases, but really because it was obvious that much of their merry little prattle fatigued him. The husband and wife sat side by side and hand in hand watching them first, as they all moved about in sight of the windows; and then Helen only, as she moved about the room filling and placing Frank's favourite vases.

"It is pleasant to have such a nice, kind sister, is it not, dear Florence?" said Frank, at last, half to her and half to Helen.

"Yes, dear Frank," said Florence, gently, knowing well that his real thought was, what a blessing Helen's love and kindness would be to her hereafter.

When the time came that Helen must leave them, promising to come again the next day if possible, Florence followed her upstairs, to help her prepare for her drive, and leaned her head against her so wearily when she bade her good-bye, that it was all Helen could do to help crying over her, in a way that would have been anything but real kindness. So she made haste to be gone, with a silent farewell-kiss.

Then she went to the Priory to see Lady Emlyn, and both she and Florence were right. Louisa never dreamed of unkindness in Florence's wish of not speaking, or being spoken to, on the subject; but her surprise, her grief, her incredulity, her suggestions of all imaginable expedients for turning aside the inevitable, her disbelief that one so good as her darling Florence should possibly be visited by such utter destruction of her life's happiness, showed clearly how little help she could be expected to afford her friend towards enabling her to accept the impending dispensation; however comforting her affectionate sympathy must hereafter be, when the blow should indeed have fallen. Nor would she believe that it was really hopeless. He had been in such bad health before he came to the country at all, and had he not quite got over it then?

"Ah! you have not seen him!" was all Helen could say in reply. Was not Frank's smile a thing less of earth than of heaven already?

As Helen was driving slowly away, after quitting Lady Emlyn, pondering with a full heart on the knowledge the day had brought forth, a step on the gravel of the drive, and a hand laid upon her reins, made her look up, and Sir William was standing beside her. She knew by his face that he had just come from the Cottage.

"Oh! Miss Helen, Miss Helen!" said he, wringing her hand with tears in his eyes, "to think of the hundreds of good-for-nothing fellows no one would miss if they all died to-morrow, who will live on these fifty years to come, and then to see that noble fellow, whose match you might go the world over to find, going—going—without help or hope! What can all your philosophy say to that? I confess mine fails me."

"Only that perhaps he is fit to go, and they are not," said Helen mournfully.

"Well—I can't stand talking about it, or I shall make a fool of myself, or a woman, or something," said Sir William, hastily, after a moment's pause. "There don't break your neck on the way home! We can't stand any more trouble just now!"

"Trouble enough, indeed, for a long while to come!" sighed Helen, choking down her own tears as she drove rapidly homewards.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW TO BEAR IT.

With peaceful mind thy race of duty run;
God nothing does or suffers to be done,
But what thou wouldst thyself, if thou couldst see
Through all events of things as well as He.

DR. BYROM.

As Helen, faithful to her promise, drove over next morning to the Priory Cottage, she remembered with thankfulness, that but a few weeks had elapsed, since her father's improved circumstances, enabling him now to place an equipage again at his wife's disposal—not, indeed, so stylish as her former ones, but better, as he observed, than Helen's open concern—had thus restored her pony-carriage to her own especial use. How different, how almost intolerable would it have been, to have been dependent on her step-mother's caprices for the power of occasionally visiting the friends who needed her presence and sympathy so deeply.

She wondered if things were so marvellously arranged for everybody as they seemed to be for her—help seemed always

to come just when she wanted it, in great things and in small ;—and if so, how could any one possibly doubt the intervention and ceaseless care of Providence over all, individuals as well as nations, in trifles as well as in great emergencies ?

But there are two things needful for such recognition as Helen's of the perpetual workings of Providence in our behalf: a willingness to be guided and worked for, and a habit of so reflecting on life as it passes, as to discern when and how the short-comings of our own weakness and folly are made good, or their consequences softened or averted, by the ever-present help of Him who numbers even the hairs of our head. The self-will which resists, or the carelessness which drifts on from day to day heedless of such aid, necessarily blinds us to its existence.

Even that class of religionists, whose conversation and correspondence teem with allusions to special providences and dispensations, vouchsafed as tokens of Divine grace, err, not in believing too much, as may be commonly supposed, but in believing too little, in Divine providence. They are not wrong in considering such special events as providential dispensations, but in forgetting that *all* events are so ; not wrong in acknowledging peculiar mercies vouchsafed to themselves, but in supposing such peculiar mercies to be vouchsafed to one class of mankind at special seasons only, instead of being freely showered on all men at all times. They believe, indeed, in Providence, but their belief is too partial ; too selfish, it may be feared.

And though it is greatly to be regretted that ridicule should ever have been used as a weapon in so serious a controversy, there is nevertheless a just ground for the disapprobation so widely felt, even among sincere believers in the same Providence, of the habit, above referred to, of perpetually dragging forth into the daylight of common discourse those holy providential influences, the consciousness of which should be always cherished within us. For when it is considered how veiled and unobtrusive are the Divine workings, and that nothing in the Divine economy can be without design, must not the habit in question be chargeable with running counter to the design of that very Providence it is intended to honour ? Whence, no doubt, the painful feeling of incongruity, nay of irreverence, it awakens.

But, for such a faith in Divine providence as we have endeavoured to indicate, who that has once realized, would ever

barter it for any imaginable bribe? Who so much as knows what true happiness is, till he has learned to say and to feel,—“I may enjoy this safely; it is God’s gift;” or has ever dreamed what new and unlooked-for blessings and strength may be developed under the discipline of sorrow, till he has similarly learned to feel, as well as to say,—“I can bear this, since He permits it?”

Deeply and more deeply did such thoughts and convictions as these impress themselves upon the mind of Helen, as she day by day witnessed and shared the sorrows and the joys, and was day by day drawn more closely into the life-sphere, of the friends who became, for the time, her absorbing interest in life. It soon became an established rule that, unless absolutely wanted at home, she should spend the chief portion of the day with them; and Frank soon knew almost to a moment when to listen for the tramp of the ponies’ feet at the little garden-gate. Inestimable to Florence was the relief which she derived from the presence of one who would always help her to exert herself to cheerfulness for Frank’s sake, or take her place beside him when other duties called her away, or when human weakness triumphed for a moment over her utmost endeavours. And to Frank Helen was scarcely more welcome for Florence’s sake than for his own. Many an hour of weakness and weariness she beguiled for both of them, with her affectionate and ever active sympathy; and entered, in return, more and more deeply into that atmosphere of peace and tranquil, nay, happy submission, which Frank’s unrepining spirit of perfect acquiescence in the lot assigned to him seemed to diffuse on all around.

Even Florence, when the effects of the first terrible shock had a little subsided, began to recover more of strength and cheerfulness than Helen could have hoped; and as, little by little, she nerved herself to hear him talk, and even to talk with him, of the future, it required less effort to ignore the silent agony at her heart, and to give herself up to the still blessed present, leaving the darkness of the future to be wrestled with when it should indeed have closed around her. The days and nights of suffering, from oppression of breathing and other causes incidental to his disease, which at times made Frank’s life seem to hang by a thread, caused the return of comparative ease to be hailed with such thankfulness, as almost banished for a season the sense of ultimate danger; and the welcome tidings, “Frank is so much better this morning!” would greet

Helen on her arrival, in tones of more than cheerfulness. There were pleasant hours to be spent, then, beside the sofa in the little drawing-room—the arm-chair had needed but too soon to be relinquished—in long talks on all such themes as the three had loved to dwell on in former days, treated now in the yet more deeply earnest spirit which the scarce-veiled presence of the angel of death could hardly fail to command. Now, for the first time, Florence and Helen learned how long Frank himself had looked forward to this early termination of his happy and useful life as probable, if not certain; and how he had even debated with himself whether he ought to marry without imparting his conviction to Florence, being only deterred from so doing by the consideration that he might thus be prematurely clouding her happiness with what might after all prove a groundless presentiment. Now, at least, she would have years of almost cloudless peace to look back on; and deeply Florence thanked him, then and in after days, for thus sparing her years of corroding anxiety.

Thus weeks passed away, and the three grew daily nearer and dearer to each other, in the peaceful communion of such sorrow—if sorrow indeed, it must be called—as no one among them would have exchanged for any joy the outer world could offer. In Helen, indeed, there might arise at times the unquenchable yearning to see among them one so well fitted by his noble, earnest nature, to share in the feelings and the aspirations shedding their elevating influences upon the hearts which might otherwise well have quailed at the prospect of parting now before them. But not for Bernard Huntley, even, would she have voluntarily relinquished her place in the charmed circle, hallowed alike by love and the approaching footsteps of the veiled angel. She would but have desired to draw him too within its sphere. She felt that there he would be at home.

It must not, however, be supposed that life in other respects was standing still for Helen. She only passed with her friends the hours generally devoted to her reading and her music, and Mrs. Montagu's wearisome rounds of visits; and at home, or in general society, little might have been discerned of the influences so strongly at work within. But her whole inner life was coloured and ruled by the one absorbing feeling and sympathy. Who has not experienced such phases of mental absorption in some one object, while the current of outward life flowed on unchanged and almost uninfluenced by it?

Nor were other friends remiss in tendering all the kindly offices and attentions by which Frank Littleton, or his wife, could be cheered or solaced in this season of deep trial. Already beloved in no common degree by all who knew them, the cloud which had settled upon their happy home, such a cloud as to command the sympathies even of the most obtuse or unreflecting, seemed at once to make them the centre of interest in the little circle of their closer friends. Many a pleasant drive did Helen take her friend in the sunny mid-day hours of the waning year, while Sir William sat with Frank the while ; and though the drives were for the most part spent in silence—there would be time enough, as Florence had said, to talk afterwards—no greater refreshment could have been devised for the over-taxed mind and frame of the suffering wife, than these silent drives amid woods and fields, under the free, cool sky. No day passed without Lady Emlyn's either coming herself, or sending fruit, flowers, books, papers, —anything that could be imagined capable of yielding pleasure or comfort to the invalid or his devoted nurse ; and often she carried off the children to the Priory for the whole day, thus leaving Florence free to give undivided attention to him who might not long need it.

The young surgeon, originally Frank's assistant, now succeeded to his relinquished practice, never failed, morning or evening, to look in and see if he could be of the slightest use ; and more than one night, during Frank's severer fits of suffering, did he insist on sitting up with him, to spare the strength of the sweet, wearied wife, who so sorely needed all the strength she could command. Mr. Montagu, too, and even Mrs. Montagu, would make it a point, on those rare occasions when Helen was detained from her friends, to make their way to the cottage, to report on their return how all fared in her absence ; and good Mr. Rawdon, Helen's old friend, found many an opportunity for a brief chat, and always went away lamenting to himself that one so excellent and lovable as Frank Littleton should be a dissenter. But for all his orthodoxy, he could not help admitting that it might, perhaps, not make much difference, where Frank was now going.

Many, too were the inquiries made at Dr. Littleton's door, on the X—— market days, which brought in, from miles round, people of all classes to whom his bright, benevolent disposition, even more than his professional skill, had endeared him ; and strangely various were the simple offerings which

found their way to the cottage, far more prized for the grateful feelings they evinced, than for any intrinsic value of their own. It was one of Frank's great pleasures when well enough, to receive visits from these his humbler friends, and to exchange with them a few words of counsel or kindness, as had been his wont in former days; and more than one rough-looking farmer, or labouring man, went away with dimmed eyes, muttering that the doctor was fitter for heaven than earth, that was the truth; so no wonder he was going! One old woman, whose grandchild he had brought through a long illness, walked six miles to bring him a pair of woollen stockings she had knitted for him with her own hands, and told him she should be sorely put to it now; for she had always reckoned on him when her own time came, and she doubted she should be almost feared without him. But he was not to be feared; he had done too many a good turn to many a poor body not to go easy; and the Lord would take care of his own, there as well as here.

Towards the end of December, the season continuing remarkably mild, there set in one of those lulls in the progress of Frank's disease, which often occur in the later stages of a decline like his. Lady Emlyn began to entertain sanguine hopes that the case might not after all be hopeless; and if Florence could not share the illusion, she could at least be deeply grateful for the reprieve, and for the peaceful enjoyment which, in the relief from physical pain, brightened Frank's spirits almost to playfulness once more. Christmas brought the Castletons and their children to the Priory, which still more enlivened the little circle of friends; and Lord Castleton must needs swallow his indignation at Helen for her rejection of Horace, which she had quite forgotten he was likely to entertain. He had, indeed, vowed to Cissy, between jest and earnest, that he would not even shake hands; but his first meeting with Helen befel by Frank's couch, and how could he remember anything but the pain his kind heart felt, at seeing the change in his old acquaintance? And afterwards, as he confided to Cissy, Helen seemed so utterly to have forgotten all about it, that his remembering it was of no use.

On the New Year's Day, Frank was unusually well, and it proved the brightest day that had been known at the Cottage for long. Helen and Lady Emlyn had devised a miniature Christmas-tree for the children of the two families, and after much debate, decided on venturing to place it at one end of

the drawing-room Frank always occupied, that he might have the pleasure of witnessing the children's delight, at least for a little time. They could be carried off to tea in another room as soon as he began to be tired. As, too, there was to be a dinner-party at the Priory—the claims of the neighbourhood must not be neglected—there could be no fear that the elders of the party might stay long enough to fatigue him. So all day long mysterious whisperings and rustlings went on, behind a curtain hung across the end of the room, while Lady Emlyn, Helen, and Cissy flitted in and out at intervals. Cissy—forgetting her usual awe of the invalid, which rarely let her venture to the Cottage, and always kept her when there in a sort of subdued, half-frightened state—brightened this day to her usual childlike gaiety; every now and then stealing up to Frank, to threaten him with all imaginable penalties, if he let Florence peep behind the curtain during the temporary absences of the conspirators.

Florence and Frank's two children were meantime spending the day at the Priory with Cissy's, and at dusk the little party was brought over in charge of Sir William and Lord Castleton, who professed themselves much elated by their temporary promotion to the dignity of mammas. Mr. Rawdon, too, had received a hint which brought him at the right time; and when the mysterious curtain was raised at last, and the blaze of tiny lights and glittering ornaments and toys revealed to the delighted gaze of the six little pairs of bright eyes—Cissy's baby stared as hard as any of them, and crowed in ecstasy—the scene in the little drawing-room was as bright and happy a one as those who planned it could possibly have hoped. And when Frank saw Florence forgetting herself and her sorrow in the intense delight of her little ones, bringing them to show their treasures one by one to "dear papa," and thanking the kind conspirators again and again for the treat afforded to her darlings, it is probable that of all assembled round him, none more thoroughly enjoyed the hour, than the invalid stretched on the couch, which must only be exchanged for the couch of death.

"She will have happy New Years yet with her children and her friends!" said he to Sir William, as the latter stood beside him.

"God send she may, Frank!" replied Sir William, in a low voice; "but where will you be?" he added, involuntarily speaking his thought.

"Where I shall not want New Years ; in the life which is all new, Emlyn !" returned Frank Littleton emphatically.

The little party had dispersed ; and, Florence, having seen her children safe asleep in their little beds, returned to spend with Frank the evening hours she prized so highly, because they could always be devoted to him, undisturbed by call of maternal or domestic duties. Moreover, even in his worst days, his evenings were generally more free from pain, and often prolonged far into the night, when he felt that it would be in vain to try to sleep. But this evening there was no such apprehension in store. Frank was not too tired by the little excitement of the day ; and, for the first time for many weeks, Florence could bring herself to sing to him some of the songs he loved ; and then she came and sat down on a low stool beside him, with her hand clasped in his, and told him, as young mothers are wont to do, of her children's various little sayings and doings, and how they had fallen asleep at last, each hugging the gift it prized the most.

"Yes, this has been a bright day, has it not, dear Florence?" said Frank, after a few minutes' silence.

"It has, indeed, dear Frank," said she, leaning her head against him, and looking up with loving, wistful eyes into his face.

"And you must not think—may I say it, dearest?" he continued, looking tenderly down on her.

"Yes, dear Frank, I can bear it to-night," she answered gently.

"You must not think, then, my own, that there will not be many bright and happy days for you when I am gone. There will be so much left ; and you are not one, dear Florence, to close your eyes to God's sunshine, when He sends it ; or to let the children lose more than they need, by clinging to grief, instead of conquering it, for their sakes—and mine."

"No, indeed," said Florence, with tears in her eyes ; "I have sometimes felt lately, when you were very ill, how selfish it must be of me to wish to keep you here, instead of being glad that you should go where there is no pain. I did not know how hard it was to be unselfish till now !" she added, with a look that seemed absolutely to cling to him in the intensity of its mournful tenderness.

"And it would be hard indeed to leave you, my own, did I not know," said Frank, "that there must still be work for you to do on earth, and happiness to be found in the doing, as you

will do it with a willing and hopeful heart. And, dearest, all *my* love could never have shielded you from sorrow, and our Father's love will be as near as ever!"

"Yes, dear Frank," said Florence, "I will try. I did feel once as if I could not even try without you; but I know how ungrateful that was. I have been so happy all this while without deserving it; I may surely do my best to deserve it—when it is gone!" she added, hiding her face for a moment on his hand.

"Not gone," rejoined Frank earnestly, "only hidden for a little while, like the sunshine. Unless you could forget all our happy past here, and cease to look forward to our happy future hereafter, what will it be, but as if I had gone, as so many do, to a foreign country for a time, and you were expecting me back any day? Only that you must come to me instead."

"And you cannot miss me, or be lonely and wretched, meanwhile, that *is* a comfort!" said Florence, gratefully.

"And it may not be for long, dearest," he continued; "or, at least, you need not think so, till you have learned to be happy again. The burden weighs heavier if we look forward to bearing it long; and, if you give each day only its own work, the life's work will be easier."

"Give us to-day our daily bread!" murmured Florence.

"And He will give it, my own!" said Frank, fervently, drawing her closer to him, till her head rested on his bosom.

"Yes, dear Frank, I will not be afraid," she answered meekly.

And who shall say that the two were not happier that evening, side by side, in the cherished home which would, they knew not how soon, shelter but one of them, than many of those who most deeply pitied them, in the friendly circle which the other would never join again?

The Priory party had, meanwhile, been unexpectedly increased by Mr. Carysfort, whom Lady Emlyn, on descending to the drawing-room, was not a little surprised to find deep in conversation with Sir William and Lord Castleton, on a grand drainage scheme of the latter's, to be carried out by aid of the government loans for that purpose, of which some neighbour of his had lately availed himself with great advantage. Not that Mr. Carysfort, as may be imagined, knew much about drainage, notwithstanding his visits to Heathlands of late years; but he had been helping Mr. Savage to negotiate the matter, and had come down partly, he said, to report progress.

"I had just a couple of days to spare," said he, in answer to Lady Emlyn's look of surprise; "so I thought I would run down and have a talk with Fred, and a peep at you all."

"You know how glad we always are to see you, Horace, but—Helen is here, do you know?" said Louisa aside, doubtfully.

"Miss Montagu will not quarrel with my coming," said Horace deliberately.

"Miss Montagu quarrel with your coming! I should like to catch her at it!" exclaimed Frederick, overhearing and firing instantly.

"Now, my dear Fred!" said Horace soothingly, between jest and earnest, "I am sure you ought not to quarrel with Miss Montagu. I should have been instituting a very different drain on your estates by this time, but for her."

"And I wish to anything you had!" said Fred, sulkily.

"Now, now Fred! Come back to business," said his brother.

"What were you saying, Emlyn, when Louisa came in?"

Helen was far from feeling disposed to quarrel with Mr. Carysfort's unlooked-for appearance; it seemed an earnest of his really meaning to keep his promise of not quarrelling with her; and when, to his brother's provocation, he offered her his arm to escort her to dinner, in a matter-of-course way, as an old friend might do, she felt really indebted to him, and only wished she could in any way make up to him for her own involuntary ingratitude;—which indeed came to pass in time, but when and as she least expected.

"I have not told you my real reason for coming down, Miss Montagu," said he, after a little time. "I did not know when I might have two days to spare again—I believe, by the way, there is something in your theory about hard work after all—and I could not bear to think of poor Littleton's dying, perhaps, without my ever having so much as said to him that I can never forget all his kindness to me; at a time, too, when most men would have wished me at the bottom of the sea. Fred himself could not have been kinder."

"It was like him," said Helen; "and I am truly glad you came. I am sure it will please him to see you."

"It was another thing when they were well and happy," said Horace, with a mental glance at the reminiscences, which might certainly plead his excuse for having hitherto avoided the Littletons; "but now—I had no idea how it really was, though Louisa had told me he was very ill, till the other day I met Huntley—her cousin, you remember perhaps?"

Perhaps Helen did ! But she merely bowed assent.

"And he told me it was quite, quite hopeless."

"Yes," said Helen with a sigh. "Sir Charles Alton admitted that it was ; and Frank himself has known it for long."

"Now that, Miss Montagu," said Horace, in a lower tone, "is one of the things which staggers me, when I try to think you and Mrs. Littleton may be right in your theories, which we used to discuss in old days. How could such things be permitted, if happiness and unhappiness really depended mainly on ourselves ? For if ever man deserved the reward of a really happy life, after all he sacrificed to his convictions, and the way he used to devote himself to such drudgery here, surely Littleton did !"

"You cannot think more highly of his deserts than I do," said Helen ; "but it does not follow that long life on earth is the highest reward that can be given. When you see him, you will not doubt that he is satisfied with that assigned to him."

"But even supposing that possible,—though it is hard to believe, of a man who always seemed so keenly to enjoy life"—continued Mr. Carysfort, "how can you reconcile such a terrible loss as it must be to her, not to speak of the numbers who will miss him in a less degree, with your ideas of all being for the best here ? I can imagine its being made right again elsewhere, but farther than that I cannot get."

"I could not," said Helen, "unless I felt sure that even dear Florence herself will not really be the worse for it, bitter as the trial may be."

"Not really the worse for it ?" exclaimed Horace.

"No," returned Helen, somewhat tremulously. "It all depends on what we regard as the real object of life ; and I admit, that unless we accept this world as merely a preparation for a better, holding its main object to be the correction of those evils in ourselves which would mar our permanent happiness there, it would be impossible to reconcile ourselves to many of the events of life."

"But even so, how could *she* need such a terrible correction, —so good as she always was, and acting up, so conscientiously, to the very principles you advocate ?"

"She does, she is," said Helen with tears in her eyes ; "and it does seem strange, even to me, that she should be destined to such a trial ; still I know it could not be, but for some great good to her. And when we see and trace, in ourselves, the

good that has come through our own troubles and sorrows, we can more easily believe the same to be the case with others whom we love and grieve for; even though we cannot see the reason of their trials, any more than we at first could of our own."

She spoke in a low voice, thinking of past days, when she, too, had been tempted to disbelieve that all could be for the best, and be accepted as such.

"You speak from experience?" said Mr. Carysfort, with a look of deeper interest than his brother would have at all approved.

"Yes," said Helen, slowly. "Nor do I at all despair," she resumed in a moment, "of your yet confessing to having arrived at the same conclusions. We learn more lessons in life than we expect, once we set about learning; and though some are hard indeed to learn"—her lips quivered as Florence's sweet, patient face rose up before her—"yet when we have learned them, I am sure we shall never wish them unlearned."

"I fear I must be a bad scholar," said Horace, shaking his head; "I should like to see things as you do, if I could; it would be much pleasanter. But it does not come home to me even as regards myself, yet; and when I think of poor Littleton and his wife," he continued, in a tone of such real feeling as must have made Helen forgive him for even more cynical sentiments—"I confess it seems to me as if things went just anyhow, and one must only scramble through the world as best one can."

"They do not think so," said Helen, "or it would indeed be hard to bear."

Yet even Helen was far from realizing the degree of comfort and peace in which her two friends passed the evening, throughout which her own heart was yearning to them with such sorrowful sympathy. The last New Year's evening they would ever spend together! But as it is most true that none can estimate, till they themselves have proved, the trials and secret bitterness of the most seemingly enviable lot, so, in the deepest trials, is it no less impossible for any but the sufferers themselves to divine the depths of consolation which may be open to them; and in love which, like that of Frank and Florence Littleton, is indeed stronger than death, there may well be a joy, deeper than any that life can yield without it, "with which the stranger"—sorrow—"intermeddleth not."

Nor were Mr. Carysfort's views much modified by his sub-

sequent visit to the Priory Cottage. The more admirable Frank seemed, in the marvellous serenity with which he accepted and looked forward to the end, to which Horace could not have voluntarily alluded in his presence for the world, and in the unselfish interest in others which he manifested as ever—Horace found himself talking of his own and his brother's progress and prospects, when he had meant to think only of Frank and his—the more inconceivable did it appear why such a man should be cut off so early. And, for Florence,—Mr. Carysfort was not one to read aright the stillness of her countenance, which spoke forcibly of the peace to be found even in the thorniest paths by those who rebel not against the Hand which guides them. It seemed to him to indicate the apathy of a spirit crushed beneath an intolerable burden.

“She would not say now, that it must be her own fault if she allowed herself to be made miserable by anything which Providence saw good to permit!” he muttered bitterly to himself, as he walked away. “Her face tells a history!”

But Mr. Carysfort forgot how much, in all histories, depends on the spirit in which they are studied.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. HUNTLEY.

Surely some phantom frights you, which full soon
Shall to the mighty exorcism of *truth*
Succumb, and vanish into empty air
If but confronted fairly. Bring it forth,
That I may vanquish it!

NORMITON.

