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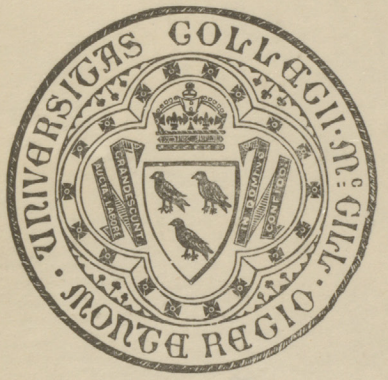

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WANTED—A HOME.

WANTED—A HOME.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MORNING CLOUDS," "THE ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE,"

ETC. ETC.

"Ho detto e lo ripeto, non ho scritto per tutti, anzi non ho scritto pei più; sibbene per quelli che davvero soffrono ed hanno sofferti."—CESARE CANTÙ.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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WANTED—A HOME.

CHAPTER I.

Io, ne' primi anni,
Speranza avea di fortunata vita.—Gozzi.

"What an odd name!—Blinkhorn! 'On the 3rd instant, Sir Matthew Blinkhorn, of Drumchase, to Mary, fifth daughter of the Rev. John Peters.' Fancy being called Lady Blinkhorn! I wonder any one was found who would change her name for that."

This the idle comment of Helen Raymond, as she sat beside her sister Mercy in the balcony of their morning room; the one intently occupied

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with her work—a richly braided travelling-cap—the other with *The Times* in her hand, taken up more as a semblance of doing something than with any interest in it.

"What about Lady Blinkhorn?" asked Mercy, half hearing, and heeding nothing but a turn of her braid.

"Oh, only married. I'm glad, dear, that you chose a nice name; what should we have done if Norman had had an ugly mean-sounding name? I never could love any one with a frightful name; have you nearly finished that? You mean to give it to him to-night, I suppose, or you would not be so desperately notable this lovely day, when really I find it impossible to settle to anything."

"So it seems," replied her sister with a busy smile. Then came a few moments of silence while Helen's laughing eye followed the light movements of the fingers beside her, as if watching a deeply interesting process—(industrious people seem to attract idlers, as surely as sun-

beams draw up vapour)—and then with a little shrug of shoulder and footstool towards her sister's chair, and a lower tone, she asked,—

"Mercy, are not you very happy to-day?—I am."

"Oh, yes, and so thankful. I've not seen him three whole weeks."

"Ah! but are you not a little glad that poor Arthur is coming too? *Do* try your best to cheer him up. The poor fellow must be so disheartened, and I know papa will not let him off altogether."

The persons they spoke of were not many years before at school together at Harrow. Norman Slade had risen steadily in his profession; he was now major in the —th regiment, and six months ago had received permission from Mr. Raymond to pay his addresses to Mercy. They were to be married in the following autumn; and the only drawback to her father's pleasure in this engagement was the knowledge that a soldier's wife could not be always within reach of the old home.

Helen wondered a good deal at her sister's choice, (she was at the time twenty-one, and Mercy three years older); and it was some weeks after the affair was settled, that she could be quite persuaded of her sister's attachment to that very straight-haired, straight-backed Major Slade, who had already such an old-mannish set of phrases; so frequently ejaculated "precisely so," when Mercy spoke; and altogether offered but a slight hold for imagination to work upon. And then his opinions and his "sentiments," which he was often propounding by that name when they seemed utterly unsentimental, were all cut and dried: his piety was really the only fresh seeming thing about his character, and that was deep and strong. Still how *could* Mercy admire those very insipid, regular features? Arthur might well call him, as he sometimes did when provoked, a dumbie of orthodoxy. But Helen wondered ignorantly: in all cases of love, it does not so much matter what intrinsic charms a person has—the fateful

gift is the power of impressing the heart of another; that done, all is done; as unalterably perhaps as if beauty or high genius had been at work.

Mercy thought Major Slade the wisest as well as the most excellent man she had ever met with; and only wished Helen could find just such another to guide and form her more original mind. Helen did not wish this at all. Their cousin, Arthur Lemayne, who had introduced his schoolfellow as one whose monitorial habits had stimulated him to more than natural mischief and prank-playing in early days, was in all things a contrast to his friend; and being a character on whom circumstances had acted with strong thwarting influence, the one cannot be fairly described without some account of the other.

His mother, the sister of Mrs. Raymond, had married a clergyman of narrow income. An anxious, thoughtful man, in a parish that allowed

time for speculations and study out of all proportion with his active work, he could not satisfy himself with ecclesiastical routine as he found it carried on; he could not rest on superficial grounds, or conform to conventional ideas of expediency. He plunged into abstractions, ardently desiring to find truth, purified from all base adjuncts,—disdaining all accommodation of truth to things as they are, he actually hoped to adjust every scheme of action to what things ought to be. The inevitable results followed: he first took leave of expediency in thought, and then in deed.

After many years of restless research, he gave up his living, and went to a small cottage home in Wales, with his wife and two young boys, where, with strictest economy, they were able to live upon her private fortune; contentedly, because it was a self-chosen fate; and he loved truth, and she loved him, too much to find the sacrifice bitter: but not cheerfully, there was too constant an anxiety about ways and means for

that; and, besides, when the two boys were at school and college, Mr. Lemayne had little occupation except study, and this (being in his case for the most part militant against the existing order of things) did not raise the spirits, though it considerably fortified pride.

He wrote too; able and keen expositions of the falsities with which his mind was ever at war; essays which his cleverest friends were glad to read, which, they told him, and with truth, were very striking and original; and which they spoke of among themselves with a sigh, half of sorrow and half of scorn, saying, "So poor Lemayne is at it again;—what a pity it is that such a man should go on fighting with windmills!" Or more seriously, "If he would but consult his own interests a little more, one could do something for him, but really——"

Virtually, the publishers, to whom his writings were sometimes submitted, said the same thing. They were undeniably clever, but attacking

religious cliques on all sides of the compass; making the ears of every party tingle with their importunate veracity and penetrating accusations, —it was clear that they would not pay: if he published it must be at his own expense. And one volume he did so risk; it interested a few independent minds, offended many bigots, and made an irreconcilable enemy of a powerful acquaintance, who had been for some time before thinking that he would try to get the gifted author for his private secretary.

When Mr. Lemayne was made to understand this, he assured his wife, and with sincerity, that he rejoiced more than ever that his little work had been brought out. The poor wife may be pardoned if even her devoted affection failed to give her a share in this joy: the expense of publishing had obliged them to retrench, to call the common necessary of many homes a needless luxury in theirs, and to give it up. And she had secretly looked forward to Lord ——'s giving

Richard some preferment when he left college; he seemed pleased with the boy.

But what touched her more nearly still, was the breach this unlucky book had made between her husband and her brother-in-law, Mr. Raymond, always an uncongenial connection. It had cost them not only the annoyance of having to read and answer a series of well-meant and *un*able controversial letters, but also it interrupted that degree of mutual friendliness which had served hitherto to veil very strong antipathies; which had procured for her children much pleasure and for her husband some peace.

Richard and Arthur had from their childhood spent many happy months at their uncle Raymond's. Fernwick being nearer Harrow than their own home, Easter holidays were generally passed there; and though Mrs. Raymond had been long dead, ever since Helen's birth, Mrs. Lemayne liked her boys to be with their sister-like cousins. She seldom cared to visit them

herself, because of their father's antagonistic temperament, but she would have been loth to deprive younger ones of this pleasure. She was a silent, quiet-mannered woman, of very intense feeling and decided opinions, not apt to give expression to either, but when she did, making their strength felt. Naturally somewhat austere, she had become stern as years went on; stern in self-control while watching the unquiet action of an intellect far more comprehensive than her own—stern in contempt of the world from which this uneasy mind had separated her—stern in daily self-denial. Also her husband was in the highest degree excitable and nervous; and she had to keep the balance with a phlegmatic composure which was almost overdone, because it was as much the effect of principle as of nature.

Richard, the eldest son, resembled his mother in features and temperament, but in him her defects were exaggerated. Narrow, obstinate, and almost contemptuous from lack of intellectual

sympathy, he looked upon his father as a fanatic, and at college allowed himself to be condoled with for having such a "crochety governor;" and pitied for the obstacles which a man like him would throw in the way of a son's advancement.

It was very different with Arthur, who had inherited his father's enthusiasm for truth, his varied powers of mind, and with these his nervous system. He loved and admired his father all the more ardently because he had broken fellowship with worldly men; and till he had seen more of life, it was natural that he should think every one worldly who called his father imprudent.

Talking to Mercy and Helen as a youngster fresh from school, he would electrify them with his denunciations of average human nature as slavish, truckling to power, and stunted by ignoble concessions to the world's authority.

"But *who* is guilty of all that?" Mercy would ask in her point-blank fashion; being just his

age, she dared to interrupt the stream of his eloquence. "Who do you mean, Arthur? tell us that. I don't understand all these generalities of yours." (No, and she never did all her life.) "And papa wouldn't see any sense in them." Helen meanwhile would sit motionless, drinking in every word with wonder and mute adherence to whatever he chose to assert.

As a schoolboy, and a very clever one, it was possible to luxuriate in the sense of intellectual liberty and greatness of soul without much opposition of fate. If he fell into an harangue upon such subjects, his companions called it spouting, and bid him "shut up," which only gave him a keener relish for certain passages in Shelley's poems, to which he was used to turn when out of temper with those about him. But when the time came for bringing mental worth to the test of examinations which would determine his course in life, Arthur's habits of mind were sadly against him. He was not lazy, but he was discursive in

thought, and could not, or would not concentrate force upon given tasks. So he failed. In two hard examinations at Woolwich he was unable to pass. Friends wondered, for he had carried off so many prizes at school; his parents grieved, so much, nay all, his very livelihood depended on his success. He had one more chance, and that after the publication of his father's book. Mr. Raymond's kindness was unabated, but it took measures to save the young man, if possible, from converse with his erring father during the time of preparatory study. Arthur was asked to stay at Fernwick till the next examination, and when there, every arrangement was made conducive to unbroken application of mind.

He worked sedulously, resisting a hundred inevitable temptations to waste time with his cousins indoors and out. He studied so hard that he made sure of success. The examination began, and the second day he broke down—from excessive nervousness, it was reported. The next morning

he was unconscious from brain-fever, and for several weeks in danger. When he recovered, his old school friend, Norman Slade, invited him, at the instigation of Mercy, to join him in a little tour on the Continent; and it was on the day of their return that she and Helen sat talking about them in the balcony—a glorious June day when a fresh light breeze was tossing the sunshine among the broad oak boughs of the veterans in the park, making their shadows dance beneath them with the untroubled glee of nature. Helen felt that glee her own. She had not seen her cousin since his recovery from the gates of death; and she longed to console him for his disappointment. She felt his sorrow much less than her power to soothe it; she did not know what a man feels when he enters life without a profession and without means, and she did know all the loving kindness in her heart with which she longed to make some amends.

So through all that sunny summer day she

moved with the lightness of heartfelt gaiety, timing her steps to the glad measure which her heart was dancing, and speaking to all she met with that plenitude of sweet good-humour which, in a high-strung nature, only great hopes can inspire.

When she dressed for dinner, listening ever and anon for the sound of expected wheels, she was glad that people called her the beautiful Miss Raymond; and that in white muslin her white arms and neck looked so well without more ornament than a gold chain.

She particularly wished that evening not to look handsomely dressed; to-morrow she would wear the roses which looked so pure and lovely in dark hair. Arthur was sure to choose them, because they had few thorns.

CHAPTER II.

Und so liegt denn ein Goldschatz von Liebe wenig sichtbar als bis auf ein kleines Flämmchen in der Brust, bis ihn endlich ein geisterwort hebt, und der mensch den alten Reichthum entdeckt.—JEAN PAUL RICHTER.

Und Lieb' ist mit Liebe so selig allein.—KLETKE.

THE travellers came in during dinner, and Arthur's nerves owed something to the obvious business of eating; the movement of servants, and broken conversation round the table, served, as he fancied, to divert attention from himself, and Helen contrived to say something to her father whenever he looked likely to fix serious eyes upon the recent invalid. But she was sure that something very severely regretful must have been said to him after she and Mercy left the room, for when the gentlemen rejoined them, Arthur had no smile or word for

her. He took up the book that lay nearest to him on the table, and withdrew to a little distance from the others.

Norman Slade was opening a small parcel, and soon exhibited the present he had brought for Mercy: a beautiful set of pearl ornaments. There were exclamations of admiration from Helen, and smiles of deep pleasure quietly passing over her sister's face, as she unclasped the case that held them; but Arthur glanced across the room, slightly frowning: he was inwardly calling his good friend an ass, for losing the happiness of a more private presentation, and making a little scene by his ostentatious display.

In a few minutes he left the room, and no one but Helen missed him; for conversation went on merrily, as Norman was in high spirits, and seemed not at all eager to reduce his social fluency to the quiet depths of a sofa *tête-à-tête*. When it was time for the removal of the tea-table, Helen slipped out of the room in search of her cousin,

and found him, as she expected, sitting in the library by the open window; the lamp burned too dimly for reading by its unnecessary light; but he held a book open on his knee, nevertheless, by way of explanation.

"Arthur! why do you run away from us the first evening? Are you tired?"

"No, thank you, I came in here to read."

"To read!—but," stealing up to his side, "you've had no tea. Is the black dog on you, as old nurse used to say?"

He made no answer, and turned his head slightly from her.

"I *wish* I could drive it away, dear Arthur. I'm so very, very sorry,—Mercy and I both are, about your disappointment."

"It's not that."

"But you are unhappy to-night, and I cannot think why."

"Because I'm a poor devil!"

"I always think you just the other thing,"

said Helen, laying her hand with timid gentleness on his square shoulder, and looking into his face with sweet earnestness of compassion.

"I'm a *poor* man, Helen, and that, in some cases, means wretchedness, being despised, slighted, and, worst of all, misunderstood."

"You *despised*—by whom?"

"Your father."

"Oh no, *you* misunderstand *him;* that cold manner of his means nothing: he is often just the same to us."

"He's not the only person who *must* misunderstand me."

Helen was silent a few seconds, puzzling over his words, and then said,—

"Yes, I can fancy that; there's too much in you for every one to make out easily——"

"Too much," cried her cousin, passionately. "Ay, Helen, far more—look here" (catching her hand with an eager clasp), "do you suppose any one—even you—has a notion—the remotest

guess—of what I feel in coming back to you? That fellow in the next room brings his expensive knick-knacks to your father, and his costly pearls to Mercy—and *his* love. Pshaw! I'm a fool to speak of it, when I've no proof to offer and no right——" It was well for them both that the lamp was turned down, and Helen's face looking towards the dusky midsummer twilight, for Arthur's eyes had flashed with fierce excitement, and hers changed now from their usual full serenity to a troubled glance, from a sense of something wrong in their present position; wrong yet exquisitely sweet. She would have cut short the dialogue, but that he seemed to want comfort; and, therefore, with a firmer tone she went on,—

"If you think we don't believe in your affection because you have not wealth for making handsome presents, you do us great wrong, dear Arthur; I should have thought you must have known your old-playfellows' hearts better than that."

"Dearest Helen! I never really doubted *your*

believing me; only it put me into a horrible state to see Norman and Mercy smiling and praising when I had nothing worth a smile from you to offer; but look here, don't take your little fingers out of my hand till I have shown you this mite of a thing in my waistcoat, or I shall be afraid to tell you about it. It is only this tiny jet cross, which has lived as near my heart as I could keep it ever since I had it made. You know I was at Cromer just after my illness, Norman and I, before we went abroad; and one evening I got out towards midnight, and was pacing up and down along the sands, like an unchained furious animal, chafing against my misery, and almost wishing the rising tide would suddenly come far enough to carry me safe away to death, without actual suicide,—when the thought of your face seemed to look out suddenly upon my inward night, and give me a new zest for living."

"Poor Arthur!"

"Ah! do not laugh at me; women cannot

imagine the horror of such a mood as mine was then, till your remembrance called me back to my better self. Well, you know my trick of keeping relics, I stooped down to pick up a shell or pebble as a memento of that black hour, and when I got in found that I had taken up a bit of jet large enough for a locket;—it's a paltry thing, befitting a penniless man, but I thought it possible you might be so kind as to like to wear sometimes a reminder of the infinite consolation you have been to me—when——"

She would not give him time to betray his agitation farther by the broken accents of his voice, but taking the locket, told him, with calm emphasis, that she could like *nothing* better, that she would always wear it.

"A little thing to use that word about, Helen; light and brittle as some sorts of love!"

"Not mine!" she repeated hastily, and then wishing the words unsaid, and checking his earnest thanks, begged him to go back to the drawing-

room while she went for some velvet to put the little locket-cross upon. Instinctive tact prevented her from wearing it that evening; and when after a little while she returned to the rest of the party, she was at once called upon to play to them, and could only catch a word now and then of what was passing. Nothing very pleasant; her father was evidently a little out of tune; and, as she guessed, Norman was trying to rectify this by a series of insipid remarks, all, of course, in the right direction, or they would not have been his. He was so much struck by the cleanly neatness of the cottages on Mr. Raymond's estate, as they drove through it—such a contrast to things abroad—to *many* villages in England, indeed;—what a blessing to the country were landed proprietors who *would* attend to the state of their tenants;—Mercy should have spent one Sunday abroad to appreciate the religious decency of an English Sabbath;—that abominable habit of smoking was seen in its most alarming aspects on the continent; but

really the habit was getting fearfully general at home now;—and so on.

Helen often tired of his unvarying good-boy-ishness, and sometimes caught herself wishing that a little irregularity of conduct or feeling on his part might lessen the pressure of his monotonous proprieties. Mercy, on the contrary, found all he said *so* wise, so excellent: Arthur tried to forget everything but Helen's last words in the library, while ostensibly listening to her music; but he was recalled from his happy musing by his uncle asking if he had formed any plans for the summer?

There was no unkindness in the tone of this question, but it made him wince. You may almost measure the degree of self-appreciation and contempt for others that exists in the companions of a sensitive person by the degree of diffidence in that person's demeanour. Nothing so surely exhilarates such a one as to meet with mildness and humility: nothing so miserably dejects as arrogance and conceit, however carefully con-

cealed. For there are qualities which though *unexpressed* make themselves felt; and perhaps none are more paralysing to the sensitive than obstinate prejudice, and dislike, hidden even from the heart that harbours it. Without a syllable of expression, these can greatly disturb.

"My plans are still too vague for discussion, uncle."

"No time to lose in vagueness, I conceive, Arthur."

The air of the younger man was haughty; the voice of his senior gentle, almost conciliating; but Arthur's pulse beat fast, and his face was under conscious control; Mr. Raymond was cool, and ready for a provoking elasticity of movement in drawing him out. But Arthur would not be drawn. In Helen's presence that evening he would run no risk of discomfiture from her father while on guard, or outbreak of his own temper, should provocation make him desperate.

But it was hard to keep silence. He was very

proud—self-rule was to him indispensable, for to find the quivering nerves of the body no longer amenable to the commands of reason, raised within him a passion of self-contempt, and the greatest irritation against one who could so painfully influence the weakest side of his character. And when this was the case, a stern self-restraint clenched his features into an expression of disdainful resistance;—who could guess that it was directed against his own infirmity? It certainly very ill rendered to most observers the idea of nervous shyness. It was only a woman, and perhaps a woman who loved him, who could detect the trepidation that needed such gyves to keep it out of notice, for Mercy and Mr. Raymond always thought him too proud to be shy.

"Nonsense, Helen," her father would sometimes say, "nonsense, he is the last person to need your kind solicitude. I do not know a young man who has a better opinion of himself, or a more inflexible resolution." And this last assertion was true; his

determination was strengthened by daily conflicts with treacherous nerve-weakness, which only a strong will could save from becoming monomania. When susceptibility is very great, it makes so many trifles occasions for self-command, that often the softest and most impressible natures acquire an air of rigid sternness; and thus necessarily mislead those who have no need of similar self-defence, and cannot therefore interpret its signs.

CHAPTER III.

O ! happy day, the best of time !
The linnets sang of love and glee,
And sang it to my love and me.
F. TENNYSON.

IN spite of all cares, anxieties, and secret annoyance, there was in the bright week that followed an intensity of happiness for Arthur. The glorious summer weather seemed to inspire him with confidence and hope whenever he was not long in the presence of his uncle. From the early stroll down the rose avenue before breakfast, to the late lingering in the park in search of glow-worms, he had all day some happy excuse for being with Helen. Norman and Mercy were not exclusive lovers; and they all four generally began their

occupations or amusements together, scarcely seeing the master of the house from breakfast time till the late seven o'clock dinner.

Sometimes they spent the morning boating on the sleepy little lake that lay under Mr. Raymond's homewood;—watching the diamond lights made by each lazy oar, or the dimple of an insect's touch upon the glassy sun-bright surface, where broad lilies spread their floating islands of tough leaf and massive blossom, and rushes fringed the tranquil watery field "di taciturne piante incoronato." Sometimes they moored the boat to a dipping alder tree,* and got up to a shady covert in the wood, where they could just see the sultry gleam of water through a tangle of clematis, or a bowery break between the delicate interlacing arches of beech-trees below. Here they would camp with books and work, and dismissing the little footman, who brought the luncheon basket, with orders not to know where to find them unless

* *Leopardi.*

Mr. Raymond really wanted the young ladies, or unless such or such *really* pleasant neighbours called, they gave themselves up to "lose and neglect the creeping hours of time."

Arthur asserted that it did him more good than reading, or writing those fruitless letters of inquiry which his uncle was always advising him to send; and Mercy and Helen seldom opposed the pleasant theory for many minutes; but Norman used to look serious and demur, till Arthur laughed him into consent, assuring him that *actinism* was doing more for his passive brain than plodding action ever could; and that *he* wanted it much more, and must therefore submit to having his hat snatched from his head, and tossed up to a high bough not easily gained by a cumbrous-bodied man like Norman, who was therefore obliged to sit still and endure a little of the baiting which both Helen and his friend so keenly enjoyed.

"Poor Norman! what a shame to run any risks with your complexion," Helen slyly observed;

and in a second Arthur had wound a handkerchief into a turban, and placed it on the round head of the good-humoured fellow; with the affirmation that no Soldan ever looked so impassively ferocious. And the red and white complexion, and regular stolid features of the black-haired, arch-eyebrowed man gave the comparison justice, and made the girls shout with laughter.

No pain to Norman; he rather liked being laughed at; it was the chief opportunity he had of gaining much attention among cleverer companions. So he laughed too, and kept his turban, and let Mercy hold her parasol over him, as she sat down at his side and asked him to read aloud to them.

"But what book *have* you got?" Arthur exclaimed. "My dear fellow, that's more than I can stand. *Montgomery's Satan!* how dare you bring such bad company into our little circle?"

"It is a very fine poem though, Arthur, and on such a serious subject—*very* serious, I should say

—too much so for joking,—but just hear a bit." And he read.

It was not long before Helen's face dipped into a tall brush of ferns on one side of the encampment; but the occasional twitch of her shoulders, which a muslin jacket made very evident, explained to Arthur that it was decorous gravity, and no lost thimble, that she was in search of. Indeed, Norman's reading of blank verse was about as smooth and harmonious as the pace of a cab over London Bridge. He came to a halt whenever he did not understand the writer's meaning—which was not seldom; and when he did, he made up for delay by vigorous spouting and emphasis, usually out of place.

"Now, my good fellow, this is really too warm work, this Satanic business with the thermometer at 75°. Do, pray, take breath, and cool yourself a bit. It's all very fine and eloquent, no doubt, but excitement is hardly safe for such brains as yours and mine. Hallo! there's your turban falling

off behind; and Helen is getting some fern-leaves ready, I see, to make you a poet's crown with: won't it be pretty, Mercy? Stay, we must bind up your chin first to look like Petrarch: you know he wears his wreath over the binder. It will be quite in character—your length of ears considered."

"Now I cannot have any more teasing of dear Norman," interposed Mercy, fancying a gleam of annoyance on his face, (quite a fancy this). "Arthur, you are a very naughty boy, and don't deserve the strawberries I had put up for you, expressly. Norman shall have them all, unless you get his hat down this minute, and then lay out the luncheon for us. Norman, *I* liked what you read very much."

Another day the weather was less sultry, and the wind made fishing practicable: but they stayed in the boat several hours without much success, though Helen had brought up a fine little jack on Arthur's rod when he lent it for one

throw; and Norman had achieved the ruin of several gudgeon and two perch.

To hide his sense of defeat, Arthur took *Keats' Poems* from Helen, and read aloud two or three of his most perfect lyrics, as those who feel their beauty and exquisite grace can read. His voice was full and clear, and its every inflexion musical; even to Norman it gave sensuous pleasure, and the sisters, especially Helen, listened as if each accent was the note of the nightingale.

But Norman soon seized an opportunity for dragging from his pocket *Pollok's Course of Time;* and with a muttered prelude of "something rather more profitable," began a heavy tuneless passage aloud. Mercy alone was pleased. Arthur, from politeness and respect to the motive, would not interrupt; till peeping over the reader's shoulder he found that silence had emboldened him to begin another book of the poem, and then he broke in, "Norman, *do* you mean to sink us entirely? Do you suppose any boat on earth can bear such a

quantity of heavy stuff being poured out in it, not to mention our four selves, and luncheon eaten. Pray run no risks by going on. Don't be hurt, old boy! I know it's all very good, and thank you for giving us the dose: some future day we can hear more, but just now had we not better push on for shade under the bank? The sun has come out fiercely since you began."

"Oh, dear, yes!" cried Mercy; "it is actually four o'clock, and I promised to be in early to-day to receive Mr. Cunnick. We must really get home as quick as we can: he was to come by the half-past two train."

"Cunnick! who is he? that fellow who got uncle to take shares in the —— Mine?"

"Yes, he is coming to stay a day or two. I dislike his visits," she added.

"Papa is always more difficult afterwards," said Helen in explanation; "and he is not very well bred, *we* think. Papa will not have a word said against him."

"And, then," continued her sister, "when he comes, he always has people asked to meet him: often such dull people—all the old stagers in the neighbourhood."

"And on Monday, Mercy, who comes?" asked Helen.

"Oh, the usual set. Mr. and Mrs. Gould, of course, as bride and bridegroom, and Sir Thomas Meek and his daughter, and old Mr. Barker. But you must not complain, dear, for the Ashcrofts have been asked for your especial benefit."

Arthur listened, little pleased. He had been so unused to mix in society that new people were still formidable to his shyness, and therefore abhorrent to his pride. He did not like to confess this, but he secretly wished Monday over, or any excuse for absenting himself possible. And so musing, he followed his cousins to the house, less joyous than he had left it a few hours before.

