

CHAPTER VII.

Close within us we will carry, strong, collected, calm, and brave,
The true panoply of quiet which the bad world never gave;
Very serpents in discretion, yet as guileless as the dove,
Lo! obedience is the watchword, and the countersign is love.

W. G. TUPPER.

ON the next hunting day, Mervyn took Phœbe with him to the meet, upon a favourite common towards Elverslope, where on a fine morning ladies were as apt to be found as hounds and huntsmen, so that she would be at no loss for companions when he left her.

Phœbe rode, as she did everything else, well, quietly and firmly, and she looked very young and fresh, with her rounded rosy cheeks and chin. Her fair hair was parted back under a round hat, her slenderly plump figure appeared to advantage mounted on her bright bay, and altogether she presented a striking contrast to her brother. She had not seen him in hunting costume for nearly a year, and she observed with pain how much he had lost his good looks; his well-made youthful air was passing away, and his features were becoming redder and coarser; but he was in his best humour, good-natured, and as nearly gay as he ever was; and Phœbe enjoyed her four-miles' ride in the beauty of a warm December's day, the sun shining on dewy hedges, and robins and thrushes trying to treat the weather like spring, as they sang amid the rich stores of coral fruit that hung as yet untouched on every hawthorn or eglantine.

The ladies mustered strong on the smooth turf of the chalk down bordering the copse which was being drawn. Phœbe looked out for acquaintance, but a few gentlemen coming up to greet her, she did not notice, as Mervyn did, that the girls with whom he had wished to leave her had become intent on some doings in the copse, and had trotted off with their father. He made his way to the barouche where sat the *grand dame* of the county, exchanged civilities, and asked leave to introduce his sister. Phœbe, who had never seen the lady before, thought nothing of the cold distant bow; it was for Mervyn, who knew what her greetings could be, to fume and rage inwardly. Other acknowledgments passed, but no party had approached or admitted Phœbe, and when

the hounds went away, she was still riding alone with her brother and a young officer. She bade them not to mind her, she would ride home with the servant, and as all were in motion, she had enough to do to hold in her horse, while Mervyn and his friend dashed forward, and soon she found herself alone, except for the groom; the field were well away over the down, the carriages driving off, the mounted maidens following the chase as far as the way was fair and ladylike.

Phœbe had no mind to do so. Her isolation made her feel forlorn, and brought home Miss Charlecote's words as to the opinion entertained of her by the world. Poor child, something like a tear came into her eye, and a blush to her cheek, but "never mind," she thought, "they will believe Miss Charlecote, and she will take care of me. If only Mervyn will not get angry, and make an uproar! I shall soon be gone away. When shall I come back?"

She rode up to the highest part of the down for a take-leave gaze. There lay Elverslope in its basin-like valley scooped out in the hills, with the purple bloom of autumnal haze veiling its red brick and slate; there, on the other side, the copses and arable fields dipped and rose, and rose and dipped again, till the undulations culminated in the tall fir-trees in the Holt garden, the landmark of the country; and on the bare slope to the west, Beauchamp's pillars and pediment made a stately speck in the landscape. "Home no longer!" thought Phœbe; "there will be strangers there and we shall be on the world! Oh! why cannot Mervyn be like Robert! How happy we could be!"

Beauchamp had not been a perfect Eden in itself, but still it had all the associations of the Paradise of her guileless childhood; and to her the halo around it would always have the radiance of the loving spirit through which she viewed it. The undefined future was hard to bear, but she thought of Robert, and of the promise that neither her sisters nor Miss Fennimore should be parted from her, and tried to rest thankful on that comfort.

She had left the down for the turnpike-road, the sounds of the hunt often reaching her, with glimpses of men and dogs in the distance taking a direction parallel with her own. Presently a red coat glanced through the hedge of one of the cross lanes, as if coming towards the road, and as she reached the opening at the end, a signal was made to her

to stop. Foreboding some accident, she hastily turned up the narrow white muddy lane, and was met by an elderly gentleman.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, kindly; "only your brother seems rather unwell, and I thought I had best see him under your charge."

Mervyn was by this time in sight, advancing slowly, and Phœbe with rapid thanks rode on to meet him. She knew that dull, confused, dazzled eye belonged to his giddy fits, and did not wonder at the half uttered murmur, rather in the imprecation line, with which he spoke, but the reel in his saddle terrified her greatly, and she was dismayed to see that the gentleman had proceeded into the high road instead of offering further assistance. She presently perceived that the danger of falling was less real than apparent, and that her brother could still keep his seat, and govern his horse, though nearly unable to look or speak. She kept close to him, and was much relieved to find that the stranger had not returned to the sport, but was leisurely following at some distance behind the groom. Never had two miles seemed so long as under her frequent alarms lest Mervyn should become unable to keep the saddle; but at each moment of terror, she heard the pace of the hunter behind quickened to come to her help, and if she looked around she met an encouraging sign.

When the lodge was reached, and Mervyn, somewhat revived, had ridden through the gates, she turned back to give her warm thanks. A kind, fatherly, friendly face looked at her with a sort of compassion, as putting aside her thanks, the gentleman said, quickly, yet half-reluctantly, "Have you ever seen him like this before?"

"Yes; the giddiness often comes on in the morning, but never so badly as this. I think it was from the rapid motion."

"Has he had advice?"

"I cannot persuade him to see any one. Do you think he ought? I would send at once, at the risk of his being angry."

"Does Dr. Martyn attend you? Shall I leave a message as I go home?"

"I should be most thankful!"

"It may be nothing, but you will be happier that it

should be ascertained;" and with another kindly nod, he rode off.

Mervyn had gone to his room, and answered her inquiries at the door with a brief, blunt "better," to be interpreted that he did not wish to be disturbed. She did not see him till dinner-time, when he had a sullen headache, and was gruff and gloomy. She tried to learn who the friend in need had been, but he had been incapable of distinguishing anybody or anything at the moment of the attack, and was annoyed at having been followed. "What a pottering ass to come away from a run on a fool's errand!" he said; "Some Elverslope spy, who will set it about the country that I had been drinking, and cast that up to you!" and then he began to rail against the ladies, singly and collectively, inconsistently declaring it was Phœbe's own fault for not having called on them, and that he would have Augusta to Beauchamp, give a ball and supper, and show whether Miss Fulmort were a person to be cut.

This mode of vindication not being to Miss Fulmort's taste, she tried to avert it by doubts whether Augusta could be had; and was told that, show Lady Bannerman a bottle of Barton's dry champagne, and she would come to the world's end. Meantime, Phœbe must come out to-morrow for a round of visits, whereat her heart failed her, as a thrusting of herself where she was not welcome; but he spoke so fiercely and dictatorially, that she reserved her pleading for the morning, when he would probably be too inert not to be glad of the escape.

At last, Dr. Martyn's presence in the drawing-room was announced to her. She began her explanation with desperate bravery; and though the first words were met with a scoffing grunt, she found Mervyn less displeased than she had feared—nay, almost glad that the step had been taken, though he would not say so, and made a great favour of letting her send the physician to him in the dining-room.

After a time, Dr. Martyn came to tell her that he had found her brother's head and pulse in such a state as to need instant relief by cupping; and that the young Union doctor had been sent for from the village for that purpose. A constitutional fulness of blood in the head had been aggravated by his mode of life, and immediate discipline, severe regimen, and abstinence from business or excitement were

the only means of averting dangerous illness; in fact, his condition might at any time become exceedingly critical, though perseverance in care might possibly prevent all absolute peril. He himself was thoroughly frightened. His own sensations and forebodings seconded the sentence too completely for resistance; it was almost a relief to give way; and his own method of driving away discomfort had so signally failed, that he was willing to resign himself to others.

Phœbe assisted at the cupping valorously and handily. She had a civil speech from young Mr. Jackson, and Mervyn, as she bade him good night, said, "I can't spare you now, Phœbe."

"Not till you are better," she answered.

And so she told Miss Charlecote, and wrote to Robert; but neither was satisfied. Honora said it was unlucky. It might certainly be a duty to nurse Mervyn if he were really ill, and if he made himself fit company for her, but it would not set her straight with the neighbourhood; and Robert wrote in visible displeasure at this complication of the difficulty. "If Mervyn's habits had disordered his health, it did not render his pursuits more desirable for his sisters. If he wanted Phœbe's attendance, let him come to town with her to the Bannermans; but his ailments must not be made an excuse for detaining her in so unsuitable a position as that into which he had brought her."

It was not so kind a letter as Phœbe would have claimed from Robert, and it was the more trying as Mervyn, deprived of the factitious exhilaration that had kept him up, and lowered by treatment, was dispirited, depressed, incapable of being entertained, cross at her failures, yet exacting of her attendance. He had business at his office in the City that needed his presence, so he insisted till the last morning upon going, and then owned himself in no state to go farther than the study, where he tried to write, but found his brain so weak and confused that he could hardly complete a letter, and was obliged to push over even the simplest calculation to Phœbe. In vain she tried to divert his mind from this perilous exertion; he had not taste nor cultivation enough to be interested in anything she could devise, and harping upon some one of the unpleasant topics that oc-

cupied his thoughts was his only entertainment when he grew tired of cards or backgammon.

Phœbe sat up late writing to Robert a more minute account of Mervyn's illness, which she thought must plead for him; and rather sad at heart, she had gone to bed and fallen asleep, when far on in the night a noise startled her. She did not suspect her own imagination of being to blame, except so far as the associations with illness in the house might have recalled the sounds that once had been wont to summon her to her mother's room. The fear that her brother might be worse made her listen, till the sounds became matters of certainty. Springing to the window, her eyes seemed to stiffen with amaze as she beheld in the clear, full moonlight, on the frosty sward, the distinctly-traced shadow of a horse and cart. The objects themselves were concealed by a clump of young trees, but their forms were distinctly pictured on the turf, and the conviction flashed over her that a robbery must be going forward.

"Perils and dangers of this night, indeed!" One prayer, one thought. She remembered the great house-bell, above the attic stairs in the opposite wing, at the other end of the gallery, which led from the top of the grand staircase, where the chief bedroom doors opened, and a jet of gas burnt all night on the balustrade. Throwing on her dressing-gown, she sped along the passage, and pushing open the swing door, beheld Mervyn at the door of his own room, and at the head of the stairs a man, in whom she recognised the discarded footman, raising a pistol. One swift bound—her hand was on the gas-pipe. All was darkness, save a dim stripe from within the open door of her mother's former dressing-room, close to where she stood. She seized the lock, drew it close, and had turned the key before the hand within had time to wrench round the inner handle. That same instant, the flash and report of a pistol made her cry out her brother's name.

"Hollo! what did you put out the light for?" he angrily answered; and as she could just distinguish his white shirt sleeves, she sprang to him. Steps went hurriedly down the stairs. "Gone!" they both cried at once; Mervyn, with an imprecation on the darkness, added, "Go and ring the bell. I'll watch here."

She obeyed, but the alarm had been given, and the

house was astir. Candle-light gleamed above—cries, steps, and exclamations were heard, and she was obliged to hurry down, to save herself from being run over. Two figures had joined Mervyn, the voice of one proclaiming her as Bertha, quivering with excitement. “In there? My emeralds are in there! Open the door, or he will make off with my—my emeralds!”

“Safe, my child? Don’t stand before that door,” cried Miss Fennimore, pulling Phœbe back with a fond, eager grasp.

“Here, some of you,” shouted Mervyn to the men, whose heads appeared behind the herd of maids, “come and lay hold of the fellow when I unlock the door.”

The women fell back with suppressed screams, and readily made way for the men, but they shuffled, backed, and talked of pistols; and the butler suggested the policeman.

“The policeman—he lives two miles off,” cried Bertha. “He’ll go out of window with my emeralds! Unlock the door, Mervyn.”

“Unlock it yourself,” said Mervyn, with an impatient stamp of his foot. “Pshaw! but thank you,” as Miss Fennimore put into his hand his double-barrelled gun, the first weapon she had found—unloaded, indeed, but even as a club formidable enough to give him confidence to unlock the door, and call to the man to give himself up. The servants huddled together like sheep, but there was no answer. He called for a light. It was put into his hand by Phœbe, and as he opened the door, was blown out by a stream of cold air from the open window.

The thief was gone. Everybody was ready to press in and look for him in every impossible place, but he had evidently escaped by the leads of the portico beneath, not, however, with “my emeralds”—he had only attempted the lock of the jewel cabinet.

Phœbe hurried to see whether Maria had been frightened, and finding her happily asleep, followed the rest of the world down stairs, where the servants seemed to be vying with each other in the magnitude of the losses they announced, while Mervyn was shouting himself hoarse with passionate orders that everything should be left alone—doors, windows, plate-chests, and all—for the inspection of the police; and human nature could not resist lifting up and

displaying signs of the robbery every moment, in the midst of the storm of vituperation thus excited.

Mervyn could hardly attend to Phœbe's mention of the cart, but as soon as it reached his senses, he redoubled his hot commands to keepers and stablemen to set off in pursuit, and called for his horse to ride to Elverslope, to give information at the police station and telegraph office. Phœbe implored him to rest and send a messenger, but he roughly bade her not be so absurd, commanded again that nothing should be disturbed, or, if she *would* be busy, that she should make out a list of all that was missing.

"Grateful!" indignantly thought Miss Fennimore, as Phœbe was left leaning on a pillar in the portico, watching him ride away, the pale light of the yellow setting moon giving an almost ghostly appearance to her white drapery and wistful attitude. Putting an arm round her, the governess found her shivering from head to foot, and pale and cold as marble; her knees knocked together when she walked, and her teeth chattered as she strove to smile, but her quietness still showed itself in all her movements, as she returned into the hall, and reached the welcome support of a chair beside the rekindled fire.

Miss Fennimore chafed her hands, and she looked up, smiled, and said, "Thank you."

"Then you were frightened, after all, Phœbe," cried Bertha, triumphantly.

"Was I?—I don't know," said Phœbe, as in a dream.

"What, when you don't know what you are talking of, and are still trembling all over?"

"I can't tell. I think what came on me then was thankfulness."

"I am sure we may be thankful that our jewels are the only thing safe!"

"Oh! Bertha, you don't know, then, that the man was taking aim at Mervyn!" and the shudder returned.

"There, Phœbe, for the sake of candour and psychology, confess your terror."

"Indeed, Bertha," said Phœbe, with a smile on her tremulous lip, "it is very odd, but I don't think I was afraid; there was a feeling of shadowing Wings that left no room for terror."

"That enabled you to think and act?" asked Miss Fennimore.

"I didn't think; it came to me," said Phœbe. "Pray let me go; Bertha, dear, you had better go to bed. Pray lie down, Miss Fennimore."

She moved slowly away, her steps still unsteady and her cheeks colourless, but the sweet light of thankfulness on her face; while Bertha said, in her moralizing tone, "It is a curious study to see Phœbe taking her own steady nerves and power of resource for something external to herself, and being pious about it."

Miss Fennimore was not gratified by her apt pupil's remark. "If Phœbe's conduct do not fill you with reverence, both for her and that which actuates her, I can only stand astonished," she said.

Bertha turned away, and erected her eyebrows.

No one could go to bed, and before five o'clock Phœbe came down, dressed for the day, and set to work with the butler and the inventory of the plate to draw up an account of the losses. Not merely the plate in common use was gone, but the costly services and ornaments that had been the glory of old Mr. Fulmort's heart; and the locks had not been broken but opened with a key; the drawing rooms had been rifled of their expensive bijouterie, and the foray would have been completely successful had it included the jewels. There were no marks of a violent entrance; windows and doors were all fastened as usual, with the single exception of the back door, which was found ajar, but with no traces of having been opened in an unusual manner, though the heavy bolts and bars would have precluded an entrance from the outside even with a false key.

Early in the day, Mervyn returned with the superintendent of police. He was still too much excited to rest, and his heavy tread re-echoed from floor to floor, as he showed the superintendent round the house, calling his sister or the servants to corroborate his statements, or help out his account of what he had hardly seen or comprehended. Thus he came to Phœbe for her version of the affair in the gallery, of which he only knew his own share—the noise that had roused him, the sight of the burglar, the sudden darkness, the report of the pistol; and the witness of his danger—the bullet—was in the wall nearly where his head had been. When Phœbe had answered his questions, he gazed at her, and exclaimed—"Hallo! why, Phœbe, it

seems that but for you, Parson Robert would be in possession here!" and burst into a strange, nervous laugh, ending by coming to her, and giving a hearty kiss to her forehead, ere hurrying away to report her evidence to the policeman.

When all measures had been taken, intelligence sent back to the station, and a search instituted in every direction, Mervyn consented to sit down to breakfast, but talked instead of eating, telling Phœbe that even without her recognition of James Smithson, the former footman, the superintendent would have attributed the burglary to a person familiar with the house, provided with facsimiles of all the keys, except those of the jewels, as well as sufficiently aware of the habits of the family to make the attempt just before the jewels were to be removed, and when the master was likely to be absent. The appearance of the back-door had led to the conclusion that the thieves had been admitted from within; a London detective had, therefore, been sent for, who was to come in the guise of a clerk from the distillery, bringing down the books to Mr. Fulmort, and Phœbe was forbidden to reveal his true character to any one but Miss Fennimore. So virulently did Mervyn talk of Smithson, that Phœbe was sorry she had recognised him, and became first compassionate, then disconcerted and shocked. She rose to leave the room as the only means of silencing him; he got up to come after her, abusing the law because house-breaking was not a hanging matter, his face growing more purple with passion every moment; but his steps suddenly failed, his exclamation transferred his fury to his own giddiness, and Phœbe, flying to his side, was only just in time to support him to a couch. It was the worst attack he had yet had, and his doctors coming in the midst of it, used prompt measures to relieve him, and impressed on both him and his sister that everything would depend on perfect quiet and absence from all disturbance; and he was so much exhausted by the reaction of his excitement, loss of blood, and confusion of head, that he attempted little but long fretful sighs when at length he was left to her. After much weariness and discomfort he fell asleep, and Phœbe ventured to creep quietly out of the library to see Miss Charlecote, who was hearing the night's adventures in the schoolroom. Scarcely, however, had Honor had time to embrace the little heroine, whose conduct had lost nothing in Miss Fenni-

more's narration, when a message came from Elverslope. It was the day of the petty sessions, and a notable bad character having been taken up with some suspicious articles upon him, the magistrates were waiting for Mr. Fulmort to make out the committal on his evidence.

"I must go instead," said Phœbe, after considering for a moment.

