

MONA MACLEAN

MEDICAL STUDENT

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MONA MACLEAN

M O N A M A C L E A N

M E D I C A L S T U D E N T

A N O V E L

BY

G R A H A M T R A V E R S

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

M D C C C X C I I

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M O N A M A C L E A N,

MEDICAL STUDENT.

CHAPTER XL.

A LOCUM TENENS.

THE excitement was over, and every one was suffering from a profound reaction. Rachel's cold was no better, and her temper was decidedly worse ; for although the sermons still lay on her table, both they and the illness that had brought them into requisition had lost the charm of novelty. However—like the ravages of drink in relation to the efforts of temperance reformers—it was of course impossible to say how much worse she might have been without them.

Mona had by no means escaped the general depression consequent on the bazaar and the ball, and her cousin's querulousness was a heavy strain upon her endurance. Fortunately, it had the effect of putting her on her mettle. "I am certainly not fit to be a doctor," she thought, "if I cannot bear and forbear in a simple little case like this." So she went from shop to parlour, and from parlour to shop, with a light step and a cheerful face, striving hard to keep Rachel supplied with scraps of gossip that would amuse her without tempting her to talk.

"Mrs Smith has come to inquire for you," she said, as she entered the close little sitting-room. "Do you think you ought to see her? You know you made your chest worse by talking to Mrs Anderson the other day."

"And how am I to get well, I should like to know, mope, mope, moping all by myself from morning till night? All these blessed days I've sat here, while other folks were gallivanting about taking their pleasure. It's easy for you to say, 'Don't see her,' after all the ploy you've been having, and all the folk you are seeing in the shop to-day."

"Very well, I will bring her up; but do you

let her talk, and save your voice as much as you can."

The interview was a long one, but it did not appear to have the desired effect of improving Rachel's spirits.

"Upon my word," she said, when the visitor had gone, "I never knew anybody so close as you are. One would think, after all the pleasure you've been having, while I've been cooped up in the house, that you'd be glad to tell me any bit of news."

"Why, cousin," laughed Mona, "what else have I been doing? I have even told you what everybody wore!"

"The like of that!" said Rachel, scornfully; "and you never told me you got the word of her ladyship? I wonder what Mrs Smith would think of me knowing nothing about it?"

Mona was puzzled for a moment. "Oh," she said, suddenly, "Lady Kirkhope! She only said a few words to me."

"And how many would she say—the like of her to the like of you! I suppose you think because your mother's sister is married on a Sir, that their ladyships are as common as gooseberries. Much your mother's sister has done

for you—leaving you to take all sorts of maggots into your head! But I've no doubt you think a sight more of her than you do of me, for all the time you've been with me."

This was the first time the Munros had been mentioned between the cousins, and Mona was not anxious to pursue the subject. "Your mother's sister married on a Sir." Oh, the sordidness of it!

Mona had refused to see the Sahib again during his stay at the Towers, and although she could not for a moment regret her refusal, she was conscious of a distinct sense of emptiness in her life. There was no doubt that for the moment she had lost her friend; and perhaps things might never again be as they had been before his clumsy and lamentable mistake. But although he was lost to her directly, she was only now beginning to possess him through Doris.

"He will see her constantly for the next two months," she thought, "and he cannot but love her. He loves her now, if he only knew it. It is absurd to suppose that he ever looked at me with that light in his eyes. He analyses me, and admires me deliberately, but Doris bowls

him over. Whether she will care for him, is another question; but I am sure he at least possesses the prime merit in her eyes of being a Sir Galahad; and by the doctrine of averages, a magnificent son of Anak like that cannot be refused by two sensible women within the space of two months. He will consider himself bound to me of course, but he will fall in love with her all the faster for that; and at the appointed time he will duly present himself in much fear and trembling lest I should take him at his word. How amusing it will be!" And a cold little ray of sunshine stole across the chill grey mists of her life.

That day Rachel's appetite failed for the first time. Her face was more flushed than usual, and her moist, flabby hands became dry and hot. In some uneasiness Mona produced her clinical thermometer, and found that her cousin's temperature had run up to 102°.

"You are a little feverish, dear," she said, lightly. "I don't think it is going to be anything serious, but it will be wise to go to bed and let me fetch the doctor. Shall I send Sally or go myself?"

"Send Sally," was the prompt reply, "and

let him find out for himself that I am feverish. Don't tell him anything about that machine of yours. He'd think it wasn't canny for the like of you."

"I will do as you please, of course; but lots of people have thermometers now, who know no more of medicine—than that spoon. Not but what the spoon's experience of the subject has been both varied and profound!" she added, smiling, as she remembered Rachel's love for domestic therapeutics.

Rachel smiled too at the feeble little joke. The knowledge that she was really ill had improved her spirits wonderfully, partly by gratifying her sense of self-importance, and partly by making the occasion seem worthy of the manifestation of a little practical Christianity.

It was evening when the doctor arrived, and then, of course, he could say but little. Milk diet, a cooling draught, no visitors, and patience. He would call about noon the next day.

"I fear you are as much in need of rest and care as my cousin is," said Mona, when a fit of coughing interrupted his final directions to her at the door.

"I am fairly run off my feet," he said. "I

have had a lot of night-work, and now this bout of frivolity has given me a crop of bronchial attacks and nervous headaches. I have got a friend to take my work for a fortnight, but he can't come for a week or ten days yet. I must just rub along somehow in the meantime. A good sharp frost would do us all good; this damp weather is perfectly killing."

As if in answer to his wish, the frost came that night with a will. In the morning Mona found a tropical forest on her window-panes; and in a moment up ran the curtains of the invisible. The shop and the dingy house fell into their true perspective, and she felt herself a sentient human being—dowered with the glorious privilege of living.

Rachel was no better, and as soon as Mona had made her patient and the room as neat and fresh as circumstances would allow, she set out to do the marketing. "Send Sally," Rachel said; but customers never came before ten, and Mona considered it the very acme of squalor to leave that part of the housekeeping to chance, in the shape of a thriftless, fusionless maid-of-all-work. She walked quickly through the sharp frosty air, and came in with a sprinkle of

snow on her dark fluffy fur, and a face like a half-blown rose.

“The doctor has just gone up-stairs,” whispered Sally, and Mona hastened up to find, not Dr Burns, but Dr Dudley. She was too much taken by surprise to conceal the pleasure she felt, and, much as Dudley had counted on this meeting, his brain wellnigh reeled under the exquisite unconscious flattery of her smile. It was a minute before he could control himself sufficiently to speak.

“I am afraid Dr Burns is ill,” said Mona, as she took his hand.

“Yes, poor fellow! He is very much below par altogether, and he has taken a serious chill, which has settled on his lungs. I fear it will be some time before he is about again. A substitute will be here in a week, I hope; and in the meantime, *nolens volens*, I am thrust into the service. Thank you, Miss Simpson, that will do, I think.” He took the thermometer to the light, and then gave Mona a few directions. “You have not got one of these things, I suppose?” he said.

“I never even had one in my hand,” put in Rachel, hastily.

“You know you can easily get one,” added Mona, severely.

“Oh, it’s of no consequence. I think there is no doubt that this is only a feverish cold. I wish I had no more serious case. Go on with the mixture, but I should like Miss Simpson to take some quinine as well. I have no doubt she will be about again in a few days.”

He wrote a prescription—very unnecessarily, Mona thought, — and then she followed him down - stairs. When they reached the shop he deliberately stopped, and turned to face her. He did not speak ; his mind was in a whirl. He was thinking no longer of the beauty of her mind, and character, and face ; he had ceased even to admire. He only knew that he wanted her, that he had found her out, that she was his by right ; every other thought and feeling was merged in the consciousness that he was alone with the woman he loved. Oh, how good it was to lose one’s self at last in a longing like this !

His back was turned to the light, and Mona wondered why her “playfellow” was so silent.

“This is an unfortunate holiday for you,” she said.

He shook himself out of his dream, and answered gaily, "Oh, I don't know. This sort of thing is a rest in one way at least,—it does not call the same brain-cells into requisition, and it gives me a little anticipation of the manhood my cursed folly has postponed."

Of course the humble words were spoken very proudly; and he looked every inch a man even to eyes that still retained a vivid picture of the Sahib. His shoulders seemed more broad and strong in the heavy becoming Inverness cape, he held himself more upright than formerly, and his face had gained an expression of quiet self-confidence.

"Work suits you," said Mona, smiling.

"That it does!" He brought his closed fist vehemently down upon the counter. "When my examination is over, Miss Maclean, I shall be a different being,—in a position to do and say things that I dare not do and say now."

He spoke with emphasis, half hoping she would understand him, and then broke off with sudden bitterness—

"Unless I fail!"

"*You* fail!" laughed Mona.

"Ah! so outsiders always say. I can assure

you, you have no idea how chancy those London examinations are."

The colour rushed into her face. A dozen times she had tried to ask Rachel's permission to tell him all; a dozen times the question, "Why him rather than any one else?" had sealed her lips. What if she were to make a clean breast of it now, and risk her cousin's anger afterwards? She could never hope for such another opportunity.

She was determined to use it, to tell him she knew the chances of those examinations only too well; but to her surprise she found the confession far more difficult than the one she had made to the Sahib. At the very thought of it, her heart beat hard and her breath came fast.

"This is too absurd!" she thought, in fierce indignation at her own weakness. "What do I care what he thinks? But if I cannot speak without panting as if I were trying to turn a mill, I must hold my peace. It is of little consequence, after all, whether he knows or not."

"Do you know," said Dudley, deliberately, "I thought for a moment that I had come into the wrong house this morning? I never should have recognised your—quarters."

“Did you notice the difference? You must have a quick eye and a good memory.”

Notice the difference! He had noticed few things in the last six months that had given him half the pleasure of that sweeping reformation. Dudley was no giant among men; but, if he cared for name and outward appearance, at least he cared more for reality; and, I think, the sight of that fresh, business-like, creditable shop was a greater comfort to his mind than it would have been to see his Cinderella at the ball. He had ceased to regret that Mona was a shopkeeper, but he was not too much in love to be glad that she was a good shopkeeper.

“I knew your influence was bound to tell in the long-run,” he said. “I suppose Miss Simpson did not greatly encourage you to interfere?”

“No, but she has been very good. I don’t believe I should have left an assistant as free a hand as she left me. I hope you admire my window. I call it a work of art.”

“I call it something a great deal better than that,” he said rather huskily, as he held out his hand. “Good morning.”

“Bless her!” he said to himself as he jumped into his gig. “She never apologises for the

shop—never speaks as if it were something beneath her. My God, what a snob I am !”

As soon as he was gone, Mona raised the hand he had shaken, and looked at it deliberately. Then she took a few turns up and down the shop. “I never mean to marry,” she said very slowly to herself, “and I don’t suppose I shall ever know what it is to be in love ; but it would be a fine test of a man’s sincerity to see whether he would be willing to take me simply and solely as I am now—as Rachel Simpson’s assistant.”

The next day was Sunday, and Rachel was so much better that she insisted on Mona’s going to church.

“Folk will be thinking it is something catching,” she said, “and by the time I’m down-stairs again, there’ll be nobody in the shop to talk to.”

It was a bright, crisp morning, but Mona found the service rather a barren one.

“I suppose the doctor has been here,” she said with marked indifference, when she re-entered Rachel’s room.

“Yes ; and very pleased he was to find me so well. He says I’m to get up to tea to-day, and go out for ten minutes to-morrow, if all’s well.

He is very busy, and he's not to come back unless we send for him. He's not one of them that tries how many visits they can put in."

"No," said Mona, drearily, and then she roused herself with an effort. "I am so glad you are better, dear," she said. "Mr Stuart is coming to see you to morrow afternoon."

CHAPTER XLI.

A SINGED BUTTERFLY.

WHEN New Year's Day came round, the little household had fallen back into its ordinary routine. Mona had decorated the parlour with evergreens, before Rachel left her sick-room; had superintended divers important proceedings in the kitchen; and had done her best to feel, and to make others feel, the festive influence of the season. The attempt had not been a very successful one, however; Rachel was at no time susceptible to the poetry of domestic life; and when dim visions rose in Mona's mind of giving a treat to her *protégées*, or to the Sunday-school children, she forced herself to remember that she was only a humble shopkeeper, bound to keep within the limits of her *rôle*. For one night she had played a more important part,

but that was over now. She was back in her humble sphere, and, for very art's sake, she must keep her true proportion till the end. Fortunately, she was asked to assist in the management of one or two "treats," and, by means of these and a few anonymous contributions to local charities, she—to use an expression of her own—"saved her soul alive." She looked for no selfish enjoyment, she told herself. Auntie Bell was the only human thing in the neighbourhood whom, for her own sake, she really cared to see; Auntie Bell—and perhaps one other; but, although Mona often saw the doctor's gig in those days, she never chanced to meet the doctor.

A New Year dinner is not a very cheerful festivity in a somewhat uncongenial *solitude à deux*, and Mona was not sorry when an invitation came for Rachel to drink tea with a crony in the evening. She herself was included in the invitation, but had no difficulty in getting out of it. She was popular on the whole, among Rachel's friends, but there was a general consensus of opinion among them that, when it came to a regular gossip over the fire, Miss Maclean, with all her cleverness, was a sad wet-

blanket. Sally had been promised a half-holiday, and Rachel had some compunction about leaving her cousin alone, but Mona laughed at the idea.

“The arrangement suits me quite as well as it does you,” she said; “I am going to take some of my mince-pies to old Jenny, and I have no doubt she will give me a cup of tea. She has been on my mind all day. It is glorious weather for a walk, and I shall have a full moon to light me home.”

And in truth it was a glorious day for a walk. The thermometer had fallen abruptly after a heavy mist, and the great stretch of fields was perfectly white with the deepest hoarfrost Mona had ever seen. From every stone in the dyke, every blade of grass by the wayside, every hardy scrap of moss and lichen, the most exquisite ice-needles stood out in wonderful coruscations, sparkling and blazing in the slanting rays of the afternoon sun; a huge spider's web in the window of an old barn looked like some marvellous piece of fairy lace-work; the cart-ruts in the more deserted roads were spanned by tiny rafters of ice; and above all, the moon, modest and retiring as yet, looked

down from an infinitely distant expanse of pale, cloudless sky.

Very slowly the sun sank below the horizon, and the moon asserted herself more and more; till, when Mona reached the pine-wood, the mystic, unearthly beauty of the scene brought the actual tears into her eyes. The silence was broken only by sounds that served to gauge its depth; the recesses of the wood were as gloomy and mysterious as ever; but the moonlight streamed down on graceful tops and spreading branches, not burdened with massive whiteness, but transformed into crystal. A pine-wood in snow is a sight to be seen, but the work of the snow is only a daub, after all, when compared with the artist touch of a frost like this.

Mona scarcely knew how long she stood there, unwilling even to lean against the gate and so destroy its perfect bloom; but she was disturbed at last by the sound of wheels on the carriage-drive. Had the Colonel come back? Was Jenny ill? And then with a quick flash of conviction she knew whom she was going to see.

It was Dudley, leading his horse by the

bridle, and looking worn and anxious. He brightened up and quickened his step when he saw a woman's figure at the gate; then recognised who it was, and stopped short, with something like a groan. Poor Dudley! A moment before he would have given almost anything he possessed for the presence of a female human creature, and now that his prayer was granted, how he wished that it had been any other woman in the world than just this one whom the Fates had sent!

He had no choice, however, and he plunged into the matter at once, with white lips, but with a quick, resolute voice.

"I am in a sore dilemma, Miss Maclean," he said. "I was sent for suddenly up country to a case of arsenical poisoning; and, as I went past, they stopped me at those cottar-houses to tell me that there was a poor soul in extremity here. It's your little Maggie, by the way. Poor child! She may well ask herself whether life is worth living now! Of course I had to go on to my man, but I left him before I really ought to have done so, and now I must hurry back. The baby is just born."

"Is Jenny here?" Mona found it difficult to

speak at all in the deafening rush of sorrow and bitterness that came over her.

“Jenny is away to Leith. Her brother’s ship has just come in. The girl came home unexpectedly, and had to get the key of the house at the cottage. Everybody is down in the town celebrating the New Year, except a few infants, and an infirm old man, who noticed that she was ill and hailed me. Will you go in? There is no fire, nor comfort of any sort for the poor child. It is no work for you——”

Mona looked up with a curious light in her eyes.

“You don’t really mean that,” she said, quietly. “If there were only a duchess on the road to-night, it would be her work. I suppose I may run to the cottage for some milk? I expect Maggie has eaten nothing all day.”

His lips quivered slightly, in the relief of finding how simply she took it.

“God bless you,” he said, as he took the reins. “I believe the girl will do well. I will be back as soon as I possibly can, and I will send the first woman I meet to your relief.”

“No, you won’t,” she said, gently. “I would rather stay all night than have a woman here of

whom I know nothing. Go on! Good speed to your case."

She fetched the milk, and then ran like the wind to the house. It was a lonely place at the best of times, and now it seemed bleak and damp and dreary,—a fitting home for the poor little singed human butterfly, who, in the hour of her agony, had taken refuge within its walls.

Mona was thankful there was so much to do, for her indignation burned like fire at the sight of that altered, chubby face. All honour to the stern and noble women who, by the severity of their views, have done so much to preserve the purity of their sex; but let us be thankful, too, for those who, like Mona, in time of need lose sight of the sinning woman in the injured suffering child.

In a very short time a bright fire was blazing in the grate; the bed had been arranged as comfortably as might be, and Mona was holding a cup of hot milk to the lips of the half-starved girl. Only an invalid knows the relief of having some one in the sick-room who, without fuss or questioning, quietly takes the helm of affairs; and poor little Maggie looked up at her comforter with the eyes of a hunted animal, which,

bruised and bleeding, finds that it has run by chance into a haven of rest.

For some time Mona doubted whether the baby would live till Dr Dudley's return. It was such a puny little thing—a poor morsel of humanity, thrust prematurely into a cold and busy world that had no need of him. "He had better have died!" thought Mona, as she did all that in her lay to keep him in life; and, in truth, I know not whether the woman or the doctor in her rejoiced more truly when she saw that all immediate danger was past.

All was peaceful, and Maggie, with the tears undried on her long eyelashes, had fallen asleep when Dudley came back.

"I don't know how to apologise for being so long away," he said, in a low voice. "Talk of Scylla and Charybdis!" He asked a few simple questions, and then, leading the way into the kitchen, he pushed forward the shabby old arm-chair for her, and seated himself on the corner of the table.

"I am afraid you are very tired," he said.

"Oh no!"

"You are reserving that for to-morrow?"

He would have liked to feel her pulse, both

as a matter of personal and of scientific interest, but he did not dare.

“I wonder what poor little Maggie and I would have done without you to-night,” he said. “As it is, I have had a close shave with my man. I found him a good deal collapsed when I went back,—cold and clammy, with blue lines round his eyes.”

“What did you do?” said Mona eagerly, with a student’s interest.

“You may well ask. One’s text-books always fail one just at the point that offers a real difficulty in practice. They tell you how to get rid of and neutralise the poison; they overwhelm you with Marsh’s and Reinsch’s tests; but how to keep the patient alive—that is a mere detail. Hot bottles were safe, of course, and ‘in the right direction.’ I was afraid to give stimulants, in case I should promote the absorption of any eddies of the poison, but finally I had to chance a little whisky-and-water, and that brought him round. I was very ill at ease about leaving you so long, but I thought some married woman from the cottar-houses would have been here before this.”

“They won’t come,” said Mona. “I gave the

old man a sovereign to hold his peace." And then she bit her lip, remembering that Miss Simpson's shop-girl could scarcely be supposed to have sovereigns to spare.

Dudley smiled,—a half-amused but very kindly smile, that reflected itself in a moment in Mona's face.

"Do you think it was foolish?" she asked, simply.

"God forbid that I should criticise a woman's instinct in such a matter! With *my* powers of persuasion, I might as well have tried to hush up the death of a prince. I have long since decided that if I don't want people to talk about a thing, the best plan is to advertise it at once, then turn up the collar of my coat, fold my arms, and—thole."

"That is all very well when only one's self is concerned, but, by the time Jenny came back, no choice would have been left her."

"True. I might have known all along that you were right. It will be worth more than a sovereign to be able to tell Jenny that no one knows. And if she comes soon, the statement will do for the truth. Heigh-ho! do you know, I could throw my cap in the air, and hurrah like

a schoolboy, when I think that my man has pulled through. A poisoning case is no joke, I can tell you; all hurry and confusion and uncertainty, with the prospect of a legal inquiry at the end of it. 'Do you mean to say, sir,'—Dudley adjusted an imaginary wig and weighed an imaginary eyeglass,—'that with a man's life at stake, you did so-and-so?' Ugh! who says a doctor's fees are easily earned? It would take many a jog-trot dyspepsia or liver complaint to restore the balance after that!"

"I am quite sure of it; and now I advise you to go home and get a night's rest if you can."

"But what am I to do about you? You don't suppose I am going to sleep the sleep of the unjust and leave you here?"

"That is precisely what you are going to do. An hour's forced march will do me no harm; you have had no lack of them lately. I will ask you to leave this note for my cousin, and if you have no objection, I think you might ask Jenny's friend, Mrs Arnot—you know who I mean—to come up to-morrow morning. She is absolutely safe. Tell her to wait till the shops

are open, and bring me the things I have jotted down here."

Maggie was awake by this time, and Dudley paid her a short visit before he left. The poor girl thought the gentleman very kind, but she was thankful when he was gone, and she was alone once more with Mona.

"I will tell you all how it was," she sobbed out convulsively.

"Not to-night, dear," Mona said quietly, stroking the thick brown hair. "When you are a little stronger, you shall tell me the whole story. To-night you must lie quite still and rest. I will take care of you."

It was a strange experience to sit there through the long hours, listening to the regular breathing of the young mother, the steady tick of the clock, and the occasional fall of a cinder from the grate. It seemed so incredible that this girl—this butterfly—had passed already, all frivolous and unprepared, through that tract of country which, to each fresh traveller, is only less new and mysterious than the river of death. A few months before, Mona had felt so old and wise, compared to that ignorant child; and now a great gulf of experience and of sorrow lay

between them, and the child was on the farther side.

More and more heavily the burden of the sorrows of her sex pressed on Mona's heart as the night went on ; more and more she longed to carry all suffering women in her arms ; more and more she felt her unworthiness for the life-work she had chosen, till at last, half unconsciously, she fell on her knees and her thoughts took the form of a prayer.

CHAPTER XLII.

QUESTIONINGS.

WHEN Mona first began her medical career, she was actuated partly by intense love of study and scientific work, partly by a firm and enthusiastic conviction that, while the fitness of women for certain spheres of usefulness is an open question, medical work is the natural right and duty of the sex, apart from all shifting standards and conventional views. Her repeated failure "took the starch out of her," as she expressed it, but I do not think that she ever for more than a moment seriously thought of giving up the work, when she laid it aside for a time; and her promise to Mr Reynolds was made, less out of gratitude to him than from a stern sense of duty. But now the cold hard lines of duty were broken through by the grow-

ing developing force of a living inspiration. We need many fresh initiations into a life-work that is really to move mankind, and Mona underwent one that night at Barntoun Wood, hundreds of miles away from the scene of her studies, with the silvered pines for a temple, the lonely house for a holy place, and a shrine of sin and sorrow. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these—" Who shall tell beforehand what events will form the epochs, or the turning-points, in the life of any one of us? Verily the wind bloweth where it listeth.

The night was over, and the morning sun was once more kindling all the ice-crystals into sparkles of light, when Mrs Arnot arrived—kind and motherly, but of course inexpressibly shocked. Mona conjured her not to have any conversation about the past that might agitate the patient; and then set out for home, promising to return before night. The ready tears welled up in Maggie's eyes as she watched her benefactress go; and then she turned her face to the wall and pretended to sleep. If she could only be with Miss Maclean always, how easy it would be to be good; and perhaps in time she would even begin to forget—about *him*.

Since her illness Rachel had been very affectionate to her cousin, and Mona was quite unprepared for the torrent of indignation that assailed her when she entered the sitting-room. She had found Maggie ill at the Wood alone, she said, and almost in a moment Rachel guessed what had happened.

For some time Mona tried to discuss the question calmly, but the cutting, merciless words wounded her more than she could bear; so she rose and took her gloves from the table.

“That will do, cousin,” she said, coldly; “but for the accident of circumstances it might have been you or I.”

This of course was a truism, but Rachel could not be expected to see it in that light, and the flames of her wrath leaped higher.

“Jenny can pay for a nurse from Kirkstoun,” she said; “I’ll not have you waiting hand and foot on a creature no decent woman would speak to. You’ll not enter that house again.”

“I’ve promised to go back this afternoon. Of course you have a perfect right, if you like, to forbid me to return here. But I am very tired, and I think it would be a pity, after all your kindness to me, to send me away with

such an interpretation as this of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Unless you mention the incident, people will never find out that I had anything to do with it."

She left the room without giving her cousin time to reply. Before long Sally knocked at her door with a tolerably inviting breakfast-tray. Poor Rachel! She had never made any attempt to reduce her opinions and convictions to common principles, and it was very easy to defeat her with a weapon out of her own miscellaneous armoury. She was perfectly satisfied that the parable of the Good Samaritan had nothing to do with the case, but the mention of it reminded her of other incidents in the Gospel narrative which seemed to lend some support to Mona's position. But then things were so different now-a-days. Was that wicked little minx to be encouraged to hold up her head again as if nothing had happened?

Not even for Jenny's sake could Mona stoop to beg her cousin to hold her peace, but Rachel had already resolved to do this for reasons of her own. She was shrewd enough to see that if the incident came out at all *at present*, it would come out in its entirety, and, rather than

sacrifice "her own flesh and blood," she would spare even Maggie—for the present.

About mid-day Dudley arrived at the shop on foot.

"I thought the friendly Fates would let me find you alone," he said. "Your patients are thriving famously. I came to tell you that Jenny is to arrive at Kirkstoun to-night. I know it is asking a hard thing; but it would soften matters so for everybody else if you could meet her."

"Thank you so much for coming to tell me. I have been very unhappy about her home-coming. I am afraid I cannot do much, but I need not say I will do my best. I meant to go out this afternoon, but I will wait now, and go with Jenny. Poor soul! it will be an awful blow to her."

Dudley was looking at her fixedly. "Having expressed my delight at finding you," he said, "I am going to proceed, with true masculine inconsistency, to scold you for not taking a few hours' sleep. You look very tired."

"Appearances are deceptive."

"I am afraid Miss Simpson is not pleased with last night's work."

She hesitated, then smiled. "Miss Simpson is not the keeper of my conscience."

"Thank God for that at least! You will not stay for more than half an hour to-night?"

"I don't know."

"No, Miss Maclean, you will not," he said, firmly; "I will not have it."

Her eyes sparkled with mischief. "Bear with my dulness," she said, "and explain to me your precise right to interfere. Is it the doctor's place to arrange how long the nurses are to remain on duty? I only ask for information, you know."

"Yes," he said, boldly, "it is."

"Ah! so it becomes a simple matter of official duty. Thank you for explaining it to me."

Then suddenly the blood rushed up into her face. "Oh, Dr Dudley," she said, impulsively, "what a brute I am to laugh and jest the moment I have turned my back on a tragedy like that!"

"And why?" he asked. "Do not the laughter and jesting, like the flowers and the sunshine, show that the heart of things is not all tragedy? If you and I could not laugh a little, in sheer

healthy human reaction from too near a view of the seamy side of life, I think we should go mad ; don't you ?”

“ Yes,” she said, earnestly.

“ I think it is a great mistake to encourage mere feeling beyond the point where it serves as a motive. As we say in physiology that the optimum stimulus is the one that produces the maximum contraction ; so the optimum feeling is not the maximum feeling, but the one that produces the maximum of action. Maggie is as safe with you as if she had fallen into the hands of her guardian angel. There is but little I can do, as the law does not permit us, even under strong provocation, to wring the necks of our fellow-men ; but I will see Jenny to-morrow, and arrange about making the fellow contribute to the support of the child. Do you think you and I need to be afraid of an innocent laugh if it chances to come in our way ?”

Dudley spoke simply and naturally, without realising how his sympathetic chivalrous words would appeal to a woman who loved her own sex. Mona tried to thank him, but the words would not come, so with an instinct that was

half that of a woman, half that of a child, she looked up and paid him the compliment of the tears for which she blushed.

It was then that Dudley understood for the first time all the possibilities of Mona's beauty, and realised that the face of the woman he loved was as potter's clay in the grasp of a beautiful soul.

He held out his hand without a word, and left the shop.

CHAPTER XLIII.