"You are tired out with *Pollok's Course of Time*," said Helen, turning back a step, to give

Norman a chance of walking alone with her sister.

"Yes, and this thundery heat always knocks me down. Who are the Ashcrofts? I don't remember the name hereabouts."

"No, they have only been staying here as residents since March. But Mercy and I knew them ages ago; we used to meet them at the Warren;—staying in the house: nice people, very; even papa likes them."

"What are they, married people? or young ladies?"

"Oh! neither of them married. An elderly aunt who has been like a mother to Beatrice Ashcroft—who is very handsome and very rich: and a brother of hers, Charles. He has a fortune, too, and is quite independent; but they both live with their aunt. That is what the world would tell you of them, so I began with outsides; but they are as good-humoured and pleasant as if they had nothing but liveliness and good nature to recommend them."

"They are happy people, Helen, to please you so much."

"Well, I do like them all three; and yet I do not feel as if *you* would. I daresay you will call them common-place. Oh, look there! papa is bringing out Mr. Cunnick to meet us: now, Arthur, be as civil to him as you can, *pray*."

Mercy and Norman stopped to shake hands with the guest; and while apologies were made for unintentional absence, Arthur came up and was introduced. Mr. Cunnick offended his taste at once by the coarse accent and thick volume of sound which came out with his every word;—and the tone of jovial heartiness used towards his cousins seemed positively insulting. "What degree of intimacy," he thought, "could warrant that loud fat laugh in answer to Helen's welcome; how dared such a vulgar-looking man grasp her delicate hand and hold it for an instant?"

But Mr. Cunnick had about as much diffidence and polish as a navvy. Phlegmatic arrogance was

the prevailing expression of his face: the loose drooping skin under his eyebrows, covering the upper eyelid as far as the lashes;—the petulantly projected eye;—the long curtains of the nostril, advancing under lip, and many-folded double chin; all told that he was a man of prompt, rough action, indomitable energy, and never shaken in self-esteem. No scruple or tenderness of feeling ever lamed his plans,—calling all who thwarted him fools, and despising everything that did not promote tangible profit, he made his game in life with as much satisfaction and as frequent success as mortal man can attain to.

Knowing people congratulated Mr. Raymond on having such an able referee in all business matters as Cunnick, adding when they spoke of him among themselves, that with all his hauteur and refinement Raymond knew well what he was about, and would never suffer such a vulgar man to have the *entrée* of Fernwick, unless it was quite worth his while to put up with him. For Mr.

Raymond was in high estimation for good judgment and inflexible probity. His opinions were respected; his word in favour of any measure, was held a sufficient guarantee for its prudence; and his veto generally considered decisive. In part this may have been owing to his position as the hereditary owner of the finest estate for many miles round, and the father of two well portioned, handsome daughters; but his habitual reserve had much more to do with it.

> "Respect *is* won by grave pretence,
> And silence surer e'en than sense." *

And his talent for judicious silence was remarkable.

Without any conscious pretence, he had the look of abstraction in society which people are apt to attribute to serious thought; which may be anything but wise, often indicating a lax brain incapable of prompt application.

And when his advice was sought, few could say that he ever presented any new combination of

* Shenstone.

ideas to those who consulted him; what he gave was the thorough attention of a gentleman; the discreet "ah!" the patient "pray continue," the cautious injunction not to be in any hurry to form a rash conclusion, or to resort to extreme measures. Strict non-committal was usually the one line of conduct he positively advised; and this was such a safe line, that no one could say it was not the wisest; and if, after half an hour spent in his library, a perplexed person came away with little more help than the advice "on no account to compromise himself in the matter," still it had been soothing and satisfactory to sit opposite that judicious-looking man, and watch his deliberate crossing of the feet and slow chafing of the hand, while, with unimpassioned emphasis and few words, he summed up all he had been hearing in eager ones, and, reiterating the need of caution, assured his listener that, should any new light come to him on the subject, he would not fail to communicate with him, but now pressing duties

demanded attention, and he would wish him a very good morning.

If, while the visitor was slowly returning homewards and digesting this light meal of counsel with needy avidity, Mr. Raymond should be only sitting in his arm-chair reading the leading articles of *The Times*, the perplexed man was none the worse; and the next person whom Mr. Raymond talked with was so much the better; for he had the benefit of what the writers of those articles thought expedient for one Englishman to say to another that day, on subjects of popular interest.

CHAPTER IV.

"You may lay your account to be excommunicated for a refractory fool, void of sense and good breeding, who knows not the lordship of your entertainer over all principles and opinions; who is not aware of the heavy penalties he can inflict on such as invade his privilege with sentiments not authorized, perhaps proscribed, at his table; who does not submit to his right of dictating as built on his power of entertaining."—P. SKELTON.

ARTHUR'S attempts to be as civil as he could to the new-comer had no better result than silence. He eyed him with intense distaste, and as much as he could avoided addressing him. It was quite unnecessary, Mr. Cunnick brought his own conversational amusement with him; told good stories, and laughed loudly as he told them; patronized Norman, and dragged in narrative tales of military friends "out of elbow" whose financial difficulties he had superintended;—ventured to

tell Helen how well she was looking,—that she reminded him of a celebrated actress, once his youthful admiration and a "splendid woman;" and was beginning to hint and joke broadly about Mercy's approaching wedding, when, pretending that he had seen her bow, Arthur moved to open the door, and so got them out of the room ten minutes earlier than they generally left the table.

While remaining there himself, he was puzzling over the anomaly of his uncle inviting such a man to his house, and when there, treating him with such deferential regard. What could the tie be? Not money interests surely: his uncle was too affluent to be so influenced; and not flattery; for Mr. Cunnick did not appear to have the least wish to propitiate favour; he spoke and acted as if that was secured, and when they went to the drawing-room, having thrown himself, with characteristic ease, on the sofa nearest Mercy, he soon proved the soundness of his sleep by snores.

Helen knew by instinct all that passed in Arthur's mind about him, and hoped to draw off the pain by talking. Mr. Raymond also seemed to be inclined for conversation; for he came to the window where they were sitting, and observed that he should be quite glad of a change of ideas; he had been so busy all the morning over business papers.

"I was just thinking, uncle, how wonderful the change of ideas in England is at this present time, —what an immense stride democratical ideas have made; even you yourself don't think, I suppose, quite as you used years ago, when I have heard you and my father argue about the mixture of classes."

"I am not aware of any change, Arthur."

Arthur's mobile features twitched during a pause long enough for a loud and complex snore to be heard and felt by them all; and Mr. Raymond went on with almost an apologetic smile.

"I am not aware of any. You must not always judge of opinions by actions, they *cannot* always correspond. I still think in the abstract that people of gentle birth seldom need and seldom ought to come in contact with those of a lower class—a baser extraction: I think we do them real damage by allowing them to suppose such unequal intercourse desirable."

"Ah! uncle, it was your saying that years ago, when I used to stand here, a jacketed boy, helping Mercy and Helen string cowslips, that used to make my blood boil, and I remember now clenching my fist as I ran out of this window to old Thomas—you remember, Helen, how fond we were of him, and saying to myself, 'When I'm a man——'"

"That's capital, *you* standing up for the *canaille*," interrupted Norman, "when you are so nice and particular yourself that there is hardly a fellow in our mess whom I was quite sure you would like to know."

"And always wondering we can visit so-and-so, or dine with such and such people," added Mercy.

"That's quite another thing altogether: don't you see that an underbred, vulgar-minded person in our class——"

"Not so loud, if you please," said his uncle.

"Is far lower in the scale of being than a rough labourer. Don't you see that he or she *must* be intrinsically baser, because with advantages of culture and elevating influences the nature refuses to be cultivated."

"A fine theory for explaining inconsistency, no doubt; but depend on it, you are the very last person who would practically put up with the rude coarse grain of the lower orders."

"I really think you misjudge me there, Mercy. I assure you I *delight* in being thrown among them; as a study of human nature they are deeply interesting. Last Christmas twelvemonth, when I was going to Lewisham, for those lectures

we had there on gunnery, I had to travel some way in an omnibus, and inside, for it poured: what fun it was! such a set of originals! one old lady with a nut-brown complexion, deeply carved with wrinkles, busy reading the *Millennial Harbinger;* her husband, a broad, benevolent-faced man, with trowsers tucked up above the ankles, and a great spread of satin waistcoat, and red cotton pocket-handkerchief over his knees. Two or three girls flirting with a young tradesman, joking slyly till the too complimentary retort was excited, and then assuming that air of unfathomable demureness by which any woman can baffle any man—if he is the least touched in the heart."

"What would your mother have said to you, dear Arthur?" observed Mercy. "Fancy her horror at seeing you issue from such a crew!"

"Ah! it is a pity my dear mother has so much buckram, though never was it worn with better grace: really I don't think even a long journey in

a full omnibus at Christmas-time with a *possé* of apple-scented old goodies and hearty-mannered fogeys would the *least* unstiffen her. I often regret it; stately serenity is all very well in its way, but to support it against the well-meant attacks of kindly vulgarity is inhuman. We are all human beings much more than we are ladies and gentlemen, and should, *I* think, indulge fellow-feeling whenever we are able to do so. Dear me! if an old woman offers me an apple out of her pocket, it does not give me a qualm to look at it, and thank her, though I would rather not accept it. But my mother would look too much amazed to answer at all."

Helen listened to him with deepest satisfaction, each word he had said delighted her, for the exclusiveness of tone in her father's and sister's notions had often annoyed her good sense and opposed her naturally genial propensities. She was pleased too to hear Arthur speak so freely in his uncle's presence, which often acted upon him like a spell

of cold restraint. This evening however there was between them that natural attraction which cultivated minds feel, when the extreme contrasts of vulgarity make lesser differences to be merged in the common ground of mutual resemblance.

Mr. Raymond had felt this, and it emboldened him to bring forward a topic which he had been watching for an opportunity to introduce; not much heeding what was last said, except as a turn of conversation apposite to his purpose, he abruptly began,

"Well, my dear Arthur, I am glad to hear you profess such ability for intercourse with the lower orders, as it would be a very essential qualification for the post which I have been thinking of for you."

"I do not understand you, uncle."

"No, you have not given me time to explain. Mr. Cunnick has been telling me that he could get you an appointment at Cwmderig as Superintendent

of the Slate Works; he has strong interest in that neighbourhood——"

"But I don't at all wish it to be exerted on my behalf, thank you; and if he got me fifty appointments, I would not be beholden——"

"Gently, gently, Arthur, you forget: we will talk about this some other time. It is very strange that you cannot learn to adopt a more gracious *manner*, however ungracious your feelings may be towards those who are doing their best to help you."

"I am much obliged to you, sir, but I greatly prefer helping myself."

Foolish words! but his uncle had inadvertently roused all his pride by speaking as if it were possible to him, even for a moment, to be indebted to the intolerable creature asleep on the opposite side of the room.

"Helping yourself! No doubt you would prefer it; and your poor father and mother too; there can be no question that a man at your age *ought* to be

in a position to do so; to be a burden and an anxiety when most men begin to reap the fruits of an expensive education, is the last thing any honourable mind could prefer. I was speaking of necessities, not tastes or preference."

Arthur kept silence by sheer force of will, but his lip blanched with anger and inward tumult, and if his cousins had not been sitting close by, he must have found vent for the passionate excitement of his thoughts. Even Norman Slade could guess this, and he began, in his kind blundering way, to try and soften the impression of Mr. Raymond's taunt.

"But I don't see how a man can help being thrown back by illness; and those stiff examinations are enough to make any one ill who hasn't brains of iron. Mr. Burt told my father when he asked him about Arthur's, that he had first-rate abilities, and ought to have been a regular stunner; he said a *little* more application was all he wanted, and I don't see how a man

can have this, when hard work gives him brain fever."

"Nor I either when he is deficient in self-discipline."

"You will oblige me, uncle, if you will explain your meaning more clearly," said Arthur, in the untunable thickness of tone with which pride and ill-temper strive to conceal their share of utterance; but his voice, though pitched to the requirements of self-respect, betrayed to every ear the total absence of self-possession.

"Simply that with all your fine notions of self-help, I see little signs of self-control: for instance —pray do not break the window line; you can surely throw it up with less violence; I conclude you think *we* wish for more air as well as yourself."

"For instance?" repeated Arthur, with insisting emphasis.

"Your waste of time, when your future livelihood depends on prompt exertion. What have

you done this week past besides boating, fishing, sketching, idling about with your cousins? and when I did hope to see you doing *something*;—at least write important letters, or keep up present acquirements, there you were sauntering up and down in the twilight."

"Oh papa, it was *our* fault. I was so happy that I wanted Helen to be idle and happy too, and you know three is a bad number for this, and so we made Arthur idle with us."

"We were speaking, Mercy, of something more important than happiness."

"You shall no longer have *that* charge to bring against me," said Arthur. "If to-morrow was not Sunday, I would leave here without a day's delay. Be so good as to continue your explanation; how else am I wanting in self-command?"

"Why, to speak truly, I should say, in habitual extravagance. I really do not wish to pain you; but since you invite comment, I must confess what I have noticed. What possible good was there in

giving Jack Reed five shillings, because he found Helen's brooch the other day? a trifle, certainly, but trifles stamp a man's character: and then—of course *I* could not find fault; but the transaction struck me as absurdly out of character. Why have your poor father's book bound so handsomely before you sent it to your tutor?—quite needless."

Your father's poor book, was the meaning conveyed by his more polite words; and Arthur chafed afresh under this new graze to his pride, but he was too honest to rebut the charge of extravagance as false, and only answered rather doggedly, "You will have enough to do, uncle, if you mean to catalogue all my pleasant sins against rigid economy. Heaven knows I fight hard against them, but parsimony is not in our blood and never comes naturally to me."

Indeed his imprudence in money matters was undeniable; he spent as lavishly as those are wont to do who know they can never save. And he

usually felt so rich in all which ordinary minds lack, that he had the sensation of "I ought to have it," about many a little indulgence not absolutely necessary, though as much a matter of course as bread to people not straitened in finance.

"I know that, my dear boy, and you must not think me unkind because I wish to warn you against very damaging tendencies. Pray retract what you said just now about leaving us; we cannot spare you yet, and really I still hope that you may find some advantage from remaining in this neighbourhood,—besides the recreation and rest, which I see both your cousins think me very cruel to find fault with. Come, Mercy, are we to have no tea to-night?"

The twinkle of Mr. Cunnick's eye had been perceived by Mr. Raymond, who thus hastened to wind up the dispute on amicable terms. But Arthur was in no mood for affectionate conclusions, and he left the room without making any reply. Norman soon followed in compliance with a

suggestive nod of Mercy's; the two young men strolled out together; and Arthur, lighting his cigar, fumed out the annoyance of the evening under the lime avenue at the end of the garden.

While ostensibly taking her part in conversation with their uninteresting guest, Helen mused sorrowfully on the painful words she had been listening to during the last half-hour. Several times she had looked at Arthur, trying with her eyes to speak comfort, but he had averted his, and turned away from her side as if it was then an unendurable position "What must he feel, poor fellow, after such upbraidings? must he not hate us all? how *could* papa be so severe!" she had said to herself.

In the last week, ever since the giving of the little cross, (which now always rose and fell with her breath, hanging out of sight upon her neck,) she had become aware that her affection for Arthur was more than cousinly; and she had felt a little shy of talking about him to her sister,

though Mercy was so much another part of herself that with her she had no disguises; she would ask her for the exact words of a half-heard compliment —if curious to know what it was—with perfect *sang froid;* pride having but rarely any influence upon their mutual relations.

Yet she could not now say, "Mercy, do *you* suppose that Arthur loves me—more than as his favourite cousin?" She was restless to know, but could not satisfy her own mind. Sometimes he seemed to take such pains to make her feel only a cousin;—and sometimes, oh! an indescribable difference—made her feel quite afraid of the power she seemed to have over him. The least word, a passing smile, or sympathizing look so lit up his whole manner and countenance. But it may be fancy, she thought, and is it not best it should be only fancy?

Yet every day made him dearer to her, and now this wretched conversation with her father gave new enthusiasm to her admiration for him

who had borne it so well, and must have suffered so acutely all the time. Henceforth she was his devoted champion for life, and would prove how little *she* cared for what the world calls advantages.

Throw a grain of imagined injustice into a woman's notions of the fate of one she loves, and that love will at once be heightened. In this men and women differ greatly. A woman not successful,—not well received by the rest of the world—loses ground in the imagination of a man; but he gains a firmer hold on hers when fortune frowns upon him, and all the world forsakes. No doubt a wisely ordered difference: he whose love for a weaker being is to raise him to a purer atmosphere of spiritual life, must be attracted by one who seems aloof from the contests of life, and safe from its soiling dangers: how else should *he* look up to the feebler object of his love unless she is on a comparative elevation? But she herself *must* look up to him by reason of her Maker's doom, and

what more sweetly puts his authoritative nature within reach of her gentle influence than that boundless tenderness of heart which God has given her,—with its unwearying compassion, the likest thing on earth to His,—and the humble, joyous self-abnegation with which she can strengthen and console those who have lost all hope and confidence in themselves?

CHAPTER V.

"Let us then speak of chiding and reproch whiche ben full grete woundes in mann 'is herte; for thei unsowe the semes of friendship in mann 'is herte."—CHAUCER.

"Some odd thinking youth,
Less friend to doctrine than to truth."
PRIOR.

"MY mother wishes me to colonise," said Arthur to his uncle, on the following morning as they sat at breakfast; and the smile which seemed to harden his countenance as he folded the letter just received, caught Mercy's eye, and gave her some notion of the pain that letter had brought him.

"You can see it if you like," he added, answering her kind questioning looks. "Short, though

not very sweet;—my mother is certainly an adept in the performance of painful duties."

"Oh, but, Arthur, she only says, '*failing other projects, it might be well;*' she cannot wish it, you may be sure."

"No, indeed" said Helen, looking over her sister's shoulder, "for she is clearly most anxious for you to get employment in England. Papa, is there no way of getting a good secretaryship? Arthur writes so beautifully,—don't you know any one who wants a first-rate secretary?"

"I asked Sir Thomas Meek to dine here to-morrow on purpose to talk about that, Helen; it seems to me by no means impossible that with his interest——"

"You are extremely kind, uncle, to arrange so many matters for me; I don't know how to thank you enough for taking so much trouble off my hands—incompetent as I am! but to tell the truth I *greatly* prefer the idea of freedom in a colony to that of servitude at home."

There was a pause while Mr. Raymond was thinking what a hopelessly impracticable person this unlucky nephew was; and the girls wondering if it was possible to try to help him without wounding his pride; and he himself chafing under the pain self-love must always suffer when a proud man fancies he is being treated as a helpless creature, needing patronage; for he was morbidly touchy, and what is touchiness but inflamed self-love that has taken a chill?

But it was Sunday morning, and Mr. Raymond bridled his tongue; only replying after a deliberate attack upon the egg on his plate,

"What kind of *servitude* you refer to, my dear Arthur, I can scarcely imagine, unless you object to the obligations of punctuality, accuracy, and method. You surely do not think these beneath you?"

"No, but to be pledged to dance attendance on all the whims of some bigwig; to have to bring into shape his fatuous notions and vague

schemes; and submit my own intellect to the dawdling, blundering, inconsistent action of his, would drive me wild: I would rather by far go to the diggings."

"What a very bad specimen of 'bigwig' you assume for your chief," Helen observed.

"Why, when one speaks of what one knows little or nothing about, caricature is natural; I never could play second fiddle in a fool's concert——"

"But it does not follow that the great man must be a fool as well as his secretary," interposed Mr. Raymond.

Arthur laughed to show that he did not feel grazed and went on, stimulated by expected opposition, to explain why, as a matter of course, he reckoned upon less high principle and less good sense in the higher orders, than was to be found in a class beneath them."

"That is one of your most objectionable democratic theories, Arthur, and I am surprised that

a man of your age can any longer hold it; as a boy one could understand such crude ideas being palatable."

"What a fine speaker we used to think you at Harrow," Norman chimed in, "when you went on about the 'unprincipled privileged classes, and the Nemesis that must ultimately overtake them.'"

"And my opinion remains unaltered. What are their privileges in many respects, but the privilege of sinning with impunity?"

"Will you not have some more coffee?" asked Mercy, anxious to interrupt him.

"No, thank you. I say, that if the sins and short-comings of the wealthier classes were looked after as sharply as those of the poor, we should have many a millionnaire working in Portland docks, and many a peer in Millbank; think of the wholesale villanies of highly respectable speculators, of the unscrupulous, conscienceless action of bodies corporate,—'all honourable men,'—

of the oppression and silent fraud of many an influential land-owner."

"Arthur, you are speaking most ridiculously; you are arguing like a child out of temper. Do, pray, bring your tirade to some sensible conclusion; we do not care for an harangue only fit to be reported with 'loud cheering' in a low radical newspaper. Supposing you had proved what you so much wish, that all men of station and wealth were rogues—and, as you will never be one of them, I can quite understand your willingness to blacken their position,—what then? what conclusion do you draw?"

"That I seriously prefer taking my chance of getting on in the Colonies, to remaining in the old country where one must wink at time-honoured abuses; and see corrupt practices cloaked with splendid prosperity, and very religious profession."

He spoke with slow emphasis now, for as he saw his uncle's temper rising, the sudden flush,

and then the paleness of still deeper passion, *his* subsided and made way for the utterance of real inward conviction; and his last words being heard in silence, he continued,—"and I think of necessity it must be so; on philosophical grounds alone one might expect a country which for several centuries had made its professed religion a *sine quâ non* for worldly advancement, to become very hollow and half-hearted at the foundations of its virtue."

"Indeed! do explain that, dear Arthur," cried Helen, who noticed with some surprise that instead of cutting the conversation short with angry rebuke, her father had fixed earnest eyes upon him, and seemed intently listening.

"Why, you see what strides we have made in all other national pursuits, in trade, science, politics, general literature, while our religion has been a fixture, almost forbidden to advance; at any rate, carefully guarded from innovation."

"Yes, thank God, it has! Surely, Arthur, you

would not wish for any novelties in a religion so pure and divinely ordered as ours?"

"I shall shock you, Mercy, if I tell you my true thought, but indeed I believe our religion suffers grievously from stagnation. I am afraid of the state of things, described in that German poem which I was showing you the other day, of it being England, of whom one might say,

> So setzt sie sich zurecht
> Den weich gepolsterten Lehnstuhl der Religion,
> Sie ruhet so süss, so bequem darin,
> Und betet gähnend—zu Gott: *

and unless some novelty of spirit is brought in as time goes on, to purify and re-invigorate that stagnation, it is likely to become more and more an outward restraint, instead of the animating principle it ought to be."

"But how much outward restraint common human nature wants. Look at the men in our regiment, I'm sure *they* want it."

* Karl Beck. *Translation*—
Snugly recumbent in an easy chair,
To the Lord God she yawns a sleepy prayer.

"No doubt; but that *cannot* be so wisely and effectually given by those who only feel religion a restraint, as by officers who know the power and love of Christian life."

"There is much truth in what you say," observed Mr. Raymond.

"Only," replied Mercy, "I don't see what *novelty* is needed for that; it has been felt at all times by the true disciples of Christ."

"Yes; but the question is, how to increase the number of these; for unhappily they are, we know, in no kind of proportion to the number of godless professors; and it seems to me that when science, and politics, and literature occupy the mind with such complications of progressive thought, religion is liable to come to a most perilous stand-still, if in some way or other the human mind does not work upon it, with the hope of carrying it to further perfection.

"Well, we do all kinds of missionary work, and have our Bible women, and scripture readers,

and all that. Surely that is carrying it on?" said Norman.

"On to those who had little or no religion before, but not a thought deeper or higher with those who pray the same prayers and read the same good books year after year, at thirty or forty, the same as they used in childhood almost. Does not *that* stunt the soul?—and every intellectual power pushing on at the pace it does? Do you remember, Helen, that passage I pointed out to you in Rénan's *Essays*, where he says, (speaking of 'le sentiment de religion'), 'qu'il n'a quelque chance de conserver son empire qu'en prenant un nouveau dégré de raffinement. La religion, de nos jours, ne peut plus se séparer de la délicatesse de l'âme et de la culture de l'esprit?' I am convinced that its influence in England cannot."*

"I had forgotten that," Helen replied, "and

* An anachronism this, but an imaginary speaker may be allowed to quote from a book not written at the time attributed to the story.

was thinking, as you spoke, of Victor Hugo's expression, 'les vieilles religions qui font peau neuve,' * that's what you want, don't you?"

"Mormonism for instance," said Mr. Raymond.

"I know you would have me there, uncle. I grant there is great danger in the process of growing the new skin, but still it seems to me less dangerous than the old one becoming quite callous and insensible."

"Oh, very very dangerous, Arthur; think of all the sects and religious parties in England now, and pray do not wish for more."

"Really, dear Mercy, I can almost believe that these are allowed by Providence for the sake of keeping attention awake upon religious questions; and if we were, as the old song says, 'four-score religions strong' † in England, I'm not sure that I

* Victor Hugo's Introduction to *Les Feuilles d'Autonne*.

† "We are four-score religions strong—
Take your choice, and the major voice
Shall carry it right or wrong."
From a song entitled, *The Anarchie of* 1640.

should wish to put one of them down: anything better than the self-satisfied apathy of consentaneous orthodoxy; nothing can be so insidiously destructive as that. The Pharisees were undoubtedly *orthodox;* and after all, is it to be supposed that no enlargements of religious life are open to us? I love Emerson for his bold hopes when he says, 'Onward, onward! In liberated moments we know that a new picture of life and duty is already possible: the elements already exist in many minds around you of a doctrine of life which shall transcend any written record we have. The new statements will comprise the scepticisms, as well as the faiths of society, and out of unbelief a creed shall be formed.'"*

This had been one of Arthur's rarely liberated moments, when in the comfortable reaction from pettish displeasure to serious talk on a subject deeply interesting to him, and at least two of his companions, he had a little lost sight of the limi-

* "Essays on Experience." Emerson's Second Series of Essays.

tations of sympathy in his uncle's mind. These were now sharply re-called by Mr. Raymond's authoritative tones when saying, "Whatever wild notions of your own you may choose to propound, Arthur, I can bear; but I must beg you to avoid quotations from an infidel writer like Emerson; it is extremely bad taste to drag in opinions so offensively discordant to those of all present, and for the future you will oblige me by abstaining from it in my house."