"My dear," exclaimed Honor, "you do not know how unpleasant it will be!"

"Mervyn must sleep," said Phœbe; "and if this be an innocent man, he ought to be cleared at once. If it be not improper, I think I ought to go. May I?" looking at the governess, who suggested her speaking to the superintendent, and learning whether her brother had been absolutely summoned.

It proved to be only a verbal message, and the superintendent urged her going, telling her that her evidence would suffice for the present, and that she would be the most important witness at the assizes—which he evidently considered as a great compliment.

Miss Charlecotte undertook to go and take care of her young friend, and they set off in silence, Phœbe leaning back with her veil down, and Honor, perceiving that she needed this interval of quiet repose, watching her with wonder. Had it been Honor's own case, she would have hung back out of dislike to pursuing an enemy, and from dread of publicity, but these objections had apparently not occurred to the more simple mind, only devising how to spare her brother; and while Honor would have been wretched from distrust of her own accuracy, and her habits of imperfect observation would have made her doubt her own senses and memory, she honoured Phœbe's careful training in seeing what she saw, and hearing what she heard, without cross lights or counter sounds from imagination. Once Phœbe inquired in a low, awe-struck voice, "Shall I be put on oath?"

"Most likely, my dear."

Phœbe's hands were pressed together as though in preparation for a religious rite. She was not dismayed, but from her strict truth at all times she was the more sensible of the sacredness and solemnity of the great appeal.

An offence on so large a scale had brought a throng of loiterers to the door of the town-hall, and Honor felt nervous

and out of place as way was made for the two ladies to mount the stairs to the justice-room; but there she was welcomed by several of the magistrates, and could watch Phœbe's demeanour, and the impression it made on persons accustomed to connect many strange stories with the name of Miss Fulmort. That air of maidenly innocence, the girlish form in deep mourning, the gentle seriousness and grave composure of the young face, the simple, self possessed manner, and the steady, distinct tones of the clear, soft voice were, as Honor felt, producing an effect that was shown in the mode of addressing her, always considerate and courteous, but increasing in respect and confidence.

And as Phœbe raised her eyes, the chairman's face—the first to meet her glance—was the kind ruddy one, set in iron-grey hair, that she remembered as belonging to the hunter who had sacrificed the run to see Mervyn safely home. The mutual recognition, and the tone of concern for his illness, made her feel in the presence of a friend, and she was the more at ease in performing her part.

To her great relief, the man in custody was unknown to her. James Smithson, she said, was taller, and had a longer face, and she had not seen him whom she had locked into the dressing-room. However, she identified a gold and turquoise letter-weight; and the setting of a seal, whence the stone with the crest had been extracted, both of which had been found in the man's pocket, together with some pawnbroker's tickets, which represented a buhl-clock and other articles from Beauchamp. She was made to give an account of the robbery. Honor had never felt prouder of any of her favourites than of her, while listening to the modest, simple, but clear and circumstantial recital, and watching how much struck the country gentlemen were by the girl who had been of late everywhere pitied or censured.

The statement over, she was desired to answer a few questions from Captain Morden, the chief of the constabulary force, who had come from the county town to investigate the affair. Taking her aside, he minutely examined her on the appearance of some of the articles mentioned in the inventory, on the form of the shadow of the horse and cart, on the thieves themselves, and chiefly on Smithson, and how she could be so secure of the identity of the robber in the pea-jacket with the footman in powder and livery.

"I can hardly tell," said Phœbe, "but I have no doubt in my own mind."

"Was he like this?" asked Captain Morden, showing her a photograph.

"Certainly not."

"Nor this?"

"No."

"Nor this?"

"Yes, that is Smithson in plain clothes."

"Right, Miss Fulmort. You have an eye for a likeness. These fellows have such a turn for having their portraits done, that in these affairs we always try if the shilling photographers have duplicates. This will be sent to town by the next train."

"I am not sure that I should have known it if I had not seen it before."

"Indeed! Should you object to tell me under what circumstances?"

"At the photographer's, at the time he was at Hiltonbury," said Phœbe. "I went to him with one of my sisters, and we were amused by finding many of the likenesses of our servants. Smithson and another came in to be taken while we were there, and we afterwards saw this portrait when calling for my sister's."

"Another—another servant?" said the keen captain.

"Yes, one of the maids."

"Her name, if you please."

"Indeed," said Phœbe, distressed, as she saw this jotted down. "I cannot bring suspicion and trouble on any one."

"You will do no such thing, Miss Fulmort. We will only keep our eye on her. Neither she, nor any one else, shall have any ground for supposing her under suspicion, but it is our duty to miss no possible indication. Will you oblige me with her name?"

"She is called Jane, but I do not know her real name," said Phœbe, with much reluctance, and in little need of the injunction to secrecy on this head. The general eagerness to hunt down the criminals saddened her, and she was glad to be released, with thanks for her distinct evidence. The kind old chairman then met her, quite with an air of fatherly protection, such as elderly men often wear towards orphaned maidens, and inquired more particularly for her brother's

health. She was glad to thank him again for having sent the physician, when his aid was so needful, and she was in so much difficulty. "A bold stroke," he said, smiling; "I thought you might throw all the blame on me if it were needless."

"Needless—oh! it may have saved him. Is that the carriage? I must get home as soon as I can."

"Yes, I am sure you must be anxious, but I hope to see more of you another time. Lady Raymond must come and see if you cannot find a day to spend with my girls."

Lady Raymond! So this was Sir John! Mervyn's foe and maligner! Was he repenting at the sight of what he had done? Yet he really looked like a very good, kind old man, and seemed satisfied with the very shabby answer he obtained to a speech that filled Honor with a sense of her young friend's victory. There was Phœbe, re-established in the good graces of the neighbourhood, favoured by the very *élite* of the county for goodness, sought by those who had never visited at Beauchamp in the days of its gaiety and ostentation! Ungrateful child, not to be better pleased—only saying that she supposed she should go away when her brother should be well again, and not seeing her way to any day for Moorcroft! Was she still unforgiving for Mervyn's rejection, or had she a feeling against visiting those who had not taken notice of her family before?

Mervyn met Phœbe in the hall, still looking very ill, with his purple paleness, his heavy eyes, and uncertain steps, and though he called himself all right since his sleep, it was with a weary gasp that he sank into his chair, and called on her for an account of what she had done. His excitement seemed to have burnt itself out, for he listened languidly, and asked questions by jerks, dozing half way through the answer, and wakening to some fresh inquiry; once it was—'And did the old sinner take any notice of you?'

"The prisoner?"

"Nonsense. Old Raymond. Of course he was in the chair."

"He was very kind. It was he that came home from the hunt with us the other day."

"Ha! I said it was some old woman of a spy, wanting to get up a story against me!"

"Nay, I think he felt kindly, for he talked of Lady Raymond calling, and my spending a day at Moorcroft."

"Oh! so the godly mean to rescue you, do they?"

"I did not accept. Perhaps they will never think of it again."

"No; his ladies will not let him!" sneered Mervyn.

Nevertheless, his last words that night were, "So the Raymonds have asked you!"

He was in a more satisfactory state the next day; feeble, but tamed into endurance of medical treatment, and almost indifferent about the robbery; as though his passion were spent, and he were tired of the subject. However, the police were alert. The man whom they had taken up was a squatter in the forest, notorious as a poacher and thief, and his horse and cart answered to Phœbe's description of the shadow. He had been arrested when returning with them from the small sea-port on the other side of the forest in the next county, and on communicating with the authorities there, search at a dealer's in marine stores had revealed hampers filled with the Beauchamp plate, as yet unmelted. The spoils of lesser bulk had disappeared with Smithson and the other criminal.



CHAPTER VIII.

Mascarille.—Oh! oh! je ne prenois pas garde;

Tandis que sans songer à mal, je vous regarde

Votre œil en tapinois me dérobe mon cœur,

Au voleur! au voleur! au voleur! au voleur!

Cathos.—Ah! volia qui est poussé dans le dernier galant!

Les Precieuses Ridicules.

THE detective arrived, looking so entirely the office clerk as to take in Mervyn himself at first sight; and the rest of the world understood that he was to stay till their master could go over the accounts with him. As house-keeper's room company, his attentions were doubly relished by the housemaids, and jealousy was not long in prompting the revelation that Jane Hart had been Smithson's sweetheart, and was supposed to have met him since her dismissal. Following up this trail, the detective proved to his own

satisfaction that she had been at a ball at a public-house in the next village the night before the hunt, and had there met both Smithson and the poacher. This, however, he reserved for Mervyn's private ear, still watching his victim, in the hope that she might unconsciously give some clue to the whereabouts of her lover. The espionage diverted Mervyn, and gave him the occupation for his thoughts that he sorely needed; but it oppressed Phœbe, and she shrank from the sight of the housemaid, as though she herself were dealing treacherously by her.

"Phœbe," said Mervyn, mysteriously, coming into the library, where his tardy breakfast was spread, "that villain Smithson has been taken up at Liverpool; and here's a letter for you to look at. Fenton has captured a letter to that woman Hart, who, he found, was always wanting to go to the post—but he can't make it out; and I thought it was German, so I brought it to you. It looks as if old Lieschen—"

"No! no! it can't be," cried Phœbe. "I'll clear it up in a moment."

But as she glanced at the letter the colour fled from her cheek.

"Well, what is it?" said Mervyn, impatiently.

"Oh, Mervyn!" and she put her hands before her face.

"Come, the fewer words the better. Out with it at once."

"Mervyn! It is to Bertha!" She stood transfixed.

"What?" cried Mervyn.

"To Bertha," repeated Phœbe, looking as if she could never shut her eyes.

"Bertha? What, a billet-doux; the little precocious pussy-cat!" and he laughed, to Phœbe's increased horror.

"If it could only be a mistake!" said she; "but here is her name! It is not German, only English in German writing. Oh, Bertha! Bertha!"

"Well, but who is the fellow? Let me look," said Mervyn.

"It is too foolish," said Phœbe, guarding it, in the midst of her cold chills of dismay. "There is no surname—only John. Ah! here's J. H. Oh! Mervyn, could it be Mr. Hastings?"

"No such thing! John! Why, my name's John—everybody's name is John. That's nothing."

"But, Mervyn, I was warned," said Phœbe, her eyes again dilating with dismay, "that Mr. Hastings never was received into a house with women without there being cause to repent it."

"Experience might have taught you how much slanderous gossip to believe by this time! I believe it is some trumpery curate she has been meeting at Miss Charlecote's school feasts."

"For shame, Mervyn," cried Phœbe, in real anger.

"Curates like thirty thousand as much as other men," said Mervyn, sulkily.

"After all," said Phœbe, controlling herself, "what signifies most is, that poor Bertha should have been led to do such a dreadful thing."

"If ever I take charge of a pack of women again! But let's hear what the rascal says to her."

"I do not think it is fair to read it all," said Phœbe, glancing over the tender passages. "Poor child, how ashamed she will be! But listen—" and she read a portion, as if meant to restrain the girl's impatience, promising to offer a visit to Beauchamp, or, if that were refused till the captives were carried off, assuring her there would be ways and means at Acton Manor, where a little coldness from the baronet always secured the lady's good graces.

Acton Manor was in Mr. Hastings' neighbourhood, and Mervyn struck his own knee several times.

"Hum! ha! Was not some chaff going on one day about the heiresses boxed up in the west wing? Some one set you all down at a monstrous figure—a hundred thousand a-piece. I wonder if he were green enough to believe it! Hastings! No, it can't be! Here, we'll have the impudent child down, and frighten it out of her. But first, how are we to put off that fellow Fenton? Make up something to tell him."

"Making up would be of no use," said Phœbe; "he is too clever. Tell him it is a family matter."

Mervyn left the room, and Phœbe hid her face in her hands, thunderstruck, and endeavouring to disentangle her thoughts, perturbed between shame, indignation, and the longing to shield and protect her sister. She had not fully

realized her sister's offence, so new to her imagination, when she was roused by Mervyn's return, saying that he had sent for Bertha to have it over.

Starting up, she begged to go and prepare her sister, but he peremptorily detained her, and, "Oh, be kind to her," was all that she could say, before in tripped Bertha, looking restless and amazed, but her *retroussé* nose, round features, and wavy hair so childish that the accusation seemed absurd.

So Mervyn felt it, and in vain drew in his feet, made himself upright, and tried to look magisterial. "Bertha," he began, "Bertha, I have sent for you, Bertha—it is not possible—What's that?" pointing to the letter, as though it had been a stain of ink which she had just perpetrated.

Alarmed perhaps, but certainly not confounded, Bertha put her hands before her, and demurely said—"What do you mean?"

"What do you mean, Bertha, by such a correspondence as this?"

"If you know that letter is for me, why did you meddle with it?" she coolly answered.

"Upon my word, this is assurance," cried Mervyn.

"Give me my letter," repeated Bertha, reaching out for it. "No one else has a right to touch it."

"If there be nothing amiss," said Phœbe, coming to the relief of her brother, who was almost speechless at this audacity, "why receive it under cover to a servant?"

"Because prejudice surrounds me," stoutly replied Bertha, with barely a hitch in her speech, as if making a grand stroke; but seeing her brother smile, she added in an annihilating tone, "practical tyranny is exercised in every family until education and intellect effect a moral emancipation."

"What?" said Mervyn, "education teaching you to write letters in German hand! Fine results! I tell you, if you were older, the disgrace of this would stick to you for life, but if you will tell the whole truth about this scoundrel, and put an end to it, we will do the best we can for you."

She made up a disdainful mouth, and said, "Thank you."

"After all," said Mervyn, turning to Phœbe, "it is a joke! Look at her! She is a baby! You need not have

made such a rout. This is only a toy-letter to a little girl; very good practice in German writing."

"I am engaged to John Hastings heart and hand," said Bertha in high dignity, little knowing that she thus first disclosed the name.

"Yes, people talk of children being their little wives," said Mervyn. "but you are getting too old for such nonsense, though he does not think you so."

"It is the joint purpose of our lives," said Bertha.

Mervyn gave his scoffing laugh, and again addressing Phœbe, said, "If it were you now, or any one with whom he was not in sport, it would be a serious matter. The fellow got himself expelled from Harrow, then was the proverb of even a German university, ran through his means before he was five-and-twenty, is as much at home in the Queen's Bench as I am in this study, has been outlawed, lived on *rouge et noir* at Baden till he got whitewashed when his mother died, and since that has lived on betting, or making himself agreeable to whoever would ask him."

"Many thanks on the part of your intimate friend," said Bertha, with suppressed passion.

Mervyn stamped his foot, and Phœbe defended him with "Men may associate with those who are no companions for their sisters, Bertha."

"Contracted minds always accept malignant reports," was the reply.

"Report," said Mervyn; "I know it as well as I know myself!" then recollecting himself, "but she does not understand, it is of no use to talk to children. Take her away, Phœbe, and keep her in the nursery till Mr. Crabbe comes to settle what is to be done with her."

"I insist on having my letter," said Bertha, with womanly grandeur.

"Let her have it. It is not worth bothering about a mere joke," said Mervyn, leaning back, wearied of the struggle, in which, provoking as he was, he had received some home thrusts.

Phœbe felt bewildered, and as if she had a perfect stranger on her hands, though Bertha's high tone was, after all, chiefly from her extremity, and by way of reply to her brother's scornful incredulity of her exalted position. She

was the first to speak on leaving the library. "Pray, Phœbe, how came you to tamper with people's letters?"

Phœbe explained.

"From Mervyn and his spy one could expect no delicacy," said Bertha, "but in you it was treachery."

"No, Bertha," said Phœbe, "I was grieved to expose you, but it was my duty to clear the innocent by examining the letter, and Mervyn had a right to know what concerned you when you were under his charge. It is our business to save you, and a letter sent in this way does not stand on the same ground as one coming openly under your own name. But I did not read it to him, Bertha—not all."

"If you had," said Bertha, more piqued than obliged by this reserve, "he would have known it was in earnest and not childish nonsense. You saw that it was earnest, Phœbe?" and her defiant voice betrayed a semi-distrust.

"I am afraid it looked very much so," said Phœbe, "but, Bertha, that would be saddest of all. I am afraid he might be wicked enough to be trying to get your fortune, for indeed—don't be very much vexed, dearest, I am only saying it for your good—you are not old enough, nor formed, nor pretty enough, really to please a man that has seen so much of the world."

"He never met so fresh, so original, or so highly cultivated a mind," said Bertha; "besides, as to features, there may be different opinions!"

"But, Bertha, how could you ever see him or speak to him?"

"Hearts can find more ways than you dream of," said Bertha, with a touch of sentiment; "we had only to meet for the magnetism of mind to be felt!"

Argument was heartless work. Flattery and the glory of her conquest had entirely filled the child's mind, and she despised Mervyn and Phœbe far too much for the representations of the one or the persuasions of the other to have the smallest weight with her. Evidently weariness of her studies and impatience of discipline had led her to lend a willing ear to any distraction, and to give in to the intercourse that both gratified and amused herself and outwitted her governess, and thence the belief in the power of her own charms and preference for their admirer, were steps easier than appeared credible to Phœbe. From listening in helpless

amaze to a miserable round of pertness and philosophy. Phœbe was called down stairs to hear that Mervyn had been examining Jane Hart, and had elicited from her that after having once surprised Mr. Hastings and Miss Bertha in conversation, she had several times conveyed notes between them, and since he had left Beauchamp, she had posted two letters to him from the young lady, but this was the first answer received, directed to herself, to be left at the post-office to be called for.

"Earnest enough on his part," said Mervyn; "a regular speculation to patch up his fortune. Well, I knew ill enough of him, as I told you, but I was fool enough to pity him!"

He became silent, and so did Phœbe. She had been too much overset to look the subject fairly in the face, and his very calmness of voice and the absence of abusive epithets were a token that he was perfectly appalled at what he had brought on his sisters. They both sat still some minutes, when she saw him lean back, with his hand to his head, and his eyes closed. "There's a steeple-chase!" he said, as Phœbe laid her cool hand on his burning brow, and felt the throbbing of the swollen veins of his temples. Both knew that this meant cupping, and they sent in haste for the Hiltonbury doctor, but he was out for the day, and would not return till evening. Phœbe felt dull and stunned, as if her decision had caused all the mischief, and more and more were following on, and her spirit almost died within her at Mervyn's interjection of rage and suffering.