“ MITHER ! ”

THE clear sky was obscured by driving clouds, and the night was darkening fast, as Mona walked up and down the draughty little station, waiting for the arrival of Jenny's train. The prospect of a long walk across the bleak open country, with a heartrending tale to tell on the way, was not an inviting one, and Mona had serious thoughts of hiring a conveyance ; but that would have been the surest method of attracting attention to herself and Jenny, so she reluctantly relinquished the idea. The train was very late, and the wind seemed to rise higher every minute ; but at last the whistle was heard, and in a few moments more Jenny's quaint old figure alighted from a grimy third-class carriage, and proceeded with difficulty to

“rax doun” the basket and bundle from the high seat.

Mona’s heart bled afresh at the sight of the weather-worn old face, and her whole nature recoiled from the task she had accepted. After all, why should she interfere? Might she not do more harm than good? Would it not be wiser to leave the whole development of events to Mother Nature and the friendly Fates?

“Is that you, Jenny?” she said; “I am going out your way, so we can walk together. Give me your basket.”

“Hoot awa’, Miss Maclean! You leddies dinna tak’ weel wi’ the like o’ that. Feel the weicht o’ it.”

“That is nothing,” said Mona, bracing her muscles to treat it like a feather. “I will take the bundle, too, if you like. And now, Jenny, I want to hear about your travels.”

Her great fear was lest the old woman’s suspicions should be aroused before they got out of the town, and she talked rather excitedly about anything that suggested itself. At last they passed the outskirts, and Mona drew a long breath of mingled relief and apprehension.

“It’s an awfu’ nicht,” gasped Jenny, taking

Mona's proffered arm, as a fierce gust of wind swept across the bare fields. "I nae ken hoo I'd win hame my lane. But what taks ye sae far on siccan a nicht?"

"I went out to see you last night," Mona answered, irrelevantly, "but found you away."

"Eh, lassie, but I'm sair fashed! An' ye'd no' ken that the key was at the cottar-hoose? Ye micht hae gaed in, and rested yersel' a bit. I'd ask ye in the nicht, but the hoose is cauld, and nae doubt ye're gaun tae some ither body."

"Yes," said Mona, and then she rushed into the subject that occupied all her thoughts. "When did you last hear from Maggie?" she asked.

The old woman's face darkened. "I wadna wonner but there'll be a letter frae her at the cottar-hoose. I'm that ill pleased wi' her for no' writin'. It'll be sax weeks, come Monday, sin' I'd ony word. I'll no' ken a meenit's peace till her twel'month's oot in Feb'ry, and she's back at hame."

"Perhaps she is ill," said Mona, deliberately.

Jenny peered up at her companion's face in the darkness.

"What gars ye say that?" she asked, quickly.

“ Jenny,” said Mona, in a voice that shook with sympathy, “ when I went out last night, I found Maggie at the house. She has come home.”

She never could remember afterwards whether she added anything more, or whether Jenny guessed at once what had befallen. There were a few quick imperious questions, and then the old woman dropped her bundle and burst into a torrent of wrath that made Mona’s blood run cold. For some minutes she could scarcely understand a word of the incoherent outcry, but it was an awful experience to see the dim figure of the mother, standing there with up-raised hands on the deserted road, calling down curses upon her child.

Presently she picked up her bundle, and walked on so swiftly that Mona could scarcely keep pace with her.

“ Hoo daured she come hame ? ” she muttered. “ Hoo daured she, hoo daured she ? Could she no’ bide whaur naebody kent her, and no’ shame her auld mither afore a’ the folk ? The bare-faced hussy ! I’d ha’ slammed the door i’ her face. An’ she’ll oot o’ the hoose this vera nicht, she an’ the bairn o’ her shame. There’s

no' room yonder for baith her an' me. I nae care what comes o' them. She suld ha' thocht o' that i' time. We maun e'en reap what we saw. Frae this day forrit she's nae bairn o' mine, and I'll no' lie doon ae nicht wi' a shameless strumpet unner my roof."

"If you turn her out of the house," Mona said, quietly, "you will tell all the world what has happened. At present it is a secret."

Jenny's face brightened, but only for a moment.

"Ye needna pit yersel' aboot tae tell me the like o' that," she said, bitterly. "Or maybe ye're but a lassie yet, and dinna ken hoo lang thae secrets is like tae be keepit. I never keepit ane mysel', and it's no' likely ither folk are gaun to begin noo." Then she burst into a wailing cry, "Eh, Miss Maclean, I'm sair stricken! I can turn her oot o' my hoose, but I'll niver haud up my heid again. What's dune canna be undune."

"What is done cannot be undone," Mona answered, very slowly; "but it can be made a great deal worse. The child did not know her trouble was so near, when she came to ask your advice and help. Where else, indeed, should she have gone? Would you have had her drift

on to the streets ? Because she has lost what you call her good name, do you care nothing for her soul ? I think, in all my life, I never knew anything so beautiful as the trustful way in which that poor little thing came home to her mother. I'm sure I should not have had the courage to do it. She knew you better than you do yourself. She had not sat on your knee and heard all your loving words for nothing ; and when the world treated her cruelly, and she fell into temptation, she knew where to turn. Fifty vows and promises of reformation would not mean so much. If I were a mother, I should turn my back on a storm of gossip and slander, and thank God on my bended knees for that.”

Mona paused, and in the darkness she heard a suppressed sob.

“ I am not a child, Jenny,” she went on. “ I know as well as you do what the world would say, but we are away from the world just now, you and I ; we are alone in the darkness with God. Let us try for a little to see things as He sees them. Don't you think He knows as well as we do that if Maggie is kindly and lovingly dealt with now, she may live to be a

better woman and not a worse, because of this fall? He puts it into her mother's power to turn this evil into good. And you must not think that her life is spoilt. She is such a child. She must not stay here, of course, but if you will let me, I will find a home for her where she will be carefully trained; and you will live yet to see her with a husband of her own to take care of her, and little children, of whom you will be proud."

Jenny sobbed aloud. "Na, na, Miss Maclean," she said; "ye may pit the pieces thegither, sae that naebody kens the pitcher was broke, but the crack's aye there!"

"That's true, dear Jenny; but are we not all cracked pitchers in the sight of God? We may not have committed just that sin, but may not our pride and selfishness be even more wicked in His eyes? I am sure Jesus Christ would have said some burning words to the man whose selfishness has caused all this misery; but to poor little Maggie, who has suffered so much, He would surely say, 'Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.' It seems to me that the only peace we can get in this world is by trying to see things as God sees them."

So they talked on till they reached the Wood. From time to time Jenny spoke softly, with infinite pathos, of her child ; and then, again and again, her indignation broke forth uncontrollably — now against Maggie, now against the man who had betrayed her. Mona’s influence was strong, but it was exerted against a mighty rock of opposition ; and just when all seemed gained, the stone rolled heavily back into its place. She was almost exhausted with the long struggle when they reached the door, and she did not feel perfectly sure even then that Jenny would not end by fulfilling her original threat.

Mrs Arnot had gone home half an hour before, and Maggie was lying alone, with pale face and large pathetic eyes. She recognised her mother’s step, and turned towards the opening door with quivering lips.

“ Mither ! ” she sobbed, like a lost lamb.

There was a moment of agonising uncertainty, and then a very bitter cry.

“ Eh, my dawtie, my dawtie ! my bonnie bit bairn ! I suld ha’ keepit ye by me.”

Mona slipped into the kitchen. The blazing fire and the well-polished tins swam mistily before her eyes, as she took the tea-canister

from the shelf, and her whole heart was singing a pæan of thanksgiving.

“It was the ‘Mither!’ that did it,” she thought. “Where was all my wordy talk compared to the pathos of that? But I am very glad I came all the same.”

She left the mother and daughter alone for ten minutes or so, and then carried in the tea-tray.

“I don’t know how you feel, Jenny,” she said, “but I am very cold and very hungry, so I took the liberty of making some tea. I even think Maggie might be allowed to have some, very weak, if she promises faithfully not to talk any more to-night.”

Jenny drank her hot tea, and her heart was cheered and comforted, in spite of all her burden of sorrow. Miss Maclean’s friendship was at least something to set over against the talk of the folk; and—and—she thought she would read a chapter of her Bible that night; she would try to find the bit about Jesus and the woman. Had any one told Jenny beforehand that, so soon after hearing such dreadful news, her heart would have been comparatively at rest, she would have laughed the idea to scorn. Yet

so it was. Poor old Jenny! The morrow was yet to come, with reflections of its own, with the return swing of the pendulum, weighted with principle and prejudice and old tradition; but in her simplicity she never thought of that, and for a few short hours she had peace.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CRIMSON STREAK.

As soon as tea was over, Mona rose to go. Jenny begged her to stay all night, for the wind was howling most dismally through the pine-trees; but Mona laughed at the idea of danger or difficulty, and set out with a light heart. She had scarcely found herself alone, however, in the wild and gusty night, when she began to regret her own rashness. She was groping her way slowly along the carriage-drive, with the guidance of the hedge, when, with a sudden sense of protection, she caught sight of lamps at the gate.

Dudley came forward as soon as he heard her step.

“That is right,” he said, with a chime of gladness in his beautiful voice; “I thought you would obey orders.”

“ I am naturally glad to receive the commendation of my superior officer.”

“ Is Jenny back ? ”

“ Yes. All is well,—for to-night at least. I must go out as early as possible to-morrow. It was one of the most beautiful sights I ever saw in my life ; ” and Mona described what had taken place.

“ You have done a good day’s work,” Dudley said, after a pause.

“ Oh, I did nothing. I laughed at my own heroics when I heard Maggie’s ‘ Mither ! ’ ”

“ No doubt ; but Maggie’s part would have fallen rather flat, if you had not borne all the brunt of the disclosure.”

“ Are you going to visit your patient ? ”

“ Is there any necessity ? ”

“ None whatever, I imagine.”

“ Then I shall have the pleasure of driving you home.”

“ Oh no, thank you ! I would rather walk.”

They were standing now in the full light of the lamps. Dudley waxed bold.

“ Look me in the face, Miss Maclean, and tell me that that is true.”

Mona raised her eyes with a curious sensa-

tion, as if the ground were slipping from under her feet.

“No,” she said, “it is not true. I rather dread the walk ; but—you know I cannot come with you.”

“Why not?”

She frowned at his persistence ; then met his eyes again.

“Because I should not do it by daylight,” she said, proudly.

There was a minute’s silence.

“Burns’ substitute comes to - morrow,” he said, carelessly.

Her face changed very slightly, but sufficiently to catch his quick eye.

“And as soon as I have discussed things with him, I have promised to carry my old aunt off to warmer climes. I shan’t be back here till August.”

No answer. A sudden blast of wind swept along the road, and she instinctively laid hold of the shaft of the gig for support.

Dudley held out his hand.

“It is a high step,” he said, “but I think you can manage it.”

Mona took his hand almost unconsciously,

tried to say something flippant, failed utterly, and took her seat in the gig without a word.

“Am I drugged?” she thought, “or am I going mad?”

Never in all her life had she so utterly failed in *savoir-faire*. She felt vaguely how indignant she would be next day at her own weakness and want of pride; but at the moment she only knew that it was good to be there with Dr Dudley.

He arranged the rug over her knees, and took the reins.

“Is this better than walking?” he asked in a low voice, stooping down to catch her answer.

Only for a moment she tried to resist the influence that was creeping over her.

“Yes,” she said, simply.

“Are you glad you came?”

And this time she did not try at all.

“Yes.”

“That’s good!” The reins fell loosely on the mare’s back. “Peggy’s tired,” he said. “Don’t hurry, old girl. Take your time.”

Mona shivered nervously.

“You are cold,” he said, taking a plaid from

the back of the seat. "Will you put this round you?"

"No, thank you; I am not really cold, and I have no hands. I should be blown away altogether if I did not hold on to this iron bar."

"Should you?" he said, with a curious intonation in his voice. "Take the reins."

He put them in her hand, unfolded the plaid, and stooped to put it round her shoulders. In a momentary lull of the storm, he fancied he felt her warm breath on his chilled cheek; a little curl of her hair, dancing in the wind, brushed his hand lightly like a cobweb; and she sat there, unguarded as a child, one hand holding the reins, the other grasping the rail of the gig.

Then Dudley forgot himself. His good resolutions were blotted out, and he felt only a gambler's passionate desire to stake all in one mad throw. If it failed, he was a ruined man; but, if it succeeded, what treasure-house could contain his riches? He could not wait,—he could not, he could not! One moment would tell him all, and he must know it. The future might have pleasures of its own in store, but would it ever bring back this very hour, of night, and storm, and solitude, and passionate desire?

So the arm, that passed round Mona to arrange the plaid, was not withdrawn. "Give me the reins," he said firmly, with that calmness which in hours of intense excitement is Nature's most precious gift to her sons; "give me the reins and let go the rail—I will take care of you."

And with a touch that was tender, but fearless with passion, his strong arm drew her close.

And Mona? why did she not repulse him? Never, since she was a little child, had any man, save Sir Douglas and old Mr Reynolds, done more than touch her hand; and now she obeyed without a word, and sat there silent and unresisting. Why? Because she knew not what had befallen her; because, with a last instinct of self-preservation, she held her peace, lest a word should betray the frantic beating of her heart.

"This is death," she thought; but it was life, not death. Dudley's eye had gauged well the promise of that folded bud; and now, in the sunshine of his touch, on that wild and wintry night, behold a glowing crimson streak!

And so Ralph knew that this woman would be his wife.

Not a word passed between them as Peggy

trotted slowly homewards. Mona could not speak, and Ralph rejoiced to think that he need not. When they reached Miss Simpson's door, he sprang down, lifted Mona to the ground, raised her hands to his lips, and stood there waiting, till the door had shut in the light.

CHAPTER XLV.

AN UNBELIEVER.

MONA did not see Dudley again before he left Borrowness. Strange as it may seem, she did not even wish to do so. Nothing could have added just then to the intensity of her life. For days she walked in a golden dream, performing her daily duties perhaps even better than usual, but with a constant sense of their unreality ; and when at last outward things began to reassert their importance, she had much ado to bring her life into unison again.

Hitherto her experience had ebbed and flowed between fairly fixed limits ; and now, all at once, a strong spring-tide had rushed up upon the beach, carrying cherished landmarks before it, and invading every sheltered nook and cranny of her being. She had fancied that

she knew life, and she had reduced many shrewd observations to broad general principles ; and now, behold, the relation of all things was changed, and for the moment she scarcely knew what was eternal rock and what mere floating driftwood.

“I feel,” she said, “like a man who has lived half his life in a house that amply satisfies all his requirements, till one day by chance he touches a secret spring, and discovers a staircase in the wall, leading to a suite of enchanted rooms. He goes back to his study and laboratory and dining-room, and finds them the same, yet not the same ; he can never forget that the enchanted rooms are there. He must annex them, and bring them into relation with the rest of the house, and make them a part of his domicile ; and to do that he must readjust and expand his views of things, and live on a larger scale.”

She looked for no letter, and none came. “When the examination is over in July, I shall be able to say and do things which I dare not say and do now.” The words had conveyed no definite meaning to her mind when they were spoken ; but she knew now

that when August came, and not till then, she would hear from her friend again.

That his behaviour the night before had been inconsistent and unconventional in the highest degree, did not even occur to her. When one experiences an earthquake for the first time, one does not stop to inquire which of its features are peculiar to itself, and which are common to all earthquakes alike. Moreover, it was weeks and months before Mona realised that what had passed between Dr Dudley and herself was as old as the history of man. I am almost ashamed to confess it of a woman whose girlhood was past, and who made some pretension to wisdom, but it is the simple fact that her relation to Dudley seemed to her something unique and unparalleled. While most girls dream of Love, Mona had dreamt of Duty, and now Love came to her as a stranger—a stranger armed with a mysterious, divine right to open up the secret chambers of her heart. She did not analyse and ask herself what it all meant. She lived a day at a time, and was happy.

More than a week elapsed before there appeared in her sky a cloud no bigger than

a man's hand, and the cloud took the form of the old inquiry, "What would Dr Dudley say when he learned that she was a medical student, that her life was entirely different from what he had supposed?" She shut her eyes at first when the question asserted itself, and turned her face the other way; but the cloud was there, and it grew. For one moment she thought of writing to him; but the thought was banished almost before it took definite form. To write to him at all, to make any explanation whatever now, would be to assume — what he must be the first to put into words.

As soon as February came in, Mona began to look out for a successor in the shop, and to prepare her cousin for her approaching departure. It was days before Rachel would even bear to have the subject broached. Then came a period of passionate protestation and indignant complaint; but when at length the good soul understood that Mona had never really belonged to her at all, she began to lavish upon her young cousin a wealth of tearful affection that touched Mona's heart to the quick.

"It has been such a quiet, restful winter,"

Mona said one day, when the time of complaint was giving place to the time of affection; "and in some respects the happiest of my life."

"Then why should you go? I am sure, Mona, I am not one to speak of these things; but anybody can see how it is with Mr Brown. Every day I am expecting him to pop the question. You surely won't refuse a chance like that. You are getting on, you know, and he is so steady and so clever, and so fond of all the things you like yourself."

Mona's cheeks had regained their wonted colour before she answered, "In the first place, dear, I shall not 'get the chance,' as you call it; in the second place, I should never think of accepting it, if I did."

"Well, I'm sure, there's no getting to the bottom of you. I could understand your not thinking the shop genteel—some folks have such high and mighty notions—but it is not that with you. You know I've always said you were a born shopkeeper. I never kept any kind of accounts before you came, but I don't really think I made anything by the shop at all to speak of—I don't indeed! So many things got mislaid, and, when they cast

up again, they were soiled and faded, and one thing and another. I showed Mr Brown your books, and told him what we had made last quarter, and he was perfectly astonished. I am sure he thinks you would be a treasure in a shop like his. My niece, Mary Ann, was capital company, and all her ways were the same as mine like, but she wasn't a shopkeeper like you. She was aye forgetting to put things back in their places, and there would be such a to-do when they were wanted again. Poor thing! I wonder if she's got quit of that lady-help, as she calls her—lady-hindrance is liker it, by my way of thinking! And then, Mona, I did hope you would see your way to being baptised. That was a great thing about Mary Ann. She was a member of the church, and that gave us so many more things to talk about like. She was as fond of the prayer-meeting as I was myself."

"You will come and see me sometimes," Rachel said, a few days later.

"That I will," Mona answered, cordially. "I have promised to spend the summer holidays with some friends, but I will come to you for a week, in the first instance, if you will be kind

enough to take me in,—the second week of August.”

And the reader will be glad to know that, if ever human being had a guilty conscience, Mona had one at that moment.

The second week of August! How her heart beat at the thought of it! The examination would be over. With his short-sighted eyes, Dr Dudley would probably never have seen her at Burlington House; and down at Castle Maclean, with the sunshine dancing on the water, and the waves plashing softly on the beach below, she would tell him the whole story, before the lists came out and betrayed her. In the exultation of that moment, the very possibility of another failure did not occur to her. The lists would appear in the course of the week, and they two would con the results together. She would humble herself, if need were, and ask his pardon for having in a sense deceived him, but surely there would be no need. Everything would be easy and natural and beautiful—in the second week of August!

There was much surprise, considerable regret, and not a little genuine sorrow, when the news of Miss Maclean's departure became known;

but perhaps no one felt it so keenly as Auntie Bell. The old woman expected little of men, and, as a rule, found in them as much as she expected. Of women she had constantly before her so lofty a type, in her hard-working, high-souled, keen-witted self, that her female neighbours were a constant source of disappointment to her. She had been prejudiced in Mona's favour for her father's sake, and the young girl had more than answered to her expectations. Miss Maclean had some stuff in her, the old woman used to say, and that was more than one could say of most of the lassies one met.

One day towards the end of February, Auntie Bell packed a basket with the beautiful new-laid eggs that were beginning to be plentiful, and set out, for the first time in many months, to pay a visit to Rachel Simpson. To her inward delight she met two of Mr Brown's sisters as she passed through the streets of Kilwinnie.

"Where are you going, Mrs Easson?" asked one. "It's not often we see you here nowadays."

Auntie Bell looked keenly up through the gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Whaur wad I be gaun?" she asked, grimly,

“but tae see Miss Maclean? She’s for leavin’ us.”

“Why is she going? I understood she was making herself quite useful to Miss Simpson in the shop.”

“Quite usefu’!” Auntie Bell could scarcely keep her indignation within bounds. “I fancy she is quite usefu’—mair’s the peety that the same canna be maintained o’ some o’ the lave o’ us. Miss Simpson wad gie her een tae gar her bide, I’m thinkin’. But what is there here tae keep a leddy like yon? Hae ye no’ mind what kin’ o’ mon her faither was? Div ye no’ ken that she has siller eneuch an’ tae spare? Ma certy! she’s no’ like tae say as muckle tae common country-folk like you an’ me, an’ Rachel Simpson yonder, but onybody can see, frae the bit w’ys she has wi’ her, that she’s no’ used tae the like o’ us!”

Having thus delivered her soul, Auntie Bell set her basket on a low stone dyke; wiped, first her face, and then her spectacles, with a large and spotless handkerchief, and proceeded on her way to the station with an easy mind.

Rachel was out paying calls when she arrived, but Mona received her friend with an enthusi-

astic welcome that amply repaid the old woman for her trouble. Half of the eccentricity for which Auntie Bell had so wide a reputation was enthusiasm blighted in the bud; and she keenly appreciated the quality in another, —when it was accompanied by a sufficiency of ballast.

“You look tired,” Mona said, as she poured out the tea she had prepared herself.

“Ay, I’m sair owerwraucht. Ane o’ the lassies is ill—that’s the first guid cup o’ tea I hae tasted i’ this hoose! Ane o’ the lassies is ill—she’s no’ a lassie aither, she’ll be forty come Martinmas; but she’s been wi’ me sin’ she was saxteen, an’ the silly thing’ll no’ see a doctor, an’ I nae ken what’s tae be dune.”

“What’s the matter with her?” asked Mona.

“Hoot, lassie! it’s nae hearin’ for the like o’ you.”

“It is just the hearing that is for me. I am not a child, and, now that I am going away, Rachel has no objection to my telling you in confidence that I am studying to be a doctor.”

Amusement — incredulity — dismay — appeared, one after the other, on the weather-

beaten, expressive old face, and then it grew very grave.

“Na, na, lassie,” said the old woman, severely. “Ye dinna mean that. A canny, wiselike thing like you wad niver pit hersel’ forrit like some o’ thae hussies we hear about in Ameriky. Think o’ yer faither! Ye’ll no’ dae onything that wad bring discredit on him?”

“Tell me about your servant,” Mona said, waiving the question with a gentleness that was more convincing than any protestations. “What does she complain of?”

Auntie Bell hesitated, but the subject weighed heavily on her mind, and the prospect of sympathy was sweet.

“It’s no’ that she complains,” she said, “but——” her voice sank into an expressive whisper.

Mona listened attentively, and then asked a few questions.

“I wish I could come out with you, and see her to-night,” she said; “but a young woman has an appointment with me about the situation. I will walk out to-morrow and see your maid. It is very unlikely that

I shall be able to do anything,—I know so little yet,—but her symptoms may be due to many things. If I cannot, you must either persuade her to see the doctor here; or, if she was able to be moved, I could take her with me when I go to Edinburgh, to the Women's Cottage Hospital."

"And what w'y suld ye pit yersel' about?"

Mona laughed. "It's my *business*," she said. "We all live for something."

"Na, na; if she doesna mend, she maun e'en see Dr Robertson. Maybe I've no' been sae firm wi' her as I suld ha' been; but I've nae opeenion o' doctors ava'. I'm ready tae dee when my time comes, but it'll no' be their pheesic that kills me."

Rachel came in at this moment, and the subject was dropped, till Auntie Bell rose to go.

"To-morrow afternoon then," Mona said, as they stood at the garden-gate.

"Eh, lassie, I couldna hae been fonder o' ma ain bairn! Who'd iver ha' thocht it?—a wiselike, canny young crittur like you! Pit a' that nonsense oot o' yer heid!"

Mona laid her hands on the old woman's

shoulders, and stooped to kiss the wrinkled brow.

“I would not vex you for the world, dear Auntie Bell,” she said. “If you like, we will discuss it to-morrow afternoon.”

“Na, na, there’s naething tae discuss. Ye maun ken fine that the thing’s no’ *fit* for yer faither’s bairn!” And with a heavy heart the old woman betook herself to the station.

“More by good luck than good guidance,” Mona said, the medicine she prescribed for the farm-servant proved effectual, at least for the moment; and a simple tonic, aided by abundant good things from Auntie Bell’s larder and dairy, soon brought back the glow of health to the pale cheeks. Auntie Bell looked very grave, and said not one word on the subject either to Mona or any one else; but the patient was less reticent, and, before Mona left Borrowness, she was infinitely touched by an appeal that came to her from a sick woman in Kilwinnie.

“I’ve niver been able tae bring mysel’ tae speak o’t,” she said, as Mona sat by her bedside, “an’ noo, I doot it’s ower late; but they do say

ye're no' canny, an' I thocht maybe ye culd help me."

Poor Mona! Very few minutes were sufficient to convince her that she could do nothing, that the case was far beyond her powers, if, indeed, not beyond the possibility of surgical interference.

"I am so sorry," she said, with a quiver in her voice; "but I know so little, it is no wonder I cannot help you. You must let me speak to the doctor. He is a good man, and he knows so much more than I do. I will tell him all about it, so he won't have to worry you or ask you questions. He will be able to lessen the pain very much, and—to do you good."

Her conscience reproached her for the last words, but they were received only with a sigh of infinite resignation.

"I made sure it was ower late," said the woman, wearily; "but when I heard about Mrs Easson's Christie, I just thocht I would speir at ye mysel'. It was awfu' guid o' ye tae come sae far."

Mona could find no words. Even the tragedy of Maggie's story faded into insignificance

before the pathos of this; for Mona was young and strong, and life seemed to her very sweet.

“Thank God, I am going back to work!” she thought as she hastened home. “I want to learn all that one human being can. It is awful to be buried alive in the coffin of one’s own ignorance and helplessness.”

Alas for the dreams of youth! We may work and strive, but do the coffin-walls ever recede so very far?

CHAPTER XLVI.

FAREWELL TO BORROWNESS.

Two great honours were in store for Mona before she left Borrowness.

In the first place, the Misses Brown paid her a formal call. They were arrayed in Sabbath attire, and were civil even to effusiveness; but they did not invite Mona to their house, nor suggest another excursion. Auntie Bell's remarks had had the intended effect of making them feel very small; but, on reflection, they did not see that they could have acted otherwise. It was a matter of comparative indifference to them whether their brother married a rich woman or a poor one; it was no part of their programme that he should marry at all. They found it difficult to predict exactly how he would be influenced by this fresh light on

the situation ; and, for the present, they did not think it necessary to tell him anything about it.

Some mysterious and exaggerated report, however, of "high connections" must certainly have got wind, or I cannot think that the second and greater honour would have fallen to Mona's share. It came in the form of a note on thick hand-made paper, embossed with a gorgeous crest.

"Mr and Mrs Cookson request the pleasure of Miss Maclean's company to dinner, &c."

Dinner! Mona had not "dined" for months. She tossed the note aside with a laugh.

"If my friend Matilda has not played me false," she said—"and I don't believe she has—this is indeed success!"

Her first impulse was to refuse, but she thought of Matilda's disappointment; and she thought, too, that Dr Dudley, knowing what he did of her relations with the girl, would think a refusal unworthy of her; so she showed the note to Rachel.

"Of course you'll go," was Rachel's immediate reply to the unspoken question. "But

I do think, seeing how short a time we're to be together, they might have asked me too!"

Mona did not answer. She was strongly tempted at that moment to write and say she went nowhere without her cousin, but she could not honestly agree that the Cooksons might have invited Rachel too.

She ended by going, dressed with the utmost care, that she might not disappoint Matilda's expectations; and, on the whole, she was pleasantly surprised. There was less vulgar display than she had expected. Mrs Cookson was aggressively patronising, and Clarinda almost rude, but for that Mona had been prepared. Mr Cookson cared nearly as much for appearances as his wife did; but, as Mona had guessed, there was good wood under all the veneer. He was much pleased with Mona's appearance; his pleasure grew to positive liking when she expressed a preference for *dry* champagne; and when she played some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*, from Matilda's well-thumbed copy, he became quite enthusiastic.

"I am afraid dear old Kullak's hair would stand on end, if he heard me," Mona said to the eager girl at her elbow, "and he would

throw my music out of the window, as he did one day, when I thought I had surpassed myself." But there were many stages of musical criticism between Kullak and Mr Cookson.

"The girls have been playing those things to me for years," he said, "but I never saw any sense in them before. It was all diddle-diddle, twang-twang. Now, when you play them, bless me! I feel as I did when Cook's man began to speak English to me, the first time I was at a French railway station."

With Matilda's handsome brother, Mona did not get on so well.

"Getting tired of your hobby, Miss Maclean?" he said, standing in front of her, and twirling his moustache.

Mona looked up with innocent eyes.

"Which hobby?" she said.

He laughed and changed the subject. He was not shy, but he had not the courage to specify shopkeeping.