SOME two months, or more, of the New Year had passed away. Frank had been much worse. There had been periods of such continuous suffering, that Helen had sometimes remained at the Cottage for days together, unable to leave Florence with such fearful anxiety hanging over her that day or night she could hardly be persuaded to rest. Now again he was better; a period of blessed relief had succeeded; and it was only by comparing this with the previous one, that the inroads made on his wasting strength could be fully realized. But Florence held her breath when the comparison forced

itself upon her, and turned to dwell thankfully on the new respite granted—for a time !

And where, meanwhile, was Bernard Huntley ?

Were he and Helen never to meet again ? as she sometimes asked herself, especially after a brief visit he had paid to the Cottage during the winter, which fell in the one only week during which a severe cold detained her from her friends. Yet as he left the neighbourhood without making any effort to see her, she felt almost glad they had not met ; since whatever reasons had formerly influenced him to avoid her must obviously still rule him—unless, indeed, he had forgotten her ; a scarcely less painful alternative.

How was she to know that, each morning during his stay, Mr. Huntley would sit, his strong nerves quivering like a woman's, awaiting the hour at which Florence looked for her friend ; or with what a strange thrill of relief from suspense mingled with crushing disappointment, he could listen to the remark that it was too late now, Helen could not be coming this day. How was she to know the effort it had cost him to place himself within reach of the possibility of seeing her, or what a still greater effort was needful, to return without having seen her after all ?

A week of beautiful, spring-like weather had so much revived Frank's strength and spirits that Helen had ventured to sacrifice a day to one of Mrs. Montagu's wearisome rounds of visits, without going to the Cottage at all, feeling that she would be less missed while he was thus better. The next morning was delicious ; and as she drove over, through the balmy spring air and sunshine,—buds swelling and birds singing around ; grass and twigs glittering with recent rain-drops ; and the whole landscape robed and glorified in that exquisite faint spring mist, which seems like the very breath of spring made visible,—her thoughts turned to the heavenly spring-time which dawns on those who have quitted earth and earth's winters for ever. If such were the beauty of spring here, what must it not be there, amidst glories such as "eye hath not seen" nor heart conceived of ; and who could wish to hold back, from its charmed sphere, any suffering fellow-mortal, much less one beloved ? For the first time Helen realized how it might be possible for Florence to let Frank go, not, indeed, without tears, but without a murmur.

Her thoughts had never been less on herself than when, not being met by Florence in the hall as usual, she placed her

hand on the handle of the drawing-room door ; but then a voice struck her ear, which it made her heart stand still to hear. Bernard was there !

She had been too long used to command her feelings, however, to fear their over-mastering her now ; and pausing but for a moment, she entered the room ; and though her countenance and naturally lively manner were by many degrees stiller than usual, her "How do you do, Mr. Huntley?" as she turned to shake hands with him after her wonted loving greetings to Frank and Florence, was apparently calm and unconstrained. Her fingers might tremble as she loosed her bonnet-strings, and threw off her shawl, but she turned to ask more minutely how Frank had been in her absence, just as if the subject were occupying her exclusively ; and when Frank pressed her hand as he replied, she had no idea how it trembled in his, or how well he interpreted its tremor.

But if Helen's greeting was calm and self-possessed, so was not Mr. Huntley's. He had risen hastily on her entrance, and yet advanced scarcely half a step to meet her ; and when they shook hands, the words he uttered in reply to hers were inaudible. And though Florence might not note it, Helen's quickened senses were keenly alive to the perception, that, while he resumed some indifferent conversation with his cousin, his voice trembled with the intensity of repressed emotion. He had not forgotten her ! It might seem but a poor comfort, if they were to meet under the same incomprehensible estrangement as ever ; yet Helen's heart bounded within her in answer to the conviction—he had not forgotten her !

She exerted herself to converse as usual, not even excluding him from her conversation ; but still, perhaps, it was a relief to her when the lunch-hour brought something to do ; and then she found Mr. Huntley tacitly waiting on her as he had been used to do in the latter days of their previous acquaintance, as if he could not help it, but did not wish it to be observed or acknowledged ; and as tacitly she submitted, and felt as if the intervening years had been a dream. It was an effort to propose the walk with Florence which must rob her of even an hour of Bernard's presence ; but Florence must not be cheated of the refreshment of the spring air by any selfish reluctance on her part ; and Frank's grateful look and words, as she carried off his wife, were no slight recompense for the self-denial it required.

Mr. Huntley sat watching the group, as first Florence, and

then Helen—they had long since laid aside any conventionalities that might remind them Helen was not the dear sister by birth which she had become in affection—stooped to kiss Frank's pale forehead as they bade him good-bye; and as the door closed behind them, he involuntarily covered his face with his hands, and Frank looked up startled, as a sound almost like a groan escaped him. Then, startled himself, he rose hurriedly, and walked to the farthest extremity of the room, where he stood for some minutes, leaning his forehead against the window. He soon roused himself, however, and, coming back to Frank, asked if he should read to him.

"I had rather be talked to than read to," said Frank. "Huntley," he added, after a moment's hesitation, "you will not accuse me of idle curiosity now, at any rate; tell me what you were thinking of just now."

Mr. Huntley looked down with strangely working features, which betrayed the depth of agitation stirred by the question, upon Frank's earnest, sympathising countenance, and did not shrink from his inquiring glance. Who could shrink from such sympathy as Frank's?

"I was thinking—God forgive me!" returned Mr. Huntley, "what I would give to lie there as you do, to be loved and tended as you are!"

"But, Huntley," said Frank earnestly, laying his hand on his arm as he was turning hastily away, "why should you not be loved and tended as I am, without lying here? I will not pretend that I have not guessed, years ago, that something stands between you and your happiness, as well as what that happiness would be. I was sure you loved Helen Montagu, even sooner, perhaps, than yourself"—Mr. Huntley's arm trembled beneath Frank's grasp, but he neither moved nor spoke—"and do not think I am trying to force your confidence, Huntley, but I would give much to see hope of your being as happy as you deserve. At any rate, no burden weighs heavier for being shared; and your secret, if it be one, would not long be in danger with me."

Warmly and gratefully Mr. Huntley grasped the hand which still rested on his arm, turned hastily away, strode once or twice hurriedly up and down the room, and then came back and seated himself near Frank's sofa.

"Did Florence never tell you about my father?" he asked, in a low tone of determined self-command, looking steadily at Frank as he spoke.

"Yes, she told me"—said Frank, and then paused; as if loth to speak on a painful subject.

"What did she tell you?" asked Bernard, as before.

"That your father ended his own life in a fit of despondency," said Frank, thus urged; "but, Huntley, that seems to me rather a reason why you should avoid, instead of seeking, a life of loneliness and mere intellectual exertion, and probably even over-work!"

"That was all Florence knew, I dare say," returned Mr. Huntley, with a heavy sigh. "She was but a child at the time, and my uncle thought his family credit concerned in hushing it up; but that was not all, nor the worst of it, Littleton! But you shall hear the rest if you will, though I warn you it is a gloomy history."

"I might care less to hear it if it were not so," returned Frank kindly.

It was with great effort that Mr. Huntley began: "My father came of a family in which insanity had been hereditary for generations; insanity born, perhaps, of the wild passions which seemed inherent in the race, and which, even before my mother's marriage, had so betrayed themselves in him as to alarm the prudence of her relatives. But she loved him as only a woman can love, and was ready to risk anything for his sake. She thought, no doubt, that the more he had gone astray, the more he needed a wife's love to guard him from further evil; and so save him, as she hoped, from the hereditary curse of madness.

"But she hoped in vain; nor was it his first fit of insanity by many, in which he died. My earliest remembrance is of a closed room, which I was never allowed to enter, but which I used to watch, creeping as near to the door as I dared for the welcome sight of my mother's face, as she glided in and out, wearing the look of patient anguish for which, child as I was, I learned even then to pity her and to love her more deeply. I was told, of course, that my father was ill, but I had a vague, childish idea that he must have done something very bad to be kept shut up there. Then I remember being told he was better, and being taken to see him in another room; and wondering if every one who had been ill looked so strange and so beautiful as he did; for he must have been very handsome, with splendid dark eyes, and a hand delicate and white as a woman's. He got quite well again, and I was very glad, for I was more with my mother, and she did not look so pale,

though I never remember her face with anything but an anxious look when at rest ; yet when she smiled, or spoke to me of my father, I always thought it the loveliest face in the world. I think I was half jealous of my father then, because he was the only person she seemed to love as well as me ; and perhaps he was the same of me ; for when he was at home my mother always had me less with her, and he never noticed me much.

“After a time there was the old story of the forbidden room again, and my mother’s face got the old look back, and I used to watch for her as before. As I grew older, and the same happened again and again, I of course learned the truth ; though I had but a vague, dreadful idea of what insanity might be, and was never suffered near my father till the fit had passed off. I remember my uncle’s urging his being removed from home ; but my mother would never hear of it, and the doctors sided with her, because she had more influence over him than any one, even at his worst ; and his first word, when the fit was gone over, and he awoke, as he generally did, rational again after a long stupor, was invariably ‘Helen !’ Yes ; her name was Helen too,” added Mr. Huntley, with a tremor in his voice ; but he commanded it, and went on.

“There must have been some four or five of these attacks before the last, which was preceded by a long interval of reason—nearly two years, which were very different from any others that I remember. My father stayed much more at home, and was very kind to me, and taught me Latin and Greek ; and I grew very fond of him, and left off being jealous ; for my mother looked happier than I had ever known her, and would sit and watch us together at the books, as if her heart were too full for words. It was a sad day for both of us when the last fit seized him. I fancy it had been stealing on for days, for I had seen my mother’s face growing anxious again ; but one morning he did not know us, and the doctors were sent for, and from that day he grew worse and worse. But this time it was a deep despondency, very different from his former violent insanity ; and for the first time my mother yielded to my passionate desire to be with him, and help her tend him, and at least cheer her by being with them ; and I lost the vague fear I had always had of him before, and pitied my mother more intensely than ever. From the first she had a presentiment how it would end, probably because it was so unlike his previous attacks ; and one morning, after about two months, the end came. She had not left his room ten minutes,

when his attendant, with unpardonable carelessness, laid down a razor within his reach; and while his back was turned my poor father clutched it, and the deed was done past hope or recall. Just as he was dying, before so much as medical help came, he opened his eyes, looked up at my mother, said 'Helen,' and was gone, even while she stooped to kiss his lips in reply.

"How well I remember the horror of that week! The fearful end; the hurrying to and fro; the inquest; the preparations for mourning, and the funeral; and my poor mother's silent agony, and my own grief, and horror perhaps greater than even hers. Our least wretched hours were when the house was quiet in the evening, and we used to sit together by the fire-light, and sometimes steal in to look at the beautiful marble face in the coffin upstairs; and even then I could understand my mother's feeling, when once she murmured: 'Thank God, it is over now!'

"Up to that time," continued Mr. Huntley, contracting his brow, and lowering his voice, as in remembrance of some terrible blow, "I had never connected my poor father's sufferings with myself; my mother no doubt had jealously guarded me from the faintest whisper of hereditary madness. I was then about fourteen, but my mother had never let me go to school, fearful of trusting me from under her own eye; and I had grown up a shy, lonely boy, older than my years in thought and feeling, quickened by the deep love and sympathy I bore my mother, little short of an angel as she was. I can see her face now, as I first saw it in her widow's weeds, more pale and worn, and yet sweeter than ever; and after the funeral, my uncle came into the room where we were sitting together, and I stole away to the farther end,—for there was something hard and cold in him I never liked,—and left them to talk together. But though he was meaning to condole with her, there was a cold, almost cruel tone, it seemed to me, in his talk to my mother, that fascinated me to listen, lest he should say anything to pain her; for which, boy as I was, I believe I should have knocked him down on the spot. He spoke of its being a merciful release, and though my mother herself had told me we ought to be thankful my poor father's sufferings were over, my blood boiled to hear him telling her so, in his hard, matter-of-fact way. He reminded her that he had forewarned her how it would be, when she persisted in marrying a man with the taint of insanity in his blood; adding,

they must only trust there was not yet further misery in store, and how anxious he was to give her his earnest advice and assistance, in concerting such measures as might best avert the possibility. The glance which he directed towards me as he spoke was barely perceptible; but I heard, and saw, and understood; and the conviction that I was doomed to inherit my father's insanity flashed upon me with an agony, which even now, Littleton, it chills me to recall. I sat motionless as though a thunderbolt had fallen at my feet; but though I was feigning to read, I saw every shade upon my mother's face, as if I had been standing beside her. She had been sitting pale and silent, listening patiently to her brother, till that last sentence came; but then rising hurriedly, with an involuntary glance of alarm towards me, which I was careful not to meet, she led the way to another room, remarking in a tone of bitterness I never heard from her lips before or since, that if he wished to talk on business they had better be alone. My uncle followed her without a word, and I was alone with my misery.

"I scarcely know how I lived through it till she returned, nor had I any perception of the lapse of time; but when at last she came back alone, she found me kneeling on the ground, with my face buried in the chair from which she had risen, in an agony which terrified her. Even then, instinct had driven me to seek a shadow of protection on the spot where her presence had last rested; a prescience, doubtless, even then, that she it was who should save me. How she soothed me so that I regained power of speech and tears, I cannot tell: nor did she need to be told what blow had fallen upon me. I only know that from that moment she was my good angel, standing between me and the phantom of madness and doom which had taken possession of my boyish imagination. She seemed to live for nothing else. She watched me night and day. How often have I opened my eyes, at dead of night, to meet hers resting on me with that look of speechless, prayerful tenderness, which never fell but as soft sunshine, or softer dew, on my gloomiest and most desponding moods. She read with me, she travelled with me; she taught me more, I believe, than all my tutors put together. She had resolutely resisted my uncle's advice to send me to school, which, though it might have been the quickest, could, as with her higher, deeper insight she well knew, have proved no real or lasting cure for the fever of dread which devoured, or the fearful malady which

might hereafter threaten me. This caused a coolness between them, an inestimable relief to me. It was years before I could see my uncle without shuddering. But for her, I should have hated him; but she urged so soothingly and earnestly, that, after all, the knowledge must have reached me sooner or later which he had been far from intending to convey to me,—and that, had it even been otherwise, it was a first duty to forgive,—that I resigned the sense of injury, and compelled myself to feel no evil feeling towards him.

“But all the more darkly did the idea of a doom hanging over me lay hold on my spirit. It was long before my mother could work on me so far as to make me admit even the possibility of escape. But hers was the faith that removes mountains, and it did work even on me at last. Gently, and often unconsciously to myself, she led me to dwell on and recognize the beneficent workings of Providence in all the events of life, all the operations of nature; and led me at last to the question, whether such a curse as I persisted in believing myself victim of, were not inconsistent with the goodness of the Creator. If all around me were created for a use, how could I alone be irrevocably doomed to what must render me worse than useless, to say nothing of the misery to me and to her? For me she did what no other earthly object could have induced her to do; she unfolded to me the whole sad history of her married life, and of my father's miserable insanity.

“She confessed that, to all appearance, he had brought it on himself, by a return to the wild and profligate courses from which their mutual love had rescued him for a season; and she had learned to look on the fearful curse which cut short his career of excess, as a blessing sent to withhold him from yet deeper sin and degradation; and the anguish with which she saw him, on recovery, yielding, time after time, to the temptations which threatened his soul's welfare, was a thousand times more bitter than any his mere insanity could have inflicted. But nothing wearied out her love; and she had watched and prayed and hoped on to the end. And her great comfort lay in the belief that it had not been all in vain. During his last interval of reason, it seemed as if Heaven's merciful chastisements had at last borne fruit; and in contemplation of the change which then came over him, she had enjoyed a deeper, purer, and more grateful happiness than even in the days of her young love and early married life. Even the fearful close, which would have shaken the faith of

others, only confirmed hers ; and she called the quiet despondency of the last months a shield cast over him by Heaven against the assaults of further temptation. Sad as was the end, he was not responsible for it ; and when Heaven had in mercy removed him from the sphere of his long trials and sufferings, why dwell repiningly on the road by which he had journeyed ? Brought face to face with the most fearful realities of life, her noble, loving spirit had learned, not only to accept and endure them with patience and faith unshaken in God's goodness to His suffering children, but even to recognize the sunshine of mercy through the pall of darkness involving her earthly lot. She had learned to regard insanity as a sort of asylum afforded by Providence to those whose hereditary tendencies to evil might present difficulties too great to resist but for such a temporary refuge from temptations, into which they might heedlessly have plunged.

"But might not such temptations be altogether avoided ? And was it not reasonable to suppose that the heavenly Father who provided such a refuge in his extremity for one who had sinned so deeply, would aid my endeavours, if I would but strive earnestly to overcome the evils of my nature, and to become a useful as well as happy member of His family ? *She* had no fears ; there was no irreversible doom, none but such as man brought upon himself by sin ; and there was help for all, precisely proportioned to the difficulties that beset them.

"Thus, by degrees, she led me first to hope, then to trust, that it depended on myself to secure Divine protection against the calamity impending over me, by resisting temptations to evil, and devoting my faculties to the service of others. And at last, though that was the work of years, she led me to trust that should it after all overtake me, strength would be given me to face and accept the infliction, which could befall but for my own good. So for years we lived on together, all in all to each other. There were times when her life was threatened by severe illness ; all she had borne might well have told on her physical frame ; and then I used to watch her night and day, feeling that my more than life hung upon hers ; and in those night-watches the resolve first stirred within me, which was soon matured to a solemn vow, that never, never would I be instrumental in inflicting on any woman what my poor father had brought on her beloved head ; never transmit to another generation the inheritance of such struggles and sufferings as he had bequeathed to me. From that time I grew

stronger in spirit, seeing a definite path of self-denial before me, in which, if I would submissively adhere to it, I might hope to win the blessing of Heaven on my efforts to lead a useful and happy life.

"Now you know the secret, such as it is, Littleton," pursued Mr. Huntley, forestalling Frank's attempt to speak; "and much as it has caused me to suffer, I have never yet repented or swerved from my vow! and I doubt not," he added, solemnly, "that strength will be given me to keep it still. When I was twenty, I went to Cambridge, feeling that the spectre was laid at last; and my mother came and lived there, too, to be near me, and there was never a day on which we did not meet. Her intellect had kept pace with my studies, as her love with my necessities; and to tell you how I loved her, Littleton!—but you may well conceive it. When I left Cambridge, we went back together to the home which, notwithstanding the effects on our resources of my poor father's extravagance, we were still able to keep up; and we clung to it the more for all we had suffered there together. Then followed happy years. With her beside me, and occupation which I soon found in writing, I had no wish ungratified; and if the spectre of my boyhood sometimes rose before me, it was only to awaken a feeling of profound thankfulness for the mercy which had saved me. From how much of evil I was shielded by the lasting influence of my mother's love and of the phase of horror I had passed through, which brought me to curb my fiery nature, and to substitute the rule of God's will for that of selfish impulse, He who bestowed her only knows; and while she lived, though I sometimes went a little into society to please her, I was never tempted by so much as a thought of the love which was to me forbidden happiness. And when she died, and I watched through the long night-hours her pale angel-face, which, for all its sweetness and heavenly peace, bore yet such indelible traces of the fiery ordeal she had passed through, I renewed, by her coffin, the vow which it has ever since, at times, been agony to keep."

A dark shade of pain crossed Mr. Huntley's features, well attesting the truth of his words; but he did not pause. After the silent endurance of years, it was doubtless a relief to pour out to a sympathising listener all that had so long been pent up in his own breast; and Frank Littleton did not again endeavour to interrupt him.

"How I missed my mother you may imagine; but still it

was unspeakable comfort to remember that she could neither miss me, nor suffer more; and, thanks to her, my path in this world was clear before me, and there was happiness with her to look forward to in the next. So I worked on, harder than before; and if I was lonely, I was not unhappy. I had health and the means of usefulness, and was content with my lot. I can hardly say how I came to accept that invitation to Emlyn Priory; I have always felt it was a trial sent to test my sincerity. But I had just finished a long spell of work successfully; and I liked the Emlyns, whom I had met occasionally at my uncle's; and Florence pressed me to go, and my mother had charged me to be kind to Florence, whose life was not too bright a one—for my uncle was a hard, cold man, though upright and good in his own way; so I came and saw—my other Helen!" said Mr. Huntley, with deep emotion, pausing as if in contemplation of the scenes he recalled.

"I had so long set aside all thought of love and marriage, as things wholly apart from my path, that I did not at first realize what the influence was which irresistibly attracted me towards her. I thought it was her name, and tried to trace a likeness to my mother. But when I saw her next day in her white, bride-like dress, and Sir William Emlyn began jesting about some imaginary duties to be performed by her and myself at the wedding ceremony, it struck upon me, like a blow, that the feeling she stirred in me was a yearning to the happiness I had abjured. As I stood listening to the marriage-service, I began for the first time to realize the magnitude of the sacrifice to which I was pledged; but I only repeated my vow the more fervently, lest I should be tempted to bring such a lot as my mother's on the fair flower beside me. The earnest look in her eyes helped me; for it reminded me of my mother's brightest look, and so of all that too often quenched its brightness; and, during that first visit, I never for a moment forgot the barrier between us, but felt that I was reaping strength and sunshine for my lonely future, in intercourse with one so noble-minded, so enthusiastic for all that was good, and true, and admirable. But when I came the second time, it was different. Florence's illness, and our common feeling for her, threw me off my guard; I thought it was anxiety for Florence which softened me so strangely; and when I awoke to the truth, the morning—you remember it—when Florence was said to be safe, it was too late. I loved her madly, hopelessly, and there was nothing left but to hide it.

“How should it be otherwise? If I had failed to trace any personal likeness to my dear mother, so much the greater was the resemblance in character. Like her, she had the heart to love, the strength to bear, the soul to rise above suffering, and work on and trust on in spite of it. Happier than her, she had still the brilliant, elastic spirits, which contrasted with mine as sunshine with shade. Her mere presence was like an oasis of brightness in the life which now seemed to have been a desert indeed, since she had not blessed it. I could not tear myself away, and quieted my conscience by the reflection that I was neither seeking, nor hoping for, a return of my love—and surely I might enjoy for a little while the bliss of seeing and being near her! It never struck me that others might divine my hidden love, till Sir William again broke my dream by a jest; but I was thankful that I could still feel it a comfort to see the queen-like calmness and dignity with which she repelled his insinuation. I had done her no hurt, whatever I might have been storing up for myself; and I wandered over the hills that night, till I had conquered myself and determined to fly from temptation. The next day was torture. I felt that I had already been in some degree false to myself, and I feared lest I might fail yet more in self-control. There was one moment when I believe fiends tempted me to die with her, instead of saving her; but, thank God, I was not craven enough for that; and then the worst struggle was over. Only when she would have thanked me, it surged up again for a moment; but that passed too, and the battle was won for that time.

“I did not know then that it would have to be fought again. I had schooled myself to expect her marriage with you, for I could not wish her not to be happy, even with another; and when Florence told me the truth, adding that Helen would come to town to be her bride’s-maid, I felt as if a whirlwind had been let loose upon me when I had believed all was stilled, though with the stillness of desolation. What I suffered during the fortnight preceding your marriage was such as your gentle soul, Littleton, cannot even imagine. The passions, the despair, of a fiery nature were roused and centred in the struggle of those days; and when I tried to avoid her, your kindness lured me back, and I was too weak to resist. One day my strength was fast failing me, lulled by the magic of her presence, when her own calm, noble words—little did she dream what hung upon them!—recalled me to myself; and I

felt that there were still guardian-angels on the earth my mother had quitted. So, by God's help, I lived through the ordeal of those days; but when it was over, and I had parted from her without the power to speak a parting word, and I returned to my desolate home, you will not think hardly of me, Littleton, if I tell you that I believed earth held no such other wretch as I; and for an hour I thought that I should go mad, and that this was the fulfilment of the old doom. She was the angel that might have saved me; and I had thrown away my only chance of escape.

"But, thank God! that could not last; and when I faced the horror of the thought that madness would steal upon me unawares in my anguish and loneliness, and there would be none to help me—the very horror of it unveiled the temptation. I had been helped to persevere in the path of duty till now: could safety lie in any other? Or should I be deserted for still persevering? It was for times of need like this, that my mother had fostered my trust in a Providence of boundless, never-sleeping love; and her life had not been sacrificed in vain, for the remembrance of her trust and her teachings saved me. The hour of temptation went by, and left me strong again for the life before me.

"And do not believe," Littleton, resumed Mr. Huntley, eagerly, "that my life is an unhappy one; though a moment of weakness might overtake me just now, realizing afresh what her presence would have been in the home where her image is ever beside me, it will be like a glimpse of sunshine for years in my loneliness to think of her as I saw her to-day. Short of that one blessing, I have all my heart could ask or wish; and the consciousness from what I have been saved is a source of grateful happiness which you cannot estimate. Nor is my life one of intellectual exertion alone, as you suppose, Littleton. There is misery in many shapes too near me in our great Babylon to leave me any lack of scope for other labours; and long night-wanderings, when I cannot sleep, have opened the way to snatch more than one fellow-creature from the reckless courses which must have ended in such a doom as I myself dreaded, or in worse still; and weeping women have blessed my mother's name for the labours of love she lavished on her son. It is little enough a man can do; but it pleases me to think that my mother would see that her son was not quite unworthy of her, were she here with her woman's heart wisdom to help me."

"And now, Frank," he concluded, rising hastily to grasp the hand held out to him, and meeting for a moment Frank's glance, expressive of the deepest and warmest admiration and sympathy, "if you love me, not a word! It will be a comfort to remember that you knew and felt for the shadow on my path; but I cannot bear to hear you talk of it just now—even to say, 'It *was* hard; but thank God that you did right!' Let me go, Frank! What can you, or any one, say but that?"