"Though they curse, yet bless thou," had of necessity been her rule while clinging to this brother; a mental ejaculation had become habitual, and this time it brought reaction from her forlorn despondency. She could do something. Twice she had assisted in cupping, and she believed she could perform the operation. No failure could be as hurtful as delay, and she offered to make the attempt. Mervyn growled at her folly, yawned, groaned, looked at his watch, counted the heavy hours, and supposed she must do as she chose.

Her heart rivalled his temples in palpitation, but happily without affecting eye, voice, or hand, and with Lieschen's help the deed was successfully done, almost with equal benefit to the operator and the patient.

Success had put new life into her; the troubles had been forgotten for the moment, and recurred not as a shameful burthen, caused by her own imprudence, but as a possible turning-point, a subject for action, not for despair, and Phœbe was herself again.

"What's that you are writing?" asked Mervyn, starting from a doze on the sofa.

"A letter to Robert," she answered, reluctantly.

"I suppose you will put it in the *Times*. No woman can keep a thing to herself."

"I would tell no one else, but I wanted his advice."

"Oh, I dare say."

Phœbe saw that to persist in her letter would utterly destroy the repose that was essential in Mervyn's state, and she laid aside her pen.

"Going to do it out of sight?" he petulantly said.

"No, but at any rate I will wait till Miss Fennimore has talked to Bertha. She will be more willing to listen to her."

"Because this is the result of her emancipating education. Ha!"

"No; but Bertha will attend to her, and cannot say her notions are servile and contracted."

"If you say any more, I shall get up and flog them both."

"Miss Fennimore is very wise," said Phœbe.

"Why, what has she taught you but the ologies and the Rights of Women?"

"The chief thing she teaches," said Phœbe, "is to attend to what we are doing."

Mervyn laughed, but did not perceive how those words were the key of Phœbe's character.

"Sir John and Lady Raymond and Miss Raymond in the drawing-room."

"Unappreciating the benefit of changing the current of thought, Phœbe lamented their admission, and moved reluctantly to the great rooms, where the guests looked as if they belonged to a more easy and friendly region than to that world of mirrors, damask, and gilding.

Sir John shook hands like an old friend, but his wife was one of those homely ladies who never appear to advantage in strange houses, and Phœbe had not learnt the art of "lady

of the house " talk, besides feeling a certain chilliness towards Mervyn's detractors, which rendered her stiff and formal. To her amaze, however, the languishing talk was interrupted by his entrance: he who regarded Sir John as the cause of his disappointment; he who had last met Susan Raymond at the time of his rejection; he whom she had left prostrate among the sofa cushions; he had absolutely exerted himself to brush his hair and put on coat and boots, yet how horribly ill and nervous he looked, totally devoid of his usual cool assurance, uncertain whether to shake hands with the two ladies, and showing a strange restless eagerness, as though entirely shaken off his balance.

Matters were mended by his entrance. Phœbe liked Lady Raymond from the moment she detected a sign to the vehement Sir John not to keep his host standing during the discussion of the robbery, and she ventured on expressing her gratitude for his escort on the day of the hunt. Then arose an entreaty to view the scene of the midnight adventure, and the guests were conducted to the gallery, shown where each party had stood, the gas-pipe, the mark of the pistol-shot, and the dressing-room door was opened to display the cabinet, and the window of the escape. To the intense surprise of her brother and sister, Bertha was examining her emeralds.

She came forward quite at her ease, and if she had been ten years a woman could not more naturally have assumed the entertainment of Lady Raymond, talking so readily that Phœbe would have believed the morning's transactions a delusion, but for Mervyn's telegraph of astonishment.

The visitors had been at the Holt, and obtained a promise from Miss Charlecote to spend the ensuing Saturday week at Moorcroft. They begged the sisters to accompany her. Phœbe drew back, though Mervyn hurried out declarations of his not wanting her, and the others never going out, till she hardly knew how it had been decided; but as the guests departed she heard Mervyn severely observing to Bertha—"No, certainly I should not send you to keep company with any well-behaved young ladies."

"Thank you, I have no desire to associate with commonplace girls," said Bertha, marching off to the west wing.

"You will go, Phœbe," said Mervyn.

"Indeed, if I did, it would be partly for the sake of giv-

ing change to Bertha, and letting her see what nice people really are."

"Are you crazy, Phœbe? I would not have Bertha with her impudence and her pedantry go among the Raymonds—no, not for the Bank of England."

Those words darted into Phœbe's mind the perception why Mervyn was, in his strange way, promoting her intercourse with Moorcroft, not only as stamping her conduct with approval of people of their worth and weight, but as affording him some slight glimmering of hope. She could not but recollect that the extra recklessness of language which had pained her ever since his rejection, had diminished ever since her report of Sir John's notice of her at the justice-room. Sister like, she pitied and hoped; but the more immediate care extinguished all the rest, and she was longing for Miss Fennimore's sympathy, though grieving at the pain the disclosure must inflict. It could not be made till the girls were gone to bed, and at half-past nine, Phœbe sought the school-room, and told her tale. There was no answer but an almost convulsive shudder; her hand was seized, and her finger guided to the line which Miss Fennimore had been reading in the Greek Testament—"By their fruits ye shall know them."

Rallying before Phœbe could trace what was passing in her mind, she shut the book, turned her chair to the fire, invited Phœbe to another, and was at once the clear-headed, metaphysical governess, ready to discuss this grievous marvel. She was too generous by nature not to have treated her pupils with implicit trust, and this trust had been abused. Looking back, she and Phœbe could recollect moments when Bertha had been unaccounted for, and must have held interviews with Mr. Hastings. She had professed a turn for twilight walks in the garden, and remained out of doors when the autumn evenings had sent the others in, and on the Sunday afternoons, when Phœbe and Maria had been at church, Miss Fennimore reproached herself exceedingly with having been too much absorbed in her own readings to concern herself about the proceedings of a pupil, whose time on that day was at her own disposal. She also thought that there had been communications by look and sign across the pew at church; and she had remarked, though Phœbe had been too much occupied with her brother to perceive, the

restlessness that had settled on Bertha from the time of the departure of Mervyn's guests, and had once reproved her for lingering, as she thought, to gossip with Jane Hart in her bedroom. "And now," said Miss Fennimore, "she should have a thorough change. Send her to school, calling it punishment, if you please, but chiefly for the sake of placing her among laughing girlish girls of the same age, and, above all, under a thoroughly religious mistress of wide intelligence, and who has never doubted."

"But we were all to keep together, dear Miss Fennimore—you——"

"One whose mind has always been balancing between aspects of truth may instruct, but cannot educate. Few minds can embrace the moral virtues unless they are based on an undoubted foundation, connected with present devotional warmth, and future hopes and fears. I see this now; I once thought excellence would approve itself, for its own sake, to others, as it did to myself. I regarded Bertha as a fair subject for a full experiment of my system, with good disposition, good abilities, and few counter influences. I meant to cultivate self-relying, unprejudiced, effective good sense, and see—with prejudices have been rooted up restraints!"

"Education seems to me to have little to do with what people turn out," said Phœbe. "Look at poor Miss Charlcote and the Sandbrooks."

"Depend upon it, Phœbe, that whatever harm may have ensued from her errors in detail, those young people will yet bless her for the principle she worked on. You can none of you bless me, for having guided the hands of the watch, and having left the mainspring untouched."

Miss Fennimore had been, like Helvetius and the better class of encyclopædists, enamoured of the moral virtues, but unable to perceive that they could not be separated from the Christian faith, and she learnt like them that, when doctrine ceased to be prominent, practice went after it. Bertha was her Jacobin—and seemed doubly so the next morning, when an interview took place, in which the young lady gave her to understand that she, like Phœbe, was devoid of the experience that would enable them to comprehend the sacred mutual duty of souls that once had spoken. Woman was no longer the captive of the seraglio, nor the chronicler of small

beer. Intellectual training conferred rights of choice superior to conventional ties; and, as to the infallible discernment of that fifteen year old judgment, had not she the sole premises to go upon, she who alone had been admitted to the innermost of that manly existence?

"I always knew Jack to be a clever dog," said Mervyn, when this was reported to him, "but his soft sawder to a priggish metaphysical baby must have been the best fun in the world!"

Mervyn's great desire was to keep Bertha's folly as great a secret as possible; and, by his decision, she was told that grace should be granted her till Mr. Crabbe's arrival, when, unless she had renounced what he called her silly child's fancy, stringent measures would be taken, and she would be exposed to the family censure.

"So," said Bertha, "you expect to destroy the attraction of souls by physical force!"

And Phœbe wrote to Robert a sorrowful letter, chiefly consisting of the utmost pleadings for Mervyn and Bertha that her loving heart could frame. She was happier when she had poured out her troubles, but grieved when no answer came by the next post. Robert's displeasure must be great—and indeed but too justly so—since all this mischief was the consequence of the disregard of his wishes. Yet justice was hard between brothers and sisters, especially when Mervyn was in such a suffering state, threatened constantly by attacks of his complaint, which were only warded off by severe and weakening treatment. Phœbe was so necessary to his comfort in waiting on him, and trying to while away his tedious hours of inaction and oppression, that she had little time to bestow upon Bertha, nor, indeed, was talking of any use, as it only gave the young lady an occasion for pouring forth magniloquent sentiments, utterly heedless of the answers. Sad, lonely, and helpless were Phœbe's feelings, but she was patient, and still went on step by step through the strange tangle, attending to Mervyn hour by hour, always with a gently cheerful word and smile, and never trusting herself, even when alone, to think of the turmoil and break up, that must ensue on her guardian's arrival.

All was darkness and perplexity before her, but submission and trust were her refuge, and each day of waiting before the crisis was to her feelings a gain.

CHAPTER IX.

O fy gar ride and fy gar rin
 And haste ye to find these traitors agen
 For shees be burnt and hees been slein,
 The wearifu gaberlunzie man.
 Some rade upon horse, some ran afit,
 The wife was wud and out of her wit,
 She couldna gang nor yet could she sit,
 But aye did curse and ban.

KING JAMES V.

MERVYN and Phœbe were playing at billiards, as a means of inducing him to take exercise enough to make him sleep. The governess and the two girls were gone to the dentist's at Elverslope. The winter's day was closing in, when there was a knock at the door, and they beheld Miss Fennimore, deadly white, and Maria, who flew up to Phœbe, crying—"Bertha's gone, Phœbe!"

"The next up-train stops at Elverslope at 8.30," said the governess, staring in Mervyn's face, as though repeating a lesson. "A carriage will be here by seven. I will bring her home, or never return."

"Gone!"

"It was inexcusable in me, sir," said Miss Fennimore, resting a hand on the table to support herself. "I thought it needlessly galling to let her feel herself watched; and at her request, let her remain in the waiting-room while her sister was in the dentist's hands. When, after an hour, Maria was released, she was gone."

"Alone?" cried Phœbe.

"Alone, I hope. I went to the station; the train had been ten minutes gone; but a young lady, alone, in mourning, and with no luggage but a little bag, had got in there for London. Happily, they did not know her; and it was the parliamentary train, which is five hours on the road. I telegraphed at once to your brother to meet her at the terminus."

"I have no hope," said Mervyn, doggedly, seating himself on the table, his feet dangling. "He will be in the lowest gutter of Whittingtonia, where no one can find him. The fellow will meet that miserable child, go off to Ostend this very night, marry her before to-morrow morning. There's an end of it!"

"Where does Mr. Hastings lodge, sir?"

"Nowhere that I know of. There will be no end of time lost in tracing him! No train before 8.30! I'll go in at once, and have a special."

"They cannot put on one before nine, because of the excursion trains for the cattle-show. I should not have been in time had I driven to catch the express at W.," said Miss Fennimore, in her clear voice of desperation. "The 8.30 reaches town at 11.23. Will you give me the addresses where I may inquire, sir?"

"You! I am going myself. You would be of no use," said Mervyn, in a stunned, mechanical way; and looking at his watch, he went to give orders.

"He should not go, Phœbe. In his state the mere journey is a fearful risk."

"It can't be helped," said Phœbe. I shall go with him. You stay to take care of Maria. There will be Robert to help us;" and as the governess would have spoken farther, she held up her hands in entreaty—"O pray don't say anything! I can't go on if I do anything but act."

Yet in the endeavour to keep her brother quiet, and to husband his powers, Phœbe's movements and words had rather an additional gentleness and deliberation; and so free from bustle was her whole demeanour, that he never comprehended her intention of accompanying him till she stepped into the carriage beside him.

"What's this? You coming?"

"I will give you no trouble."

"Well, you may help to manage the girl;" and he lay back, relieved to be off, but already spent by the hurry of the last two hours. Phœbe could sit and—no—not think, except that Robert was at the other end of the line.

The drive seemed to have lasted half the night ere the lamps of Elverslope made constellations in the valley, and the green and red lights of the station loomed out on the hill. They drove into the circle of gaslights, among the vaporous steeds of omnibuses and flies, and entered the station, Phœbe's veil down, and Mervyn shading his dazzled eyes from the glare. They were half an hour too soon; and while waiting it occurred to Phœbe to inquire whether a telegram for Beauchamp had been received. Even so, and they must have crossed the express; but a duplicate was brought to them.

"Safe. We shall be at Elverslope at 10.20, P.M."

Assuredly Phœbe did not faint, for she stood on her feet; and Mervyn never perceived the suspension of senses, which lasted till she found him for the second time asking whether she would go home or await the travellers at Elverslope.

"Home," she said, instinctively, in her relief forgetting all the distress of what had taken place, so that her sensations were little short of felicity; and as she heard the 8.30 train roaring up, she shed tears of joy at having no concern therewith. The darkness and Mervyn's silence were comfortable, for she could wipe unseen her showers of tears at each gust of thankfulness that passed over her; and it was long before she could command her voice even to ask her companion whether he were tired. "No," he said; but the tone was more than half sullen; and at the thought of the meeting between the brothers, poor Phœbe's heart seemed to die within her. Against their dark looks and curt sayings to one another she had no courage.

When they reached home, she begged him to go at once to bed, hoping thus to defer the meeting; but he would not hear of doing so; and her only good augury was that his looks were pale, languid, and subdued, rather than flushed and excited. Miss Fennimore was in the hall, and he went towards her, saying, in a friendly tone, "So, Miss Fennimore, you have heard that this unlucky child has given us a fright for nothing."

The voice in which she assented was hoarse and scarcely audible, and she looked as if twenty years had passed over her head.

"It was all owing to your promptitude," said Mervyn; "a capital thought that telegraph."

"I am glad," said Miss Fennimore; "but I do not lose sight of my own negligence. It convinces me that I am utterly unfit for the charge I assumed. I shall leave your sisters as soon as new plans can be formed."

"Why, I'll be bound none of your pupils ever played you such a trick before!"

Miss Fennimore only looked as if this convinced her the more; but it was no time for the argument, and Phœbe caressingly persuaded her to come into the library and drink coffee with them, judging rightly that she had tasted nothing since morning.

Afterwards Phœbe induced Mervyn to lie on the sofa, and having made every preparation for the travellers, she sat down to wait. She could not read, she could not work; she felt that tranquillity was needful for her brother, and had learnt already the soothing effect of absolute repose. Indeed, one of the first tokens by which Miss Fennimore had perceived character in Phœbe was her faculty of being still. Only that which has substance can be motionless. There she sat in the lamplight, her head drooping, her hands clasped on her knee, her eyes bent down, not drowsy, not abstracted, not rigid, but peaceful. Her brother lay in the shade, watching her with a half-fascinated gaze, as though a magnetic spell repressed all inclination to work himself into agitation.

The stillness became an effort at last, but it was resolutely preserved till the frost-bound gravel resounded with wheels. Phœbe rose, Mervyn started up, caught her hand and squeezed it hard. "Do not let him be hard on me, Phœbe," he said. "I could not bear it."

She had little expected this. Her answer was a mute caress, and she hurried out, but in a tumult of feeling, retreated behind the shelter of a pillar, and silently put her hand on Robert's arm as he stepped out of the carriage.

"Wait," he whispered, holding her back. "Hush! I have promised that she shall see no one."

Bertha descended, unassisted, her veil down, and neither turning to the right nor the left, crossed the hall and went up stairs. Robert took off his overcoat and hat, took a light and followed her, signing that Phœbe should remain behind. She found Mervyn at the library door, like herself, rather appalled at the apparition that had swept past them. She put her hand into his, with a kind of common feeling that they were awaiting a strict judge.

Robert soon reappeared, and in a preoccupied way, kissed the one and shook hands with the other, saying, "She has locked her door, and says she wants nothing. I will try again presently—not you, Phœbe; I could only get her home on condition she should see no one without her own consent. So you had my telegram?"

"We met it at the station. How did you find her?"

"Had the man been written to?" asked Robert.

"No," said Mervyn; "we thought it best to treat it as childish nonsense, not worth serious notice, or in fact—I was not equal to writing."

The weary, dejected tone made Robert look up, contrary to the brothers' usual habit of avoiding one another's eye, and he exclaimed, "I did not know! You were not going to London to-night!"

"Worse staying at home," murmured Mervyn, as leaning on a corner of the mantelshelf, he rested his head on his hand.

"I was coming with him," said Phœbe; "I thought if he gave directions, you could act."

Robert continued to cast at him glances of dismay and compunction while pursuing the narrative. "Hastings must have learnt by some means that the speculation was not what he had imagined; for though he met her at Paddington——"

"He did?"

"She had telegraphed to him while waiting at Swindon. He found her out before I did, but he felt himself in a predicament, and I believe I was a welcome sight to him. He begged me to do him the justice to acquit him of all participation in this rash step, and said he had only met Bertha with a view to replacing her in the hands of her family. How it would have been without me, I cannot tell, but I am inclined to believe that he did not know how to dispose of her. She clung to him and turned away from me so decidedly that I was almost grateful for the line he took; and he was obliged to tell her, with many fine speeches, that he could not expose her to share his poverty; and when the poor silly child declared she had enough for both, he told her plainly that it would not be available for six years, and he could not let her—tenderly nurtured, &c., &c. Then supposing me uninformed, he disclaimed all betrayal of your confidence, and represented all that had passed as sport with a child, which to his surprise she had taken as earnest."

"Poor Bertha!" exclaimed Phœbe.

"Pray where did this scene take place?" asked Mervyn.

"On the platform; but it was far too quiet to attract notice."

"What! you had no fits nor struggles?"

"I should think not," smiled Phœbe.