All evening Matilda followed Mona like a shadow; taking her hand whenever she dared, and gazing up into her face with worshipping eyes. "It is too lovely having you here," she

said, "but I can't forgot it's the end of all things."

"Oh no, it is not," Mona answered. "You will be coming up to London one of these days, and perhaps your mother will let you spend a few days with me. In the meantime, I want you to spend a long afternoon with me to-morrow."

The long afternoon was in some respects a trying one, but that and most of the other farewells were over at length, and Mona was hard at work packing up.

"What a lifetime it seemed, six months ago!" she said, "and now that it is past—— And how little I ever dreamed that I should be so sorry to go!"

She had to find room for quite a number of keepsakes, and she almost wept over the heterogeneous collection. There were home-made needle-books and pin-cushions from the girls who had come to her for advice about bonnets, and situations, and husbands; there was a pair of gaudy beaded footstools, which Rachel had got as a bargain at the bazaar; there was a really beautiful Bible from the Bonthrons (how Mona longed to show it to Dr Dudley!); and

from Matilda Cookson there was a wreath of shells and sea-weed picked up near Castle Maclean, and mounted on cardboard, with these lines in the centre of the wreath—

“FROM
M. C.
IN GRATEFUL MEMORY
OF
THE HAPPIEST HOURS OF HER LIFE.”

The inspiration was a happy one, and it had been carried out with much care, and a dash of art. Tradition and early education had of course to put in their say; and they did it in the form of a massive gold frame, utterly out of keeping with the simple wreath.

“Oh dear! why will people be so pathetic?” said Mona; but, if the gifts had been priceless jewels, she could not have packed them with tenderer care.

Then came the hardest thing of all, the parting with Rachel. A bright and competent young woman had been engaged in Mona's place, but Rachel could not be induced to hear a word in her favour.

“What's all that to me?” she sobbed; “it's

not like one's own flesh and blood. You'd better never have come!"

Mona felt sure that the edge of this poignant grief would very soon wear off, but when the first bend in the railway had shut the limp, flapping handkerchief out of sight, she sank back in the comfortless carriage, feeling as if she had come to the end of a severe and protracted campaign.

She was too exhausted to read, and was thankful that by some happy chance she had no fellow-passengers. No mountains and fjords haunted her memory now; but instead—changing incessantly like a kaleidoscope—came a distorted phantasmagoria of perished elastic and ill-assorted knitting-needles; red-cushioned pews and purple bonnet-strings; suffering women in poor little homes; crowded bazaar and whirling ball-room; rocky coast and frosted pines; and—steady, unchanging, like the light behind the rattling bits of glass—the wonderful, mystic glow of the suite of enchanted rooms.

Dusk was gathering when the train drew into the station. Yes; there stood Doris and the Sahib. Doris was looking eagerly in the direction of the coming train, and the Sahib was

looking at Doris. But what a welcome they gave the traveller! A welcome that drove all the phantasmagoria out of her head, and made her forget that she was anything other than Doris's sister, the friend of the Sahib, and—something to somebody else.

“Ponies and pepper-pot still to the fore?” she said, as they crossed the platform.

“Oh yes; but a horrible fear has seized me lately that the pepper-pot is beginning to grow.”

“Are you not coming with us?” Mona asked, as the Sahib arranged the carriage-rug.

He looked down at his great athletic figure with a good-humoured smile.

“How is it to be done?” he asked, “unless I put the whole toy in my pocket—dolls and all. Miss Colquhoun has been kind enough to ask me to dinner. I am looking forward to meeting you then.”

Scarcely a word passed between the friends as they drove home, and Mona was glad to lie down and rest until dinner-time.

“Welcome, Miss Maclean!” cried Mr Colquhoun as she entered the drawing-room. “You’ve come in the very nick of time to give me your opinion of a new microtome I want to buy. I

could not have held out another day. Why, I declare you are looking bonnier than ever !”

“She is looking five years younger,” said Doris.

“Since we *are* making personal remarks,” said the Sahib, “I should have said older, but that does not prevent my agreeing cordially with Mr Colquhoun.”

Mona’s laugh only half concealed her rising colour.

“Older has it,” she said, nodding to the Sahib. “Score !”

As they went in to dinner, she looked round at the unpretentious perfection of the room and the table, with a long sigh of satisfaction.

“There is no house in the world,” she said, “where I have precisely the sense of restfulness that I have here. Nothing jars ; I don’t need to talk unless I like ; and I can afford to be my very own self.”

“That’s a good hearing,” said Mr Colquhoun, heartily. “Have some wine !”

The two gentlemen kept the ball going between them most of the time, for Doris never talked much except in a *solitude à deux*. And yet how intensely she made her presence felt, as

she sat at the head of the table—sweet, gracious, almost childlike, her fair young face scarcely giving a hint of the strength and enthusiasm that lay behind it!

“I can hardly believe that I am to have you for a whole week,” she said, following Mona into her bedroom, and rousing the fire; “it is too good to be true. And I am so glad you are going back to your work!”

“So am I, dear,” said Mona, simply.

“Of course! I knew you would come back to the point you started from.”

Mona smiled. “You are determined not to make it a spiral, I see. Ah, well! taking it as a circle, it is a bigger one than I imagined.”

Her words would not have struck Doris but for the tone in which they were unconsciously spoken.

“What has biggened it?” she said, looking up from the fire.

Mona’s hands were clasped beneath her head on the low back of her arm-chair, and her eyes were fixed on the ceiling.

“I don’t know,” she said. “Many things. How is Maggie getting on?”

“Famously. Laurie says she will make a

first-rate cook. You should have seen the child's face when I told her you were coming! I am so grateful to you, Mona, for giving me a chance to help her. There is so little that one can do!—that I can do at least! She is a sweet little thing, and so pretty. When I think of that man——” her face crimsoned, and she stopped short.

“Don't think of him, dear,” said Mona. “It is no use; and, you know, you must not spoil Maggie.”

Doris bent low over the fire, and the tears glistened on her long eyelashes. She tried to wink them away, but it was no use; and, after all, there was only Mona there to see, and Mona was almost a second self. She pressed her handkerchief hard against her eyes for a moment, and then turned to her friend with a smile.

“What a time you must have had of it that night at the Wood! I *was* proud of you!”

“I wish you had more cause, dear. My duties were simple in the extreme.”

“And the country doctor—what did he say when he found how you had risen to the occasion?”

Mona's eyes were fixed on the ceiling again.

“I don't think he said anything that is likely to live in history. I believe he ventured to suggest that Maggie might have some beef-tea.”

This, as Dudley could have testified, was a pure fabrication.

“I don't suppose he would be man enough to admit it, but he must have seen that you were in your proper place there—not he.”

Mona opened her lips to reply, and then closed them again.

“Maggie has not been my only patient by any means,” she said, finally. “I have had no end of practice. I assure you I might have set up my carriage, if I had been paid for it all. Oh, Doris, it is sad work sometimes!” and she told the story of the last patient she had had.

“Poor soul! Glad as I am that you have left that place, I don't know how you could bring yourself to leave her.”

“No more do I, quite.”

“You could not have brought her into Edinburgh?”

Mona shook her head. “Too late!” she said.

“It must have been dreadful to give her

over, after all, to a man. I don't know how you could do it."

"That's because you don't know how kind he is, how he met me half-way, and made my task easy. It was the Kilwinnie doctor, you know, an elderly man." Mona sprang to her feet, and leaned against the mantelpiece. "At the risk of forfeiting your esteem for ever, Doris, I must record my formal testimony that the kindness I have met with at the hands of men-doctors is almost incredible. When I think how nice some of them are, I almost wonder that we women have any patients at all!"

"*Nice!*" said Doris, quietly, but with concentrated scorn. "It's their *trade* to be *nice*. I never consulted a man-doctor in my life, and I never will; but if by any inconceivable chance I were compelled to, I would infinitely prefer a boor to a man who was *nice!*"

Mona laughed. "Dear old niceness," she said, "I won't have him abused. When all is said, he is so much more attractive than most of the virtues. And before we banish him from the conversation,—how do you like the Sahib?"

Doris's face brightened.

"*He* believes in women-doctors," she said.

“Ay, and in all things lovely and of good report.” Mona was forgetting her resolution.

“He has very wholesome views on lots of subjects,” Doris went on, reflectively.

“Have you seen much of him?”

“A good deal. He is very much interested in the things my father cares about. I quite understand now what you meant when you said he was the sort of man one would like to have for a brother.”

This was disappointing, and Mona brought the conversation to a close.

Every day during her visit the Sahib came in for an hour or two, sometimes to lunch or dinner, sometimes to escort “the girls” to a lecture or concert. He was uniformly kind and brotherly to both, but Mona fancied that at times he was sorely ill at ease.

“If only he would show a little common-sense,” she thought, “and let the matter drop altogether, what a relief it would be for both of us!”

But this was not to be.

On Sunday afternoon Doris had gone out to teach her Bible-class, Mr Colquhoun was enjoying his weekly afternoon nap, and Mona was

sitting alone by the fire in the library, half lost in a mighty arm-chair, with a book on her knee.

Suddenly the door opened, and the Sahib entered unannounced.

“You are alone?” he said, as though he had not counted on finding her alone.

“Yes,” said Mona, and she tried in vain to say anything more. It was Sunday afternoon.

Somewhat nervously he lifted the book from her lap and glanced at the title-page.

“Your choice of literature is exemplary,” he said, seating himself beside her.

“I am afraid the example begins and ends with the choice, then,” said Mona, colouring. “I have not read a line; I was dreaming.”

He looked at her quickly.

“Miss Maclean,” he said, making a bold plunge, “I have come for my answer.”

Mona raised her eyes.

“What answer do you want, Mr Dickinson?” she said, quietly.

If the Sahib had been absolutely honest he would have replied, “Upon my soul, I don’t know!” but there are moments when the best of men think it necessary to adapt the truth to circumstances. Before Mona came to Edinburgh he

had certainly regretted those hasty words of his at the ball ; but, now that he was in her presence again, now especially that he was alone in her presence, the old charm returned with all its force. Doris was a pearl, but Mona was a diamond ; Doris was spotless, but Mona was crystalline. If only he had met either of these women three years ago, what a happy man he would have been ! The Sahib had lived a pure, straightforward life, and he was almost indignant with Nature and the Fates for placing a man like him on the horns of such a dilemma ; but Nature has her freaks—and her revenges. When he was alone with the pearl, the diamond seemed hard, and its play of colours dazzling ; when he was alone with the diamond—but no, he could not admit that even the clearness and brilliancy of the diamond suggested a want in the pearl.

“ I am not a boy,” he said hastily, almost indignantly, “ not to know my own mind.”

True man as she knew him to be, his words rang false on Mona’s sensitive ear. She rose slowly from her chair and stood before the fire.

“ Nor am I a girl,” she said, “ not to know mine. It is no fault of mine, Mr Dickinson, that you did not take my answer two months

ago. I can only repeat it now," and she turned to leave the room.

He felt keenly the injustice and justice of her anger; but he was too honest to complain of the first without pleading guilty to the second.

"Considering all that has passed between us," he said, simply, "I think you might have said it less unkindly."

He was conscious of the weakness of the answer, but to her it was the strongest he could have made. It brought back the brotherly Sahib of former days, and her conscience smote her.

"Was I unkind?" she said, turning back. "Indeed, I did not mean to be; but I thought you were honest enough, and knew me well enough, to come and say you had made a mistake. I was hurt that you should think me so small." She hesitated. "Sahib," she said, "Doris and I have been friends ever since we were children, and no man has ever known both of us without preferring her. I can scarcely believe that any man will have the luck to win her, but I could not be jealous of Doris——"

She stopped short. At Christmas she could have said the words with perfect truth, but were they true now? The question flashed like light-

ning through her mind, and the Sahib watched her with intense interest while she answered it. Her face grew very pale, and her lips trembled. She leaned her arm against the mantelpiece.

“Sahib,” she said, “life gets so complicated, and it is so difficult to tell what one is bound to say. You asked me if—if—there was somebody else. There is somebody else; there was then. I did not lie to you. I did not know. And even now—he—has not said——”

She broke off abruptly, and left the room.

The Sahib lifted up the book she had laid down, and carefully read the title-page again, without really seeing one word. The question had indeed been settled for him, and at that moment he would have given wellnigh everything he possessed, if he could have been the man to win and marry Mona Maclean.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE DISSECTING-ROOM.

IT was the luncheon-hour, and the winter term was drawing to a close. The dissecting-room was deserted by all save a few enthusiastic students who had not yet wholly exhausted the mysteries of Meckel's ganglion, the branches of the internal iliac, or the plantar arch. For a long time a hush of profound activity had hung over the room, and the silence had been broken only by the screams of a parrot and the cry of the cats'-meat-man in the street below; but by degrees the demoralising influence of approaching holidays had begun to make itself felt; in fact, to be quite frank, the girls were gossiping.

It was the dissector of Meckel's ganglion who began it.

“If you juniors want a piece of advice,” she said, laying down her forceps,—“a thing, by the way, which you never do want, till an examination is imminent, and even then you don’t take it,—you may have it for nothing. Form a clear mental picture of the sphenomaxillary fossa. When you have that, the neck of anatomy is broken. Miss Warden, suppose, just to refresh all our memories, you run over the foramina opening into the sphenomaxillary fossa, and the structures passing through them.”

The dissector of the plantar arch groaned.

“*Don’t!*” she entreated in assumed desperation. “With the examination so near, it makes me quite ill to be asked a question. I should not dare to go up, if Miss Clark were not going.”

“I should not have thought she was much stand-by.”

“Oh, but she is! If she passes, I may hope to. I was dissecting the popliteal space the other day, and she asked me if it was Scarpa’s triangle!”

A murmur of incredulity greeted this statement.

"She has not had an inferior extremity," said a young girl, turning away from the cupboard in which the skeleton hung. "You can only learn your anatomy by dissecting yourself."

"It is a heavy price to pay," said she of the spheno-maxillary fossa; "and a difficult job at the best, I should fancy."

There was a general laugh, in which the girl at the cupboard joined.

"Where it is completed by the communicating branch of the dorsalis pedis," said Miss Warden, irrelevantly. "I am no believer in *Ellis and Ford* myself," she went on, looking up, "but I do think one might learn from it the general whereabouts of Scarpa's triangle."

"Come now, Miss Warden, you know we don't believe that story. Have you decided whether to go to Edinburgh or Glasgow for your second professional, Miss Philips?"

"Oh, Glasgow," said the investigator of the internal iliac, almost impatiently. "I need all the time I can get. I have not begun to read the brain and special sense. Where can one get a bullock's eye?"

"At Dickson's, I fancy."

"And where can one see a dissection of the

ear? It is so unsatisfactory getting it up from books."

"There is a model of it in the museum."

"*Model!*" The word was spoken with infinite contempt.

"Do you know what it is, Miss Philips? You are thrown away on those Scotch examinations. Why did you not go in for the London degree?"

"*Matric.*," was the laconic response.

"Oh, the *Matric.* is nothing!"

"Besides, I could not afford the time. Six years, even if one was lucky enough not to get ploughed."

"Talking of being ploughed," said a student who had just entered the room, "you won't guess whom I have just met?—Miss Maclean."

"Miss Maclean?—in London?"

"In the chemical laboratory at the present moment. She is going up for her Intermediate again, in July."

"Who is Miss Maclean?" asked the girl who had been studying the skeleton.

There was a general exclamation.

"Not to know her, my dear," said the newcomer, "argues yourself—quite beneath notice.

Miss Maclean is one of the Intermediate Chronicles."

"Miss Maclean is an extremely clever girl," said Miss Warden.

"When I first came to this school," said Miss Philips, "I wrote to my people that women medical students were very much like other folks, but that one or two were really splendid women; and I instanced Miss Maclean."

"The proof of the student is the examination."

"That is not true—except very broadly. You passed your Intermediate at the first go-off, but none of us would think of comparing you to Miss Maclean."

"Thank you," was the calm reply. "I always did appreciate plain speaking. It is quite true that I never went in for very wide reading, nor for the last sweet thing in theories; but I have a good working knowledge of my subjects all the same—at least I had at the time I passed."

"Miss Maclean is too good a student; that is what is the matter with her."

The dissector of Meckel's ganglion laughed. "Miss Maclean is awfully kind and helpful,"

she said ; “ but I shall never forget the day when I asked her to show me the nerve to the *vastus externus* on her own dissection. She drew aside a muscle with hooks, and opened up a complicated system of telephone wires that made my hair stand on end.”

“ I know. For one honest nerve with a name, she shows you a dozen that are nameless ; and the number of abnormalities that she contrives to find is simply appalling.”

“ In other words, she has a spirit of genuine scientific research,” said Miss Philips. “ It does not say much for the examiners that such a woman should fail.”

A student who had been studying a brain in the corner of the room, looked up at this moment, tossing back a mass of short dark hair from her refined and intellectual face.

“ Poor examiners,” she said. “ Who would wish to stand in their shoes ? Miss Maclean may be a good student, and she may have a spirit of genuine scientific research ; but nobody fails for either of those reasons. Miss Maclean sees things very quickly, and she sees them in a sense exactly. She puts the nails in their right places, so to speak, and gives them a rap with

the hammer; she fits in a great many more than there is any necessity for, but she does not drive them home. Then, when the examination comes, some of the most essential ones have dropped out, and have to be looked for all over again. It was a fatal mistake, too, to begin her Final work before she had passed her Intermediate. I don't know what subject Miss Maclean failed in, but I am not in the least surprised that she failed."

Her audience heard the last sentence in a kind of nightmare; for Mona had entered the room, and was standing listening, a few yards behind the speaker. The girl turned round quickly, when she saw the conscious glances.

"I did not know you were there, Miss Maclean," she said proudly, indignant with herself for blushing.

Mona drew a stool up to the same table, and sat down.

"It is I who ought to apologise, Miss Lascelles," she said, "for listening to remarks that were not intended for me; but I was so much interested that I did not stop to think. One so seldom gets the benefit of a perfectly frank diagnosis."

“ I don't know that it was perfectly frank. Some one was abusing the examiners, and I spoke in hot blood——”

“ It seems to me that statements made in hot blood are the only ones worth listening to—if we have a germ of poetry in us. Statements made in cold blood always prove to be truisms when you come to analyse them.”

“ And one thing I said was not even true—I *was* surprised when you failed.”

Mona was not listening. “ What you said was extremely sensible,” she said, “ but so neatly put that one is instinctively on one's guard against it. It is a dreary metaphor—driving in nails ; and, if it be a just one, it describes exactly my quarrel with Medicine, from an examination point of view. Why does not one big nail involve a lot of little ones ? Or rather, why may we not develop like trees, taking what conduces to our growth, and rejecting the rest ? Why are we doomed to make pigeon-holes, and drive in nails ? ”

“ But the knowledge a doctor requires is in a sense unlike any other. He wants it, not for himself, but for other people.”

“ And so we come back to the eternal ques-

tion, whether a man benefits humanity more by self-development or self-sacrifice? Does knowledge that is fastened on as an appendage ever do any good? Have not the great specialists, the men of genius, who are looked upon as towers of strength, worked mainly at the thing they enjoyed working at?"

"Yes," said Miss Lascelles, "but they passed their examinations first."

Mona laughed. "True," she said, "I own the soft impeachment; and there you have the one and only argument in favour of girls beginning to study Medicine when they are quite young. It is so easy for them to get up facts and tables."

"I think one requires to get up less, in the way of facts and tables, for the London than for any other examination. It is more honest, more searching, than any other."

Mona smiled — a very sad little smile. "Perhaps," she said.

"I don't know what you mean by knowledge that is fastened on as an appendage never doing any good," said the girl who held that the proof of the student was the examination; "I don't profess to have found any mysterious food for

my intellectual growth in the action and uses of rhubarb, but I don't find rhubarb any the less efficacious on that account when I prescribe it."

"But you open up a pretty wide field for thought when you ask yourself, Why rhubarb rather than anything else?"

"It is cheap," said the girl, frivolously, "and it is always at hand."

No one vouchsafed any reply to this.

"You have surely done enough to those brain sections for one day, Miss Lascelles," said Mona; "won't you come and lunch with me? It is only a few minutes' walk to my rooms."

The girl hesitated. "Thank you," she said, suddenly—"I will. I shall be ready in five minutes."

She slipped from her high stool, and stood putting away her things—a tiny figure scarcely bigger than a child, yet full of character and dignity.

"In the meantime come and demonstrate this tiresome old artery, Miss Maclean," said Miss Philips. "I am getting hopelessly muddled."

"If you knew the surroundings in which I have spent the last six months," said Mona, smiling, "you would not expect me to know

more than the name of the internal iliac artery. I shall be very glad to come and look at your dissection though, if I may."

"You see I have not forgotten the kindness you showed me when I first began."

"I don't remember any kindness on my part. You were kind enough to let me refresh my memory on your dissection, I know."

"That's one way of putting it. Do you remember my asking you how closed tubes running through the body could do it any good?"

"Yes; and I remember how delighted I was with the intelligence of the question. Heigh-ho! what a child you seemed to me then!"

She took the forceps in her hand, and in a moment the old enthusiasm came back.

"How very interesting!" she said. "Look at this deep epigastric."

And a quarter of an hour had passed before she remembered her guest and her luncheon.

"I am so sorry," she said, pulling off the sleeves she had donned for the moment. "Is anybody going to dissect during the summer term? Shall I be able to get a part?"

The two girls walked home together to Mona's rooms, Miss Lascelles's diminutive figure, in

its half-æsthetic, half-babyish gown and cape, forming a curious contrast to that of her companion.

“I really do apologise most humbly for my thoughtlessness,” said Mona.

“Don’t,” replied the other, swinging her ungloved hand and raising her slow pleasant voice more than was necessary in the quiet street; “one does not see too much enthusiasm in the world. It is good to have you back.”

“I feel rather like a Rip Van Winkle, as you may suppose.”

“Yes. The students seem to get younger every year. It is a terrible pity. One does not see how they are ever to take the place of some of the present seniors. What can they know of life?”

“And, as a natural consequence, the supply of medical women will exceed the demand in the next ten years—in this country. After that, things will level themselves, I suppose; but at present, if a woman is to succeed, she must be better than the average man.”

“Whereas at present we are getting mainly average women, and of course the average woman is inferior to the average man.”

“ Heretic ! ”

“ Oh, but wait till women have had their chance ! When they are really educated, things will be very different.”

“ Do you think so ? If I did not believe in women as they are now, apart from a mythical *posse*, I should be miserable indeed. I have a great respect for higher education, but there is such a thing as Mother Nature as well.”

“ Even Mother Nature has only had her say for half the race.”

They entered the house, and presently sat down to the luncheon-table.

“ Explanations are always a mistake,” said Miss Lascelles, suddenly.

“ Always,” said Mona, “ and especially when there is no occasion for them.”

“ ——but I should like to tell you that I thought out that nail metaphor (God forgive the term !) in relation to myself originally. It is because I am so familiar with that weakness in myself, that I recognised, or fancied I recognised, it in you. I think our minds are somewhat alike, though, of course, you have a much fresher and brighter way of looking at things than I.”

“——and I am the profounder student,” she added, mentally.

“Explanations are not always a mistake,” said Mona. “It was very kind of you to make that one. I should be glad to think my cast of mind was like yours, but I am afraid it is only the superficial resemblance which Giuseppe’s violins bore to those of the master.”

“It is pleasant, is it not, to leave dusty museums now and then, and feel Science growing all around one? And what I love about London University is, that it allows for that kind of thing in its Honours papers. It is a case of ‘This ought ye to have done, and not have left the other undone.’ But it is difficult to find time for both.”

“Ay, especially when one has to find time for so many other things as well.”

“*Nicht wahr?* I feel that intensely. I hate to be insulated. I must touch at more points than one. But I do try to work conscientiously, or rather I don’t try. It is my nature. Study is a pure delight to me.”

“I expect you will be taking honours in all four subjects.”

“I find it a great help in any case to do the

honours work : it is so much more practical and useful ; but it does take a lot of time. I find it impossible to work more than ten hours a-day——”

Mona laid down the fish-slice in horror.

“ Ten hours a-day ! ” she exclaimed.

“ Yes ; I tried twelve, but I could not keep it up.”

“ I should hope not. I call eight hours spurt-ing. I only read for six, as a rule, and for the last fortnight before an examination, only two.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I can't read at the end. That is the ruin of me. Up to the last fortnight, I seem to know more than most of my fellow-students ; but then I collapse, while they—they withdraw into private life. What mystic rites and incantations go on there I can't even divine ; but they emerge all armed *cap-à-pie*, conquering and to conquer, while I crawl out from my lethargy to fail.”

“ You have the consolation of knowing that you really know your work better than they.”

“ Do you know, I have had nearly enough of that kind of consolation ? I could make shift

now to do with an inferior, more tangible kind."

"You will get that too this time."

Mona sighed. "*How* I hope so!" she said. "Have some more Chablis, and let us drink to our joint success."

"I confess I was rather surprised that Miss Reynolds passed. I am not given to meddling in other people's affairs; but if Miss Reynolds is ever to take her degree at all, it was quite time you came back. Have you seen her yet?"

"Only for a few minutes. She is coming to spend the evening with me."

"You know she used to hide a capacity for very earnest work behind an aggravatingly frivolous exterior. Now it is just the other way. She professes to be in earnest, but I am sure she is doing nothing. You will wonder how I know, when I am not at hospital; but quite a number of the students have spoken of it. She never read widely. The secret of her success was that she took good notes of the lectures, and then got them up. But now they say she is taking no notes at all, scarcely. It was very much against her, of course, coming in in the middle of term; but one would have predicted

that that would only have made her work the harder."

"I don't think so. That is not what I should have predicted. She really worked too hard last summer, and a thorough reaction is a good sign. I think that is quite sufficient to account for what you say. Miss Reynolds is a healthy animal, and one may depend upon her instincts to be pretty correct. She will accomplish all the more in the end, for letting her mind lie fallow this year."

But though Mona spoke with apparent certainty, she felt rather uneasy. Lucy's letters had been few and unsatisfactory of late; and her manner, when she met her old friend at the station, had been more unsatisfactory still.

"I can't force her confidence," Mona thought, when Miss Lascelles was gone; "but I hope she will tell me what is the matter. Poor little soul!"

It was pretty late in the evening when Lucy arrived, pale and tired. "I have kept you waiting for dinner," she said; "I am so sorry. A fractured skull came in just as I was leaving, and I waited to see them trephine. They don't

think it will be successful, and—it made me rather faint. But it's an awfully neat operation."

Mona went to the table and poured out a glass of wine. "Drink that," she said, "and then come to my bedroom and have a good splash. I will do all the talking during dinner; and when you are quite rested, you shall tell me the news."

"Life will be a different thing, now you are back," Lucy said, as they seated themselves at the table. "What lovely flowers!"

"You ought to admire them. Aunt Maud sent them from your beloved Cannes. I do so admire that Frisia. It is white and virginal, like Doris."

The last remark was added hastily, for at the mention of Cannes, Lucy had blushed violently and incomprehensibly.

"I was at the school to-day," Mona went on.

"Were you really? It must have been horrid going back."

"It was very horrid to find the organic solutions in the chemical laboratory at such a low ebb. But I suppose they will be filled up again for the summer term."

"Oh, you know all those stupid old tests!"

“It is precisely the part of the examination that I am most afraid of. I have not your luck—or power of divination. Why don’t they ask us to find whether a hydroxyl group is present in a solution, or something of that kind?”

“Thank heaven, they don’t!”

“I wonder what a scientific chemist would say, if he were asked to identify two organic mixtures in an hour and a half!”

“I did it in half an hour.”

“*Ja, aber wie?* By tasting, and guessing, and adding I in KI, or perchloride of iron.”

Lucy helped herself to more potato.

“I seem to have heard these sentiments before,” she said.

Mona laughed. “Yes; and you are in a fair way to hear them pretty frequently again, unless you keep out of my way for the next four months.”

“Did you go into the dissecting-room?”

“Yes; and what do you think I found them dissecting?”

“Anything new?”

“Quite, I hope, in that connection—my unworthy self,” and Mona told the story of her little adventure.

“Well, really,” said Lucy, indignantly, “those juniors want a good setting down. I never heard such a piece of barefaced impudence in my life. What on earth do they know about you, except that you are one of the best students in the School?”

“There, there, firebrand!” said Mona, much relieved to see the old Lucy again, “I think you and I have been known to say as much as that of our betters. In truth, it did me a world of good. I was very morbid about going back to the anatomy-room—partly because I had got out of tune with the work, partly because I knew nobody would know what to say to me, and there would be an awkward choice between constrained remarks and more constrained silences. It was a great relief to find myself and my failures taken frankly for granted. How I wish people could learn that, unless they can be superlatively tactful, it is better not to be tactful at all; for of tact it is more true than of anything else, that *ars est celare artem*. But, to return to the point we started from, there is a great deal of truth in what Miss Lascelles said. For the next four months I am going to spend my life *driving in nails*.”