"It won't be for long, uncle," he answered, "with 'a yawning kind of pride.'" * And then, as if nothing had disturbed the current of his thoughts, he went on to Helen, as she rose from table, "I've told you about my dear old friend, Anthony Beek. Well, he was remarking when I was last with him, discussing this very point, how rarely as we go on through life, we find the simpler branches of religious duty suffice for our guidance. It seems as if we were purposely brought into

* Dryden.

some intricate dilemma, some subtle web of doubt, or conflict of one duty with another, in order to keep the *mind* in toilsome exercise about duty; and to drive us, perforce, from the outworks of faith to the secret recesses of our sanctuary, by inability to find help from anything less than vital religion. He said too, I remember, that unless we suffered a good deal from our religious duties, in some way or other, we should never feel the joy of devotion; that if sacrifices were not commanded, we should, if we were wise, undertake them for our own comfort and satisfaction. And he ought to know, poor old fellow, he's had an up-hill life with his duties. I wish you knew him, Helen; any good I have in me seems to grow every time I see Anthony."

He spoke thus, as they stood together in the recess of a window, while Mr. Raymond directed Mercy to let the breakfast things remain in readiness for Mr. Cunnick's later hour, and then left the room. And Helen might have prolonged the

argument and enjoyed the opportunity of free discussion, had her mind been in tune for it, but her thoughts were painfully occupied by a secret distress. Nothing could have been colder and more unfeignedly indifferent (as it appeared to her) than Arthur's tone about going abroad; no one, she assured herself, could so speak of a long exile, if it was banishment from one truly, deeply loved. She felt nothing like resentment or pique, but a blank surprise, and steadied her thoughts with pride until she could manage their tumult with a better strength.

And so, smiling gently at her cousin's last words, she only replied, "Yes, some day, I hope you will introduce us to him. You talk, Arthur, as if there was no friend or relation to leave behind in the old country you are so displeased with,—don't hinder me now, please; we are already late, and I must be at the school in ten minutes. I'm coming, Mercy."

"Helen! one minute!" But she would not

stay, perhaps she had not heard him. He spoke very low, for Norman Slade was staring vacantly out of the other window; and what he wished to say was not for heavy ears.

Mercy looked in as she and Helen were crossing the hall, and seeing him with folded arms, apparently unoccupied, she asked him if he would like to look at a very nice little book.

"I am sure, dear Arthur, you have much need of comfort now; do read this,—you know we don't want you at the school as well as Norman, you laugh so when anything goes wrong. Helen and I are so fond of this book. I brought you her copy, because Norman has mine in his room. Good-by, for the present; I know you will like it."

Arthur opened the book with dubious interest, but it was Helen's copy. Helen's dear eyes had been bent on those much-scored pages, and here and there a geranium petal, or rose-leaf, had dropped from her nosegay and left traces of a fading present

among the fixed, undying records of a long extinguished past. He read a few chapters, eyeing with curiosity and something like amusement the energetic marks of approval that underlined sentences on which *his* admiration would have laid no stress: to him they seemed like truisms; very devout but none the less trite.

The masculine soul takes its religious nourishment in a form very different from that which delights women, and at this delight it often wonders. A man's nature is moved to good aims by strong impulse or victorious principle; but *having taken* the right direction, it does not care to be incessantly reminded that this is right and best, with every variety of devout rhetoric. But a woman, more quickly influenced, more fluctuating in determination of will, enjoys frequent stimulus, and seeks for this in reiterated little explosions of ardent piety, either from the pulpit or the press.

Arthur wondered, also, to see so many marks of acceptance beside passages inculcating patience.

What could that happy, lovely creature know of sorrow? Girlish troubles, in truth, they must be for which these little doses of religious sentiment could be thought so sovereign a cure. But while he knelt by her that morning in church, Helen was praying for much needed resignation; and when she turned away to speak to an old woman coming out, rather than walk home with him, it was that she would not have him see traces of the tears she had done her best to hide.

CHAPTER VI.

"His innate sense of beauty and his books had, indeed, made him acquainted with the rules of politeness and good breeding; but real life is more pliant than life in books; it assumes a variety of forms, presents unforeseen situations, which, in spite of their insignificance, seem overwhelming to him who does not know how to conquer them with a slight degree of presence of mind; a slight degree, and yet so much to him who has it not."
—*Homeless*, by M. GOLDSCHMIDT.

"How wretched all the arguing yesterday was, Mercy! We must really do our utmost to keep papa and Arthur apart to-day; if they have any more wrangling, he will be in such a state of prickliness that every one at table will be made uncomfortable."

"Let us invent some out-of-door business till dinner-time, and then they will have no chance."

Such was the design of the two sisters before coming down stairs, but Arthur announced the necessity of giving up the morning to letter-writing. He did this, in spite of the presence of Mr. Cunnick in the library; shutting himself up with monosyllables and frowns whenever the rough voice attempted small talk, or indulged in horse laughs over the newspapers he was reading.

In the afternoon riding was possible; Mercy and Norman preferred walking, and Arthur begged Helen to ride with him. It was a silent ride; they had both too much that they wished to say to each other and could not, to be able to talk pleasantly; but it was pleasant to them both to be together, passing swiftly over the elastic turf of down country, while a web of silvery clouds drawn over the deep blue heavens, shaded its sultry brightness.

Mr. Cunnick met them as they rode into the court.

"What a delightful canter you young people must have had now! first-rate, I should say."

"Yes," replied Helen; "a shady afternoon is charming this summer."

Before dinner she met Mr. Cunnick in the drawing-room alone; for she had hastened down to receive the friends they expected, and he nettled her by saying:—

"So, Miss Helen, your father tells me that the wedding-day is fixed. I hope *you* will have Mr. Arthur Lemayne here on the occasion, to console you."

"I hope so," she said, with cold unsmiling directness; "we shall ask my uncle and aunt, and both my cousins, of course. Will you oblige me by drawing up the blind of the west window, we need not shut out a sunbeam to-day."

But when Arthur came in, soon afterwards, and naturally drew towards her, she was a shade less cordial; for the moment forgetting his feelings in

her own slight annoyance, and addressing her conversation as much as she could to a Mr. Ashcroft on her other side. What was Arthur's uneasiness, that it should have been remembered by her? simply the effects of over much seclusion. Scarcely ever seeing a new face at home, unaccustomed there to the habits of general society, he felt, on an occasion like this, as full of misgivings as a traveller does in savage regions;—he knew not where contempt or surprise (which a novice thinks almost as terrible) might be lying in ambush for his discomfiture; and with this prepossession, he often suspected carefully concealed astonishment to lurk behind common, meaningless incidents. These very suspicions were enough to cause it, and occasionally their betrayal in awkward or abrupt manners, did for a moment create surprise. Helen knew this and pitied, but she had never been poor, and therefore could not pity as much as the case deserved.

Sometimes he attempted a gaiety of non-

chalance, hoping thus both to reassure himself, and to assert his claims upon the respect of others by the ease he affected to feel: vainly—of all uneasy things an assumed semblance of ease is the worst. And it generally changed with him to proud silence, and an inward attitude of vigilant self-defence.

He had besides an occasional haughtiness of manner, which was heart-felt; a proud consciousness of strength, almost inevitable when amid humiliations of outward life the spirit is fortified in "all the adamantine holds of truth;"* and feels possessed of powers which, sooner or later, must conquer inferior antagonists.

To-day this conflict between shame and pride had been intensified by a trifling observation of Norman Slade's. Lounging into Arthur's room at dressing time, himself in most accurate full dress, he exclaimed:—

"There, again, that careless fellow Jenks has

* Wordsworth.

been putting out the wrong coat; just as he did to me, till I gave him a good rowing for it."

"It is the best coat I have."

"You *don't* call that a dress-coat, my good fellow? why, it's what you wore on Sunday morning, for I know I was noticing the cut of the collar—rather peculiar—all the time your uncle was blowing you up for being a rad——"

"It's the coat I wear on Monday evening also," replied Arthur, working his two brushes with indignant energy. "I shall be down directly, Norman: don't wait, you only hinder me."

A trivial incident, merely a careless remark which any one might have let slip; but on Arthur's nature it acted like the prick of a poisoned sting, the venom of which soon spread, and infected every thought and feeling with noxious, lowering influence. Piteous as the "innocent guilt" of poverty may be, it is next to impossible that it should be pitied. The

difference between a rich man and a poor man sounds simple enough, and easy enough of explanation: in theory it is so; practically the poor man is shackled by a hundred fetters, which the rich *cannot* see, and he whom they gall cannot reveal. The rich man is endowed with facilities and means of giving and getting pleasure, which only he who wants them can duly estimate. To him who has them, they seem part of the necessary conditions of civilized existence, and nothing but a strong effort of christianized imagination can teach him what a hindered up-hill march life is to the poor. Without such imagination the stints, and hesitations, and uglinesses of poverty will be attributed more to the person who suffers from them, than to the condition to which he or she is doomed. Bitterly conscious of this and many other painful *fancies*, Arthur entered the drawing-room, and confronted its dreaded assemblage, much in sympathy with Ranaldo when he—

"Avea di foco gli occhi accesi,
Perchè queste traditori, in atto altieri,
L'avean tra lor ridendo assai beffato,
Perchè non era com essi addobbato." *

He gratuitously attributed this mocking tendency to the young man who had engaged Helen's attention before he came in, for Mr. Ashcroft seemed to scan him from head to foot, when introduced, with a derisive glance; and there was a cool affability in his bow—as Arthur fancied—which only a contemptuous fop would show towards a perfect stranger: besides, he kept on laughing at everything Helen said; such impertinence, when a beautiful woman was speaking to him, to feel so much at ease!

Charles Ashcroft hardly knew what it was to feel otherwise; tall, handsome, as far as perfect health and good style could make rather unmeaning features—with the entire self-possession of a man who has been for some years the favourite of any circle he entered, he found very

* Bojardo.

little in life to trouble him, except the long-sighted stratagems of admiring mothers, and his pretty sisters' claims upon him as an escort or companion.

"Beatrice is all very well," he was just then saying, "but I wish she'd get married and have done with it; it's such a bore to be on guard continually, and to have my aunt ever and anon beseeching me to make inquiries about Mr. this and Mr. that."

"What is Charles saying about me, Helen?" said his sister, coming up to them; "doesn't he look worn out? There never was such a lazy creature in the world before. Look at him now, with his hands in those horrible pockets, and tell me if he is not greatly indebted to the only person who obliges him sometimes to exert himself."

The sister was one of those regular-featured, well-got-up people whose best points are seen at once, whose character seems to lie on the surface, as much as good manners will allow. A pro-

ficient in *savoir-faire*, she saw directly that Arthur was standing awkwardly silent, and involved him in lively commonplace talk without a moment's delay; but her cool, self-contented stare, robbed him of even *his* average ability in that game, and after trying to get on with him for some minutes, as she sat beside him at dinner, and failing, she gave up the attempt, and chatted away uninterruptedly with her next neighbour.

Mrs. Gould, the young bride, was on Arthur's other side, but she could not promote conversation any better than himself; very shy, and a little daunted by the flash of the dark eyes and the curl of the moustache in the striking looking face he turned towards her, she only hazarded a few generalizing remarks, safe because incontrovertible, such as that June was a charming month, and Fernwick a very pretty place, and travelling very agreeable—oh! *had* he been abroad lately too, and stayed at Heidelberg?

Fortunately he had, and Heidelberg lasted them

a few minutes, and feeling then as if he had a small stock of available experience in hand, Arthur was just beginning a modest little narrative of an expedition he and Norman had made from thence, when Mr. Ashcroft catching the name of the place, began with unconscious rudeness, "Oh, talking of Heidelberg, Miss Raymond, I must tell you what happened to me this time last year, as we were going up the Rhine, close by—"

He was at the other side of the table and speaking to Helen, so Arthur need not have been interrupted; but the loud mellow voice of his *vis-à-vis*, and his attention-claiming manners, drew off Mrs. Gould's attention (as he supposed), and he abruptly closed his own observations and kept silence while the other dilated upon his past adventures,—the hero of his own tale, and the evident admirer of his own exploits. And Helen seemed to listen with interest. Clearly she liked him, and took no pains to conceal her liking; it was natural. She liked him just as little and as much as a girl is apt to like

an agreeable man who has made no secret of admiring her from the first time of meeting to the last. He was agreeable to her and nothing more; with Arthur in the room, no one else seemed worth looking at or speaking to comparatively, and many a careful glance had she bent towards him while he sat silent and nervous and full of aching comparisons.

Love is often too humble; and a man deeply in love often over-estimates the worldly advantages which he lacks; while the high value he puts upon them drives his heart to despair; he forgets that he is thus dishonouring the love he fain would win; for what woman worth loving could prefer wealth to genius, or rank to a noble heart?

To Arthur it was altogether a miserable evening. When in the drawing-room, he found himself located beside the elder Miss Ashcroft, a stately, world-witted woman, who looked as if anything not perfectly according to usage would strike her as vicious and intolerable,—who had sent

Mr. Cunnick to the farther end of the room by her polished instruments of repulse, and now inclined her long neck, with meditative deliberation, while saying in silvery syllables, "I am not sure that I entirely grasp your meaning, Mr. Lemayne; can you place one a little more on the level of your thought?"

Poor Arthur had stumbled into some subject of æsthetic interest, without using the received phraseology which acts as a pass-word for proving to shallow brains that the speaker handles the right cue, and commands his ground. He repeated in other words the original thought he had so rashly hazarded; but Miss Ashcroft let it "fall to the ground" with all the gentle impertinence of an elderly lady who never means to countenance eccentricity: and as she then began to wave her fan, he had the excuse of fearing she felt the heat, to withdraw to open a curtained window,—and when there, did not return.

Unperceived by him, Helen and Mrs. Gould

and the young Ashcrofts had gone out at the opposite window, and were now strolling together on the lawn, crossing and re-crossing its dim moonlight shadows in the sweet hay-scented night, with many a merry laugh and eager joyous outcry. He go and join them? no, truly. He loved his cousin too well to wish to disturb her enjoyments, and clearly she preferred walking without him, or he would have had her usual inviting summons; "Arthur, the cockchafers are droning so pleasantly under the chestnut tree." She had hoped he would follow, and talked all the more gaily to Beatrice and her brother and Mrs. Gould, because she resolved she would not care whether he did or no. A woman more often causes her lover pain for the sake of propriety than from any want of feeling: her rigid submission to conventional law a man seldom understands, and imputes coldness where there is only timidity, and indifference where pride often guards a very opposite feeling.

So he stood at the window plagued with

jealousy and angry self-abasement; but this mood turned to indignant self-appreciation when, hearing his own name, he looked round and saw his uncle in close conversation with Sir Thomas Meek, who stood near wearing an expression of judicious benevolence on his bland face and erect little figure; while Mr. Raymond with low tones and impressive gestures explained the difficulties of the case.

Arthur knew so well what was being said. Perhaps it is impossible ever to get over the impression you have made on an irritable sensitive childhood: if you have been the one to reprove, and to reproof have added ridicule, no degree of acted kindness, no proof of real love, will conquer life-long suspicions of you in such a nature. Mr. Raymond's whole heart and mind were bent on doing his utmost to advance his nephew's interest, but Arthur could not believe it. The ineffaceable memories of ridicule and contemptuous snubbings doomed to discredit all the good-will which lay

behind them; and not even the deep heart-interest which Arthur had in his uncle's approbation would bend him to conciliatory measures. He vehemently determined on no account to accept help from the man by whom he considered himself habitually injured, and was indeed seriously injured, for on his character the stern powers of his uncle had taken most unfortunate effect.

"There must be some conformity as you say"—"a young man has necessarily a subordinate part." These broken sentences were all that Arthur heard, as a footman, passing by the speakers with a tray, caused them to move a few steps nearer to the place where he stood. But having heard thus much, he strode off rapidly to the farther end of the room, where Norman and Mr. Gould were looking over some views in India with Mercy; and where Helen, who had just come in with her trio, was preparing to sing,—to sing with Mr. Ashcroft of course,—whereas he himself who had known her from a child, and sung not so badly,

people said, never had the nerve to accompany her in public. "The puppy! how conceited he looks," thought Arthur (the prosperous often do to him who never expects prosperity). "And with what assurance he glanced at me while closing the music-book." When we are very much occupied with any one, it is next to impossible for us to believe that the feeling is in no degree mutual.

When Arthur got into his own room that night, he took down a volume of Fichte's works, and throwing himself on the sofa read the following passage, at which the book opened, with a satisfaction only to be understood by those who have occupied his imaginary position: a passage apposite to his excited feelings, though not strikingly applicable to his real circumstances:—

"I am eternal, and I defy your might! Break all upon me! and thou earth and thou heaven mingle in the wild tumult! and all ye elements foam and fret yourselves, and crush in your con-

flict the last atom of the body I call mine! My will, secure in its own purpose, shall soar undisturbed over the wreck of the universe, for I have entered upon my vocation, and it is more enduring than ye are; it is eternal, and I am eternal like it." Then, reading on a little further, he paused, exulting over these concluding lines: "I joyfully bear the cunningly concealed enmity of the great, the dull sneer of the coxcomb, and the compassionating shrug of the fool."

The kind Sir Thomas Meek, and the light-hearted Charles Ashcroft,—least of all his unconcerned aunt, Miss Ashcroft,—all going peaceably to bed like good Christians after a sociable evening, could never have dreamed that *they* fell under this category; but by force of rhetoric the defiant outbreak applied to them, and so Arthur let off the steam.

CHAPTER VII.

"And this is an old fairy tale of the heart,
It is told in all lands, in a different tongue."

LUCILE.

"In those blest days, when life was new,
And hope was false, but love was true."

T. L. PEACOCK.

No entreaty could induce Arthur to stay at Fernwick later than Wednesday; he thought it a great concession of proud resolve to remain these three days, after saying he should leave at once. So the day after the dinner-party was his last, and part of it he gave to copying some music of Miss Ashcroft's into Helen's book, feeling grandly forgiving, but sadly depressed all the time. He thought it a mere feint of good-natured politeness on her part, that brought her so often to his side to see how he was getting on, and made her insist

with such pathetic earnestness upon his putting his initials, with the date of the month and day, at the end of the piece.

There was an early dinner that day, for Mr. Raymond and Mr. Cunnick had a distant ride to take for some business purpose, and the heat made this undesirable till towards evening. It was probably some effect of Mr. Cunnick's irksome presence on the tempers both of his host and his nephew that made them each so inclined to dispute; all through dinner-time a suppressed disagreement on personal grounds led them to wrangle on abstract themes with an obstinate vivacity, which Helen mistook for a fresh proof of Arthur's indifference. How else, she thought, could he care to defend the tendencies of Kingsley's "Yeast" with such pertinacious zeal? She dearly loved his warmth of feeling for the oppressed, but why blaze out with it now? It was natural; having failed himself in every competitive struggle, his judgment was unconsciously

biassed by the suspicion that all authority was oppressive, and all in high positions were blind to merit; and when speaking to his uncle, he assumed as a matter of course, that large possessions and a rich man's security from anxiety about ways and means, made him necessarily out of sympathy with the suffering classes. (Ah, little he guessed what his uncle was suffering then!) He tried to lash him into more sensibility by some of Carlyle's stinging axioms about the contrast of rich and poor. That alone was a new provocation, and Mr. Raymond hastened to denounce Carlyle as one of the most pestilent writers of the day, and Mr. Cunnick to rub his coarse hands, with the air of one who watches a cock-fight promising long endurance. Now Arthur had an essential dislike to hasty generalizations; he had thought enough to perceive their usual falsity; and to sit and hear Carlyle's works run down as immoral and pernicious, as full of shocking, criminal, and indefensible modes of thought, was more than he could

patiently endure. As the dispute went on, he found himself defending much that really was not worth the trouble of defence, and much that was too strong in truth at all to need it. Unfortunately Norman joined in, echoing Mr. Raymond's condemnation with the weak fluency of one who adopts second-hand opinions. He had excellent sound sense for practical matters, but as soon as he left these for abstractions, his words provoked contempt as surely as does the hiss of a goose; for when any mind of small ability tries to meet the original thinker on his own ground, he loses his birthright of natural power, and infallibly stretches his weak reason to elaborate tedious platitudes. Under the pressure of these,—added to the cool arguments of his uncle, and the vulgar-minded amusement of Mr. Cunnick, Arthur's temper gave way, and as soon as dessert was on table, he excused himself to Mercy, saying something about an early dinner allowing one to waive ceremony, and left the room at once.

It was about three hours later, when the elder gentlemen had ridden away, and Norman and Mercy had gone off together to a hay-field at some little distance, charging Helen to follow as soon as she could persuade Arthur to come out and join them,—that he looked up from the book he was pretending to read in the library, and saw her leaning against the window, and peeping in with timid curiosity.

"Are you so very busy still, Arthur?"

"Busy? Yes, fighting down a hundred devils."

"Fie, fie, one is quite enough; at least, I find it so; what *my* enemy is telling me is that you are unkind to keep away from us all this lovely afternoon. M. and N. are gone on; shall not we go after them? you can tell me what your evil spirits say as we walk."

And, as she spoke, she stepped in and laid a clove carnation, from the greenhouse, upon his book.

"What they say? Oh! thank you for this—(sniffing at the flower as if it was a reviving cordial)—they say that I am fated in every conceivable way to displease your father,—my last day too! such a fool to speak as I did, making you and Mercy uncomfortable; but Norman would thrust in his oar, and my uncle praising him up to the skies for such sound judgment."

"But, dear Arthur, you need not have volunteered your difference of thought, what was the good of explaining it? Silence covers much, and wounds no one."

"Suppressed truth is often tacit falsehood."

"Not at all—at least not always. When we refrain from telling old Mr. Leatherby that he is *nearer* than next door to a fool, surely we do not give him to understand that we consider him directly descended from Solomon? Come, Arthur, leave off cudgelling your brain for extra wisdom, and come with me into the garden. I want to plant some seedlings before we go to the

hay-field, and you shall help me if you will. Come, and don't look so fierce."

"Thank you, Helen, I have such a heart-ache to-day, I can hardly smile, even with you."

"Why? Because you mean to go to Australia? Why should you banish yourself—why not stay in England, and do as other men do?"

"Because in every profession I see so much humbug, and I cannot put my mind under its yoke; no, not to please your father!"

"If that was all, you should think it very discreditable to be a man at all: the professions of gentlemanly England only monopolize particular sorts of humbug."

"And then," Arthur muttered, getting up and following her into the garden, "once far from temptation, I might——"

He was fencing, and by instinct she would have known it without the ardent, wistful gaze

fastened upon her as she tied on her hat,—fencing very clumsily, and longing for a moment to lay down the weapons of dissimulation.

"What temptation?" said Helen, carefully pulling out the loops of her hat-strings, as if the question was simple and of no moment, though at that moment she had become so suddenly sure of his feelings, that her voice fell, and she hardly knew what she said.

> "The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow,
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow."*

She was too sincere and free from coquetry to have at her command any of those graceful shifts for hiding consciousness, which later in life few women can fail to acquire, — and she neither pretended not to understand the meaning of his quotation, nor sought to cover their mutual fulness of heart with seeming levity; however

* Shelley.

much her cheeks coloured from intelligence, Arthur was not sure of it, for long curls fell between their eyes as she stooped to take up a basket of seedlings that she had left outside the window; and just saying, "Please fetch the trowel and rake from the tool-house," she passed on alone to a small plot of ground that lay apart from the rest of the garden, and was completely screened from the house by a thick woodbine hedge. This was called "the girls' garden," and both Mercy and Helen liked to keep it in beautiful order with their own hands, for the sake of old associations as much as for present pleasure. She was deliberately nipping off dead roses from one of the little borders, when Arthur came back with the tools; and, possessed of these, she set to work so diligently preparing the ground for her china-asters, that he supposed her still impassive, and after watching her in silence some moments, with one of those sudden starts of strong emotion which at a crisis will almost unintention-

ally overpower all old barriers, he poured out his heart's burden, and told her all his despair and all his passionate hopeless love.

When he began, she was kneeling on the turf, and finding it uneasy to hold up her head to meet this torrent of eloquent words, she put her hand gently into his, and said,—

"But I love you so much, almost better than any one besides; haven't I, ever since the time when you first went to school, and I *would* mark your checked cotton handkerchief with my short little hairs, to make you think of me?"

"Yes, dearest Helen, you have always been the kindest, most generous, sweetest cousin to me, but can I ever dare hope that you would let me be some day more than cousin to you—that you could love me enough——"

"Yes, if I *ever* marry; but we must ask papa's leave about that. Don't look so terribly earnest, Arthur. I *do* love you; come and sit down on the bench, and tell me if you will be good now

and stay in England. You are kissing a very dirty glove, you know—nonsense!"

Nervously laughing to hide a slight panic, lest she should have overstepped accustomed limits in this direct avowal of preference, she slipped past him towards the garden seat, stumbled over the rake he had just thrown down, and then found relief for the overstrained feelings of both, in scolding him playfully for being such a clumsy untidy gardener. A long streak of sunset light fell across them as they sat there together, and seemed to bring with it a blessing of unutterable peaceful joy. Lovely flowers were in their confidence all that evening hour; the giant poppy's delicate crinkled leaves stood wide open to hear what Arthur said when his eager voice sank, and when she turned her face aside in a momentary embarrassment, the honeysuckle was twining towards her soft cheek, and sweetly said, "I understand it." But it would not do to sit there all the evening, and Helen got up, smitten with

compunction, and proposed that since it was too late now to think of reaching the hay-fields, they might at least go across the meadow beyond the park fence to meet her sister and Norman. They too had lingered, deeply drinking in the bliss of the summer evening. The sun had set some little time when Arthur and Helen reached the half-way stile; and except the dusky crimson left on the western sky, there was no colour for the eye to rest on, and light was too clear all over the heavens for many stars to show.

The sight to their eyes was as beautiful in its dim boundless expanse as the prospects of their love; no limitations and obstacles of earth met their notice; only the broad, all-embracing glow of heaven,—and, as yet, they needed not the steadfast light of stars; the glow of love, the light of their earthly sun, was all-sufficient, and they thought it the dawn of joy.

As they lent against the stile, Arthur had

Helen's hand in his, but he was speaking with firm decision.

"You do not know what you insist on," he said; "on nothing less than a total sacrifice of truth and manliness of mind. Helen, God knows I love you, and would sacrifice all besides to win your love; but this I *cannot*. It is childish to talk of not reading this or that book: our minds cannot be cramped thus, and I could no more give up such thoughts than I could cease to breathe."

"But, dearest," she replied, imploringly, "you could indeed avoid reading any more of that dreadful Emerson; you could abstain from all poison, and keep to wholesome diet."

She paused. Arthur had stooped to catch her low-toned words, but as he listened, he lifted his head towards the silent and mysterious sky, glanced at the dim glories of the west, and sighed.

"Helen, we are all too ignorant to speak as

you do now. Hark! a nightingale now — in June?"