"She stood like a statue, when she understood him; and

when he would audaciously have shaken hands with her, she made a distant courtesy, quite dignified. I took her to the waiting-room, and put back her veil. She was crimson, and nearly choking, but she repelled me, and never gave way. I asked if she would sleep at an inn and go home to-morrow; she said "No." I told her I could not take her to my place because of the curates. "I'll go to a sister-hood," she said; and when I told her she was in no mood to be received there, she answered, "I don't care." Then I proposed taking her to Augusta, but that was worse; and at last I got her to come home in the dark, on my promise that she should see no one till she chose. Not a word has she since uttered."

"Could he really have meant it all in play?" said Phœbe; "yet there was his letter."

"I see it all," said Mervyn. "I was an ass to suppose such needy rogues would come near girls of fortune without running up the scent. As I told Phœbe, I know they had some monstrous ideas of the amount, which I never thought it worth my while to contradict. I imagine old Jack only intended a promising little flirtation, capable of being brought to bear if occasion served, but otherwise to be cast aside as child's play. Nobody could suspect such an inflammable nature with that baby-face; but it seems she was ready to eat her fingers with dullness in the school-room, and had prodigious notions of the rights of woman; so she took all he said most seriously, and met him more than half-way. Then he goes to London, gets better information, looks at the will in Doctors' Commons, maybe, finds it a slowish speculation, and wants to let her down easy; whereof she has no notion, writes two letters to his one, as we know, gets desperate, and makes this excursion."

Robert thoughtfully said "Yes;" and Phœbe, though she did not like to betray it, mentally owned that the intercepted letter confirmed Mervyn's opinion, being evidently meant to pacify what was inconveniently ardent and impassioned, without making tangible promises or professions.

The silence was broken by Mervyn. "There! I shall go to bed. Phœbe, when you see that poor child, tell her not to be afraid of me, for the scrape was of my making, so don't be sharp with her!"

"I hope not," said Robert, gravely; "I am beginning

to learn that severity is injustice, not justice. Good night, Mervyn; I hope this has not done you harm."

"I am glad not to be at Paddington this minute," said Mervyn. "You will stay and help us through this business. It is past us."

"I will stay as long as I can, if you wish it."

Phœbe's fervent "Thank you!" was for both. She had never heard such friendly tones between those two, though Mervyn's were still half sullen, and chiefly softened by dejection and weariness.

"Why, Phœbe," cried Robert, as the door closed, "how could you not tell me this?"

"I thought I had told you that he was very unwell."

"Unwell! I never saw any one so much altered."

"He is at his best when he is pale. The attacks are only kept off by reducing him, and he must be materially better to have no threatening after such a day as this."

"Well, I am glad you have not had the letter that I posted only to-day!"

"I knew you were displeased," said Phœbe, "and you see you were quite right in not wishing us to stay here; but you forgive us now—Mervyn and me, I mean."

"Don't couple yourself with him, Phœbe!"

"Yes I must; for we both equally misjudged, and he blames himself more than any one."

"His looks plead for him as effectually as you can do, Phœbe, and rebuke me for having fancied you weak and perverse in remaining after the remonstrance."

"I do not wonder at it," said Phœbe; "but it is over now, and don't let us talk about it. I want nothing to spoil the comfort of knowing that I have you here."

"I have a multitude of things to say, but you look sleepy."

"Yes, I am afraid I am. I should like to sit up all night, to make the most of you, but I could not keep awake."

Childlike, she no sooner had some one on whom to repose her care than slumber claimed its due, and she went away to her thankful rest, treasuring the thought of Robert's presence, and resting in the ineffable blessing of being able to overlook the thorns in gratitude for the roses.

Bertha did not appear in the morning. Robert went to

her door, and was told that she would see no one; and Phœbe's entreaties for admission were met with silence, till he forbade their repetition. "It only hardens her," he said, "we must leave her to herself."

"She will not eat, she will be ill!"

"If she do not yield at dinner-time, Lieschen shall carry food to her, but she shall not have the pleasure of disappointing you. Sullenness must be left to weary itself out."

"Is not this more shame than sullenness!"

"True shame hides its face and confesses—sullen shame hides like Adam. If hers had not been stubborn, it would have melted at your voice. She must wait to hear it again, till she have learnt to crave for it."

He looked so resolute that Phœbe durst plead no longer, but her heart sank at the thought of the obstinate force of poor Bertha's nature. Persistence was innate in the Fulmorts, and it was likely to be a severe and lasting trial whether Robert or Bertha would hold out the longest. Since he had captured her, however, all were relieved tacitly to give her up to his management; and at dinner-time, on his stern assurance that, unless she would accept food, the door should be forced, she admitted some sandwiches and tea, and desired to have her firing replenished, but would allow no one to enter.

Robert, at Mervyn's earnest entreaty, arranged to remain over the Sunday. The two brothers met shyly at first, using Phœbe as a medium of communication; but they drew nearer after a time, in the discussion of the robbery, and Robert presently found means of helping Mervyn, by letter writing, and taking business off his hands to which Phœbe was unequal. Both concurred in insisting that Phœbe should keep her engagement to the Raymonds for the morrow, as the only means of preventing Bertha's escapade from making a sensation; and by night she became satisfied that not only would the brothers keep the peace in her absence, but that a day's *tête-à-tête* might rather promote their good understanding.

Still, she was in no mood to enjoy, when she had to leave Bertha's door still unopened, and the only comfort she could look to was in the conversation with Miss Charlecote on the way. From her, there was no concealing what had happened, and, to Phœbe's surprise, she was encouraging. From an external point of view, she could judge better

than those more nearly concerned, and her elder years made her more conscious what time could do. She would not let the adventure be regarded as a lasting blight on Bertha's life. Had the girl been a few years older, she could never have held up her head again; but as it was, Honor foretold that, by the time she was twenty, the adventure would appear incredible. It was not to be lightly passed over, but she must not be allowed to lose her self-respect, nor despair of regaining a place in the family esteem.

Phœbe could not imagine her ever recovering the being thus cast off by her first love.

"My dear, believe me, it was not love at all, only mystery and the rights of woman. Her very demonstrativeness shows that it was not the heart, but the vanity."

Phœbe tried to believe, and at least was refreshed by the sympathy, so as to be able, to her own surprise, to be pleased and happy at Moorcroft, where Sir John and his wife were full of kindness, and the bright household mirth of the sons and daughters showed Phœbe some of the benefit Miss Finnemore expected for Bertha from girl friends. One of the younger ones showed her a present in preparation for "cousin Cecily," and embarked in a list of the names of the cousinhood at Sutton; and though an elder sister decidedly closed young Harriet's mouth, yet afterwards Phœbe was favoured with a sight of a photograph of the dear cousin, and inferred from it that the young lady's looks were quite severe enough to account for her cruelty.

The having been plunged into a new atmosphere was good for Phœbe, and she brought home so cheerful a face, that even the news of Bertha's continued obstinacy could not long sadden it, in the enjoyment of the sight of Robert making himself necessary to Mervyn, and Mervyn accepting his services as if there had never been anything but brotherly love between them. She could have blessed Bertha for having thus brought them together, and felt as if it were a dream too happy to last.

"What an accountant Robert is!" said Mervyn. "It is a real sacrifice not to have him in the business! What a thing we should have made of it, and he would have taken all the bother!"

"We have done very well to-day," was Robert's ac-

count; "I don't know what can have been the matter before, except my propensity for making myself disagreeable."

Phœbe went to bed revolving plans for softening Bertha, and was fast asleep when the lock of her door was turned. As she awoke, the terrors of the robbery were upon her far more strongly than at the actual moment of its occurrence; but the voice was familiar, though thin, weak, and gasping. "O Phœbe, I've done it! I've starved myself. I am dying;" and the sound became a shrill cry. "The dark! Oh save me!" There was a heavy fall, and Phœbe, springing to the spot where the white vision had sunk down, strove to lift a weight, cold as marble, without pulse or motion. She contrived to raise it, and drag it with her into her own bed, though in deadly terror at the icy touch and prone helplessness, and she was feeling in desperation for the bell rope, when to her great relief, light and steps approached, and Robert spoke. Alas! his candle only served to show the ghastly, senseless face.

"She has starved herself!" said Phœbe, with affright.

"A swoon, don't be afraid," said Robert, who was dressed, and had evidently been watching. "Try to warm her; I will fetch something for her; we shall soon bring her round."

"A swoon, only a swoon," Phœbe was forced to reiterate to herself to keep her senses and check the sobbing screams that swelled in her throat during the hour-like moments of his absence. She rose, and partly dressed herself in haste, then strove to chafe the limbs; but her efforts only struck the deathly chill more deeply into her own heart.

He brought some brandy with which they moistened her lips, but still in vain, and Phœbe's dismay was redoubled as she saw his terror. "It *must* be fainting," he repeated, "but I had better send for Jackson. May God have mercy on us all—this is my fault!"

"Her lips move," gasped Phœbe, as she rubbed the temples with the stimulant.

"Thank God!" and again they put the spoon to her lips, as the nostrils expanded, the eyes opened, and she seemed to crave for the cordial. But vainly Robert raised her in his arms, and Phœbe steadied her own trembling hand to administer it, there were only choking, sobbing efforts for words, resulting in hoarse shrieks of anguish.

Mervyn and Miss Fennimore, entering nearly at the same moment, found Phœbe pale as death, urging composure with a voice of despair; and Robert with looks of horror that he could no longer control, holding up the sinking child, her face livid, her eyes strained. "I can't, I can't," she cried, with frightful catches of her breath; "I shall die ——" and the screams recurred.

Mervyn could not bear the spectacle for an instant, and fled only to return to listen outside. Miss Fennimore brought authority and presence of mind. "Hysterical," she said. "There, lay her down; don't try again yet."

"It is hunger," whispered the trembling Phœbe; but Miss Fennimore only signed to be obeyed, and decidedly saying, "Be quiet, Bertha, don't speak," the habit of submission silenced all but the choking sobs. She sent Robert to warm a shawl, ordered away the frightened maids, and enforced stillness, which lasted till Bertha had recovered breath, when she sobbed out again, "Robert! Where is he? I shall die! He must pray! I can't die!"

Miss Fennimore bade Robert compose his voice to pray aloud, and what he read tranquillized all except Mervyn, who understood this to mean the worst, and burst away to sit cowering in suspense over his fire. Miss Fennimore then offered Bertha a morsel of roll dipped in port wine, but fasting and agitation had really produced a contraction of the muscles of the throat, and the attempt failed. Bertha was dreadfully terrified, and Phœbe could hardly control herself, but she was the only person unbanished by Miss Fennimore. Even Robert's distress became too visible for the absolute calm by which the governess hoped to exhaust the hysteria while keeping up vitality by outward applications of warmth and stimulants, and from time to time renewing the endeavour to administer nourishment.

It was not till two terrible hours had passed that Phœbe came to the school-room and announced to her brothers that after ten minutes' doze, Bertha had waked, and swallowed a spoonful of arrowroot and wine without choking. She could not restrain her sobs, and wept uncontrollably as Mervyn put his arm round her. He was the most composed of the three, for her powers had been sorely strained, and Robert had suffered most of all.

He had on this day suspected that Bertha was burning

the provisions forced on her, but he had kept silence, believing that she would thus reduce herself to a more amenable state than if she were angered by compulsion, and long before serious harm could ensue. Used to the sight of famine, he thought inanition would break the spirit without injuring the health. Many a time had he beheld those who professed to have tasted nothing for two days, trudge off tottering but cheerful, with a soup-ticket, and he had not calculated on the difference between the children of want and the delicately nurtured girl, full of overwrought feeling. Though he had been watching in loving intercession for the unhappy child, and had resolved on forcing his way to her in the morning, he felt as if he had played the part of the Archbishop of Pisa, and that, had she perished in her fearful determination, her blood would have been on himself. He was quite overcome, and forced to hurry to his own room to compose himself, ere he could return to inquire further; but there was little more to hear. Miss Fennimore desired to be alone with the patient; Phœbe allowed herself to be laid on the sofa and covered with shawls; Mervyn returned to his bed, and Robert still watched.

There was a great calm after the storm, and Phœbe did not wake till the dim wintry dawn was struggling with the yellow candlelight, and a consultation was going on in low tones between Robert and the governess, both wan and haggard in the uncomfortable light, and their words not more cheering than their looks. Bertha had become feverish, passing from restless, talking sleep, to startled, painful wakening, and Miss Fennimore wished Dr. Martyn to be sent for. Phœbe shivered with a cold chill of disappointment as she gathered their meaning, and coming forward, entreated the watchers to lie down to rest, while she relieved guard; but nothing would persuade Miss Fennimore to relinquish her post; and soon Phœbe had enough to do elsewhere; for her own peculiar patient, Mervyn, was so ill throughout the morning, that she was constantly employed in his room, and Robert looking on and trying to aid her, hated himself doubly for his hasty judgments.

Maria alone could go to church on that Sunday morning, and her version of the state of affairs brought Miss Charlecote to Beauchamp to offer her assistance. She saw Dr.

Martyn, and undertook the painful preliminary explanation, and she saw him again after his inspection of Bertha.

"That's a first-rate governess! Exactly so! An educational hot-bed. Why can't people let girls dress dolls and trundle hoops as they used to do?"

"I have never thought Bertha oppressed by her lessons."

"So much the worse! Those who can't learn, or won't learn, take care of themselves. Those who have a brain and use it are those that suffer! To hear that poor child blundering algebra in her sleep might be a caution to mothers!"

"Did you ever see her before, so as to observe the little hesitation in her speech?"

"No, they should have mentioned that."

"It is generally very slight; but one of them—I think Maria—told me that she always stammered more after lessons——"

"The blindness of people! As if that had not been a sufficient thermometer to show when they were overworking her brain! Why, not one of these Fulmorts has a head that will bear liberties being taken with it!"

"Can you let us hope that this whole affair came from an affection of the brain?"

"The elopement! No; I can't flatter you that health or sanity were in fault there. Nor is it delirium now; the rambling is only in sleep. But the three days' fast——"

"Two days, was it not?"

"Three. She took nothing since breakfast on Thursday."

"Have you made out how she passed the last two days?"

"I wrung out some account. I believe this would never have occurred to her if her brother had given her a sandwich at Paddington; but she came home exhausted into a distaste for food, which other feelings exaggerated into a fancy to die rather than face the family. She burnt the provisions in a rage at their being forced on her, and she slept most of the time—torpor without acute suffering. Last night in sleep she lost her hold of her resolution, and woke to the sense of self-preservation."

"An infinite mercy!"

"Not that the spirit is broken; all her strength goes to sullenness, and I never saw a case needing greater judgment. Now that she is reduced, the previous overwork tells on her, and it will be a critical matter to bring her round. Who can

be of use here? Not the married sisters, I suppose? Miss Fulmort is all that a girl can be at nineteen or twenty, but she wants age."

"You think it will be a bad illness?"

"It may not assume an acute form, but it may last a good while; and if they wish her to have any health again, they must mind what they are about."

Honora felt a task set to her. She must be Phœbe's experience as far as her fifty years could teach her to deal with a little precocious rationalist in a wild travestie of Thekla. *Ich habe geliebt und gelebet* was the farewell laid on Bertha's table. What a Thekla and what a Max! Oh profanation! But Honor felt Bertha a charge of her own, and her aid was the more thankfully accepted that the patient was quite beyond Phœbe. She had too long rebelled against her sister, to find rest in her guardianship. Phœbe's voice disposed her to resistance, her advice to wrangling, and Miss Fennimore alone had power to enforce what was needful; and so devoted was she, that Honor could scarcely persuade her to lie down to rest for a few hours.

Honor was dismayed at the change from the childish *espiègle* roundness of feature to a withered, scathed countenance, singularly old, and mournfully contrasting with the mischievous-looking waves and rings of curly hair upon the brow. Premature playing at passion had been sport with edged tools. Sleeping, the talk was less, however, of the supposed love, than of science and metaphysics; waking, there was silence between weakness and sullenness.

Thus passed day after day, always in the same feverish lethargic oppression which baffled medical skill, and kept the sick mind beyond the reach of human aid; and so uniform were the days, that her illness seemed to last for months instead of weeks.

Miss Fennimore insisted on the night-watching for her share. Phœbe divided with her and Lieschen the morning cares; and Miss Charlecote came in the forenoon and stayed till night, but slept at home, whither Maria was kindly invited; but Phœbe did not like to send her away without herself or Lieschen, and Robert undertook for her being inoffensive to Mervyn. In fact, she was obliging and unobtrusive, only speaking when addressed, and a willing messenger. Mervyn first forgot her presence, then tolerated her saucer eyes, then

found her capable of running his errands, and lastly began to care to please her. Honora had devised employment for her by putting a drawer of patchwork at her disposal, and suggesting that she should make a work-bag for each of Robert's 139 school-girls; and the occupation this afforded her was such a public benefit, that Robert was content to pay the tax of telling her the destination of each individual bag, and being always corrected if he twice mentioned the same name. When Mervyn dozed in his chair, he would require from Robert "stories" of his scholars; and it even came to pass that Mervyn would recur to what had then passed, as though he had not been wholly asleep.

Mervyn was chiefly dependent on his brother for conversation, entertainment, and assistance in his affairs; and though not a word passed upon their differences, and no professions were made, the common anxiety, and Mervyn's great need of help, had swept away all traces of unfriendliness. Not even when children in the nursery had they been so free from variance or bitterness as while waiting the issue of their sister's illness; both humbled, both feeling themselves in part the cause, each anxious to cheer and console the other—one, weak, subdued, dependent—the other, considerate, helpful, and eager to atone for past harshness. Strange for brothers to wait till the ages of twenty-nine and twenty-seven to find out that they really did prefer each other to every one else, in spite of the immense differences between their characters and habits!

"I say," asked Mervyn, one day, when resting after having brought on giddiness and confusion by directing Robert how to answer a letter from the office, "what would you do with this bore of a business, if it came to you?"

"Get rid of it," said Robert, surveying him with startled eyes.

"Aye—sell it, and get the devilry, as you call it, multiplied to all infinity."

"Close it."

"Boil soup in the coppers, bake loaves in the furnaces? It makes you look at me perilously—and a perilous game you would find it, most likely to swallow this place and all the rest. Why, you, who had the making of a man of business in you, might reflect that you can't annihilate property without damage to other folks."

"I did not reflect," said Robert, gravely; "the matter never occurred to me."

"What is the result of your reflection now?"

"Nothing at all," was the somewhat impatient reply. "I trust never to have to consider. Get it out of my hands at any sacrifice, so as it may do the least harm to others. Had I no other objection to that business, I should have no choice."