"But believe me, Huntley, you are wrong!" said Frank Littleton, earnestly.

"Wrong!" exclaimed Mr. Huntley, facing round upon him, pale with agitation and surprise.

"Indeed, I trust to convince you that you are adhering to a mistaken, though most heroic, sense of duty," returned Frank.

"Mistaken!" repeated Mr. Huntley, as if in a dream.

"Yes," said Frank; "believe me, it is so! And first tell me did it never occur to you that you might be sacrificing another's happiness with your own?"

"Littleton! Littleton! why should you torture me with that idea?" exclaimed Mr. Huntley, striding to the opposite end of the room. "Have I not shunned it, prayed against it——"

"I cannot talk to you so far off, Huntley," said Frank, in a faint tone, which instantly recalled the other to his side, while a painful fit of coughing bore witness how little equal he was to the least exertion.

"Do not talk at all, Frank," said Mr. Huntley, bending over him with all the tenderness of a woman; "it will do you harm—and me no good!"

"I must!" said Frank, firmly, as he recovered himself. "I could not die in peace, Huntley, if I did not—knowing what happiness you are missing," he added, regaining strength as he went on, though speaking slowly, and often with great effort, throughout. "Tell me, did your mother know of the vow you had made?"

"No," said Mr. Huntley; "why should I tell her?"

"She would have helped you to see your mistake," returned Frank. "Did she repent, do you think, of the lot she had chosen? Would she, on her death-bed have prayed that no other woman might ever do and suffer like her?"

"No; but she was an angel!" returned Bernard, huskily. "She would have suffered even more for my poor father's

sake ; and she hoped that she had saved him, and she knew that she had saved me ! ”

“ May there be no other woman who would do the same ? ” continued Frank ; “ but that is, perhaps, beside the question. Another might be willing to do what was wrong ; I wish to show you there would not be the wrong you imagine. Listen : you do not regard marriage as a mere earthly tie, but—when it is what it should be—as a spiritual union, designed for the perfecting of two human beings, each respectively, man and woman, as imperfect apart as are the will and intellect till they have been schooled to act together in harmony ? ”

Mr. Huntley assented.

“ And you believe, as I do, that the union of will and intellect, which consists in loving and doing from the heart that which we see and understand to be good and true, is the means, and, when perfected, the sum of regeneration, which consists in the Divine marriage of goodness and truth in the soul ? If so, you must admit that marriage, as the symbol and outward embodiment of such a union, is one of the most powerful aids afforded us for the work of social and spiritual regeneration or healing ? ”

“ And as,” continued Frank, pausing at each question for Mr. Huntley’s silent assent, “ you do not consider yourself, or those labouring under similar tendencies, to stand *less* in need of aid than others, how can you be even justified in rejecting the help of so holy and beautiful a tie ? ”

Mr. Huntley made no answer.

“ I do not say,” pursued Frank, “ that it might not behove you to be doubly careful—only that no man can be too careful—to contract such a tie from no unworthy or selfish motives, but from a true and sincere love, and perception of adaptability to your own character and necessities—just such, Huntley, as you have described your feelings for Helen Montagu ! An insanity being, like all other evils, susceptible of counteraction ; and originating as it does, in the disproportionate predominance of some one form of evil, moral or intellectual, it follows that a true marriage union,—in which two hearts and minds blend, so as to supply the lack of good, and counterbalance, and thus correct, the peculiar evils inherent in each—is *the* means, humanly speaking, by which tendencies to insanity may best be counteracted and cured.”

“ It is not the blessing to myself that I doubt, God knows ! ”

returned Mr. Huntley. "But the selfishness of involving another in such a destiny must be wrong."

"The destiny is not different, believe me, from any other," returned Frank, earnestly; "at least, when we have once looked beneath the surface of life, and resolved to strive, in spite of suffering, against the evils which we trace within and around us, it can signify but little to what peculiar form of strife or suffering we brace our nerves; and without the suffering, who would ever have known what happiness means? And sure I am that any loving woman would be a thousand times happier, suffering and striving with and for the man she loves, than in any life of seeming peace, apart from him, that could be secured to her."

A strange gleam of hope, beautiful to see, flitted over Mr. Huntley's countenance as he listened; but it faded as quickly, and his lip quivered as he replied in a voice choking with repressed emotion: "But the children, Frank? If there were children?"

"Trust for them as your mother trusted for you," returned Frank. "Train them as she trained you, to trust in God, and leave the rest to Him! Would they be less His children, because yours? And do we not, after all, transmit, every one of us, to our children, a worse taint than that of insanity—which, unless brought on one's self, is at worst a misfortune—the taint of sin and self-love, which *may* issue in spiritual destruction? Yet God permits the propagation of the race, knowing that evil may be overcome of good; and whatever heathens might, can you, Huntley, for an instant, suppose, that an All-just, All-loving Providence could suffer a child to be born into the world, for which—except by its own fault—it were better that it had never been born?"

He paused, exhausted; and Mr. Huntley paced the room in speechless agitation, struggling with the new light opened to him; fearing to admit it too hastily, lest the dream of bliss it conjured up should prove but a dream at last.

"I do not expect, I could not wish you," resumed Frank, faintly, after awhile, "to yield the convictions, the settled purpose of years, to my mere arguments: but go home and think of them; work them out, test them by your own standards, and then come back and tell me the result."

"And one thing more, Huntley," he continued, placing his hand on the arm of the latter, who had returned, and stood looking down on him in deep and agitated thought; "do not

suppose I cannot appreciate—I cannot tell you how unspeakably I honour—your heroic sacrifice of your love, under such tenfold trying circumstances. But I think I see what misled you—misled I ought hardly to say, seeing that, in all human probability, your mistake scaled the achievement of the self-conquest, which will yet, I trust, prove to have overcome the taint of insanity transmitted in your family ; but I think that dwelling too much on your own burden led you to imagine it heavier than, and a thing different from the burdens of others, instead of its being only your share of what all alike are born to : whence your idea of an especial self-sacrifice.”

“God knows it may have been !” said Mr. Huntley, humbly and thoughtfully.

“And when you are convinced,” said Frank, more faintly, “come back, and let me see that there are days of such happiness in store for you—as mine have been ; and—perhaps I ought not to say it—but I think it rests with yourself.”

A flush passed over Mr. Huntley’s face, and he grasped the hand of his friend ; but Frank sank back in another fit of coughing, distressingly exhausted.

“I have been letting you talk yourself to death, Frank ! How could I have been so selfish ?” said Mr. Huntley anxiously.

“I am past harm now,” returned Frank feebly, as he recovered himself, with the beautiful smile which took the sadness from his words. “A few hours of suffering, more or less—I would risk more than that for your happiness and hers !”

“God bless you, Frank !” said Mr. Huntley, clasping his hand fervently ; “I cannot tell you—I dare hardly hope or believe it—I must go and fight it out at home by myself. But if ever it should be as you say, God knows I shall owe it all to you, after Him.”

“And if all marriages were such as yours—will be, I must say it, Bernard !—there would be little insanity in the next generation ! Go ; you are quite right ; God bless you ! Good-bye ; not, I hope, for the last time.”

“God forbid !” returned Mr. Huntley. “Find some excuse for me to Florence ; I will come again when I dare ; but now I could not meet *her*, or rest here for an hour. Good-bye !”

With a farewell pressure of the hand, they parted, and Frank Littleton lay still, in exhaustion of body, but in such peace, such happiness of mind as only so unselfish a heart as

his could taste, in the prospect of joy for others he would not even live to witness.

Mr. Huntley was already crossing the park in the direction of the nearest railway station, when he paused to cast, unseen, a hurried look at Helen, re-entering with Florence the little garden-gate. Then, with a murmured blessing on the fair, unconscious head, dearer to him than any upon earth, he went on his way praying fervently,—as he had often, but then in anguish of spirit, prayed before—that even for her sake he might not be tempted to entertain the hope new-stirred within him, unless it should clearly approve itself to his conviction as consistent with the dictates of duty.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO BROTHERS.

What is he
Whose grief bears such an emphasis?

Hamlet.

“YOU have been talking too much, dear Frank!” said Florence, bending anxiously over him, on her return.

“Yes; never mind, dearest,” he said, with a serene look in answer to her anxious one. “I so seldom have Huntley to talk to; and I will be as quiet as you like, now. And Helen shall sing to me as a reward.”

“What! a reward for talking too much?” said Helen, in a tone of playful reproach.

“No,” said Frank, looking at her with a peculiar, pleased smile, of which, in after days, she read the meaning; “hardly that. Let it be for some imaginary deserts, then.”

“On condition of your behaving better next time,” returned Helen; and then she sat down, and sang away the time; and Florence sat by her husband, stilling by degrees, under the soothing influence of the music, the anxiety stirred by the unusual lassitude in Frank’s looks.

Helen went home without hearing more of Mr. Huntley; and she could not help, that evening, dreaming of the past, and wondering, while old scenes rose before her eyes, and words rang in her ear as if they had been spoken anew, if she

should see him again next day? Or would this fresh glimpse of him pass away, too, like a dream?

But the next day all was forgotten in new anxiety about Frank. Whether from over-fatigue, or a sudden change of wind, or both combined, he had been coughing nearly all night, and was now in a state of exhaustion and oppression, under which, however, he suffered far less keenly than Florence; and all Helen's thoughts and energies were called into requisition on behalf of both. In cheering Florence, helping her to tend Frank, seeing she did not absolutely disregard her own wants of food and rest, and performing numberless little duties in the household and for the children, to spare her over-tasked strength, Helen always had head, heart, and hands full when Frank was worse than usual; and they had not yet seen him so ill as he now was.

Nor was trouble this day confined to the Cottage. Late in the afternoon, when Helen and Frank together had at last persuaded Florence to lie down for a few hours, as she would not hear of leaving him at night, Sir William came over from the Priory to say that he and Louisa were going off to Yorkshire that night, Cissy having been taken alarmingly ill, in consequence of an accidental fall. Sir William was doubly grieved to hear of Frank's being so much worse, now that he must be away for some days at least, even should things not turn out quite so desperate as Lord Castleton at present feared. He entreated Helen to hold all the resources of the Priory at her command; to send the children there all day, or night and day too; and, above all, to let him know instantly should any immediate apprehension arise for Frank: though, sanguine as usual, he trusted to finding him much better again on his return.

"Then you must not stay long," said Frank, with a faint smile, in answer.

"Not an hour longer than I can help, you may be sure; but till Louisa is happier about her sister, I could hardly leave her. And surely, Frank," added Sir William, bending sadly over him, "you do not mean—you do not think—but what I shall see you again?"

"Who can tell?" said Frank, musingly. "I grow weary at times, and feel as if the rest must be near. But never look so grieved for me, Emlyn!"—he met his friend's eye with a bright, earnest glance—"Who ever passed through life with so little weariness, so much sunshine, as I?"

"But that makes it no easier to spare you, Frank," returned Sir William.

"You will find some one else to be kind to," replied Frank, pressing his friend's hand; "and if I should not see you again," he added earnestly, "remember how much of my happiness I have owed to you all these long years; and though I have never been able to requite"—

"Don't, don't, Frank!" interrupted Sir William, huskily. "If I, like many others, did not owe you more happiness than you have ever owed us, should we so much grudge the losing you? You will tell me that is wrong, but I cannot help it. There—I must leave you in better hands," he added, as Helen looked in, fearful lest Frank should be talking too much; "good-bye—for the present. I shall soon be back, I hope."

"God send you and yours a safe journey, Emlyn!" said Frank, fervently and significantly. "A little longer, or a little shorter, what signifies? God speed you!"

"God bless you, Frank! I cannot say God speed you!" returned Sir William, wringing Frank's hand with sorrowful energy, and so the friends parted.

Some hours later, Frank had fallen at last into a comparatively quiet slumber, and Helen stood beside him, watching the worn, delicate features, brightened even in sleep by the serene expression which marked the supremacy, over all bodily suffering, of the spirit whose earthly joys and trials were so soon to end—how soon, Helen trembled to think as she watched; and then—Florence!

Just then a hand was laid gently on hers, and, without a word, she put her arm gently round Florence, and the two stood side by side watching the sleeper, Florence leaning her head against Helen's shoulder. It might almost seem as if she divined the thoughts passing through the mind of the latter; for after a moment, without lifting her head, or withdrawing her eyes from her husband's face, she whispered:—"I can let him go now, Helen, dearest. I used to feel that it would be more than I could bear; but now—last night—I felt as if it would be almost better—not to see him"—the whisper was barely audible now—"than to see him suffer so terribly."

"Dear Florence, it is a blessing you can feel so!" returned Helen, in the same whisper. "Doubtless it would be selfish to wish to keep him here; but it seemed more than any one could expect you to feel."

"If he were not so unselfish," said Florence, with tears in her eyes. "But he makes me afraid to be selfish about him. I feel as if I should never find him again, dear Helen," she added, half-fearfully, "if I do not grow more like him."

"Ah! who can guess how he may help you yet?" whispered Helen. "Perhaps even more there than here. There is no help like such love as his and yours!"

"No human help, dear," returned Florence, looking up, as she pressed her friend's hand with a sympathy whose meaning did not then reach Helen.

"I meant that," she answered, without turning her eyes; she had not been thinking of herself when she spoke. If in former days their happiness could still and overshadow her own griefs, how much more their sorrow and their impending separation! The meeting of the previous day seemed already a dream of the past.

Beyond even Florence's hopes, however, Frank rallied again; or, at least, the access of active suffering passed off, and a sweeter serenity than ever diffused itself over his whole being as the pressure of pain and restlessness was once more removed. But the sofa was, without question, transferred to his own room; and though his strength did not for the moment seem sinking further, Helen shook her head over the sanguine hopes as to Frank's even yet getting through the spring and summer, expressed in Sir William's answer to her announcement of his being a little better.

"He would not hope if he were here," thought Helen, as she put the letter aside; for there is an instinct which often tells the least experienced of the approach of the great mystery—mystery, indeed, to the eye of sense alone, since it has been given to the eye of the spirit to pierce the mists that shroud it, and so discern the bright realities, the unveiling of all mysteries, beyond.

A few days passed in almost unnatural painlessness and tranquillity, and all that love could do to gild the tranquil hours as they sped, was done by Florence for her husband, by Helen for both. Gardens and woods were searched for the earliest spring-flowers, which Helen taught the little ones to carry in with such gentle steps and hushed voices as might safely gladden, with the music of their human spring-time, the eye and the ear which would see, on earth, no summer-blooming of these infant flowers. Nothing is quicker than the instinct of childhood at such seasons, in feeling the awe it

cannot comprehend ; and it needed but little bidding to insure their quietness, when so much as within hearing of the sick-room. Lady Emlyn's conservatory, too, supplied many a fragrant bouquet to gratify Frank's old love for flowers ; and when he would look round and say, spring had come before its time for his sake, his smile was still as of old the sunshine to which Helen had been used to say the flowers naturally belonged. Again they read, or even sang, to him, but oftenest sat near him, talking more with the eyes and the heart than with the lips ; yet there was no lack of communion in those still hours.

He recurred a good deal at times to the past, and told them, now and then, passages of his life which he had himself forgotten till they rose up again in the review of old days. But more frequently he spoke of the future, dwelling even on trifles that might influence the welfare of those dearest to him ; and giving messages for some of his poorer friends or neighbours, or others he would not see again. One day, in the midst of a reminiscence of his boyhood, he stopped short, and said :—" Florence, I had forgotten ; I must write to my brother."

" Write, dear Frank ?" said she. " Will it not tire you too much ? Do you know whether he is in England ?"

" I dare say not," said Frank ; " but it will reach him some day—his London lawyer will send it. George had a heart, though he made little use of it, poor fellow. I should not like him to hear—without a line of farewell from me."

" Poor George !" he said, when, with a great effort, he had traced the few lines, and given them to Florence to enclose and seal. " He was made for better things ; I trust he may find it out himself yet."

It was scarcely strange that Frank should have forgotten that he had a brother, to whom some intimation of his state might be due. When he had written to inform his father of his approaching marriage, the only notice of the announcement that followed was a note from his brother, hoping the lady was an heiress worth marrying, and adding, that if such were the case, and he were prepared to throw up his beggarly profession, " the governor" might perhaps be induced to overlook the past, and notice him again. On his father's death a year later, his brother wrote from abroad, telling him there was no will to be found, but it could not signify as there was nothing to leave ; and the estates were so heavily encumbered, Frank must not expect anything from him. Frank's subsequent let-

ters, intimating that he neither wished nor expected anything from the wreck of his father's affairs, and urging his brother to visit him, or let him meet him elsewhere, any time he might be in England, remained unanswered. His sisters, both married, had long since disdained all communication with him; and so, by degrees, he had almost forgotten the existence of relatives, who seemed to have quite forgotten him. And now, the farewell missive despatched, which his kindly feelings suggested, the subject again passed from a mind absorbed in far nearer and dearer interests.

Another week or more had passed away, and the stillness deepened day by day, to Helen's feelings, over the sick-chamber; and day by day the husband and wife seemed drawing closer those mutual bonds of love, over which death must so soon cast a veil, though powerless to sever them.

One evening Frank had been lying, as if asleep, for some little time, and Florence and Helen sat anxiously watching some indefinable change that seemed, during the last hour, to have passed over his countenance, when he opened his eyes, and asked how long it was since Bernard Huntley had been with them? In his voice, too, there was the same indefinable change, and he met Florence's anxious glance with one of such lingering tenderness, which was half compassion, that Helen was fain to turn away; she read its meaning so well.

"About three weeks, is it not?" said Frank; and on Helen's assenting, added, "Would you mind, dear Helen, writing to say I should like to see him again?" His look towards Florence said tenderly that he could not ask her to do so.

"Yes, dear Frank," said Helen, in a low voice. "It might still go by the night post from X——, if you wish," she added, with an inward tremor, and involuntarily stooped to kiss Florence as she spoke.

"Yes, dear Helen, thank you," said Frank; and as Helen left the room, Florence hid her face on the pillow beside her husband's without a word.

"Florence, my own, look up," said Frank, with anxious tenderness. "You are not afraid to let me go? It is but for a time."

"No, dear Frank; God's will be done!" returned Florence, in a voice no ear but his could have heard.

"It is not as if death could really part us, my own," said Frank, in a low voice, but sweet and clear, as if the fervour of

his love triumphed over the languor of disease. "I am not leaving you for a land of shadows, where your love could only follow me with vague and trembling hope. *We* know of our home beyond the veil, and that we shall still be treading side by side, ever nearer and nearer to each other, even though the veil have fallen between us for a season. And the path, meantime, will be the happiest God's love can shape for us—for both of us. You do not doubt it, my own?"

"No, dear Frank," said Florence; "you have taught me to trust. I never could have—but for you."

"I taught you! No; you have had a higher and a wiser Teacher than I," said Frank, reverently. "And if I have helped you, how have you not helped me, brightening every hour of my life since—nay, even before, you promised to be mine! God only knows how happy we have been, or how happy we shall be," he added in a lower tone, drawing her closer to him to kiss away the tears stealing irresistibly over her cheeks.

"Yes, when we have both done our work," she answered meekly; and hand in hand, and heart to heart, the two rested silently beneath the shadow of the great sorrow, which love and faith thus transfigured for them to its true likeness, of a ministering angel. For sorrow is the angel which ministers to those soul-sicknesses which, unhealed by its benignant touch, would sap the foundations of that spiritual health, without which happiness is a phantom, and earth's sweetest security but the hush before the whirlwind.

Helen, meantime, having written and despatched her note to Mr. Huntley, had yielded irresistibly to a reverie, strangely blended of past joy and pain, recalling the occasion of a similar summons she had once before sent him, and mingled with thoughts of the sadder present, in which the dreaded sorrow could no more be turned aside. And oh! what else might not yet be in store? Had she *then*, in those days, but guessed what lay before her? Thank God that she had not—that she could not now!

The sound of wheels startled her, as a carriage drove clattering up, and before she had well time to think that it might be Sir William returned, or Bernard come unsummoned save by his own fears, a gentleman in deep mourning, an entire stranger, was ushered into the room.

He walked restlessly and hurriedly, like a man under the influence of feelings he was little accustomed to control, and

heedless of the servant's murmurs about fetching her mistress, came straight up to Helen, who had risen from her seat, and bowed slightly as he said in quick, uneasy tones, "Mrs. Littleton, I believe?"

"No, she is upstairs," said Helen; "but I can let her know"—

"I beg your pardon; I am not acquainted with Mrs. Littleton. I am Lord Northborough," added the stranger, in answer to Helen's inquiring look. "I have come to see my brother; I understand he is—very ill," he concluded abruptly.

Helen wondered, as soon as the stranger named himself, that she had not detected the likeness to Frank. His hair, indeed, was dark, but there were the same delicate features, something even of the same naturally sweet expression of eye and mouth, only marred by lines of weakness and passion, and clouded now by traces of some ill-borne mental suffering. It was a face made for better things, as Frank had said of its owner a few days before.

"He will be very glad to see you; I will go and tell him," said Helen quickly.

"But, excuse me," said Lord Northborough, with the uneasy shadow crossing his face again; "as a friend, I presume"—Helen bowed—"you can perhaps tell me—is it really true that my brother is dying?" He spoke with such effort that Helen pitied him, though it seemed strange he should care so much for a brother so long neglected.

"It is too true," she replied, with the tears in her eyes, which rise so irresistibly when we are compelled to utter to another fears we have long schooled ourselves to face calmly in our own minds.

"There goes the last chance for me then!" said Lord Northborough, with bitter vehemence, utterly forgetful or careless of Helen's presence. "What need he have buried himself in this hole to work himself to death for, before his time, as if life were not short enough and black enough as it is?" He stood, treading restlessly with one heel on the floor, as if chafing, yet conscious that he chafed in vain, against some vindictive phantom of destiny.

"Shall I tell Frank—your brother—that you wish to see him?" said Helen, after waiting a minute, uncertain what to do or say.

"Thank you, I shall be greatly obliged," he replied, bowing hastily, as if suddenly recalled to himself; and the moment

Helen was gone, he flung himself into the nearest chair in an attitude of deep despondency.

A few minutes later he was ushered into his brother's sick-room, where he found Frank alone, Florence having yielded to her husband's persuasions to go and rest meanwhile, and to her own natural disinclination to see a stranger at such a time. Lord Northborough walked straight up to Frank's sofa, and took the hand his brother held out to him.

"I am glad, indeed, to see you once more, George," said Frank, faintly but kindly.

Prepared as he had been, Lord Northborough was dreadfully shocked at the change in his brother, which might well be startling to one who had last seen him in all the brilliancy of youth and health and buoyant spirits—how many years ago he really forgot. He was, moreover, as may be guessed, little used to the aspect of sickness and death, and recoiled from the unearthly beauty of expression which rendered more unmistakable the approaching end.

"God of heaven! Dying, indeed!" he muttered between his teeth, falling back a few steps, and leaning against the mantelpiece, but never turning his eyes from his brother's face. "Frank, you have been killing yourself with your insane ideas of duty, and your beggarly country doctoring!" he exclaimed hoarsely, in a tone which spoke more feeling than his words.

"No, George; happiness kills no one," said Frank, calmly. "I wish you had been as happy all these years as I have."

"What do you call happiness? I don't believe in such a thing," rejoined Lord Northborough, bitterly.

"You are in mourning, George," said Frank, kindly, as he glanced towards him for some clue to the mood, so unlike anything he had formerly known of the reckless, light-hearted man of the world. "You have met with some loss—your wife, perhaps?"

"That would have been a loss!" retorted his brother, in a tone of fierce irony. "No, Frank," he added, in a strangely softened voice, "my boy, my only boy! The only one of my children that ever lived a week. I believe she murdered them all with her dancing and her follies"—Something too like a curse was muttered between his teeth; he felt, perhaps, that in such a presence he could not speak it aloud.

"But this boy," he resumed, in a passionate, sorrowful tone, "was a fine little fellow, a noble little fellow, and my only one,

Frank. I went away from Paris for about ten days, leaving my boy quite well. Never heard a word while I was gone—of course! Came back one night; found my boy dying of some infectious sore-throat and fever, and his mother—out at a ball! I did, upon my honour! I went off to fetch her—went straight into the ball-room, splashed and dirty as I was,—I had ridden in from Versailles,—that it might not be said she was dancing while her child died; took her out of it, whether she would or no—and what do you think she said? It was infectious, and she was afraid to go near him; so what was the use of her staying at home? The child would soon be well again, no doubt. And when I got back, he was gone! My boy, my boy!”

And, with a passionate burst of grief, Lord Northborough flung himself into a chair near Frank, as if instinctively feeling the sympathy in the eyes he shunned to meet.

“That was sad indeed, George,” said Frank, compassionately; “but surely his mother must have felt it dreadfully afterwards?”

“Felt it? I tell you, she has no feeling,” returned his brother, vehemently. “But there—she is not worth talking of. I had come over to bury my poor boy at the old place, Frank, and I found your note—but I did not think to find it so bad as this, Frank. I wish you had seen my boy,” he added, reverting to his own sorrow.

“I shall see him soon,” said Frank, calmly. “You have been to the old place then? We have never seen much of each other since we were boys there, George.”

“No,” answered his brother, who had meanwhile been watching him with regretful eyes. “And you may wonder what it may signify to me how I find you—and I don’t know that anything does signify much,” he muttered recklessly,—“but I had a vague idea I should send the boy to you some day. I did not want his mother to make him such another as herself, or even as his father—I had grace enough left for that, Frank! And then I thought that some day, when I was quite used up, I should come to you to be preached to; I always thought you fitter for a parson than anything else, Frank—and now it is all done for, every way!”