A low whispered note from some fledgling bird in a nest hidden near them, had broken the universal hush of nature.

"How strange it sounds," she answered, "like birds singing in their sleep. See! they are coming across the field—and we have only a few minutes more. Arthur, I entreat you to think of what I have said."

"And you, my dear love, remember that I have solemnly refused so to bind myself, even for love of you. Here they come, Mercy reciting,"

"'How fine has the day been! how bright is the sun!'" was going on from her lips in a sing-song emphatic tone.

"I wish dear Mercy would not try to repeat poetry!" said Helen, wishing to turn the subject, and give herself time for thought. "What can make her so deficient in ear, and so patient of humdrum rhymes?"

"Taste not cultivated enough to meet the requirements of piety."

"Piety! how so?"

"Does not piety approve of hymns?"

"To be sure."

"Then it wants, you may be certain, a cultivated taste as a medium for that mode of expression. Let me lift you over this stile, in the gloaming you will not climb as cleverly as usual."

When they met the others, there was a little mild surprise expressed at their delay; but Mercy was too full of self-accusation for being out so long herself, to have any reproaches ready for Helen, whose quiet apology about their "gardening a little first," easily satisfied curiosity. On reaching the house, Helen stole away to her room as quickly as she could; and when Mercy entered it ten minutes later, she found her standing by the window, an idle hand upon the unclasped shawl-pin, with her eyes fixed in a look

of soft astonishment. She was in one of those entranced moods when, had she spoken, she might have said—

"I at this time
Saw blessings spread around me like a sea.*"

She scarcely knew how to arrange the treasures of blissful thought now crowding upon her mind. Everything but joy seemed now a mistake; a dull exhausted error: joy was the truth that really filled the world; with this intensity of love in his heart, and this bewildering fulness of delight in hers, how unreasonable it would be to fear anything.

"Is anything the matter, dear Helen?" asked Mercy, in a grave, quiet voice. "You look odd, and seemed quite in a dream when I opened the door."

"Oh, Mercy, I am only so wonderfully happy. He *does* love me, Mercy."

She reddened all over and stopped short, for

* Wordsworth.

her sister's face only betrayed distress as she answered slowly,—

"He! what—you don't mean Arthur? Oh, Helen, our *cousin!* and what will papa say—surely you do not intend—oh, I'm sorry to seem unsympathizing, but I am so afraid that he will oppose it; and—I cannot be glad yet, for you see, dear Helen, it was not honourable of Arthur to tell you while he is so poor."

"*Poor;* not honourable! You don't know what you are speaking of. He's the soul of honour; and—but don't let us talk about it to-night, I am too much occupied for those outside thoughts, and I want to be alone. I will be down soon. I'm not vexed about what you said, too happy to feel that: were not you happy when Norman wrote in the winter?"

CHAPTER VIII.

"What am I?
A woman feeble as the drooping reeds
That tremble on the river. I can bend,
But not my love; I tremble—I am faint,
But not my love; I weary—not my love;
And I can die, but deathless is my love."

M. E. Braddon.

Helen had only time for a few hurried words with her cousin before he left Fernwick the next morning; they sufficed to assure him that she should be quite content to wait any length of time for the occasion when he would think it possible to open his suit with her father,—that they would be very good, and not write more than the little notes which commonly passed between them in any season of peculiar anxiety, —notes that could be shown; but that she

depended on his telling her uncle and aunt about it at once.

"And, Arthur," she added, with a faltering voice, "you must tell them that it was quite *my* fault your saying what you did; otherwise, they may say as Mercy——"

"What can Mercy have to say?"

"Oh, nothing that matters, only she thinks it was a little rash while you were so unsettled,—but——"

"The bell has rung for prayers, ma'am," said the white-headed butler, crossing the hall to the porch where they stood, and there was no possibility for another confidential word.

Earnest glances and one or two unnecessary good-byes and hand-shakings were the only communications possible; and at half-past ten Helen felt the sultry gloom of that soundless summer day unspeakably blank and oppressive. Mercy was occupied with Norman (he too was obliged to leave them in two days' time): and

her sister would not disturb them. Besides she had instinctive knowledge that as soon as she was alone with Mercy, she would have to encounter remonstrance and disapproval. She received them in affectionate abundance as they sat together after dinner on the bench by their little childish borders; and while Helen gazed on a convolvulus that had only twisted once more round its prop since the last evening's eventful hour, Mercy expressed sedate astonishment that, "poor Arthur could *venture* to speak; it was not right, Helen, indeed. No gentleman feels it honourable to propose when he has nothing to offer,—and absolutely no prospects — and if you take my advice you will write and positively forbid him to say more. Only fancy what papa will say when he knows! He will say that Arthur has behaved shamefully, betrayed his confidence, and made himself unworthy to be welcomed here again."

"Oh, Mercy, don't blame him; it was not his

fault. You will be very unjust if *you* think so. I did not know what I was leading to, quite, and he looked so wretched, and seemed so despairing about himself that I could not help telling him that he had at least *my* love, and then you know, it all came out, and he wanted to know——"

She broke down, great tears stealing over the hot cheek that Mercy hastened to kiss, with soothing words of little meaning but love.

"Dear Helen! did I speak harshly? I can fancy how it was; one cannot always be prudent when one pities very very much——"

"More than pities," ejaculated Helen, wringing a leaf from the rose-bud in her hand with downcast eyes. She felt as conscience-stricken as a child when justly scolded for conduct of which it cannot repent. There was too much truth in what her sister had said, but through it all she heard what Arthur had said so lately, on that very spot; and in her heart she smiled.

"If you had been quite discreet," continued

the elder sister, "you would not have betrayed so much interest in Arthur's melancholy. It is not a young woman's business to console unhappy gentlemen, they *must* be left to their own good sense, and the one help that never fails."

"But how could I leave off all at once, when for years past he had told me every trouble he had? I am sure you would have found it difficult if Norman had been in his place, and besides it is so dreadful to be seeming on one's guard, making arrangements to prevent what may never exist. I assure you that till yesterday evening, I really did not feel sure that Arthur cared for me much more than he would for any good-natured old playmate."

"Did you think he liked me as well?"

"No, not in the same way, because your tastes are so different from his; but I often thought he has talked to you more than to me lately. Oh, how dreadfully long it seems till we can hope to see him again! You must not scold me, Mercy

dear, to-day; I feel everything *so* dull without him; yes, let me rest my head here, it just fits in under yours, and I will show you what he gave me as a keepsake."

And as she spoke she drew out the little cross, twining one of her curls round the chain on which it hung.

"See! I love it so much."

Mercy smiled sadly; her thought was that the love of which it was the token would prove a cross indeed, and a heavy one.

"Well, dearest, I cannot combat what you feel so strongly, but I entreat you to keep silence, and tell him to do so too till there is, at least, more chance of your wishes being listened to. Try to think of it as a thing you have both dreamed; and wait for wiser years to see if there is any possibility of the dream coming true. I dread papa's discovering your secret, and yet nothing could be more wrong than letting anything go on without his knowledge."

"Yes, Arthur and I quite agree about that. Till he can tell papa honestly all about it, we do not mean to say or do anything; but if he gets some good appointment, and does well, surely then papa could not be so cruel——"

"I am afraid," replied Mercy; "let us go in now, I see him looking for us from the terrace."

Helen, too, was afraid; and as days and days passed and Arthur did not write, her fears increased and her hopeful spirits sank. Nevertheless, "inasmuch as love calls all which appertains to it good,"* she still thought herself a happy woman, and was able to take a joyous interest in all her sister's preparations and arrangements for the approaching wedding, without a shade of self-pitying comparison.

Mr. Raymond had never for a moment suspected her attachment to Arthur, for the same reason that a person looking for his spectacles seldom remembers that they may be on his nose.

* E. S.

The proofs which might have warned him were too near, the open affection between the three cousins too notorious for any secret bond to be suspected. Besides, he had long since given her in thought to Charles Ashcroft: she evidently liked him, and his admiring preference was perceived by all the neighbourhood, and never denied by any of his own relations. Mr. Raymond therefore chose to consider it a settled thing; but not being inclined to lose both daughters in the same year, he was careful to avoid any measures that might serve to precipitate a decision. Helen's anxiety to know whom he had heard from; her nervous tremor when a letter from Mr. Lemayne was taken from the letter-bag, and pale disappointed look when only a few lines of general family interest were inside it, quite escaped her father's observation. It was Mercy who asked so eagerly, "Any news of Arthur?" and begged to see the letter from either his father or mother or brother, if one lay long beside him as a communi-

cation of too little interest to be passed on to his girls.

One day, about three weeks after Arthur's leaving Fernwick, Mr. Raymond had been absent for a day and night on business, a visit to Mr. Cunnick the girls believed; and the letter-bag could not be opened till their father's return; but this caused no disquietude, as he had heard from Mr. Lemayne the morning before, who only spoke of Arthur in the usual terms, as being still on the look-out for employment. The morning was quiet and sultry, and the sky so clouded that the two girls had been able to sit out on the lawn ever since breakfast, when about twelve o'clock the servant came out with the message,

"Master is come back, and wishes to speak with Miss Helen in the library."

"With me, Burton? Why will he not come out and talk to us here?" said Helen, looking up from her drawing (she was taking a water-

colour sketch of the house for Mercy). But a rush of blood to the face, and a strange sinking at the heart, answered the hasty question, and adding with mechanical indifference of tone, "Very well, I will be in directly," she dabbled and dried her brush till the footman was out of hearing, and then rose, trembling with excessive trepidation.

"Oh, Mercy, he must be very angry, or he would have come and said good-morning to us first; I wish you might come with me."

"Go quickly, dear, and be brave; waiting will only vex him more."

She went and tried to hasten, but wanted nerve, and wished the rose avenue had been three times as long; and, as is the wont of people in strong excitement, she seemed to see and hear and smell with sharpened senses, to take in everything with strange accuracy of perception. She noticed the annuals in every little border that she passed round each rose-tree stem,—saw the minor convolvulus with its full-spread cup; the neat *collinsea*

bicolor, and delicate blue pea; went into comparisons about them, likened the one to china, the other to a lady in lilac and white muslin, and wondered if the blue pea was anywhere wild, or a product of cultivation—all in a passing moment while her heart beat quick with uncontrollable thumps; for Mr. Raymond was formidable in anger. Then she observed every distinct stroke of the stable clock, and took a kind of comfort in remembering that the next time it struck she should know her fate, and that at least her father should know that she could love no one as she loved Arthur.

On the door-mat, as she went into the library, lay her favourite terrier dog, stretched on its back in perfect repose, scarcely raising an eyelid to see her step across his four uplifted paws, and she had time to envy the dog, and to say, "Pretty Fluff, cannot you move *one* inch this hot day?" This was by way of encouraging herself in apparent coolness before she met her father's eye.

He only looked up from the table strewed with open letters, and said nothing till she stood behind his chair, resting her hands on its back, and saying,—

"Good-morning, papa, have you been in long?"

"Good-morning: sit down if you please—no, not there, here, opposite me. I wish to ask you a question of some importance."

A pause followed that seemed long to Helen, long enough to hear the incessant chip chap, chip chap, chip, of sparrows scuffling over the verandah, and to see that Arthur's letter had been voluminous enough to need two stamps. And then,—

"Is it true, Helen, that you love Arthur Lemayne more than as a cousin?"

"Yes, papa, I love him."

"I never doubted that. Do you mean to tell me that you wish to marry him?"

And the tone in which this question came out was both stern and derisive; fortunately, for that tinge of contempt in Mr. Raymond's accent acted

like a tonic to her true woman's heart, and she replied, clasping her hands tight, and speaking very slowly now,—

"Yes, I love him so dearly that I never mean to marry any one but him."

But the sparkling flash of her beautiful eyes soon fell under the cold astonished glance they met.

"Never *mean* to marry! let me tell you that *your* intentions on that point are not the only things to be considered. How long—of course, you knew that Arthur was going to exhibit this extraordinary pitch of presumption; you must have been misleading me, and *others* for some length of time, with tolerable success hitherto. I cannot say that I admire the sense of honour which allows a man to take advantage of the position my confidence has permitted him to enjoy, nor the heart of a daughter who can deceive so indulgent——"

"Oh, do not speak so," cried Helen; "do not be so angry with us; it was my fault that he ever

let me know his feelings—he could not help being sure that I returned them; and we have not done anything underhand, because we would not for a moment deceive you. We have neither of us written a word to each other all this long time since he went, because he had determined to wait till you could be told."

"Could! Could! I confess *I* see no great suitability in the occasion which you seem to think so fully justifies him in making his suit; the folly of it is only equalled by the presumption of entertaining such hopes—*his* expectations, forsooth!"

"I do not know what these are, papa, for you have not told me; but if it is presumption to have paid me the greatest honour, and given me the greatest happiness this world could afford—*then* Arthur is presumptuous; as it is, I am proud of his love, and only wish——"

She could barely keep her voice clear enough of tears and trembling to add, "more worthy of it"

—and then hid her face with her hand, and would not look up when again Mr. Raymond spoke. His lip had blanched while listening to her brave profession of love, and the few minutes of silence that followed were necessary for regaining his self-command. To him, poor man, the discovery of that morning was a terrible blow.

When he had rustled his letters about for awhile, and pretended to find, with difficulty, one particular passage in Arthur's, his attitude was more rigid and his voice firmer.

"The expectations to which your cousin refers are these:—'I have at last heard of an agent's position in Ireland, which I shall be very well satisfied to take, if you sanction my dearest wishes; the salary offered is three hundred a year, with a house on the estate of Lord ——, an habitual absentee, but a liberal and kind landowner. My father thinks I could be sufficiently qualified for this post to undertake it, without fear of failing in the discharge of its duties; and

though not, of course, what I should most like, if it enables me in a year or two to secure a home in which my dearest cousin,"—— the context was too much for his uncle's patience, and he broke off abruptly.

"Is that all about his plans, papa?"

"No, there is an alternative; why cannot he write in fewer words? Oh, here, sheet six!—'Should you condemn me to despair, I shall be able, the week after next, to take my passage to Australia in the *Mariana*, and mean to take my chance at the diggings. To stay in England, or near it, under such bitter disappointment, will be impossible to me; my acceptance of Lord ——'s offer depends therefore on your decision.'"

Helen started up, and fixing imploring eyes on her father, she said,—

"Oh, papa, you will not surely make us both so utterly unhappy?"

"Whatever I decide upon, Helen, will be solely for your good, and future happiness: I have no

other motive. Are you prepared to marry a poor man? You—used to luxury from your cradle—have you ever imagined what actual poverty would bring upon you?"

"But, dear papa, I should mind nothing that I suffered *with* him; and besides if he was absolutely penniless, with what I have, we could never be so very poor, could we?"

Either Mr. Raymond did not hear, or would not heed her question; for he only rose from his chair and began to pace up and down the room in silence. About the fourth turn he stopped suddenly, and asked, laying his hand on her shoulder,—

"My child, there are more serious interests at stake in this matter than *you* are likely to think of. Could you consent to be the wife of an irreligious man?"

"Oh, never; but, indeed, there is no fear of that. Arthur is so good, and so high-principled; so devout in his own way," she added, hesitating a

moment; as in naming the last characteristic, it flashed upon her memory that he was notoriously averse to any church-going which he could decently avoid.

"Yes, the question is—is it the right way? Can that be called religion which scorns rule, or that true devotion which will not even sacrifice private whims and fancies to the obedience we owe to the Church? His studies again,—what are his favourite writers? Unitarians, dissenters, and infidels all, with few exceptions."

"Oh, papa!"

"Are they not? Did you ever hear him speak of any orthodox writer as he does of such men as Godwin, Carlyle, Channing, and I know not who else."

Truly Mr. Raymond did not; his knowledge of literature was scanty, and wholly gathered from the *Christian Remembrancer*, the *Quarterly*, and such standard works "as no gentleman's library should be without." Even of these his eyes knew

much more than his brain; for he liked them to wander over the tiers of well-bound books on his library walls, and he did not much like to read. He was, in consequence, liable to some phantom terrors which the least acquaintance with general literature might have allayed. The occasional reference to pioneers of modern thought that he met with in the *Christian Remembrancer* often roused alarm; and there was proof enough in *The Times* newspaper that they were making insidious advances in popular favour. Without therefore knowing more of the opinions advocated by various able men beyond a faint guess at their tendencies, he endeavoured to neutralize the poison they might contain by wholesale reprobation, and blind refusal to see anything they had brought to light.

His logic was simple and, to his mind, irrefragable: only bad men could hold pernicious opinions, and all that was new in some lines of thought must be bad, because all that he had long been

used to was good; *therefore,* these were bad men. This mode of reasoning satisfied him completely, both in politics and religion, and if it failed to convince others, he was shocked first and then indignant; and every discomfiture which his narrow mind received from people who could not assent to its dogmas, was carried over to the already heavy account of the guilty innovators in the literary world. If Emerson and Carlyle had had horns and hoofs, and all other insignia of diabolic parentage, they could not have held a darker place in Mr. Raymond's detestation than they already did. Helen knew nothing about them; such reading was strictly tabooed; she only knew the odd, beautiful sayings Arthur quoted sometimes from their works, and now listened with meek perplexity and dread to her father's exposition of their soul-destroying skill, and the ruinous effect they had taken on her cousin's unbalanced mind. She could only say in reply, "I cannot understand why

dear Arthur takes delight in such dreadful books; but I do not think they *have* hurt his faith."

"I fear, Helen, that it has been slowly sapped to the very foundations, and your poor uncle's influence is much against him."

"But, papa, I must have *some*. I will do all I can to persuade him to accept better, more orthodox opinions; do not fear, I am sure he will come right at last."

"At last! he must come right at first before I can, for a moment, consent to his making any pretensions to your hand; so far, at least, that he must give me his solemn promise to abstain from studies that cannot fail to bring him to indifferentism—not to say worse."

"And if he does?" asked Helen.

"He will be here, he tells me, about noon to-morrow; he writes from London. He comes only to take my answer, and will be off when he has seen me."

"Off! Oh, pray, *pray*, give him time to reflect, *don't* be hard upon him, papa, for if you forbid his hopes, I can never leave off loving him."

Her father was standing at the further end of the room, and looking intently upon a portrait that hung over the mantel-piece; his wife's likeness, taken a few weeks after their engagement, full thirty years ago. But as his eye stayed upon the sweet face, of which now not all God's universe could give back the earthly original, he seemed to see again the flitting blush and shy smiles that had stolen over it, when he stood by to watch the artist's skill and amuse the lovely sitter; and that vision brought to his heart a pitiful sympathy, though he only said, "Go now, Helen; I have much to occupy me, and send Mercy."

Yet, when Mercy came, his first words were, "Good morning, my love, just take this letter to your sister; she wants, I know, to see it, and come back again to me."

He had noticed how hungrily Helen had looked at Arthur's many sheets; but could not conquer his chagrin enough to give it to her himself.

CHAPTER IX.

"They think that some sacredness or authority passes upon their passion or design, if they call it conscience."—JEREMY TAYLOR.

"Ah, bitter strife!
I may not be thy love: I am forbidden—
Indeed I am—thwarted, affrighted, chidden."
KEATS.

WHEN Helen told Arthur that she loved him "better almost than any one else," she spoke truly. She had felt till then as if it was impossible to love anybody more than she loved her sister. Never having known a mother's love, she believed nothing could be more tender and devoted than Mercy's, who, ever since she first stroked the baby-sister's face, herself only three years old, had taken the position of an affectionate elder, and

given her more petting and more advice than either of them had ever received from their governess. They had been together from infancy, and very seldom left home.

The lady who had been with them from Mercy's tenth year, left Fernwick as soon as she was of age. She had accurately discharged her duties, perfecting their instruction in all necessary learning and in various accomplishments, with great care and patience; but she had been chosen by their father as a teacher after his own heart;—strong in good sense, firm, gentle, and rigidly right-thinking, but neither sympathetic nor quick in discerning character. As regards her two pupils, she had made the mistake of treating Helen's reflective turn of mind as an undesirable habit, tending as she said to irresolution and vagueness of thought; while Mercy, naturally given to accept dogmatic teaching with blind and exclusive credence, she made still more positive by encouraging such docility as a very valuable safeguard. If Helen

mooted any question of abstract difficulty, she was snubbed; and Mercy's girlish eagerness to shut up all her sister's doubt with some little form of sound words, was applauded both by their father and Miss Duckett as singularly judicious and right. This accustomed Helen to look up to her sister with unquestioning reverence; for not only was she herself very humble-minded and teachable, but Mercy had a sweetness of temper and rectitude of conduct which made all praise seem justly her due; and, besides, she took such pride in her sister's beauty and gracefulness, that it was not difficult to forgive the occasional slight put upon her mental abilities; of these Helen was but partially aware. During the last two or three years she had begun to feel obscurely, that if Mercy was so very superior in some matters of judgment, she was wonderfully stupid in others, and that it took her half-an-hour to understand what she herself saw at a glance.

However, the superstitions of youth are not

easily shaken, and in every difference of opinion Helen continued to think Mercy *must* be right, even when it began to dawn upon her that she *might* sometimes be wrong. This told upon her fate now. After nearly an hour's anxious conference with Mr. Raymond, Mercy emerged from the library, resolute in the determination to prove her sisterly love by "helping poor dear Helen to fight against her temporary weakness."

"I would not pain the poor child." Mr. Raymond had said, as Mercy went towards the door, "by bringing forward more objections than the one I find so insuperable, or I might have urged my strong prejudice against cousins marrying."

(Sly human nature! how ready it is to put forward a frank confession of prejudice when the feeling so named is securely based on facts; but when only hasty judgment raises the obstacle, it must then keep clear of the word, and call itself scruple, or reason's unalterable verdict.)

"No need of any other reason," replied his daughter, sighing, "the Bible speaks very clearly about touching pitch and being defiled. No, Helen *must* give it up. I will do my best with her, papa."

She did: all that day and all the next morning she lost no opportunity of working upon Helen's conscientious fears, and as surely upon Helen's pride, which was strong, though not in the direction of intellectual claims. She reminded her continually of the text, "Whoso loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me:" and if, when making it bear upon Arthur's unhallowed admiration of writers who denied Christ, Helen ventured to demur to that charge as unproved, it did quite as well to turn the same text another way, and to show that obedience to a father's wish was now the test by which her fidelity to the Saviour was to be made sure. And then the poor girl had no answer to make but tears and wringing hands. Seeing which, her

sister would begin on a fresh tack—for it made her kind heart wretched to see such sorrow on her darling's face—and say in less solemn tones, "Depend upon it, dearest, if Arthur really loved you as much as you suppose, he would never hold out as he did about a silly book. The minute you asked him to give up reading Emerson, he would have assented at once, only too glad to have any means of proving his attachment. Why, see how it was with Norman, he did but hear me say once that I could not bear to see him reading that horrid book of Doyle's—you remember—full of vulgar caricatures, and he said, 'Do you really object? for if you do, I solemnly assure you that you shall never see it in my hands again.'"

"But," said Helen dubiously, now able to smile again, "there is such a difference between the sort of reading Arthur likes, and 'Brown, Jones, and Robinson,' which *I* saw no harm in."

"Ah! but the principle is the same: the feeling a man ought to have that no sacrifice of

personal fancies is too much to make for a woman he truly loves. A woman *ought not* to give her heart away so lightly to one who will not even resign a worthless book."

The dose was telling upon Helen; already it had raised her drooping head, given an increased firmness to her mouth, and made her think that perhaps she had not sufficiently asserted her rights with her lover.

"Womanly dignity should never be lost sight of!" ejaculated Mercy, throwing back her compact little head, with a proud sense of being the experienced monitor she was. "You must not forget what you owe to your family either."

As her last words fell, Helen was standing by the window, very erect; looking out with brightening eyes on the beautiful grounds that lay beyond the garden: she was thinking of her power with Arthur, and flattering herself that by its exercise, she could secure both his happiness and her own; her thoughts so mixed with joy

and fear that they rang in her brain like bells in an echoing tower—wild as they, and sweet in their varied measure.

Arthur had well judged in announcing that he would come himself to receive his uncle's answer; but for this he would assuredly have had a prompt and unconditional refusal. Now, Helen would have time to use her influence, should the dreaded consultation with Mr. Raymond take an unfavourable turn.

Had she been older and known more of human nature, she would have exerted her influence in a very different way: she would have tried to modify rather than to oppose; to ask for a sacrifice as a concession to her weakness rather than as a tribute of acknowledgment to her strength. But she was young and ignorant, and succumbed to the dictates of minds much feebler than her own. What they wanted in wisdom was hidden from her by what they had in large measure, and she lacked — religious zeal. It never

occurred to her that an excess of zeal could be the result of defective understanding, yet so it was in this instance.

One of the most acute thinkers of our day * has offered proof of the hypothesis that in physical life compression intensifies force: in spiritual life also it is very obvious that a narrow belief increases the explosive energies of zeal. Peremptory assertion and mournful diatribes seldom come from a very comprehensive mind. Looking backwards for causation and onwards for ultimately beneficial consequences, the religious philosopher cannot feel, and therefore does not express, any passionate excitement about the present. Meditation calms his regret; a deep consciousness of his own human blindness forbids him to despair, an ever growing knowledge of the inscrutable resources of Divine Providence leads him to suspect hidden good under all seeming evil: while the devout zealot chides, laments, and exhorts as

* See *Life in Nature*, by JAMES HINTON.

it the fate of the universe would be desperate, were not the measures he considers right adopted by all good men.

Each works his work, and in the one-sided convictions of a small mind we may find cause to be satisfied; for the weak nature that holds truth in prejudice would be the sport of temptation if it had not a singular tenacity in retaining its impressions of duty; and if mean intellects balanced reasons as long as those of greater calibre do before they put thought into speech, and resolves into act, what would be done in man's short broken day?

But in Helen Raymond's day wiser work had been done, if her father and sister had had the least tinge of Christian philosophy.

CHAPTER X.

"And mortals when they take a whim,
The greater the folly the stiffer the limb
That stands upon or by it.—T. Hood."

By dint of Mercy's exhortations Helen had fortified herself with many a strong resolve. She would be firm—love should *not* prevail over principle—but when Arthur came in and their eyes met, and his own fine voice spoke for him, she forgot all about principles; his presence filled her with joy, and made everything but pleasing him appear unimportant. Mercy remained beside her, kind but very grave, and only the most trifling remarks were interchanged.

"We quite forgot that evening to water the seedlings," said Arthur, taking up the ball of

cotton from which Helen was knitting, and winding up what had run down with great accuracy. "I thought of them as I rode past the sunk fence the next morning, and was afraid you would find them drooping when you went out."