"Your cloth? Well, that's a pity, for I see how it could be mitigated, so as to satisfy your scruples;" and Mervyn, whose head could work when it was not necessary, detailed a scheme for gradually contracting the most objectionable traffic, and adopting another branch of the trade.

"Excellent," said Robert, assenting with delight at each pause. "You will carry it out."

"I? I'm only a reprobate distiller."

There it ended, and Robert must have patience.

The guardian, Mr. Crabbe, came as soon as his gout would permit, and hemmed and grunted in reply to the strange narrative into which he had come to inquire. Acting was as yet impossible; Mervyn was forbidden to transact business, and Bertha was far too ill for the removal of the young ladies to be attempted. Miss Fennimore did, indeed, formally give in her resignation of her situation, but she was too necessary as a nurse for the time of her departure to be fixed, and Mr. Crabbe was unable to settle anything definitively. He found Robert—who previously had spurred him to strong measures—bent on persuading him to lenity, and especially on keeping Phœbe with Mervyn; and after a day and night of perplexity, the old gentleman took his leave, promising to come again on Bertha's recovery, and to pacify the two elder sisters by representing the condition of Beauchamp, and that for the present the Incumbent of St. Matthew's and Miss Charlecote might be considered as sufficient guardians for the inmates. "Or if their Ladyships thought otherwise," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "why did they not come down themselves?"

Mervyn made a gesture of horror, but all knew that there was little danger. Augusta was always "so low" at the sight of illness, and unless Phœbe had been the patient out of sight, Juliana would not have brought her husband; obvious as would have been the coming of an elder sister when

the sickness of the younger dragged on so slowly and wearily.

No one went through so much as Miss Fennimore. Each hour of her attendance on Bertha stamped the sense of her own failure, and of the fallacies to which her life had been dedicated. The sincerity, honour, and modesty that she had inculcated, had been founded on self-esteem alone; and when they had proved inadequate to prevent their breach, their outraged relics had prompted the victim to despair and die. Intellectual development and reasoning powers had not availed one moment against inclination and self-will, and only survived in the involuntary murmurs of a disordered nervous system. All this had utterly overthrown that satisfaction in herself and her own moral qualities in which Miss Fennimore had always lived; she had become sensible of the deep flaws in all that she had admired in her own conduct; and her reason being already prepared by her long and earnest study to accept the faith in its fulness, she had begun to crave after the Atoning Mercy of which she sorely felt the need. But if it be hard for one who has never questioned to take home individually the efficacy of the great Sacrifice, how much harder for one taught to deny the God-head which rendered the Victim worthy to satisfy Eternal Justice? She accepted the truth, but the gracious words would not reach her spirit; they were to her as a feast in a hungry man's dream. Robert alone was aware of the struggles through which she was passing, and he could do little in direct aid of her; the books—even the passages of Scripture that he found for her—seemed to fall short; it was as though the sufferer in the wilderness lay in sight of the brazen serpent, but his eyes were holden that he could not see it.

Only the governess's strong and untaxed health could have carried her through her distress and fatigue, for she continued to engross the most trying share of the nursing, anxious to shield Phœbe from even the knowledge of all the miseries of Bertha's nights, when the poor child would start on her pillow with a shriek, gaze wildly round, trembling in every limb, the dew starting on her brow, face well-nigh convulsed, teeth chattering, and strange, incoherent words—

"A dream, only a dream!" she murmured, recovering consciousness.

"What was only a dream?" asked Miss Fennimore, one night.

"Oh, nothing!" but she still shivered; then striving to catch hold of the broken threads of her philosophy, "How one's imagination is a prey to—to—what is it? To—to old impressions—when one is weak."

"What kind of impressions?" asked Miss Fennimore, resolved to probe the matter.

Bertha, whose defect of speech was greatly increased by weakness, was long in making her answer comprehensible; but Miss Fennimore gathered it at last, and it made her spirit quake, for it referred to the terrors beyond the grave. Yet she firmly answered—

"Such impressions may not always result from weakness."

"I thought," cried Bertha, rising on her elbow, "I thought that an advanced state of civilization dispenses with sectarian—I mean superstitious—literal threats."

"No civilization can change those decrees, nor make them unmerited," said Miss Fennimore, sadly.

"How?" repeated Bertha, frowning. "You, too? You don't mean that? You are not one of the narrow minds that want to doom their fellow-creatures for ever." Her eyes had grown large, round, and bright, and she clutched Miss Fennimore's hand, gasping, "Say not for ever!"

"My poor child! did I ever teach you it was not?"

"You thought so!" cried Bertha; "enlightened people think so. Oh say—only say it does not last!"

"Bertha, I cannot. God forgive me for the falsehoods to which I led you, the realities I put aside from you."

Bertha gave a cry of anguish, and sank back exhausted, damps of terror on her brow; but she presently cried out, "If it would not last! I can't bear the thought! I can't bear to live, but I can't die! Oh! who will save me?"

To Miss Fennimore's lips rose the words of St. Paul to the jailer.

"Believe! believe!" cried Bertha, petulantly; "believe what?"

"Believe that He gave His Life to purchase your safety and mine through that Eternity."

And Miss Fennimore sank on her knees, weeping and

hiding her face. The words which she had gazed at, and listened to, in vain longing, had—even as she imparted them—touched herself in their fulness. She had seen the face of Truth, when, at Mrs. Fulmort's death-bed, she had heard Phœbe speak of the Blood that cleanseth from all sin. Then it had been a moment's glimpse. She had sought it earnestly ever since, and at length it had come to nestle within her own bosom. It was not sight, it was touch—it was embracing and holding fast.

Alas! the sight was hidden from Bertha. She moodily turned aside in vexation, as though her last trust had failed her. In vain did Miss Fennimore, feeling that she had led her to the brink of an abyss of depth unknown, till she was tottering on the verge, lavish on her the most tender cares. They were requited with resentful gloom, that the governess felt to be so just towards herself that she would hardly have been able to lift up her head but for the new reliance that gave peace to deepening contrition.

That was a bad night, and the day was worse. Bertha had more strength, but more fever; and the much-enduring Phœbe could hardly be persuaded to leave her to Miss Charlecote at dusk, and air herself with her brothers in the garden. The weather was close and misty, and Honora set open the door to admit the air from the open passage window. A low, soft, lulling sound came in, so much softened by distance that the tune alone showed that it was an infant school ditty sung by Maria, while rocking herself in her low chair over the schoolroom fire. Turning to discover whether the invalid were annoyed by it, Honor beheld the hard, keen little eyes intently fixed, until presently they filled with tears; and with a heavy sigh, the words broke forth, "Oh! to be as silly as she is!"

"As *selig*, you mean," said Honor, kindly.

"It is the same thing," she said, with a bitter ring in her poor worn voice.

"No, it is not weakness that makes your sister happy. She was far less happy before she learnt to use her powers lovingly."

With such earnestness that her stuttering was very painful to hear, she exclaimed, "Miss Charlecote, I can't recollect things—I get puzzled—I don't say what I want to say. Tell me, is not my brain softening or weakening? You

know Maria had water on the head once!" and her accents were pitifully full of hope.

"Indeed, my dear, you are not becoming like Maria."

"If I were," said Bertha, certainly showing no such resemblance, "I suppose I should not know it. I wonder whether Maria be ever conscious of her *Ich*," said she, with a weary sigh, as if this were a companion whence she could not escape.

"Dear child, your *Ich* would be best set aside by living to others, who only seek to make you happier."

"I wish they would let me alone. If they had, there would have been an end of it."

"An end—no indeed, my poor child?"

"There!" cried Bertha; "that's what it is to live! To be shuddered at!"

"No, Bertha, I did not shudder at the wild delusion and indiscretion, which may be lived down and redeemed, but at the fearful act that would have cut you off from all hope, and chained you to yourself, and such a self, for ever, never to part from the shame whence you sought to escape. Yes, surely there must have been pleading in Heaven to win for you that instant's relenting. Rescued twice over, there must be some work for you to do, something to cast into shade all that has passed."

"It will not destroy memory!" she said, with hopeless indifference.

"No; but you may be so occupied with it as to rise above your present pain and humiliation, and remember them only to gather new force from your thankfulness."

"What, that I was made a fool of?" cried Bertha, with sharpness in her thin voice.

"That you were brought back to the new life that is before you."

Though Bertha made no answer, Honor trusted that a beginning had been made, but only to be disappointed, for the fever was higher the next day, and Bertha was too much oppressed for speech. The only good sign was that in the dusk she desired that the door should be left open, in case Maria should be singing. It was the first preference she had evinced. The brothers were ready to crown Maria, and she sang with such good-will that Phoebe was forced to

take precautions, fearing lest the harmony should lose "the modest charm of not too much."

There ensued a decided liking for Maria's company, partly no doubt from her envied deficiency, and her ignorance of the extent of Bertha's misdemeanour, partly because there was less effort of mind in intercourse with her. Her pleasure in waiting on her sister was likewise so warm and grateful, that Bertha felt herself conferring a favour, and took everything from her in a spirit very different from the dull submission towards Miss Fennimore or the peevish tyranny over Phoebe. Towards no one else save Miss Charlecote did she show any favour, for though their conversation was never even alluded to, it had probably left a pleasant impression, and possibly she was entertained by Honor's systematic habit of talking of the world beyond to the other nurses in her presence.

But these likings were far more scantily shown than her dislikes, and it was hard for her attendants to acquiesce in the physician's exhortations to be patient till her spirits and nerves should have recovered the shock. Even the entrance of a new housemaid threw her into a trepidation which she was long in recovering, and any proposal of seeing any person beyond the few who had been with her from the first, occasioned trembling, entreaties, and tears.

Phoebe, after her brief heroineship, had lapsed into quite a secondary position. In the reaction of the brothers' feeling towards each other, they almost left her out. Both were too sure of her to be eager for her; and besides, as Bertha slowly improved, Mervyn's prime attention was lavished on the endeavour to find what would give her pleasure. And in the sick room Miss Fennimore and Miss Charlecote could better rule; while Maria was preferred as a companion. Honor often admired to see how content Phoebe was to forego the privilege of waiting on her sister, preparing pleasures and comforts for her in the background, and committing them to the hands whence they would be most welcome, without a moment's grudge at her own distastefulness to the patient. She seemed to think it the natural consequence of the superiority of all the rest, and fully acquiesced. Sometimes a tear would rise for a moment at Bertha's rude petulance, but it was dashed off for a resolute smile, as if with the feeling of a child against tears, and she as plainly felt

the background her natural position, as if she had never been prominent from circumstances. Whatever was to be done, she did it, and she was far more grateful to Mervyn for loving Robert and enduring Maria than for any preference to herself. Always finding cause for thanks, she rejoiced even in the delay caused by Bertha's illness, and in Robert's stay in his brother's home, where she had scarcely dared to hope ever to have seen him again. Week after week he remained, constantly pressed by Mervyn to delay his departure, and not unwillingly yielding, since he felt that there was a long arrear of fraternal kindness to be made up, and that while St. Matthew's was in safe hands, he might justly consider that his paramount duty was to his brother and sisters in their present need. At length, however, the Lent services claimed him in London, and affairs at Beauchamp were so much mended, that Phœbe owned that they ought no longer to detain him from his parish, although Bertha was only able to be lifted to a couch, took little notice of any endeavour to interest her, and when he bade her farewell, hardly raised eye or hand in return.

CHAPTER X.

When all is done or said,
In th' end this shall you find,
He most of all doth bathe in bliss
That hath a quiet mind.

LORD VAUX.

ROBERT had promised to return in the end of March, to be present at the Assizes, when the burglars would be tried, and he did not come alone. Mr. Crabbe judged it time to inspect Beauchamp and decide for his wards; and Lady Bannerman, between Juliana's instigations, her own pride in being connected with a trial, and her desire to appropriate Phœbe, decided on coming down with the Admiral to see how matters stood, and to give her vote in the family council.

Commissions from Mervyn had pursued Robert since his arrival in town, all for Bertha's amusement, and he

brought down, by special orders, "a musical box, all Leech's illustrations, and a small Maltese dog, like a spun-glass lion, which Augusta had in vain proposed to him to exchange for her pug, which was getting fat and wheezy, and would amuse Bertha just as well." Lady Bannerman hardly contained her surprise, when Maria, as well as Mervyn and Phœbe, met her in the hall, seemingly quite tame and at her ease. Mervyn looked better, and in answer to inquiries for Bertha, answered, "Oh, getting on, decidedly; we have her in the garden. She might drive out, only she has such a horror of meeting any one; but her spirits are better, I really thought she would have laughed yesterday when Maria was playing with the kitten. Ha! the dog, have you got him, Robert? Well, if this does not amuse her, I do not know what will."

And at the first possible moment, Mervyn, Maria, and the Maltese were off through the open window. Robert asked what Phœbe thought of Mervyn. She said he was much stronger, but the doctor was not satisfied that the mischief was removed, and feared that a little want of care or any excitement might bring on another attack. She dreaded the morrow on his account.

"Yes," said the elder sister, "I don't wonder! A most atrocious attempt! I declare I could hardly make up my mind to sleep in the house! Mind you swear to them all, my dear."

"I only saw Smithson clearly."

"Oh, never mind; if they have not done that they have done something quite as bad; and I should never sleep a night again in peace if they got off. Was it true that they had packed up all the liqueurs?"

Phœbe exonerated them from this aggravated guilt.

"I say, my dear, would you tell the butler to bring up some of the claret that was bought at Mr. Rolleston's auction? I told Sir Nicholas that he should taste it, and I don't like to mention it to poor Mervyn, as he must not drink wine."

"There is some up," said Phœbe; "Mervyn fancied that Bertha liked it."

"My dear, you don't give Bertha that claret! You don't know what poor papa gave for it."

"If Bertha would only enjoy anything Mervyn would be overjoyed."

"Yes, it is as Juliana says; it is nothing but spoiling that ails her," said Augusta. "Did you say she was in the garden? I may as well go and see her."

This Phoebe withstood with entreating looks, and representations that Bertha had as yet seen no fresh face, and was easily startled; but her sister insisted that she was no stranger, and could do no harm, till Phoebe had no choice but to run on and announce her, in the hope that surprise might lessen the period of agitation.

In the sunniest and most sheltered walk was a wheeled chair, over which Miss Fennimore held a parasol, while Mervyn and Maria were anxiously trying to win some token of pleasure from the languid, inanimate occupant to whom they were displaying the little dog. As the velvet-bordered silk, crimson shawl, and purple bonnet neared the dark group, a nervous tremor shot through the sick girl's frame, and partly starting up, she made a gesture of scared entreaty; but Lady Bannerman's portly embrace and kind inquiries were not to be averted. She assured the patient that all was well since she could get out of doors, the air would give her a famous appetite, and if she was able to drink claret, she would be strong enough in a day or two to come up to Juliana in London, where change and variety would set her up at once.

Bertha scarcely answered, but made an imperious sign to be drawn to the west wing, and as Phoebe succeeded in turning Augusta's attention to the hothouses, Mervyn beckoned to Robert, rather injudiciously, for his patient was still tremulous from the first greeting. Her face had still the strangely old appearance, her complexion was nearly white, her hair thin and scanty, the almost imperceptible cast of the eye which had formerly only served to give character to her arch expression, had increased to a decided blemish; and her figure, which had shot up to woman's height, seemed to bend like a reed as Mervyn supported her to the sofa in the school-room. With nervous fright, she retained his hand, speaking with such long, helpless hesitation, that Robert caught only the words "Juliana—never—"

"Never, never," answered Mervyn; "don't fear! We'll prevent that, Robert; tell her that she shall not fall into Juliana's hands—no, nor do anything against her will."

Only after repeated assurances from both brothers that

Augusta should not carry her off in her present state, did she rest tranquilly on the sofa, while Mervyn, after waiting on her assiduously, with touching tenderness, as if constantly imploring her to be pleased, applied himself to playing with the dog, watching her face for some vestige of interest, and with so much gratification at the slightest sign of amusement as to show how melancholy must have been the state compared with which this was improvement.

After slowly attaining her present amount of convalescence, she had there stopped short, without progress in strength or spirits, and alarms constantly varying for her head, spine, and lungs, as if the slightest accidental cause might fix permanent disease in either quarter; and to those who daily watched her, and knew the miserable effects produced by the merest trifles, it was terrible to think that her destination was in the hands of a comparative stranger, urged on by the dull Augusta and the acid Juliana. Mervyn needed no severer penalty for having forfeited his right to protect his sisters; attached to them and devoted to Bertha as the anxieties of the spring had rendered him. The sight of Bertha had so far modified Lady Bannerman's scheme, that she proposed herself to conduct the three to Brighton, and there remain till the London season, when the two younger could be disposed of in some boarding school, and Phœbe conducted to Albury-street. Mr. Crabbe did not appear averse to this offer, and there was a correctness about it which rendered it appalling to those who had not Phœbe's quiet trust that no part of it would be allowed to happen unless it were good for them. And she found her eldest brother so much subdued and less vituperative, that she thought him quite obliged by her experienced counsel on his housekeeping and cookery, breaking up his present establishment and letting the house for a year, during which she promised him all facilities for meeting a young widow, the wealth of whose stockbroking husband would be exactly what his business and estate required, and would pay off all his debts.

Phœbe saw indications on Mervyn's countenance which made it no surprise that he was in such a condition in the morning that only copious loss of blood and the most absolute rest to the last moment enabled him to go to W—— for the trial. Miss Charlecote had undertaken the care of Ber-

tha, that Miss Fennimore might take charge of Maria, who was exceedingly eager to see her brother and sister give evidence.

There is no need to dwell on the proceedings. It was to Phœbe on a larger scale what she had previously gone through. She was too much occupied with the act before God and her neighbour to be self-conscious, or to think of the multitudes eagerly watching her young simple face, or listening to her grave clear tones. A dim perception crossed Lady Bannerman's mind that there really might be something in little Phœbe when she found the sheriff's wife, the *grande dame* of the hunting field, actually shedding tears of emotion.

As soon as Mervyn's own evidence had been given, he had been obliged to go to the inn and lie down; and Phœbe wished to join him there and go home at once. Both Robert and Sir John Raymond were waiting for her at the door of the witness-box, and the latter begged to introduce the sheriff, who pressed her to let him take her back into court to Lady Bannerman, his wife wished so much to see her there and at luncheon. And when Phœbe declared that she must return to her brother, she was told that it had been settled that she was to come with Sir Nicholas and Lady Bannerman to dine and sleep at the sheriff's next day, after the assize was over, to meet the judges.