“I trust not, George,” said Frank, kindly and earnestly. “I believe you could preach to yourself if you would. Why not go down to the old place, and try and set things straight there, instead of”——

"And take *her* there! Live *tête-à-tête* with her! I should cut my throat in a week! The heartless, unnatural"——

"But, George," returned his brother, soothingly, "tell me honestly, did you ever try to improve her? Did you ever try what a good example might do?"

"Example!" said Lord Northborough, fiercely. "Is a woman to wait for an example not to treat her child worse than a brute beast would? I am bad enough myself, but to be saddled with such a —— It's enough to make a man a brute himself, I can tell you!"

"But, George, what did you marry her for?" asked Frank.

"Marry her for? I was obliged to marry; a man must live!" said Lord Northborough, recklessly.

"Then you married for money, George, and you got money," said Frank, significantly.

"And had no right to expect more than my bargain, you mean?" said his brother, with a low, bitter laugh. "But grant that, even, why should it have fallen on the poor boy? Why should he suffer because I sold myself?"

"He has not suffered: believe me, George, he is better and happier where he is, though you may miss him bitterly here," said Frank compassionately.

"Better anywhere than with such a mother and such a father? There may be something in that!" returned Lord Northborough, more bitterly than ever.

"I did not mean that; I should have said the same had one of my own little ones been taken," answered Frank, gently.

"You have children?" asked his brother, with sudden, eager interest. "Boys?"

"A girl and a boy," said Frank.

"The boy may be Lord Northborough yet!" returned the brother, gloomily.

"I trust not, George; I trust you will yet have a boy of your own. And it would hardly make Florence the happier," Frank added, thoughtfully.

"Give me the boy, and he shall be!" said his brother, eagerly. "I would take him down to the old place, and leave her to her follies! It would serve her right, by"——

"I could not take him from his mother for any earthly object," said Frank, gravely.

"I don't believe in mothers!" retorted Lord Northborough. "But how are they provided for, mother and all?"

"Amplly, thank you; that is, amplly for them, though you might not think it much," said Frank, with a faint smile. "But now, George—I am nearly worn out"—and indeed the feebleness of his voice would long since have betrayed as much to a less pre-occupied listener, "tell me what you are going to do with yourself in future."

"Do?" returned Lord Northborough, gloomily. "I shall just go back to the old mill, and put my neck into the old halter, and go round and round till it chokes me. There!—it's no good preaching to me now, Frank, and you shall not kill yourself the quicker for me. If I had not such a mill-stone round my neck as *she* is, there might be some hope of me; but as it is—I'll just try and do as little downright wickedness as I can, for my poor boy's sake, and drown the rest! Good-bye, Frank!"

"You will think better of it yet, George, I trust, for your own sake, too," said Frank, earnestly. "Good-bye, and God help you!"

"And if you do see my poor boy up yonder, Frank,—some people think it may be—" said Lord Northborough, in a low, choking voice, turning back as he left the room, "tell him his father loved him better than he ever did anything in the world, or ever will!"

"Poor George! Pleasure has been a hard task-mistress to him," said Frank, with a sigh, when his brother was gone. "God help him!"

Lord Northborough hurried downstairs and straight for the hall-door, but suddenly turned short into the drawing-room, and rang the bell sharply.

"The child—the boy is in bed, I suppose?" he said to the servant who answered it. "I want to see him—ask your mistress!" he added authoritatively.

Florence had already returned to her husband; and Helen took in the message, which Frank overheard, as she whispered it to Florence.

"Let him. He has lost his boy, poor fellow! Helen will go, dear," said he, feebly, keeping hold of Florence's trembling hand. His rapidly increasing exhaustion had not escaped her.

So Helen went back to Lord Northborough, and led the way to the nursery, where the two children were sleeping, each in its little bed. He barely glanced at the girl, as Helen pointed out which was which; but over the boy he bent long

and earnestly, stooping at last to kiss the round, soft cheek, with visible emotion.

"Would *his* mother dance, do you think, while he was dying?" he asked bitterly, as he raised his head; then, as with sudden recollection, checking himself and adding hurriedly: "I beg your pardon—thank you!" he bowed, and passed out of the room and straight downstairs to his carriage; departing as he had come; one last, dark, restless shadow from the outer world, flitting for a moment across the sheltered sphere of love and stillness, nay, brightness, even, which seemed to diffuse itself, as from a centre, around the couch on which his brother lay—dying.

With a passing feeling of deep commiseration, Helen returned to Frank's room.

"You must let me stay on the sofa to-night, dearest," Frank was saying; "I am too weary to be moved; and it will not signify."

With the exchange of a silent pressure of the hand alone, Florence and Helen prepared to watch through the night beside him; and hours passed on almost in silence. He did not sleep, however. His eyes often rested on Florence with their look of ineffable love; and sometimes followed Helen's movements, as she went in and out, busied in cares for one or both of them; and once, when she was standing beside Florence, he looked up at them, as if to thank them for watching by him, yet grieved they should weary themselves for him.

"But it will not be for long," he said tenderly, and so closed his eyes again.

The serenity or a spirit at peace with heaven, the world, and itself, settled down upon his death-pale features; and his bright hair caught a golden hue in the rays of the single lamp which he would not allow them to shade from him—he loved light as he loved flowers—and might seem to image the crown of life, so soon to drop from the hand of the angel, on the brow of the spirit already fluttering to take wing.

And through the long hours of the night, the hush deepened and deepened over the hearts of the watchers and the watched.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DEAD AND LIVING.

Two hands upon the breast
And labour's done;
Two pale feet stretched to rest,
The race is won:
* * *

Two eyes that look above
Still through all tears;
Two lips that breathe but love,
Never more fears.

Newspaper.

NIGHT had come again.

The morning had brought—for the last time—something of refreshment, and more of enjoyment, in its sunshine and balmy brightness, alike to the spirit and the senses of the cherished invalid. Once again he could take pleasure in all the little arrangements for his comfort and gratification, made silently around him. Once again the sunshiny smile rested on the flowers over which Helen's tears had fallen in silence, as she grouped them anew to look as fresh and bright as possible—she could not go out this day, even to gather flowers for Frank. Once again the sofa was moved to the spot which afforded the favourite view over the Priory Park; and once again the little ones crept in with the few early violets they had gleaned in their walk, and the little voices and footsteps died away as they receded, like echoes of music, from the sick chamber.

The day had passed, Helen hardly knew how. Florence, absorbed in him from whose side she scarcely stirred—listening, or answering a few words, when he could still exert himself to speak; wiping from his brow the chill dewdrops gathering more and more as the day wore on; clasping his hand with the speechless fervour of love which would do all, and can do nothing—let Helen do, for and around her, what she would; thanking her at times with a passive, grateful smile. The surgeon paid his usual morning visit, and went away shaking his head in silence. Helen went in and out to tend on the two in the still chamber, sometimes pausing outside for a few minutes, to subdue the rising impulse of tears which it might have been

hard to check if once let flow. Sometimes she went to see if all was right with the children, but she could not stay with them; and then again she sat for long hours beside Frank's couch, losing the consciousness of time in intensity of concentrated feeling.

It was but a day, but it seemed interminable. The evening had renewed the rapid sinking of the previous one. Frank's words had grown few and far between, and his languid glances had ceased to follow Helen's movements, though she still shared the language of love with which they so eloquently dwelt on Florence, when she sat or stood for awhile beside them. The children had been brought to kiss and be kissed in silence, and Helen had since seen them safe asleep, in their innocent unconsciousness that one who had kissed, and so fervently blessed them in his heart that evening, would kiss and bless them on earth no more. And now it wanted but little of midnight, and midnight might bring Mr. Huntley, if he had started immediately on receipt of Helen's note.

Helen could not herself have told why she should so intensely desire his coming; but, standing there as she did, a little apart, in the deep shadow the lamp-light did not penetrate, her brow resting for coolness on the marble of the mantelpiece, every nerve strung to the uttermost by that mental tension which excludes all sense of bodily fatigue, she was dimly conscious, even while no image dwelt on her mind but that of the two cherished faces near at hand, that her ear was straining for the sound of wheels, her heart sickening at the thought that Frank might pass away before Bernard should be there to stand beside them. Not beside her; how should thought of self enter such a presence? But to that sphere of holy, peaceful influences, beneath the shadowy wings of the heavenly messenger about to set Frank's pure, calm spirit free, she seemed to feel only that Bernard belonged, and that his place there was still empty.

Mr. Huntley was meantime hastening fast as steam could bear him to obey her summons, in a state of mental tension no less intense than her own. At first, on his return home, old associations had re-asserted such influence over him, that he had well-nigh turned in despair from the hope Frank's words had for a moment unveiled to him. But by degrees the spiritual light of truth asserted its supremacy over a mind willing to embrace it, even should it crush, instead of crowning his most cherished desires; and he found that he might

dare to trust and nourish the hope which at first seemed sent but to torture him. Still he shrank from stretching out his hand to seize this new treasure of visioned happiness, lest it should collapse and vanish in his grasp; and he was lingering divided between this undefined fear and his yearning to the dying friend, now doubly dear, when the signal came that he must delay no longer. Sad as was the summons, there was comfort in its coming from *her*; and in his thoughts, as he journeyed, she and Frank were as closely blended, as he with Frank and Florence in hers, in her motionless suspense in the sick room.

"Where is Helen?" asked Frank's faint voice at last.

"Here, dear Frank," said she, moving to seat herself on the low stool at Florence's feet, on which she had passed hours of that, and many a previous day.

"Stay there, dear Helen," he said; "I cannot see you so far off now."

"And you must be so tired, dearest," whispered Florence, stooping to kiss her tenderly.

"No, dear," said Helen, quietly; and another interval of silence followed.

At last the sound of wheels was heard.

"Huntley!" said Frank, in a tone of satisfaction; and, in a few minutes, Mr. Huntley entered through the half-open door, pausing a moment till Florence held out her hand as if to invite him to approach; but when he did so, and pressed her hand with a look which spoke all the sympathy he felt, she turned her head away quickly. Tears must come if she met his eye, and the time for tears was not come yet.

From the same feeling, Helen did not look up to meet the momentary glance of deep emotion which Mr. Huntley bent on her as they shook hands in silence, before he passed round to Frank on the other side of the couch. But it was the glance Frank had been watching for, and a faint, bright gleam of pleasure lighted up his face as Mr. Huntley bent over him, and took the hand he feebly raised.

— "Then I was right, Huntley!" he said gladly.

"I hope—I trust so! God bless you for it, Frank!" returned Mr. Huntley in a choked voice. "I will try," he added, in answer to Frank's glance towards Helen. "But oh! Frank, is it come to this so soon?"

"I was waiting for you," said Frank, with the same pleased smile. "And, Huntley," he added, as his friend bent more

closely over him, to catch what was intended for his ear alone, "you must take care of them; they will need it. And you will stay and do all you can for my poor Florence; I have left all to you and Emlyn to manage"——

"All—everything that man can do," said Mr. Huntley, earnestly, as Frank paused.

"I know you will," said Frank in a tone of perfect reliance; "and, Huntley, may your home be as happy as mine has been!" he added, pressing as he relinquished his hand. "Helen, dear!"

Feeling that these were to be his words of farewell, Helen rose and knelt beside the couch, taking his chill hand lovingly in both of hers, and looking towards him, though with tears in her eyes, for she could not bear to miss one farewell glance that could be spared for her.

"I will not ask you not to forget me," said Frank, clearly though faintly, and pausing now and then for breath; "for I know you will not, dear Helen; only I should like you to remember me in joy and not in sorrow,—so try and think of me when you are happiest. I will not try to thank you for all your love and kindness, dear Helen,—it would be impossible; and I know you will love Florence still, and help her to be happy again among you."

"I will, I will, dear Frank," said Helen, tearfully; "how could I help it, for both your sakes?"

"Thank you, dear Helen," said Frank, drawing her gently to him, and kissing her forehead. "God bless you then, till we meet again."

"Yes, till we meet again!" repeated Helen, tremulously, returning his farewell-kiss, and then knelt down again and covered her face with her hands, not weeping, but pondering the sublime significance of the "meeting again" beyond the veil.

"And what shall I say to you, my own?" said Frank in a lower voice, turning to Florence with that look of ineffable tenderness and almost angelic compassion with which his eyes had of late so often rested on her patient, suffering countenance. "What can I say, to express to you what you have ever been to me, that you may take comfort in the remembrance—higher comfort I need not remind you to seek. Words will not do, my own, but God will requite it to you! Tell me, dearest Florence, tell me that you are not afraid!"

"I am not afraid, dear Frank," murmured Florence, kissing

away the tears which, in spite of herself, fell upon his brow as he looked up to her; "do not be afraid for me. God will take care of me, and I will try to deserve it, that I may come home to you at last. Indeed, I will wait patiently."

"Thank God!" said Frank fervently. "Truly, I need not fear for you, my own!—Florence, dearest," he added more feebly, after a pause, "I am soon going—let us—once more—Our Father,"—and he placed his clasped hands between hers, and looked up reverently and earnestly, waiting to follow her words.

But words would not come. "Once more" was a thought which choked them; and looking hastily round, as if for help, she leaned her forehead, trembling, on the pillow beside Frank's.

There was a moment of utter silence, and then Mr. Huntley's deep voice took up, in low, reverent tones, the words of the simplest and sublimest prayer which human lips can offer to the Father in Heaven, who condescended to earth to dictate it to His children; the prayer which involves every petition human frailty can need to prefer, at any season, or in any necessity: in joy or sorrow, in health or sickness, in the day of danger or the hour of death.

At first Bernard's voice was heard alone then Helen's followed low and clear; then even Florence's; and when Frank's had joined in the final Amen, the spirit of perfect peace was felt in the silence that followed.

One long, lingering look of love Frank lifted to Florence; one kiss more he pressed on her lips as she bent over him when the prayer was ended; and then lay still, as if asleep; his breathing rising and falling on the ears of the listeners, as if the universe gave forth no other sound for them.

Hours passed. The breathing grew fainter,—fainter yet. With eyes rivetted on those closed eyes, the listeners strained their ears for the sound which threatened to escape them, in lengthening pauses which oppressed the sense. Was it gone? No, not quite gone! Not yet!

— Suddenly the eyes unclosed. A radiance of more than earthly sunshine diffused itself over the countenance of the departing; and, fixing his glance full on Florence, loving and bright and clear, without a trace of the dimness of decay to cloud it, he said in tones of unutterable tenderness, "It is but for a little while, my own!"—and all was hushed.

The watchers might watch, and the listeners listen in vain.

The smile was still upon the countenance, but the spirit which lent it had gone home.

A lingering, breathless silence—then a low cry, “Oh ! Frank ! Frank !”

* * * * *

In the silent chamber, where lay, in its calm beauty, the form on which death's still grasp had been laid so gently, Helen Montagu stood lost in thought, in the early twilight of another day. To her no feeling of dread was associated with the solemn presence in which she stood. With a hushed and reverent heart, beneath the influence of the holy awe, the ineffable peace, which the angel of death drops like dew from his folded wings upon hearts attuned to recognize the beauty, the sublimity of his benign mission, she stood with clasped hands, and eyes bent unwaveringly on the still face before her, reading, with the eyes of her spirit, the new page of life's experience now first unrolled before her.

Till now she had never stood face to face with death ; and happy are those to whom life's great reality reveals itself, for the first time, in such guise as now to Helen. Not by some sudden agonizing blow, some torturing wrench of the very heartstrings, clutching the heart's nearest and dearest treasure ere time has been afforded, or applied, to read and recognize in the approaching shadow, the coming of a cloud sent not in wrath, but in love. But by a gentle, peaceful unveiling, a tranquil unfolding of the gates of eternal life, through which, while the departing spirit takes its way, some rays of celestial comfort may descend upon hearts prepared for their reception, by a gradual chastening of the blindness which ignores, and the self-will which rebels against, God's Providential care.

For it is not to hearts *unprepared*, innocent though they be of deep evil or wilful transgression, that death can come with such a revelation of peace, and strength, and consolation, as had now descended upon Helen. She, like others, could look back to the time when death was a thought of gloom and terror, from which she only shrank the more because of the awful, mysterious eternity it heralds. She had needed first to realize the insufficiency of earthly happiness ; the impotency of her own heart's desires to secure their fulfilment here ; and then patiently to turn to the pursuit of higher objects, and to bow her will to the Divine will, before it could be possible for her to appreciate the peace, the blessedness which may attend

on the transition from earth to heaven, even where all that the heart holds dearest must be left behind for a season.

Now it seemed to her as if the viewless hand which had shed the stillness upon Frank's marble features, had been laid on her own heart also, stilling the tumult of earthly feelings, and rendering grief and fear alike strangers to it, in the "great calm" of death's making. Before, it had been so hard to keep back tears; now tears would have seemed an insult to the pale, spiritual beauty of the dead, which could but faintly image forth the peace into which the LIVING had entered. All that long day and night the words had seemed floating through her brain,—“He is not here, for he is risen.”

It had been a long day indeed; passed, as such days must be, between the indulgence of sacred sorrow and the jarring routine of external trifles and necessities; but on Helen nothing had had power to jar. Occupied in shielding and soothing, in every possible way, the feelings of the friend grown dearer yet in her affliction; spending hours with her in the chamber where they had already watched through so many together, she had yet been able to do, order, and arrange, without sense of effort, fatigue or disinclination, all of which Mr. Huntley could not relieve her.

Florence's grief was like herself, gentle and patient: but the deep suffering in her face spoke more eloquently than her quiet tears; and her touching submission might well deepen to reverence the tender compassion with which Helen regarded her. The only time Helen's composure had nearly failed her, was when she found Florence patiently listening to the children's innocent questions, and trying to make, in some degree comprehensible to their baby-minds, why dear papa had gone away, and they could not see him any more. And now night had come and passed; and Florence had at last wept herself gently to sleep, beside the child which Helen's feminine instincts had inspired her to place beside its mother, as a last resource to soothe and compose the overtried nerves, which seemed to render impossible the slumber indispensable to the exhausted frame. Helen would vainly have endeavoured to sleep; and had returned, drawn by a resistless fascination, to the neighbouring chamber, where lay, in their matchless beauty, Frank's mortal remains. Mr. Huntley, whose long night-watch she thus relieved, had wandered out into the cool morning air, and she was now at liberty to surrender herself, freely, to the feelings and impressions which absorbed her.

She had never imagined that death could be so beautiful. Even the sunshine of Frank's most winning smile had been but a foreshadowing of that which now shed its marvellous spiritual sweetness and serenity over the still, marble countenance which would reflect the soul no more. Heaven must indeed have been around the spirit, which could shed such a farewell-glory on the deserted temple of the body. Heaven might well seem nearer to Helen as she gazed.

How inexpressibly trifling and insignificant did she not feel every possible conjuncture of the life to be, which must intervene between this present and the accomplishment for herself of the sublime translation she had now witnessed. All lesser changes, from joy to sorrow, from youth to age, seemed dwarfed to inappreciable proportions, in presence of the one great change to which all are tending, as to life's one great reality and certainty. Other ends may disappoint, deceive, elude us; this cannot! Other fancied realities may grow poor and mean, this but the grander, the more beautiful and holy, the nearer we approach, the more profoundly we fathom it. Death—the sanctifier; death—the strengthener; “death—the consoler!”

Little had Helen guessed that in the presence of death, she would for the first time feel as if all the terrors of life had vanished for ever, now that she had looked on the face of the misnamed King of Terrors, and found it the face of an angel. For now, first, she could grasp and realize the comfort of the thought, that should, hereafter in her pilgrimage, her burden weigh too heavily, the angel might at any moment lift the veil, beyond which we enter into the fruition of repose. She felt as if, should the summons at this moment overtake her, she could at this moment obey it without a tremor; so far off, in that holy presence, did earthly hopes and fears seem removed. Such feelings could doubtless prove but transitory; in their present intensity could last barely for a season; and there would yet be times, impossible as it might now seem, in which her heart would cling again to earth with all the tremulous yearnings of natural affection. But to have so felt, even for a time, must ever form an era in life, and leave an indelible, salutary impression on the character; and Helen would go forth again to the world, strengthened and purified by the glimpse of heaven vouchsafed to her in this sanctuary of life's highest and holiest experience.

Even for Florence she could trust now. If on herself, who stood but on the outer verge, as it were, of this sacred sphere

of love and trial, the blessing could descend in such rich measure, how much more must it not abound for her, who was passing in patience through the very heart of the cloud, the "deep waters" of life and affliction?

The morning was now wearing on, but Florence still slept. More than once Helen stole noiselessly into her room, and had long since borne away her little slumbering companion lest its wakening should disturb her; but still, when she found all quiet in the darkened chamber where rest was needed so sorely, she returned to her former watch by the bed of death's deeper slumber.

Presently Mr. Huntley came in, and stood beside her. All sense of restraint between herself and him, all uneasy consciousness or agitating remembrance, had vanished from Helen's mind in the solemn awe of the scene they had lately witnessed together. They had met upon higher ground, on which mere personal feeling could find no footing; and if in her secret heart there was a deep satisfaction in his presence beside her at such a season, there are times and seasons in life, thank God! when self slumbers so wholly within us, that its joys and its dictates pass unheeded; and this was one with Helen. When, therefore, Mr. Huntley offered her a handful of early violets which he had gathered in his walk, she took, and strewed them around and over the sleeping image of him so dear to both, without a thought of their being offered with any other motive.

"Oh! thank you!" she said, in the subdued tone which involuntarily we use in such a presence. "Florence will like to see them here: he was so fond of flowers."

Mr. Huntley looked from her face to that before them, with no less of tenderness in one glance than in the other. "Yes, that is as it should be," he said in the same subdued tone; "thank you!"

"Sir William Emlyn is below, and would like to see you," he said, after a brief silence. "He returned last night."

"Just too late," said Helen, with a sigh. "Will he not come up? I should like every one who loved Frank to see that smile upon his face."

"I will tell him," said Mr. Huntley.

And if, when he had left the room, Helen gathered up two or three of the violets, and kissed them softly, and hid them in her bosom, it was with a feeling in which Frank bore to the full as large a share as the giver.

"Helen, my dear girl, why are you here?" said Sir William,

as she held out her hand in silence. "I little thought I was too late after all. Poor Frank! poor Frank!" And Sir William brushed the tears from his eyes, as he looked at the face which would brighten no more to the sound of his friendly greeting.

"I like to be here; it does me good," said Helen, in a low voice, in answer to the gentle force with which he tried to draw her away. "And you must not say 'Poor Frank,' Sir William, when he could pass away with that smile upon his face!" she added, leaning on his arm as he stood watching, more steadfastly, the still countenance in its matchless, calm beauty.

"No," he said, drawing a deep breath; "but where shall we find another like him, Miss Helen?"

Helen shook her head. The tears would come now, stirred by Sir William's honest grief; but she soon checked them.

"We must be content not to," she said, after a pause.

"And how does *she* bear it?" asked Sir William, in tones of such heartfelt sympathy, that Helen thanked him in her heart.

"Like an angel of patience and goodness, as she is!" said Helen, tears rising again with the words. "Thank God, she is asleep now!"

"Let her sleep! let her sleep!" he replied, earnestly. "Louisa will grieve not to be here, but it is impossible. Cissy is out of danger, but will not leave her room for weeks; and I dare say no one could do more than you. Come now," he added, drawing her out of the room, and closing the door, "you look too pale by half, and must take care of yourself, too. Huntley and I will arrange everything; and—pray do not go back!" He fancied that what was so trying to his feelings, must be distressing to hers.

"No, I must go to Florence now, for fear she should wake," said Helen; and they parted with hushed footsteps; he to join and consult with Mr. Huntley below, she to sit and watch by her friend.

She might well dread the re-awakening to consciousness of such a loss: but it did not come as she expected. Suddenly across the pallid face, so touching in its expression of sorrowful submission, there passed a faint smile; the lips moved for a moment, as if in speech, and then Florence opened her eyes, and lifted them, suffused with tears, to Helen's face.

"Oh! dear Helen," said she, in a soft, tremulous tone, "I had never thought of that!"

"Of what, dearest?" said Helen, stooping to kiss her, half-fearing she was still under the delusions of slumber.

"That I might see him in my sleep, dear Helen," she replied, shedding quiet tears which it comforted Helen to see. "I saw him just now, dear Helen; and perhaps when I grow weary sometimes of not seeing him, his dear face will come back to me in my dreams again, as it did now."

"Oh! surely it will, dearest," said Helen, touched beyond expression by the humble, grateful tone, even more than the words. How should any comfort be withheld from one who found only cause for gratitude, in what so many would have treated as a cruel aggravation of their distress?

"Are you rested, dearest? Did you go to sleep soon?" asked Florence, tenderly, after a few moments.

"I was not at all tired, dear," answered Helen evasively; but Florence's eyes were resting on her face, and a slight tinge of colour betrayed her.

"Oh, Helen! You have been sitting up all night! And I was so selfish, I never thought of you!" exclaimed Florence, in a tone of keen self-reproach.

"Dear Florence, do not say that! I cannot bear to hear you talk of your being selfish," said Helen, tearfully, taking both her hands in hers, and kissing them. "I really am not tired; you know I am much stronger than you, and it does my heart good to help take care of you a little!"

"Dear Helen, what should we have done without you?" returned Florence; and her tremulous "we" thanked Helen more expressively than any eloquence.

All through that day and the succeeding ones, Helen watched, with deepening admiration and love, Florence's patient efforts to perform the duties that remained to her, and her tender thoughtfulness for others, beneath the heavy burden of grief to which her physical weakness so touchingly bore witness. And throughout that sad week, Mr. Huntley stood like a brother beside them, watching every opportunity of serving and solacing both, without a shade of difference that any one could have detected in his manner to either.