"Oh, everything seemed tired and dull then. Tell us what you have been doing these weary weeks. How is uncle Richard? and is aunt in better spirits now?"

"Both pretty well, thank you. They have been so kind, so very kind about it. You don't know, Helen, how much they love you; and they did not give me half the scolding I expected."

"And Richard?" interposed Mercy, checking farther confidences as drily as she could. "He is not at home now I suppose?"

"No, he has just taken a curacy in Wiltshire, and seems to be in the seventh heaven of rubrical obedience;—finds his rector a dutiful son of the church, and his choir alone not quite satisfactory."

Mr. Raymond came in at this moment, and after shaking hands with his nephew, and just saying, "I have received your letter," he told them that luncheon was ready, and went with them to the dining-room.

In vain Arthur tried to divine the intentions that lay hid in his measured politeness, which had just enough of a relation's cordiality to prevent any suspicion of anger, and just a smile too little to give any semblance of encouragement.

They talked of the weather, the latest news, the speech of the French President (it was in the year 1850), the wasps, the dog's cleverness in sitting up, the new mowing machine, everything in short that they could recall far enough from the thoughts which occupied them all. Meanwhile Helen's flush of gladness had paled, and her hands grown cold, and her voice so low that twice her father had to ask her to repeat what she had said; but even then, while she spoke, his eye was averted from her face. A long luncheon-

time it seemed to those who felt as if every bit they tried to eat would choke them; and Mercy who had watched her sister's vain efforts, poured out a glass of port wine, and passed it to her with the decisive order to take what was good for her, at once.

"We will proceed to business now, if you please," said Mr. Raymond as they rose to leave the room. "Come into the library, will you—"

He went first, and Helen let Arthur grasp her hand, and kiss it as he passed by her, saying, "Will *you* be at leisure to speak to me when he has done?"

"In the lime avenue till you come out."

And then the heavy library door shut him in with her father.

"Oh, Mercy, do say something hopeful! all my courage is dying out."

"I can only hope that your good principle will conquer, or at least enable you to bear grief well. Alas! I see no other hope for you in this matter."

That was the last thing the fainting heart could bear to be told; and wishing to prevent further annoyance, she took her garden hat from the hall, and went out to the avenue.

The limes were full of a drowsy hum of bees, the blossom was fading, but honey dew on the leaves still attracted swarms of insect life. Helen sat down on one of the seats beneath them, and tried to quiet agitation by listening to the sweet low music of nature, and watching the grasshoppers that were jumping about in the grass beside her; but all the time her heart heard her father's stern voice, and saw its cruel effect on her cousin, by the knitted brow and swelling veins, and the lips he could hardly constrain himself to keep closed.

Sitting still was no rest to her, she walked up and down in the light trembling shade of lime-trees, and went over in her mind the several counts against Arthur, which her father had so angrily enumerated. As to his radical notions,

she did not understand them, and would not therefore think of bringing them forward; but what was there in his religious opinions that she had to hold out about?

He did not believe that England would tolerate the Liturgy as it stood, unaltered, many years longer. That was very bad certainly, but did not touch articles of faith; it was only a different mode of expression he wished for.

Then he had said that many missionaries had done more harm than good, and he wished they would stay at home, and not go humbugging savages about spiritual experiences, when they had but just left off eating each other, and when all the poor wretches thought of was the number of beads and pieces of cloth they should get if they said "oh!" to the white man's Great Spirit. Yes, it was *that* which Mercy said was so profane. But certainly missionary reports were sometimes weak enough to offend common sense and create suspicion. She must allow that.

Then he quoted Godwin's saying about clergymen, with full approval. It was very shocking,* but not entirely untrue; she must say there was something in it.

Then he would read bad writers like Emerson, and she supposed he quoted from him or some one equally bad, his detestable saying that many an infidel philosopher had really done more to advance the cause of religion than hundreds of "unctional" divines.

Musing on these opinions, and puzzling herself to settle how she could best oppose them, and fancying how Arthur would smile and bite his

* "It is surely a strange and anomalous species of existence where a man's days are to be spent in study, with this condition annexed, that he must abstain from inquiry. Yet abstain he must, for he has entered into a previous engagement, express or implied, what his opinions shall be through the course of his life. This is incompatible with anything that deserves the name of inquiry. He that really inquires can by no means foresee in what conclusion his inquiry shall terminate. . . . . He never dares trust himself to one unprejudiced contemplation. He starts with impatience and terror from its possible results. By long habits of intellectual slavery he has learned to bear the yoke without a murmur."—W. GODWIN'S *Inquirer*.

lip as he listened, she spent more than an hour, and was beginning to be aware of physical weariness, when Arthur came in sight. He strode forward hastily and she was sure of his angry disappointment before he joined her.

"But once, Helen, if it may never be again," he said when he came up, "once more alone with you!" And her hand was in his arm in a moment, and in silence they slowly walked towards the seat at the farther end of the avenue.

"It's of no use arguing with your father, dearest, he will not hear of it. He could not bear you to marry a poor fellow like myself—let alone cousin-hood; and so he makes it a condition that I should think just as he does, and believe just as little or as much. And you know that if it were to save my life—Heaven knows I'd rather keep your love than life without it—I *couldn't* shape my creed to suit my own interests."

"No, dearest Arthur, of course not, no one

could wish that; but could you not avoid having anything more to do with objectionable writers, who do so much harm to truth?"

"My dear love, you speak as if truth was a fixed property of man, a thing we could get in the whole lump at once, or by inheritance—and guard as a dog guards its bone. You seem to mistake the very nature of our spiritual existence—truth is all around us, it is the very atmosphere of our souls. It is to be learned more and more every day we draw breath; I do not read the writers you and my uncle are always railing at, with any notion that they hold truth in any perfect proportion; but because they have the courage to open their eyes, and to say exactly what *their* eyes see when opened. They help to break the iron crust of prejudice and superstition which holds us all in fetters—cramping the faculties, and making all right growth impossible; and with all their faults, and many I allow they have, they are free from the

absurd arrogance of laying claim to infallible orthodoxy."

Helen sighed; she felt quite out of her depth already, and as they sat together, it was pleasanter to look at him and watch the varying expression of his frank dark eyes than to attempt argument.

"You look pale," she said.

"I feel hopeless. I know you will never do what your father forbids, and he will—he does forbid me to think of this again."

"Of our marrying; but no one can make us give up what we feel. Nothing. I shall never care for any one as I do for you, Arthur."

"You say so now: and may feel the same towards me for some time: you are good enough for that I know; but absence, long absence is a terrible solvent. You will come at last to forget me—by degrees of course. You will hear people saying, 'What a pity that sweet Miss Raymond should waste her life in an unhappy attachment!'—till you are brought at last to

think so too. Then clergymen friends will step in and tell you that you are wishing to have fellowship with an unbelieving sinner; and you will begin to think of me as 'poor Arthur,' and despise me a little——"

"Arthur! dear Arthur! for shame, you do not really believe that——"

"Then you will go on thinking of me in this way till love almost dies out, and then you will marry for an establishment; for I really *don't* think you will love any one else in a hurry—judging by your constancy to old dogs. I promise myself a share of what they enjoy."

"*I* marry for an establishment?"

"Yes; don't you know how it is in story-books: when religion requires people to sacrifice anything, it always compensates them in the end by some temporal comfort—I always remark that—and when Mercy is married you will be lonely."

"You ought not to say such cruel things in joke or earnest; you ought not, indeed."

"Ought not? Helen, your father ought not to try and cure you of loving me, if, as he pretends to be, he is in such concern for the welfare of my soul."

To a physiognomist, Arthur's look at that moment would have warranted the bitterness of his words. There was in it a dark intensity of pride and passion which might have been a warning of the risk incurred by subjecting such a nature to the fierce temptations of despair. Helen saw it, and replied in her gentlest accents:—

"Dearest Arthur, he will never succeed. *You* are the only one who can ever shake my affection for you: nothing but conduct which I believe quite impossible in your case, could ever alter my feelings."

Surely there are in the human spirit tides and currents of emotion for which we cannot altogether account. Some sudden withering remembrance of his uncle's scorn had come across Arthur, and in combination with the earnest

desires lately expressed for his spiritual health, that remembrance stung him to wrathful contempt; and even then, in the bitter sorrow which he shared with Helen, he could scarcely control a more violent expression. But he kept silence, and she, recalling Mercy's impressive verdict, "You may be quite positive that his love for you is a mere say-so, if it cannot yield such a trifle as reading a few books more or less," thought it would be a suitable pendant to the last encouraging words to make one more attempt, and with unfortunate pertinacity added,—

"I think that *if* you value that affection, you will consent to give up the kind of study we all so strongly disapprove."

"If you were a foolish vain woman, Helen, who wished to test her influence, I could understand this most unreasonable demand, as it is it seems to me sheer madness. You ask me to falsify my whole nature; I tell you, that unless I prefer what I hold to be right to any consider-

ations of a personal nature, I should be unworthy of your love."

As he spoke, white-lipped with angry excitement, she withdrew her hand from his, and, falling back upon the unassailable fortress of woman's pride, said in a constrained voice,—

"You then compel me to say that I, too, *must* prefer duty to everything else, and must try henceforward to conquer a forbidden affection."

Mr. Helps has made the observation "that a man seldom makes so signal a blunder as when he acts exceptionally, and contradicts the usual tenour of his life and character." This blunder Helen had committed, doing violence to the mildness and gentleness of her nature by a retort which, though prompted in the first instance by her sister, was uttered now under stress of temper and chagrin. And thus, there was a harsh note in her voice and an assumed hauteur, so forced and so unlike her usual sweet deference, as to betray that from the heaven of perfect love,

she was for the moment banished; and that a bitter consciousness that his words *did* hit her weak point,—that this *was* a struggle for mastery,—clenched her determination not to succumb.

The shallow current would soon have turned, and the pride which she then mistook for high principle, would quickly have yielded to the melancholy surprise of Arthur's manner, had they not been at that minute interrupted by Mercy, hurrying breathless towards them. As they got up and went without a word to meet her, she cried out,—

"I would not send Burton to look for you, dear Helen, but you are wanted in-doors—the Ashcrofts—and papa asking why you are not told, so they know you are at home. Come. Arthur, you do not go till to-morrow morning, papa tells me, so I need not apologize to you for running away now. Will you come in with us?"

"Not yet, thank you."

Mercy took Helen's arm and walked on quickly towards the house, a little surprised to see Arthur turn and go the other way. Helen could account for it too well; but she said nothing, till her sister asked if Arthur *quite* understood their father's decision?"

"Yes, and mine. Do not talk about him now, Mercy, if you want me in the drawing-room."

From their childhood they had both been used to an uncommon degree of self-command. Their father looked on demonstrations of feeling as so much nonsense; as puerilities beneath any man's endurance; and all the kissings and weepings of women he tried to keep clear of, as he would of entangling burrs. With this view, the affectionate advances of his girls, when quite little, had often been repelled; and nothing gives a girl an earlier habit of self-control than finding her caresses checked by impatience or contempt.

So trained, Helen was able to meet the three

Ashcrofts and Mr. Raymond, coming out on the lawn as she approached, with courteous equanimity, to baffle the curiosity of Beatrice as to what she could have been about; to turn aside the remarks on her paleness made by the elder lady; and to meet one jest with another as Charles rallied her on the romantic shepherdess figure she made, with her flapping Leghorn hat and broad blue strings—a hat not usually worn at that time.

"Oh, but I have neither crook nor dog, Mr. Ashcroft, both essentials to that costume. Fluffy was too idle to walk with me."

"Then you have been walking?" asked his aunt, whose quick ear had caught the plural "they," when on first arriving Mr. Raymond had asked Mercy where her sister was.

"In the avenue."

She glanced at her father, but his impassible face expressed polite ease only.

"Oh, Helen, since you have your hat on, do not take us back to the drawing-room; let us

sit down under this delightful beech tree; we will leave the chairs for Mr. Raymond and my aunt, but we four are not old enough to fear rheumatism, —there, Charles, put my shawl down on the turf; it will hold three, well, and I want it to serve as a kind of wishing carpet: that is, I want, before we move, to persuade both you and Mercy to spend to-morrow with us. It is Charlie's birthday, and we always try and amuse the poor fellow on that day—don't we?" (turning to her brother).

"Oh, thank you," said Helen, too eager to decline to think of the most unanswerable objection. "Thank you, but papa wished us to go with him to make our first call upon some new tenants at Rye Farm."

"Yes, but he has given his consent, dear, and says he will come too, if you will give us the pleasure: so, you see, you must come!"

Helen did see, and was vexed: looked at Mercy, and saw that she would suggest no escape; looked at Miss Ashcroft, and found her

practised eye scanning her face intently, and hastened to give the unavoidable assent.

"Then we must certainly accept your kind invitation."

"That's right. We only mean to have a quiet dinner out of doors: and then a little dancing in the hall."

"Worse and worse," thought Helen; but she continued assiduous endeavours to keep the conversational ball rolling; and with Beatrice and Charles this was at any other time most easy, they having those full-bodied, resonant voices, which seem to cover the ground and prevent any awkward vacancies in the social atmosphere.

They enjoyed the lounging *séance*, sheltered from the rich afternoon glow by boughs which feathered to the ground; and they lingered and chatted there till the dressing-bell rang.

Arthur heard it as he came up at the side of the garden where they sat, through a shrubbery which masked his nearness. He heard too

merry voices, ringing laughter, eager exclamations; and Helen's now and then. Walking slowly past, so as to avoid meeting the visitors as they crossed the terrace in front of the house, he caught these words: "To-morrow then at twelve; not a minute later or Charles will be disappointed. He wants to show you where that new fern grows."

"If it is fine," was Helen's reply; "I hope it will be."

Such trifling words; but to him, who only heard their forced cordiality, they seemed to have a strength that could break his heart—the strength of gay indifference.

CHAPTER XI.

"A future, with an unimagined face,
Will break on thee and me."—ALEXANDER SMITH.

"A se la terra
Forse il mortale inabitabil fatta
Vede omai senza quella
Nova, sola, infinita
Felicità che il suo pensier figura."—LEOPARDI.

A LOVER'S quarrel is notoriously of short duration, and seldom makes so deep a breach as it simulates, but to have quarrelled the day before a long and hopeless parting, is a very serious step towards disunion, particularly when relations in authority are doing their best to effect entire separation. With this view, Mercy and Mr. Raymond managed to prevent anything more than the merest small-talk passing between Helen and her cousin for the rest of the day. They were both very silent, very grave,—much too

unhappy, now, to keep up any appearance of cheerfulness.

Arthur made no pretence of conversing; he answered when he was spoken to, and that was all. Helen, a woman, and therefore more habituated to self-suppression, tried hard to make the slow hours less uncomfortable for her sympathizing sister; but just as she began to make some safe generalizing remark for public relief, a particular application of it would occur—a keen dart from memory or fear strike through her—and the half-said sentence had to be cut short, before her voice gave way. She maintained calmness of demeanour till Mr. Raymond, with cruel want of tact but intended kindness, took up his glass and proposed Arthur's health: and lifting her eye to his, she saw a tear glitter there, and beyond him, on the wall, the map of the world, and its dread expanse of ocean. She knew the full meaning of that unusual ceremony: her father was wishing prosperity to the emigrant,

and he—? He sat with them, perhaps, for the last time, and this last day she had made his sad heart heavier, and formally rejected his priceless love. Mercy rose at once, and her sister's outburst of distress was hidden on the drawing-room sofa.

The gentlemen left the table very soon after, for Mr. Raymond felt embarrassed by the presence of one with whom he did not again care to measure his strength of intellect; though as far as a prevailing will goes, he had been victor at their previous encounter: and Arthur could not keep up a farce of smooth politeness when indignation and grief were each minute urging him to a vain outburst of complaint, and were more controlled by contempt than by conscience.

"Will not Helen play to night?" he said to Mercy in his lowest tones, apparently taking no notice of her sister as she bent over her work in silent perturbation. But she heard him, and only too thankful now to be able to show any compliance, lay down her work at once and went to the piano.

It was some minutes before she could choose in her own mind what was suitable, or rather bearable, music for that hour. A few airs were tried, and left unfinished, as if memory failed her; but when, at last, she began a sonata of Beethoven's, strength and determination seemed to come with its passionate harmonies, and she played as those do, who feel as if in music they could pour out the burden of their souls. She gave such heart-stirring pathos to some passages, such an expression of wild tumultuous emotion to others, that she imagined herself speaking to Arthur's ear almost as distinctly as if using articulate words. But the language of music though full of meaning is indefinite, and often conveys to the hearer a false as well as a vague suggestion. Sitting apart in the twilight to-night—he would not take his usual post at her side—Arthur felt that she was deeply moved by pity—it might be by pride—but no thrilling discord in her soft minor keys told him of her compunction and regrets, and his grave

"thank-you" when the lights came in and she left the instrument, sounded to her relentlessly distant; and immediately she was more collected and conversable.

An hour later they were saying "good-night," her hand in his, and her eyelids dropped under the sad intensity of his gaze. He seemed to be printing her features and their beautiful expressiveness once more on his fond heart—to be loth to give up that momentary touch of cordiality—to linger over the simple words, "Good-night, Helen! Good-by, God bless you, Helen!" as if longing for a few words more.

Her father perceived it, and said rather sharply, "Helen, it is late. I want you, Arthur, to look at some papers your mother sent for my signature: can you spare me five minutes now?"

Helen left the room hastily, and was soon locked in her own; unable even to see Mercy again that night. Mercy stayed in the drawing-room to put away several little things, and Arthur had time to

say to her, while his uncle went for the papers, "Mercy, if you have any right to your name, get me an opportunity of speaking to Helen once more. I promised your father to leave at five, to-morrow morning."

"But, dear Arthur, it is impossible."

"No, do not say so; only tell her that I will come under her window and call about ten minutes to five; if she will but look out, and wish me good speed, and give me a kind good-by, I shall leave England with less wretchedness. Will you tell her?"

Mr. Raymond came in, and glanced suspiciously at them, perceiving that Arthur broke off when he entered; so that Mercy could not then say yes, lest it should lead to inquiry; and she was now obliged to hurry away after a short, but heartily expressed farewell.

"I do not believe you *will* leave England really, Arthur, but wherever you go, you have my earnest good wishes: good-by!"

Tapping at her sister's door when she got upstairs, she received no answer; and judging it best to leave her in the solitude she wished for, she went back into her own room adjoining. There she had time to think about Arthur's message. Should she give it? She had not promised to do so. Surely it would be better to suppress what could only disturb her poor sister's peace still more. The cousins had parted as cousins only—if there was another interview, even at a window, it would be as lovers again that they would exchange sighs and assurances of constancy. Helen was very impulsive—mere pity when she saw him going away for years, possibly, and to the antipodes, would make all her resolution waver, and the unhappy work of to-day would be undone, and her best interests again in danger. It would be more truly kind to them both, to let matters take their course, and spare them both from temptation.

So Mercy reasoned, and once having got the

idea that in this case silence was duty, she dismissed all remaining doubt, and quietly went to bed—not without many a prayer both for her sister and cousin, for their eternal welfare rather than their immediate consolation. She had not been quite asleep, though dozing, when she heard Helen gently unlock the door between their two rooms, which it was their wont to keep open at night: but her soft tread went back again to the inner room, and neither of them spoke. She was awakened again in the early sunlight of next morning by Helen standing at her bedside.

"Mercy, did you call?"

"Call! what do you mean?" she replied, drowsily creeping back to full consciousness. "Oh no, to be sure not. I was in the midst of such busy dreams: what made you think that I did?"

"I thought some one was calling me, several times over; but I suppose I was dreaming too."

"Lie down, dearest, and try to go to sleep again; it is quite early, not five o'clock yet."

"I can lie down," said Helen, "but cannot sleep again. I have hardly slept half an hour all night."

And she lay down, and closed her eyes, and tried hard to forget the burden on her heart which imperfect sleep had scarcely for an hour removed. A softened light filled the room, the curtains being still drawn; but the voices of birds told her that without all nature was astir. The wood-pigeon was telling plaintively in her soft notes of the fulness of happy love, the blackbird sung of joy, and every little bird twittered, busy with fresh enjoyment.

Helen heard them all too plainly, for sleep would not come; it seemed almost an hour since she had been trying to obtain forgetfulness, when the thought struck her that by six o'clock Arthur *might* be in the garden, and that if she was down by that time, she could see him alone,

and heal the wound she had the day before inflicted. It was not likely, as his habits were not those of an early riser—being given to late vigils, but just possible. It was a welcome hope.

She sprang up, and began to dress. When she had noiselessly shut the door between the two rooms, she could open the windows without fear of disturbing her sister by the flood of sunshine they admitted. Throwing up the sash so gently that but a few drops of dew were shaken from a cluster of noisette roses which almost touched the window-frame, she leaned out, thirsty for the cool blessing of the fragrant morning air. She had an eye for the jessamine opening just beneath, for the gum-cistus now full of blossom on the lawn, and then a sudden glance towards the park showed her two men riding along the distant road, now going through the gate at the farthest lodge, and now—quite out of sight.

One she knew at once was her father's head groom, the other her sinking heart refused to

know; but its sudden faintness and strong fear confessed that it was Arthur.

There are moments when we positively disbelieve our senses, to avoid accepting our doom. And when she could no longer doubt that it was her cousin's figure, she tried to make herself believe that it was but for a morning's ride that he had gone out;—that he would be back to breakfast. Ah! Helen, this is the first stage of his journey to another side of the globe—do not look for him again so soon.

Probably she did not really, but when the mind sees that a terrible grief is come, it invents many a strange subterfuge for temporary escape, and while hop lessly reiterating to itself, "It cannot be," time is gained for gathering sufficient fortitude to submit to the undeniable "It is." To do this is, in some cases, as much as poor human nature can do. The heartfelt *so be it* of faith, it may take long years, and many, to acquire.

CHAPTER XII.

"I know not if the sunshine waste—
The world is dark since thou art gone!
The hours are, oh, so leaden-paced!
The birds sing, and the stars float on,
But sing not well, and look not fair—
A weight is in the summer air,
And sadness in the sight of flowers;
And if I go where others smile,
Their love but makes me think of ours;
And heavier gets my heart the while
Like one upon a desert isle."—*Anonymous.*

"YES, ma'am, Mr. Lemayne left at five for the early train," was the quiet announcement of Helen's maid, when repeated ringings had at last roused her to answer the summons; "do you please to want hot water before seven?"

"I want nothing, thank you; nothing but

quiet. I have slept badly; do not come again till eight."

Till eight was a long time for desperate weeping, and that sort of angry surprise which amounts to rebellion against the will of God; which makes it seem impossible to pray to Him who knew all, and permitted the dire deception,—Him whose hard service exacted the cruel sacrifice. This darkened all her spirit now, and when Mercy came in and spoke wise words about resignation, and providential care, and heavenly love, poor Helen flung them from her as empty, meaningless forms.

"Resign myself to breaking his heart under pretence of being better than him! dear, dear Arthur who always helped me to be good more than—I feel I shall be bad now for life—cured of blind submission. You talk of Providence, did not that Providence make us love each other? Was it not God's will that we should? and why do you now make it out that it is His will that

forbids it and separates? I see no proof of heaven's love to *us*."

"Hush, hush, dear! you must not say such dreadful things."

"But it is worse, oh, far worse, to feel them. I have prayed for his happiness so long, and now! Prayers don't seem to make any difference. How I entreated last night that one hour more alone with him might to be granted before he went away, and see how it has been answered!"

"Because God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. He may have seen that, had you had that meeting, your fate in this life and in the next would have been different, perhaps ruinous. You should still trust in God's infinite mercy. Remember Job's saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

"I wish he *had* slain me," muttered Helen, hiding her face again with a gesture of sullen fatigue. Mercy's heart smote her as she spoke to her sister thus, representing her own judgment

as the probable decree of Heaven; but as she had acted conscientiously she could not repent, and thought it a blamable weakness to question afresh the justice of a previous decision. And so thinking, she was able to keep silence when a few minutes later Helen's ejaculations broke out from another source of grief. "If he had but told me when he was going! or given me the least idea—papa knew of course, but he knew papa would never have told me!"

"He will be vexed with us if we are late for breakfast; had you not better finish dressing and come down?"

"Must I?"

"You had better, indeed."

Always used to follow Mercy's lead, she got up from the couch on which she had flung herself, and with the occasional sob of a spent storm of passion, went on mechanically with the business of the hour. She was in time for family prayers, and took her place at the breakfast-table in silent

dejection. Mr. Raymond asked no questions, and plumed himself on the considerate kindness which led him to refrain from any remark upon the vanished guest; even from saying what a fine day Arthur had for his journey. He was altogether well pleased with his part in this transaction; he was sorry for Helen, sincerely sorry, but girl's romantic griefs pass, he thought, like April showers, and Charles Ashcroft would soon console her. He felt that he had acted firmly and judiciously, nipping an enormous evil in the bud, and this feeling gave to his voice and look that expression of thorough, though well-curbed, hilarity, which a sore heart is so quick to detect and resent as an additional aggravation.

There was no escape for Helen from the social duties of that most miserable day. At noon they went to the Ashcrofts, and in their merry-making home she had to feign composure at least, and as much appearance of gaiety as it was possible to assume. Within, she was made almost deaf to

every other impression by the confused tumult of her heart, by its passionate outcry for the presence withdrawn, and threatenings of revolt against every link of duty's leaden chain. But she was forced to silence its clamour, and meet external demands, —to smile and bandy about lively conversational nothings, and seem pleased, interested or amused, according to her friend's kind expectation. But Charles Ashcroft had never before appeared to her so insipid, or Beatrice in the plenitude of her self-satisfaction so uninteresting: and, as to their aunt, she quite turned from her to-day, observing her smile when she said to Mr. Raymond, "So I hear your nephew, Mr. Lemayne, has payed you a flying visit. My coachman met your groom near the station bringing back the horses, and was gossip enough to let us know of it."

That smile looked intriguing to Helen, and she resolved not to dance with Charles that evening at least. She pleaded headache, and with that excuse, prevailed on her father, through Mercy's

intercession, to go home an hour or two earlier than they had at first intended.