Lucy shivered. "Couldn't you *screw* them in?" she suggested. "It would make so much less noise."

Mona reflected for a moment. "No," she said, "there is something in the idea of a good sharp rap with the hammer that gives relief to my injured feelings." And she brought her closed fist on the table with a force that sent a ruddy glow across her white knuckles.

"And now," she said, "it is your innings. I want to know so many things. How do you like hospital?"

"Oh, it is awfully interesting;" but Lucy's manner was not enthusiastic. "I spotted a presystolic murmur yesterday."

"H'm. Who said it was a presystolic? Did not you find it very cold coming back to London from the sunny South?"

Lucy shivered again. "It was horrid," she said.

"And you really had a good, gay, light-hearted time?"

It was a full minute before the girl answered. "Oh yes," she said, hurriedly and emphatically. "It was delightful. I—I was not thinking."

“That is just what you were doing. A penny for your thoughts.”

Again there was a silence. Evidently Lucy was strongly tempted to make a clean breast of it.

“I am in my father’s black books,” she said at last.

Mona looked at her searchingly. That the statement was true, she did not doubt; but that this was the sole cause of Lucy’s evident depression, she did not believe for a moment.

“How have you contrived to get there?” she asked.

“It is not such a remarkable feat as you think. I went to Monte Carlo with the Munros.”

“Did he object?”

“Awfully! You see, when I came to write about it, I thought I would wait and tell them when I got home; but Mr Wilson, one of the churchwardens, saw me there, and the story leaked out.”

“But you did not play?”

“No—not to call playing. Evelyn was so slow—I pushed her money into place with the cue. But my father does not think so much

of that. It is my being there at all that he objects to."

"Just for once?"

"Just for once. He said you would not have gone."

"That is a profound mistake. I want very much to see a gambling-saloon, and I certainly should have gone. I will tell him so the first time I see him."

"Oh, Mona, don't! What is the use? Two blacks don't make a white."

"Truly; but, on the other hand, you can't make a black white by painting it. Your father thinks me so much better than I am, that he binds me over to be honest with him. Besides, I want to defend my point. Of course, I should not go if I thought it wrong. But, Lucy, that is not a thing to worry about. It can't be undone now, even if you wished it; and your father would be the last man in the world to want you to distress yourself fruitlessly. Of all the men I know, he is the most godlike, in his readiness to say, 'Come now, and let us reason together.'"

"I am not distressing myself," Lucy said, brightening up with an evident effort. "Did

I ever tell you, Mona, about the boy we met at Monte Carlo? He had got into a fix and was nearly frantic. We begged Lady Munro to speak to him, and she invited him to Cannes, and ultimately she and Sir Douglas sent him home. But it was such fun! He proved to be a medical student, a St Kunigonde's man. I was alone in the sitting-room when he called,—such a pretty sunny room it was, with a sort of general creamy-yellow tone that made my peacock dress simply lovely! Of course we fell to comparing notes. He goes in for his second examination at the Colleges in July, and you should have seen his face when I told him I had passed my Intermediate M.B. Lond.! I really believe it had never occurred to him that any woman under thirty, and devoid of spectacles, could go in for her Intermediate. He is coming to see me at the Hall."

A poorer counterfeit of Lucy's racy way of telling a story could scarcely have been imagined. Mona wondered much, but she knew now that nothing more was to be got out of her friend that night.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONFIDENCES.

IT was a hot day in June, and "blessed Bloomsbury" was converted into one great bakehouse. The flags in Gower Street radiated out a burning glow; the flower-sellers had much ado to preserve the semblance of freshness in their dainty wares; and those of the inhabitants who were the proud possessors of outside blinds were an object of envy to all their neighbours.

Mona was sitting at her writing-table, pen in hand, and with a formidable blue schedule before her. She was looking out of the window, but in her mind's eye the dusty, glaring street had given place to the breezy ramparts of Castle Maclean; and, instead of the noise of the traffic, she heard the soft splash of the waves. Presently she laid down her pen, and leaned against the

scorching window-sill, with a smile, not on her lips, but in her eyes.

“ My spirit and my God shall be
My seaward hill, my boundless sea,”

she quoted softly.

“ What, Mona, caught poetising ! ” said Lucy, unceremoniously entering the room.

“ Far from it,” said Mona, drily. “ I was engaged on the most prosaic work it is possible to conceive, filling in the schedule for my Intermediate. It seems to me that I have spent the greater part of my life filling in the schedule for my Intermediate. If I fail again I shall employ an amanuensis for the sole purpose. Come and help me. Full Christian name and surname ? ”

“ Mona Margaret Maclean.”

“ Oh, drop the Margaret ! I am prepared to take the chance of there being another Mona Maclean. Age, last birthday ? ”

“ Ninety-nine.”

“ No doubt I shall fill that into an Intermediate schedule some day, but not yet awhile. I wonder if they will have reformed the Practical Chemistry by that time ? Or will the

dear old M.B. Lond. have lost its *cachet* altogether? It is warm to-day, is it not?"

"Frightfully! I met Miss Lascelles just now, and she informed me, in her bell-like voice, that if we were quite civilised we should go about without any clothes at all just now. I told her I hoped the relics of barbarism would last out my time."

"Then I presume Miss Lascelles will not throw her pearls before swine again. Are you going to hospital?"

"Not to-day. Hospital is unbearable in this weather. The air is thick with microbes."

Mona looked at her friend reflectively. "Suppose you come down to Richmond with me," she said, "and blow away a few of the microbes on the river?"

"Oh, Mona, how lovely! But can you spare the time?"

"Yes, I began early to-day. But we will have some lunch first. In the meantime I will sing you my last song, and you shall criticise."

"Are you still going on with your singing lessons? I can't think how you find time for it."

“I think it saves time in the end. It is a grand safety-valve; and besides—a woman is robbed of half her armour if she cannot use her voice.”

Her hands ran lightly up and down the keys of the piano, and she began to sing Schubert's *Ave Maria*.

“Miss Dalrymple says that is my *chef-d'œuvre*,” she said, when she had finished. “What think you?”

But Lucy made no answer.

“Mona,” she said a minute later, “do you think it is worth while to go on the river, after all? It is rather a fag, and why should we?”

Her voice was husky, and suggestive of infinite weariness. Mona rose from the piano, and deliberately, almost brutally, took the girl's face between her hands, and turned it to the light. She was not mistaken. The pretty eyes were dim with tears.

“Lucy,” she said, “you and I have pretended long enough. What is the use of friendship, if we never fall back upon it in time of need? I want you to tell me what it was that spoilt your visit to Cannes.”

“Nothing,” said Lucy, with burning face,

“unless, perhaps, my own idiocy. Oh, Mona, you dear old bully, there is not anything to tell! I thought I was always going to get the best of it with men, and now a man has got the best of it with me. It’s only fair. Now you know the whole story. Despise me as much as you like.”

“When I take to despising people, I imagine I shall have to begin even nearer home than with my plucky little Lucy. Will it be any use to tell me about it, do you think? Or is the whole story better buried?”

“I can’t bury it. And yet there is positively nothing to tell. When I look back upon it all, I cannot honestly say that the flirtation went any farther than half-a-dozen others have gone; but this time, somehow, everything was different.”

“Is he a friend of the Munros?”

Lucy nodded. “Yes — you know — Mr Monteith. He arrived at the hotel the night of our first dance. I was wearing my mermaid costume for the first time, and — I saw him looking at me again and again. He was not particularly handsome, but there was a sort of bloom about him, don’t you know? He made

me feel so common and work-a-day. And then when I danced with him I felt as if I had never danced with a man in my life before. I did not see very much of him ;—Lady Munro was so particular ;—but one afternoon a party of us walked up to the chapel on the hill, and he and I got apart from the others somehow. It was the first time I had seen the Maritime Alps, and I never again saw them as they were that day in the sunset light. It was like looking into a golden future. Well, he went away. I was awfully low-spirited for a day or two ; but somehow, whenever I thought of that evening on the hill, I felt as if the future was full of beautiful possibilities. One day we went to Monte Carlo, and there I met him again. He asked if I would like him to come back for a day or two to Cannes, and I said I did not care. He never came. Sometimes I wish I had begged him to,—yes, Mona, I have sunk as low as that—and sometimes I think he must have read my poor little secret all along, and I could kill myself for very shame. Oh, Mona, I wish you could take me out of myself !”

“ You poor little soul ! Lucy, dear, it sounds very trite and commonplace ; but, by hook or by

crook, you must get an interest in your hospital work, and go at it as hard as ever you can."

"It is no use. I hate hospital. I wonder now how I ever could care so much about prizes and marks and examinations. It is all such child's-play."

"Yes; but sorrow is not child's-play, and pain and death are not child's-play. It is only a question of working at it hard enough, old woman. You are bound to become interested in it in time, and that is the only way to get rid of yourself;—though it is strange teaching, perhaps, to come from self-centred me. They say we women of this generation have sacrificed a good deal of our birthright; don't let us throw away the grand compensation, the power to light our candles when our sun goes down. Do you remember Werther's description of the country lass whose sweetheart forsakes her, taking with him all the interest in her life? We at least have other interests, Lucy, and we can, if we try hard enough, turn the key on the suite of enchanted rooms, and live in the rest of the house."

"The rest of my house is a poky hole!"

Mona sighed sympathetically. "No matter,"

she said, resolutely; "we must just set to work, and make it something better than a poky hole."

Further conversation was prevented for the time by the entrance of the luncheon-tray.

"Well, is it to be Richmond?" said Mona, when the meal was over.

Lucy blushed. "I have a great mind to go to hospital, after all," she said. "I don't think it is quite so hot as it was."

"No, I think there is a suspicion of a breeze. *Au revoir!* Come back soon."

I wish I could honestly say that Mona profited as much by Lucy's example as Lucy had by Mona's preaching; but I am forced to record that she did not open a book, nor return to her little laboratory, for the rest of the day. For a long time she sat in her rocking-chair with a frown on her brow. "I wonder if he has only been playing with her," she said—"the cad!" Then another thought crossed the outskirts of her mind. At first it scarcely entered the limits of her consciousness; but, like the black dog in *Faust*, it went on and on, in ominous, ever-narrowing circles, and she was forced to recognise that she must grapple with it sooner

or later. Then she put up her hands to cover her face, although there was no one there to see, and the question sounded in her very ears —“What if *he* has only been playing with *me*?”

What then, Mona? Lock the door on the suite of enchanted rooms, and live in the rest of the house! But she never thought of her advice to Lucy. She threw herself on the couch, and lay there for a little while in an agony of shame. After all her lofty utterances, had she given herself away to a man who had not even asked for her? Why had he not spoken just one word, to save her from this torture?

By some curious chain of associations the words flashed into her mind—

“Denn, was man schwarz auf weiss besitzt,
Kann man getrost nach Hause tragen.”

She laughed a little breathlessly, and drew her hand across her damp forehead.

“I am a fool and a coward,” she said; “I will ask Dr Alice Bateson to give me a tonic. What do mere words matter, after all, between people like him and me?”

She walked up to a calendar that hung on the wall, and carefully counted the days till the second week in August. Then she sighed regretfully.

“Poor little Lucy,” she said, “what an unsympathetic brute she must have thought me!”

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE INTERMEDIATE.

THE classic precincts of Burlington House were once more invaded by a motley crowd of nervous, excited young men, who hung about the steps and entrance-hall, poring over their notebooks, exchanging "tips," or coolly discussing the points of the women.

"None of them are so good-looking as the little girl with the red hair, who was up last year," Mona overheard one of them say, and she made a mental note to inform Lucy of her conquest.

About half-a-dozen girls were already assembled in the cloak-room when she entered.

"Well, Miss Maclean, how are you feeling?"

"Hardened," said Mona, taking off her hat, but she did not look particularly hardened.

“ ‘In my heart if calm at all,
If any calm, a calm despair,’ ”

quoted Miss Lascelles.

“ Do tell me about the cardiac branches of the pneumogastric,” said some one.

Miss Lascelles proceeded to give the desired information, while the others discussed the never-settled question of the number of marks required for a pass.

“ It seems to me that x equals the most you can make plus one,” and Mona sighed resignedly.

“ Now, ladies, please,” said an imposing individual in broadcloth, and the little party was marshalled through the hall to the examination-room.

“ Why has Miss Maclean done her hair like that?” said a student with a mind at leisure from itself. “ It is not half so becoming as the old way.”

Nor was it. Mona had made the alteration in order to change the outline of her head as much as possible, for she was most anxious that Dr Dudley should not recognise her, in surroundings that did not admit of an explanation on her part. She did not venture to raise her eyes as she entered the room, and as soon as she was

seated, she bent low over the pink and green *cahiers* that lay on her desk. A minute later the examination papers were distributed, and for three hours neither Dudley nor any other human being had any existence for her. She wrote on till the last moment—wrote on, in fact, till the examiner, Dudley's "monument of erudition," came up and claimed her paper.

"I think I have seen you before," he said, kindly.

"Twice," said Mona, smiling, "and I am afraid you are in a fair way to see me again."

He looked at her with some amusement and interest in his shrewd Scotch face.

"I don't think you are much afraid of that," he said.

Mona followed him with her eye, as he turned away, and in another moment saw him at the other end of the room, shaking hands very cordially with Dr Dudley. She turned her back, and, hastily gathering together her pens and coloured chinks, she left the room. Her heart beat fast with apprehension till she reached the open air; and, as she walked up to Regent Street for lunch, she fancied every moment that she heard his step behind her.

But she need not have feared. For the three days that the written examination lasted, Dudley was aware of a patch of colour at the opposite side of the hall, where the women sat; but he was too indifferent and preoccupied to investigate its details. He felt so old among those boys and girls; his one wish was to get the examination over, and be done with it.

Now that she knew where he sat, Mona had no difficulty in avoiding his short-sighted eyes. In fact, as time went on, she grew bolder, and loved to look on from a distance, while Dudley's fellow-students gathered round and assailed him with a torrent of questions, the moment each paper was over. It was pleasant to see his relations with those lads,—the friendly raillery which they took in such good part. Clearly they looked upon him as a very good fellow, and a mine of wisdom.

“You are mere boys to him,” thought Mona, proudly. “He is willing to play with you; but I am his friend!”

Wednesday evening came at last, and with a mingled sense of excitement, and of weariness that amounted to physical pain, Mona went down the steps.

Lucy was awaiting her in the street, and they betook themselves to the nearest shop where they could get afternoon tea.

“Well,” said Lucy, “what is your final judgment?”

Mona sighed. “Anatomy, very fair,” she said—“morning paper especially; Physiology—between you and me and the lamp-post—the best paper I ever did in my life; Chemistry, safe, I think; Materia Medica—better at least than last time.”

“*Brava!*” cried Lucy.

“Oh, don’t! I ought not to have said so much. It is tempting the Fates.”

“No matter. With a record like that you can afford to tempt the Fates. Oh, Mona, I do hope you have got the Physiology medal!” She raised her teacup. “Here’s to Mona Maclean, Gold Medallist in Physiology.”

“No, no, no,” said Mona. “My paper is not on those lines at all, and the Practical is still to come.”

“And who is better prepared for that than you, with your private laboratory, and all the rest of it?”

“I have often told you that the best work of

the world is rarely done with the best instruments."

Lucy groaned. "If three days' examination won't keep her from moralising," she said, "it may safely be predicted that nothing will. What a prospect!"

Mona wrote to Rachel that night, fixing the day and hour of her arrival at Borrowness some three weeks later; and the next day she went down to Bournemouth to visit some friends. Only a very unlikely chance could have taken Dudley to Bournemouth too, but Mona never saw a tall and lanky figure on the cliffs, without a sudden wild fancy that it might be he. There was a good deal of gladness in her agitation at these times, but she did not really want to see him there. No, no; let things take their course! Let it all come about quietly and naturally, at dear old Castle Maclean, in the second week of August!

She returned to town a few days before the Practical Examination, and found a letter from Rachel awaiting her.

"My DEAR COUSIN,—I was very pleased to get your letter, telling me when you were coming

to pay me a visit; but there has been a great change in my life since last I wrote you. You know I have never been the same being since you went away. That Miss Jenkins, that you thought so much of, did very well in the shop, and was good at figures, but she was not like one of my own folk. Then she was a U.P., and she had friends of her own that she always wanted to go to in the evening; and many's the time I've been so dull that if it hadn't been for Sally I believe I'd have gone clean daft. I wrote and told Mary Ann about it, and she wrote back saying, wouldn't I go and join her in America? Of course I never thought of such a thing, but I spoke to my friends about her writing, and a few days after I got a very good offer for the goodwill of the business. It really was like a leading, but I never thought of that at the time. Then, without waiting to hear from me, Mary Ann wrote again, begging me to come. There was word of a baby coming, and naturally at such a time she took a longing for her own flesh and blood. She never was one of your independent ones. Then I began to think I would like to go, but I'd an awful dread of the sea and the strangeness. Well, would you believe it? four days ago,

Mrs Anderson came in and told me her brother was sailing to America in about ten days, with all his family from Glasgow, and he would be very glad to look after me if I would take my passage by the same steamer. So that settled it somehow. It's a queer-like thing, after sitting still all one's life, to make such a move all in a minute; but there seems to be the hand of Providence in it all, and Mary Ann says some of their acquaintances are most genteel, and the minister of the Baptist Chapel preaches the word with power.

“So you see, my dear, I shall be sailing from Glasgow the very day you were meaning to come to me. I am all in an upturn, as you may think, with a sale in the house and what not; but if you would come a week sooner, I'd be very pleased to see you. If you could have been happy to stay with me, I never would have thought of all this; but I never could have gone on as I was doing, though it is a terrible trial to break off all the old ties.

“You must write to me often and tell me what you are doing, and whether there is any word of your settling down in life.

“Your affectionate Cousin,

“RACHEL SIMPSON.

“*P.S.*—Do you know of anything that is good for the sea-sickness?”

It was some time before Mona grasped the full consequences of this letter. She even allowed herself to wonder for a moment whether Mary Ann’s difficulty in finding a lady-help had anything to do with this cordial invitation. But that fancy was soon crowded out of her mind by the formidable situation that had to be faced. No Rachel, no shop,—nothing more outside of herself to blush for; but, on the other hand, no wind-swept coast, no Castle Maclean, no long-postponed explanation, no Dr Dudley! The truth came upon her with a force that was absolutely crushing.

“I might have known it,” she said, looking out of the window, with white lips and unseeing eyes. “I was counting on it too much. It has been the pivot on which my whole life has turned.”

Then a bright idea occurred to her. Auntie Bell had plenty of spare room in the farmhouse, and she was sure the dear old woman would be glad to have a visit from her at any time.

But, when she timidly suggested it, Auntie

Bell wrote back in great distress to say that, after much persuasion, she had let her up-stairs rooms to an artist for August. She would be so proud and pleased if Mona would come to her in September.

But Mona had promised to join the Munros on the 15th of August.

There still remained the chance of the Practical Examination ; but Mona knew by experience that the initials D. and M. came sufficiently far apart in the alphabet to make it very unlikely that the owners of them would be called up at the same time.

Nor were they. Neither at Burlington House, nor at the Embankment, did Mona see a trace of her friend. At the Practical Physiology examination, all the students were called up together, but Mona did not take the pass paper ; she went in for honours the following day, and her first glance round the handful of enthusiasts assembled for six hours' unbroken work was sufficient to convince her that Dr Dudley was not there. In this subject at least he had evidently contented himself with a pass. In the bitterness of her disappointment, she cared little for the results of the examination, and so

worked coolly with a steady hand. When she was called up for her *Viva* she vaguely felt that she was doing better than her best, but she did not care.

At last it was over—the examination which had once seemed to be wellnigh the aim and end of existence; and now, though conscious of having done well, she threw herself on the hearth-rug, in a fit of depression that was almost maddening.

“Oh God,” she groaned, “help me! I cannot bear it!”

CHAPTER L.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE ?

ONCE more the lists were posted at the door of the university, and once more a group of eager faces had gathered round to read them. Presently a tall figure came swinging down the street, and, ignoring the Pass-list altogether, made straight for the Honours.

It was all right,—better than he had dared to hope.

ANATOMY.

First Class.

DUDLEY, RALPH, St Kunigonde's Hospital.

Exhibition and Gold Medal.

Ralph's heart gave a great leap of thanksgiving.

“Now,” he said, almost audibly, “I can go

down to Borrowness, and ask Miss Maclean in so many words to be my wife."

As if the paper in front of him had heard the words, his eye caught the name Maclean below his own. He looked again. Yes, there was no imagination about it.

PHYSIOLOGY.

First Class.

MACLEAN, MONA, Lond. Sch. of Med. for Women.
Exhibition and Gold Medal.

Mona Maclean—*her* name was Margaret. She had told him so that day at Castle Maclean, and he had seen it in a well-worn prayer-book in Mr Ewing's church. But the coincidence was a curious one. He turned sharply round and touched a fellow-student on the arm.

"Who," he said, hastily, "is Miss Mona Maclean?"

"Miss Maclean? Oh, she is one of their great dons at the Women's School. She took a First Class in Botany the year I passed my Prel. Sci."

Certainly it was only a coincidence. No doubt this woman was an out-and-out blue-stocking, in spite of her pretty name; and even

in the matter of brains he did not believe she was a patch upon his princess.

He knew his old aunt would be delighted to hear of his success, but he would not telegraph, lest by any chance the news should leak round to Mona. He wanted to tell her himself. She had been so interested the day he had told her the story of his life. He had not concealed its failures, and he wanted to tell her with his own lips of this first little bit of success. For, after all, it was a success to be M'Diarmid's medallist. No man who had scamped his work could possibly hold such a position as that; and Miss Maclean was so quick, so sympathetic, she would see in a moment how much it meant. It seemed almost too good to be true, that this time to-morrow he would be sitting with her, alone on her storm-tost battlements, free to talk of his love, and to draw her secret from half-willing lips—free to build all sorts of castles in the air, and to sketch the bold outline of a perfect future.

He looked at his watch, and wondered how he was to exist till eight o'clock, when the night express left for Edinburgh. He scarcely heard the congratulations that were heaped upon him

by one and another of his friends, so eager was he to hear what she would say.

The examination was over now—well over. He was free for the first time to give the reins to his thoughts, and to follow whithersoever they beckoned; and a wild dance they led him, over giddy heights that made his brain reel and his pulse leap high with infinite longing. The dusty streets might have been Elysian fields for all he knew; in so far as he saw outward things at all, he saw them through a rose-hued medium of love. Introspection was almost dead within him—almost, but not quite—enough remained to fill him with intensest gratitude that this complete abandonment should have come to him.

“Oh let the solid ground not fail beneath my feet,
Before my life has found what some have found so
sweet!”

How often he had uttered those words, scarcely daring to hope that his prayer would be granted; and now he had found what he longed for, and surely no man before had ever found it so sweet.

“Holloa! cutting old friends already?” said a

merry voice in his ear. "Some people are very quickly blinded by success."

"Why, Melville, what brings you here?"

"I was on my way to the university to find out how many medals you have got. Your face proclaims four at least."

"I am sorry it is so deceptive. I have only got one."

"Anatomy?"

"Anatomy."

"Played! Anything else?"

"No. A second class in chemistry."

"And that's nothing? We have grown very high and mighty all of a sudden. Who's got the medal in physiology?"

"A woman!"

"Name?"

"Miss—Maclean, I think;" and Dudley was amazed to find himself blushing.

"When do you go down?"

"To-night."

"That's right! But look here, dear boy. Take a word of advice with you. Keep out of the way of the *siren*!"

"You go to——!" Dudley stopped short, but his eyes flashed fire.

“It’s a curious thing,” he observed, cynically, “how a man can go through half his life without learning to hold his tongue about his private affairs.”

Melville raised his eyebrows, and whistled a few notes of a popular music-hall ditty.

For about a hundred yards the two walked on in silence. Then Ralph put his hand in his friend’s arm.

“Don’t talk to me about it, Jack,” he said, “there’s a good fellow, but I have been the most confounded snob that ever lived.”

Nothing more was said till they parted at the street corner, and then Melville stood and watched his friend out of sight.

“Another good man gone wrong!” he observed, philosophically; and, shrugging his shoulders, he made his way back to the hospital.

The long day and the interminable night were over.

“Even an Eastern Counties train
Must needs come in at last.”

And Dudley did actually find himself alight-

ing at the familiar little station on a bright August morning. Never before had his home seemed so attractive to him. The strong east wind was like wine, fleecy clouds chased each other across a brilliant blue sky, and the first mellow glow was just beginning to tinge the billowy acres of corn. The tall trees at the foot of his aunt's garden threw broken shadows across the quiet lawn. The beds were bright with old-fashioned flowers, and the house, with its pillared portico, rose, white and stately, beyond the sweep of the carriage-drive.

"Welcome home, doctor!" said the gatekeeper's wife, curtsying low as Ralph passed the lodge. "You're gey late this year. Jeames cam' through frae Edinbury a fortnight syne."

"I suppose so," said Ralph, smiling pleasantly; "how is he getting on?"

"Vera weel, I thank ye, sir! He's brocht a prize buik wi' him this time;" and the good woman's face beamed with triumph. To the great pride of his family, the gatekeeper's son was studying "to be a meenister."

Mrs Hamilton came out to the door to meet her nephew, and a pang shot through Ralph's heart as he saw how frail she looked.

“Why, I declare,” he said, putting his arm round her affectionately, “my old lady has been missing her scapegrace.”

“Conceited as ever,” she said, returning his caress, but the rare tears stole into her eyes as she spoke.

“You dear old thing! why didn’t you send for me? And Burns, too, promised to let me know.”

“Nonsense, laddie! There’s nothing wrong. I have never been ill. I am getting to be an old woman, that’s all; and I’m not so fond of east winds as I once was. Run up-stairs while Dobson infuses the tea, and then come and tell me all about the examination.”

The breakfast parlour was bright with flowers, and the table was laden with good things. The window stood open, and the bees hummed in and out in a flood of sunshine.

“Grouse already!” exclaimed Ralph.

“Yes; Lord Kirkhope and Sir Roderick have each sent a brace.”

“What it is to live with the belle of the country-side, as they say in the story-books!”

“What it is to live with a spoilt and impertinent nephew! Very well done, Ralph! I

have no patience with a man who does not know how to carve."

"Carving ought to come easy to the Gold Medallist in anatomy, oughtn't it?" he said, mischievously.

"Are you really that?"

"At your service."

"And you have not shown it to me yet!"

"Bless the old darling! I shall not see it myself till May. The object of the medal is to remind a man of the mountain of learning he has contrived to—forget!"

Mrs Hamilton laughed.

"How long a holiday can you take, Ralph?" she asked, presently.

"A month. I ought to get back to hospital then, if you are—sick of my company."

"Oh, I'll be that, never fear! and I suppose you would have no objection to spending a few weeks with me up in the Highlands, when you get a little rested. It's not like me, but I've a great longing for a change."

"I daresay it would be a good plan," he answered, very gravely; and, quick as she was, she did not guess the throb of dismay that shot through his heart.

“You do look tired, Ralph, in spite of yourself,” she said, presently. “Your room is all ready. Go and lie down for a few hours.”

“No, no,” he said, restlessly. “I can’t sleep during the day. Let us have a drive; and this afternoon, while you have your nap, I will go and smool on the beach. That rests me more than anything.”

Smool! Oh Ralph!

He never doubted that he would find Mona at Castle Maclean. She went there so often, and now she must know well that any day might bring him, and that he would seek her there. He had rehearsed the meeting so often in his mind; and unconsciously he rehearsed it again this afternoon, as he strode down the little footpath that led through the fields to the sea. The tide was out. That was disappointing. Sunlit waves, rocking festoons of *Fucus* on their bosom, had always formed part of his mental picture; but now the great brown trails hung dry and motionless, from the burning rocks, in the strong afternoon sun.

Never mind! It was of no consequence after all. Two minutes hence, he and she would have

little thought to spare for the tide and the *Fucus*. Ralph quickened his steps and leapt up the side of the rock.

But Castle Maclean was empty.

“ I need not have been in such a confounded hurry,” he muttered irritably, as he looked at his watch. “ Miss Simpson’s mid-day dinner won’t be over yet.”

But two hours passed away, and no one came.

Miss Simpson’s mid-day dinner must certainly be over now. Ralph was bitterly disappointed. Miss Maclean had always shown herself so much quicker, more perceptive, than he had dared to hope. Why did she fail him now, just when he had depended on her most? It took half the poetry out of their relationship, to think that she had not understood, that she had not counted on this meeting as he had.

He made up his mind to go home; but he overrated his own resolution; and in an incredibly short space of time, the bell of Miss Simpson’s shop rang as he opened the door.

The shop was disappointing too. Everything was disappointing to-day! There was no lack of new goods, but they were displayed with a want of design and harmony that jarred on his

over-strained nerves ; and, to crown all, an "air with variations" was being very indifferently played on a cracked piano up-stairs. The music stopped at the sound of the bell, and a young woman came down-stairs.