The day of the funeral came, and hand in hand, in the chamber where the spirit had taken flight for its lasting home, and whence the dust had been carried forth to its kindred dust, Florence and Helen passed the interval which the last sad ceremonies occupied. Few words passed between them, and few tears were shed, even by Florence. The struggle,

the parting, had little in common for her with the removal of the coffined clay which was Frank no longer; and her sorrow and her submission lay alike too deep to be greatly stirred or tried by the outward observances of mourning. When all was concluded, she patiently acquiesced in Sir William's wish to see her, and gratefully received the expressions of kindness and sympathy which his warm heart was longing to pour out; attending even to some brief communications on business which it was necessary for him and Mr. Huntley to make.

Helen, meanwhile, secured from her father, who had returned with Sir William to the Cottage to see his daughter, ready permission to remain with Florence, till Lady Emlyn's return to the Priory should in some degree supply her place to the friend who needed all that friendship and sympathy could afford.

Then, too, when they were alone again, Helen admired afresh Florence's gentle acquiescence in her arrangement of dining early with the children, made with a view of somewhat breaking for her friend, that return to the ordinary routine of life which jars so painfully upon the unspeakable change within.

Only when dinner was over and the children were gone, and Helen would have persuaded her to lie down and let her read her to sleep, she looked so worn and wan and weary, Florence for the first time refused her kind care.

"No, dear," she whispered, kissing her, "I must be alone this afternoon. And Bernard must take you for a walk; you do not know how those pale cheeks reproach me."

"If you really wish to be alone, dear Florence?" said Helen, suddenly conscious of an intense craving, mental and physical, for fresh air.

But she did not go till she had seen Florence comfortably settled, with pillow and footstool and book, in the room where her hours of solitary indulgence would always henceforth be passed. Nor could she fear to leave her there. Florence's tears might fall as she received and returned her friend's farewell kiss, but so gently, so calmly, that they must soothe instead of exhausting; and Helen left her, pondering, as in the last week she had often done, on the marvellous strength mere submission can give, even where no great strength of character would warrant the expectation of unusual fortitude.

Alas! that this should be a lesson seldom learned; that few among those who suffer beneath afflictions which seem

intolerable, should guess that not in the affliction, but in their hearts' rebellious chafing against it, lies the worst bitterness of their lot. "It is hard to kick against the pricks;" but once we *accept* the dispensations we cannot evade, their sting is removed; and energies no longer expended in fretting against the bars of the cage of circumstance, may be devoted, with gain till then undreamt of, to the seeking out of blessings and consolations which are always to be found—unless we close our hearts against them—within the circle of grief's straitest prison.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOY-SPRINGS IN SORROW.

Oh! could my heart, mountain-regioned in bliss,
Thy life with love's affluence dower,
Thou shouldst have heaven in a world e'en like this,
And the joy of a life in each hour!

GERALD MASSEY.

HELEN found Mr. Huntley waiting to walk with her. In silence he offered his arm, and she accepted it; and almost without a word they passed into the woods of the Priory Park—now beginning to put forth the tender beauties of early spring—through which, in a bygone spring, Frank Littleton had so often passed on his sunny way, to meet her whom they had now left in her solitary chamber, schooling her loving, aching heart to realize and humbly accept the loneliness of her earthly widowhood.

Their hearts might well be full of sad thoughts of him who had left her and them, and of her to whom they could so little supply his place, as they trod silently through the brown woods and green glades of the park; now over the dead leaves, whose mournful rustling might seem to speak of decay and death; now over velvet sward, which might remind them of the freshness and peace of the new life beyond.

Sunk in such thoughts, and unconscious in what direction they were wandering, Helen simply followed Mr. Huntley's guidance; and he, unwilling to break in upon her musings, merely followed such paths as seemed most pleasing to the eye, or least likely to prove fatiguing to his charge. It was so

pleasant to feel her entrusted to his charge ; and her face, as his stolen glances dwelt on it from time to time, looked lovelier to him in its pensive paleness, than even as he recalled it on the bright morning when, freed from anxiety for Florence, she had rambled with him through the woods in her blithest, happiest mood, shedding brighter sunshine than earth's around her, till he forgot all, and dreamed a dream. Was it only another dream he was dreaming now ?

Suddenly Helen stood still, and dropped his arm. They had come unawares upon the very spot, where, on Cissy's wedding-day, they had all seated themselves at her word in such careless gaiety. There were the lime-trees—leafless now ; the seat she had sportively assigned to Lady Emlyn as the place of honour ; the tree against which Mr. Huntley had leaned, watching them ; Florence's green knoll ; the very spot, not far from her, where Frank had sat upon the grass ; and beyond, on the open stretch of sunny sward, the daisies were springing by thousands where Frank had gathered them at her bidding in his light-hearted glee, to be crowned with them afterwards in sport,—it was too much for her. All the joy, and all the sorrow, past and present, her own and theirs, of which that spot re-opened the long vista, rushed overpoweringly on her mind ; and, leaning against a tree, she covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

Mr. Huntley stood silent beside her, conscious of one impulse only : to clasp her to his breast, and let her weep there the tears which must be shed to lighten the overcharged heart ; but that he had not the right to do. It was no use—he must win it ! He could not stand there to see her sorrow ; he must risk it, win or lose !

“ Miss Montagu,” he said, in a tone of desperate effort, “ it must seem a strange time to you—but I must tell you—must ask you—Helen ”——

But with the utterance of her name, his old sense of the magnitude of the sacrifice he would be asking her to make, and of the hopelessness of her granting it, rushed back upon him, and he stopped short with a feeling of despair.

But he had said enough.

The first sound of his voice had thrilled upon Helen with a feeling of vague alarm—the heart recoils almost as fearfully from some strange, new joy, as from some dreaded sorrow—which seemed to freeze the flow of her tears, and make her shrink from looking up. But when he called her by her name,

she could not, to save her life, have resisted the simple, passionate entreaty the word and the tone conveyed. Look up she must, and his face said the rest.

"Bernard!" she exclaimed, with a look and start of such sudden, tremulous joy and hope, as struck on him almost like a pang with the intensity of answering joy it stirred; and then—she could not have told how it happened, but the burst of tears was finished on Bernard's shoulder.

"Helen! my own! my treasure!" exclaimed Mr. Huntley, bending over her, and soothing her with every tender expression of love he could command. "You must not yet—you do not know"—But it was to no purpose. It was vain to struggle with the blessed conviction that they had found each other, and that nothing on earth could part them now.

"Thank God!" he murmured to himself; "thank God! How have I ever deserved such blessedness as this? Look up, my darling, my Helen, or I shall not believe it! Look up, and tell me it is true!"

"O Bernard!" said Helen, lifting her head from its resting-place, and bending it for a moment unresistingly to the tender, reverent kisses he showered on her forehead, her hands, her hair; "why were you so unhappy? Why did you never tell me before?"

"For the same reason which, now I have told you," returned Bernard, a touch of pain shadowing the deep tenderness of his tone, "now I feel that you will dare the worst with me, makes me almost grieve over you, my darling, lest I should be bringing sorrow upon you, in return for such happiness, as"—

"But what worst, dear Bernard?" said Helen, half-anxiously, half-soothingly. "At any rate, must it not be better together than alone?"

"Ah! Frank said so," said Mr. Huntley looking down on her with eyes of grateful, mournful love.

"Frank! did dear Frank know?" said she, tremulously, her eyes filling again.

"I should never have dared but for him; what shall I not owe him?" returned Mr. Huntley, with deep feeling. "I thought it would be wrong—but I am wrong now!" he interrupted himself, suddenly withdrawing the arm which pressed her closely to him, and taking both her hands reverently in his. "I must tell you all, Helen, before I let myself feel or fancy that you are mine; and if you can then say—'at any rate, must it not be better together?'—may God reward you

for the heaven on earth which those blessed words will open to me !”

“ But tell me all now, then !” said Helen, imploringly. “ If you only knew how the mystery has tortured me—no, I do not mean that,” she added hastily, catching his grieved look ; “ but I used to think it would be so much easier to bear, if I only knew what stood between us, Bernard !”

“ Alas ! that I should ever have caused you what was hard to bear !” said Mr. Huntley, with the same grieved, tender look. “ But tell you now, indeed, I must : how could I delay, with such a stake ?”

Helen sat down on the seat, which yielded a welcome relief, trembling as she was with the bewilderment of sudden joy ; and, placing her hand in his as he sat beside her, waited for him to speak, with the trustfulness of a love which neither doubts nor fears.

He raised her hand to his lips, and nerved himself to the effort, on which hung more than life, to his feelings. He told her all, as he had told Frank, softening only the allusions to what he himself had suffered, lest he should be unduly biassing her by exciting her compassion—but his tones said much he would fain have left unsaid—and then related his unpremeditated confidence to Frank, and Frank’s arguments to convince him that he had been looking at things from too morbid, and at marriage from too earthly a point of view.

Helen listened in silent sympathy, and her hand rested, unwithdrawn, in his. It may be, that had such a prospect as this been placed before her years sooner—when her spirit, untried and unchastened, had as yet not learned to trace the beneficent purpose of all earthly trials and the peculiar adaptation of each to the heart it is permitted to overtake—it may be, that she would have shrunk from facing it ; or that, even had her love overcome in the struggle, and linked her to Bernard to abide the worst with him and for him, she might yet have quailed in secret beneath fears and forebodings which she had not then learned to cast upon the lap of Providence, and which might have gone far to realize and attract the very evil from which she shrank. But now it was otherwise. Her lot, and his whom she loved, must be of God’s ordering, and, therefore, must be good. What then was there to shrink from ? And the insight she thus gained into the nobility, the true heroism of Bernard’s character, deepening and justifying her most enthusiastic love, nay, reverence, seemed cheaply purchased,

now, at the price of years of separation and patience. When he ended, her heart was too full for words, and she neither spoke nor stirred, not dreaming that he could doubt her heart's answer to that which was truly no question to her.

"And now," he said, kissing and releasing her hand after a moment's pause; then rising to stand before her, and proceeding in tones of deep but controlled emotion, "do not suffer yourself to be swayed for a moment by any consideration of disappointment to me, or of the momentary betrayal into which I led you of feelings for which, though we should never meet again, I shall feel eternally grateful to you. It will be happiness enough for me to know, that but for"—

"Bernard, Bernard!" exclaimed Helen, holding out both her hands, and looking imploringly in his face. "What can you think of me, that I should love you less, because you need it more—because you deserve love worth a thousand times more than mine?"

"And you are not afraid?" said he, taking the tremulous hands in his, and pressing them tightly as he bent over her.

"Only of being too happy, Bernard," she answered in a low voice, meeting his eyes as she spoke.

"Then God has indeed been gracious to me!" said Mr. Huntley, as he folded her fervently to his heart.

"To *us*," whispered Helen softly; "say to *us*, Bernard!"

Who shall describe the new spring-glory that seemed to have fallen on all around, as the two sat side by side, in the still, sweet spring sunshine, under the leafless but budding lime-trees; reading each other's hearts deeply and freely for the first time, knowing that henceforward in each the earthly blessedness of each must centre? Not this "the glory and freshness of a dream," early found, to fade from their path ere they had gathered strength to bear the burden and heat of the day; but rather, the glory of soul-true love, matured and purified by trial and self-abnegation; such love as alone may abidingly brighten the dark passages of life here, and be found worthy of seal and acceptance in heart-searching day-beams of the life to come.

"O Bernard," said Helen at last, her eye falling, as she looked up, on the daisies springing in the sunshine before them; "how little I knew,—when I used to think that happiness like this would be too bright for earth,—what the cloud would be which should temper it! How little I guessed,

when Frank bid me think of him when I was happiest, what deep cause we should have to do so !”

“Yes, it has been his doing,” returned Mr. Huntley gratefully ; “all his doing, under Providence.”

“Under Providence, indeed,” said Helen in a low voice. “Is it not marvellous to look back and trace how all that seemed so hard to bear has been nothing but the path leading us nearer to each other ? But for these long years of doubt and loneliness, I should never have been half good enough to make you happy ”——

“Not good enough !” exclaimed Mr. Huntley.

“No, Bernard ; you do not know,” she continued ; “but it is quite true for all that. And but for the terrible dread which fell upon you in your boyhood, who knows that even your mother’s influence might have saved you from being led away like your poor father ? You would not wish to have escaped even that, now, Bernard ?”

“Now !” said Mr. Huntley, with a brighter smile than Helen had ever guessed he could smile before. “That would be a poor test ! But I felt sure, long before I could frame a reason for it to my mind, that without some deep need so terrible a trial would never have been permitted. No doubt, the words of my uncle’s which I was tempted to resent, as a cruel injury, were one means of saving me from the doom, the horror of which they first brought before me. And your words saved me once, too !” he added.

“Mine ?” said Helen in surprise. “When ? From what ?”

“Have you forgotten what you said that day in Richmond Park, about never yielding our convictions to excited feeling, which only blinds us ?” replied Mr. Huntley. “Had I then yielded, unconvinced as I was, I believe I should have gone mad from the feeling that I must deserve to.”

“How little I dreamed what you were thinking of ! I am glad I did *not* dream,” said Helen with a sigh of retrospective relief. “I will never again think I could bear things better if I could know what is hidden from me ! If I *had* known all these years, how could I have borne to think of you, struggling and suffering alone ?”

“Or if I had known,” said Mr. Huntley, looking tenderly into the face upturned in such compassion to his, “that I was torturing you as well as myself,—instead of rejecting the very idea as intolerable !”

"But you do not know how you have helped me, too, all these years," said Helen eagerly. "Do you remember what you said that day upon the hill, about its being cowardly?"——

"Do not talk of the hill!" said Mr. Huntley with a shudder. "And what must you have thought of me that day, Helen?"

"I did not know what to think; I was sure you were unhappy; but that is all past now," answered Helen gratefully; "and it is worth while to be unhappy, when sorrow ends in such happiness as ours!"

"May you always be able to say so," returned Mr. Huntley earnestly. "And doubtless what God sends must be good for us both; so why should I fear it for you? It is man's foolish pride, I suppose," he added with a half-mournful smile, "which would fain have his love, unlike all other gifts bestowed on mortals, bring unmixed happiness to her to whom he devotes it. But you must teach me to love you more humbly, dearest, and to trust you to a higher love than mine. You need not teach me to love you gratefully, Helen!"

The brief brightness of the spring sunshine had already faded, when the two re-entered the little gate, which they had passed with such different feelings a few hours before. Helen felt as if she had since then lived a lifetime, in which her life and Bernard's had so inextricably blended that she could have parted with him that moment for months, years, for a real lifetime, without a shadow of doubt or fear as to their certain and final re-union.

"You must let me go now," she said, pausing at the gate, and extending her hands in farewell. "I must go to dear Florence. And you must not call me 'Helen' for her to hear now," she whispered, with a faint blush, and a tremor in her voice.

"Never, till you permit me," he replied. "God forbid I should intrude my happiness on her sorrow."

"But I am glad dear Frank knew it," she whispered again, tears springing afresh as she named him.

With a silent kiss on the hands he held, Mr. Huntley released her; and when she had disappeared into the house, turned back to the woods again to endeavour, in the cool freshness of the evening twilight, to attune his spirit, long nerved to struggle and endurance, to sober contemplation of the purest and deepest happiness that life can afford.

Helen paused for a moment, to dry the tears which might attract Florence's attention, before she went upstairs to rejoice

her. Florence must not dream, now, of the revolution in her whole life this brief interval had effected. But Helen did not calculate on the impossibility of concealment, where so close an intertwining of sympathies has place, as existed between herself and Florence. Our joys may indeed be shared with those from whom our sorrows would be jealously kept sacred ; but when hearts have been drawn together in the holy and intimate communion of such sorrow and such sympathy as stir and interweave the deepest and purest feelings of which they are susceptible, then reserve becomes, not only treason to friendship, but impracticable treason ; for that which affects the one, is instinctively felt by the other.

Helen found Florence sitting where she had left her, with a countenance of tearful, rapt serenity, which spoke the impossibility of any consciousness on her part of the time that had elapsed. She had been thinking of Frank, and—

“ Into her thoughts of him time entered not, for it was not.”

“ Thank you, dear Helen,” said she, stooping to kiss her as Helen seated herself, according to her wont, on the footstool at her friend’s feet ; “ thank you for letting me stay by myself this afternoon. I have been thinking over all he told me ; and though I know he would say it was best to bring down the thought of him into my daily life with the little ones, and among others, and not to shrink apart to indulge it—and I do not mean to, indeed, dear Helen—yet it has done me good for once.”

Helen kissed the white, thin hands placed lovingly in hers, but she said nothing. Her heart was swelling with aching pity for Florence, with her own happiness, and a passionate yearning for Frank’s sunshiny smile to crown it ; and it was all she could do to command herself.

“ And have you had a nice walk, dear ? Let me see if you have got a little colour into those poor, pale cheeks ? ” said Florence, after a few minutes, lifting Helen’s drooping head between her hands ; but in the twilight she could see little of the deep blush her words called up.

“ Yes, dear, it was very pleasant,” said Helen, steadying her voice with a great effort ; “ and I have been to see after the children ; they have had their tea, and are happy at play downstairs. Let me sit quiet with you a little, dearest.”

“ Yes, we will sit and think of Frank together,” said Florence, in a whisper, stooping to kiss Helen’s forehead again,

"Your head is hot; you have been walking till you are too tired, dear?" she added.

"No, indeed," said Helen, tremulously; but as she rested her arm on Florence's lap, shading her face from her, and Florence kept passing her cool hand lightly over her brow and hair, the tender affection the touch conveyed unnerved Helen more and more. It seemed to make it still more unnatural for her to have been welcoming such happiness, when the veil had just fallen over that of so loving and beloved a friend; and though she strove with her tears, it was to no purpose while that soft touch on her forehead continued. Faster and faster they came, and she dropped her face lower and lower to hide them; till at last a sob startled Florence, who bent over her in sudden alarm. It was no trifle that could stir such emotion in Helen.

"Helen, dearest! what is the matter? What has happened?" she exclaimed, fearfully, trying to lift up the face closely hidden on her knees.

"Nothing, nothing, indeed! Please do not mind me, dear; it is only that I am foolish," said Helen, struggling with her sobs; but check them she could not, and Florence was not to be so satisfied.

"But Helen, darling, I am sure something is the matter," said Florence, in a tone of tremulous alarm which spoke of nerves already sorely shaken. "You are not foolish, and unless you tell me, I shall think something terrible is the matter. And have I not a right to your sorrows, you who have shared all ours?" she whispered, kissing her tearfully. "You must tell me—for Frank's sake!"

"O dear Florence, it is not sorrow!" murmured Helen, unable, thus adjured, to resist longer. "It was—Bernard," she added, in the faintest possible whisper.

"Bernard!" exclaimed Florence, in a tone of tender tremulous gladness, that went to Helen's heart. "O dear Helen! I am so glad, so thankful! It rejoiced dear Frank even to think of it!" And Florence's tears flowed as fast as Helen's now, but still it was she spoke first again.

"Dear Helen! pray! I shall think you are not happy if you cry. Show me a bright face! Can you not fancy what good it would do me?" And she folded her arms lovingly round her.

"O dear Florence!" said Helen, lifting her head at last and pressing her cheek, bright enough too, wet with tears as

it was, closely to her friend's ; "indeed I am very happy about Bernard—but it really pained me to be happy just now ; and I would not have told you for the world——"

"Not have told me, dear Helen !" interrupted Florence in accents of tenderest reproach. "You did not think I could be so selfish as not to be glad for you—and when Frank would have been so glad, too ! He told me about it, dearest, the night Bernard went away before—though I had almost forgotten it again. And he knew how happy you would be. He was sure you cared for Bernard."

"Dear Frank ! it was his doing !" said Helen. "But it seems almost cruel to me now, dear Florence, to be happy without him."

"Not without him, dear Helen," whispered Florence ; "our love will keep him with us, though his face is hidden from us. I have been thinking of him all the afternoon, and he does not seem far away. And besides, dearest, it does me good ; it makes me feel as if all happiness had not gone out of this world with my Frank. Even in very selfishness I must be glad !"

"Selfishness ! You do not know what it means," said Helen, in a voice almost inarticulate with emotion.

Little do those who allow their own joys or their own sorrows to shut their hearts to the sorrows or the joys of others, know how much of pure gladness, how much of deep comfort, they forfeit, for lack of those sacred influences of true sympathy which take the narrowness of self from joy, the sting of loneliness from sorrow ; and which may be likened to soft mists in the atmosphere, now gathering at noon-day to temper and soften the burning radiance of the meridian sunshine ; now falling at eventide in gentle dews, to revive drooping, heart-stricken children of earth.

When Mr. Huntley returned from a long wandering, he found Florence and Helen together in the drawing-room ; the former lying on the sofa, the latter sitting beside her. Helen did not look round to him as he entered, but Florence held out her hand.

"Dear Bernard," said she, "I have made her tell me, and I am more glad than I can tell you, for both your sakes and my own besides. And for Frank's sake, too," she added, with an effort ; "it was one of his last pleasures to think of it, Bernard !"

Mr. Huntley would have found it difficult to reply ; but he

stooped down and kissed Florence for the first time in his life; and notwithstanding their relationship and long mutual interchange of kindness, it nevertheless proved in after-days that Helen had, as Frank foretold, indeed found a brother for Florence. Helen's frank affection for both supplied a link wanting between the two, whose characters were somewhat too similar in natural reserve and intensity of feeling to understand one another fully without such intervention. And as in former years she had thankfully accepted the happiness of others as a balm for her own suffering heart, so now was it permitted her to shed, from her own joy a cheering and softening light upon the deep shadows which the earthly wreck of that very happiness had cast upon the lot of her sister-friend.

Yet it was not on Bernard and Helen's future that the three friends dwelt that evening as they communed together in the chastened sorrow and chastened joy, between which there is no gulf, no dissonance. It is selfishness alone which severs and jars, and when this is laid to sleep for a season, amid the holier and better emotions of our nature, these may all alike meet upon hallowed ground; some hushed, and others subdued, to peace.

They talked of Frank—of his goodness and his love; of his life here, and his life above; of the blessed influences diffused by such a spirit, such a life as his, whether that life be lived on earth, or in heaven; and of the duty and the pleasure it would be to treasure and court those influences in their hearts, to diffuse them again more widely in their lives; thus drawing ever spiritually nearer to him, while the stream of time, too, narrowed between them.

Doubtless there were, in the heart of the bereaved wife, depths of love and sorrowful yearning which no word might profane, no friendship fathom; yet even on these a balm must descend from the atmosphere of tender sympathy which encircled her; and with the friends beside her who so warmly loved and appreciated him, she could feel, even more comfortingly than in her solitary chamber, that he whom her heart ached for, was "not far away."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SUNSHINE AT LAST.

Wrap as a mantle round thee
The gloom thou hast not known,
Until another's sufferings
Seem for a time thine own.
Then take the memory with thee
Into the world again ;
The cloud shall on thy gladness
Melt in refreshing rain.

Lays of the Sea.

THREE more weeks elapsed before Cissy had sufficiently recovered to allow of Lady Emlyn's return home. Helen felt most grateful for the respite ; a return to the work-day life of the outer world must needs be painful, in proportion to the depths of feeling stirred by the events which have for a season secluded us. And now it was not only this, and her reluctance to leave Florence to struggle on alone—but for her children—in her widowed home, but a more personal feeling superadded, which made her shrink from quitting the little sanctuary of love, sorrow, and peace, from whence all petty cares and worldly feelings seemed excluded. Her affection for Bernard Huntley had so long been treasured in the deepest recesses of her heart ; her new happiness seemed so sacred, no less than precious, up-springing as it did in such different scenes from any which generally usher in the realization of a long-cherished dream of love, that she shrank, almost as from a profanation, from the idea of bringing it forth into the daylight of common life, to encounter possibly opposition, certainly matter-of-fact discussion, surprise, congratulation. Yet this must be done as soon as she should leave Florence. She felt almost guilty, as it was, in her silence towards her father when he occasionally rode over to see her ; and once at home, his sanction must be sought. She would not dwell beforehand on the fears which old reminiscences called up, as to his possible disapprobation.

But the time must come, and it came, all too soon to Helen's feelings. Florence wisely declined Lady Emlyn's affectionate importunities to remove with her children to the Priory for weeks, months, till she should be better able to face the

comparative loneliness of her life—how was this to be hoped from seeking to escape it?—but still her constant visits and kindness would do more to break the change of Helen's departure than anything else that could be looked for. Florence did her best to hide how deeply she in her heart felt that she should miss the one who had been beside her through all her sorrow; and talked the more, the last evening, of her and Bernard's future prospects, and of her own anxiety to hear of Mr. Montagu's acquiescence in his daughter's choice, lest her friend should see too much of the blank her departure would leave.

Helen, as the time approached that she must think of it, grew more and more uneasy as regarded her father. His careless words years since about "young lady nonsense," spoken in reference to Mr. Huntley, returned to harass her with apprehension; and might not, must not, his disinclination to such a match be immeasurably heightened by that which Bernard himself had all this while regarded as a bar to their union? Not that she feared any assumption of parental authority to prohibit her marriage. Her father was too fond of her, as well as too liberal in his views of individual rights of action, for that: but would it not be most painful if his only and beloved daughter's marriage were to prove a source of uneasiness instead of happiness to him? There would be no rest for Helen now, till this point should be settled.