Two heavy days passed; Mercy doing all she could to cheer and comfort, (all she could without sympathy, which in this matter her strong religious principles made impossible,) and Helen giving herself to a kind of trance of misery which even her father could not decorously avoid noticing, and begging her in sincerest kindness to fight against with christian valour. She listened to them both, but felt no gleam of comfort. She had an obscure notion that whilst they kept on talking of duty, they had been giving way to an unkind prejudice against Arthur. She had not yet brought it into distinct words, even to herself, but she began to doubt whether an inflexible opposition was the most effectual means for rectifying error. She knew that had she been in Arthur's place, she would not have been cured of any honest conviction by sheer resistance; and every now and then the thought crossed her mind

that opinions which he held so dear, and suffered for so nobly, must have had something more in them than she had before understood; it was clear that he had not been actuated by mere pride or obstinacy; it was profound conviction. But then a cold shudder ran through her as she remembered that she was believing in this too late; that her silly notion of what he owed to her had prevented her from seeing, when he implored her to do so, that to sacrifice truth would be vile; and now she felt how immeasurably lower he would have stood in her estimation had he yielded to make any admission which he thought wrong.

"Too late! why too late?" she said to herself one afternoon, as she sat out of doors seemingly in listless thought. "Why not write and tell him so?" Alas! she had promised her father that she would abide by the test agreed upon. She was bound in honour not to re-open communications. Yet surely a message of kindness would not be

wrong, and as she walked towards the house, she stooped to gather two heartsease flowers, and with these in her hand, went up to the morning-room.

Mercy was writing at her desk. "Will you give me the greatest pleasure I am capable of, dear Mercy?"

"Oh, how gladly, if it is what I can do."

"Only write to Aunt Catherine."

"You must tell me what for."

"Oh, merely say to her how *very, very* miserable I have been since Arthur went, and ask what he is really going to do, will you?"

"Yes, dear. There may be no objection to that." Mercy's voice was dubious, but she thought it best to do as her sister wished, rather than run any risk of refusal leading her to the transgression of writing direct to Arthur. "You know, dear Helen, I cannot say anything that would bring him back here; it would be wrong," she added, directing the letter she had just finished,

and beginning on another sheet with "My dear aunt."

"I do not want you to do so, only tell her facts, and find out facts. And, Mercy, please put this flower into your cover, and ask her to give it him from me. It can only mean, 'Don't be too unhappy!'"

Mercy nodded, and let her sister lay the purple blossoms on the table beside her. Just then, some visitors were announced in the room below, and Helen promised to do them justice, if Mercy would make haste and save the post. Much relieved by this innocent attempt at reconciliation, she ran down, and was gayer after that than she had been for several days past; it was easier to pray for resignation that night, for she had begun again to see joy beyond it.

But Arthur never saw the messenger flower. Mercy suppressed that part of the business, and when she had faithfully described her sister's grief, she took care to add, on her own authority, a very

decided opinion that it was better to endure such sorrow for awhile than to form an unhappy marriage; which, without a father's sanction, could never have a blessing from heaven. By throwing in this gratuitous safeguard against a mother's sanguine sympathy, she brought the indignation of her aunt to its crowning point. She had been angry enough before, when she heard from Arthur the sad issue of his last attempt,—calling her boy wronged, her niece heartless and unworthy of him, Mr. Raymond infatuated with pride; though, at the same time, her common sense was in irritating agreement with his views, and she felt that in his position she might have taken a similar course. But now, to have the disadvantages of the connection thus cast in her teeth by his daughter, was intolerable; and she would neither answer the letter, nor let Arthur know of its coming; she burned it out of hand, and digested her anger and sorrow in silence during the busy days when she was working hard

to prepare part of her poor boy's outfit, while Helen was expecting what loving hearts will expect—wilder and more improbable things than the tongue ever dares to speak of.

She waited eagerly for her father's coming in the first morning that an answering letter from Arthur was possible; but the letter-bag only held a few unimportant notes, three circulars, Norman's daily letter to Mercy, and a very uninteresting one for herself.

The next morning, with increased eagerness, she met the same disappointment; but a little consideration turned it into a stronger hope. "The only way to account for his silence," she said to herself, "is that he is coming back to see me again. He is very probably on his way here, for most likely he stayed in London, making preparations for his voyage, and from thence he could easily run down here;—that is it, surely." She fancied his sudden relief at seeing her heartsease; his dashing movements, as once more he took

hope, and smiled gently to the image she thus painted, as much as to say, "that hope shall be fulfilled."

But the day wore on, and her own was not yet realized; and the quiet of the house, and the soft trimness of the garden seemed oppressive. "Let us have a little walk beyond the park, to-day, dear Mercy," she said, when the afternoon was far advanced towards evening. "I long for a fresher air, and wider views,—do you mind coming out as far as the road?"

"Oh no, not if you prefer it; but I am afraid you will find it no pleasanter there,—there is not a breath stirring."

And, indeed, as they passed from the shrubbery to the road, a kind of suffocating stillness seemed to surround them. The road and its overhanging banks looked dusty, and meditative, and unexpectant,—looked as if nothing could disturb their sultry peace under a sky so grey and motionless, that it hushed the very sparrows; and if any bird

shook the spray of a bough, it was without song that it perched, and without song that it again spread wings and flew away.

Conversation flagged, and there was not much to occupy attention outwardly. Two or three well-to-do cows dawdling down the road towards the place of milking; a little village girl, in secret anxiety about her stockings, giving them now and then a furtive pull up, when she hoped the Miss Raymonds were looking another way. A venerable lady coming from a side lane, who carried on a small business with the otherwise disregarding world, by looking afflicted to the farthest sketch of a lugubrious countenance, and waylaying incautious neighbours for the recital of the few and slight troubles which discontented egotism was able to scrape together in a singularly easy life. "Don't look that way, Mercy; Mrs. Yates is coming up the lane," said Helen, as soon as she perceived her, and the child, hoping that the approach of another person might distract atten-

tion from herself, aimed one more despairing pull at the treacherous stocking.

But Helen's eye was intent on the farthest point of the road, where she saw nothing yet. Hearing Mercy complain of the dust and heat, she reluctantly proposed turning homewards. She was careful not to betray the expectation which now animated her movements, but all the time persuaded herself that a mile or two further on, Arthur was or would be before the day ended. She too felt tired, but her heart had revived, and it was now comparatively easy to be patient.

After dinner, she left Mercy reading her latest despatch from Norman, and stole up to a spare room of which one window looked out upon the road. The hedge opposite had that peculiarly matter-of-fact appearance which roadside hedges must assume after midsummer; and yet with its coarse ground-fringe of nettles, and dull lilac betonies; its torn, white convolvulus cups, and

dim green wall behind; *that* hedge was idealized by the evening light that was upon it, and by the placid faces of several white-browed heifers who peered up from the field beyond, as they tried to reach the topmost twigs of the thorn fence above them. Vain look-out! No one came; no one passed by, but a labouring-man wearily plodding home.

"He is detained by business; but to-morrow—" thought Helen, as she left her secret watch-tower. And with this thought the next day's brighter skies and cooler breezy air gave her fresh exhilaration. About eleven o'clock the door-bell rang—too early for callers. Helen's heart fluttered, and it seemed a long few minutes till she knew who rung it; but a lady was shown in. Beatrice Ashcroft had arrived, proposing to spend the day with her friends at Fernwick, if they were at liberty—a sociable custom usually much enjoyed by Helen; to-day an unspeakable burden. Of course she was obliged to give her-

self up to her guest; and as the hours passed and her pleasant talk and silvery laugh went on, no one could have suspected what a time of inward agony it was becoming. Her whole being was on the stretch for a sound, a sight, which every minute might, and no minute did, bring forth: and the sunshine glared strongly down the walk where she hoped to see one dear figure; and other people's voices jarred on the ear which listened intently for an accent still not heard: and yet she *could* not give up her hope.

All the home sounds racked her: the dogs barking "at nothing," she faintly said, after rising to look out, while Beatrice sat over her embroidery, passing pointless comments to and fro as she turned her busy needle. "At nothing;" but cruel disappointment lay in that word nothing; and Helen's heart now clamoured for its joy so vehemently that she thought it must be near.

The iron of disappointment sunk deeper and

deeper into her soul as the hand of the clock moved on, and only wanted half-an-hour to dinner-time. She left the drawing-room, and before she dressed, took one more gaze from the window upstairs, but still her eye was vexed and wearied with the many waving motions of the wind-ruffled trees alone: all active and eager, and he not come; and in her own room the afternoon sun had stared open every blossom in the flower vase on her table, and not one had seen her flush with the constantly expected joy.

Still she listened again after dinner. To her it was an hour of fate, to her companions the interval of do-nothingness between dinner-time and tea.

And what was Arthur then doing? With stern despatch hurrying from place to place in the city, getting through the business of preparation for his long voyage. Among all the painful thoughts of Fernwick, which he tried in vain

to banish from a harassed mind, there was not one which suggested the possibility of Helen's present delusion. It was, then, unimaginably beyond hope.

But Helen knew nothing of his proceedings till his mother wrote, with a certain bitter satisfaction, to let Mr. Raymond know that his nephew had sailed from Gravesend three days before her letter would reach Fernwick. Of Mercy's letter she took no more notice than saying that she had received it: no message whatever was sent to Helen. Then pride woke up fully: pride strengthened her. To say to herself, "If *he* forgets and makes light of our old affection, so too will I," made her feel so strong and brave against fate, that she fancied it could prove a lasting support. She did not remember that pride was the instinct of a fallen nature; that love with which it held such fierce conflict was immortal, because it belonged to the everlasting spirit. She thought that pride and love were

equally matched: for a few days they were, and then pride sunk like a wind-swollen bubble, and love remained unalterable, unappeasable, remorseless in reproaches, and inexhaustible in hopes that only time can crush.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I ask of day where it beheld thee last,
I ask of night, but both are sadly silent;
And ocean's self, that bears thee, only answers
My question with a sigh upon the shore."

Frithiof Saga.

"Much milk of human kindness too he carries,
A little soured with dogma, through the parish.
* * * *
Stiff in cravat and dialectic strife."

Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland.

FEW trials can put affection to a severer test than that which Helen's had now to endure; the daily demand for sympathy with joy she could not share. Mercy was most tenderly kind and considerate, and did all she possibly could to console her. Thinking distraction of thought the most likely means, and perhaps a little fearing

any approach to a subject which had burdened her own heart with a secret, and a kind of treachery towards an unsuspecting sister; she was always trying to invent some new pleasure and set on foot some interesting occupation for Helen's listless mind. Seeing her object, Helen tried to seem amused and to be occupied, but it was hard to disguise how little she cared now about anything; harder still to rejoice with her dear sister, who was just now possessed with the spirit of joy. Her loving heart was glad to see it; of anything like envy she was incapable, but the sense of contrast was inevitably bitter, and at times miserably irritating.

When she had all day been doing her best to show a lively interest in discovering the relative advantages of white silk or India muslin for the wedding dress; or tired herself during a long shopping expedition, devoted to some of the lighter parts of the trousseau, spirits and temper seemed to fail with strength, and she

found it very patience-trying to sit and listen to her father's old-fashioned sort of raillery, and hear Mercy's merry repartees; to see her blushing face kissed because it had crimsoned with excess of happiness when pleasant prospects were talked of; while her's was white with wearying grief and wet with unnoticed tears.

She overheard the cold gravity of her own voice while she tried to take part in the conversation; felt the dryness of her short ventures of speech, and hated herself for the want of warmer concern in all that touched her sister so nearly. Then lapsing into the silence of deepening discouragement, the bitter thought would often steal in, that if Mercy had not been so much of an abettor of their father's stern decrees, she and Arthur might have had some remaining gleam of hope; and regarding them both as accomplices who had worked her woe, she would often leave them abruptly—not for her old garden haunts, for there they might follow, but to her room, where

she could open her heart to the only Being who knew its unspeakable sorrow.

Having vainly beaten her proud will against the insuperable obstructions of Providence, and now and then given way to the terrible belief that her Maker could be pitiless, she had been brought by degrees of abject grief and utter desperation, once more to commit herself wholly to the loving kindness of Almighty God. "Is there anything too hard for Him?" she would ask herself, applying the Lord's own question to the restoration of her broken hope: not thinking while she used these words that the Lord might choose to show a still greater proof of omnipotent mercy than that for which she pined; that He might bend her will to an entire love and acceptance of His. "With Him," she said to herself, sighing, "all things are possible." And though her head was bowed reverently as she so said, kneeling in humble prayer, imagination hurried away in quest of *what* things could be possible for bringing back Arthur; a

wreck from which he should be saved unhurt; where he should have distinguished himself by generous self-devotion, and, saving the life of a rich fellow-passenger, should receive, in token of gratitude, a lucrative appointment in England, —a field for splendid display of talents; and, so provided, renew his suit and win her father's assent. For when did the imagination of the heart wait for probabilities? It cares as little for evidence of means as faith itself, and like faith, despises reason. Rousing herself, however, from the insidious dream, she would renew her prayer, and strengthen herself with the undeniable comfort of truth—the truth that she spoke to the Searcher of hearts who at this minute saw all that was in her dear cousin's and could, if He so pleased, convey to it any information as to her feelings, and fill him with sweet consolation. Then came soft refreshing tears, and she lifted thankful eyes as if she knew it was at that moment done.

Blind mortals that we are, and ever ready to

suppose that we know the mind of the Lord, enough to anticipate His mode of working! Arthur was at that time walking up and down the deck of the *Marianna* smoking, with a frown on his brow, and cruel scorn in his heart, which it must have pleased the tempter to see. The part he was now trying to play was a cold recklessness. He characterized all religion as hypocritical pride; all feminine sweetness and grace as deceitful and cold-hearted; all success as the result of more or less roguery; all feeling as a weakness; all civilized life as a farce; and so rating their pretensions, strove to spurn them and live as though they were not. If his mother's deep-voiced prayers, short but intense, sounded again in memory, he tried to smile as though at a woman's superstition; if the pure glance of Mercy's earnest eye met him in the chambers of imagery, he turned from it as from an arrogant self-righteous accusation; if Helen's tender gaze, he clenched a feverish hand and cursed the wiles of woman.

But even a moral insanity like this has its lucid intervals, and then the proud man trembled. When the storm rose, and huge Atlantic billows pressed against the groaning vessel, and seemed to roar with terrible menace, then he hoped that his mother prayed for him still, and he thought of Helen with an agony of hope. Was he to be swept away from this life, and to take his famished heart to the dread unknown while she lived on unheeding? He found then that he still believed and still hoped more than he had allowed to himself that he could, ever since the morning he had ridden away from Fernwick, leaving her deaf to his call, or regardless of his last passionate entreaty.

The heart of man is an unfathomable deep, and Arthur had gone only a few steps in exploring his. The mercy of God is infinite, but he thought he had found its limits, that to him God had forgotten to be gracious; and all the slow weeks of his voyage, and long after, while he toiled in the

tumult of the Bendigo diggings, it seemed to him that the heavens above him were brass and all the earth iron.

Three weeks after he left England his father fell ill; it was called a case of congestion of the brain and not a hopeless one, when Richard Lemayne informed his uncle of the attack. When he wrote again, the sufferer had died in the violent convulsions of brain fever; and "his mother," he said, "bore up wonderfully."

In that dire affliction the habits of life-long fortitude, and a true though stern piety, supported the widow's heart. With unhesitating energy she hastened to vacate her pleasant home in Wales; sold all its furniture and books, and went to live with Richard at his curacy in a village on the bleakest part of the Wiltshire downs, where nothing was to be seen for miles round but the bare chalky plain, with its gradual swell and blunt indentures, its oblong ponds for watering sheep, and stunted vegetation; where the shadows

of the clouds flitting past or slowly creeping by, seemed more inanimate than the human life which moved so sluggishly in that barren district, that the new curate felt as if he had to wake up his people to spiritual consciousness before he could do anything to improve their spiritual condition. Richard's lodgings were small and close, beside a glaring white high-road. Just opposite stood a nankeen-coloured chapel, belonging to the Independents, who were strong in his village,—and at the back of the house a narrow strip of treeless garden.

Nothing could have contrasted more painfully with Mrs. Lemayne's pretty old cottage; but it was an excellent house for the practice of severe self-denial; and on that ground she desired no better. Here she could grapple with her sorrows, unhelped by any but the Comforter, and while her eldest son was whisking cheerfully about his parish, really exhilarated by a tooth-and-nail resistance to the encroachments of dissent, Mrs. Lemayne

was minute by minute striving for more perfect resignation, and imploring help for her poor unhappy absentee.

Richard was a dutiful son, but in his nature—though kind-hearted,—there was no provision made for sympathy; he had neither quick perception nor tender feeling; and when, after breakfast, he left his mother sitting in the ugly little parlour with a basket full of socks on one side of her, and Nelson's *Fasts and Festivals* on the other, he never doubted that she would pass the day very well; particularly if he had begged Mrs. Grove, the rector's wife, to call and consult with her on a measure which he considered highly important, namely the withholding of offertory alms from two old women whose sons had been seen on three Sundays running to enter the Dissenters' chapel. His mind was narrow and positive, and having found its scope in ecclesiastical interests only, he gave himself to promote these with gravely controlled triumph.

Mr. Raymond had kindly asked his sister-in-law to make Fernwick her home,—a kindness that cost him a struggle, but which he performed with more cordiality than it met with from her. With a cold and dignified expression of due gratitude she declined the offer as wholly repugnant to her wishes; saying to Richard when she gave him the letter to post, that they had had quite enough of Fernwick patronage.

"I should think he might have offered you a little financial help though, mother; he must know how you are circumstanced, and with his income a few hundreds would be no sacrifice."

A severe smile on the widow's face seemed to give assent, but she said, "Much best as it is."

Mercy and Helen had both written to her once and again since her bereavement; written as pitying women do; and Helen with pathetic tenderness: no repulse could make Arthur's mother less than very dear to her. She had ventured to ask if any chance passing ship had

brought a letter from him, and to say how *very* unhappy she had been ever since he went; and how bitterly she regretted something she had said to him then. She confidently reckoned on a mother's curiosity being roused by this, and on her thus becoming a medium of explanation between herself and Arthur. She little knew the measure of a mother's pride.

Mrs. Lemayne thanked her for her feeling letter, and kind inquiries; she had not heard from Arthur; and that was all the mention she made of him. She enlarged upon Richard's excellence, and declared herself to be very thankful for having such a son to live with in her sadly altered condition. It was quite a privilege.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Le plus pénible aveu,
Longtemps captif ailleurs,
S'échappe au coin du feu."—DELILLE.

"To draw the picture of unkindness truly
Is, to express two that have dearly loved
And fallen at variance."—JOHN WEBSTER.

MR. LEMAYNE'S death had, of course, obliged the Raymonds to alter the day fixed for Mercy's wedding. It was now put off till the first of November. No striking event marked the intervening weeks, except Charles Ashcroft's proposing to Helen; and her prompt and decisive refusal. He was as much surprised as the Laird of Cockpen, and perhaps cherished a secret hope that, like Mistress Jean, Helen would in the end rectify her astonishing mistake. But he was too

thorough a gentleman to express any idea of this; or to accuse her of misleading him: indeed her artlessness and goodnature had kept him in prolonged uncertainty of her feelings up to the day on which he proposed, and he would not have brought the question to the crisis, if his sister had not taunted him on the loss he was likely to incur from faint-heartedness, assuring him at the same time that he would never have a better chance than now; that if there had been anything in the rumoured gossip about Helen and her cousin, it was all over now, and she was evidently in just that state of ill-concealed dejection, when counter-irritants are most welcome to the heart, and counter-attractions have most power.

When Beatrice found her theory disproved, she vehemently accused Helen of coquettish irresolution; but first, having small personal experience of a heart, tried to laugh the matter out of thought, and then seeing that Charles's attachment had been strong enough to make him really

unhappy now, she organized a plan for a tour on the Continent. She and her brother and aunt were starting for this tour on one of the last days of August, while Helen and Mercy were in their morning-room, consulting about the guests who were to be invited for the wedding-party.

"And the Trouncers I suppose," said Helen with great reluctance in her tones.

"Oh yes, dear, of course. Aunt Trouncer would never forgive us if she has not an early invitation."

"Then we need not ask *all* surely?"

"Not the sons, I should think, though we have rather an overplus of ladies as it is. But they will be from home probably. Edwin of course must be during term time, and we will take *that* for granted. Matilda and Esther must be asked; and Mr. Trouncer, no help for it."

"Poor me! think what it will be after you are gone; conceive how he will me-dear-niece me all day long! What a pity it is that

unpleasant people *will* be so overpoweringly affectionate."

"Oh, you should not say that of him, Helen, he is really very kind, and always means *so* well——"

"I wish to my heart he wouldn't. It only makes disagreeable people still more odious when they deprive us of the possibility of hating them cordially. Now Aunt Trouncer is not pleasant exactly, is she? but one feels for her having tacked herself on to such a family, and besides, her faults are well marked and above board, which I think I prefer to lurking mischief. Do you understand me, Mercy? Oh! I see you are writing."

"Only a list of our guests. I heard all you said, and I was considering whether I quite agreed with you. Of course I like honest natures best, but I am not sure whether a plain-spoken egotism means honesty so much as want of self-control."

"Well, I never doubted aunt's temper being warm, but there is a heartiness about her manner, and a sort of sincerity in her sharp sayings that always used to make me feel comfortable with her as a child."

"But I am not so sure how that would be if one lived long with her, Helen: in our short visits we could hardly prove it. How many did I say we had got down already?"

"Only five. I think you make too sure of Aunt Catherine's refusal; surely if Richard comes, she will."

"Not a chance of it, she would feel aggrieved if such a thing was proposed."

"Dear old Mr. Heathcote comes, of course?"

"Oh, he invited himself long ago. And Norman's old cousin, and my too young bridesmaids: if the Ashcrofts are returned by that time, really we *must* ask them too,"

"But they won't be; they talked of wintering in Rome."

"Well, I no longer want Beatrice as bridesmaid, with Norman's little cousins, and you and Julia Meek, but I should have liked her to be here for your sake. Oh! my love, how I wish you could have given Charles any hope; it would have made us all so happy. Papa wished it so much; indeed he made quite sure of your feelings for him till the day Arthur wrote."

"Did he? I am sure I never gave him or any one reason for such misunderstanding."

"No, not intentionally; but you liked him, and he is such a thoroughly nice fellow. Norman often says he wonders how you could have preferred poor Arthur, though he was his friend."

"Norman! How can people say such foolish things, and other people repeat them? the idea of comparing the two! Oh! Mercy, there is nothing like Arthur in the whole world—for me at least. How cruel he was not to send any message when I let him know how wretched I was. I wonder if he keeps his heartsease as I do th

one I gathered with it, and looks at it at all as I do."

As she said this, Helen was leaning her cheek on one hand, and looking up full in Mercy's face with a mournful gentleness that made her sister wince.

"Why are you in such haste with those accounts, Mercy?" Helen went on, seeing her begin to stir papers and fidget with pens. "I shall not have you to pity me long; tell me, dearest, do you think Aunt Catherine showed him your letter and *certainly* gave him the flower?"

Mercy reddened, and stammered out,

"The letter perhaps—but—she couldn't give him the heartsease. I mean—she had not got it to give. Oh, Helen, you must forgive me, I never sent that."

"Never sent it! You do not mean that *you* have deceived me so cruelly! How could you be so unkind? I would as soon have kept back

a verbal or written message—I would as soon have told a falsehood!"

She drew back from her sister, trembling with indignation; and there was a pause. Mercy bent over the table, covering her face with both hands. At last her inward struggle ended in a brave resolution, and she looked up, white with emotion, and said in a low shaken voice,

"Helen, I have done worse than you think; but I believed it right when I did so: I never told you that Arthur begged me the night before he went, to ask you to look out the next morning about five, and say good-by again."

The sudden start, and the dismay on Helen's face as she heard this, was reproach enough. She said nothing, but her hands trembled, and her eyes were fastened on her sister with a look of exacting inquiry.

"I did not say I would; and when I came upstairs and found you locked into your room, I thought it best for you and for him; really

kindest and wisest and most right not to tell you, and so to spare you a bitter parting, when it was your *duty* to part as mere cousins——"

"Mercy, you were cruel—how *could* you be so very, very unkind to us both? and I trusting you so utterly. I would have given *anything*, all I possess; oh much, much more, for one five minutes before he went. Oh! you don't know what you have done; more harm than making me miserable for life—and him. Poor fellow! poor Arthur! *how* cruel and heartless I must appear to him; do not ask me to forgive you yet, *I cannot*, this terrible notion of being right in doing wrong will not help me or remedy the mischief. Oh! I can scarcely believe yet that *you* could have treated me so barbarously."

In the first heat of her passionate surprise, Helen felt almost beside herself, and ran on with so many angry words that, at length, their intemperance began to lessen her sister's sense of compunction; and finding herself reproached,

as she thought, with undeserved severity, she answered both these reproaches and her own secret self-accusations, with the justifying plea that she had acted conscientiously and could not therefore repent.

"Was it for *conscience* sake that you kept silence when you heard me wondering at Arthur's conduct for weeks after all the danger of our communicating with each other was at an end? Was it right or just to let me accuse *him* of slightness and cooling affection, when you knew all the time? Oh! for shame, do not say so! But you shall see that so far from doing any good, you have only made me love him ten times more. You have injured me with him; very likely he hates me now, but you shall never again injure him with me. *He* would never be false under any pretext whatever: he has none of those horrid jesuitical notions which you think so righteous; he would scorn such dissembling ——"

In her passion she had twitched out her little

jet cross and snapped the slender gold chain on which it hung. The locket fell to the ground and was broken. This accident, trifling as it was, completed her distress. As she stooped to pick up the precious relics, she burst into uncontrollable tears.

"Dearest Helen! I am *so* grieved for you: never mind about this, it can be rivetted I think; believe me, I would not willingly have caused you a moment's pain. Say you forgive me!"

But Helen had turned from her, and left the room, before she could finish her sentence.

For the rest of the day there was constraint and silence between them, and no notice taken on either side of what had passed. At night, Helen got up from her prayers tearful but humbler-minded: she stole barefooted to her sister's bedside, and said between the jerks of dying sobs, "Mercy, I quite forgive, and do you forgive what I said in anger; but never, never speak of this to me again."

She would not wait for an answer, and she did not give a kiss. For the first time in her life she was glad to get out of reach of her sister's caresses.

CHAPTER XV.

"The lady chosen was of good repute;
Meekness she had not, and was seldom mute;
Though quick to anger, still she loved to smile,
And would be calm if men would wait awhile:
She knew her duty, and she loved her way,
More pleased in truth to govern than obey."—CRABBE.

"Discomfortable cousin."—SHAKSPEARE.

THAT word cousins may stand for the pleasantest as well as the least agreeable kind of relationship. In the vocabulary of some happy people it means a number of long-tried friends, with whom one is as much at ease, and perhaps more free from anxiety, than among brothers and sisters; a kind of enlarged home circle, without the responsibilities, if without the tender affection, of home; a little world in its variety of interest and attraction, a

far-stretching fence of kindness against the bleak neglect and cold self-seeking of the wider world; a band of intimates who love the children because they loved and remember the parents. With some the word cousins has no charm; it means instruments of inevitable annoyance,—claimants of life-long affection because they have the right of relationship for as much worry and interference as can be carried on under pretexts of kind concern,—bores, from whom there is no escape short of quarrelling,—undesirable acquaintance, who are not wished to settle near.