Phœbe was almost desperate in her refusals, and was so little believed after all, that she charged Robert—when the sheriff had taken leave—to assure Augusta of the impossibility of her accepting the invitation. Sir John smiled, saying, "Lady Caroline scarcely deserved her," and added, "Here is another who wishes to shake hands with you, and this time I promise that you shall not be persecuted—my brother "

He was a thin, spare man, who might have been taken for the elder brother, with a gentle, dreamy expression and soft, tender voice, such as she could not imagine being able to cope with pupils. He asked after her brother's health, and she offered to ascertain whether Mervyn felt well enough to see him, but he thanked her, saying it was better not.

"It could not have been his doing," thought Phœbe, as she went upstairs. "How strong-minded Cecily must be! I wonder whether she would have done Bertha good."

"Whose voice was that?" exclaimed Mervyn, at his door above.

"Sir John Raymond and his brother."

"Are they coming in?"

"No; they thought it might disturb you."

Phoebe was glad that these answers fell to the share of the unconscious Robert. Mervyn sat down, and did not revert to the Raymonds through all the homeward journey. Indeed, he seemed unequal to speaking at all, went to his room immediately, and did not appear again when the others came home, bringing tidings that the verdict was guilty, and the sentence penal servitude. Lady Bannerman had further made a positive engagement with the sheriff's lady, and was at first incredulous, then highly displeased, at Phoebe's refusal to be included in it. She was sure it was only that Phoebe was bent on her own way, and thought she should get it when left at home with her guardian and her brothers.

Poor Phoebe, she did not so much as know what her own way was! She had never so much wished for her *wise* guardian, but in the meantime the only wisdom she could see was to wait patiently, and embrace whatever proposal would seem best for the others, though with little hope that any would not entail pain and separation from those who could spare her as ill as she could spare them.

Dr. Martyn was to come over in the course of the ensuing day to examine Bertha, and give her guardian his opinion of her state. There was little danger of its being favourable to violent changes, for Augusta made a descent on the schoolroom after dinner, and the morbid agitation thus occasioned obliged Miss Fennimore to sit up with the patient till one o'clock. In the morning the languor was extreme, and the cough so frequent that the fear for the lungs was in the ascendant.

But Augusta, knowing of all this, believed her visit to have been most important, and immediately after breakfast summoned Robert to a conference, that he might be convinced that there must be no delay in taking measures for breaking up the present system.

"We must hear what Dr. Martyn says."

"I never thought anything of Dr. Martyn since he advised me to leave off wine at supper. As Juliana says, a

physician can always be taken in by an artful woman, and he is playing into her hands."

"Into whose?" said Robert, unable to suppose it could be Phœbe's.

"Come, Robert, you ought not to let yourself be so blinded. I am sure it is more for your interest than my own, but I see you are as simple as ever. Juliana said any one could hoodwink you by talking of altar-cloths and Anglo-Saxons."

"Anglo-Catholics, possibly."

"Well, it is all the same! It is those nonsensical distinctions, rather than your own interests; but when you are cut out, and depend upon it, she will lose no time in his state of health——"

"Of whom or what are you talking?"

"I never thought well of her, pretending to drink nothing but water; and with that short, dry way, that I call impertinence; but I never thought she could be so lost till last night! Why, when I thought I would just go and see how the child was—there, after calling himself too ill to come in to dinner, there sat Mervyn, actually drinking tea. I promise you they looked disconcerted!"

"Well they might be! Bertha suffered half the night from that sudden visit."

"And you believe that, Robert! Well! it is a convenient blind! But if you won't, we shall do our best to shame them, and if she dares it, we shall never visit her! That's all!"

Her drift here becoming revealed to Robert, his uncontrollable smile caused Augusta to swell with resentment. "Aye! nothing on earth will make you own yourself mistaken, or take the advice of your elders, though you might have had enough of upholding Phœbe's wilfulness."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"To join us all in seeing that Miss Fennimore leaves the house before us. Then I will take the girls to Brighton, and you and the Actons might keep watch over him, and if he should persist in his infatuation—why, in the state of his head, it would almost come to a commission of lunacy. Juliana said so!"

"I have no doubt of it," said Robert, gravely. "I am obliged to you both, Augusta. As you observe, I am the

party chiefly concerned, therefore I have a right to request that you will leave me to defend my interests as I shall see best, and that you will confide your surmise to no one else."

Robert was not easily gainsaid when he spoke in that tone, and besides, Augusta really was uncertain whether he did not seriously adopt her advice; but though silenced towards him, she did not abstain from lamenting herself to Miss Charlecote, who had come by particular request to consult with Dr. Martyn, and enforce his opinion on Mr. Crabbe. Honora settled the question by a laugh, and an assurance that Mervyn had views in another direction; but Augusta knew of so many abortive schemes for him, and believed him to be the object of so many reports, that she treated this with disdain, and much amused Honora by her matronly superiority and London patronage.

Dr. Martyn came to luncheon, and she endeavoured to extort from him that indulgence hurt Bertha, and that Mervyn needed variety. Failing in this, she remembered his anti-supper advice, and privately warned Mr. Crabbe against him.

His advice threw a new light on the matter. He thought that in a few weeks' time, Bertha ought to be taken to Switzerland, and perhaps spend the winter in the South of France. Travelling gave the best hope of rousing her spirits or bracing her shattered constitution, but the utmost caution against fatigue and excitement would be requisite; she needed to be at once humoured and controlled, and her morbid repugnance to new attendants must be respected till it should wear off of its own accord.

Surely this might be contrived between sister, governess, and German nurse, and if Mr. Fulmort himself would go too, it would be the best thing for his health, which needed exemption from business and excitement.

Here was playing into the governess's hands! Mindful of Juliana's injunctions, Lady Bannerman announced her intention of calling heaven and earth together rather than sanction the impropriety, and set off for her party at the sheriff's in a mood which made Phœbe tremble, lest the attractions of ortolans and Burgundy should instigate the "tremendous sacrifice" of becoming chaperon.

Mervyn thought the doctor's sentence conclusive as to Miss Fennimore's plans, but to his consternation it made

no change in them, except that she fixed the departure of the family as the moment of parting. Though her manner towards him had become open and friendly, she was deaf to all that he could urge, declaring that it was her duty to leave his sisters, and that the change, when once made, would be beneficial to Bertha, by removing old associations. In despair, he came to Miss Charlecote, begging her to try her powers of persuasion for the sake of poor Bertha, now his primary object, whom he treated with spoiling affection. He was quite powerless to withstand any fancy of Bertha in her present state, and not only helpless without Miss Fennimore, but having become so far used to her that for his own sake he could not endure the notion of a substitute. "Find out the objection," he said, "that at least I may know whether to punch Augusta's head."

Honora gratified him by seeking an interview with the governess, though not clear herself as to the right course, and believing that her advice, had she any to give, would go for very little with the learned governess. Miss Fennimore was soft and sad, but decided, and begging to be spared useless arguments. Whether Lady Bannerman had insulted her by hinting her suspicions, Honor could not divine, for she was firmly entrenched within her previous motive, namely, that it would be wrong to remain in a family where first her system, and then her want of vigilance, had produced such results. And to the representation that for her own sake the present conjuncture was the worst in which she could depart, she replied that it mattered not, since she saw her own deficiencies too plainly ever to undertake again the charge of young ladies, and only intended to find employment as a teacher in a school.

"Say no more," she entreated; "and above all do not let Phœbe persuade me," and there were tears on either cheek.

"Indeed, I believe her not having done so is a most unselfish act of deference to your judgment."

"I know it for a sign of true affection! You, who know what she is, can guess what it costs me to leave her above all, now that I am one in faith with her, and could talk to her more openly than I ever dared to do; she whose example first showed me that faith is a living substance! Yes, Miss Charlecote, I am to be received into the Church

at St. Wulstan's, where I shall be staying as soon as I have left Beauchamp."

Overcome with feeling, Honora hastily rose and kissed the governess's forehead, her tears choking her utterance. "But—but," she presently said, "that removes all possible doubt. Does not Robert say so?"

"He does," said Miss Fennimore; "but I cannot think so. After having miserably infused my own temper of rationalism, how could I, as a novice and learner, fitly train that poor child? Besides, others of the family justly complain of me, and I *will* not be forced on them. No, nor let my newly-won blessing be alloyed by bringing me any present advantage."

"I honour you—I agree with you," said Miss Charlecote, sadly; "but it makes me the more sorry for those poor girls. I do not see what is to be done! A stranger will be worse than no one to both the invalids; Lieschen has neither head nor nerve; and though I do not believe Phœbe will ever give way, Bertha behaves very ill to her, and the strain of anxiety may be too much for such a mere girl, barely twenty! She may suffer for it afterwards, if not at the time."

"I feel it all," sighed Miss Fennimore; "but it would not justify me in letting myself be thrust on a family whose confidence in me has been deceived. Nobody could go with them but you, Miss Charlecote."

"Me! how much obliged Mervyn would be," laughed Honora.

"It was a wild wish, such as crosses the mind in moments of perplexity and distress; but no one else could be so welcome to my poor Bertha, nor be the motherly friend they all require. Forgive me, Miss Charlecote; but I have seen what you made of Phœbe, in spite of me and my system."

So Honor returned to announce the ill-success of her mission.

"There!" said Mervyn; "goodness knows what will become of us! Bertha would go into fits at the sight of any stranger; and such a hideous old catamaran as Juliana will be sure to have in pickle, will be the death of her outright. I think Miss Charlecote had better take pity on us!"

"Oh, Mervyn, impossible!" cried Phœbe, shocked at his audacity.

"I protest," said Mervyn, "nothing else can save you from some nasty, half-bred companion! Faugh! Now, Miss Charlecote would enjoy the trip, put Maria and Bertha to bed, and take you to operas, and pictures, and churches, and you would all be off my hands!"

"For shame, Mervyn," cried Phœbe, crimson at his cavalier manner.

"It is the second such compliment I have received, Phœbe," said Honor. "Miss Fennimore does me the honour to tell me to be her substitute."

"Then if she says so," said Mervyn, "it is our only rescue!"

If Honor laughed, it was not that she did not think. As she crossed the park, she felt that each bud of spring beauty, each promised crop, each lamb, each village child, made the proposal the more unwelcome; yet that the sense of being rooted, and hating to move, ought to be combated. It might hardly be treating Humfrey's "goodly heritage" aright, to make it an excuse for abstaining from an act of love; and since Brooks attended to her so little when at home, he could very well go on without her. Not that she believed that she should be called on to decide. She did not think Mervyn in earnest, nor suppose that he would encumber himself with a companion who could not be set aside like a governess, and was of an age more "proper" and efficient than agreeable. His unceremonious manner proved sufficiently that it was a mere joke, and he would probably laugh his loud, scoffing laugh at the old maid taking him in earnest. Yet she could not rid herself of the thought of Phœbe's difficulties, and in poor Bertha, she had the keen interest of nurse towards patient.

"Once before," she thought, "have I gone out of the beaten track upon impulse. Cruel consequences! Yet do I repent? Not of the act, but of the error that ensued. Then I was eager, young, romantic. Now I would rather abstain: I am old and sluggish. If it is to be, it will be made plain. I do not distrust my feeling for Phœbe—it is not the jealous, hungering love of old; and I hope to be able to discern whether this be an act of charity! At least, I will not take the initiative. I did so last time."

Honor's thoughts and speculations were all at Beauchamp throughout the evening and the early morning, till her avocations drove it out of her mind. She was busy, trying hard to get her own way with her bailiff as to the crops, when she was interrupted by tidings that Mr. Fulmort was in the drawing-room; and concluding it to be Robert, she did not hurry her argument upon guano. On entering the room, however, she was amazed at beholding not Robert, but his brother, cast down in an arm chair, and looking thoroughly tired out.

"Mervyn! I did not expect to see you!"

"Yes, I just walked over. I thought I would report progress. I had no notion it was so far."

And in fact he had not been at the Holt since, as a pert boy, he had found it "slow." Honor was rather alarmed at this fatigue, and offered varieties of sustenance, which he declined, returning with eager nervousness to the subject in hand.

The Bannermans, he said, had offered to go with Bertha and Phœbe, but only on condition that Maria was left at a boarding-house, and a responsible governess taken for Bertha. Moreover, Augusta had told Bertha herself what was impending, and the poor child had laid a clinging, trembling grasp on his arm, and hoarsely whispered that if a stranger came to hear her story, she would die. Alas! it might be easier than before. He had promised never to consent. "But what can I do?" he said, with a hand upon either temple; "they heed me no more than Maria!"

Robert had absolutely half consented to leave his cure in the charge of another, and conduct his brothers and sisters, but this plan did not satisfy the guardian, who could not send out his wards without some reliable female.

He swung the tassel of the sofa-cushion violently as he spoke, and looked imploringly at Honora, but she, though much moved, felt obliged to keep her resolution of not beginning.

"Very hard," he said, "that when there are but two women in the world that that poor child likes, she can have neither!" and then, gaining hope from something in her face, he exclaimed, "After all, I do believe you will take pity on her!"

"I thought you in joke yesterday."

"I thought it too good to be true! I am not so cool as Phœbe thought me. But really," he said, assuming an earnest, rational, gentlemanly manner, "you have done so much for us that perhaps it makes us presume, and though I know it is preposterous, yet if it were possible to you to be long enough with poor Bertha to bring her round again, I do believe it would make an infinite difference."

"What does Phœbe say?" asked Honor.

"Phœbe, poor child, she does not know I am come. She looks as white as death, and got up a smile that was enough to make one cry, but she told me not to mind, for something would be sure to bring it right; and so it will, if you will come."

"But, Mervyn, you don't consider what a nuisance I shall be to you."

Mervyn looked more gallant than Robert ever could have done, and said something rather foolish; but anxiety quickly made him natural again, and he proceeded, "After all, they need not bother you much. Phœbe is of your own sort, and Maria is inoffensive, and Bertha will have Lieschen, and I—I'll take my own line, and be as little of a bore as I can. You'll go?"

"If—if it will do."

That odd answer was enough. Mervyn, already leaning forward with his arm on his knees, held out one hand, and shaded his eyes with the other, as, half with a sob, he said, "There, then, it is all right! Miss Charlecote, you can't guess what it is to a man not to be trusted with his own sisters!"

These words made that *bête noire*, John Mervyn Fulmort, nearly as much a child of her own as his brother and sister; for they were in a tone of self-blame—not of resentment.

She was sufficiently afraid of him to respect his reserve; moreover, he looked so ill and harassed that she dreaded his having an attack, and heartily wished for Phœbe, so she only begged him to rest till after her early dinner, when she would convey him back to Beauchamp; and then left him alone, while she went to look her undertaking in the face, rather amused to find herself his last resource, and surprised to find her spirit of enterprise rising, her memories of Alps, lakes, cathedrals, and pictures fast assuming the old charm

that had erst made her long to see them again. And with Phœbe! Really, it would be almost a disappointment if the scheme failed.

When she again met her unwonted guest he plunged into plans, routes, and couriers, treating her as far more completely pledged than she chose to allow; and eating as heartily as he dared, and more so than she thought Phœbe would approve. She was glad to have him safe at his own door, where Phœbe ran to meet them, greatly relieved, for she had been much disturbed by his absence at luncheon.

"Miss Charlecote! Did you meet him?"

"I went after her"—and Mervyn boyishly caught his sister round the waist, and pushed her down into a curtsey—"make your obedience; she is going to look after you all."

"Going with us!" cried Phœbe, with clasped hands.

"To see about it," began Honor, but the words were strangled in a transported embrace.

"Dearest, dearest Miss Charlecote! Oh, I knew it would all come right if we were patient; but, oh! that it should be so right! O! Mervyn, how could you?"

"Ah! you see what it is not to be faint-hearted." And Phœbe, whose fault was certainly not a faint heart, laughed at this poor jest, as she had seldom laughed before, with an *abandon* of gaiety and joyousness. The quiet girl was absolutely thrown off her balance, laughed and cried, thanked and exclaimed, moved restlessly, and spoke incoherently.

"Oh! may I tell Bertha?" she asked.

"No, I'll do that," said Mervyn. "It is all my doing."

"Run after him, Phœbe," said Honor. "Don't let Bertha think it settled!"

And Bertha was, of course, disappointingly indifferent.

Lady Bannerman's nature was not capable of great surprise, but Miss Charlecote's proposal was not unwelcome. "I did not want to go," she said; "though dear Sir Nicholas would have made any sacrifice, and it would have looked so for them to have gone alone. Travelling with an invalid is so trying, and Phœbe made such a rout about Maria, that Mr. Crabbe insisted on her going. But you like the kind of thing."

Honor undertook for her own taste for the kind of thing, and her ladyship continued, "Yes, you must find it uncom-

monly dull to be so much alone. Where did Juliana tell me she had heard of Lucy Sandbrook?"

"She is in Staffordshire," answered Honor, gravely.

"Ah, yes, with Mrs. Willis Beaumont; I remember. Juliana made a point of letting her know all about it, and how you were obliged to give her up."

"I hope not," exclaimed Honor, alarmed. "I never gave her up! There is no cause but her own spirit of independence that she should not return to me to-morrow."

"Oh, indeed," said Augusta, carelessly letting the subject drop, after having implanted anxiety too painful to be quelled by the hope that Lady Acton's neighbourhood might have learnt how to rate her words.

Mrs. Crabbe was satisfied and complimentary; Robert, rejoiced and grateful; and Bertha, for the first time, set her will upon recovering and made daily experiments on her strength, thus quickly amending, though still her weakness and petulance needed the tenderest management, and once when a doubt arose as to Miss Charlecote's being able to leave home, she suddenly withered up again, with such a recurrence of unfavourable symptoms as prove dhow precarious was her state.

It was this evidence of the necessity of the arrangement that chiefly contributed to bring it to pass. When the pressure of difficulty lessened, Mervyn was half ashamed of his own conduct, disliked the obligation, and expected to be bored by "the old girl," as, to Phœbe's intense disgust, he *would* speak of Miss Charlecote. Still, in essentials he was civil and considerate, and Honor carefully made it evident that she did not mean to obtrude herself, and expected him to sit loose to the female part of the company. Divining that he would prefer the start from home not to be simultaneous, and also favouring poor Bertha's shuddering horror of the direct line of railway to London, she proposed that the ladies should work their way by easy journeys on cross lines to Southampton, whilst Mervyn settled his affairs at the office, and then should come to them with Robert, who had made it possible to take an Easter holiday in which to see them safe to their destination in Switzerland.