Mr. Huntley, in compliance with Helen's wish, had returned to town after a few days and a few more such walks and talks as made Helen feel that she had never before dreamed what happiness meant—and was occupying himself in arranging business-matters for Florence. But it was arranged that he should accept the old standing and lately renewed invitation to the Priory, so as to be there the day after Helen's return home. One day she must reserve to open the matter to her father; nor was Mr. Huntley to make his appearance at Hawk's Nest without permission duly intimated. There should be no appearance, even, of seeking to force her father's consent.

So, bidding Florence a tearful farewell, and promising, in answer to her last reminder—the very thought of it would else have been swallowed up in the deep emotions stirred afresh at parting—to bring or send her the first intelligence of the fate of her communication to her father, Helen entered the carriage sent for her, with the feeling of going forth to some

new, untried world, from the shelter of a sanctuary which the world entered not.

It was pleasant, however, to feel how welcome she was at home. Her father's greeting—"Well, Helen, I was beginning to feel quite lost without you"—spoke volumes; and even Mrs. Montagu seemed pleased to have her at home again, and asked so compassionately about Florence, and all the particulars of her loss, that Helen forgot her usual dislike to the gossiping tendencies which might have some share in the interest manifested. A visit from Ida Merton, the same afternoon, afforded more full and genuine sympathy. Ida could always enter into all her feelings so warmly and deeply, that it needed an effort to reserve from her the secret of which the first communication was due to her father; but, feeling this, she contented herself with promising Ida a visit next day.

Helen hardly knew whether to feel glad or sorry, that an engagement of Mrs. Montagu's, to one of her charitable committees, left herself and her father alone in the evening. The nearer it came, the more she dreaded entering on the subject which she must open to her father. And as he had much to tell her of matters in which he had been engaged during her absence, there was ample leisure for her apprehensions to magnify themselves before she could find resolution and opportunity to begin. At last, growing desperate, she rose from the tea-table, at which she had been seated, not hearing half her father was saying; stirred the fire needlessly, while he drew his chair nearer to it, still talking about a prospective election; and stood absently leaning on the mantelpiece till he paused.

"Well, that looks well, don't you think?" said he. "We may carry Carysfort next time, after all."

The name somewhat encouraged Helen. Surely her father must recognize, when he fairly considered the subject, Mr. Huntley's indisputable superiority of mind and character, which in her estimation placed such a gulf between the two. She nerved herself to the effort.

"I am very sorry, dear papa, I was not listening; I—have something to tell you."

Her suppressed agitation did not escape her father, but his wish guided his thoughts—back to Mr. Carysfort.

"Well," he said, smiling, "I will forgive your not listening, if you will tell me something pleasant."

"But—I am afraid, papa,—I do not know," she answered in a tone of distress; "and I should be grieved, if you were not pleased, papa!"

Mr. Montagu might be a little disappointed, seeing clearly there was no question of Mr. Carysfort; but he did his best to help her, when nothing more came.

"Come, something matrimonial, is it?" said he kindly. "And why should I not be pleased, if you are? Only I cannot guess who your knight may be; he must certainly have kept himself invisible this long while. Or, stay," he added, as a sudden light flashed upon him; "shall I give a guess, Helen? Your friend's cousin, Mr. Huntley?"

"Yes, papa," said Helen, in a low voice, but somewhat relieved by her father's penetration.

"Well, I confess I am surprised, Helen; I cannot fancy your preferring him to—however young ladies, as well as their fathers, must have fancies," said Mr. Montagu good-naturedly. "And he is no doubt a very superior man, if a little too much of a book-worm; sound political views, too; I know Sir William thinks highly of him; if he were rather more practical—and I suppose through your having been a good deal thrown with him lately,—there! I won't quarrel with you about it, Helen."

"Dear papa!" said Helen, venturing to his side and kissing him; "but it was not," she added, resorting to the mantelpiece again, feeling that the worst was yet to come, and speaking with great effort; "it was not lately alone; it—it is an old story, papa."

"Was that the old story?" said her father in surprise. "Come then! I knew there was one, and I never teased you with questions then, Helen; so the least you can do, is to tell me all about it now. Did you refuse him, or quarrel with him, before you went to Brighton that time, and why have you waited all these years to make it up? I only hope he is no lukewarm suitor; no one shall have you, Helen, who does not know what I am giving up in parting with you. There!—I must have it all out; sit down on your old stool, and I promise not to look at you till you give me leave."

Mr. Montagu pointed, with a smile, to the stool on which Helen had been used, in her childish days, to sit at his feet, as she would still sometimes do when they were alone together; and feeling that it must indeed all come out, and that the sooner it was over the better, Helen sat down and told him

the whole story. Her father's remark as to lukewarm suitors led her to dwell more than she might otherwise have done, on the struggle and the suffering it had involved to Mr. Huntley; and her low, tremulous voice sufficiently told how deeply her own feelings were and had been interested. Long before she had finished, her father rose from his seat, and stood looking down on her with closely rivetted attention, which bespoke no lack of sympathy in that which moved her so deeply.

"And you mean to tell me, Helen," said he in a low, somewhat constrained voice, when she had broken off with the simple "And then he told me," which conveyed so much,— "you mean to tell me, that, ignorant as you were of the motives which prompted such apparently unwarrantable treatment of you, you have loved Mr. Huntley all these years, refusing on his account most eligible offers; and that you are willing, desirous, to run the risk—I admit it to be but a risk; I always regarded insanity as the disease of weak and ill-balanced minds—but say, the bare risk, for his sake, of such a lot as his mother's?"

He looked intently at her, as if awaiting the solution of some mysterious problem.

"O papa, if there were any risk," said Helen, lifting her eyes in tearful deprecation to his, "must it not be a thousand times worse to think of his having to face it alone?"

"Then marry him, child, in God's name!" said Mr. Montagu with deep feeling. "God forbid I should come between you and a man who loves you, and whom you love, after *that* fashion! They say men love one way and women another; and on my soul I believe it! When should *I* have thought—but there," he added, returning Helen's tearful kiss of thanks, "if he does not consider himself eternally indebted to me for giving you up of my own accord in this way, when I might have fought him about you these six months to come, I shall never believe in man's gratitude again!"

"I do not think he will be very ungrateful, papa," said Helen, smiling through her tears.

"Well, and what have you done with your paragon?" asked Mr. Montagu, smiling. "Is he to be found in the neighbourhood, or must I send off an express to London after him?"

"He is coming to the Priory to-morrow, papa," said Helen, beginning to realize that her happiness was really safe after all; "and I should like you to go over to meet him at dinner.

"I could arrange it with Lady Emlyn; I must not let her hear from any one else"—

"Certainly, very good!" said Mr. Montagu. "I am not sure, Helen, that I shall not feel quite proud of so distinguished a literary son-in-law. I should have been vexed if you had chosen a man I could not feel proud of for something!"

Perhaps this had more to do than even Mr. Montagu knew, in reconciling him to a match which he certainly would not have selected for the daughter he cherished with pardonable pride.

"And you know, Helen," he continued, with a slight return to his man-of-the-world tone, "tell the Emlyns what you like; they are people to be trusted; but, beyond that, take my advice. Your having been formerly acquainted, and thrown together again lately, is quite explanation enough for the rest of the world. The worst mischief of such things often lies in their being talked of."

Helen would not have cared that all the world should know that for which she herself most deeply revered Bernard; but she could have no wish in opposition to her father's, and could not but feel that Mrs. Montagu's talk, to which she well knew her father alluded, would be well escaped on such a subject. How far it might be possible to induce Mrs. Montagu to adhere to Helen's wish, that her engagement should not yet be announced in the neighbourhood, was indeed problematical; but her father promised to do his best; and, after all, if even Florence could rejoice to hear it, why need any secret be made of the matter? So Helen resigned herself, mentally, to the probability of Mrs. Montagu's immediately spreading the news among all her acquaintance, as "a thing not to be talked of on any account," and, therefore, sure to be talked of the more; and went up to bed, feeling that the outer world was not, after all, so very chilly as she had feared to find it.

It need scarcely be said with what tender congratulations Florence next morning received her friend, on her arriving to impart the good news before proceeding to the Priory, having left her father to enlighten Mrs. Montagu. Helen found Florence in the garden with her children, helping them to make daisy-chains, and wondered if she remembered the incident which linked Frank in her mind with the starry blossoms; till Florence said, in the soft, tremulous tones in which she

always named him : " Dear Frank used to make daisy-chains for the children in the Isle of Wight last year ; and they must not forget anything he did for them."

Helen felt thankful to realize, that where every remembrance is alike treasured up and dwelt on, instead of shunned, the sting is taken from those flashes of memory, which might else seem too grievous for a loving heart to endure. Like all other trials, these pangs of remembrance need but be accepted, to turn to an absolute blessing.

Florence would not let Helen stay with her at all this morning. She was anxious Louisa should hear of Helen's happiness, she said with the faintest shadow of a smile, which half-pained, half-comforted Helen ; making her think that, perhaps in time, Florence might be able to smile one of her own sweet, bright smiles again.

" What makes you smile, dearest ? Have they any suspicion ?" said she, a little nervous at the idea of Sir William's probable greeting, should he have learned her secret.

" Not that I know of, dear Helen, or why should I be anxious for them to hear ? Good-bye, dearest, and be very happy !"

" Five weeks to-day !" murmured Florence to herself, looking with serious, tearless eyes after Helen, when the latter had driven off, with her eyes full of tears for the friend to whom she must not say, " Be very happy !" in return. " Frank would be so glad that I can really feel the happier for their happiness ! He said I should !—God bless him ! God bless him !"

And then tears must come, and the sweet, pale face was hidden in trembling hands, till little hands pulled at her gown, and little voices called " mamma " back to her remaining treasures and the daisy-chains again.

At the Priory, Helen was shown into Lady Emlyn's morning-room, the servant saying that he would let his mistress know ; and she was advancing to Sir William, as she supposed, sitting reading behind the newspaper, when the paper was suddenly dropped, and her hand seized, but not by Sir William, as the reader started up.

" Bernard !" she exclaimed, with a tone and look of such unmistakable delight, that his grasp and greeting must needs redouble their tenderness ; and though she blushed, she by no means resented his involuntary lover-like salute.

" You have seen Florence ? That was what made her smile just now ?" she asked, smiling herself.

"Yes, last night ; I could not help coming a day sooner," said Mr. Huntley, apologetically.

"Papa was most kind," continued Helen, not seeming greatly angered by his disobedience ; "he is going to invite himself to dine here to-day to meet you ; I came to tell Lady Emlyn."

"Oh !" said a voice behind Mr. Huntley—Helen had forgotten to look beyond him when the deceitful newspaper was withdrawn—"I am sure Lady Emlyn will be delighted—*delighted*, Miss Helen !" And there stood Sir William, bowing and smiling, his eye positively dancing with glee at her confusion.

Helen instinctively snatched away her hand from Bernard ; but she could not get out a word.

"I—I forgot Sir William. I beg pardon !" stammered Mr. Huntley, scarcely less confused than herself.

"Forgot Sir William ! No wonder ! Something to forget him for, it seems !" said that gentleman, maliciously.

"Sir William, you are really too bad !" said Helen, trying to recover herself, but colouring desperately as she held out her hand to him, knowing it would be useless to try and run out of the room.

"I too bad, Miss Helen !" said he, keeping her hand prisoner. "As if I had been doing anything improper ! Huntley, my good fellow," added he, with a comical face, "your presence—don't you see?—embarrasses Miss Montagu. Do me the favour to hasten to the conservatory, and tell Lady Emlyn she is wanted here directly !"

"Now do you mean to tell me," said Sir William, when Mr. Huntley, nothing loth had departed to execute the commission, "that my old romance is coming true, Miss Helen ?"

"What can I know about your old romances, Sir William ?" she replied, recovering a little now Bernard was out of sight, and trying vainly to extricate her hands, which Sir William kept hold of, to secure a full look of her face.

"Don't equivocate, Miss Helen ; that is wrong !" said Sir William. "Have you repented of neglecting your duty all these years, and are you going to marry Huntley after all ?"

"I don't know ; I have not said anything about marrying yet ;" said Helen with an air of grave consideration.

"Miss Helen ! Don't exasperate me !" exclaimed Sir William. "Are you engaged to him ?"

"Why—something like it—I believe !" said Helen, with a

sparkle of the old mirth in her eye ; the fun in Sir William's was irresistible.

"You are ! Then—dear me !" said he, suddenly releasing her, as Lady Emlyn and Mr. Huntley entered the room. "I must take care what I am about now ! You came in a great hurry, I think ;" he added, turning to his wife.

"I thought you wanted me directly," said she, turning with a smile to greet Helen, pleased to see her husband in his wonted gay spirits, which the loss of his friend had greatly over-shadowed of late. "What is the matter, Helen, dear ?"

"O dear Lady Emlyn, it is all Sir William !" said Helen, half-amused and half-distressed.

"All Sir William !" Huntley, I appeal to you !" exclaimed Sir William in tones of injured innocence. "Now I leave it to you to state the case"—

"Sir William," cried Helen, if you do not go away this moment, I will not speak to you for a week ! I came to see Lady Emlyn and not you !"

"Not me—oh I know that !" he returned. "Well, let me know when I may come back ; I will take all possible care of him !" and he followed Mr. Huntley, who, exchanging a glance with Helen, had already left the room.

"Why really, dear Helen, there seems a mystery this morning !" said Lady Emlyn, with her bright, pleasant smile, when they were left alone.

The mystery was soon unfolded ; and Lady Emlyn was as delighted as Helen's natural liking for sympathy could desire. Nor was it very long before the gentlemen were re-admitted, when a slight change was made in Helen's proposed plan ; she being herself kept prisoner at the Priory—whether she would or no, Sir William said—and an invitation despatched to Mr. and Mrs. Montagu to dine at the Priory. Helen added a note for Ida, brief enough, but quite sufficient to more than make up to Ida's affectionate feelings for the loss of the promised visit ; and Mr. Huntley proposed to be the bearer of both missives, if Sir William would lend him a horse.

"A horse ! A dozen ! Only too happy !" returned Sir William. "I must make hay whilst the sun shines, now ! But don't be jealous, Huntley ; I promise good behaviour,—when you are not here to set me a bad example."

"Really, William, I hope you will recover a little before this evening," said Lady Emlyn ; or what will Mrs. Montagu

think? He is worse than usual to-day, is he not, dear Helen?"

"If possible!" said Mr. Huntley, with a smile, coming to Helen's assistance.

"Two to one! I must look out now!" said Sir William.

"Come, Huntley, let me despatch you, before I am utterly annihilated!"

So Mr. Huntley was carried off, and duly despatched, and Sir William returned to boast of having expelled the enemy. In the afternoon, he insisted on having Helen to take a walk with him, and sending Louisa to see Florence alone; and finding him, as they said, perfectly unmanageable, the ladies gave him his own way, Louisa charging Helen to get him into better order by dinner time.

"Now, Miss Helen," said Sir William, before they had walked very far, "don't call me very impertinent; but I shall have no peace till I know why you were not engaged to Huntley ages ago? If you do not tell me, I shall only have to wheedle it out of Louisa, or get at it in some underhand way; so had you not better save me the trouble?"

Helen laughed, almost in spite of herself, at Sir William's air of comic determination, but only for a moment.

"My dear Sir William," said she earnestly, "you must know I could not call anything impertinent that you might say or do; you have long been too kind a friend for that."

"Well, I hope so," said Sir William, pleased. "Then tell me, like a good girl, what the hitch was. To tell the truth, I have been owing Huntley half a grudge all these years, not sure whether he had behaved quite well to you,—though you know, at first, I thought it was you ill-using him—and, you see, I should not like to owe your husband a grudge for anything."

"No, indeed you must not," said Helen, with tears in her eyes, at the bare thought of Bernard's being blamed for what did him such honour, and premising her father's wish that it should go no farther, she told Sir William in a few words what he wished to know.

— He looked very grave at first; but when she came to Frank's intervention, his face brightened again.

"So Frank thought it was safe for you? Well, I know no one whose opinion I would sooner have taken on any point," said he, when she had done. "Besides, if we once begin shying at possibilities, we might soon all make ourselves miserable

for the rest of our lives. No ; Hope, or as Frank would have said, Trust, is the true motto ! Poor Frank, to think of his not being here to help us all make merry over you, Miss Helen. His was always the brightest face among all the bright ones ! ”

“ It was, indeed,” said Helen, tearfully.

“ Now, now, Miss Helen, I am not going to have you cry to-day,” said Sir William, kindly ; “ and I promise to owe Huntley no more grudges. On my word, knowing what men are, I don’t believe there is one in ten thousand that would have acted like him. Frank was another who would, but I don’t know a third. There, are you satisfied ? ”

“ And I will not make any speeches about yourself, Miss Helen,”—he continued, sufficiently answered by her pleased, grateful look.

“ No, pray, Sir William,” interrupted Helen, imploringly. “ I really could not stand any just now.”

“ Ah ! by-the-by, I may keep them for Huntley,” he returned, with the merry look in his eye again, and having no idea of producing his prisoner with pale cheeks at dinner-time, proceeded to talk her into spirits again ; and led her such a ramble through woods and fields, as effectually brought back the roses he desired to see.

The dinner, which Helen rather dreaded, passed off most happily. A few words which her father contrived to whisper to her before it was announced, together with his manner to Mr. Huntley, set her quite at ease, as to the footing on which he already stood with his future son-in-law ; and Mrs. Montagu, who was at first doubtful how to receive the news of the engagement, had been so much flattered by Mr. Huntley’s peculiarly courteous and deferential manner, and by the invitation to the Priory, that on her arrival she was only waiting to be talked over by somebody into a state of genuine approbation. For Helen’s refusal of Mr. Carysfort had been a set-off against the similar insult to her nephew ; and she had somewhat softened to Helen of late, and was not wholly insensible to the romance of the long secret attachment which might now be inferred ; so Lady Emlyn’s sincere and assiduous congratulations, and polite attentions to herself, finished the business ; and when the ladies retired together, after dinner, she very cordially embraced and wished her step-daughter joy, considerably to the relief of the latter, for any jar must have been painful on such an occasion.

Nay, when the gentlemen joined them, Mrs. Montagu actually deigned to intimate most graciously to Mr. Huntley, that she believed their dear Helen to be in the adjoining music-room; and no one was much surprised that music did not follow his adjournment thither. It was not till coffee had come and gone, and tea was served, that Mr. Montagu looked n, as if by chance, to the silence of the music-room.

"Birds flown!" said he to Lady Emlyn, coming back with a smile. "Are you in the secret?"

"No, indeed," said she, a little surprised.

"Oh! dear," said Mrs. Montagu, with her little affected laugh, of which it was too much to hope that she should ever lose the habit now. "A romantic moon-light walk, I suppose!"

"Romantic! I doubt not," said Sir William, shaking his head. "I can guess where they are gone. Over to the Cottage—to poor Littleton's," he added, in explanation to Mr. Montagu, "to see her, poor thing!" And he turned away to the window, by which Frank had so often "taken them by storm," as he called it, in just such moonlight as this.

Sir William was right; and Helen and Mr. Huntley were now retracing their steps in the bright moonlight, as slowly and almost as silently as they had threaded the glades of the park, on the afternoon which neither of them would ever forget. But if silent, they were not sad. Their happiness, deep and serious in its tone, made them feel more thoroughly at home, than as yet, at least, they could elsewhere feel, in the atmosphere of Florence's bereaved, but not desolate, home, and of her sympathy chastened, but not chilled, by grief; and Helen purposely directed their walk, that they might return by the little stretch of daisied sward beneath the lime-trees. Both paused, almost on the self-same spot as once before, and Mr. Huntley laid a hand tenderly on that which rested on his arm, but neither spoke for some minutes.

"Bernard," said Helen, at length with tremulous earnestness, "if I were to lose you, or you me, could we bear it as Florence does?"

"Dearest, there are partings far worse than death!" he replied, looking down on her with the serious smile which always seemed to her to be shining from the depths of his soul. "We could never lose each other now!"

"No, that is true!" she returned, in a voice tremulous no longer; and they walked on, in the pure, still moonlight

across the little spread of daisied sward, with its countless night-closed blossoms.

* * * *

A few months later, Helen Huntley sat, for the first time, beside the fire in the old home—no longer desolate now—to which its master had brought his bride, after six weeks' ramble among Swiss mountains. Her husband stood near her, before the fire, but not looking at that.

"Now I do feel as if I had just dropped into my proper place in the world," said she, looking up with a quick, bright smile. "Those books and papers of yours look like something to work at for our livelihood—we have no right to be happy on idleness—and this very arm-chair feels as if made for me, Bernard!"

"My mother's arm-chair!" said Mr. Huntley, with his serious smile and look of deep love, answering Helen's bright one.

"Oh, I am glad!" said Helen, laying her hand reverentially on the arm of the chair, feeling almost as if it were on the hand which must so often have rested there. "I am only afraid of one thing, Bernard," she added, looking up after a moment. "You almost frighten me sometimes; you must promise not to spoil me!"

"Indeed I could not afford to," he returned, taking both her hands in his, as she stood up beside him, looking up into his face, half pleadingly, half in jest. "Even though I may think there is not much danger, it will be as well not to try. But how about me; am I to be spoiled?" he added with a smile.

"Would you like to be?" she returned, playfully.

"No!" said Mr. Huntley, kissing her, gravely and tenderly. "We will do better than spoil each other; we will help each other in our home here, to grow fit for our home beyond, Helen!"

"We will, we will, Bernard!" was Helen's tearful reply; but it is well with them who are as happy when they smile, as Helen was, notwithstanding her tears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE WIDOW AND HER CHILDREN.

Let the soul deeply engrave in its belief this answer to the oft-recurring question, "Why am I thus tried?" *Because this affliction, and no other, could save thee.*

MRS. H. B. STOWE.

WE must now return to Florence Littleton, striving, in the loneliness of her early widowhood, to subdue her aching heart to that full acquiescence in the lot assigned to her, which she deemed it an imperative duty to yield.

Nor was the struggle the sorest in the early days of her trial. On her heart, too, after Frank's death, had fallen that hush of more than earthly stillness, which we may well believe to be diffused by the presence of the angels whose mission it is to welcome the freed spirit on the threshold of its new life, and which so softens the grief it cannot wholly heal, that we are at first tempted to ask if this indeed be grief, or no. But the blessed calm must fade after a season, as she returned to the sphere of outward life: and especially when Helen's marriage and removal deprived her of the comfort of sympathy such as none else could afford, there were hours when she again felt, with little short of despair, that it was impossible to realize in her heart and her life the comfort of the truths her intellect acknowledged.

Still these were only hours, and the unwavering acknowledgment was much; and she struggled on, not forgetting where and how to seek the help which is never sought in vain, against the selfishness of sorrow which alone could poison the possession of the many treasures still left to her; while her one chief treasure had but left her for a home in which sorrow could not touch him, and sin of hers alone sever him from her. There are, indeed, as even she could feel, partings far, far worse than death; and the dread lest shortcomings of her own should build up a barrier between them, proved often a stronger incentive than any other to exert herself against the indulgence of grief, which she admitted to be a practical repining against Providence. It was such comfort, too, to think of Frank's happiness! She needed but the command of a few hours of solitary thought, to bring back her spirit to submission and thankfulness for the time,

She had been long accustomed to look to the other world as to a home,—a home not shrouded in the vague mist of uncertainty, which, to many, renders it a land of shadows indeed, wrapping the loved one from sight, and almost from thought, of those left behind ; but a home of many mansions, with all the familiar features and realities of this world restored, only transfigured and spiritualized like those who enter it ; in which the desires of all hearts find fruition, and all faculties of every individual mind find that scope for free and fruitful exercise, in which—and not in inaction—lies their true rest. In this home, Frank was not, therefore, as one lost to her. She could still think of him as leading a life of active and progressive usefulness in the wider and purer sphere which he had now entered ; as devoting, there, as here, but more perfectly, his affections and energies to the service of Him who reigns here as there, would men but learn to recognise the workings of His providence ; as living, loving, and labouring like herself, though apart from herself, save only that he was freed from the thralldom of pain or weariness ; and perpetually treading on in the path which would blend again with hers when her earthly probation should be accomplished. It needed but time to think this out, to secure afresh a glimpse of heaven-like peace, even amidst her darkest hours ; and these glimpses sustained the flagging hope that such peace might, in due time, be lastingly achieved.

And as she struggled on, there dawned upon her mind by degrees a new light, unveiling the need within herself of this, the great trial of her life. Not till Frank was gone, and she began to address herself without him to her remaining duties, could she be led to feel how completely she had allowed the question, "Would Frank like it?" to supersede the true touchstone, "Would it be right?" Not till her earthly prop had been removed, could she discern how much, in relying upon his counsel and guidance, she had lost the habit of trusting to and seeking that higher guidance, which alone can never fail. She had, in fact, been well-nigh making an idol of her husband ; and from such idolatry how should she have been saved, except by one of two trials—either by losing him, as she had lost him ; or by awakening to discover the weakness, the worthlessness, of the staff she leaned on? And who that has ever loved, will doubt that the former must be recognised as Heaven's tenderest blessing, when compared with the agony of the latter? Florence never doubted ; and seeing

clearly now what specific evil in herself she must strive to overcome, before she could hope for reunion with Frank—that she must learn to put him second, and God's will first—it became easier to strive ; and by slow degrees the heavy cloud began to lift and lighten, till she could again feel her love for Frank, and her remembrance of their past happiness mingled with hope in the future, to be the richest and choicest of her earthly blessings.

It may well be imagined, how, as the strife of soul subsided, which all must in some degree experience when called on to part from those they truly love, Florence's affections entwined themselves with tenfold fervour round the children in whom Frank's love and Frank's smile seemed anew to shine upon her ; and, by degrees, all her earthly hopes and aims centred in them with an absorbing tenderness, which scarcely left room for any void in her life, but what was easy to fill with the aid of patience and of prayer.