"Genus *minx*, species *vulgaris*." A moment was sufficient to settle that question. Ralph was so taken aback that it did not even occur to him to ask for india-rubber.

"Is Miss Simpson in?" he said at last.

"Oh lor'! no, sir. Miss Simpson sailed for America nearly a week ago. My pa bought the business, and he means to conduct it on quite a different scale. What is the first thing I can show you to-day, sir?"

He tried to ask for Miss Maclean, but he could not bring her name over his lips; so, lifting his hat, he hastily left the shop.

He emptied his first glass of wine at dinner, before he ventured to broach the subject to his aunt.

"You did not tell me Miss Simpson had emigrated," he said, suddenly.

"Miss Simpson! What Miss Simpson? Bless the boy! he's developing quite a taste for local gossip. I only heard it myself three or

four days ago. It seems that niece—whom you thought such a genius, by the way—went to America some time ago, and now her aunt has gone to join her.”

“*Nonsense!* I mean”—Ralph laughed rather nervously—“I can’t conceive of any one sending across the Atlantic for old Simpson. And, besides—that—young lady—wasn’t her niece at all, auntie mine. She was a distant cousin.”

“I think you are mistaken, dear. The *young woman* told me herself she was Miss Simpson’s niece, and I suppose she ought to know.”

Dimly it occurred to Ralph that he and his aunt must be talking of two different people; but his mind was in such a whirl of bewilderment that reflection was impossible, and as soon as dinner was over, he escaped to his own room, on the true plea of a racking headache.

What had happened? Was it all a hideous nightmare, from which he would awake with infinite relief; or was some evil genius really turning his life upside down? What an infernal idiot he had been not to speak out plainly six months ago! And to think that he had waited only for this examination,—this trumpery bit of child’s-play! Perhaps she had expected him to

write, perhaps she had gone to America in despair; at all events, she had vanished out of his life like the heroine of a fairy tale, and he had not the vaguest notion where to look for her.

Then saner thoughts began to take form in his mind. He was living, after all, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. People could not vanish now-a-days and leave no trace. There must be many in Borrowness who could tell him where she was.

Yes; but who were they? He knew few people in the place, and he could not go round from door to door making inquiries.

At last, with a rush of thankfulness, he be-thought himself of Mr Stuart and Matilda Cookson. Both of them were sure to know where Miss Maclean had gone. He looked at his watch—yes, it was past his aunt's bedtime, and not too late to drop in on Stuart. He told the servants not to sit up if he should be late, and then he walked along the highroad to Kirkstoun, at a pace few men could have equalled.

Once more disappointment awaited him. Mr Stuart was away for a month's holiday, and the manse was occupied by his "supply." Dudley

was certainly not intimate enough with the Cooksons to pay them a visit at this hour ; so he was forced, sorely against his will, to postpone his inquiries until the next day.

“I suppose the Cooksons will be away for August too,” he said to himself many times during that restless night ; but Fortune favoured him at last. When he opened the garden-gate next day, he found Matilda and her father on the lawn.

“Come away, doctor !” cried Mr Cookson, heartily. “I have got some cigars here that you won’t get a chance to smoke every day of your life. Come and tell us your news !”

Fully half an hour passed before Dudley contrived to bring the conversation round to Rachel Simpson’s departure.

“And has Miss Maclean gone to America too ?” he said indifferently, with his eyes fixed on the curling wreaths of tobacco-smoke.

“Oh, bless my soul, no !” cried Mr Cookson, slapping his visitor on the knee. “Did you never hear that story ? It was excellent,—excellent ! Where do you think I saw Miss Maclean last ? Driving in Hyde Park in as

elegant a carriage as ever I wish to see. There was another lady with her—leaning back, you know, with their lace and their parasols,”—Mr Cookson attempted somewhat unsuccessfully to demonstrate the attitude of the ladies in question,—“and a young man riding alongside. A tip-top turn-out altogether, I warrant you.”

Dudley’s face darkened, but he waited for his host to go on.

“I had got wind of it before she left us,” Mr Cookson continued complacently, “from something Colonel Lawrence let drop, and we had her here to dinner; a fine girl, a fine girl! I remember when I was a boy hearing what a successful man her grandfather was; but her people had been out of the place so long, one never thought of one of them coming back. Matilda knew about it all along, it seems; and she and Miss Maclean were fast friends, but she kept it very close.”

“I found it out by accident,” Matilda said, with dignity; “but no one with any perception could see Miss Maclean and question that she was a lady.”

“I quite agree with you,” Dudley said,

gravely ; “ but did Miss Maclean confide to you what induced her to come masquerading down here ? ”

He regretted the words the moment they were spoken, but it was too late to recall them.

Matilda's face flushed.

“ If you knew Miss Maclean at all,” she said, “ you would be ashamed to say that. She was not always wondering what people would think of somebody's cousin, or somebody else's niece ; she was her very own self. The fact that she had grand relations did not make Miss Simpson any the less her cousin. It was as easy to Miss Maclean to claim kindred with a vulgar woman in a shop as with a fine lady in a ball-room.”

This was hyperbolic, no doubt ; but as Dudley listened to it, he wondered whether Mona could safely be judged by the influence she had had on Matilda Cookson.

One question more he had to ask. “ Is she a medical student ? ”

“ Bless my soul, no ! ” laughed Mr Cookson. “ She has no need to do anything for herself. In a small way she is an heiress.”

This was rash ; but after acting the part of the

one who knows, Mr Cookson was unwilling to own his ignorance ; and, his idea of medical women being vague and alarming in the extreme, it never crossed his mind that an attractive, well-to-do young lady like Miss Maclean could possibly belong to their ranks.

Ralph turned to Matilda.

“ Do you know where Miss Maclean is now ? ” he said. “ In London ? ”

“ I had a letter from her yesterday,” Matilda answered proudly, drawing an oft-perused document from her pocket. “ She is just starting with a party of friends to travel in Switzerland.”

“ What a magnificent araucaria that is ! ” Dudley said, suddenly.

“ It would need be,” replied Mr Cookson. “ It cost me a pretty penny, I can tell you.”

Then Dudley rose to go. His manner was playful, but his heart was welling over with bitterness. He did not realise the position in which he had placed the woman he loved ; it did not occur to him to think how much worse it would have been if she had run after him, instead of appearing to run away. He could not

believe that she was false, and yet — *how* she had deceived him ! What madness it was ever to trust to the honesty of a woman's eyes !

“ Well, old boy ! ” he said to himself, cynically, as he walked back to Carlton Lodge, “ are we going to write our ‘ Sorrows of Werther ’ *once again* ? ”

CHAPTER LI.

ANOTHER CHAT BY THE FIRE.

THE last sodden leaves had fallen from the London trees, and autumn was fast merging into winter. Mona sat alone in her study, deep in a copy of *Balfour On the Heart*, which she had picked up second-hand, on her way from hospital, and had carried home in triumph. It was the height of her ambition at this time to be "strong on the heart and lungs"; and as she read she mechanically percussed the arm of her big chair, with a lightness of touch which many doctors might have envied.

There was a knock at the door, and Miss Lascelles entered the room.

"That's right," said Mona, holding out her hand, "sit down."

"Thanks," was the reply, in Miss Lascelles's

cultured, musical drawl. "I am not going to stay. I came to ask if you would lend me your notes of that leucocythæmia case. I am working up the spleen just now."

"I will, with pleasure. But don't be in such a hurry, now that you have come so far. I never get a chance to speak to you in hospital. Sit down and tell me what the scientist thinks of it all."

Miss Lascelles pulled off her hat unceremoniously, and passed her hand through her dark hair.

"Oh, reform it altogether!" she cried. "There is a deal of humbug in the profession, and I don't know that the women have lessened it."

Mona laughed.

"What a born reformer you are!" she said, admiringly.

"I suppose I am. In other words, I shall never be a successful doctor. *Kismet!* I don't see how any honest man can live in this world and not be a reformer."

"Don't you? Oh, I do."

Miss Lascelles glanced round the pretty room.

"I almost envy you," she said. "It must be

very pleasant to be able to shut one's eyes to abuses, and eat one's pudding in comfort."

"Ay, or to shut one's eyes to one's father's shortcomings, and make the best of them."

"It is not the shortcomings I object to, it is the false pretensions. Give me honesty at all costs. Let everything be open and above-board."

"Honesty—honesty—honesty!" said Mona. "I sometimes think I hate honesty; it is so often another name for ingratitude and brutality. I care more for loyalty than for all the other virtues put together. It is the loyal souls who prepare the way for the reformer. His actual work is often nothing more than the magnificent thrust with which a child knocks down a castle of cards."

"I believe in loyalty, too; but let us be loyal to the right, not loyal to the wrong."

"With all my heart, if you can contrive to separate the right from the wrong. I never could. I am always brought back to that grand bold line—

'Mit ihm zu irren ist dir Gewinn.'

You don't believe that?"

Miss Lascelles laughed, and shook her head. "I don't mean to go astray with anybody, if I can help it. I had no idea, Miss Maclean, that you were so desperately—*mediæval*."

Mona smiled.

"I think it is rather Greek than mediæval to shut one's eyes to abuses, and eat one's pudding in comfort. The mediæval spirit renounces the pudding, and looks beyond the abuses."

Miss Lascelles sprang to her feet, and carelessly threw on her broad picturesque hat.

"I am neither Greek nor mediæval, then," she said, involuntarily drawing up the sleeves from her plump pretty wrists as she spoke; "for I choose to share my pudding, and wage war to the death against the abuses."

"*Brava!*" said Mona. "You are one of the sort that live in history."

"For knocking down a castle of cards?"

"Nay, nay; I did not say that of all reformers."

"Well, Miss Maclean, whatever your theories may be, you have worked a grand reformation in Miss Reynolds."

"Now that is precisely a case of the wrong

man getting the credit. That, at least, was the work of her own loyal self."

"If only she would be quite natural, and not treat the doctors with that half-coquettish air!"

"But that is natural to her, and I can't say I altogether object to it. Perhaps I am partial. Here are the notes in the meantime."

"Many thanks. Good-bye."

"*Au revoir!* Come back again—when you want another chapter out of the *Middle Ages*."

Mona returned to her books, but she had not read a page before another visitor was announced.

"I really shall have to sport my oak," she said; but when she took the card from the salver, her whole face beamed.

"Show him in," she said, wheeling an arm-chair up to the fire. "Mr Reynolds, there are not three people in the world whom I should be so glad to see. What lucky wind blows you here now?"

"I have come partly to look after my two daughters," said the old man, smiling. "Let me have a good look at this one. Lucy tells me you are working yourself to death."

“One of Lucy’s effective statements.” But Mona flushed rather nervously under his steady gaze. “I suppose you have just come from her now.”

“Yes.”

“*She* is working splendidly if you will.”

“So I gather.” He smiled. “She is very indignant to - night about the rudeness of the doctor under whom she is working at hospital.”

“I don’t think it is very serious. They are excellent friends in the main, and you cannot expect all men to be gentlemen. The fact is”—Mona drew down her brows in earnest consideration—“we women are excellent, really excellent, at taking a good hard blow when we are convinced that we deserve it. That is where our mettle comes in. But if we really mean to share men’s work, we have got to learn within the next generation to take a little miscellaneous knocking about from our superiors, without inquiring too closely whether we have deserved it or not. That is where our ignorance of the world comes in.”

“I should think that was extremely true,” Mr Reynolds said, reflectively, “especially in a busy life like a doctor’s, where there is so little

time for explanations. There must be a good deal of give and take. But, my dear girl, don't let your common-sense run away with one atom of your womanliness. One would not think it necessary to say so, if one had not been disappointed in that respect, once and again."

"I know," Mona answered, hurriedly. "It is a case of Scylla and Charybdis. We don't want to be mawkish and sentimental, and in the first swing of reaction we are apt to go to the other extreme and treat the patients in hospital as mere material. But you know, Mr Reynolds, if one realises that the occupant of each bed is a human soul, with its own rights and its own reserves—if one takes the trouble to knock at the door, in fact, and ask admission instead of leaping over the wall—life becomes pretty intense; a good deal gets crowded into a very few hours."

"I know. That is quite true. But all things become easier by practice. It may be the view of a half-informed outsider, but I cannot help thinking that, if you take the trouble, when you first begin ward-work, as Lucy calls it, to gain admission with the will of the patient, you will in time become the

possessor of a magic *passe-partout*, which will make entrance not only infinitely more satisfactory and complete, but also even easier than by leaping over the wall."

"You should preach a sermon to women-doctors," Mona said, smiling; "and have it printed. I would lay it to heart for one."

"You will do far more good by preaching it yourself in your daily life, as indeed I believe you are doing now. But in any case, I did not come here to preach to you."

"You don't know how much I stand in need of it."

"I want you to talk to me. Do you know it is more than a year since I saw you?"

Mona sighed. "It seems five to me sometimes."

"I suppose it has been very full of events?"

Mr Reynolds had not forgotten the man whose presence at Borrowness made "all the difference" in Mona's life there.

"Yes. There was first my life with my cousin; and then the examination; and then Switzerland with the Munros; and then hospital. Four different Mona Macleans,—each living as hard as ever she could."

“And enjoying life?”

“I don't know. I have been so restless, so unsettled.”

“I fancied I could read that in your face, but it is passing over now.”

“I hope so. I don't know. Don't let us talk of it.”

“You enjoy your hospital work?”

Mona was sitting opposite him on the corner of the tiled fender. She looked into the fire now, with an amount of expression in her face that was almost painful.

“Hospital,” she said, “is—*salvation!* All one's work apart from that tends to make one self-centred. It is a duty to think much of *my* knowledge, *my* marks, *my* success, *my* failure. Hospital work gives one a chance to ‘die to live.’”

She laughed softly.

“It must seem incredible to you, but I actually thought once that I had died to live,—I, with my books and my pictures, and my pretty gowns, and my countless toys! I thought I held them with so light a hand, that I valued them only for the eternal that was in them.”

She paused and went on without much logical

sequence. "It is so easy to die to live, when the life one dies to is something vague and shadowy and unknown; but let one brilliant ray of promised happiness cross one's path, and then it becomes a very different thing to die to that—to nothing abstract, nothing vague, but just to *that*! One realises what one's professions are worth.

"All the time I was at Borrowness I hardly once said a cross word to my cousin, and I suppose I took great credit to myself for that; but I see now that there was no true selflessness in it at all. It was simply because she was so unlike me that she never came into my real life. I conquered my hardships in a sense, by escaping them. I thought I had attained, and I have only learned now that I have attained nothing. The whole lesson of self-renunciation has still got to be learnt."

"You are thinking much of the duty of self-renunciation; what of the duty of self-realisation?"

"Is there such a duty?"

"You have acted instinctively up till now on the theory that there is. Have you any reason to distrust your instincts?"

“ I don't know. I seem to have got into a muddle about everything. How can they both be duties when they are so absolutely incompatible ? ”

“ One can only unite them certainly by seeking for a higher truth that combines them both. It may seem a strange thing for a Christian minister to say, but it has always seemed to me that those words, ‘ die to live, ’ were an admirable expression of a philosophy, but a very poor maxim for daily life ; partly because they ignore that duty of self-realisation, in which I for one believe, and partly because, so long as a man says, ‘ Am I dying to live ? ’ he cannot possibly do it. The maxim accentuates the very element we want to get rid of. If we are indeed to die to live, we must cease to think about it ; we must cease to know whether we live or die. ”

“ But the higher truth, Mr Reynolds, what is that ? ”

“ Nay, I should be doing you a poor service by telling you. ”

“ There is only one higher truth conceivable, ” Mona said, boldly, “ and that is—God in all. ”

“ And is not that enough ? God in me. God ”

to have His way in me, and to find the fullest possible expression there. God in all men—in the church, the ball-room, the slum. If we see all things through the medium of God, what becomes of the strife between self-renunciation and self-realisation?"

Mona pressed his hand in silence. "You knew all that before, dear child," he said; "you had only got confused for the moment."

Mona shook her head. "I knew it vaguely," she said, "but you must not think I am living up to that level. I thought, in my infinite conceit, that I had risen above happiness and attained to blessedness; and now—and now—I want the happiness too."

He laid his hand on her shoulder. "And so you are wearing yourself out at hospital," he said quietly, as though that were the natural outcome of what she had said; "but don't forget the friends who love you, and who are depending on you."

Mona looked up gratefully into his face. The advice was almost the same as that which she herself had given to Lucy some months before; but the value of advice is rarely intrinsic—we think far less of its substance than we do of the

personality of the giver. The words that are empty platitudes on the lips of one man, become living inspiration on those of another.

To-night, however, even Mr Reynolds had not the power to raise Mona above the longing for happiness. As the months went on, the strain of uncertainty was becoming almost unendurable. Never, since that night when he drove her home in his gig from Colonel Lawrence's Wood, had she heard anything from Dr Dudley; never, since the chance glimpses at Burlington House, had she even seen him. It seemed incredible that he could have failed to find her, if he had really tried; and yet—and yet——

“Oh, my friend, my friend!” she said, wearily, “I have waited so long. *Where are you?*”

CHAPTER LII.

OLD FRIENDS.

“You are late,” said Lady Munro. “Had you forgotten that you were going to take us to the theatre?”

She was sitting alone in the firelight, one dainty slippered foot on the burnished fender.

Sir Douglas looked sharply round the room without replying. “Is Mona here?” he said.

“No; she could not spare enough time to come to dinner. We are to call for her.”

Sir Douglas frowned.

“That’s always the way. Upon my soul, for all we see of her, she might as well be at—Borrowness!”

“Where in the world is that?” asked Lady Munro, languidly. Then, with a sudden change of tone, “I have got such a piece of news for

you," she said. "Another of our friends is engaged to be married."

"Not Dickinson?" he said, glancing at the foreign letter in her hand.

"Yes; the Indian mail came in to-day. Guess who the lady is?"

"You know I hate guessing. Go on!"

"Miss Colquhoun!"

"What an extraordinary thing!"

"Isn't it? It seems he wanted the thing settled before he sailed, but it took the exchange of a few letters to decide the question. I must say it is a great disappointment to me. I am quite sure the Sahib cared for Mona, and I did think she would take pity on him in the long-run."

"How ridiculous!" said Sir Douglas, testily.

He wanted Mona to marry, because that was the natural and fitting destiny for a young and attractive woman; but it was quite another thing to think of her as the wife of any given man.

"Of course we all know that Mona ought to marry a duke," said Evelyn, quietly. She had entered the room a moment before, looking very fair and sweet in her white evening dress. "But

even if the duke could be brought to see it, which is not absolutely certain,—I suppose even dukes are sometimes blind to their best interests—oh, father, *don't!*”

For Sir Douglas was pinching her ear unmercifully.

“You little sauce-box!” he said indignantly, but he did not look displeased. Evelyn had learned that approaching womanhood gave her the right to take liberties with her father which his wife would scarcely have ventured upon.

“Well, whatever may be the cause of it,” said Lady Munro, “Mona is not half so bright as she was a year ago.”

Evelyn laughed.

“Do you remember what Sydney Smith said? ‘Macaulay has improved of late,—flashes of silence!’ Lucy told her yesterday that, to our great surprise, we find we may open our lips now-a-days, without having our heads snapped off with an epigram.”

“It’s all nonsense,” said Sir Douglas, loftily. “Mona is not changed a bit. You did not understand her, that is all.”

But in truth no one had wondered over the change in Mona so much as he. He was per-

fectly certain that she did not care for the Sahib, and he had come at last to the conclusion that, with a girl like Mona, incessant hospital work was quite sufficient to account for the alteration. To his partial mind Mona's increased womanliness more than made up for her loss of sparkle. When friendship and affection are removed alike from all danger of starvation and of satiety, they are very hard to kill.

At this moment Nubboo announced dinner, and an hour or so later the carriage stopped at the door of Mona's rooms in Gower Street.

Much as Sir Douglas spoiled his niece, she "knew her place," as Lucy expressed it, better than to keep him waiting; and the reverberations of the knocker had not died away when she appeared.

Sir Douglas ran his eye with satisfaction over the details of her toilet. It was an excellent thing for her, in this time of hard work and heart-hunger, that she felt the bounden necessity of living up to the level of Sir Douglas's expectations. She cared intensely for his approbation; partly for her own sake, partly because to him she represented the whole race

of "learned women"; and she could not well have had a more friendly, frank, and fastidious critic.

The theatre was crowded when they entered their box. Like many habitual theatre-goers Sir Douglas hated boxes, but he had applied for seats too late to get anything else. It was the first night of a new melodrama,—new in actual date, but in all essentials old as the history of man. A noble magnificent hero; a sweet loyal wife; a long period of persecution, separation, and mutual devotion; a happy and triumphant reunion.

Judged by every canon of modern realistic art, it was stagey and conventional to the point of being ridiculous; but the acting was brilliant, and even Sir Douglas and Mona found it difficult to escape the enthusiasm of that crowded house. Evelyn and her mother were moved almost to tears before the end. The one saw in the play the ideal that lay in the shadows before her, the other the ideal that her own life had missed.

"Have you heard the news about the Sahib?" Lady Munro inquired in the pause that followed the first act.

“Yes,” said Mona, flushing slightly; “I had a few lines from him by to-day’s mail.”

“Do you think the match a desirable one?”

“Ideal, so far as one can foresee. They won’t water down each other’s enthusiasms, as most married people do.”

“Douglas remembers Miss Colquhoun as a quaint, old-fashioned child—not at all pretty. I suppose she has improved?”

“I suppose she has,” Mona answered, reflectively; “she is certainly immensely admired now.”

“It was such an odd coincidence; we heard this morning of the engagement of another of our friends—Colonel Monteith’s son; I forget whether you have met him?”

“No; I have met the Colonel. Who is the son engaged to?”

“Nobody very great. A Miss Nash, a girl with plenty of money. George inherits a nice little estate from his uncle, and he had to marry something to keep it up on. By the way, Lucy Reynolds must have mentioned him to you. She saw a good deal of him at Cannes.” And Lady Munro looked rather anxiously at her niece.

“I rather think she did,” Mona answered,

pretending to stifle a yawn. "But Lucy met so many people while she was with you——"

The rise of the curtain for the second act obviated the necessity of finishing the sentence, and Lady Munro did not resume the subject.

As soon as Sir Douglas had left the box for the second time, it was entered by a stout man, with a vast expanse of shirt front, and a bunch of showy seals.

"I thought I could not be mistaken," he said with a marked Scotch accent, and holding out his hand to Mona. "I have been watching you from the dress circle ever since the beginning of the play, Miss Maclean; and I thought I must just come and pay my respects."

Lady Munro looked utterly aghast, and the ease of Mona's manner rather belied her feelings, as she took his outstretched hand.

"That was very kind of you," she said, simply. "Mr Cookson, my aunt, Lady Munro,—Miss Munro."

Mr Cookson gasped, and there was an awkward pause. Rachel Simpson had not taken with her, across the Atlantic, all the complications in her cousin's life.

Fortunately, at this moment two young men

came in, and Mona was able to keep Mr Cookson pretty much to herself.

“I hope you are all well at Borrowness,” she said, cordially.

“Thanks, we are wonderful, considering. It’ll be great news for Matilda that I came across you.”

“Please give her my love.”

There was another pause. Mona was longing to ask about Mrs Hamilton and Dr Dudley, but she did not dare.

“It was a great thing for Matilda getting to know you,” Mr Cookson went on. “We often wish you were back among us. If ever you care to renew the homely old associations a bit, our spare room is always at your disposal, you know.”

Care to renew the old associations! What else in life did she care so much about? In her eagerness she forgot even the presence of her aunt.

“I should like very much to see the old place again,” she said. “You are very kind.”

Mr Cookson’s good-natured face beamed with delighted surprise.

“It isn’t looking its best now,” he said; “but

any time you care to come, we shall be only too delighted."

"Thank you. If it would not be too much trouble to Mrs Cookson, I could come for a day or two at the beginning of January. I shall never forget the fairy frost we had at that time last winter."

Mr Cookson laughed.

"We will be proud to see you at any time," he said; "but I am afraid we have not enough interest with the clerk of the weather to get up a frost like that again. I never remember to have seen the like of it."

He turned to Lady Munro with a vague idea that he ought to be making himself agreeable to her.

"My girls were wishing they could carry the leaves and things home," he said; "it seemed such a waste like."

Mona inwardly blessed her aunt for the gracious smile with which she listened to these words; but, whatever Lady Munro's feelings might be, it was extremely difficult for her to be ungracious to any one.

The Fates, after all, were kind. Mr Cookson left the box before Sir Douglas returned.

“My dear Mona!” was all Lady Munro could say the first moment they were left alone.

“Poor dear Aunt Maud!” Mona said, caressingly; “it is a shame that she should be subjected to such a thing. But never mind, dear; he lives hundreds of miles away from here, and you are never likely to see him again.”

Lady Munro groaned. Fortunately, she had heard nothing of the invitation, and in another minute she was once more absorbed in the interest of the play.

The party drove back to Gower Street in silence. Sir Douglas alighted at once, and held out his hand to help Mona.

“Many thanks,” she said, warmly; “good night.”

“No; I am coming in for ten minutes. I want to speak to you. Home, Charles!”

Mona opened the door, and led the way up the dimly lighted staircase to her cheerful sitting-room.

“Now, Mona,” he said, as soon as the door was closed, “I want the whole truth of this Borrowness business.”

Mona started visibly. Had he met Mr Cookson in the corridor, seized him by the throat,

and demanded an account of his actions? No, that was clearly impossible.

“Who has been talking to you?” she said, resignedly.

“I met Colonel Lawrence at the club to-day.”

Mona threw herself into the rocking-chair with a sigh of capitulation.

“If you have heard *his* story,” she said, “you need not come to me for farther details. He knows more than I do myself. They say down at Borrowness that he is ‘as guid as an auld almanac.’”

But Sir Douglas declined to be amused.

“How long were you there?” he said, severely.

“Six months.”

“And you have kept me in the dark about it all this time? I think I deserved greater confidence from you.”

“I think you did,” she said, frankly; “but you see, Uncle Douglas, I promised to go at a time when I only knew you by name, and I had not the least idea then that you would be so kind to me. I felt bound to keep my word, and I did not feel quite sure that you would approve of it.”

“*Approve of it!*” he exclaimed, indignantly.

“But I always meant to tell you about it sooner or later.”

Mona sighed. She had expected the whole story to come out in connection with her engagement to Dr Dudley. And now that engagement seemed to be becoming more and more problematical.

“Particularly later,” said Sir Douglas, sarcastically. “It is nearly a year now since you left.”

“Yes; but that isn’t exactly due to intentional secrecy on my part. The fact is, my visit has some painful associations for me now.”

“So I should think,” he said. “Is it really true, Mona, that you stood behind a counter?—that you *kept a shop*?”

“Perfectly true,” said Mona, meeting his gaze without flinching. “I confess I had no special training for the work, but I did not do it so badly, after all.”

The least suspicion of a smile played about the corners of his mouth, but he suppressed it instantly.

“And when,” he asked, “may we expect your next attack of shopkeeping?”

“Oh, did Colonel Lawrence not tell you? My cousin sailed for America months ago.”

He looked relieved.

“To your infinite regret, no doubt.”

“I am afraid it is a great weight off my mind.”

“And is that the end of the affair, or have you any more cousins down there?”

“I have one or two friends; no relatives.”

“Then there is nothing to take you back again?”

Poor Mona!

“I met a Borrowness acquaintance in the theatre to-night,” she said, “and promised to go down for a day or two at Christmas. Uncle Douglas, you did not ask to see my genealogical tree before you took me to Norway. I am proud of the fact that my grandfather rose from the ranks; and, even if I were not, I could not consent to draw all my acquaintances from one set. There are four links in the chain—your world, you, me, my world. Your world won’t let you go, and I can’t let my world go. If you must break the chain, you can only do it in one place.”

“I don’t believe you would care a straw if I did.”

“I should care intensely,” said Mona, her

eyes filling with tears. "It seems like a fairy tale that a brilliant man of the world like you should be so good to commonplace me ; and, besides—you know I love you almost as if you were my father. But, indeed, now that I know you and Aunt Maud, you may trust me in future always to think of what is due to you."

She had risen from her chair as she spoke, and he strode across the hearth-rug and kissed her affectionately.

"There, there," he said, "she shall dictate her own terms ! Thank heaven at least that that old frump is well across the Atlantic !"

He went away, and Mona was left alone, to think over the events of the day. Doris and the Sahib, Monteith and Lucy,—it was the old tale over again,—"The one shall be taken, and the other left." How strange it seemed that life should run smoothly for Doris, with all her grand power of self-surrender ; and that poor little Lucy, with her innocent, childlike expectation of happiness, should be called upon to suffer !

"——so horribly," Mona added ; but in her heart she was beginning to hope that Lucy had not been so hard hit after all.

And for herself, how did the equation run? As the Sahib is to Doris, so is somebody to me? or, as Monteith is to Lucy, so is somebody to me? No, no, no! That was impossible. Monteith had never treated Lucy as Dr Dudley had treated her.