Phœbe tried to acquiesce in Miss Charlecote's advice to trust Mervyn's head to Robert's charge, and not tease him with solicitude; but the being debarred from going to Lon-

don was a great disappointment. She longed for a sight of St. Matthew's; and what would it not have been to see the two brothers there like brothers indeed? But she must be content with knowing that so it was. Mervyn's opposition was entirely withdrawn, and though he did not in the least comprehend and was far from admiring his brother's aims, still his name and his means were no longer withheld from supporting Robert's purposes, "because he was such a good fellow, it was a shame to stand in his way." She knew, too, rather by implication than confession, that Mervyn imagined his chief regrets for the enormous extravagance of the former year, were because he had thus deprived himself of the power of buying a living for his brother, as compensation for having kept him out of his father's will. Whether Mervyn would ever have made the purchase, and still more whether Robert would have accepted it, was highly doubtful, but the intention was a step for which to be thankful; and Phœbe watched the growing friendliness of the long estranged pair with constantly new delight, and anticipated much from Mervyn's sight of St. Matthew's with eyes no longer jaundiced.

She would gladly, too, have delayed the parting with Miss Fennimore, who had made all her arrangements for a short stay with her relatives in London, and then for giving lessons at a school. To Phœbe's loyal spirit, it seemed hard that even Miss Charlecote's care should be regarded as compensating for the loss of the home friend of the last seven years, and the closer, nearer link was made known as she sat late over the fire with the governess on Easter Sunday evening, their last at Beauchamp. Silent hitherto, Miss Fennimore held her peace no longer, but begged Phœbe to think of one who on another Sunday would no longer turn aside from the Altar. Phœbe lifted her eyes, full of hope and inquiry, and as she understood, exclaimed, "Oh, I am glad! I knew you must have some deep earnest reason for not being with us."

"You never guessed?"

"I never tried. I saw that Robert knew, so I hoped."

"And prayed?"

"Yes, you belonged to me."

"Do I belong to you now?"

"Nay, more than ever now."

"Then, my child, you never traced my unsettled faith?—my habit of testing mystery by reason never perplexed you?"

Phœbe thought a moment, and said, "I knew that Robert distrusted, though I never asked why. There was a time when I used to try to sift the evidence and logic of all I learnt, and I was puzzled where faith's province began and reasoning ended. But when our first sorrow came, all the puzzles melted, and it was not worth while to argue on realities that I felt. Since that, I have read more, and seen where my own ignorance made my difficulties, and I have prized—yes, adored, the truths all the more because you had taught me to appreciate in some degree their perfect foundation on reasoning."

"Strange," said Miss Fennimore, "that we should have lived together so long, acting on each other, yet each unconscious of the other's thoughts. I see now. What to you was not doubt, but desire for a reason for your hope, became in poor Bertha, not disbelief, but contempt and carelessness of what she did not feel. I shall never have a sense of rest, till you can tell me that she enters into your faith. I am chiefly reconciled to leaving her, because I trust that in her enfeebled, dependent state, she may become influenced by Miss Charlecote and by you."

"I cannot argue with her," said Phœbe. "When she is well, she can always puzzle me; I lose her when she gets to her *ego*. You are the only one who can cope with that."

"The very reason for keeping away. Don't argue. Live and act. That was your lesson to me."

Phœbe did not perceive, and Miss Fennimore loved her freedom from self-consciousness too well even for gratitude's sake to molest her belief that the conversion was solely owing to Robert's powers of controversy.

That one fleeting glimpse of inner life was the true farewell. The actual parting was a practical matter of hurry of trains, and separation of parcels, with Maria too busy with the Maltese dog to shed tears, or even to perceive that this was a final leavetaking with one of those whom she best loved.

CHAPTER XI.

Tak down, tak down the mast of gowd,
 Set up the mast of tree,
 It sets not a forsaken lady
 • To sail so gallantly

Annie of Lochroyan.

"QUAINT little white-capped objects! The St. Wulstan's girls marching to St. Paul's! Ah! the banner I helped to work! How well I remember the contriving that crozier upon it! How well it has worn! Sweet Honey must be in London; it was the sight she most grudged missing!"

So thought Lucilla Sandbrook as a cab conveyed her through the Whittingtonian intricacies.

Her residence with Mrs. Willis Beaumont was not a passage in her life on which she loved to dwell. Neither party had been well content with the other, though deference to Mrs. Prendergast had held them together. The lady herself was worthy and kind-hearted, but dull and tedious; and Lucilla, used to animation and intellect, had wearied excessively of the platitudes which were meant as friendly conversation, while her keen remarks and power of drollery and repartee were just sufficiently perceived to be dreaded and disliked. The children were like their mother, and were frightened and distressed by her quickness and unreasonable expectations. Their meek, demure heaviness and complacency, even at their sports, made her positively dislike them, all but one scapegrace boy, in favour with no one, and whom she liked more from perverseness and compassion than from any merits of his own. Lady Acton's good offices gave the widow a tangible cause, such as was an absolute satisfaction, for her antipathy, and shook the implicit trust in Mrs. Prendergast's recommendation that had hitherto overridden her private sentiments; yet still, habitual awe of her sister-in-law, and her own easiness and dread of change, left things in the same state until a crisis caused by a grand disturbance among the children. In the nice matter of meting out blame, mamma's partiality and the children's ungenerosity left an undue share upon the scapegrace; his indignant partisan fought his battles "not wisely but too well," lost temper, and uttered sarcastic home truths which

startled and stung the lady into the request for which she could hardly have nerved herself in cooler moments, namely, that they might part.

This settled, each secretly felt that there was something to be regretted, and both equally wished that a new engagement should be made before the termination of the present should be made known at Southminster. For this purpose, every facility had been given for Miss Sandbrook's coming to town personally to answer two ladies to whom she had been mentioned. A family in the neighbourhood had already been tried, but had declined her, and Mrs. Beaumont had shown her the note; "so stylish, such strange stories afloat." Lucilla felt it best to break upon new ground, and wounded and depressed, had yet resentment enough to bear her through boldly. She wished to inspect Owen's child, and wrote to ask Mrs. Murrell to give her a bed for a couple of nights, venturing on this measure because, in the old woman's monthly report, she had mentioned that Mr. Fulmort had gone abroad for a fortnight.

It had not been an exhilarating evening. Small children were not much to Lucilla's taste, and her nephew was not a flattering specimen. He had the whitened drawn-up appearance of a child who had spent most of his life in a London cellar, with a pinched little visage and preternatural-looking black eyes, a squeaky little fretful voice, and all the language he had yet acquired decidedly cockney. Moreover, he had the habits of a spoilt child, and that a vulgar one, and his grandmother expected his aunt to think him a prodigy. There was a vacant room where Lucilla passed as much of her time as she could without an assumption of superiority, but she was obliged to spend the evening in the small furniture-encumbered parlour, and hear by turns of her nephew's traits of genius, of the merits of the preachers in Cat-alley, and the histories of the lodgers. The motherly Mrs. Murrell had invited any of the young men whose "hearts might be touched" to attend her "simple family worship;" and to Lucilla's discomfiture and her triumph, a youth appeared in the evening, and the young lady had her doubts whether the expounding were the attraction.

It was a relief to quit the close, underground atmosphere even for a cab; and "an inspecting lady must be better than that old woman," thought poor Lucy, as, heartily

weary of Mrs. Murrell's tongue and her own graciousness, she rattled through the streets. Those long ranks of charity children renewed many an association of old. The festival which had been the annual event of Honor Charlecote's youth, she had made the same to her children, and Cilla had not despised it till recently. Thoughts of better days, of home-feelings, of tenderness, began to soften her. She had spent nearly two years without the touch of a kindred hand, and for many months past had been learning what it was to be looked at by no loving eye. She was on her way to still greater strangers! No wonder her heart yearned to the gentle voice that she had once spurned, and well-nigh, in spite of herself, she muttered,

"Really I do think a kiss of poor Honor's would do me good! I have a great mind to go to her when I come back from Kensington. If I have taken a situation, she cannot suppose that I want anything from her. It would be very comfortable; I should hear of Owen! I will go! Even if she be not in town, I could talk to Mrs. Jones, and sit a quarter of an hour in the cedar room! It would be like meeting Owen; it would be rest and home!"

She felt quite happy and pleased with herself under this resolution, but it was late before she could put it in practice. The lady at Kensington rather started on entering the room where she had been waiting nearly an hour. "I thought—" she said, apologetically, "Did my servant say Miss Sandbrook?"

Lucilla assented, and the lady, a little discomposed, asked a few questions, furtively surveying her all the time, seemed confused, then begged her to take some luncheon. It was so long since Mrs. Murrell's not very tempting breakfast, that the invitation was welcome, even though the presence of a gentleman and an elderly lady showed that it was a pretext for a family inspection, and again she detected the same start of surprise, and a glance passing around the circle, such as made her glad when afterwards an excuse was made for leaving her alone, that she might apply to the glass to see whether anything were amiss in her dress.

Then first she remarked that hers was not the governess air. She had long felt very virtuous for having spent almost nothing on her clothes, eking out her former wardrobe to the utmost; and the loose, dove-coloured jacket over her

black silk skirt betrayed Parisian make, as did the exquisite rose, once worn in her hair, and now enlivening the white ribbon and black lace of the cheap straw bonnet, far back upon the rippling hair turned back from her temples, and falling in profuse ringlets. It was her ordinary, unpremeditated appearance, but she perceived that to these good people it was startlingly stylish, and she was prepared for the confused intimation that there was no need for entering upon the discussion of terms.

She had been detained too late to make her other call, and the processions of tired children showed her that the service at St. Paul's was over. The depression of disappointment inclined her the more to the loving old face, and she caused herself to be set down at the end of Woolstone Lane, feeling as if drawn by a magnet as she passed the well-known warehouse walls, and as if it were home indeed when she reached the court door.

It would not yield to her intimate manipulation of the old latch—a bad sign, and the bell re-echoed in vacancy. Again and again she rang, each moment of exclusion awakening a fresh yearning towards the cedar fragrance, every stare of passer-by making her long for the safe shelter of the bay-window parlour. At last a step approached, and a greeting for the friendly old servant was on her tongue's end. Alas! a strange face met her eye, elderly, respectable, but guarded. Miss Charlecote was not at home, not in town, not at Hiltonbury—gone abroad, whither was not known. Mrs. Jones? Dead more than a year ago. Every reply was followed by an attempt to close the door, and it needed all Lucy's native hardihood, all her ardent craving for her former home, to venture on an entreaty to be admitted for a few minutes. She was answered, that the house might be shown to no one without orders from Mr. Parsons.

Her heart absolutely fainted within her, as the heavy door was closed on her, making her thoroughly realize her voluntary renunciation of home and protection, and the dreariness of the world on which she had cast herself. Anxiety on Honor's behalf began to awaken. Nothing but illness could have induced her to leave her beloved Holt, and in the thought of her sick, lonely, and untended by the children she had fostered, Cilla forgave her adoption, forgave

her forgiveness, forgave everything, in the impulse to hasten to her to requite the obligation by the tenderest care.

She had actually set off to the parsonage in quest of intelligence, when she recollected that she might appear there as a discarded governess in quest of her offended patroness; and her pride impelled her to turn back, but she dispatched Mrs. Murrell's little maid with a note, saying that, being in town for a day, and hearing of Miss Charlecote's absence on the Continent, she could not help begging to be certified that illness was not the cause. The reply was brief and formal, and it only altered Lucilla's uneasiness, for Mrs. Parsons merely assured her of Miss Charlecote's perfect health, and said she was gone abroad with the Fulmort family, where there had been a good deal of illness.

In her displeasure and desire to guard Honora from becoming a prey to the unworthy Sandbrooks, Mrs. Parsons never guessed at the cruelty of her own words, and at the conclusion drawn from them. Robert Fulmort likewise absent! No doubt his health had broken down, and Honor was taking Phœbe to be with him! She examined Mrs. Murrell, and heard of his activity, indeed, but of his recent absences from his parish, and by and by the good woman bethought her of a report that Mr. Fulmort was from home on account of his health. Oh, the misery of not daring to make direct inquiry!

But the hard practical world was before her, and the new situation was no longer a matter of wilful choice, but of dire necessity. She would not be hastily thrust from her present post, and would be lovingly received at Southminster in case of need, but she had no dependence save on her own exertions, and perverse romance had died away into desolateness. With strange, desperate vehemence, and determination not again to fail, she bought the plainest of cap-fronts, reduced her bonnet to the severest dowdiness, hid, straightened, tightened the waving pale gold of her hair, folded her travelling shawl old-womanishly, cast aside all the merely ornamental, and glancing at herself, muttered, "I did not know I could be so insignificant!" Little Owen stared as if his beautiful aunt had lost her identity, and Mrs. Murrell was ready to embrace her as a convert to last night's exposition.

Perhaps the trouble was wasted, for the lady, Mrs. Bosstock, did not seem to be particular. She was quite young, easily satisfied, and only eager to be rid of an embarrassing interview of a kind new to her; the terms were fixed, and before many weeks had passed Lucilla was settled at a cottage of gentility, in sight of her Thames, but on the Essex side, where he was not the same river to her, and she found herself as often thinking that those tainted waters had passed the garden in Woolstone Lane as that they had sparkled under Wrapworth Bridge.

It was the greatest change she had yet undergone. She was entirely the governess, never the companion of the elders. Her employers were mercantile, wrapt up in each other, busy and gay. The husband was all day in London, and, when the evenings were not given to society, preferred spending them alone with his wife and children. In his absence, the nursery absorbed nearly all the time the mother could spare from her company and her household. The children, who were too old for playthings, were consigned to the first-rate governess, and only appeared in the evening. Lucilla never left her schoolroom but for a walk, or on a formal request to appear in the drawing-room at a party; a solitude which she at first thought preferable to Mrs. Willis Beaumont's continual small chatter, especially as the children were pleasant, brisk, and lovable, having been well broken in by their Swiss *bonne*.

Necessity had trained Cilly in self-restraint, and the want of surveillance made her generous nature the more scrupulous in her treatment of her pupils; she taught them diligently, kept good order, won their affection and gave them some of her own, but nothing could obviate her growing weariness of holding intercourse with no mind above eleven years old. Trouble and anxiety she had known before, and even the terrible heartache that she carried about with her might have failed to wear down a being constituted as she was, without the long solitary evenings, and the total want of companionship. The first shock had been born by the help of bustle and change, and it was only as weeks passed on, that care and depression grew upon her. Lessons, walks, children's games were oppressive in turn, and though the last good-night was a welcome sound, yet the solitude that ensued was unspeakably forlorn. Reading she

had never loved, even had this been a house of books; the children were too young to need exertion on her part to keep in advance of them, and their routine lessons wore out her energies too much for her to turn to her own resources. She did little but repair her wardrobe, work for the boy in Whittington street, and let thoughts drift through her mind. That death-bed scene at Hyères, which had so often risen unbidden to her mind as she lay on her crib, was revived again, but it was not her father whose ebbing-life she watched. It was one for whom she durst not ask, save by an inquiry from her brother, who had never dropped his correspondence with Honora; but Owen was actively employed and his locality and habits were so uncertain that his letters were often astray for long together. His third year of apprenticeship had begun, and Lucilla's sole hope of a change from her present dreary captivity was in his either returning with Mr. Currie, or finding employment and sending for her and his child to Canada. "By that time," she thought, "Europe will contain nothing to me. Nay, what does it contain that I have a right to care for now?" I don't delude myself. I know his look and manner. His last thought will be for his flock at St. Matthews, not for her who drove him to the work that has been killing him. Oh, no, he won't even forgive me, for he will think it the greatest service I could have done him." Her eyes were hot and dry; what a relief would tears have been!

CHAPTER XII.

Enid, my early and my only love,
I thought, but that your father came between,
In former days you saw me favourably,
And if it were so, do not keep it back,
Make me a little happier, let me know it.

TENNYSON.

THE foreign tour proved a great success. The summer in the Alps was delightful. The complete change gave Bertha new life, bodily strength first returning, and then mental activity. The glacier system was a happy exchange for her *ego*, and she observed and enjoyed with all the force of her

acute intelligence and spirit of inquiry, while Phœbe was happy in doing her duty by profiting by all opportunities of observation, in taking care of Maria and listening to Mervyn, and Miss Charlecote enjoyed scenery, poetry, art, and natural objects with relish keener than even that of her young friends, who were less impressible to beauty in every shape.

Mervyn behaved very well to her, knowing himself bound to make the journey agreeable to her; he was constantly kind to Bertha, and in the pleasure of her revival submitted to a wonderful amount of history and science. All his grumbling was reserved for the private ear of Phœbe, whose privilege it always was to be his murmuring block, and who was only too thankful to keep to herself his discontents whenever his route was not chosen (and often when it was), his disgusts with inns, railroads, and sights, and his impatience of all pursuits save Bertha's. Many a time she was permitted to see and hear nothing but how much he was bored, but on the whole the growls were so mitigated compared with what she had known, that it was almost contentment; and that he did not absolutely dislike their habits was plain from his adherence to the ladies, though he might have been quite independent of them.

"Bertha's distortion of eye and hesitation of speech, though much modified, always recurred from fatigue, excitement, or meeting with strangers, or—still worse—with acquaintance. The difficulty of utterance distressed her far more than if she had been subject thereto from infancy, and increased her exceeding repugnance to any sort of society beyond her own party. The question whether she were fit to return home for the winter was under debate, when at Geneva, early in September, tidings reached the travellers that produced such a shock as to settle the point.

Juliana Acton was dead! It had been a very short attack of actual illness, but disease had long been secretly preying on her—and her asperity of disposition might be accounted for by constant unavowed suffering. It was a great blow. Her unpleasant qualities were all forgiven in the dismay of learning what their excuse had been; for those who have so lived as to make themselves least missed, are perhaps at the first moment the more mourned by good hearts for that very cause.

Augusta was so much terrified on her own account, that

she might almost have been made a hydropathist on the spot; and Robert wrote that poor Sir Bevil was perfectly overwhelmed with grief and self-reproach, giving himself no credit for his exemplary patience and forbearance, but bitterly accusing himself of hardness and neglect. These feelings were shared in some degree by all the others, and Mervyn was especially affected. There had been much to soften him since his parents' death, and the sudden loss of the sister with whom he had always been on terms of scorn and dislike, shocked him excessively, and drew him closer to the survivors, sobering him, and silencing his murmurs for the time in real grief and awe. Bertha likewise was thoroughly overcome, not so much by these feelings, as by the mere effect of the sudden tidings on her nervous temperament, and the overclouding of the cheerfulness that had hitherto surrounded her. This, added to a day of over-fatigue and exposure, brought back such a recurrence of unfavorable symptoms, that a return to an English winter was not to be thought of. The south of France was decided upon at once, and as Lucilla had truly divined, Honor Charlecote's impulse led them to Hyères, that she might cast at least one look at the grave in the Stranger's corner of the cypress-grown burial-ground, where rested the beloved of her early days, the father of the darlings of her widowed heart—loved and lost.