When Helen and her husband came, in the early spring, to spend with her the anniversary season of her loss, Helen marvelled at the serenity and cheerfulness, the power of entering into her children's enjoyments, which this one year of steadfast, patient endeavour had achieved for Florence.

"But is it not very hard sometimes, dearest?" asked Helen, tearfully, one day, when they had been talking of the past.

"No, dear, not now : it was at first," said Florence, the tears starting in her eyes as she spoke ; "but now, when I cannot think happily of him, I go to the children, to teach them, or play with them ; and if they are asleep, I sit and look at them, and think of all I must do for them, to make up for his being gone : and how could I be so ungrateful as to repine, with so much left? Especially when I know how it would grieve Frank to think of my saddening Franky and Florry's bright little faces, by always wearing a sad one myself. Look ! here they come ! Mamma's darlings ! - My own !"

And when Helen saw the look of loving delight with which she kissed and caressed her living treasures, she could better realize that it was not so very hard ! To love and be loved is the heart's great want ; a sphere of usefulness, the healthy spirit's great need : and in both of these respects her friend was still blessed above many who yet are happy in life ; without counting the treasure laid up for her in heaven.

If Helen had a fear for her friend at this time, it was lest her intense love for her children should hereafter spoil them,

by blinding her to the possibility of their having faults; but as yet they really seemed unspoilable. In little Frank's eyes there beamed his father's almost angelic smile; and a similar sweet seriousness of disposition heightened the magic of the resemblance. Florry seemed to have inherited more of Frank's playful buoyancy of spirits; and the two together formed as charming a picture of childhood's innocent beauty, as mother's heart and eye could desire. No wonder that Florence almost worshipped them!

With what self-reproach she now looked back to her first selfish wish to die with Frank, which would have left these treasures to the care of strangers! With what a pang, when she had asked and won Helen's eager promise to be as a mother to her darlings, should anything remove herself, she realized what must yet be the gulf between any love even her dear Helen could possibly bestow, and her own love for them! Were they not *her own*?

Helen left her friend with a lightened heart; and as the spring and summer passed on, and Florence's letters spoke of her little ones' felicity in childhood's paradise of cowslip-balls and strawberry-gatherings, and pony-rides—Sir William's kindness had provided the ponies—it might really seem as if she were no less happy than themselves in their happiness, and in the thought how it would please Frank to see them enjoy themselves together.

The summer passed on; and early in August the Emlyns must needs leave the Priory for a time, to join the Castletons in a yachting excursion, to which Frederick said that he had treated himself as a reward for his long devotion to agricultural pursuits; and as Cissy and the "encumbrances" were sure to be sea-sick, at least at first, Louisa must perforce come and help him take care of them. She was loth to leave Florence; but the latter would not hear of her staying on her account. What would Frank think of her, if she could not be happy with their children for a couple of months?

It always puzzled Lady Emlyn that Florence could speak of Frank as she did. It could not be want of feeling, for who ever loved more devotedly? Yet were she to lose her own husband, Louisa felt as if she could never speak of him without anguish; and must it not needlessly sadden the children's little lives to hear everything associated with their dead father? However, it was dear Florence's way, and must doubtless be right; and so she took leave of her with kindness re-

doubled, to atone for the transient feeling Florence's words had stirred.

"No, I want nothing else," murmured Florence, her eye resting on the little pair at play in the garden. "Nothing else, my own treasures!"

Was that loving, gentle heart henceforth to rest at peace, in the shadow of the comfort so gratefully embraced?

It might seem strange that it is just such as Florence whom we so often see exposed to repeated shocks of severest trial, but for the remembrance that the higher and purer the nature, the less can its internal necessities of purification be judged of from without. And it has been mistakenly supposed, that a mother's love is less exposed to the taint of selfishness than other human affections. "The trail of the serpent is over them all;" and it may well be doubted, whether maternal love, as involving the strongest possible sense of property in its object, is not more especially open than any other to the danger of being thereby misled. Not that a child can be loved too well, but it may be loved too selfishly: too much as *one's own*; too little as one of the children of the Father in heaven: too much as a source of present happiness; too little as a sacred trust, to be rendered account of in the end.

But few days had elapsed after the departure of the Emlyns, before Florence was made uneasy by the sudden indisposition of her little girl; and the same evening, little Frank was similarly, though more slightly, attacked. Cholera had been prevalent that summer; and though little beyond the milder forms of the disease had been known in the neighbourhood of X——, there had been enough of sickness, and even death, from these, to render the mother's heart keenly alive to the first throb of alarm. Nor was her alarm decreased by the injunctions of Mr. Mortimer, Frank Littleton's medical successor, to keep up the children's strength, as he did not think them constitutionally very strong; though, he added, they were both so slightly attacked, that there was no present cause for uneasiness.

But their indisposition continued and increased, especially little Florence's; and though even hers was still not very severe, it was obvious, from the rapid wasting of her strength, that the doctor was right, at least as regarded her. Little Frank was so much more still and patient a child, that the illness seemed to take less hold on him; but the vague feeling of alarm, which had from the first possessed itself of Florence,

tightened at her heart as she watched and tended her eldest child—the “second Florence”—whose advent had been so rapturously hailed, as the crowning joy in the cup then full even to the brim. Yet for all that, though she might not yet know it herself, it was little Frank, the image of his father, the last, choicest pledge of their deep mutual happiness, who lay nearest to the mother’s heart; and thankfulness for his slighter sufferings helped to sustain her hopes. Perhaps she feared the less for little Florence, because the fear would not have been so terrible as that which she was thus far spared.

Three more days passed away, and who shall describe their sadness to the tender mother? No more pattering of fairy footsteps, no more ringing of childish laughter about house or garden; no more rosy night-long slumbers, deep and calm as none but childhood’s are. Little faces clouded and paled by suffering and weariness; restless tossings; tearful petitions to get up and run about, or go into the garden—“for a little, just only for a little;” broken slumbers scarcely less restless than the long, sleepless hours; and little hands growing thinner and whiter day by day.

Yet there were still, through all, gleams of such precious joy as only a mother’s heart, so tried, could ever know. “Poor Florry is so tired of lying in bed; go and sit by her, mamma, she wants you most!” or, “I *will* try to be quiet, dear mamma; I am not so good as Franky, though he is the least!”—were words which must bring tears of grateful tenderness to the loving eyes, which rested with such mournful, passionate tenderness on each of the little treasures by turn. And happily, she had little time to think; she had barely time to snatch, now and then, a needful hour of rest, when both chanced to be asleep at once; but if Franky chanced to wake before her, he never failed to promise to be so, *so* good, if only nurse would not wake poor dear mamma!

On the fourth day, there could be no doubt that little Florence was sinking fast. All that Mr. Mortimer, and another medical man, whom he had of his own accord brought over from X——, could say, was, that while the child could take the nourishment that was given her, there was still hope that she might rally. Florence well knew how slender was the thread of hope thus held out to her; and sat down, with desperate calmness, to write the truth to Helen, to whom she had as yet told nothing more than that her children were unwell; loth to stir the anxiety, or cloud the happiness, of her friend,

in her joy over her own firstborn treasure, barely a month old. But now, if her fear were to come true, Helen must be prepared to learn it.

"I hope it is not wrong," she added, after briefly explaining how things stood, "but I feel as if I could bear it better than if it were little Frank. He always seems my own Frank over again; and God will help me to comfort him and myself, if this sorrow comes upon us."

It may well be guessed how little such words expressed the pang at the heart of her who wrote them; but she felt the need of keeping herself firm and strong for her darlings' sake, and barely trusted herself to think as she wrote. Then she hurried back to her post.

"Mamma," said little Frank's weak, gentle voice as she went in; "is Florry asleep? She does not answer me to-day."

"No, darling, not asleep," said Florence, tremulously; "but she is very weak, and it tires her too much to talk."

The children's beds had both been brought into the room in which their father had died, as the pleasantest and airiest the house afforded; and their mutual affection had rendered it so great a pleasure, when well enough, to talk to each other and share their little amusements, that there had been no thought of parting them, especially as Florence could thus be with both at once. But now she turned to ask Mr. Mortimer, in a voiceless whisper, if one of them had not better be moved into another room? His assent and advice that it should be little Florence, as she was hardly conscious enough to feel it, she felt as a death-warrant.

But when little Frank discovered their intention, his pathetic entreaties frustrated it. He feared he had been naughty in calling to Florry, and nothing could pacify his remorseful tears, till they promised not to move her.

"When he is asleep, by-and-by," Mr. Mortimer whispered; but Florence forgot the injunction, in the breathless night-watch that followed.

Sinking, sinking, sinking! Florence knew too well that gradual ebbing away of life; she had watched it in that room before; and somehow, through that dreary night, it seemed dimly to comfort her that it was there she was watching. The sphere of Frank's presence which, to her feelings, always pervaded it, seemed to soothe the throbbing agony at her heart. There, better than elsewhere, she could picture him by her side, whispering words of comfort in her ear; telling of the

child's bright waking in the pure and sinless atmosphere of the better land; reminding her once more that it was "but for a little while." And who, in sooth, dare mourn for a child, falling asleep so to awake? How durst she even pray that it might be averted, or offer any prayer but one? "Thy Will be done!"

Then she would steal aside for a moment, to comfort herself by a glance at her safer treasure. Little Frank was often awake that night; but he never sought to detain her from "poor Florry;" and his serious, half-pitying eyes, reminded her more than ever of his father's, when he said, "Kiss Florry for me, Mamma," as if he knew that he should himself kiss her no more.

Morning found Florence raining silent tears over the wax-like form, from whence the child-spirit had slumbered gently away into eternity; silent tears, lest her grief should disturb the slumbers of her other treasure; but resistless, till little Frank's voice called "Mamma."

"I will go and speak to him," said Mr. Mortimer, compassionately. He had been in and out many times during the night, having other patients; and had just returned when all was over. Florence profited by the respite to wipe away the tears which Franky must not see, till she could nerve herself to break the truth to his childish apprehension; and then, with one long kiss on the little lips that could return it no more, she turned away to little Frank's bedside.

"Here is Mamma, darling," said she, kissing him, and he opened his eyes with a smile of pleasure, but so languidly, that she looked hastily at the doctor, who was feeling the child's pulse on the other side. He did not meet her eye; and whispering a few directions to the nurse, turned to leave the room.

But Florence was beside him in the passage in an instant, her white lips framing the question she had no power to utter.

"I am afraid your little boy is not so well this morning," he said, with so much reluctance, that the words bore double meaning to the mother's ear. "But let me advise you to lie down now; you must be quite worn out," he continued, feelingly. "I have told the nurse all that is needful, and you may find him better when you wake."

Florence shook her head. Sleep, with this new, unspeakable dread upon her! But she thanked him mechanically for

the kindness intended, and returned to little Frank, feeling as if a hand of ice had been crushed down upon her heart.

It was but too true that, in the last twelve hours, the boy had grown rapidly worse, as the broadening daylight now more plainly showed her; but who could have had the heart to intimate it to the mother, watching the last moments of her other child? She shed no tears now; the very power of weeping seemed frozen within her.

"Mamma," whispered the child—how faint the little voice was growing!—"Nurse told doctor Florry was gone. Is she gone to dear papa?"

"Yes, my darling," answered Florence, breathlessly.

"And did you go with her, Mamma?" asked the child.

"No; I stayed to take care of Franky," she replied, in the same breathless whisper.

"But how could she go all that way by herself, Mamma? She was so little!" said Franky, with a look of half-awed compassion in his grave little eyes.

"Not by herself, darling," said Florence, her heart wrung with growing fears by the child's strange questioning. "God sends His beautiful angels to take care of little children on the way."

"How nice! So then you could stay with me, Mamma!" said the child, nestling his cheek to hers, and closing his eyes. But presently he opened them again.

"Will the beautiful angels come for me, Mamma, when I go to dear papa?"

"Yes, dearest," whispered Florence, the agony tightening at her heart with every word. The little eyes closed again with a pleased smile, and the child said no more.

We pass over the hours that followed; hours during which the mother felt as a swimmer may feel, clinging for life to the last spar of the wreck; conscious that with every moment his power of grasping it is ebbing slowly, but surely, away.

Day was again waning when Franky opened his eyes, and murmured: "The angels are coming, Mamma."

With ice-cold lips, Florence bent over him yet closer, and pressed a long, long kiss to the little fluttering lips which even then seemed trying to meet hers; but when she rose up again, they were still.

Unconscious of the lapse of time, Florence was standing, late that night, beside the bed on which now lay, side by side, lovelier if possible in death than in life, the tender forms of

her heaven-claimed treasures. She had shed no tear, and was conscious of no definite feeling but the death-like chill which had fallen upon her heart in the morning, deepening and deepening till all seemed numbed within her. But before her there seemed passing the while two distinct trains of thought, almost like pictures unrolled to her sight.

Above, she seemed to see the bright, new life into which her little ones had entered; the flower-wreathed, music-gladdened, angel-guarded path, which stretched far away into the tearless future before them.

Below, she seemed to see herself in her desolate home, wandering from room to room, from house to garden, looking everywhere, and listening, as if seeking the little faces and the little voices which had filled it with sunshine and music—looking, listening, in vain!

“Alone!” she said, at last, in a low, still voice, covering her face with her hands, as if to shut out a picture. “Alone! God help me!”

“Florence! Florence! My poor darling Florence!” And Helen’s loving arms were twined closely round her, and tears fell faster than kisses upon the pale, still face which was instinctively laid upon her shoulder, as on some welcome, unlooked-for pillow of rest.

“Dear Helen!” whispered Florence, in answer. “God forgive me for saying I was alone!”

“Come away, dearest; you must, indeed!” pleaded Helen, imploringly. “You look so white, you frighten me!”

“Yes, dear,” said Florence, in the same submissive whisper; “but kiss them first; they look so lovely!”

But though she stooped to kiss away the tears which bedewed the little angel-faces when Helen’s kiss had been given—the new-born mother’s love at whose heart was quickening it to tenfold acuteness of sympathy in her friend’s anguish—Florence still shed no tear herself. And though she suffered Helen to draw her away into another room, and to tend her as she would, she sat there so pale and tearless still, that Helen was terrified. Her own words and tears were powerless to break the unnatural calm, which spoke of powers of endurance overstrained to the uttermost, and at last she suddenly left the room; but, quickly returning, knelt down by Florence, and laid something on her lap, while she looked up into her face with swimming eyes.

“Love it, dear Florence! It shall be yours, too! It shall

love you and comfort you"— She could say no more for tears, but she had touched the right chord.

Clasping the sleeping babe in her arms, and covering it with true mother-kisses, "too soft to wake the sleeper," Florence burst into a flood of tears. The trance of tearless agony was broken.

Differently, indeed, had things turned out from Helen's anticipations, when she had looked forward—as one of the blessings of the solitary life to which she was resigning herself—to the prospect of being of use to these very children, whose forms she had now seen reposing in the deep death-slumber, which places at once beyond the reach and beyond the need of all earthly ministration.

CHAPTER XXX.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

Our early loved! Hath their after-path
 From our steps far parted been?
 Hath the hand of prudence, power, or wrath
 Raised barriers our love between?
 Yet still in our dreams their shadows come,
 Through the waste of parted years;
 Though the path be marked by many a tomb,
 Or its sands be wet with tears.

FRANCES BROWN.

YEARS had again passed on, when the New Year's Eve found a numerous party assembled in Bernard and Helen Huntley's home—the old home still, but so changed that its master sometimes declared he scarcely knew it again, since his life's sunshine had come to gladden it—

"Filling it full of love and the rosy faces of children."

There were many children there this evening, mixed with elders of all ages. The grand "tree" of the evening had now burned out; and the juniors of the party might be seen and heard engaged in merry games; while the seniors talked in groups apart, or mixed in the children's amusements.

Sir William and Lady Emlyn might be seen, each looking, perhaps, a little older than before, but each full as ever of the

warm kindness of heart, and the cheerfulness of spirits, which made them ever and everywhere favourites. Sir William's eye had not lost its fun, and he still occasionally committed himself by addressing his present hostess as "Miss Helen," for the sake of reminding her that it was all her fault, for having taken so long to get married. Lord and Lady Castleton were there too, with a whole tribe of children, who might easily be recognised by their likeness to their bright-eyed, frank-hearted father, and their pretty, gay, but rather too doll-like mamma. Lord Castleton bore some slight traces, in manner and appearance, of his long country residence; but his affection for his brother had known no diminution, and he had had much difficulty in forgiving Helen for becoming Mrs. Huntley, especially as Horace's cynical turn did not decrease as years wore on.

Helen, herself, looked almost younger than in former days, from the gentler, brighter expression born of years of wifehood and motherhood; and her eye never failed to light with peculiar pleasure when it rested on her father, conversing earnestly and confidentially with her husband, whom he had long since learnt to estimate as highly as even she could desire. Mrs. Montagu was not of the party. Her health somewhat failing, she now seldom left X—, whereas Mr. Montagu's business in London seemed perpetually to increase.

In the midst of the merry groups of children, romping with them, leading their games, and enjoying himself seemingly as much as they, might be seen a gentleman, whose fierce moustache suggested his military profession. Major Marston had returned but a few weeks since to claim Helen's promise of friendship and cousinship—her other promise, duly observed, had led to a correspondence for years past—and "Cousin Gerald" was already a household word in the mouths of her children. He had, on his first arrival, looked with keenly scrutinizing eyes, to see if Helen were as happy as she deserved; and thereupon extended his cousinly amity to her husband as warmly and fully as to herself. For though he had never fallen in love again, and Helen might still in his secret heart remain his ideal of feminine perfection, he had got over his disappointment; and afforded a creditable instance of the triumph, so rare in man's love, of the unselfish surviving the selfish part of his attachment. Children had become his passion now; and Helen's eldest girl, some three or four years of age, was his especial darling. He at once

detected a likeness to her mother, which no one else had ever seen ; and devoting himself to her as the best of playfellows, never failed, if she were naughty, to assure her gravely, that unless she were quite good, and minded all her mamma said, he would never be able to marry her when she grew up ;—a threat terrible, of course, in proportion to its incomprehensibility.

Helen, meanwhile, had not forgotten her plans for his consolation ; and smiled, well-pleased to see him and Ida Merton making friends together over the children's games, which they vied with each other in leading and inspiring.

Florence Littleton, too, might be seen, mixing among the younger children especially, till Helen, watchful of her easily overtaxed strength, rescued her by gentle compulsion, and placing her on a quiet ottoman in a secluded corner, gave her in charge to Mr. Carysfort, who had just come in, "to keep her out of mischief," she said. Pale and sweet, Florence's was a face which few would pass without a second glance. If it bore deep traces of suffering and patience, they were traces of suffering passed through, and patience no longer felt as pain ; and all who had known Frank Littleton in his last illness, deemed that something of the more than earthly serenity of his glance and smile was reproduced in hers. It might be seen, too, from the smile and caress which she stooped, now and then, to bestow on a child as it passed her, that she had learned to diffuse on other children the warm maternal affection which had suffered so fearful a trial in the loss of her own treasures. The trial had purified, not crushed her. Since that time her home had been with Helen and her husband, in whose affection and congenial society she found solace even from the first ; and in whose busy life and growing family she found scope for the exertion needful to the restoration of cheerfulness. The Priory Cottage was not deserted : they all spent some months of every summer there ; but few were the days of precious solitary indulgence which Florence there permitted herself, fearful lest brooding on the past should weaken her for life in the present. At the Priory and at Heathlands she was ever a welcome and courted guest ; but her heart's home was with the friends who had watched with her by Frank's deathbed.

Mr. Carysfort and she met often, for he was as frequent a visitor at the Huntleys, as his now busy life would allow ; and they always met as friends ; she retaining the kindly feeling which a gentle-hearted woman must needs bear to a

man on whom she has, ever so innocently, inflicted pain ; and he the high respect of former years, deepened and softened by compassion for her heavy trials.

But now he sat silent beside her ; for he was always ashamed of feeling cynical near her, and yet this evening he did peculiarly so ; contrasting his lonely bachelor-chambers and dull lawyer's life with the homes and lives of men who had wives like Louisa, or Helen, or even Cissy, to gladden them. Florence, too, really tired as Helen had guessed, was glad to be quiet, till, as some gayer burst than usual from the children struck her ears she said :—

“ It does one's heart good to see all those dear, merry children so happy,”

“ Well, yes,” said Mr. Carysfort slowly ; “ I suppose children may be happy.”

“ You do not mean that you think only children may ? Surely you have given up those old heresies of yours ? ” said Florence, with a faint smile.

“ Now that I have become a useful and respectable member of society, as Mrs. Huntley tells me ? ” returned he, smiling too. “ But I am afraid I grow more confirmed in them ; how few people one ever sees really happy ! ”

“ So much depends on our estimate of happiness,” said Florence.

“ I am sure mine is not an immoderate one,” said he. “ I do not suppose one need have all one wishes or wants, to be happy ; but *enough*—enough to feel content with what one has, and not to feel how gladly one would exchange with almost any one. Besides,” he added with a touch of bitterness, “ setting myself aside, I do not see that those people are happy who ought to be, even according to their own theories. Now I can imagine that Mrs. Huntley is really very happy—while it lasts—but why should she be so much happier than——”

He stopped short, having quite forgotten in this little ebullition of cynical feeling to whom he was talking.

“ Than I am, you mean ? ” said Florence, gently. “ But perhaps——”

“ Mrs. Littleton,” said Horace, quickly, “ I did not mean—pray forgive me—I forgot that I was talking and not thinking. But believe me, little as your theories ever came home to myself, I always thought them so beautiful, that there is no one I had not rather have seen disenchanted than yourself ! ”

He spoke with such real feeling, that no offence could possibly be felt.

"But indeed I am not disenchanted; I think as I always did," said Florence, eagerly though tremulously: "about happiness, and its being within our own reach, I mean."

Horace looked at her in surprise.

"But do you then—if you can forgive such a question—do you think Mrs. Huntley has done and deserved so much better than——"

"Dear Helen! I dare say she has," said Florence, affectionately; "though I had not thought of comparing in that way. What I meant, is"—she spoke with some little effort, as in old days, and yet feeling that to speak was a duty—"that perhaps she may not be so much the happier, as you suppose. At least, when I sometimes see the look of anxiety on her face, if she sees Bernard looking over-worked and wearied, or little Bernard giving way to one of his bursts of passion, or when any of them are ill, I feel that no one knows the blessing it is, to think that all *my* treasures are safe—safe from suffering and sinning; and I can most truly say, that not only would I not wish to change my lot for hers, but that I do not, dare not, wish my own had been differently ordered."

She paused with tears in her voice, though not in her eyes; and Mr. Carysfort looked at her in silent wonderment.

"And when one remembers," continued Florence, fearful lest she should fail in doing justice to her long-cherished faith, "to how many the thought of sickness or of death comes like a cloud of terror across their brightest hours, it is no small privilege that even sickness and death should become actual blessings to look forward to, since the one may always lead to the other which holds all my treasures in store for me."

"I can understand that, in one who believes as you do," said Horace in a low voice; "but then how can life be anything but a burden?"

"A burden!" said Florence, her voice trembling with emotion, "When I have much more to make me happy than many have all their life long! Such a brother and sister as Bernard and Helen, and all their dear children to love me, and let me love them; not to speak of so many other kind friends and blessings! And all my own happiness besides," she added in a low voice.

She was silent for a moment; then recalling what had led to

the conversation, resumed:—"But, perhaps, I ought to confess one mistake which I made, unconsciously, in those days of old. Perhaps I expected, that because I believed all trials to be sent as blessings, I was therefore to be spared the experience through which they really become blessings; forgetting how much there must be in myself, as in every one, of the self-will which makes it difficult to accept the good provided for us—the happiness which, I still think, we may all find if we seek it in a right spirit, and neither throw away, nor underrate, what we possess."

"Then I suppose I underrate what I possess," said Horace, with a sigh; "for I cannot accuse myself of ever having thrown away my happiness."

Suddenly there rose before Mr. Carysfort a vision of a pair of soft, pleading eyes dimmed by tears; while he seemed to hear himself saying, angrily and recklessly, "Now, or never!" And the vision called up the fresh, warm feelings of long-past years, which had first taught him that his liking for Louisa had been merely fraternal; feelings never stirred since he had allowed pride and petulance to suffocate, and frivolous excitements to supplant and wither them; for even his love for Florence had been selfish and passionate, and Helen, as she had truly discerned, he had only admired. But why should these old memories recur to him now, when he had not so much as seen or heard her face or voice for years? So vividly, too, that he could fancy he heard that same sweet voice singing——

"What a pretty old ballad, is it not?" said Florence Littleton's soft tones beside him.

He started up; the voice at least was no dream. Casting a hurried glance at the face of the singer, seated at the piano in the adjoining drawing-room, he turned back and inquired, in a voice he could hardly command, if Florence knew the name of the lady singing.

"Ida Merton," said Florence; "a great friend of Helen's. Have you not met her before? She has been staying with us for some weeks."

"Ida Merton!" repeated Horace. The dream-mists were thickening round him; and turning slowly away, he wound his way through the rooms, so as to approach the singer from behind, unseen.

"Now another, dear Ida," said Helen; "you shall choose your own this time."

"Sing the song you sang on the Lake of Geneva, on the twentieth of June, in the year Forty"—said a voice behind Ida, too low for any one but her to hear.