During all these months what had caused Mona the acutest suffering was an anguish of shame. It never remained with her long, but it recurred whenever she was worn out and depressed. She had long since realised that, from an outsider's point of view, her experience that winter night was in no way so exceptional as she had supposed,—that there were thousands of men who would give such expression to a moment's transient passion. But surely, surely Dr Dudley was not one of these, and surely any man must see that with a woman like her it must be everything or nothing! If he had indeed torn her soul out and given her nothing in return, why then—then—— But she never could finish the sentence, for the recollection of a hundred words and actions and looks came back, and turned the gall into sweetness. And she always ended with the same old cry—“If only I had told him about my life, if only I had

given him no shadow of a reason to think that I had deceived him !”

But to-night it seemed as if the long uncertainty must be coming to an end at last. If she went to Borrowness at Christmas, as she had promised, she could not fail to hear something of her friend, and she might even see him.

CHAPTER LIII.

WAITING.

THE weeks passed very slowly till the Christmas holidays came round ; but, on the whole, life had become more bearable for Mona. The future was as uncertain as ever, but she had at least one definite event to look forward to. There was a light of some kind before her, though it might be only a Will-o'-the-wisp.

And a Will-o'-the-wisp it was destined to prove.

She arrived at Borrowness late in the evening, and immediately after breakfast next morning, Matilda begged her to come to Castle Maclean. Mona assented the more readily, as the walk led them past the gates of Carlton Lodge ; but at the first glance she saw that the house was shut up.

It was some minutes before she could measure the full force of the blow.

“What has become of Mrs Hamilton?” she said at last, with averted face.

“Oh, didn’t you know? She was awfully ill last autumn. Dr Dudley had some great gun down from London to see her,—as if Edinburgh doctors were not a great deal better!—and she was ordered abroad for the winter. Dr Dudley took her away at once, to Cairo, or Algiers, or some such place. We don’t hear anything about them now. By the way, Miss Maclean, the very last time that I saw Dr Dudley he was asking about you.”

Mona could not trust herself to speak.

“He wanted to know if you had gone to America with Miss Simpson, and Pa gave him a glowing account of how he had seen you in London.”

“At the theatre?”

“No, no. Pa saw you once, long before that, one day in Hyde Park, with a lady—and a young gentleman. I thought it would be Lady Munro, but I never said so to Pa.”

It was contrary to all Mona’s instincts to ask what any one had said of her, but the opportu-

nity was too precious to be lost. Her dignity must go.

“And what did Dr Dudley say to that?” she asked, as carelessly as she could.

Matilda hesitated; but she felt a pardonable longing to repeat her own brave words.

“I don’t know whether I ought to tell you,” she said. “You see—Dr Dudley doesn’t know you as well as I do. He said in that horrid sneering way of his, ‘And do you know what induced her to come masquerading down here?’ I gave him a piece of my mind, I can tell you.” And Matilda repeated the retort which she had so often gone over with keen satisfaction in her own mind.

“You loyal little soul!” said Mona; but her face had turned very white.

“Dr Dudley asked such an extraordinary thing,” Matilda went on. “He wanted to know whether you were—a *medical student!*”

Ah! so he had noticed her name in the lists. Then why had he not written to her at the School?

“Fancy his imagining such a thing! Pa told him you had no need to do anything for yourself.”

Mona was too preoccupied to think of it at the time ; but, before she left Borrowness, she broke to the Cooksons the astounding fact that, although she had no need to do anything for herself, she *was* a medical student.

When she came to think calmly over the incident which Matilda had narrated to her, she did not know whether to draw from it comfort or despair. She was not sorry that Dudley should have been angry,—angry enough to forget himself before little Matilda Cookson ; but had he been content to condemn her unheard ? Surely he could in some way have got a letter to her. Algiers and Cairo were far off, but they were not on the astral plane.

No, certainly Mona did not despair of her friend. It might have been better for her physically if she had. If she had been sure that he had forgotten her, she would have turned the key with a will on the suite of enchanted rooms ; but the suspense, the excitement of uncertainty, was wearing out her strength.

When spring came round she was thoroughly ill. She went about her work as usual, but even her lecturers and fellow-students saw that some-

thing was wrong ; and Sir Douglas implored her to give up medicine altogether.

“ I ought to have trusted my own instincts,” he said. “ The very first day I saw your face, I felt sure that you were not the sort to make a doctor. That kind of work wants women of coarser fibre. There is no use trying to chop wood with a razor.”

In vain Mona protested that medical work had nothing to do with it ; that she could not live without her hospital. She was not prepared to suggest any other explanation, and Sir Douglas stuck to his point.

“ Don't fret, dear,” she said at last. “ If you like, I will go and see Dr Alice Bateson to-morrow.”

“ *Do!*” he said, emphatically. “ I have a great mind to go and see her myself.”

So next evening Mona found herself in a pleasant, airy consulting-room. Dr Bateson rose as her patient entered, and looked at her steadily, with the penetrating brown eyes.

“ I am not ill,” Mona said, apologetically. “ But I can't sleep much, and things get on my nerves ; so I thought I would allow myself the luxury of consulting you.”

“You do look seedy,” was the frank reply, and the brown eyes kept firm hold of the white, sensitive face. “Overworking?”

“No.”

“When is your next examination?”

“Not for eighteen months.”

“So it isn’t that?”

“No, it isn’t that.”

Dr Bateson put her fingers on the girl’s pulse. Her manner could not be called strictly sympathetic—certainly not effusive—but there was something very irresistible in her profound and unassumed interest in her patients.

“Is something particular worrying you?” she said, shortly.

Mona smiled drearily.

“There you have me,” she said. “Something is worrying me. It lies entirely out of my power, so I cannot control it; and it is still uncertain, so I cannot make up my mind to it.”

“And you can’t shake it off, and wait?”

“I am afraid it is because I have failed in that, that I have come to you. I suppose I am demanding the impossible—asking you to ‘minister to a mind diseased.’”

“I don’t mind ministering to a mind diseased

at all—if it is not too diseased to carry out my instructions. In this age of worry and strain one laughs at the stories of the old doctors, who declined to undertake a case if the patient had anything on his mind. They would not have a very flourishing practice now-a-days. Thousands of worries and not a few suicides might be prevented by the timely use of a simple tonic. Prosaic, isn't it?"

"Prove it true in my case, and I shall be grateful to you all my life. I don't play the part of invalid *con amore*."

"That I believe. What are you going to do with your Easter holiday?"

"I am not going to leave town,—at least not for more than a few days."

"Why not?"

Mona's appearance did not suggest the lack of means, to which Dr Alice Bateson was pretty well accustomed in her practice.

"I want to get on with my hospital work; and besides, it is work that keeps one sane."

"That is quite true up to a certain point. I suppose you have friends that you can go to?"

"Yes. My aunt wants me to go to Bournemouth with her," Mona admitted unwillingly.

“And is she a congenial companion?”

“Thoroughly; but I should mope myself to death.”

“Not if you follow my advice. Live on the cliffs the whole day long, read what will rest you, and take a tonic that will make you eat in spite of yourself.”

She asked a few more questions, and then consulted Mona very frankly about the ingredients of her prescription. Dr Bateson did not at all believe in making a mystery of her art, nor in drawing a hard-and-fast line between students and doctors.

“Thank you very much indeed,” Mona said, rising and tendering her fee.

“Nonsense! we are none of us cannibals, as your great Scotch *Æsculapius* says. I don't take fees from students and nurses.”

“But I am not studying in order to support myself.”

“I can't help that. Now I wonder if you mean to take my advice as well as my tonic?” She asked the question quite dispassionately, as if it only interested her in an abstract way.

“If you don't accept a fee,” Mona said, in an

injured tone, "you bind me over to take your advice."

"Ah! if that's the case, I wish I could afford to refuse fees from all my patients. Good-bye. Send me a line from Bournemouth to tell me how you get on. I wish I could be of more use to you!" And for the first time a look of very genuine sympathy shot from the honest brown eyes.

"Well?" said Sir Douglas, when he saw Mona that evening.

"Dr Bateson says I am to go to Bournemouth with Aunt Maud."

"Nonsense! Did she really?"

Warmly as Sir Douglas approved of women-doctors, it was a source of great surprise to him that they should recommend anything sensible.

And so it came to pass that Mona began by degrees to pick up fresh health and strength in spite of everything. She could not shake off her worry; but day by day, to her own surprise, it weighed on her more bearably.

One morning near the end of April she took up a copy of the *Times*, and her eye fell on the following notice—"On the 23d inst., at Carlton Lodge, Borrowness, Eleanor Jane, relict

of the late George Hamilton, Esq., J.P. and D.L. of the County, in her 79th year."

"So she came home to die," Mona thought; "and now—now I suppose he will come up to London and go on with his work. I wonder if he will present himself at Burlington House for his medal next month? For, if he does, I shall see him."

And it was well that Presentation Day was so near, or Dr Bateson might have been disappointed, after all, in the results of her prescription.

CHAPTER LIV.

PRESENTATION DAY.

THE eventful day dawned at last, clear and bright, with a summer sky and a fresh spring breeze.

“One would think I was a bride at the very least,” Mona said, laughing, when Lucy and Evelyn came in to help her to dress.

“If you think we would take this amount of trouble for a common or garden bride,” said Lucy, loftily, “you are profoundly mistaken. Bride, indeed!”

Sir Douglas had insisted on giving Mona an undergraduate's gown, heavy and handsome as it could be made; and the sight of her in that, and in a most becoming trencher, did more to reconcile him to her study of Medicine than any amount of argument could have done.

“Distinctly striking!” was Mona’s comment, when Lucy and Evelyn stopped dancing round her, and allowed her to see herself in the pier-glass. And she was perfectly right. Never in all her bright young life had she looked so charming as she did that Presentation Day.

“You will go to the function to-day, Ralph?” said Melville to his friend the same morning.

“Not I! God bless my soul! when a man has graduated at Edinburgh and Cambridge, he can afford to dispense with a twopenny-half-penny function at Burlington House.”

“I thought you admitted that, even in comparison with Cambridge and Edinburgh, London had its points?”

“So I do. But the graduation ceremony is not one of them. Ceremonial does not sprout kindly on nineteenth-century soil. One misses the tradition, the aroma of faith, the grand roll of the *In nomine Patris*. Call it superstition, humbug, what you will, but materialism is confoundedly inartistic.”

“Spoken like a book with pictures. But without entering fully into the question of Atheism *versus* Christianity, the point at issue

is briefly this: I have got a ticket for the affair, for the first time in my life, and I want to applaud somebody I know. Sweet girl-graduates are all very well, but I decline to waste all my adolescent enthusiasm on a physiologist in petticoats."

"By the way, a woman did get the Physiology Medal, did not she?" And Dudley felt a faint, awakening curiosity to see that other Miss Maclean.

"Oh, if it is going to make you sigh like that," said Melville, "I withdraw all I have said. I have no wish to sacrifice you on the altar of friendship."

"Did I sigh?" said Ralph, very wearily. "It was not for that. Oh yes, dear boy, I'll go. It won't be the first time I have made a fool of myself for your sake."

And he did feel himself very much of a fool when, a few hours later, he went up on the platform of the crowded theatre to receive the pretty golden toy. The experience reminded him of his brilliant schoolboy days, and he half expected some kindly old gentleman to clap him on the shoulder as he went back to his seat. He was thankful to escape into in-

significance again ; and then, adjusting his gold-rimmed spectacles, he proceeded to watch for Miss Mona Maclean.

It was well that he had ceased to be the centre of attraction in the theatre. Ralph was not a blushing man, but a moment later his face became as red as the cushioned seats of the hall, and when the wave of colour passed away, it left him ashy pale. At the first sight of that dear familiar face, beautiful to-day with excitement, as he had seen it at Castle Maclean, his hard, aggrieved feeling against her vanished, and he thought only how good it would be to speak to her again. He was proud of her beauty, proud of the ovation she received, proud of his love for her.

But while the tedious ceremony went on, the facts of the case came back to him one by one, like common objects that have been blotted for the moment out of view by some dazzling light. His face settled into a heavy frown.

“I will walk along Regent Street with her,” he thought, “and ask her what it all meant.”

At last the “function” was over. Mona seemed to be surrounded by congratulating friends, and so indeed was he ; but before many

minutes had passed he found himself following her out of the hall,—gaining on her. She was very pale. Was it reaction after the excitement of the ceremony? or did she know that he was behind her?

In another moment he would have spoken, but during that moment a bluff, elderly professor, who had been looking at Mona with much interest and perplexity, suddenly seized her hand.

“Why, I declare it is Yum-Yum!” he exclaimed, enthusiastically. “No wonder she took us by surprise on a deserted coast, when she wins an ovation like this at Burlington House!”

Mona stopped to speak, and Dudley passed on.

No wonder, indeed! What a blind bat, what an utter imbecile, he had been! and how he had babbled to her of his past, present, and future, while she had sat looking at him, with infinite simplicity and frankness in her honest eyes!

His lip curled with a cynical smile.

“Bravo, old chap!” said Melville’s friendly voice. “It was a genuine consolation to my misanthropic mind to reflect that one of those medals was well earned.”

Ralph stopped for a minute or two to speak to his friend, and then went down the steps. Most of the carriages had gone, but, a few yards from the door, a pair of fine bays were pawing the ground. Ralph looked up and recognised his Anglo-Indian friend, Sir Douglas Munro; but Sir Douglas was waiting for a lady, and had no eyes for the clever young doctor. Ralph's glance wandered on to the next carriage, and when it came idly back to the bays, he saw that the lady had arrived. Nay, more, the lady was looking at him with a very eloquent face.

"Dr Dudley," she said, almost below her breath.

In a moment every trace of expression vanished from Dudley's face, and with slightly exaggerated courtesy, but without the faintest shadow of a smile, he lifted his hat and walked on.

A minute later, the mail-phaeton bowled past him. Dudley laughed gloomily. And he had meant her to trudge along Regent Street with him, and "tell him what it all meant"! What a hopeless imbecile he had been!

How could he guess that Mona would cheer-

fully have given three years' income to leave her uncle at that moment, and "trudge along Regent Street" with him?

"Who is that young fellow?" Sir Douglas was saying. "I seem to know his face."

"He is a Dr Dudley," Mona answered, stooping low to arrange the carriage-rug over her feet.

"Oh, to be sure. I remember—a clever fellow." Sir Douglas fell a-musing for a few minutes. "How did you pick him up, Mona? He told me when I last saw him that he did not know any of the women-students."

CHAPTER LV.

LUCY TO THE RESCUE.

“ I HAVE an idea, Mona,” said Lucy.

“ Have you, dear ? I wish I had ! ”

The two girls were in the Gower Street garden again, and Lucy was swinging lazily in the hammock, just as she had done that summer day nearly two years before.

“ You know I told you the Pater had had a little money left him ? ”

“ Yes, and very glad I was to hear it. ”

“ Well, the more I see of what is being done in a medical way in the hub of the profession here, the more I am inclined to think it might be worth while for the Mater to come in to town. ”

Mona did not answer for a minute or two. She was trying to intensify her recollections of Mrs Reynolds's somewhat mysterious illness.

“I think it is extremely likely,” she said at last.

“I would take her to Dr Bateson, get her to go into the case thoroughly, and then choose any specialist she liked—man or woman—to consult with. Don’t you think that would be wise?”

“Very.”

“It is perfectly awful to think how helpless people are who are quite outside the profession. I think it is worth while studying Medicine, if only to be able to tell your friends whom to consult,—or rather, whom not to consult.”

“I know. When I am low-spirited I brood over all the people whose deaths I might have prevented, if I had known what I know now. If I were a reformer, like Miss Lascelles, there is one change I would try to work in the profession. Every family able to pay for a doctor at all should give a yearly amount to some sharp-eyed, keen-witted, common-sense man or woman, who would keep an eye on the children, and detect the first trace of struma, or lateral curvature, or any of the neuroses. He need not be a great don at all. He must understand the dynamics of a vital organism in relation to its surroundings——”

“The *what?*” said Lucy.

“——know the value of iron and cod-liver oil; and, above all, see when the moment has arrived to send for a specialist. It seems to me that half the mistakes that are made would be prevented, if that plan were carried out.”

“Or you might adopt the Chinese system,—salary the doctor, and stop his pay when you get ill.”

Mona laughed. “The fact is, the public have not begun to realise yet how Medicine is specialised, and most doctors are afraid to tell them.”

There was a few minutes' silence.

“Edgar Davidson took me over St Kuni-gonde's yesterday,” said Lucy, presently.

“Who is Edgar Davidson?”

“I wish somebody would prescribe for your memory, Mona. Believe me, the moment has come, when your jog-trot, common-sense adviser” — she bowed — “suggests a specialist. Don't you remember the boy we met at Monte Carlo?”

“Oh yes, to be sure.”

“He is developing a very wholesome admiration for me.”

“I thought boy-worshippers were the special appanage of middle-aged women, like myself!”

“He is not such a boy, after all,” said Lucy, colouring slightly. “And all his worship is reserved for a wonderful fellow-student of his, whom he introduced to me yesterday — Dr Dudley.”

Mona rearranged her cushions.

“Do you still believe in nice men, Mona?”

“I always did.”

“Ah, that’s a pity. You will never know the joys of conversion.”

“Who has been converting the pessimist in the hammock?”

“Oh, I am a hopeless sceptic. But I like Dr Dudley all the same. He seems to have an awfully good influence on the students. He is a good deal older than they are, and he lives his life according to his own tastes, without posing as a saint or being mistaken for a muff. What I liked was his manner with those horrid dirty ‘casuals.’ And then he is just enough of a cynic to give an edge to it all.”

“I am afraid I am too old to appreciate cynics.”

“Poor soul!” said Lucy, in a tone of profound

commiseration. "Life is indeed a thing of the past for you. Cynics are the spice of the world. However, it seems to me the Mater should come up at once. It would not do for her to be here during the hottest of the summer. I will write to her this very day."

She proceeded to alight from the hammock as she spoke.

"By the way, Mona," she said, suddenly, "you must have seen Dr Dudley. He was Anatomy medallist."

"Yes," said Mona, and she said no more. She hoped the broad brim of her garden-hat would conceal the whiteness of her face.

This was almost the first time that any outsider had spoken to her of Dr Dudley, and she was amazed to find how strong was her sense of possession in him. It was very characteristic of her that, after the first moment of indignation, she scarcely blamed Dudley at all for his frigid greeting in Burlington Gardens. She realised vividly how things must look from his point of view—so vividly that, with that quick power of seeing both sides of a question which was her compensation for "not being a reformer," she saw also her own danger,

and cried out in her heart, "Whatever happens, let me not lose my pride!"

"I want you to come and have tea with me at the Hall on Saturday," Lucy said, when the friends met at hospital a few days later. "Knowing your love for what you are pleased to call 'sensuous beauty,' I have asked Edgar Davidson's sister to meet you. She has just come home from San Remo, and she really is the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life."

"I would go a long way to see a really beautiful woman," said Mona, laughing; "but I have a young friend whose swans show an awkward tendency to turn out ugly ducklings."

"Ah, well! wait till you see Miss Davidson."

And when Saturday afternoon came, Mona confessed that Lucy was right. There could be no doubt that Angela Davidson was a beauty. A winter in the South had banished every apparent trace of delicacy, while leaving behind a bloom that was really flower-like.

"Miss Reynolds tells me that Lady Munro is your aunt," she said to Mona. "Do you think she would mind my calling to thank her for her wonderful kindness to Edgar at Monte Carlo?"

“I am sure she would be delighted to see you,” Mona answered, warmly; “but I expect she has entirely forgotten the incident.”

“I shall not forget it as long as I live. Edgar never knew what it was to have a mother; and it seems as if people understood by a kind of instinct how terribly unwilling I was to leave him without a sister.”

“*A propos* of that,” said Lucy, “Miss Maclean is a co-medallist with Dr Dudley.”

Miss Davidson raised wondering eyes. “You must be awfully clever,” she said, simply.

“Oh no; I failed twice before I carried home the medal. Do you know Dr Dudley?”

She scarcely even blushed as she asked the question. She was delighted at her own assurance and self-possession.

The girl’s beautiful face lighted up. “I should think I did,” she said. “He has been the turning-point in my brother’s life. There is no one in the world to whom I owe so much as to Ralph Dudley.”

A curious pain shot through Mona’s heart. She had never experienced anything like it before, and it was gone before she could ask herself what it meant.

A few minutes later she rose to go.

“I am afraid it is taking a great liberty, with any one so busy and so clever,” Miss Davidson said, in her pretty childlike fashion, “but I should be so proud if you would come and see me next Thursday. Miss Reynolds has promised to come, and I am expecting some of my very best friends.”

“I will come with pleasure,” said Mona, quickly; and this time a more perceptible colour rose into her white forehead. She wanted to see this beautiful girl again, and—it would be interesting to know whether “Ralph Dudley” was one of her “very best friends.”

That night as she sat by the open window in the twilight, looking out on the lime-trees in the garden, the same unaccountable pain came over her, and she proceeded to analyse it mercilessly. For a long time she remained there with a deep furrow on her brow.

“I thought I had attained,” she said at last. “Were they all for nothing, those years of striving after the highest, with strong crying and tears? I thought I had attained, and here I am, at the end of it, only a commonplace, jealous woman after all!”

“Well,” said Lucy the next day, “did I exaggerate? or is she as sweet and as pretty as they make ’em now-a-days?”

“I think she is,” Mona said, reflectively. “But don’t introduce her to other people as a ‘sensuous beauty.’ The word is misleading in that connection.”

“So I suppose. I used it in strict accordance with your own definition.”

“No doubt; but you will find that, on hearing it, the popular imagination flies at once to a Rubens’ model.”

“I am so glad you promised to go and see her on Thursday. I was afraid you would not. When you were gone, I made her promise to ask Dr Dudley to meet us.”

“*Lucy!*”

“Why not? I like him, and it must be most refreshing to him, after all the learned women he meets, to have this ignorant, beautiful creature look at him with great worshipping eyes.”

“And you don’t mind her telling him that we wished to meet him?”

“Oh, she won’t do that. I told her not to breathe the words ‘medical student.’ It would

be enough to keep him away. A man does not go out to afternoon tea with the prospect of being waylaid on the threshold of the drawing-room by an advanced woman who invites him to 'forget sex.'"

But Mona was not listening.

"It is so schoolgirl, so undignified! I would not stoop to ask a mere acquaintance not to repeat something I had said."

But now it was Lucy's turn to fire up.

"And suppose she does repeat it?" she said. "Is it a crime to say one wants to meet a good and clever man, who is years and years older than one's self? If it is a crime, I can only say your influence over me for the last three years has been less elevating than I supposed. You have a perfect right to be inconsistent, Mona; but if you expect me to be inconsistent at the same moment, and on precisely the same lines, you might give me a little warning!"

CHAPTER LVI.

A LOST CHANCE.

“DR DUDLEY, let me introduce you to Miss Maclean.”

Almost any hostess would have effected that introduction under the circumstances. Ralph and Mona were the two people in the crowded little drawing-room who made their presence felt; who, unconsciously to themselves, suggested grave responsibilities on the part of their hostess; therefore by all means let them entertain each other.

Mona bowed, as she would have done to a stranger, and Dudley seated himself by her side. Without a moment's hesitation he began to discuss a book that lay on the table, and never had Mona admired his gift of utterance more. It was not that he said anything

peculiarly brilliant, but he talked so easily and fluently that even she could not tell whether his self-possession was real or assumed. She would have been in less doubt on the subject, perhaps, if she had trusted herself to meet his eye when he entered the drawing-room. As it was, she was determined not to be outdone, so for nearly half an hour the stream of conversation ran lightly on.

At length several people rose to go, and, in the slight stir this involved, Ralph and Mona were left alone and unnoticed for a moment, in the oriel window.

In an instant the conversation ceased and their eyes met.

“Dr Dudley,” Mona said impulsively, in a very low voice, “what have I done?”

The same honest eyes as of old—the eyes that had smiled and deceived him.

“Done?” he said coldly, with an accent of surprise. “Nothing whatsoever. I was under a stupid misapprehension as to the terms on which we stood; but I have long since seen my mistake. That is all.”

Even as he spoke, his lips quivered; a terrible struggle was concealed beneath the calm-

ness of his manner. One word more from her might have dragged aside the flimsy veil; but she, too, had her pride.

“Well, I am afraid I must go,” she said presently, as Miss Davidson returned to her remaining guests. “Don’t let me hurry you, Lucy; I must get that book you mentioned out of the library, Dr Dudley.”

She bowed to him with a frank cordiality that was far more cutting than his coldness, shook hands with her hostess, and went away. Lucy, of course, accompanied her, and Dudley was left to reap what he had sown.

But Mona could not bear even Lucy’s society to-day, and she made an excuse for parting from her before they had gone many hundred yards. Then her lithe figure straightened itself defiantly.

“Two chances I have given him,” she said to herself; “and now, come what may, he shall make the third himself!”

When Mona came in from hospital a few days later, she was met by the announcement that a gentleman had called to see her, and had said he would return in the evening.

“Did he leave no name?” she asked in some surprise.

“No, ma’am, he said it was of no consequence.”

Mona bethought herself of Mr Reynolds.

“Was he an old gentleman?” she said.

“Oh no, ma’am; a youngish gentleman, tall and thin.”

Mona’s heart leaped. “Show him up to my sitting-room when he comes,” she said, quietly.

She went to her lecture as usual that afternoon, but found it difficult to give her full attention to the varieties, causes, and treatment of aneurism. The moment the class was over she hurried home, dressed with more than usual care, rearranged her flowers, dined without knowing what was on the table, and then seated herself in her rocking-chair with a book.

But she did not read. She proceeded to make a leisurely, critical survey of the room. It looked very pretty just then in the soft evening light, and at worst it was a picturesque, suggestive place.

She rose to her feet and redraped a curtain; then she glanced with satisfaction at the soft folds of her gown, and seated herself again with

a sigh. How sensible of him it was to come to her quietly, here in her own territory, where they could talk over everything thoroughly, and explain all misunderstandings!

A loud rat-tat-tat resounded through the house. Alas! she knew that imperious knock only too well! A minute later Sir Douglas and her aunt entered the room.

"You do look well," he said, holding her at arm's-length before he kissed her. "I never saw you with such a colour."

"And your rooms are so charming," said Lady Munro. "I like them a great deal better than ours in Gloucester Place."

Mona laughed. She was well used by this time to her aunt's figures of speech.

"We are on our way to dinner at the Lacys', and as we had ten minutes to spare——"

"For a wonder!" growled Sir Douglas.

"——Douglas was determined to look in upon you."

Mona smiled across brightly at her uncle, but she fervently hoped the ten minutes would be over before Dr Dudley arrived. It was at least fortunate that the engagement was dinner.

The ten minutes, however, still had half their

course to run when Mona heard a timid knock at the street-door.

"That can't be his," she said to herself. But she did not find it easy to preserve her self-control when she heard footsteps coming up-stairs.

A moment later the door was thrown open, and the parlour-maid announced—

"Mr Brown from Kilwinnie."

Mona's heart stood still, but the situation had to be faced.

"How kind of you to come and see me!" she said, going forward to meet him. "Aunt Maud, Uncle Douglas, this is my friend Mr Brown."

She laid the least possible deliberate emphasis on the words "my friend," and she turned to her uncle right proudly as she said them.

Sir Douglas had risen from his chair when she did, and now he bowed somewhat formally. The lines of his mouth were a little hard. Possibly he found it difficult to suppress a smile.

Mona made a motion of her hand towards an easy-chair, and Mr Brown seated himself on the edge of it, wiping his brow with a large silk handkerchief.

"I was coming up to town on business," he

said, shyly, "so I got your address from Mrs Easson."

"Oh yes. How is Mrs Easson?"

"She wasn't very well a week or two back, but she seems pretty much in her usual again."

Mona turned to her aunt. "Mr Brown is a fellow-enthusiast of mine on the subject of botany," she said. "He is the greatest living authority on the fauna and flora of the district in which he lives. I want him to write a book on the subject."

"Indeed!" said Lady Munro, with a pretty assumption of interest.

Mr Brown shook his head. "No, no," he said, "Professor Bristowe was saying that; but you would need to be familiar with the whole county before you could write a book it would be worth while reading, and I never have time to get very far. It's only once a-week that I can get an afternoon away from the shop, and now I shall have less time than ever." He looked rather sheepishly at Mona, and added, "They've just over-persuaded me to take the Provostship."

"I am glad to hear they have shown so much sense," she answered, cordially. "I don't know

whether you are to be congratulated or not, but I am quite sure they are."

"Oh, I don't know that. They could easily have got somebody who was more of a hand at speeches, but they would take no refusal, so to say."

There was a pause.

"I suppose you have just come up to town?" Sir Douglas remarked, affably; and Mona looked at him with infinite gratitude.