The Trouncers would not answer to either description of cousins; in the first place, they were not blood relations: Mrs. Trouncer was an elder half-sister of Mr. Raymond's; for many years she had vainly fretted her temper and spirits with the undeniable truth that her brother was a man of substance, and that *her* mother having been portionless, her own means were now small and very insufficient for her tastes.

It was some consolation to her that Mrs. Raymond's sister married a poor clergyman, that equalized matters, to her thinking, in some degree; and she used to observe with undisguised contentment, that, judging by all she heard, Mr. Lemayne's vicarage must be far less stylish than her own elegant rooms in the school near London where she lived as a lady boarder. But her imagination was haunted by the idea that the will of her father had not been so irreversibly explained as Mr. Raymond's legal advisers thought; there was some ambiguity in the terms in which old Mr. Raymond's bequests had been made, which allowed, as she supposed, a faint gleam of hope: and a grievance of inexhaustible weight. Some people are curious in china, some in antiquities or coins: she was curious in grievances, and collected all she could and set them off to the best possible advantage.

A well-to-do attorney in one of the largest towns of Berkshire had placed his two motherless

girls at the school where the unattached Miss Raymond resided. He was an honest jovial man, not over refined, but pleasant from his cheerfulness to the worn superiors of the establishment, and often asked to stay for dinner or tea when he came to see his daughters. On these occasions Miss Raymond first met him. Her florid face and abundant figure, though now matured by more than thirty years, attracted his admiration; and she soon won his heart by confiding to him at the tea-table some of the wrongs she suffered. She did not say that her brother was unjust or unkind, but she mentioned facts; his fine establishment at Fernwick and ample fortune; her isolated position here, where she had to submit to privations to which *she* was little used, a fate her poor mother could never have anticipated for her child: and Mr. Trouncer would put down his cup and look thoughtful, while she gave a hasty outline of the supposed misconception of her dear father's testamentary wishes.

Here the lawyer was at home, and interested himself in the business with professional ardour. He did more; when she had obliged him by furnishing all necessary information for a fresh scrutiny into the rights of the case, he went thoroughly into it, and found her quite mistaken. There was no flaw, and no possibility of questioning the disposition of her father's property any further: but when he had the painful duty of breaking this to her, he did his best to console, and at the same time offered his hand and his home.

A widower, with five children nearly grown up, —a gentleman *not* moving in the best circles, or having more than a moderate competence, was not, Miss Raymond thought, a very brilliant match; and she was in no haste to accept; but when she had made him feel that some natural reluctance was hidden by graceful condescension, and just before she had wearied him of pursuit, she consented and became Mrs. Trouncer.

Before her marriage, her brother had several times taken his little daughters to see her, for friendly relations were never lost sight of; and spending the day with their aunt, as children, they had often seen and played with Matilda and Esther Trouncer. But this process had not tended to make them delight in calling such playmates cousins; and when they had to go and stay at Mr. Trouncer's after his marriage, they enjoyed the privilege still less, and pitied the stepmother a good deal more than they had pitied the boarded spinster. Pity quite thrown away. Mrs. Trouncer keenly enjoyed having an establishment, and though, do what she would, she could never sufficiently sink its strong Trouncer element of vulgarity in the more refined atmosphere of a Raymond, she did a good deal towards bringing about a closer contact with the best society in their neighbourhood. At least she had called on Lady Jane Hatfield with some success, for her card and Sir Harry's took a prominent position in

her card basket; and they had been asked to dine with them once; (when both she and Mr. Trouncer were notoriously absent from home, but still it was a civility, or regarded as such.) At the time of Mrs. Trouncer's marriage, Matilda was seventeen and Esther fourteen years old. She had been married now twelve years; and in wishing that they might soon be married also, her step-daughters had passed the greater part of those years. Not that their home was unhappily circumstanced, or their liberty restricted; but that they were not able to feel any higher aspiration, and being unused to reflexion, were apt to desire an escape from the home their tempers embittered, without thinking for a moment that if they took those same unruly tempers to other homes, they must in a new place find as much or more unhappiness.

Besides, the idea of marriage had been unfortunately fixed in their minds early, by the fate of their eldest sister Jane, the gentlest of the family,

who, while keeping house for her father before his marriage, had unwarily won the heart of a clergyman in the next parish;—a poor clergyman whom her father wondered she could "take up with, though to be sure he was quite the gentleman."

Half a year after her abdication from office as the head of Mr. Trouncer's *ménage* she was married, and left the neighbourhood; her husband having been presented to a small living in Sussex.

Her sister Matilda was considered the clever one of the family; a diplomatic genius was evident in the foxy outline of her features, and in all her social transactions. Her father was wont to appeal to her as an infallible authority on points of etiquette, when he was afraid to encounter one of his wife's tart answers by confessing himself to be at fault; and as a natural consequence, Matilda got most of the snubbing which Mrs. Trouncer thought good to apply in every case of possible elevation.

With vulgar features fronting a truly vulgar

soul, Matilda had a liveliness and a degree of good looks which might have made her attractive in society of a certain stamp; but that in her prevailing passion for "gentility" she had contracted a mincing manner, quite foreign to nature's designs,—a social varnish, of which the ingredients, a wish to please and a great doubt of her ability to please,—were in themselves amiable enough, but in combination they acted very disagreeably.

Esther Trouncer could hardly be described without seeming unkindness, for she was one of those unhappy people on whom nature appeared to heap a variety of injuries.

A French writer has said, "Je suis persuadé qu'il y a des esprits emprisonnés dans l'enveloppe humaine aussi durement que dans l'enveloppe des bêtes. Suivant le dégré de leur énergie ces hôtes captifs se précipitent avec d'impuissans efforts contre les barreaux de leur geole, ou se résignent doucement à leur existence de prisonniers, et se

bornent de temps en temps à faire derrière ces barreaux quelque mélancolique apparition." *

In poor Esther's face there was much to justify the theory. The spirit that looked out from it, seemed resentful of its fate,—eyeing everything unpleasantly with a sort of chronic sulkiness. It was a messy sort of face, (let the ugly expression pass, for nothing else could describe one in which features, expression, and colours were all indistinct and unmeaning): it had the softness of habitual melancholy, and had she been loved and cherished as woman by nature is formed to be, she might even have been almost pretty. But a hungry disregarded heart pales the cheek and drags every line of the face and figure into rigidity and uncomeliness. Hers was the common tragedy,—a heart eager for love, which the temper, combined with clumsy eagerness to secure it, perpetually rendered impossible. Nor did her mind afford compensation. She was

* P. de Molènes.

dull and so conscious of mental deficiency as to resent any attempt to save her from conviction of dulness; but she had just quickness enough to nonplus cleverer people by withholding even her small degree of intelligence from their words when they tried to amuse or inform her.

Besides these elder girls and their brothers, there were two little daughters, and a son of the second Mrs. Trouncer's. Arabella was ten, Penelope Ann eight, and Marmaduke five years old. The choice of names was not felicitous; no one out of the family could have guessed why the mother insisted on calling her second child by two names—which, in the mouths of hasty speakers at home, were usually contracted to Pennan. The fact was that Mr. Trouncer would have the common name for love of an old aunt, and his wife was resolved to qualify its vulgarity. Wishing to do something for her little son also, she gave him, with the same idea, the distinguishing name of Marmaduke.

Such were the members of Mr. Trouncer's family; not very happy ones, but then his was a nature that could cheer itself by punning; and found nothing distasteful to it in the petty squabbles of a country town. They all brought "fish to his net," he would joyously assert as he prepared for his morning drive to the office in Bank-street, and to enable his "gals" to make good matches.

In all respects Mr. Trouncer was very sanguine. He had two sons, the eldest lately married, the youngest of his family, Edwin, just sent to college, at Mrs. Trouncer's earnest request, as the only chance left for making a gentleman of him. It was not in this case a natural product. This cousin by connection neither Mercy nor Helen had ever seen.

But such as the Trouncers were, they had to be civil to them; and Mercy, who had hitherto found her aunt so uninteresting a branch of the family that she used to save any fact or anecdotes to eke out the scanty materials of a half-yearly letter to

her, now wrote to beg her to give them the pleasure of hers and Mr. Trouncer's society at the wedding: of course, Matilda and Esther would come too, and stay, she hoped, a week or ten days with her sister, after she left.

CHAPTER XVI.

"'Tis absence of another kind
Grieves me; for where you are present too,
Love's geometry does find,
I have ten thousand miles to you.
'Tis not absent to be far,
But to abhor is to absent;
To those who in disfavour are,
Sight itself is banishment."

Mendoza, translated by Sir R. Fanshaw.

Between the time that Helen discovered her sister's previous dissimulation and the first of November, they both suffered from a painful state of feeling, totally new in their experience. There was usually such complete frankness between them that the least concealment of present emotion caused a perceptible cramp in their everyday intercourse. Now, such frankness was impossible; the

only chance of peace seemed to hang upon guarded politeness. Helen was occupied in fighting down a resentment that seemed ineradicable—in making the forgiveness she had promised, true. Dimly conscious of possible misjudgment, Mercy yet refused to give a hearing to any doubt. She acted according to her faith and her conscience and therefore she held that it must be a right judgment, and persisted in self-approval for the part she had taken. Alas! poor human nature! it is so easy and so pleasant to its weakness to call uncertain wisdom, faith; and positive prejudice, conscience: when there is sincere faith amid its growth of folly, and "the answer of a good conscience" is combined with the voice of a blind understanding, it *can* be done, and is very often done, without the least breach of honesty. But still pity and something like remorse troubled Mercy's mind.

Thus they spent their days together in secret disunion; earlier in the summer it had been

settled that they would have no guests asked to stay with them, in order that the last weeks before Mercy's wedding might be given up to each other in peace. The decision was now silently regretted. As much as they could, they mutually avoided being alone together; and when they were, seldom looked at each other with eyes that rested on the sister's face; and when they conversed, carried on their talk ceremoniously, conscious of broken ground, — conscious of a battle-field, trenching by association of thought upon almost every topic that was approached by either of them. The breach between them was too deep to be avowed without awakening a fresh storm of passion; and yet it might have caused less alienation if this had been risked, for open wrath separates for a time, but concealed anger can sap the very basis of affection.

From time to time the old love of their former happy days stole up again to the surface, and made wistful advances, and gave and received the

sweet tokens of early trust; but it was as the sweetness of a dream, marred by the deep sense of transient duration: some little incident would rouse up the remembrance of recent wrongs, pride would take fire, confidences falter into chill silence, and all the wretched restraint of the last few weeks close over them again.

It was a cruel tempered gusty season, which blew cold raw air into every pore with a ruthless force, and then dashed down a deluge of rain upon the sere leaves, as if all trace of summer was to be washed away before regretful autumn could ornament its death-bed with a capricious fading glory. The swallows hurried about tumultuously with a troubled uneasy cry, and the rooks hardly seemed able to bear up against the buffeting wind and rain. It is vain to laugh at people, as Dr. Johnson did, for being influenced by weather: it *must* affect every sentient mind to be met by the persistent frown of a darkened sky, day after day, and to see gloom and suffering on the face of the earth, instead

of the ever-varying beauty of a blissful sunlit world. Even Mr. Raymond felt it. He, who was usually so absorbed in his own thoughts, looked gloomy, and spoke often with an impatience under trivial provocation which surprised both his daughters.

Mercy was every day more taken up with the manifold preliminaries of a wedding; and it seemed to Helen that she was perpetually either talking to her maid about dresses and trimmings, or writing letters of acknowledgment for all the beautiful presents sent her, over and above the never failing despatch to Norman. A few months before she would have fancied herself feeling a joyous pride in all that delighted her dearest Mercy; but now—it was an effort even to talk to her about her happiness; and with many an exculpatory remark, such as "you must forgive me if I seem heavy-hearted or unsympathizing; everything feels dull and uninteresting to me now," she would cut short the tasks of sympathy,

and especially she shrunk from any avoidable collision with the warm-hearted excitement of underlings.

It was natural therefore that, seeing her sister so happily engrossed, she should seek for distraction and amusement out of the house more than was her wont; should order the carriage oftener for making calls, though Mercy declined going, and should try to incite her father to accept dinner invitations more frequently. Equally natural it was for one so unskilled in the study of human nature as Mr. Raymond to take all this as an incontrovertible proof that her grief about Arthur was forgotten. Mercy, though never a very acute observer, knew better. Helen's resolute silence about him ever since she had forbidden the subject, had not for one day concealed from *her* the strength of a passionate attachment. She longed, while feeling her own love so happy, to give some relief to Helen's aching heart, but had been more than ever

satisfied that in trying to interrupt all communications between them she had done right, ever since she had caught sight of a vision in her sister's room which unfeignedly shocked her. It was actually *Emerson's Essays.* At first she thought she must openly remonstrate, or at any rate mention it to their father, but milder intentions prevailed; she would wait till Norman came, and ask his advice; for it was clear that it was no use to rouse Helen's pride and obstinacy, —which, being herself very obstinate, she attributed to another—by dealing with her like a child, just before she was going to be left more than ever to her own devices.

Meanwhile it was Helen's mournful delight to sit with this book in her hand at the window of her room, where last her eyes rested on Arthur's receding figure; (out of her room she never dared or wished to take it)—to read and make strong marks of admiration, and occasionally little annotations of disapproval; hoping still—

for still she thought the day must come when she should be showing the book to Arthur and telling him how much she found to like and benefit from, in the writings of one she had so ignorantly denounced.

One evening at the end of October, the day before the Trouncers were to arrive, Mercy and Helen were sitting together on a low couch by the drawing-room fire, softened by the expectation of being soon apart, and having opened the way for something like confidence, by talking upon a subject on which they were necessarily unanimous—Mr. Cunnick; Mercy having said,

"Well, dear, it really *is* a relief to know that papa does not want to have him next week; and until to-day I did not dare feel sure; he always makes such a strange point of treating him like a friend," she went on with an abrupt change of voice. "There's something I have been wishing to tell you a long time. Norman was with poor Arthur on one of his last days in London, and

now he is coming you may be able to hear more about him. Do ask; I am sure Norman will be pleased to give you any information he can."

"You knew that Norman had seen him then before, I suppose."

"Yes, he told me, but no particulars, and you know men go on so about their own affairs and feelings, and do not tell one of little things they notice about others. He only said he had been with him one whole day, and that he seemed very much cut up."

Helen's face bore sign of contending impulse; it was grief, and indignation, and love, the deepest rooted, if not the strongest, which shook her now; but that faint touch of hope which promised her pining heart the exquisite pleasure of hearing more about Arthur, melted the seal of iron fortitude, and without a word she flung her arms round her sister, and leaning her head on the soft neck that had so often been its pillow of old, wept silently and felt no longer estranged.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Volendo far come coloro
Che per vergogna celar lor mancanza,
Di fuor mostro allegranza,
E dentro dallo cor mi struggo, e ploro."—DANTE.

"Mir ist so eigen, ist so trübe,
Mein Herz strebt in die Ferne fort;
Es denkt an seine alte Liebe,
Und sinnt auf ein verloren wort."—E. GEIBEL.

THERE is in the happiness talked of, and assumed as being present on a wedding day, something which tries the spirits as much as bridal white tries the complexion. It is so positive and peculiar a happiness, that like this, it will not harmonize with the dim shades of everyday contentment. It professes such perfection that all moderate joys shrink from the contrast, and become almost as grave as sorrow, because they

are stained by well-known alloys, and having the drag of experience upon them, cannot make the heart to dance. And with this shabby every-day reality burdening our own sensations, to try to compete in gladness with those who approach the ideal of brightest and purest earthly felicity, is an effort in which few people are successful. When much cheerfulness is expected, it too often happens that it is altogether absent, and forced gaiety takes its place; an unwelcome deputy sent by sovereign will, that never stays a moment longer than bounden duty requires.

Helen suspected this to be the case the day before her sister's wedding; but she had so much real grief to subdue in the prospect of losing her, that she might have fancied the merriment round the dinner-table more artificial than indeed it was. Owing to their recent loss it was not to be the gay affair that had been previously intended. Mr. Raymond clearly made the most of the excuse. Four Trouncers, Richard Lemayne,

Mr. Heathcote (a college friend of Mr. Raymond's, who had petted his girls from their infancy), a young officer who came to be best man to Norman, his two little cousins—girls of fourteen and sixteen—an elderly single lady who came with them as chaperone, and who made herself sincerely glad by self-congratulations at not being in Miss Raymond's predicament,—Sir Thomas Meek and his daughter,—these were all the guests invited to Fernwick.

In the hum of voices, Mr. Trouncer's was predominantly audible; laughing heavily at such blunt-pointed jokes that Mr. Heathcote, a white-headed barrister used to London society, could not very often see where the joke lay, and arched his eyebrows in gentle surprise, while his ingrain benevolence kept him smiling as long as smiles seemed wanting.

Helen examined her cousin Richard's face with a searching eye, thinking how much she was likely to get out of him. He had seldom been

at Fernwick compared to Arthur, his more successful career having allowed him little time ever since he left school: he had had pupils to read with in most of his vacations, for in his own way he was clever. A buttoned-up mouth, smooth hairless cheeks, demure eyes, and a short tight forehead, gave to his whole aspect a smug look of caution. "One would not easily persuade him to be communicative," Helen thought. And when he talked, a strong consciousness of clerical dignity seemed to measure emphasis and guard opinion. It would be difficult to broach any tender business before such a man.

Mercy did not forget to give her sister the earliest private audience with Norman that she could: she called her away after tea to help them pack up a set of chess-men in the library, and then left the room herself.

Helen had carefully wrapped up several weighty knights and bishops, before she could bring herself to speak of anything more inter-

esting than the safest way of packing them; but Norman began, tearing up a sheet of paper as he spoke—

"Mercy says you wanted to hear what I could tell you of Lemayne. There's not much to tell. He wrote and told me that he was going to sail in three days, and as we were quartered at Hounslow then, I was fortunately able to take a day's leave: I found him in no end of a hurry, tearing about from one place to another, and smoking I don't know how many cigars. He went to his outfitters last, I remember—let me see though—we did go to Hoby's after that; but anyway, he looked dead beat when we came out of the last place, and so I made him come and dine with me at my club. Poor fellow! he wanted his dinner;—not so much paper if you please in there—you will break the flag of that castle—pray take care ——"

"Thank you; but (I *am* taking care indeed)—but what I hoped you could tell me is something

of what he said and talked about; oh! *was* he angry with me?"

"Angry with everybody; using much stronger language than I ever heard from his lips; I cannot repeat it. I did what I could to quiet him, and told him how wise I thought you had been to break it off——"

"I? Go on please."

"I told him that he must try and forget bygones; that I was positive that you and your father and Mercy never could be unkind; that you were only doing what you thought your duty——"

"But I was very unkind; you don't really think he will forget?" she said, clasping idle hands.

"'Pon my honour it's hard to say. A fellow can't be hanging-on all his life, with nothing better than remembrance to trust to."

"I suppose he did not give you any message for us?"

"Not any."

"And did you take leave of him that evening? was that the last time you saw him?"

"Yes, it was: when we reached his lodgings, we found his old chum, Anthony Beck, had come up to town; and this did him more good than anything I could say. He came to see him off and told me that he should not leave him till his ship sailed; a fine fellow that; something like a friend."

Mercy looked in just then, and begged her sister not to be longer away from the rest of the party: they were both wanted, for their father was looking tired. So she thanked Norman again, and went away, her heart sinking a few degrees lower, yet pleased, nay, more than that, thankful, to know that Arthur had the comfort of a dear friend's society, when but for that, he must have felt so drearily sad and alone. She wished she could see that Mr. Beck; she felt very grateful to him now.

How gentle and winning was her manner to

Richard Lemayne whenever she had occasion to address him! How stiff and forbidding his! As much disapprobation as he could mix with apparent politeness, he managed to convey to her much dejected mind: it surprised, but did not anger: she thought herself blameable, and when he presupposed that she was seeking admiration, all she strove to win was but a little kindness. He snubbed her as much as a gentleman can snub a lady when she asked him if his church was a pretty one, by the curt reply, "Not unlike a barn;" and then buried his shortsighted face decisively in a volume of the *Glossary of Architecture*. Matilda Trouncer took up the other volume, and was soon launched on a flowing stream of ecclesiastical æsthetics: even to her he spoke rather severely (for she was a woman, and as such to be kept at arm's length); but with some measure of indulgence, for she wished so much to know whether he preferred early English to Norman arches.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Mit Geduld will ich es tragen,
Alle Morgen will ich sagen,
O mein Schatz, wann kommst zu mir?

Alle Abend will ich sprechen,
Wenn mir meine anglein brechen;
O mein Schatz, gedenk 'an mich!"

Deutsche Volkslied.

THE wedding-day passed off prosperously. It was fine and the sun shone brightly on one of the happiest and least nervous of brides. Norman Slade seemed quite to enjoy his pre-eminence of dignity, and took the bantering of his gentlemen friends with a radiant solemnity of satisfaction that amused the ladies very much.

"As strong gales
Hold swollen clouds from raining,"

so did the continual demand upon her attention

for public purposes, sustain Helen's thoughts above any indulgence of private sorrow. It was impossible to pause one minute for self-pity, when she felt that she ought to be attending to six or seven individually all at once. After Mercy, her father had the strongest claim upon her consideration, for she knew that it was a most trying day for him; though he said so little about his own feelings at parting with his dutiful daughter, and seemed bent upon playing the Stoic. Not finding him down-stairs, Helen had gone to his room just when the carriages were about to drive off to the church, to ask him to take a glass of wine before they started, and his paleness and silence startled her, as he turned round, without speaking, to see who came in.

"Are you feeling unwell, dear papa?"

"Not now; it was nothing; only for a minute; but if you will fetch me a little sal-volatile from the medicine chest, I shall be much obliged. You know excitement never suits me."

She flew to get what he asked for; and the colour that agitation and hurry brought to her cheeks, made her face even more lovely than usual. As she stood measuring his dose, in her bridesmaid's dress, with her veil and wreath of violets, she looked so beautiful that he could not refrain from complimenting, and a father's admiration is so sweet! It was like a cordial to Helen that morning.

"I am glad you like to look at me, daddy dear," she said, taking away the wine-glass, and kissing him fondly. "I am afraid you will find me a sad falling off as housekeeper, after Mercy; but it will be my only happiness to do my best to make you happy. Hark! that is Mercy going down; let us come, it is quite time."

At the breakfast Helen felt as if she was in a kind of trance. It was done; Mercy now belonged more to Norman than to her. All the old days of their girlhood lay behind them, finished, and past any possibility of return. An infinite

blank seemed to stretch out before herself; she could not even hope for a visit from the bride till February, as her husband's regiment was ordered to Ireland. But Mr. Heathcote was proposing the health of the bridesmaids, and she *must* listen and smile; and Esther Trouncer was looking aggrieved about something or other, and she must try and make her look more cheerful. The two youngest bridesmaids were as happy as they could possibly be; Mr. Heathcote gave himself to their entertainment and exhilaration with the gracious vivacity of an amiable old bachelor: indeed all through the day his bland presence seemed to Helen to be diffusing a magical charm, making even Richard Lemayne more pliant, and Mr. Trouncer less noisily jocund than it was their wont to be; while on the other ladies it acted like the delicate encouragements of a tacit admirer. For Helen, who was his god-daughter, his tenderest devotion was reserved, but seeing how much she had on her hands with all four of the Trouncers, he

kindly judged it most helpful to her to try and keep all the guests in good humour.

But a few hurried minutes was she alone with Mercy, during the interval of changing the bride's dress, and then came the general leave-taking, and then the doleful turning back to the rooms she had quite left, and the tasks of a hostess without a sister to share the trouble, and sympathize in amusement or annoyance. Helen dared not be alone now till the day's work was over, and at once went into the drawing-room and set Miss Meek and her young colleagues to work upon the putting up and directing of cards.

"This must be a sad breaking up to Miss Helen Raymond," observed the elderly chaperone to Matilda Trouncer at the other end of the room.

"I suppose it is; my cousins always made a vast deal of each other."

But in saying this, she as little conceived the sadness so taken for granted, as the feelings of the lady who commented upon it. To pity the feelings

of any one who commanded such facts as Helen's never occurred to her, while with prowling eye she watched her graceful movements from one group to another, and the pleasant smile and easy talk of a self-forgetting beauty.

"We want you, Richard, in the dining-room to help us cut up the wedding cakes."

"I beg your pardon?" (looking straight before him as he spoke.)

"I am beating up recruits for the assistance of ladies in work much too hard for most of them; oh, yes, Mr. Heathcote, I knew we might depend upon you; thank you, Mr. Barrett, I believe we need not take you and Miss Meek from your chess, pray finish the game at any rate before you come; my cousin Richard is, you see, doing nothing, and we cannot let him off merely because he is lazy." For Richard had not yet risen from his chair.

She was a little piqued, as pretty women are apt to be when they find neither their kindness nor

their personal fascinations take the least effect upon a gentleman. His indifference about pleasing her—a new phenomenon in her experience—was so marked that she began to fancy that Arthur must have said something *very* disparaging of her to his brother. In happier days she would not have thought such a thing possible to Arthur's generous nature, but now it was different; we fear strange horrors sometimes in the darkened road which seemed so pleasant and clear of danger when we crossed it in full sunshine.

Richard's voice had just that touch of likeness to his brother's which made it both a pain and pleasure to listen to it; in spite of his uncourteous rebuffs, she kept near enough to him during the process of cutting cake, to take the chance of being able to exchange a few words, brought him what he wanted for dividing the pieces, and held string for him while he folded the paper round.

Perhaps she hoped that in winning his regard,

or at least overcoming his prejudice against her, she might indirectly regain lost ground with Arthur: when he was written to, it might so naturally be reported that "Helen behaved very kindly:" in some way or other a word of commendation might reach him whose esteem was worth more to her than the praise and admiration of all the world besides. Loving hearts are foolish enough to harbour such ideas, to think of everything and everybody as a possible vehicle for the transmission of love.

Matilda Trouncer, who was busy at an adjoining table, noticed the alacrity with which Richard's services were assisted by Helen, and with her usual keenness at once discovered the covert of some dear secret, and determined to explore it. They were sealing up a packet of cake for his mother, and Helen with her back turned to Matilda's side of the room, not being aware of her proximity, said in a low voice, "Do you mind telling me how you thought poor Arthur was when you saw

him at home this summer? after he had been here, I mean."