With a scarcely perceptible start, Ida mechanically began playing the air of the song—some old association was doubtless connected with it—but the prelude was a long one. Not that the meeting was a surprise to her, and she had felt glad it should thus occur in a large party where it might pass almost unnoticed. But she had schooled herself to expect a formal bow, a scarcely conceded recognition; and now to hear him address her in the way best calculated to stir all the memories of those old days, in which he had been wont to stand behind her chair, and say, "Sing this song" or "sing that,"—implying too, that he had seen and listened to her when she had little dreamed of it—was almost too much.

Exerting, however, her utmost efforts, she threw out her voice to its full pitch of power and sweetness in the rising strain of the air; but there it suddenly failed her. She faltered, struggled for a moment with the choking sensation in her throat, burst into tears, and rising hastily, escaped through a side-door near which the piano stood.

"She has not long lost her mother; and this is the first time she has sung in company since," said Helen, apologetically to those who stood near; but hastened then to follow Ida, by no means satisfied with her own explanation.

"Ida, dearest! What is the matter?" she said, anxiously closing the door of the little boudoir adjoining, in which Ida had taken refuge. "What is it, dear, tell me?" she added earnestly, as Ida remained leaning against the mantel-piece, her face hid in her hands.

"Nothing, nothing, dear Helen," she replied in a moment, stooping to stir the fire as a pretext for turning her face away. "It was very foolish of me—an old song I used to sing long ago—that was all." But she coloured so at the untruth implied in the last words, that Helen was not to be deceived.

"Ida, I am sure that was not all; your cheeks always tell truth, if you do not," she remonstrated, in a tone of affectionate scolding. "What was it?"

"Dear Helen, I cannot tell you now," said Ida, so humbly and gently that Helen was sure it was no trifle had disturbed her; "but little things sometimes bring back old troubles; and that was all, I assure you. Pray go back, dear; it will be more noticed if we are both away; and do not be angry if I

THE WEDDING GUESTS.

do not come back just now. Pray go, dear," she entreated, tearfully.

"Well, I suppose I must ; and never mind coming back at all if you had rather not," said Helen, kissing her, only half convinced ; and wondering, as she left the room, what could possibly have so distressed her, she was just closing the door when a hand was laid on hers ; and, looking up, she met Mr. Carysfort's eye, full of such agitated, imploring earnestness, that she fairly started in amazement.

"Mrs. Huntley—I beg, I entreat of you—I must speak to her ! I—I knew her long ago," he added, colouring, as he became aware of Helen's extreme surprise.

A whole flood of light broke upon Helen at once ; and without word or look, she passed on and re-entered the drawing-room, with a burst of such positive glee at her sudden discovery, that she hardly knew how to behave herself discreetly, and answer, as a matter of course, the inquiries made as to her friend's indisposition. She was obliged to sit down and sing the merriest air she knew, by way of safety valve for her delight.

"Poor Gerald !" said she, with a smile and a sigh, as her eye fell on Major Marston, a few minutes later, still in the midst of his little playfellows. "So this is the end of my match-making for his benefit ! Well, I suppose there must be some old bachelors ; and he is much too good and unselfish not to be happy somehow !"

Ida, meanwhile, left alone, had reverted to her former position ; and was bitterly chiding herself for her weakness and folly, as she tried to think it. Was it possible that she could still be so childish, after all these years ?—and when a footstep close behind her startled her to look up, her first impulse, on seeing Mr. Carysfort, was unmistakably betrayed by her hasty glance towards the door as an escape.

"Ida, Ida ! for the sake of old days !" said Horace, in a tone of earnest remonstrance, "Will you not even speak to me—shake hands with me ?"

Ida recovered herself, and held out her hand, though she coloured as she did so. If she were foolish, he must not guess it.

"Indeed, I am very glad," said she, gently ; "but I was so surprised."

"Not more than I was," he returned quickly. "I thought you were married years ago !"

"What could make you imagine that?" said Ida, colouring again, in spite of herself.

It was impossible, notwithstanding the lapse of years, for either to speak to the other as a stranger. They had parted, in a moment as it were, with no time to cool or diminish the affectionate intimacy of betrothed lovers, and meeting again for the first time, seemed carried back to the point at which they had separated; standing side by side, neither looking at the other, and speaking in low, constrained voices, much as if they were meeting after a quarrel and parting of the previous day.

"I saw you with a gentleman and a child in the boat, that day you sang the old song," said Horace.

"I was travelling with some friends, and Mrs. Singleton was not well that day," said Ida; and there was a pause.

"And you are in mourning," said Horace, presently, "for—your mother, I am afraid Mrs. Huntley said."

"Yes," said Ida; "she had been failing for some time; I could not regret it on her account, though"—But she would not say to him, that it left her alone in the world.

"And—your father?" he asked hesitatingly, looking desirous somehow to express sympathy, but fearful how it might be received.

"He died many years ago," replied Ida.

"Not before I saw you that time?" asked Horace, as if hoping for an answer in the negative.

"Yes, years before; soon after we went to X——."

"To X——?" cried Horace, starting. "But you have not been at X——since then, surely?"

"Yes, all the time," said Ida in a still lower voice.

"Fool! fool! that I have been!" he muttered between his teeth, half stamping with irrepressible vexation. "But how should it happen I never met you, never heard of you there, Ida?—I beg your pardon, it was the old habit," he apologized, colouring deeply.

"You were not likely to," said Ida tremulously. "You have been little there since I knew Mrs. Huntley, and as a poor music teacher I could scarcely"—

"A music teacher!" echoed Horace, in a tone of such dismay as roused the little pride Ida possessed.

"My father's death left us without other means of support," she said, coldly; "and I was most thankful to be enabled so to provide for my mother and myself."

"God forgive me ! And you have been actually working for bread—while I—O Ida, Ida ! But I deserved it, I deserved it !" And quitting his stand by the fireplace, he paced the little room in uncontrollable emotion.

"But—that was no fault of yours ; and indeed it made me much happier to feel of use to my mother," said Ida, quickly perceiving how deeply she had mistaken his feeling ; "and—you have been working, too, all these years,—and rather for your brother than for yourself."

"No fault of mine !" said Horace, stopping suddenly beside her. "Why did I throw away my right to prevent the possibility of such a thing ? What right had I to dictate to you ? To insist on disobedience to your father as a test of your love—for you did love me in those days, Ida, little as I deserved it," he added, sadly. "It has all served me right !"

There was so much truth in his words, and Ida had suffered so bitterly from his reckless injustice, that she knew not how to gainsay them ; but she looked after him as he paced the room again, so regretfully and compassionately, that, meeting her eye by chance, he could not help reading her inclination to excuse him both to her and to himself. Coming back, he said in a very different tone :—"I will not ask you to forgive me now, Ida ; I do not deserve it ; but you will let me—You are not going back to X—? You surely—you must not," he added, interrupting himself with sudden apprehension.

"No, not at present," said Ida, colouring painfully. It was pleasant to hear him say "You must not," just in his old, half-peremptory way ; but did he mean anything by it ?

"Then will you let me come to see you sometimes, as—an old friend ?" said he, very humbly.

"Yes," said Ida, faintly. It was all she could do to help bursting into tears again.

Helen did not perceive exactly at what juncture Mr. Carysfort re-entered the drawing-room, but presently she found him standing near her, waiting for an opportunity to speak.

"I—I have asked Miss Merton's permission," said he, in a state of embarrassment of which Helen had not believed him capable, "as an old friend—to come sometimes"—

"Whenever you like !" she returned cordially, with a bright, mirthful smile, which sent him away more than at ease as to her goodwill.

Yet never in his life had Horace Carysfort felt more thoroughly humiliated, than as he walked home that night to his

bachelor abode in Lincoln's Inn. What a comparison was that forced upon him, between his own course of life since they had parted, and that of which he had gleaned the outlines from Ida! The conviction he could not resist—Ida could not feign even when she wished it—that notwithstanding his heartless treatment of her, she had never forgotten him, scarcely, perhaps, ceased to love him—only increased the bitterness of his reflections. What had he to offer her—should she really be disposed to forgive the past—in return for such much-enduring affection? How should he ever be able to confide to her the long story of the folly, the weakness, the vice even, from which no life like his is ever wholly free? His love for Florence, his suit to Helen, might rank among the things he had least reason to be ashamed of; and yet what was a heart worth, which had thus been the very shuttlecock of his selfish, fickle vanity, which must now seem to return to her only when other hopes had failed him? Part of this no doubt she knew already; all perhaps! In X—— all those years, while he was playing the fool under her very eyes! He felt as if he should never be able to look her in the face again!

Nevertheless—it was not very many days after the New Year's Eve in question, that he and Ida might again have been found together, in the self-same little boudoir; sitting side by side, Ida forgetting to work, and Horace speaking low and earnestly, while playing with the silk which had dropped from her fingers. There was a soft glow meantime upon her cheek, which restored all the bloom, if it could not the soft, rounded outlines, of her early youth.

"And can you, will you really forgive me, Ida, and try to love me again as if I had always deserved it?"

"I—I—am afraid I never left off," murmured Ida.

"But I shall never forgive myself, Ida!" he exclaimed earnestly, seizing and kissing her unresisting hand. "To think that even when I saw you on the lake, I might, by making a single inquiry, have saved you years of drudgery"——

"No, you could not have married then; at least if you were to help your brother; and I could not have left mamma. Indeed it was all right!" said Ida, simply.

Some half hour later, a light tap was heard at the door, and in answer to Ida's low "Come in," Helen's bright face looked in half anxiously, half archly. Her welcome was not doubtful. Mr. Carysfort rose instantly, and taking her hand to lead her

to the seat by Ida which he had just quitted, drew a chair close in front of them for himself, and sat down again.

A kiss, a whisper, and a warm pressure of the hand, said all that was needed between Helen and Ida; and the former, retaining Ida's hand, turned to Mr. Carysfort, while Ida leant back on the sofa, her eyes filling with tears of such exquisite happiness as those alone may know, who have sorrowed, doubted, despaired, endured, resigned, ere the hour of rich compensation for all past suffering strikes unexpectedly for them.

"Mr. Carysfort," said Helen, trying to look grave, though her eyes were dancing all the while, "I must ask if you still retain your old opinions as to the paucity of happiness in the world?"

"I retract, I confess everything!" said he, deprecatingly; "but let me first thank you"——

"And are you ready to admit that you would not even wish your past life to have been ordered differently?" persisted Helen.

"Except it were as to my own conduct," said he, though he coloured as he spoke. "And, further, I confess, if you will have it," he added, with a smile, "that I, at least, have found a thousand times more happiness than ever I deserved!"

"Ah! we may all say that!" said Helen, feelingly. "But now I really am satisfied, Mr. Carysfort. You know I told you, you would find it out some day, and you have justified my confidence after all!" she added, gaily.

"But having confessed, Mrs. Huntley, you must let me thank you for all your kindness to Ida."

"I will not be thanked; I owe her quite as much as she can me," interrupted Helen.

"But indeed you do not; and indeed you must be thanked!" said Ida, lovingly.

"Then I must run away," said Helen; but, it need scarcely be said, she was not allowed to put her threat in execution.

And had Ida Merton, it may be asked, really kept unsullied and unbroken, through all these long, long years, the heart's love and faith, so early pledged and so ill-required?

We answer: Ida Merton is not the first woman, by many, who has done as much or more. Many a one has carried, we will not say to her grave, but to her home beyond it, the love which, once given, she had no power to recall. For though of love, as of all realities, there are many counterfeits—selfish

passions, fickle fancies, misplaced affections, which are to love as the mirage to the life-giving pools of the desert-oasis, and are permitted in mercy to pass away from the hearts they degrade and desolate—such counterfeits afford no standard for judging of the reality they mock. The true chord once struck, be it early or late, in a true, pure heart, thrills on for ever; alike amid the discords of disappointment, or the heaven-lent harmonies of heart-sufficing happiness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOME!

The modern artist does not hesitate to lay his hand upon the deepest and most solemn chords of the human heart; for the echoes they awaken are not returned from the chambers of the tomb, but from the vault of heaven that bends over them.

HILLIARD'S *Six Months in Italy*.

THE bright September sun was scorching pavements and dazzling eyes without; but all was pleasant coolness in Helen Huntley's chamber, where green jalousies, softening the glare, gave passage to the pleasant freshness of a light breeze which was stirring in streets and squares, wherever it found space to flutter its airy wings.

There was a fulness of tranquil joy in Helen's bright, pale face, as she lay on her sofa, looking round from time to time at the tiny sleeping occupant of a cradle placed near her, while her husband sat reading aloud to her, on the other side.

"Bernard," said she presently, interrupting him, "you shall not read any more. I know you are tired, for I am sure you have not the least idea what you are reading about."

"I must plead guilty to the latter part of the charge," said Mr. Huntley, laying down the book with a faint smile in answer to hers, "but I am not in the least tired"

"Your mind is, if not your tongue," said Helen; "and besides, I want to talk to you a little. I am getting quite impatient for Florence to come home."

"You have not been feeling lonely without her?" asked Mr. Huntley, with a look of tender anxiety in the serious dark eye, which had long, however, ceased to be melancholy—at least when they rested on Helen.

"Lonely, Bernard! With you and the children? Not to speak of my new baby!" she added, with a proud, pleased glance in its direction, and a smile which amply refuted his supposition. "Besides, Ida came to see me to-day, while you were out. It always does me good to see how young and pretty she looks since her marriage. Now just think, if I had spoiled *that* match!" She gave an arch, saucy smile to her husband, who returned it fondly, but gravely still.

"No, I only want Florence to see her namesake," she continued. "I should have been quite disappointed if it had not been a girl, to be called after her. But, Bernard, I do not believe you are hearing half I say, and I really cannot put up with that! You must tell me what you are thinking about," she added playfully.

"I was thinking of a dream I had this morning, and whether I should tell it to you or not?" said Mr. Huntley, drawing his chair near to her.

"Tell it me—of course!" said Helen. "Was it a real dream, or a waking dream?"

"You shall judge," said Mr. Huntley, with still some shade of anxiety in the glance which rested tenderly on her.

Perhaps he was in the habit of exercising his inventive powers for her amusement, for after another glance at the little sleeper, Helen settled herself on her pillows, with a face of pleased expectation directed towards her husband; who, after looking at her half-sadly for a moment, withdrew his eyes, which gradually assumed an indrawn expression, as if the dream he was about to narrate were to be wrought forth from some vivid picture floating mentally before him. A minute or two elapsed before he began:—

"I dreamed that I awoke in the spirit-world. I knew it to be so, from the peculiar quality of the light diffused around; not so much dazzling, as so infinitely pure and penetrating, that I seemed to feel it to the innermost recesses of my heart. It was light in and from which nothing could be hid; nor was its quality, in this respect, affected by the shadow in which I myself stood. I was standing under a vast, oak-like tree, on the verge of a magnificent grove or forest, which, as I gazed into it, presented the appearance of a boundless cathedral or temple. I, at least, could see no limits to the shadowy aisles of living tracery stretching in endless perspective, intersected by transept-like spaces, and beautified by arches, and domes, and fountains of bright waters, such as no earthly architect ever

designed, even in imagination. The vaulted roof seemed high and ethereal as the vault of the sky itself, and yet I knew that it was not the sky; and though the whole seemed shadowy at first, I perceived, as my eyes grew accustomed to the scene, that the whole precincts were filled with the same marvellous light, only brighter and purer still than that around me without.

“And in endless motion, through aisles and transepts, beneath domes and arches, a perpetual stream of human life was flowing in every direction. Men and women, superhuman only in the beauty and grace of their countenances, forms, and apparel, in pairs, in groups, and even in crowds, were passing to and fro, even as men and women in the streets of a great city on earth. Yet the impression still dwelt on my mind that this was a vast temple, and that all I saw within were engaged in worship; and I fancied this might be a type of the true life-worship, which can render every act, nay every breath, a prayer.

“But either because I stood without, or because my spirit was not fitly attuned to the strains of heavenly music which floated ceaselessly through the aisles of the matchless fane, I was conscious of a chill as I gazed on its exquisite beauties; a sense as if something were wanting—in myself, doubtless. Only in the extreme central distance I perceived a warmer glow gradually diffusing itself, as if some train were slowly approaching, who bore sunshine—such as I could appreciate—in their presence. I would gladly have watched the approach which seemed about to complete for me the charm of the whole, but I felt irresistibly impelled to turn my eyes in the opposite direction, to explore the scene which lay without, beyond the verge of the shadow cast by the tree beneath which I stood.

“It was a scene of unspeakable beauty; more earth-like, perhaps, than that I had recently been gazing on; and yet his perceptions must have been dull indeed, who should have mistaken it for an earthly landscape. I looked out over a garden or paradise, bathed in sunshine; radiant with flowers and brilliant insects of every hue and dye; diversified with undulations, sparkling streams, and woods and shrubberies of aromatic perfume and luxuriant growth; and bounded by a soft horizon-line of hills, which might indeed be but a mountain-like boundary of aerial mists, so delicate was their outline, so changeful the blendings of light and shade and colour they presented. On my left, and seemingly near one portion of this mountain-

boundary, I discerned a graceful rustic dwelling, wreathed with flowers and creepers, more lovely than even flowers can be on earth; and near and around, and passing in and out, I saw bright beings clothed in white, like the others, human in all but their superior beauty, and an aspect of more plastic, yet more intense, vitality than any human face or form presents on earth. Their very garments seemed instinct with the sphere of life diffused by each; I felt that no one could have worn the garb of another.

"As they passed in and out, they spoke to each other; and though too distant to have heard their words through any earthly atmospheric medium, I could hear, or perhaps rather feel, the words they uttered. Some said, 'Is she awake?' and others answered, 'She will soon wake now.'

"In the intervening space between this dwelling and the sylvan spirit-fane, troops of lovely children were sporting under the trees, or beside sparkling streams, on the flowery, velvet sward; and twining garlands of flowers, and talking as they twined them. Some said, 'Ours are for him;' and others replied, 'Yes, and ours are for her.' It seemed to me that a negative was thus carefully avoided, because it would have jarred on the universal spirit-harmonies which sensibly pervaded the scene.

"Suddenly there flowed forth from the entrance of the temple-like fabric near which I stood, a flood of radiance, a swell of music; and when I recovered from the delicious swoon-like sensation which rapt me, I perceived that a stately train, or procession, had passed forth on my right. I felt it to be that which I had descried in the temple; and, bending like a river round some turn in its bed, it now advanced to meet another train which must have issued from the rustic dwelling on my left; so that the point where their meeting must fall lay nearly in front of me,—and was defined, I now perceived, by an oasis of beauty outshining even the beauty around it. I could thus perceive the countenances of several in each of the advancing trains; but one in each at once so fascinated my glance, that I looked only from one to the other, forgetful of all beside.

"And, yet more strangely, between his countenance who had come forth with the train from the temple, and hers who drew near with that from the garden-dwelling, I recognised at once, not a likeness, but an affinity, a mutual correspondence, which proclaimed them to my quickened perception husband and wife, or rather bridegroom and bride, since there, as I in-

stinctively realized, all things are perpetually new. And as the two trains met, like two strains of music flowing into one, and the husband and wife embraced, all but themselves, even the children strewing their garlands around, vanished from my sight, and the two alone were before me in their oasis of tender beauty. This seemed to me to image forth the fulness and completeness of that conjugal love, which is the sum and the crown of all human bonds of affection.

"I saw that as they met, the countenance of each assumed a fuller radiance and beauty; and as they wandered together among sunshine and flowers, they seemed less two than one, so perfect was the harmony of their motions. I felt that their discourse was too mutual to reach me, till she, pausing, looked up inquiringly to him.

"'Our children?' she said.

"'These are all to be our children,' he replied; and as he pointed, I saw a valley open beneath and in front of them, peopled with countless children, before each of whom, whether sitting or standing, at rest or at play, I discerned an air-drawn path, now tortuous, now straight, or nearly so, ascending to the higher level of the paradise-plain above. I knew that these were earthly children, and the paths, their paths to heaven.

"As the two gazed on the scene, they seemed drawn even more closely together, as if by the contemplation of a joint sphere of use their union were rendered yet more perfect. And I marked a blended ray, like a faint sunbeam, shining from their eyes on one child in particular, who was straying from his upward path. It dwelt on him as with a magnetic attraction, such as the subtle influence of love may exercise over those whom it softens and bends to its will; yet at first the child seemed to resist its power and strayed downwards still. But when it stumbled in a dark place, and saw no light but that which fell on its heart from the pure, loving eyes above—though I felt that the light was only shed through them, and was not their own—it yielded to the heavenly influence; and wearied and weeping, yet led by the ray as by a clue, was soon safely treading its own prescribed path.

"'You see!' he said, turning upon her a glance of pure delight.

"'I see!' she replied, with a smile of ineffable joy; and even as they spoke, a path of light defined itself before them to the entrance of the mystic fane; and as if gently attracted

towards it, they drew near. And now I perceived that through the whole of its marvellous precincts was diffused that warmer glow, that heart-filling radiance, which I had missed there at first. The pair on whom I had been gazing with such absorbing interest, had, in their approach, brought me spiritually nearer to that which had before too much transcended my mortal perceptions.

"They had already reached the threshold, from which light and music seemed flowing forth to receive and indraw them as in a stream of delight, when I felt her glance, in passing, sweep over me. It did not rest on me, or take cognizance of my presence; but it seemed that the earthly sphere at hand, stirred to faint vibration some lingering chord of earthly feeling or memory; for pausing once more, a space so brief as scarcely to break the onward flow of their progress, a faint shade passed over her countenance, as of thought extending back into the far past; and then, lifting her face to his—a sunburst of radiant tenderness flooding every line and feature—"It was but for a little while!" she said"—

"Bernard!" exclaimed Helen, who had long been listening with more and more rapt attention, and now started forward with clasped hands outstretched trembling towards him; "Bernard! Florence is gone!"

"Home!" returned Mr. Huntley, in a low soothing voice, as he bent forward to support his wife in his arms, fearing the possible effects of agitation on her frame.

"Yes, home," murmured Helen, laying her cheek to her husband's, while the bright tears fell from her eyes like rain. "Home, God bless her!"

"God has blessed her!" was the earnest rejoinder.

THE END.



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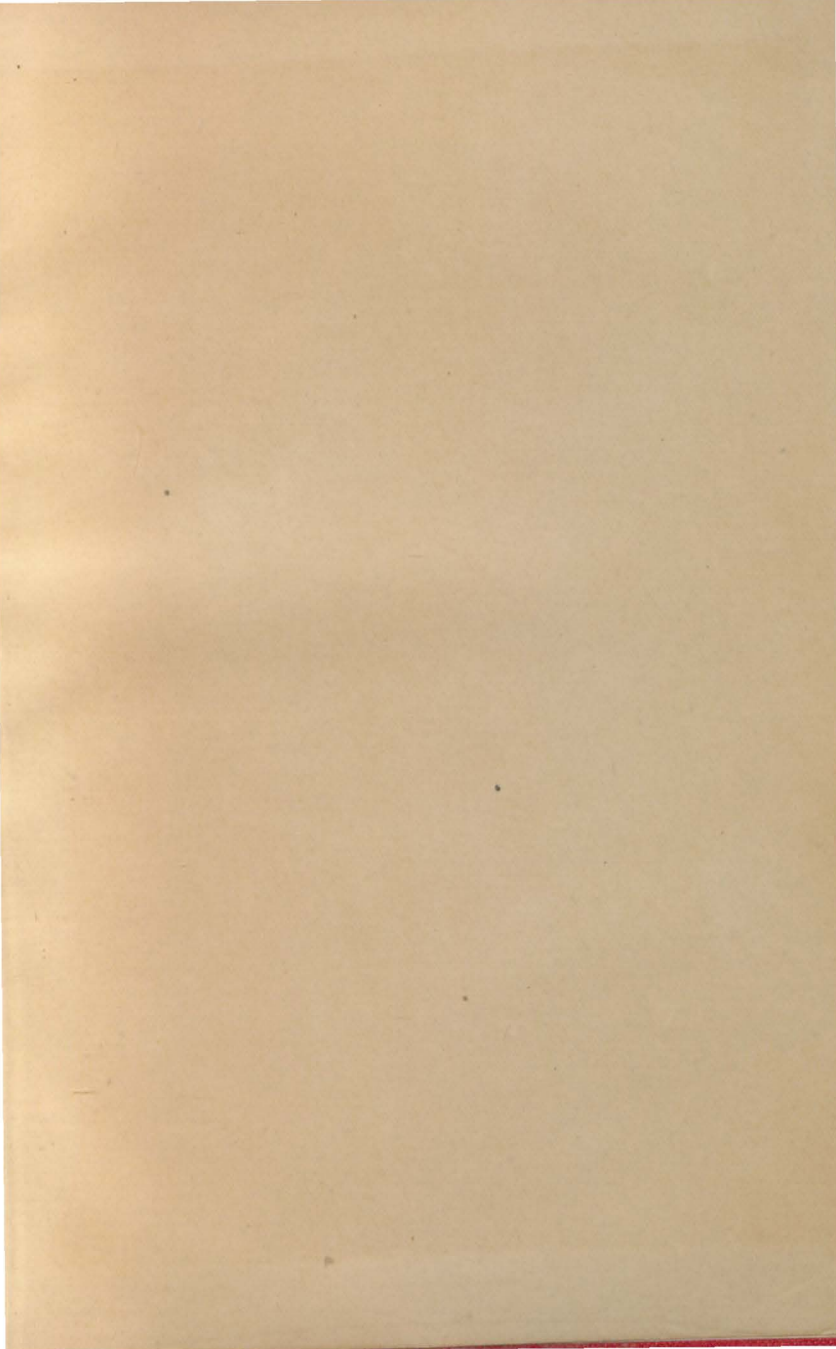
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