"I came up last night." He looked again at Mona. "I was here once before, to-day."

She smiled. "I heard that somebody had called, but I did not know it was you. I am sorry you had the trouble of coming twice. I suppose you find London a great deal warmer than Kilwinnie?"

"It's warm everywhere just now." He turned to Sir Douglas, with an idea that his next remark was peculiarly suited to masculine ears. "It's very poor weather for the turnips."

"Ah! I suppose it is," Sir Douglas said, so genially that Mr Brown took courage, and looked at Mona's aunt.

Lady Munro's Indian shawl had fallen back, and the draper made a mental valuation of her

heavy silk dress. It would be no use keeping a thing like that in his shop. Then his eye fell on Sir Douglas, and for the first time in his life he realised that a man could wear evening-dress without making a fool of himself. From the easily fitting swallow-tail his eye passed to the spotless, dazzling shirt-front, and, with something of a blush, he pulled the sleeves of his tweed coat over the cuffs which his sister had so carefully trimmed before he left home.

“I am afraid we shall have to go,” Lady Munro said, glancing at Mona’s carriage clock; and, as she rose, she looked somewhat pointedly at Mr Brown.

The hint was lost on him, however. He bowed awkwardly to Lady Munro, and waited till Mona returned to the sitting-room.

“Miss Maclean,” he blurted out hastily, “you will be disposed to laugh at me when I tell you I came here to ask you to be my wife. I knew you were far above me, but I had no notion of the like of this. You’ve no need to tell me that it can never be, but if ever you stand in need of a plain man’s friendship, you know who to come to.”

He held out his hand, forgetful of the frayed

cuff, and Mona's eyes filled with tears as she took it.

"It is true it can never be, Mr Brown," she said—"not because I am above you, but because I don't love you as a good woman will some day. But I shall be proud and grateful, as long as I live, to think that so good a man has honoured me with his love."

She went with him to the door, and with a few commonplace words they parted.

For the first time in her life Mona felt something of a contempt for Dr Dudley.

"What a fool I am," she thought, "to break my heart for you, when at least two greater men have wanted to make me their wife!"

But, even as she spoke, she knew that her words were not perfectly just.

CHAPTER LVII.

HAVING IT OUT.

LUCY had taken rooms for her mother in an unpretentious square in Bloomsbury, and Mr Reynolds had gladly agreed to spend his short summer holiday with his wife and daughter in London. Dr Alice Bateson had called the day after their arrival, and had gone into the case very thoroughly.

“There is no doubt that your mother must have an operation,” she had said to Lucy, in her brusque fashion, “but it is nothing that need make you unhappy. So far as one can see, the chances are all in her favour, and she will be a different being when it is over. I would like her to rest, and take a tonic for a week or so, in order to get up her strength as much as possible ; but I should not advise her to postpone it any longer than that.”

Lucy was in great spirits. "What say you to that, Daddy," she cried, "as the first-fruits of your investment in me? We shall see Mother on the top of Snowdon before the summer is over."

"I think we shall be glad to rest content with something short of that," he said smiling, and stroking his wife's soft hair.

The operation was successfully accomplished in due course, and as soon as Mrs Reynolds was well on the way to recovery, Lucy insisted on taking her father about "to see something of life," as she expressed it.

"I thought I knew the full extent of your aunt's fascination," she said to Mona, when the latter came in one day with a basket of hothouse fruit for the invalid, "but I do wish you had seen her with Father when we called. She was a perfect woman, and a perfect child. He was awfully impressed—thinks in his heart that she is thrown away on Sir Douglas, which, in the immortal words of Euclid, is absurd. Lady Munro told me afterwards that Father made her wish she could go back and live her life all over again. 'It is so strange,' she said, with ex-

quisite frankness, 'that he should be your father!' '“Degeneration, a Chapter on Darwinism,” in fact?' I suggested; but she only smiled sweetly and said, 'What *do* you mean, child?'"

"Was Sir Douglas at home?"

"He came in for a few minutes at the end. He and my father got on all right. Of course they only met as——" she paused.

"Of course—as two men of the world."

"Do you call my father a man of the world?" Lucy asked, surprised and pleased.

"Assuredly."

"Of this world, or the other?"

Mona raised her eyes slowly. "Looked at from your father's point of view, it is a little difficult to say where this world ends and the other begins. He would tell you that this is the other world, and the other world is this."

"No, indeed, he would not. Father never gets on to the eternal with me."

This was rather a sore point with Lucy, so she hastened on, "Do you know, your aunt's 'At Home' is going to be no end of an affair?"

"Is it?"

"Yes; I am in a state of wild excitement. Father is giving me a new gown."

"I am frivolling shamefully this week," Mona said. "I have promised to go to the Bernards' at Surbiton from Saturday to Monday. I don't think I ought to go to my aunt's as well."

"Tell Sir Douglas that! By the way, while you are here, you might cast your eagle eye through that microscope, and tell me what the slide is. I forgot to label it at the time, and now I can't spot it."

Mona bent over Lucy's writing-table in the window. "I suppose you are not used to picrocarmine," she said. "It is only a 'venous congestion,' but it is cut far too thick. I can give you a much better one."

"Just scribble 'venous congestion' on the label, will you? before I forget again. Now I think of it, Miss Clark told me it must be 'venous congestion,' because that was the only red one we had mounted on a large slide! You will be shocked to hear, Mona, that I made Father take me to hear Dr Dudley lecture last night. That man's voice is worth a fortune!"

"*Far* too thick," repeated Mona, with unnecessary emphasis. "You can make out nothing with the high power at all. Where was he lecturing?"

“To his Literary Society. Angela Davidson sent a note to tell me. It really was magnificent—on *The Rose in Tennyson*.¹ I thought I knew my Tennyson, but Dr Dudley’s insight seemed to me perfectly wonderful. He was showing how, all through Tennyson’s poems, the red rose means love, and he showed it in a thousand things I had never thought of before. He began with *The Gardener’s Daughter*, and with simple idyllic quotations, like—

‘Her feet have touched the meadows,
And left the daisies rosy.’

And he showed us how the whole world becomes a rose to the lover. You know the passage, beginning, ‘Go not, happy day.’ Then he worked us gradually on to the tragedy of love,—

‘I almost fear they are not roses, but blood.’

It made one’s flesh creep to hear him say that. And again triumphantly,—

‘The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire.’

Then he took us by surprise, passed beyond

¹ The following sketch was suggested by a very beautiful but as yet unpublished paper, by a friend of the author.

human love altogether, and ended up with God's rose :—

‘ At last I heard a voice upon the slope
Cry to the summit, “ Is there any hope ? ”
To which an answer pealed from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand ;
And on the glittering limit far withdrawn
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn ; ’

I did not understand it all ; but, when he stopped, I found my eyes were full of tears, and Father was so struck that he went up to speak to Dr Dudley before we came away.”

Mona said nothing. What would she not have given to have heard that paper !

“ But here comes Dad,” Lucy went on. “ Father, I want you to tell Mona about that lecture last night.”

“ Your mother wants you, dear,” he said, laying his hand on her shoulder, and then he seated himself by the open window.

“ Yes, I confess I was very much struck,” he said. “ One rarely meets with such fine—*appreciation*. It seems to me that young man will make his mark. I should greatly like his help with a little bit of work I am doing on Wordsworth just now, so I asked him to

come and see me some evening. He promised very cordially to do so to-morrow, and now I want him to meet my elder daughter. If you can spare the time, I am sure you would enjoy hearing him talk. Will you come?"

Mona retained sufficient presence of mind to wonder whether it was worth while trying to conceal how far she had lost it, and then she turned her white face to Mr Reynolds.

"I think I had better not come," she said, rather breathlessly. "I—know Dr Dudley."

Nay, verily! If ever they met again, it should be by no doing of hers.

"Just as you please, dear, of course."

She was a little surprised that Mr Reynolds asked no questions. She did not know that she had already given him the remaining links of her story, and that the chain in his mind was now practically complete.

All through the lecture on the previous evening, Dudley had wondered vaguely to whom the grand white head belonged, and when the owner of it came up at the close, and told him how much he had enjoyed the evening, Dudley felt the compliment much

more keenly than most clever young men would have done. He was drawing sufficiently near the farther boundary of youth to dread the advance of age; and his love and admiration for Mrs Hamilton made a warm corner in his heart for all old people.

He arrived early on the evening of his appointment, and knocked at the door with a good deal of pleasant anticipation. The Reynolds seemed to have brought with them to London the atmosphere of their country home. The room was sweet with old-fashioned flowers, tea and fruit and home-made cake were laid out on the spotless cloth, and the windows were opened wide on a world of green. Moreover, the very sight of Mr Reynolds's refined and beautiful face seemed to throw the dust and turmoil of the world outside into the far distance. Petty aims lost half their attraction, the ideal became more real, when one entered that plain little room. "Is this really London?" Dudley said, as he shook hands with the invalid on the sofa.

"I am happy to say it is," she answered, smiling. "London has done great things for me."

“That is right. We hear so much of its misdeeds now-a-days that it is refreshing to be brought in contact with the other side of the question.”

In a few minutes Lucy came in, bright and smiling. Dudley had not noticed her with her father at the lecture, and her relationship to the saintly old clergyman was as great a surprise to him as it had been to Lady Munro.

“How I wish I had asked Mona to come in!” she exclaimed, as she seated herself in front of the tea-tray.

No one answered, but Mr Reynolds glanced at his visitor's face.

“You know who I mean,” Lucy went on, turning to Dudley, “my friend Miss Maclean. You were talking to her for a long time at the Davidsons' the other day. Is not she awfully clever?”

“Particularly, I should think.”

There was no sneer in the words, but the frank, almost boyish simplicity, which had come so naturally to Dudley a few minutes before, was gone.

“‘Her price is far above rubies,’” quoted Mr Reynolds, quietly.

It was Dudley's turn now to raise his eyes, and glance quickly at his host.

Whenever there was a pause in the conversation, Lucy had some fresh tale to tell about Mona. This was nothing new with her, and Mr Reynolds made no effort to prevent it. He thought it a fortunate chance that, without a hint from him, she should thus unconsciously play so effectually into his hands. He could scarcely tell whether Dr Dudley found the conversation trying or not, but there could be no doubt that the young man was profoundly interested.

“Do you know Sir Douglas Munro?” he said suddenly to Lucy.

“Oh yes, very well indeed. Do you?”

“I met him accidentally, a year or two ago, and the other day I called to ask him to give me his votes for a case I am trying to get into the Incurable Hospital. He was very cordial, and asked me to a musical evening at his house to-morrow.”

“Oh, do go! It is going to be splendid, and I expect you will hear Miss Maclean sing. She has such a sympathetic voice.”

Wordsworth received but scant justice when

the two men retired to Mr Reynolds's study. Each felt strongly the spiritual kinship of the other, and they talked as men rarely do talk at a first or second meeting.

"I have stayed an unconscionable time," Ralph said at last, "and I hope you will let me come again. I can scarcely tell you what you have done for me. You have made me feel that 'the best is yet to be.'"

Mr Reynolds did not answer immediately. When he did, it was to say somewhat dreamily—

"But I need now as then,
Thee, God, who moulded men."

I wish I had your voice, Dr Dudley. With such an organ, and with such a faith, you ought to be able to move mankind."

"Faith?" repeated Dudley; "I am not overburdened with that."

"By faith I did not mean creed. I was thinking of your paper the other evening."

Dudley winced. "That paper was not written yesterday," he said. "I had neither the heart nor the energy to write another, so I

'Gored mine own thought, sold cheap what is most dear.'

Greater men than I have preached to-day the

faith of yesterday, in the hope that it might return to-morrow. But I am afraid that sort of faith never does return."

"Had you built your house upon the sand?"

Ralph coloured. He could not honestly say that.

"Dr Dudley," said the old man, quietly, "you and I have been disposed to trust each other to-night. Before you go, there is one thing I want to tell you. You know that Miss Maclean is my daughter's friend. I don't know whether you are aware that she is as dear to me as my own child; that outside my own small family circle there is no woman living in whom I am so deeply interested. I invited her to meet you this evening, and she refused. If you had not made me respect you, I should not ask you, as I do now, to tell me why she refused?"

Dudley's face was a battle-field of conflicting emotions.

"What has she told you about me?" he said at last.

"She has never mentioned your name." Mr Reynolds hesitated; and then made up his mind to risk all, and go on. "One day I was praising her steadfastness of purpose in remain-

ing in her uncongenial surroundings at Borrowness, and she told me, with an honesty of which I am not sure that you and I would have been capable, that—the people she met were not all uncongenial. She spoke as a girl speaks who has never thought of love or marriage; but her words conveyed more to my mind than they meant to her.”

Vague as Mr Reynolds's words were, he could have chosen no surer key to unlock Ralph's heart. A vivid picture of the old idyllic days at Castle Maclean flashed across his mind, and with it came an almost unbearable sense of regret. Oh, the pity of it! the pity of it!

“I will tell you!” he burst out suddenly. “God knows it will be a relief to speak to any man, and I believe you will understand. Besides, I *owe* an explanation to somebody who cares for her. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have thought nothing of it, but to me it was *just everything*. If she failed me there, she failed me everywhere. One could reason about a crime, but you can't reason about a subtle thing like that. It is in the grain of a man's mind. If it strikes you, it strikes you; and if it doesn't strike you, it doesn't strike you;

and that's final. It is everything or nothing. And the worst of it is, that as things stand, I have wronged her horribly, and I can't put it right. If she were an ordinary woman it would be a matter of honour to ignore it all, and ask her to be one's wife ; but she is Miss Maclean. If one has any *arrière pensée*, one must at least have the decency to let things alone, and not insult her farther."

In the course of Mr Reynolds's experience as a clergyman he had heard many incoherent confessions, but he had rarely listened to one which left him so completely in the dark as this. His face betrayed no perplexity, however, as he said, "Tell me how you met her, and where."

Then by degrees the truth began to dawn upon him. With bitter self-mockery, Dudley told the story of his doubt as to whether he could marry a "shop-girl"; told how his passion grew till it swept away all obstacles ; and then he just hinted at what took place that stormy night when he brought her home from the wood.

"And you told her you loved her?" The words were spoken very quietly and as a matter of course.

Dudley's face flushed more deeply.

"I think we had both risen pretty well above the need of words that night," he said, with a nervous laugh. "When an electric spark passes between two spheres—— You see, I was weighed down by the feeling that I had wasted my life; this London course was a sort of atonement; and I would not ask a woman to be my wife till I had at least left all schoolboy work behind me. But that night I forgot myself."

"And when you met her next——?"

"I left Borrowness the next day." Dudley's lip curled. "Our next meeting was a fine dramatic tableau at Burlington House, a modern version of the sudden transformation of Cinderella."

"But you had written to her?"

Dudley shook his head. "I had told her—before that night—that I should not be a free man till my examination was over in July. She was so quick; she always seemed to understand. But when I went down to Borrowness, half mad with longing for her—her cousin had gone to America, and Miss Maclean, I was told, was starting for Switzerland with a party of friends!"

“Did you write to her then?”

“I did not know her address. And it was no use *writing* about a thing like that. Then came my aunt's long illness. She was the best friend I had in the world, and she died.”

He paused, and resumed with a sudden change of tone, “Miss Maclean told me her name was Margaret.”

“Margaret is her second name.”

“Of course I know,” Dudley broke out again vehemently, “that thousands of men would treat the whole affair as a joke; would be glad to find that the woman they loved had money and position, after all; but I cared for Miss Maclean on a plane above that. It drives me mad to think how she sat looking at me with those honest eyes, listening to my confessions, and playing her pretty little comedy all the time.”

Mr Reynolds waited in vain for Dudley to go on before he spoke.

“Did it ever occur to you that Miss Maclean's cousin might have asked her not to tell any one that she was a medical student?”

There was a pause.

“Why should she?” Dudley asked, harshly.

“ *Why* she did it I presume was best known to herself—though, considering the kind of person she seems to have been, it does not strike me as particularly surprising; but one thing I am in a position to say unhesitatingly, and that is, that she *did* do it.”

Another long pause.

“ Even if she did,” Dudley said, “ what was a trumpery promise like that between her and me, if she loved me ? ”

“ Perhaps you did not give her much opportunity to speak of herself; but when I saw her in October, she certainly did not love any man. Whether you taught her to love you afterwards, you are of course the best judge. I do not think she was bound to tell you before she knew that you loved her; and, judging from your own account of what took place, you do not seem to have made it very easy for a self-respecting woman to tell you afterwards.”

Little by little the truth of this came home to Ralph, as he sat with his eyes fixed on the glowing embers of the fire.

Mr Reynolds gave his words time to take full effect, and then went on.

“When I think how you have made that sensitive girl suffer, Dr Dudley, I am tempted to forget that I owe my knowledge of the circumstances entirely to your courtesy.”

Ralph looked up with a rather wintry smile.

“Don’t spare me,” he said. “Hit hard!” And then there was another long silence.

“The one thing I cannot explain,” said Mr Reynolds, “is her telling you that her name was Margaret.”

“Oh, that’s simple enough. It was in early days. I was talking of the name in the abstract, and she said it was hers; I daresay she never thought of the incident again; and then I saw it in her prayer-book—her mother’s, no doubt. Mr Reynolds, I have been a blind fool; but I do think still that she ought to have told me.”

“Since the old man has your permission to hit hard, you will allow me to say, that I think you do not realise how far injured pride has a share in your righteous indignation; but I have no wish to convince you. I would fain see my ‘elder daughter’ the wife of a nobler man.”

Ralph smiled in spite of himself.

“That certainly is delivered straight out from the shoulder!” he said; “but do you think it is quite just? Every man is exacting on certain points. That was mine. But I am not a savage. No woman on earth should be so free and so honoured as my wife.”

Mr Reynolds rose and held out his hand.

“It is midnight,” he said, “and I have no more to say. Go home and think about it.”

But when Ralph left the house, it was not to go home, but to pace up and down the squares, in such a tumult of excitement and thanksgiving as he had never known before.

CHAPTER LVIII.

“LOVE MAY GO HANG!”

LADY MUNRO'S "At Home" proved, as Lucy had predicted, "no end of an affair." Sir Douglas considered it snobbish to entertain on a scale beyond the resources of his own *ménage*; but, if the thing was to be done, he would at least have it done without any visible straining on the part of host and hostess. So the rooms at Gloucester Place were given over to the tender mercies of Liberty and Gunter for a day or two, and during that time most people found it advisable to keep out of Sir Douglas's way.

When Mona alighted from her cab on the expanse of crimson drugget before the door, she would not have recognised her aunt's rooms. The half lights, the subtle Eastern aroma, and the picturesque figure of Nubboo had dis-

appeared, giving place to a blaze of pretty lamps, festoons of æsthetic drapery, profuse vegetation, and groups of magnificent footmen.

“Come along, Mona!” Evelyn cried, impatiently. “Lucy has been here for half an hour. I was so afraid you would be too late to see the rooms before the bloom is knocked off them. The supper-table is simply a dream.”

“*Bless my soul!*” said Lucy, in an awe-struck whisper, as Mona threw off her cloak. “You do look imposing! Mary Stuart going to the scaffold is not in it. I don’t think I ever saw you in black before. If only you would show a little more of that swan-white neck and arms, I honestly believe this would be the achievement by which you would live in history.”

“The fact is,” Mona said, laughing, “it has been borne in upon me lately that the youthfulness of my appearance now-a-days is dependent on the absence from the stage of sweet seventeen; so I resolved, like Sir Walter Scott, to strike out in a new line. I aim at dignity now. This”—she glanced over her shoulder at the stately figure in the pier-glass—“is my *Waver-*

ley. I flatter myself that you young Byrons can't compete with me here.”

“No, indeed! Schoolgirl is the word,” Lucy said, ruefully stepping in front of Mona to survey her own pretty gown in the pier-glass; but this was so palpably untrue that they all laughed.

“I am sure you looked dignified enough in the blue velvet. I wonder you did not wear your diamonds, Mona, while you were about it?”

“I wanted to, but I did not dare to do it without asking Uncle Douglas, and he would not hear of such a thing. The old darling! He sent me these white orchids to make up. I must go and let him see how they look, before people begin to arrive.”

But Sir Douglas was only half pleased with Mona's gown.

“It is all very well in a crowd like this, perhaps,” he said, “but don't wear that dowager plumage when we are by ourselves.”

An hour later the rooms were full, and a crowd had gathered in the street below to listen to the music, and to catch an occasional glimpse of fair faces and dainty gowns.

Several professional singers had been engaged,

but when most of the people had gone down to supper, and the music-room was half empty, Sir Douglas begged Mona to sing.

“We want something to rest our nerves,” he said, “after all that. Sing that little thing of Beethoven’s.”

He had heard her singing it in her own room one day, when she did not know he was within hearing, and the pathetic song had been a favourite with him ever since.

It was a fine exercise in self-control, and Mona accepted it. The excitement of the evening raised her somewhat above the level of her own personality, and she thought she could do justice to the pathos of the song without spoiling it by feeling too much.

“But if thy vow weary thee now,
Though I should weep for thee, come not to me.”

The door of the music-room stood open, and it was fortunate for the success of her song that the last wailing notes had died away before she caught sight of a figure on the landing, reflected in the mirror opposite.

In an instant the sympathetic pleading look went out of her face; she struck a few defiant

chords, and launched into Moore's quaint, piquant little melody:—

“When Love is kind, cheerful, and free,
Love's sure to find welcome from me;
But when Love brings heartache and pang,
Tears and such things, Love may go hang!

If Love can sigh for one alone,
Well-pleased am I to be that one;
But if I see Love giv'n to rove
To two or three,—then good-bye, Love!

Love must, in short, keep fond and true,
Through good report and evil too;
Else here I swear young Love may go,
For aught I care, to Jericho!”

She sang with great *verve*, and of course there was a storm of applause as she finished.

Ralph, looking on, could scarcely believe his eyes and ears. Was she thinking of him? Had his love brought her heartache and pang? He would fain have persuaded himself at that moment that it had; but the very idea of such a thing seemed ridiculous as he looked at her now.

What a chameleon she was! Ever since his conversation with Mr Reynolds the night before, he had pictured her looking up in his face with that sweet half-childlike expression, “Dr

Dudley, what have I done?" and here she was, cold, brilliant, self-possessed, surrounded by a group of men of the world, and apparently very much at her ease with them.

"Why, Mona!" Sir Douglas said, laying his hand on her arm.

It was a pretty sight to see how her face changed.

"Don't be angry," she said coaxingly, turning away from the others. "We have had nothing but sentiment all evening, and it proved nauseous at last."

"We will discuss that another time. Come now and have some supper."

Dudley escaped into the adjoining room. He felt positively jealous of Sir Douglas.

"What the deuce did I come here for?" he said, looking round the sea of unknown faces. He would not own, even to himself, that he had come in the hope of having a long talk with Mona. But just then he caught sight of Lucy Reynolds, and went up to speak to her.

"Oh, Dr Dudley, I am so glad to see you," she said, eagerly.

This was very soothing, and Ralph seated himself on a vacant chair beside her.

“I hope your father may be able to say the same when I meet him next. I am afraid I proved a heavy strain on his endurance last night.”

“Oh no! I will spare your blushes, and not tell you what father said of you at breakfast this morning.”

But this remark had not the desired effect of sparing Ralph's blushes.

“Do you know many people here?” he asked.

“No, I am rather out of it.”

“So am I. It was quite refreshing to see a face I knew.”

“Have you seen Miss Maclean?”

“I have heard her sing. She seems to be greatly in requisition.”

“Well, of course she is practically a daughter of the house, and Miss Munro is so young.”

“May I have the pleasure of taking you down to supper?”

“Thank you, I have promised to go with Mr Lacy. Here he comes.”

And Ralph was left alone once more. He could not tear himself away from the house till he had seen Mona again; and, while he waited, he suddenly espied his friend Jack Melville.

“How in the world do you come to be here?” he asked, surprised.

“If I had not been well brought up, dear boy, I should repeat the question. As it is, with characteristic complaisance I answer it. I am here, firstly, because I cherish a hopeless passion for Lady Munro; secondly, because my cousins were kind enough to bring me.”

“I did not know you knew the Munros.”

“My acquaintance with them is not profound. It is enough to see Lady Munro, and hear her speak. She is simply perfect; at least I thought so until I was introduced to her niece. Jove! Ralph, that is a stunning girl!”

Ralph did not answer.

“Did you see her sing?”

“I heard her.”

“Ah, but you should have seen her. She changed completely when she sang that first thing. She has a face like your *Nydia*.”

At this moment Mona entered the room on her uncle's arm. She was, as Ralph had said, very much in requisition, and it was almost impossible to get a chance to speak to her. Ralph was very pale with excitement. Convinced as he now was that he had inflicted

a great deal of unnecessary suffering, possibly on her, and certainly on himself, he would not have found it easy to face even Miss Simpson's assistant. How, then, was he to address this woman of the world, who sat there so thoroughly at ease in her own circle, so utterly regardless of him?

Ralph watched his opportunity, however, and when Mona rose, he took his courage in both hands.

“Miss Maclean,” he said, in a low voice, “will you allow me to see you to your carriage?”

“Thank you very much,” she said, simply, “but I have promised to stay here all night.”

Ralph bit his lip. No, certainly she had not been thinking of him when she sang that song.

He made a few commonplace remarks, to which Mona replied quietly, but it was maddening work trying to talk to her in that crowd, and he soon gave up the attempt in despair. To-morrow, thank heaven! he could see her alone.

“Have not you had enough of this, Jack?” he said to his friend. “I vote we go home.”

“Done! Let's go and have a smoke.”

When the two men entered Dudley's sitting-room, Jack walked straight up to the *Nydia* on the wall.

"There!" he said, triumphantly. "Miss Maclean might have stood for that."

"Or you might!" said Ralph, scornfully.

But when his friend was gone, he owned to himself that there was a superficial resemblance to Mona in the contour of the face, and in the breadth of movement suggested by the artist. Ralph laid down his meerschaum and walked across the room to look at it.

The blind girl was carrying roses — white roses—all white. One red rose had been among them, but it had fallen unheeded to the ground, and would soon be trodden under foot on the tessellated pavement. Why had she dropped the red rose? She could ill spare that.

And then a curious fancy came upon him, and he asked himself whether Mona too had dropped her red rose. She had seemed so cold, so self - possessed, so passionless. Did the red rose lie quite, quite behind her? Was it already withered and trampled under foot, or could he still help her to pick it up again?

“Oh, my love, my love,” he said, “you don’t really care for all those men! You do belong to me, don’t you? don’t you?”

But at this point Ralph’s thoughts became incoherent, if indeed they had not been so before.

To-morrow, at least, thank God! she would be out of the din and crowd; to-morrow he could see her alone, and say whatever he would.

CHAPTER LIX.

AT LAST!

NEITHER Ralph nor Mona slept much that night.

Mr Reynolds had said nothing to his "elder daughter" about his conversation with Dr Dudley. He had sufficient confidence in her absolute honesty to believe that she would do herself more justice if she were taken unprepared; but Ralph's manner at the Munros' had been a revelation in itself, and Mona felt sure that night that, for better or worse, some great change had taken place in his feelings towards her.

"Let me not lose my pride!" she cried. "Nothing can alter the fact that he has treated me cruelly—cruelly."

She had promised to go down to Surbiton

to spend a day or two with a fellow-student, and, unwilling as she was to leave London at this juncture, she determined to keep her promise to the letter.

So when Ralph knocked at her door in the early afternoon, he was met by the news that she had gone to the country till Monday. She had started only a few minutes before, and had left no address; but the maid had heard her tell the cabman to drive to Waterloo.

Two minutes later Ralph was tearing through the streets in a hansom. He had wasted time enough, fool that he was! Nothing should induce him now to wait another hour.

Just outside the station he met Lucy.

"Mona is starting for Surbiton," she said. "I am hurrying to catch a train at Cannon Street."

"Alone?"

Lucy did not ask to whom he referred. "Yes," she said.

"Thank you." He lifted his hat, and turned away without another word. With the reckless speed of a schoolboy he tore through the station, and overtook the object of his search as she passed inside the rail of the booking office.

“Two first-class tickets for Surbiton,” he said, before she had time to speak.

“One third-class return for Surbiton,” said Mona, with a dignity that strangely belied the beating of her heart.

“No hurry, sir,” said the man, stamping Mona’s ticket first. “You have three minutes yet.”

“I have got your ticket,” Dudley said, joining Mona on the platform. “You will come with me.”

The words were spoken almost more as a command than as a request.

(“Let me not lose my pride!”)

“Thank you very much,” she said; “I never travel first class.”

“You will to-day.”

Her only answer was to open the door of a third-class carriage.

Dudley bit his lip—then smiled. “Do you *prefer* a smoking-carriage?” he said.

She laughed nervously, and, moving on to the next, entered it without a word. Ralph longed to follow her, but he prudently thought better of it.

With punctilious courtesy he saw her into the

carriage; and then, closing the door, he lifted his hat and walked away.