"In a very anxious state; not at all satisfactory."

"Oh, you are speaking of your brother Arthur," Matilda interposed; "I was wanting to know something about him: I hear he has emigrated; to what part of Australia is he gone, may I ask?

"To Melbourne; but it is uncertain whether he remains there."

"Oh, indeed—as a settler?"

"My brother's plans were not clearly determined upon when I was last in communication with him. That will do, Helen, thank you; you need not direct it, I shall take it with me, you know: and really it is time I should be off. My train starts at seven, and it is already a quarter to six. Allow me to ring, my uncle said he had told James to have the brougham in readiness."

Matilda's interruption had stolen from Helen her last hope of hearing more about Arthur; but

it answered Miss Trouncer's purpose. A glance at Helen while her inquiries were going on had satisfied her curiosity: there *was* something in the gossiping report which had reached her through a sympathetic housemaid, who on that busy morning had been allowed to assist at the dressing-table.

By no entreaties of his uncle would Richard be detained. He had engaged to sleep at the house of a friend in London, and had a vestry the day after to-morrow to attend, and besides wished to practise with his choir the following evening. Armed with these engagements he had come; and pleased to withdraw from an uncongenial circle he left;—what was Helen's anxious beseeching look to him? The silly passion of a vain woman, fascinating enough, as he confessed to himself that she was, could not alter his opinion of all that had occurred. Arthur was well out of the snare. He himself knew what love was, but he had never allowed it to unman *him*.

Had it ever done so, he must have been weak

indeed: the preference, to which he gave the name of passion, had been based in the first instance on a mutual liking for certain Gregorian chants, which his rector's daughter "rendered" on the church organ very fairly. It grew with the curves of the scrolls she was illuminating, at his request; and had come to the perfection of an engagement when she set to work upon the pattern he had chosen for a couple of faldstools for her father's church. In this sober love-making there had been neither let nor hindrance; and it was the only sort of attachment which Richard could ever have approved: he looked upon a clergyman's wife as a weakness, only allowable for the sake of parish work; and with an eye to that and the possibility of wealth that could justify *his* marrying at all, he had wooed and won a girl who was able to respect him, and make all his crotchets her own.

CHAPTER XIX.

"There is plenty of some kind of brain behind those sallow brows. I do not look upon their owners as an inferior race, but I cannot in any way place myself in moral rapport with them. They are not beneath me but alongside, with an impassable gulf between us."—*Anon., Chambers' Journal, Sept.* 3, 1859.

THE evening of the wedding-day had passed off better than Helen would have thought possible in anticipation. The servants had a little dance with those whom other visitors had brought, and a few of the village *élite;* there was quite a roomfull when Helen went with her friends to open the ball; and of course she could not avoid having to go through one country dance. Mr. Heathcote was her partner, and took such brisk exercise among the smiling ladies'-maids and demure footmen, and paid such high-flown compliments to

the fat cook and little dumpty scullery-maid in passing, that the house-keeper whispered to the butler with whom she was dancing, that the old gentleman seemed "uncommon lively and ready to dance till midnight."

When however he had brought Helen to the farther end of the servants' hall, she declared herself tired, and seeing some of her cottage acquaintance among the spectators crowding round the door into the kitchen, she commissioned Mr. Heathcote to go and be polite to Esther Trouncer while she said a few words to the women curtseying at her. The audible comments they had been making upon "dear Miss"—upon her fine colour and light step and "sweet pretty frock," ceased as she came up and asked after one and the other left at home. She gratified the mothers by saying how nicely the children had taken their part of strewing flowers in the morning's ceremony; and how fond Mrs. Slade was of the white chrysanthemums they had fastened in

tufts upon evergreen arches;—sheepish lads she honoured with a smiling notice of the famous cheers they had got up; and to rosy girls with superfluously shiny hair she wished as bright a wedding day when their turn came. For Helen, unlike her father and sister, was naturally and pleasantly gracious among her inferiors. Broad, happy grins on many an honest face rewarded her for making this little effort; and she was penetrating far into the village group, and asking two old women between seventy and eighty, if they remembered how they spent their wedding-day, when some one touched her on the shoulder.

It was Mr. Naseby, the rector of their parish; who having retired after the wedding breakfast, came back by special invitation to see what was going on at night.

"I wanted to see you, Miss Helen, before I went, about the meat tickets your sister wished to be given away to-morrow. She said she would

give me a list, but no wonder it was forgotten just at the last."

"But you are not going yet, Mr. Naseby! you are only just come?"

"Indeed I came here full half an hour ago. You did not see me down here. Perhaps you are not aware that it is past eleven already?"

"Is it? I am glad the day is so nearly done."

"A very sorrowful one to you, my dear young lady, I can well believe, but it gives you a new and blessed privilege. You will now be Mr. Raymond's only child for all practical purposes; and I think you will be a dutiful one——"

"I shall try," said Helen, looking up with glistening eyes.

"You will, I know, and find all the comfort of being a blessing to him. May I have the list now, if it would not trouble you to send for it. I know Mrs. Slade said it was ready."

They were standing a little apart, and the

merry tunes which were going on drowned every voice but the one close to the ear.

"Oh! I will fetch it in a minute, we left it the night before last in one of the library table drawers, I remember: but thank you for what you have said; I wanted it."

They had been few words, but they fitted, and from a man like Mr. Naseby, who seldom broke through a rather stiff fence of taciturn formality, they were emphatic, and lifted the weight from Helen's spirits more than all the admiring kindness of companions who had dealt with her that day on external evidence only.

In Scripture when it is said "he spake comfortably to her," the margin gives these words instead, "spake to her heart." And this is the secret of true comfort between man and his fellow; whatever is said of a consoling nature must come home to present feelings to be of the slightest avail. It is more soothing to have these recognized by an understanding mind—when recognition is

all that can be offered, than to listen to the most undeniable arguments of comfort when it is clear that they are vaguely directed.

Helen would not disturb either of the dancing servants, and quickly went for the list.

"My dear," said Mrs. Trouncer as she bustled after her niece, "I wonder you did not invite the rector's wife, you seem so intimate with him."

"She is such an invalid," replied Helen, "that she seldom leaves the sofa. Did you not see a lady sitting in a Bath-chair by the church-door as we came out? Mercy stopped to shake hands with her—that was Mrs. Naseby."

Mrs. Trouncer would have wondered at several other things which she thought needed explanation, if the late hour had not obliged the party to break up. She was almost oppressively sympathetic the next morning in her consideration for the young mistress of a large household; and her husband with heartfelt kindness tried to make himself very agreeable to her in default of Mercy. With all

the gaiety of underbred good-nature, he turned upon her old jokes about wedding cake and dreams. She was unused to that sort of thing, and to her fastidious nature it was most unpleasing; but his hearty good-will saved her from any loss of good humour, and she laughed when she would fain have silenced him.

Of his unpolished peculiarities she had spoken at a distance strongly and succinctly, and the opinion thus expressed was habitual and real; was she *less* true when in hourly proximity to him, she spoke with such a softened tone, and thought with modified judgment? Not at all: at a distance only the more salient characteristics of our fellow-creatures appear; once beside them, and a hundred minute sympathies connect one's faculties with their personal claims—one's interest with their self-love; and to a degree one becomes bound up in their individual ties. Thus gaining knowledge of much that explains the striking defects on which we have given a verdict afar off,

we may cease for awhile to think of these defects as the most prominent part of character. Besides her former dislike was now partly neutralized by pity. She thought her aunt worried and snubbed him, and this naturally made her more lenient.

It appeared to her that his domestic relations were far from happy: Matilda and Esther, who were so honied in their way of speaking to herself, seemed to have no indulgence for their father. He had an essentially clumsy mind, and she could see how provoking it often made him to children whose ideal of happiness was fine-ladyish: but she longed to tell them how much better it would become them, even on the lowest ground of social refinement, to show him more respect.

When talking among themselves, the sound of their voices told tales; they had the short jerky tones of voices frequently given to wrangling, contradiction, and taunting repartee. In every accent Helen thought she heard concealed exas-

peration, and impatience hardly bridled. Her own needed a strong curb; she scarcely liked to confess to herself how much she disliked Esther's taking up the strong position of old friendliness which she now assumed. It jarred her nerves to hear her speak of the Lemayne cousins by their Christian names; to find her bringing back in conversation their old little family jokes; and worst of all, now and then referring to one of her relations by a nickname.

It was very disagreeable, but then Esther herself was still more so, and no one had the heart even to wish to tell her that these proofs of undesired ease were obnoxious to taste, and infinitely distancing. Helen found Matilda a pleasant coadjutor in general conversation, and did her best to keep her nearer to Mr. Raymond than the younger sister, who had singular arts of annoying. Turning full upon him a flat, blunt-nosed face, she would either persist in giving lengthy information on matters totally

uninteresting to him; blind to every symptom of exhausted courtesy; or, what was worse, subject him to a cross-examination on points where it was abhorrent to his nature to be explicit. A series of inquiries unrelentingly followed up by a questioner of slow apprehension is a severe exercise of patience. Few things could try Mr. Raymond's so severely. A graceful discreet silence was his favourite attitude in society; and this kept up his credit with the public for a greater amount of wisdom than he really possessed. His intellectual inferiority being well guarded by delicate tact, people not very intimate with him thought him profound when he was only puzzled; and as it was one of his instinctive aims to prevent any one being very intimate with him as long as he could possibly avoid it, nothing could be more disagreeable than the way Esther Trouncer drove his vagueness into a corner, and so pressed him for definite replies, that he was reduced to confess ignorance

or admit his unwillingness to give fuller satisfaction to her very unflinching curiosity.

As for instance, the day but one after the wedding, after a long catechism at breakfast-time upon Mr. Cunnick's antecedents, when Mr. Raymond had tried in vain to direct conversation to some other channel, she began afresh to worry him by saying,—

"I only wanted to know *where* that Mr. Cunnick lives, uncle, because *a* Mr. Cunnick was at one time very intimate with the Miss Masons at our school, and cheated them shamefully; I can't tell you what it cost them to recover half the money he had risked——"

"Indeed! I am sorry for the poor ladies; you must excuse me further delay, for I have business at —— which claims my punctual attendance. Helen, you will do your best to supply my place with our guests. Mr. Heathcote will, I hope, challenge the young ladies once more in the billiard-room: I wish you good-morning."

Thus did Mr. Raymond effect his escape, and when Helen followed him out of the room to learn which carriage might be used in his absence, she found him muttering, "That girl's want of tact is quite intolerable. How long *are* they going to be here, Helen?"

"Oh, they will stay the week out, of course; but you shall have her as little in your way as I can possibly help. I really rather enjoy them; they are very good-natured and pleasant to me."

This was quite true: of kissing and my-dearing there was only too much. On Helen all the politeness and suavity of the Trouncers was concentrated. Mrs. Trouncer found her an amiable listener, and took every opportunity of her step-daughter's absence from the room, to explain what trials and anxieties she underwent on their account. To her niece it was the revelation of quite a new phase of existence, and she pitied and admired with the *naïveté* of one who knew little of human nature: so little

that she entertained the juvenile fancy that in some measure she might influence her cousins happily, and with this view tried hard to attach herself to them, and put out many an eager feeler, when talking with them, in search of their depths. She could not imagine how shallow they really were; and when she began to guess, she yet half-distrusted her own perceptions, and tried with greater skill to reach their hidden powers of mind. But they had none corresponding to her expectancy, and her words fell fruitless to the ground, while Matilda would answer, with cold unsentient eye, "Oh, I know nothing about that; we don't do that sort of thing." Reading poetry was the thing spoken of.

On this and all other matters the Trouncers had a mode of giving their opinion which seemed intended to convey the idea that there could be no other held with impunity. Helen looked at them on such occasions with deep compassion.

It was a misplaced feeling, for constitutional dul-

ness, like sleep, makes amends for all loss of vivid impressions. Of these, however, both the Miss Trouncers were susceptible when they were conveyed to them by tangible objects. Throughout the whole time of their visit a chronic worry of comparison seemed to disquiet Matilda. Had she spoken her mind out, she would have exclaimed, ever and anon, "How enviably happy you must be to be habitually up to the mark of thorough lady-like ease without effort or care; and—but if I watch close enough I can find out how to give ourselves a little pull nearer to it, by nice imitation."

She did not bring the thought into consciousness, but it was in her mind, and sometimes found vent thus:—

"Oh, Helen, how delightful it must be to have a maid of one's own!"

"Delightful? Well, I daresay I should feel it so if I ever had been without one. And yet, I don't know, they have often faceache, or headache,

or lovers to make them careless and tiresome. Did you not say you liked my evening cape? Mrs. Green shall cut out the pattern if you care for it; or, what will be better, make you one. It will be doing me a kindness if you will allow it; she has a quantity of muslin and lace of mine that will only get yellow with keeping. No thanks, pray; you do not know how glad I am—to give her work of that sort."

Helen hurried her sentence to an unintended drift, for she had been going to say, You do not know how glad I am to give any one pleasure when I feel too sorrowful to find any myself; but Matilda's face was a sufficient restraint upon confidence. A vigilant littleness of thought was its prevailing expression.

While they spoke, Esther was casting many a questioning glance into the pier-glass opposite, with the thought of whether Mr. Barrett, or either of the gentlemen she met at Fernwick, could wish some day to place her in the same position as

Mercy's; but the forbidding scowl of ugliness which she met there, unsoftened even by that brilliant effort of fancy, ought to have turned her from such a baseless idea. It is a pity that on *this* point so many women are already imbued with Arago's notions when he said, "Celui qui en dehors des mathématiques pures prononce le mot *impossible*, manque de prudence." Now Esther might have used it about herself with perfect security, until she chanced to be suddenly enriched by a handsome legacy. The kindest old bachelor could not have overlooked *her* temper.

CHAPTER XX.

"They will not hear me if I call;
They will not see these tears that start;
'Tis autumn—autumn with it all—
And worse than autumn in my heart."

Gone Away (*Household Words*).

"In whatsoever character
The book of fate is writ,
'Tis well we understand not it."—COWLEY.

TEN days later, and all the guests at Fernwick had taken their departure, leaving Helen to an almost unbroken sense of her loneliness. She had hardly been able to picture to herself beforehand how lonely she would feel without Mercy, and now it was as difficult to imagine how she could ever again feel happy apart from her. She tried

to occupy herself as much as she could with her father's interests, begged for a walk or ride with him as eagerly as if it was an inestimable favour, and caught at any chance that occasionally offered for being of service to him in the library. But he was not a man who liked to communicate his cares or explain his objects; it suited him better to treat Helen as a child; and as to the idea of making her in any degree a coadjutor, he laughed kindly when she spoke of it, and bade her not trouble her pretty head about things that did not concern her; so long as she made herself happy she was doing him the best service she could render: what had become of her harp? He had not heard it for weeks.

Dejected at such dismissal, Helen would go back to her morning-room, and willing to comply with any suggestion of his, uncover the harp and begin to tune it; but the silence that followed fell heavier on her heart, and the undisturbed neatness of the room, with Mercy's empty chair

and unused work-frame, looked colder and more forsaken when the chords had ceased to vibrate under her languid uninterested touch. Then she would get up and go hastily to the window, as if to find escape from surrounding objects, which, laden as they were with the saddest and sweetest associations of her life, seemed ready to overwhelm her with memories of what could never come again.

Here at this table, Arthur had sat between his cousins, giving them lessons in etching, the first day after he had come to read at Fernwick; she placed herself in the bright vision of remembrance, and saw him leaning over her with his gentle courteous grace, showing her where and why she failed; heard again her father's reproof for wasting time, and remembered how, nevertheless, Arthur went the next morning to the lake, to cut some reeds for them before he shut himself up for study. How much Mercy used to make of him then! calling him King Arthur, and saying

that all England could hardly show a finer sample of nature's nobleman than he.

There, by the fire, they used all three to sit together in the wintry twilight during the half-hour before dressing-time, when she and Mercy had come in from their drive or walk, and he, if not of the party out-of-doors, used always to find some excuse for coming in to hear what they had "been after."

That banner screen, which now stood behind the sofa, how often when he had placed it so as to shade one or other of them, he would twirl and untwirl bits of its deep fringe while telling them some delightful ghost-story, or repeating some beautiful old ballad.

"Oh! I little knew then how happy I was; I never thought of a wretched time like this!"

Could she have foreseen her future life, she might have trembled when using such an expression about the present; yet to her it then seemed

wretched enough; and when she stood at the window, and saw the dead leaves lying between the balustrades of the balcony, and the bronzy glare of the oak woods, which looked as if they would outface winter with a ghastly kind of splendour, nature appeared to justify her complaint and to be feeling wretched also.

It was a day when the sky only now and then made sullen admissions that there was a sun behind the clouds. The park was sodden with the cold damp of November, and the air so full of moisture that nothing above or below could dry. On the road running through the park, heavy cartloads of turnips were dragging slowly by to feed melancholy-looking sheep, and cows that stood at gaze on the trampled grass, as motionless as the fog around them.

She turned from the window with an impatient sigh, and determined to console herself with an extra letter to Mercy: on such a day a little self-indulgence was pardonable. But when she sat

down to write she could not be so selfish as to give vent to sorrow; and remembering that the poor people were an unfailing source of interest to her sister, she bethought her of making a round of visits in the village, unmindful of fog, in order that her letter might be more acceptable.

If this was the impelling motive, it was not the only one; but just then she was scarcely able to care for anything unconnected with thoughts of Arthur or Mercy. One wholesome employment led to another, and little by little she made some way in conquering dejection. Her self-appointed reward for a busy day, cheerfully used, was a snug hour of reading before dinner. Every book upon Australia of any note she had procured, and with these, and Emerson's, and some of Arthur's favourite poets, she found this hour very enjoyable. In a very short time she was better informed about the geography of Australia then known, than about any country in Europe. Her imagination worked

constantly at the diggings. It pleased her to read men's descriptions of the jolly amusing life some led there, but she trusted that poor Arthur would not be thrown among bad companions, and might be so successful as to be able to come back to England quickly.

The winter months passed slowly by, with the usual amount of quickened sociability at Christmas; and nothing marked the time with peculiar interest except the marriage of Beatrice Ashcroft, which Helen, of course, had to attend as bridesmaid. It was not so distinguished a match as the elder Miss Ashcroft expected for her niece; but the gentleman was very rich and of a good family. They had met at Rome, and been engaged before they left it.

Helen was unavoidably thrown once more into a good deal of friendly intercourse with the bride's brother. Possibly she enjoyed feeling herself once more the object of tender regard: it may have done something to raise her self-love from

the prostration to which a good deal of loneliness, and the constant sense of Arthur's displeasure, had brought it; but she was very careful to avoid anything that could renew hope. If in the depths of womanly vanity there was a moment's satisfaction in finding out Mr. Ashcroft's uncalled-for constancy, with her whole heart she wished that he might find some one who would repay it worthily.

Her father and all her friendly neighbours wished Helen to marry him,—called it an excellent match for her; and predicted that she would not refuse much longer. Quite apart from attachment to another, she judged of him differently: in her secret thought he was beneath her, not in rank, or position, or wealth, but in *being*. His exceeding commonness of mind did not so much convince her of this, as an instinct of unconscious philosophy, which warned her that in the blank of wit, of deep intelligence and fire, many a damaging foible must thrive. She owned him

good and pleasant in his way, but it was not a way which it would have been safe for her to accept in a husband. Twenty years, and the sharp sorrows of the last were beginning to teach her something of what she was worth, according to the valuations of inner life: and beauty, though very agreeable,

> "The woman's blessing, which shall bend
> Around thee many a sudden friend,"*

seemed to her comparatively of small account.

The last week of January she spent in joyous expectation of a visit from her sister and Norman. They were coming for a fortnight, and to her it appeared a long stretch of happiness.

It had been a time of long hard frost, when sunset and sunrise seemed like powerless painted phenomena; and the outer world was so still that a blackbird flitting over the iron turf had an individuality of attention given to it, as a sufferer for whom but little could be done to

* Mrs. A. Clive.

save him from certain starvation. Almost choked with ice, the river to which Fernwick owed its lake, rippled on through frost-bitten meadows, under bushes still hoary with wreaths of clematis seed; and the few little birds that could be seen appeared almost stationary, as if the cold had paralysed their short glancing movements. But the birds, no less than the old women and school-children, claimed Helen's care, for they too had always been her sister's pensioners, and she was eager for them to prove by their looks how well they had all been provided for.

It is a mistake to affirm, as some people do, that in this life there is no perfect happiness. An elegant Italian writer says more truly, "Vi son dei piaceri in questo mondo i quai non si mischian' con l'amaro del quale è sparsa la vita, più che si mescoli colla sabbia la goccia di rugiada che, giú pel monte d'arena, scende ritonda intatta e indipendente all' falde del medesimo."*

* Guido Sorrelli.

To Helen the first days that followed her sister's return were perfectly happy; in the pure full joy they brought, her heart ceased from long unrest; ceased, for the most part, from the wandering of the desire for Arthur's face and Arthur's words. The sight of the eyes satisfied her for a while: Mercy looked so thoroughly happy, and was so unchanged. Not the least trifle that concerned Helen failed to interest her; and, though entirely content with Norman's calibre of mind, she appeared, notwithstanding, to enjoy being able to stretch her ideas in the more imaginative atmosphere of Helen's. Both sisters advocated his skating a good deal; it left them at leisure for talking, and as there was necessarily the interruption of dinner guests, or dining out, several days in the week, and Mr. Raymond liked Mercy to be with him in the afternoon, there was none too much time for hearing and telling all about everything in the divided fate of each.

Willing to show a forgetfulness of former wrongs, Helen seized the first favourable opportunity to entreat her sister to ask him to permit her to write to Arthur.

"Only once," she repeated several times, flushing with earnestness of good intention. "I only want to tell him *why* I cannot write more,—to explain——"

"He must know that, dearest Helen; but since you wish it so very much, I will do my best with papa."

When this was said they were passing along a very muddy thawing road to call at the rectory. The winter walk offered nothing very transportingly beautiful; though the sun was so low that the mossy hill-sides looked as brightly, softly green, as uplands do in early morning light. Groundsel gemmed with frosty dew in the unploughed fields on one side, and the glistening flats of soil which the ploughshare had smoothed and turned up, on the other, were the brightest

objects near them; and every bird was silent; but to Helen the scene was beautiful; her heart danced with reviving hope; and love sings all the year round.

Permission to write but one letter, to effect the reconciliation she had pined for, seemed now quite a brilliant prospect.

Mercy was true to her promise. She had said, "I will speak to him about it," with kindly strength of purpose, though not wholly approving the request. She spoke with the courage and confidence of one who seldom failed to make her own opinions influential, but she found it a far more difficult task than she had imagined. To try and push through a marble wall, to make ice boil water, or fire freeze it, would not have been much harder than to melt such stubborn feelings as Mr. Raymond's, — to disentangle the intricate webs of pride and caution,—to change the resolves of what he considered a just prejudice and conscientious determination. Spiritual

barriers are often insuperable. It was vain for Mercy to describe to him what needless misery was caused by a supposed misunderstanding, or to point out how much more painful and unlikely to heal were the wounds of hearts severed in displeasure, than when love was resigned with full acknowledgment of the cost of the sacrifice.

He replied that they both had acted very wrongly and *deserved* to suffer: he hoped, indeed, that they had now paid the full penalty of their folly by suffering. Undaunted by this stern reply, Mercy asserted that she was quite sure a nature like Helen's would more easily forget one to whom she had given a kind and tender dismissal, than one whom she felt to be wronged by her own unexplained severity. Compunction, in her case, exasperated the griefs of remembrance, and made its lightest mark indelible.

Mr. Raymond would hear no more of such "fine-spun nonsense," — "the girl shall never

write or speak another word to Arthur Lemayne if *I* can help it," he repeated, raising his voice to its highest pitch. "You have got my answer, once for all, and there's an end of it. Assure Helen that nothing can alter my determination."

It was heavy news to take a hungry heart; and with this, and the approach of the last day that she and Norman were to be at Fernwick, Helen's spirits sank very low, and her future began to look most dreary.

"Oh, what *shall* I do all through the tedious months till you come again? How tiresome it is that papa won't consent to our coming to see you before May: it would be so delightful," she cried out the night but one before Mercy's intended departure; sitting by her bedroom fire, chatting long after she ought to have been in bed. "You cannot think how wretchedly dull it is without you. One might as well live quite alone, most days, for any good I get out of papa."

"But he walks with you, and spends the evening as usual in the drawing-room, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, but when out-of-doors he hardly speaks at all, unless to ask me if I think we should miss this or that oak tree—by-the-by, why is he thinking of cutting down at such a rate?"

"Just what puzzled Norman and me the other day: we noticed so many fine trees marked for doom; and you know poor dear Norman's way of blurting out his questions just as they come into his head; we met papa soon after with Simmons, and Norman at once asked why so much timber was to be disposed of? It was not for the sake of scenery, and there was no need of thinning,—of course he only got an evasive answer, and I could not touch on the subject again. Has Mr. Cunnick been again?"

"Not since that one day's visit I told you of;

but he writes perpetually. I quite dislike the sight of his stupid counting-house writing, for papa always seems worried after he gets one of his letters. But what were we saying? Oh, in the evenings, yes, he sits with me, and asks me to play and sing; but seems so absent often: sometimes I think he is feeling angry about poor Arthur; yet he is very affectionate in his manner to me—more than he used to be, since I have been so lonely."

"You should try, dear Helen, to cheer him with pleasant conversation; make yourself as lively as you can, and then, perhaps, he would be gayer."

"I do try. But somehow, when I have been most really gay-hearted, it has not seemed to answer; he has sighed so when he had done laughing, as if a weight had fallen back upon him after being lifted off a few minutes. I think, perhaps, he is not feeling quite so well as usual; the very cold weather tries him."

"I have fancied him paler too. I tell you what, Helen, we will go to-morrow for a drive, and call on Dr. Stephens privately, and ask him to look in some day as if by accident, and find out if anything really does ail papa. You ought, indeed, to go to bed now, dear; you look tired."

"Do I? Well, good-night, this time week I shall have no one to say good-night to, upstairs."

The next morning, waking in the brown twilight of a February dawn, Helen heard some one sobbing in the adjoining room, on which hers opened.

"Mercy! Mercy, dear! what *is* the matter?" she cried. "I will come directly."

But before she could move, her sister's arms were round her, and a terrible choking whisper was at her ear.

"Oh, Helen, papa! They have sent for Dr. Stephens, but Anne says—it's too late."

By the time the first glint of ruby light fell on the stem of the aspen tree outside her window, the doctor had arrived, but death came first.

END OF VOL. I.

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