Mona turned very pale.

"I cannot help it," she said. "He has treated me cruelly, and he cannot expect me to forget it all in a moment." But I think it would have done Ralph's heart good if he could have seen the expression of her face.

Very slowly the train moved off, but Ralph's lucky star must have been in the ascendant, for at the last moment a party of rough men burst open the door, and projected themselves into the carriage where Mona was sitting alone. They did not mean to be offensive, but they laughed and talked loudly, and spat on the floor, and fondled their pipes in a way that was not suggestive of prolonged abstinence from the not very fragrant weed.

At the first station Ralph opened the door.

"You seem rather crowded here," he said, in a voice of cold courtesy. "There is more room in a carriage farther along. Do you think it worth while to move?"

"Thank you," said Mona, and she rose and took his hand.

"Let me not lose my pride!" she prayed

again, but she felt, as she had done that night long ago in the shadow of the frosted pines, as if the earth was slipping away from under her feet.

He followed her into the carriage and closed the door. It was big with meaning for both of them, the sound of that closing door.

Neither spoke until the train had moved off.

“You need not have been so afraid to grant me an interview, Miss Maclean,” he said at length. “I only wished to ask your forgiveness.”

In one great wave the blood rushed over her face, and she held out her hand.

“Oh, Dr Dudley, forgive *me!*” she said.

“I want to,” he said, quite simply. “I have been far more to blame than you, but that is nothing. Tell me about it. Did our friendship mean nothing to you?—had I no claim upon your candour? Don’t look out of the window; look me in the face.”

“Dr Dudley,” she said, “you are so quick, so clever, did you not see? My cousin had asked me not to say that I was a medical student, and I had promised faithfully to do as she wished. It never entered my mind at

that time that I might want to tell any one down there, and—and—I did not know till that night at the fir-wood—— But I can't bear to have mysteries, even from my friends, and a dozen times I was going to ask her permission to tell you, but somehow I had not the courage. One morning, in the shop, after your first visit to Rachel, I wanted to tell you then, and risk her anger afterwards; but my heart beat so fast that I was ashamed to speak. Don't you see? It was one of those trifles that one thinks about, and thinks about, till one can't say or do them—like stopping to consider before jumping across an easy crevasse. And yet, let me say this one thing in my own defence. You can scarcely conceive how little opening you gave me, how absolutely you took me for granted."

An expression of infinite relief had come over his face while she was speaking; but now he winced and drew down his brows. "Don't!" he ejaculated, gloomily. Then he shook himself. "I retract that 'Don't,'" he said. "You shall say what you please. Your touch is a great deal gentler than my boundless egotism deserves."

“It was not egotism,” Mona said, recovering her self-possession in a moment, with a pretty toss of her head. I will not be cheated out of the gracefulest compliment that ever was paid to me. I should have been dreadfully hurt if you had told me I was out of perspective.”

“Your reading is the correct one,” said Dudley, gravely. “You are perfectly right.”

But his own confession was still to make, and he was determined not to make it by halves.

“In the course of our acquaintance, Miss Maclean,” he began somewhat stiltedly, “you have known me in the threefold capacity of snob, fool, and child.”

“In the course of our acquaintance,” Mona interrupted, hastily, “I have known you in the threefold capacity of teacher, friend, and——”

“And what?”

She laughed. “Memory fails me. I don’t know.”

His eyes glowed like fire.

“Don’t you?” he said, with a tremor in his beautiful voice. “*Come and learn!*”

He rose and held out his arms.

Mona tried to laugh, but the laugh died away on her lips; she looked out of the window, but

the landscape swam before her eyes; even the noisy racketing of the train sank away into the background of her perception, and she was conscious of nothing save the magnetism of his presence, and then of the passionate pressure of his arms. Her head fell back, and her beautiful lips—all ignorant and undefended—lay just beneath his own.

Oh human love! what are you?—the fairest thing that God has made, or a Will-o'-the-wisp sent to brighten a brief space of life's journey with delusive light? I know not. This I know, that when Ralph sent a kiss vibrating through Mona's being, waking up a thousand echoes that had scarcely been stirred before, the happiness of those two human souls was almost greater than they could bear.

CHAPTER LX.

ON THE RIVER.

MONA did not go to Surbiton, after all, that day. She telegraphed to her friend from Clapham Junction, and then she and Ralph took the train to Richmond.

“Let me take you for a pull on the river,” he had said. “I have never done anything for you in my life, and my arms just ache to be used in your service. Oh Mona, Mona, Mona! it seems too good to be possible that you are still the same simple, true-hearted girl that I knew at Castle Maclean. By the way, do you know that Castle Maclean is yours for life now? At least Carlton Lodge is, and only the sea-gulls are likely to dispute my princess’s claim to her battlements.”

He handed her into a boat, and rowed out into the middle of the river.

“Now,” he said, “you shall see what your slave’s muscles are worth.”

Like an arrow the little boat shot through the water in the sunshine, and Mona laughed with delight at the exhilaration of the swift rushing movement.

“That will do, Dr Dudley,” she said at last. “Don’t kill yourself.”

“I don’t answer to the name,” he said shortly, pulling harder than ever.

“Oh, do please stop!” she cried.

“Who is to stop?” he panted, determined not to give in.

There was a moment’s pause. A deep rosy colour settled on her eager face.

“Ralph,” she said, scarcely above a whisper.

The oars came to a standstill with a splash in the middle of a stroke, and Ralph leaned forward with a low delighted laugh. Then he sighed.

“You had no eyes for me last night, Mona,” he said.

“Had not I?”

“*Had you?*” very eagerly.

But when the language of looks and smiles begins, the historian does well to lay aside his pen. Are not these things written in the memory

of every man and woman who has lived and loved?

Not that there was any lack of words between them that day. They had such endless arrears of talk to make up; and a strange medley it would have sounded to a third pair of ears. Now they were laughing over incidents in their life at Borrowness, now exchanging memories of childhood, and now consulting each other about puzzling cases they had seen in hospital.

It was a long cloudless summer day, and for these two it was one of those rare days when the cup of pure earthly happiness brims over, and merges into something greater. Every simple act of life took on a fresh significance now that it was seen through the medium of a double personality; every trifling experience was full of flavour and of promise, like the first-fruits of an infinite harvest.

What is so hard to kill as the illusions of young love? Crushed to-day under the cynicism and the grim experience of the ages, they raise their buoyant heads again to-morrow, fresher and more fragrant than ever.

“I am going in to see Mr Reynolds for a few minutes,” Ralph said, as they walked home in

the twilight. "Do you know when I can see your uncle?"

"On Monday morning, I should think—not too early. I want to tell you about Sir Douglas. He never was my guardian, and two years ago I had not even seen him; but his kindness to me since then has been beyond all words. Whatever he says—and I am afraid he will say a great deal—you must not quarrel with him. He won't in the end refuse me anything I have set my heart on. You see, he scarcely knows you at all, and that whole Borrowness episode is hateful to him beyond expression."

And indeed, when Ralph called at Gloucester Place on Monday, Sir Douglas forgot himself to an extent which is scarcely possible to a gentleman, unless he happen to be an Anglo-Indian.

Ralph stated his case well and clearly, but for a long time Sir Douglas could scarcely believe his ears. When at last doubt was no longer possible, he sat for some minutes in absolute silence, the muscles of his face twitching ominously.

"By Jove! sir, you have the coolness of Satan!" he burst forth at last, in a voice of concentrated passion; and every word that

Ralph added to better his cause was torn to pieces and held up to derision with merciless cruelty.

The moment his visitor was out of the house, Sir Douglas put on his hat and went in search of Mona.

“It is not true, is it,” he said, “that you want to marry that fellow?”

So Mona told the story of how the clever young doctor fell in love with the village shop-girl.

“King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, in fact,” he sneered. “If that young whipper-snapper had had the impertinence to tell me that he thought you were really a shop-girl, I should have knocked him down on my own doorstep. Who is Dr Dudley? I never heard of him before.”

“I am afraid I am no authority on pedigrees,” Mona said, smiling. “But I have no doubt you could get the required information from Colonel Lawrence.”

To the last Sir Douglas maintained that he could not imagine what Mona saw in the fellow; but he came by degrees to admit to himself that things might have been worse. If Mona was

determined to practise Medicine, as was certainly the case, it was as well that she should have a man to relieve her of those parts of the work in which her womanhood was not an essential factor; and it was a great matter to think that he could have his niece in London under his own eye.

Jack Melville's opinion was characteristic.

"Well played, Ralph!" he exclaimed. "It just shows that one never ought to despair of a man. When you went down to Borrowness after your Intermediate, I could have sworn that the siren was going to have an easy walk over."

"I am glad you both had sense enough to settle it so quickly," Lucy said, phlegmatically, when Mona told her the news.

"Do you mean to say you suspected anything?"

"Suspected! I call that gratitude! The first time I saw Dr Dudley at St Kunigonde's, he said the surgery was as close as a Borrowness town-council room; and as soon as I mentioned him to you, I saw it all. I have been trying to bring you together ever since. *Suspect*, indeed! I can tell you, Mona, it was as well for my peace of mind that I did suspect."

“What a she-Lothario it is!”

“Don’t be alarmed,” said Lucy, loftily. “When I was a child I thought as a child, but—I have outgrown all such frivolities. I—I am to be the advanced woman, after all! When you and Doris are lost in your nurseries, I shall be posing as a martyr, or leading a forlorn-hope!”

CHAPTER LXI.

A *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* COURTSHIP.

IT was arranged that the wedding should take place as soon as Ralph and Mona had passed their M.B. examination in the October of the following year ; and during the fifteen months that intervened, they resolved to devote themselves with a whole heart to their studies, and if possible to forget that they were lovers.

“It would never do to fail at this juncture,” Mona said, when the first week of their engagement came to an end, “and I certainly shall fail if we go on living at this rate. I have a great mind to go to the Colquhouns’, and study at the Edinburgh School.”

This arrangement was rendered needless, however, by Dudley’s election as house-surgeon at St Kunigonde’s, — an appointment which left

him little time for reading, and less for any kind of recreation.

So they rarely saw each other more than once a week, and on these occasions Mona decreed that they should meet simply as good friends and comrades.

“For you must see, Ralph,” she said, “how easy it is to crowd the life and energy of seven days into that one weekly meeting.”

“Your will shall be law,” he said. “What a spending we shall have some day, after all this saving!”

But I doubt whether any man ever got more pleasure from his courtship than Ralph did. There was a very subtle delight about the pretty pretence that the touch of Mona’s hand meant no more than the touch of a friend’s; and, in proportion as she gave him little, he valued that little much.

So the winter passed away, and summer came round once more.

Doris’s marriage was to take place in August, and, a few weeks before the Sahib came to England to claim her, she went to London to visit Mona, and to order her outfit.

“I am just choosing my own things in my

few spare hours," Mona said, the day after her friend's arrival, "so we can go shopping together."

They were sitting at afternoon tea, and Lucy had run in to borrow a book.

"You don't mean to say," Doris said, in great surprise, "that you are having a *trousseau*? When one is going to India, of course one requires things; but at home—it is a barbarous idea."

"Dear Doris," Mona said, "what do you suppose I am marrying for?"

"Miss Colquhoun does not understand," said Lucy. "A *Trousseau* is a thing no medical practitioner can be without. See, there it stands in five goodly volumes on the second shelf,—particularly valuable on the subject of epilepsy."

"Lucy, do talk sense," said Mona, laughing.

"I appeal to any unbiassed listener to say whether I am not the only person present who is talking sense. But seriously, Miss Colquhoun, I wish I had a rich and adoring uncle. To have a *trousseau* like Mona's I would marry the devil!"

She set down her cup and ran away, before either of them could enter a protest.

“Will she ever really be a doctor?” Doris asked, doubtfully.

“Oh yes, indeed. Your presence seems to rouse a spirit of mischief within her, but you have no idea how she has developed. She will make a much better doctor than I shall. She would have been on the Register now but for her illness; as it is, she goes in with Ralph and me in October.”

“Are you going to get another medal?”

“Oh no,” Mona said, gravely. “I only aim at a pass, and I think I am pretty sure of that. There are fewer pitfalls than there were in the Intermediate for my mighty scientific mind. But we can talk of that another time. I want to hear about some one else now. Does your father really consent to your going to India?”

“Dear old Dad!” said Doris, smiling. “He is coming with us. He has not had a long holiday for years, and everybody goes to India now-a-days. When he comes back, I expect one of my aunts will keep house for him.”

“He will miss you sadly; but I am very glad the Fates are smiling so brightly on the dear old Sahib.”

Doris’s face flushed. “Do you know, Mona,”

she said, "it is a dream of mine that I may be of some use in India. Knowing you so well, I shall be a sort of link between the cause here and the cause there; and I may be able in a small way to bring the supply into relation with the demand. If only I were going out as a qualified practitioner!"

"Oh, Doris, Doris! don't you see that an enthusiast who has no connection with the movement, and who happens to be the wife of the Deputy-Commissioner, will be able to do far more than an average doctor?"

"Especially when the Deputy-Commissioner is as much of an enthusiast as his wife," Doris answered, with a very pretty blush.

"And I think it is worth living for to be able to show that a woman can be an enthusiast and a reformer, and at the same time a *helpmeet* for her husband."

Mona watched her friend rather anxiously as she said this, but Doris answered quite simply, "How often I shall long for you to talk to! The Sahib, as you call him, says that most of the women he meets out there have gone off on a wrong line, and want a little judicious backing before one can safely preach advancement to

them ; but it seems to me that the great majority of women only need to have things put before them in their true light. Don't you think so ?”

“ I don't know, dear,” Mona said, thoughtfully. “ I am afraid I never try to influence my sex. I live a frightfully irresponsible life. Let me give you another cup of tea ?”

“ No, thank you. I shall have to drink a cup with my aunt, if I go to pay my respects to her. In fact, I ought to be there now.”

She hurried away, and Mona was left alone. She did not rise from her chair, and half an hour later she was roused from a deep reverie by a well-known knock at the door.

“ Come in !” she cried. “ Oh Ralph, how delightful ! Let me make you some fresh tea.”

“ No, thank you, my queen. It was my day out, and I could not settle to work till I had had a glimpse of you.”

“ I don't need to confess that I have been doing nothing,” she said, holding out her empty hands. “ The fact is, I am horribly depressed.”

“ Having a reaction ?”

“ I should think I was—a prussian-blue reaction, as Lucy would say.”

“ Examination fever ?”

“Far worse than that. You see, dear, it’s a great responsibility to become a registered practitioner, and it’s a great responsibility to be married; and the thought of undertaking the two responsibilities at once is simply appalling.”

“But we are going away for a good holiday in the first instance; and even when we come back, brilliant as we both are, I don’t suppose we shall burst into busy practice all at once.”

“I am not afraid of feeling pulses and taking temperatures,” said Mona, gravely, “nor even of putting your slippers to the fire. The thought that appals me is, that one must hold one’s self up and look wise, and have an opinion about everything. No more glorious Bohemian irresponsibility: no more airy—‘Bother women’s rights!’ One must have a hand to show, and show it. Ralph, do sit down!—No, on the other side of the fire—and let us discuss the Franchise.”

“With all my heart. Shall we toss for sides?”

“*Meinetwegen*. I went once to a Women’s Suffrage conversazione, and—well, I left without signing a petition. But the next day I heard two young women discussing it, chin in air.

“‘I am interested in no cause,’ said one, ‘that excludes the half of humanity.’”

“‘As long as I live,’ said the other, ‘I prefer that men should open the door for me when I leave a room, or shut the window when I feel a draught.’

“I said nothing, but I put on my hat and set out to sign the petition.”

“And did you do it?”

“Sagely asked! No, I did not. I reflected that I had a student’s inherent right to be undecided; but that suit is played out now. Seriously, dear, it seems to me sometimes in my ignorance as if we women had gone half-way across a yawning chasm on a slender bridge. The farther shore, as we see it now, is not all that our fancy pictured; but it still seems on the whole more attractive than the one we have left behind. *Que faire?* We know that in life there is no going back; nor can we stand on the bridge for ever. I could not even advise, if I were asked. My attitude of mind on the subject would be best represented by one great point of interrogation. Only the future can show how the woman question is going to turn out, and in the meantime the making of the future lies in our own hands. There is a situation for you!”

She had opened the subject half in jest, but now her face wore the expression of intense earnestness, which in Dudley's eyes was one of her greatest charms. It interested him profoundly to watch the workings of her mind, and to see her opinions in the making. Perhaps it interested him the more, because it was the only form of intimacy she allowed.

"You must bear in mind," he said, "that every cause has to go through its hobbledehoy stage. The vocal cords give out dissonant sounds enough, when they are in the act of lengthening out to make broader vibrations; but we would not on that account have men speak all their lives in the shrill treble of boyhood."

"True," said Mona, "true;" and she smiled across at him.

Presently she sighed, and clasped her hands behind her head. "It must be a grand thing to lead a forlorn-hope, Ralph," she said. "It must be so easy to say, 'Here I stand,' if one feels indeed that one cannot do otherwise. It would be a terrible thing for the leaders of any movement to lose faith in the middle of the bridge, and, if we cannot strengthen their hands, we are

bound at least not to weaken them. A negative office, no doubt, and more liable than any partisanship to persecution; but, fortunately, here as everywhere, there is the duty next to hand. If we try to make the girls over whom we have any influence stronger and sweeter and sounder, we cannot at least be retarding the cause of women."

"Scarcely," said Ralph, with a peculiar smile. "So, to return to the point we started from, we are not called upon to show our hand, after all."

Mona laughed. "In other words, don't let us take stock of our conclusions, Ralph," she said, "for that is intellectual death."

CHAPTER LXII.

IN ARCADIA.

IT was a December afternoon. The sun shone down from a cloudless sky on the olive-woods of Bordighera, and Ralph lay stretched on a mossy terrace, looking up at the foliage overhead. It filled him with keen delight, that wonderful green canopy, shading here, as it did, into softest grey, glowing there into gold, or sparkling into diamonds. The air was soft and fragrant, and, away beyond the little town, he felt, though he could not see, the blue stretch of the Mediterranean. It seemed to him as though the stormy river of his life had merged into an ocean of infinite content. For the moment, ambition and struggle were dead within him, and he looked neither behind nor before.

The crackling of a dry twig made him turn round.

“Come along, sweetheart,” he said; “I have been lazily listening for your step for the last half-hour.”

“Then you began to listen far too soon,” she said, seating herself beside him, and putting her hand in his. “But I am a few minutes late. The post came in just as I was starting.”

“No letters, I hope?”

“Two for me—from Doris and Auntie Bell. I suppose you don’t care to read them?”

He shook his head. “Not if you will boil them down for me.”

“They had a delightful passage, and seem to be as happy as two human beings can be.”

“Nay, that we know is impossible.”

“Well, *nearly* as happy, let us say. Doris found my letter awaiting her at Bombay,—not the one that told of your ‘Double First’; but she was delighted to hear that we had all passed. She did not in the least believe that Lucy would.”

“Trust Miss Reynolds not to fail! One would as soon expect her to do brilliantly.”

“Doris says I am not to forget to tell her whether Maggie’s soups and sauces satisfy my lord and master.”

He laughed. "I seem to recognise Miss Colquhoun in that last expression. What does Auntie Bell say?"

"She would dearly like to come and visit us in London; but her husband seems to be breaking up, and she has everything to superintend on the farm; so she 'maun e'en pit her mind past it, in the meantime.' You will be interested to hear that Matilda Cookson has carried her point. She goes up for her Preliminary Examination in July; and, if she passes, she is to join the Edinburgh School in October."

"You are a wonderful woman."

"Oh, by the way, Ralph, they are having an impromptu dance at the hotel to-night."

His face clouded. "Do you like dancing?" he asked.

"Very much indeed. Why don't you claim me for the first waltz?"

"Because I can't dance a little bit. You would lose every atom of respect you have for the creature, if you saw him being 'led through a quadrille,' as they call it."

"Would I? *Try me!*"

What a wonderful face it was, when she let it say all that it would! Ralph took it very ten-

derly between his hands, and greedily drank in its love and loyalty. Then he turned away. How he loathed the thought of this dance! There were one or two men in the house whom Mona had met repeatedly in London, and the thought of her dancing with them gave him positive torture.

“Come, friend!” he said to himself roughly. “We are not going to enact the part of the jealous husband at this time of day;” but when he entered the *salon* that evening, some time after the dance had begun, and morbidly noted the impression made by Mona’s appearance there, he would gladly have given two years of his life to be able to waltz.

Of course he must look as if he enjoyed it, so he moved away, and spoke to an acquaintance; but above all the chatter, above the noise of the music, he could hear the words—

“May I have the honour of this waltz, Mrs Dudley?”

Very clearly, too, came Mona’s reply.

“Thank you very much, but I only waltz with my husband. May I introduce you to Miss Rogers?”

A few minutes later Dudley turned to where

his wife was sitting near the door,—his eyes dim with the expression a man's face wears when he is absolutely at the mercy of a woman. He could not bear the publicity of the ball-room, and he held out his arm to her without a word. Mona took it in silence. He wrapped a fleecy white shawl about her, and they walked out into the cool, quiet starlight.

“You do like this better than that heat and glare and noise?” he asked, eagerly.

“That depends on my company. I would rather be there with you than here alone.”

“Mona, is it really true,—what you said to that man?”

“That I only waltz with my husband? Oh, you silly old boy! Do you really think any other man has put his arm round me since you put yours that night in the dog-cart? Did not you know that you were teaching me what it all meant?”

He put it round her now, roughly, passionately. His next words were laughable, as words spoken in the intensity of feeling so often are.

“Sweetheart,” he said, “I am so sorry I cannot dance. I will try to learn when we go back to town.”

Mona laughed softly, and raised his hand to her lips.

“That is as you please,” she said. “Personally I think your wife is getting too old for that kind of frivolity. Of course she is glad of any excuse for having your arm round her.”

“It is a taste that is likely to be abundantly gratified,” he said, quietly. “Are you cold? Shall we go back to the hotel?”

“Yes, let us go to our own quiet sitting-room. And, please, be quite sure, Ralph, that I don’t care for dancing one bit. I used to, when I was a girl, and I did think I should love to have a waltz with you; but, as you say, this is a thousand times better.”

They walked back to the house in silence.

“Oh, Mona, my very own love,” he said, throwing a great knot of olive-wood on to the blazing fire, “what muddlers those women are who *obey* their husbands!”

Mona did not answer immediately. She seated herself on the white rug at his feet, and took his hands in hers.

“Obedience comes very easy to a woman when she loves,” she said at last,—“dangerously easy.”

I never realised it before. But passion dies, they tell us, and the tradition of obedience lives and chafes; and then the flood-gates of all the miseries are opened. Don't ever let me obey you, Ralph!"

"My queen!" he said. "Do you think I would blot out all the exquisite *nuances* of your tact and intuition with a flat, level wash of brute obedience? God help me! I am not such a blind bungler as that. Don't talk of passion dying, Mona. I don't know what it is I feel for you. I think it is every beautiful feeling of which my soul is capable. It cannot die."

"Ralph," said Mona, "man of the world, do I need to tell you that we must not treat our love in spendthrift fashion, like a mere boy and girl? Love is a weed. It springs up in our gardens of its own accord. We trample on it; but it flourishes all the more. We cut it down, mangle it, root it up; but it seems to be immortal. Nothing can kill it. Then at last we say, 'You are no weed; you are beautiful. Grow there, and my soul shall delight in you.' But from that hour the plant must be left to grow at random no more. If it is, it will slowly and gradually droop and wither. We must tend it,

water it, guard with the utmost care its exquisite bloom ; and then——”

“ And then ? ”

“ And then it will attain the perfectness and the proportions that were only suggested in the weed, and it will live for ever and ever.”

“ Amen ! ” said Ralph, fervently. “ Mona, how is it you know so much ? Who taught you all this about love ? ”

She smiled. “ I had some time to think about it after that night at Barntoun Wood. And I think my friends have very often made me their confidante. It is so easy to see where other people fail ! ”

CHAPTER LXIII.

“VARIUM ET MUTABILE.”

“You escaped us last night, Mrs Dudley,” said one of her acquaintances next morning.

“Yes. I wanted to watch the dancing; but the *salon* gets so warm in the evening, I could not stand it. We went for a stroll instead.”

“Neither of you gives us too much of your company, certainly. I am anxious to hear your husband’s opinion of a leader in this morning’s *Times*.”

“Here he comes, then,” said Mona, as Ralph appeared with a rug over his arm. “Captain Bruce wants to speak to you, dear. You will know where to find me by-and-by.”

She strolled on into the woods, and ensconced herself comfortably on a gnarled old trunk, to

wait for her husband. It was not many minutes before he joined her.

“That’s right!” he said, throwing himself on the grass at her feet, with a long sigh of content. “How you spoil one, dear, for other people’s conversation!”

“I have not had a very alarming competitor this morning,” she said, smiling.

“No; but if he had been an archangel, it would have made little difference. Go on, lady mine, talk to me—talk to me ‘at lairge.’ I want to hear your views about everything. Is not it delightful that we know each other so little?”

Mona laughed softly and then grew very grave.

“I hope you will say twenty years hence, ‘How delightful it is that we know each other so well!’”

“I will say it now with all my heart! But it is very interesting to live when every little event of life, every picture one sees, every book one reads, has all the excitement of a lottery, till I hear your opinion of it.”

Mona passed her hand through his hair. “Then I hope you will still say twenty years

hence, ‘How delightful it is that we know each other so little!’”

“I think there is little doubt of that. My conception of you is like a Gothic cathedral: its very beauty lies in the fact that one is always adding to it, but it is never finished. Or, shall I say of you what Kuenen says of Christianity?—‘She is the most mutable of all things; that is her special glory.’”

“*Varium et mutabile* in fact! It is a pretty compliment, but I seem to have heard it before.”

“*Varium et mutabile femina*,” he repeated, smiling. “A higher compliment was never paid to your sex. *Varium et mutabile*—like the sea! I never know whom I shall find when I meet you,—the high-souled philosopher, the earnest student, the brilliant woman of the world, the tender mother-soul, the frivolous girl, or the lovable child. I don’t know which of them charms me most. And when I want something more than any of those, before I have time to call her, there she is,—my wife, ‘strong and tender and true as steel.’”

Mona did not answer. Her turn would come another time. They knew each other too well

to barter compliments like goods and coin across a counter.

“I thought you were going to talk to me,” he said, presently. “Let us talk about the things that can never be put into words. Imagine I am Gretchen, sitting at your feet. ‘*Glaubst du an Gott?*’”

Mona smiled down on the upturned face.

“If Gretchen asked me, I hope the Good Spirit would give me words. If my husband asked me——”

“He does. ‘*Glaubst du an Gott?*’”

Mona did not answer at once. She looked round at the silent eloquent world of olive-trees, with their grand writhing Laocoon-like stems, and their constant, ever-varying crown of leaves—those trees that seem to have watched the whole history of man, and that sum up in themselves all the mystery of his life, from the love of pleasure in the midst of pain, to the worship of sorrow in a world of beauty.

“Ralph,” she said, “when you ask me I cannot tell; but I worship Him every moment of my life!”

She smiled. “You have surprised me out

of my creed, and you see it is not a creed it all.”

“Be thankful for that! It seems to me that the intensest moment in the life of a belief is when it is just on the eve of crystallising into a creed. Don't hurry it.”

“No, I am content to wait. When I go to church, I always feel inclined to reverse the words of the prayer, and say, ‘Granting us in this world life everlasting, and, in the world to come, knowledge of Thy truth.’”

CHAPTER LXIV.

PARTNERS.

DECEMBER still, but what a change! Without—bitter cold and driving rain; within—bright fires and welcoming faces and a home.

They had returned from the Continent a few hours before, had tested Maggie's "soups and sauces," had discussed ways and means by the fire in Mona's consulting-room; and now Ralph had gone through the curtained door into his own room adjoining, to look at his letters.

"I shall only be gone ten minutes," he had said, "if you invite me back. Nobody is likely to call on a night like this, even in 'blessed Bloomsbury.'"

Sir Douglas had begged them to settle in Harley Street, but both Ralph and Mona were far too enthusiastic to forego the early days of night-work, and of practice among the poor.

Ralph had scarcely finished reading his first letter when a patient was announced, and a moment later a young girl entered the room with a shrinking, uncertain step. Her hair was wet with the rain, and her white face expressionless, save for its misery.

“Do you wish to consult me?” he said. “Sit down. What can I do for you?”

She looked at him for a moment, and tried to speak, but her full lips quivered, and she burst into hysterical tears.

His practised eye ran over her figure half unconsciously.

“I think,” he said, kindly, “you would rather see the doctor who shares my practice,” and he rose, and opened the door.

Mona looked up smiling.

She was sitting alone in the firelight, and his heart glowed within him as he contrasted her bright, strong, womanly face with—that other.

“Mona, dear,” he said, quietly, “here is a case for *you*.”

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