She endured her absence from home far better than she had expected, so much easier was it to stay away than to set off, and so completely was she bound up with her companions, loving Phœbe like a parent, and the other two like a nurse, and really liking the brother. All took delight in the winter paradise of Hyères, that fragment of the East set down upon the French coast, and periodically peopled with a motley multitude of visitors from all the lands of Europe, all invalids, or else attendants on invalids.

Bertha still shrank from all contact with society, and the ladies, for her sake, lived entirely apart; but Mervyn made acquaintance, and sometimes went out on short expeditions with other gentlemen, or to visit his mercantile correspondents at Marseilles, or other places on the coast.

It was while he was thus absent that the three sisters stood one afternoon on the paved terrace of the *Hotel des Isles d'Or*, which rose behind them, in light colored stone, of a kind of Italian-looking architecture, commanding a

lovely prospect, the mountains on the Toulon side, though near, melting into vivid blue, and white cloud wreaths hanging on their slopes. In front lay the plain, covered with the peculiar grey-tinted olive foliage, overtopped by date palms, and sloping up into rounded hills covered with dark pines, the nearest to the sea bearing on its crest the Church *de l'Ermitage*. The sea itself was visible beyond the olives, bordered by a line of *étangs* or pools, and white heaps of salt, and broken by a peninsula and the three Isles d'Or. It was a view of which Bertha seemed never able to have enough, and she was always to be found gazing at it when the first ready for a walk.

"What, are you going to sketch, Phœbe?" she said, as the sisters joined her. "How can you, on such a day as this, with the air, as it were, loaded with cheiranthus smell? It makes one lazy to think of it."

"It seems to be a duty to preserve some remembrance of this beautiful place."

"It may be a pity to miss it, but as for the duty!"

"What, not to give pleasure at home, and profit by opportunities?"

"It is too hard to carry about an embodiment of Miss Fennimore's rules! Why, have you no individuality, Phœbe?"

"Must I not sketch, then?" said Phœbe, smiling.

"You are very welcome, if you would do it for your pleasure, not as an act of bondage."

"Not as bondage," said Phœbe; "it is only because I ought that I care to do so at all."

"And that's the reason you only make maps of the landscape."

It was quite true that Phœbe had no accomplished turn, and what had been taught her she only practised as a duty to the care and cost expended on it, and these were things where "all her might" was no equivalent for a spark of talent. "Ought" alone gave her the zest that Bertha would still have found in "ought not."

"It is all I can do," she said, "and Miss Fennimore may like to see them; so, Bertha, I shall continue to carry the sketch-book by which the English woman is known like the man by his 'Murray.' Miss Charlecote has letters to write, so we must go out by ourselves."

The Provençal natives of Hyères had little liking for the foreigners who thronged their town, but did not molest them, and ladies walked about freely in the lovely neighbourhood, so that Honor had no scruple in sending out her charges, unaccompanied except by Lieschen, in case the two others might wish to dispose of Maria, while they engaged in some pursuit beyond her powers.

Poor Lieschen, a plump Prussian, grown portly on Beauchamp good living, had little sympathy with the mountain tastes of her frauleins, and would have wished all Hyères like the shelf on the side of the hill where stood their hotel, whence the party set forth to the Place des Palmiers, so called from six actual palms bearing, but not often ripening dates. Two sides were enclosed by houses, on a third an orange garden sloped down the descent; the fourth, where the old town climbed straight up the hill, was regarded by poor Lieschen with dread, and she vainly persuaded Maria at least to content herself with joining the collection of natives resting on the benches beneath the palms. How willingly would the good German have produced her knitting, and sought a compatriot among the nurses who sat gossiping and embroidering, while Maria might have played among their charges, who were shovelling about, or pelting each other with the tiny white sea-washed pebbles that thickly strewn the place.

But Maria, with the little Maltese dog in her arms, to guard him from a hailstorm of the pebbles, was inexorably bent on following her sisters, and Bertha had hurried nervously across from the strangers, so that Lieschen must pursue those light steps through the winding staircase streets, sometimes consisting of broad shallow steps, sometimes of actual flights of steep stairs hewn out in the rock, leading to a length of level terrace, where, through garden gates, orange trees looked out, dividing the vantage ground with houses and rocks—up farther, past the almost desolate old church of St. Paul—farther again—till, beyond all the houses, they came forth on the open mountain-side, with a crest of rock far above, surmounted by the ruins of a castle, said to have been fortified by the Saracens, and taken from them by Charles Martel. It was to this castle that Phœbe's sketching duty was to be paid, and Maria and Bertha expressed their determination of climbing up to it, in hopes, as

the latter said, of finding Charles Martel's original hammer. Lieschen, puffing and panting already, looked horrified, and laughingly they bade her sit down and knit, whilst they set out on their adventure. Phœbe smiled as she looked up, and uttered a prognostic that made Bertha the more defiant, exhilarated as she was by the delicious compound of sea and mountain breeze, and by the exquisite view, the roofs of the town sloping rapidly down, and the hills stretching round, clothed in pine woods, into which the grey olivettes came stealing up, while beyond lay the sea, intensely blue, and bearing on its bosom the three Isles d'Or, flushed with radiant colour.

The sisters bravely set themselves to scramble among the rocks, each surface turned to the sea-breeze exquisitely and fantastically tinted by coloured lichens, and all interspersed with the classical acanthus' noble leaves, the juniper, and the wormwood. On they went, winding upwards as Bertha hoped, but also sideways, and their circuit had lasted a weary while, and made them exhausted and breathless, when looking round for their bearings, they found themselves in an enchanted maze of grey rocks, half hidden in myrtle, beset by the bristly battledores of prickly pear, and shaded by cork trees. Above was the castle, perched up, and apparently as high above them as when they began their enterprise; below was a steep descent, clothed with pines and adorned with white heaths. The place was altogether strange; they had lost themselves; Bertha began to repent of her adventure, and Maria was much disposed to cry.

"Never mind, Maria," said Bertha, "we will not try to go any higher. See, here is the dry bed of a torrent that will make a famous path down. There, that's right. What a picture it is! what an exquisite peep of the sea between the boughs! What now, what frightens you?"

"The old woman, she looks so horrid."

"The witch for the lost children? No, no, Maria, she is only gathering fir-cones, and completing the picture in her red *basquine*, brown jacket, and great hat. I would ask her the way, but that we could not understand her Provençal."

"Oh, dear! I wish Phœbe was here! I wish we were safe!"

"If I ever come mountain-climbing again with you at

my heels ! Take care, there's no danger if you mind your feet, and we must come out somewhere."

The somewhere, when the slope became less violent, was among vineyards and olivettes, no vestige of a path through them, only a very small cottage, picturesquely planted among the rocks, whence proceeded the sounds of a *cornet-à-piston*. As Bertha stood considering which way to take, a dog flew out of the house and began barking. This brought out a man, who rudely shouted to the terrified pair that they were trespassing. They would have fled at once up the torrent-bed, bad as it was for ascent, but there was a derisive exclamation and laugh, and half-a-dozen men, half-tipsy, came pouring out of the cottage, bawling to Colibri, the rough, shaggy white dog, that seemed disposed to spring at the Maltese in Bertha's arms.

The foremost, shouting in French to the sisters to stop, pointed to what he called the way, and Bertha drew Maria in that direction, trusting that they should escape by submission, but after going a little distance, she found herself at the edge of a bare, deep, dry ravine, steep on each side, almost so as to be impassable. The path only ran on the other side. There was another shout of exultation and laughter at the English girls' consternation. At this evident trick of the surly peasants, Maria shook all over, and burst into tears, and Bertha, gathering courage, turned to expostulate and offer a reward, but her horrible stammer coming on worse than ever, produced nothing but inarticulate sounds.

"Monsieur, there is surely some mistake," said a clear voice in good French from the path on the other side, and looking across, the sisters were cheered by an unmistakable English brown hat. The peasants drew back a little, believing that the young ladies were not so unprotected as they had supposed, and the first speaker, with something like apology, declared that this was really the path, and descending where the sides were least steep, held out his hand to help Bertha. The lady, whose bank was more practicable, came down to meet them, saying in French, with much emphasis, that she would summon "those gentlemen" to their assistance if desired; words that had considerable effect upon the enemy.

Poor Maria was in such terror that she could hardly

keep her footing, and the hands both of Bertha and the unknown friend were needed to keep her from affording still more diversion to the peasants by falling prostrate. The lady seemed intuitively to understand what was best for both, and between them they contrived to hush her sobs, and repress her inclination to scream for Phœbe, and thus to lead her on, each holding a hand till they were at a safe distance; and Bertha, whose terror had been far greater than at the robbery at home, felt that she could let herself speak, when she quivered out an agony of trembling thanks. "I am glad you are safe from these vile men," said the lady, kindly, "though they could hardly have done anything really to hurt you."

"Frenchmen should not laugh at English girls," cried Bertha. "Oh, I wish my brothers were here," and she turned round with a fierce gesture.

"Phœbe, Phœbe; I want Phœbe and Lieschen!" was Maria's cry.

"Can I help you to find your party?" was the next question; and the voice had a gentle, winning tone that reassured Maria, who clung tight to her hand, exclaiming, "Don't go away;" and though for months past the bare proposal of encountering a stranger would have made Bertha almost speechless, she felt a soothing influence that enabled her to reply with scarcely a hesitation. On comparing notes, it was discovered that the girls had wandered so far away from their sister that they could only rejoin her by re-entering the town and mounting again; and their new friend, seeing how nervous and agitated both still were, offered to escort them, only giving notice to her own party what had become of her.

She had come up with some sketching acquaintance, and not drawing herself, had, like the sisters, been exploring among the rocks, when she had suddenly come on them in the distress which had so much shaken them, that, reluctant to lose sight of their guardian, they accompanied her till she saw one of her friends, and then waited while she ran down with the announcement. "How ridiculous it is in me," muttered Bertha to herself discontentedly; "she will think us wild creatures. I wish we were not both so tall."

And embarrassment, together with the desire to explain, deprived her so entirely of utterance, that Maria volunteered, "Bertha always speaks so funnily since she was ill." Ra-

ther a perplexing speech for the lady to hear; but instead of replying, she asked which was their hotel; and Bertha answering, she turned with a start of surprise and interest, as if to see their faces better, adding, 'I have not seen you at the *table d'hôte*,' and under the strange influence of her voice and face, Bertha was able to answer, "No. As Maria says, I have been very silly since my illness in the winter, and—and they have given way to me, and let me see no one."

"But we shall see *you*; you are in our hotel," cried Maria. "Do come and let me show you all my Swiss costumes."

"Thank you; if ——" and she paused, perhaps a little perplexed by Maria; and Bertha added, in the most womanly voice that she could muster, "My sister and Miss Charlecotte will be very glad to see you—very much obliged to you."

Then Maria, who was unusually demonstrative put another question—

"Are you ill? Bertha says everybody here is ill. I hope you are not."

"No, thank you," was the reply. "I am here with my uncle and aunt. It is my uncle who has been unwell."

Bertha, afraid that Maria might blunder into a history of her malady, began to talk fast of the landscape and its beauties. The stranger seemed to understand her desire to lead away from herself, and readily responded, with a manner that gave sweetness to all she said. She was not very young looking, and Maria's notion might be justified that she was at Hyères on her own account, for there was hardly a tint of colour on her cheek; she was exceedingly spare and slender, and there was a wasted, worn look about the lower part of her face, and something subdued in her expression, as if some great, lasting sorrow had passed over her. Her eyes were large, brown, soft, and full of the same tender, pensive kindness as her voice and smile; and perhaps it was this air of patient suffering that above all attracted Bertha, in the soreness of her wounded spirit, just as the affectionateness gained Maria, with the instinct of a child.

However it might be, Phœbe, who had become uneasy at their absence, and only did not go to seek them from the conviction that nothing would set them so completely astray

as not finding her at her post, was exceedingly amazed to be hailed by them from beneath instead of above, and to see them so amicably accompanied by a stranger. Maria went on in advance to greet the newly-recovered sister, and tell their adventure; and Bertha, as she saw Phœbe's pretty, grateful, self-possessed greeting, rejoiced that their friend should see that one of the three, at least, knew what to say, and could say it. As they all crept down together through the rugged streets, Phœbe felt the same strange attraction as her sisters, accompanied by a puzzling idea that she had seen the young lady before, or some one very like her. Phœbe was famous for seeing likenesses; and never forgetting a face that she had once seen, her recognitions were rather a proverb in the family; and she felt her credit almost at stake in making out the countenance before her; but it was all in vain, and she was obliged to resign herself to discuss the Pyrenees, where it appeared that their new friend had been spending the summer.

At the inner door they parted, she going along a corridor to her aunt's rooms, and the three Fulmorts hurrying simultaneously to Miss Charlecote to narrate their adventure. She was as eager as they to know the name of their rescuer, and to go to thank her; and ringing for the courier, sent him to make inquiries. "Major and Mrs. Holmby and their niece," was the result; and the next measure was Miss Charlecote's setting forth to call on them in their apartments, and all the three young ladies wishing to accompany her—even Bertha! What could this encounter have done to her? Phœbe withdrew her claim at once, and persuaded Maria to remain, with the promise that her new friend should be invited to enjoy the exhibition of the book of Swiss costumes; and very soon she was admiring them, after having received an explanation sufficient to show her how to deal with Maria's peculiarities. Mrs. Holmby, a common-place, good-natured woman, evidently knew who all the other party were, and readily made acquaintance with Miss Charlecote, who had, on her side, the same strange impression of knowing the name as Phœbe had of knowing the face.

Bertha, who slept in the same room with Phœbe, awoke her in the morning with the question, "What do you think is Miss Holmby's name?"

"I did not hear it mentioned."

"No, but you ought to guess. Do you not see how names impress their own individuality? You need not laugh; I know they do. Could you possibly have been called Augusta, and did not Katharine quite pervade Miss Fennimore?"

"Well, according to your theory, what is her name?"

"It is either Eleanor or Cecily."

"Indeed!" cried Phœbe; "what put that into your head?"

"Her expression—no, her entire *Wesen*. Something homely, simple, a little old-fashioned, and yet refined.

"It is odd," said Phœbe, pausing.

"What is odd?"

"You have explained the likeness I could not make out. I once saw a photograph of a Cecily, with exactly the character you mention. It was that of which she reminded me."

"Cecily? Who could it have been?"

"One of the Raymond cousinhood. What o'clock is it?"

"Oh, don't get up yet, Phœbe; I want to tell you Miss Holmby's history, as I make it out. She said she was not ill, but I am convinced that her uncle and aunt took her abroad to give her change, not after illness, but sorrow."

"Yes, I am sure she has known trouble."

"And," said Bertha, stifling her voice so that her sister could hardly hear, "that sorrow could only have been of one kind. Patient waiting is stamped on her brow. She is trying to lift up her head after cruel disappointment. Oh, I hope he is dead!"

And, to Phœbe's surprise and alarm, the poor little fortune-teller burst into tears, and sobbed violently. There could be no doubt that her own disappointment, rather than that which she ascribed to a stranger, prompted this gush of feeling; but it was strange, for in all the past months the poor child's sorrow and shame had been coldly, hardly, silently borne. The new scenes had thrust it into abeyance, and spirits and strength had forced trouble aside, but this was the only allusion to it since her conversation with Miss Charlecote on her sick bed, and the first sign of softening. Phœbe durst not enter into the subject, but soothed and composed her by caresses and cheerfulness; but either the tears, or perhaps their original cause—the fatigue and terror

of the previous day—had entirely unhinged her, and she was in such a nervous, trembling state, and had so severe a headache, that she was left lying down, under Lieschen's charge, when the others went to the English chapel. Her urgent entreaty was that they would bring Miss Holmby to her on their return. She had conceived almost a passion for this young lady. Secluded as she had been, no intercourse beyond her own family had made known to her the pleasure of a friendship; and her mind, in its revival from its long exhaustion, was full of ardour, in the enthusiasm of a girl's adoration of a full-grown woman. The new and softening sensation was infinite gain, even by merely lessening her horror of society; and when the three churchgoers joined the Holmby party on their way back from the chapel, they begged as a kindness to an invalid, for a visit to Bertha.

It was granted most readily, as if equally pleasant to the giver of the kindness and to the receiver, and the two young maidens walked home together. Phœbe could not but explain their gratitude to any one who could rouse Bertha, saying that her spirits had received a great shock, and that the effects of her illness on her speech and her eyes had made her painfully bashful.

"I am so glad," was the hurried, rather quivering answer. "I am glad if I can be of any use."

Phœbe was surprised while gratified, by the eager tenderness of her meeting with Bertha, who, quite revived, was in the sitting-room to greet her, and seemed to expand like a plant in the sunshine, under the influence of those sweet brown eyes. Her liveliness and drollery awoke, and her sister was proud that her new friend should see her cleverness and intelligence; but all the time the likeness to that photograph continued to haunt Phœbe's mind, as she continued to discover more resemblances, and to decide that if such were impressed by the Christian name, Bertha was a little witch to detect it.

Afternoon came, and as usual they all walked seawards. As Bertha said, they had had enough of the heights, and tried going towards the sea, as their new friend wished, although warned by the Fulmorts that it was a long walk, the *étangs*, or great salt pools, spoiling the coast as a beach. But all were brave walkers, and exercise always did Bertha good. They had lovely views of the town as they wound

about the hills, and admired its old streets creeping ^{Phœbe,} hill, and the two long wings stretching on either side; iron cross stood up before the old church, relieved ^{Phœbe,} would go, exquisite radiance of the sunset sky. "Ah!" said ^{Phœbe,} hold out "I always choose to believe that is the cross to which ^{Phœbe,} will seem legend belongs." "Tell it, please, Miss Charlecote," ^{Phœbe,} Maria.

And Honor told a veritable legend of Hyères:—^{Phœbe,} duty, Moorish princess, who had been secretly baptized and educated as a Christian by her nurse, a Christian slave, was beloved by a genie. She regarded him with horror, pined away, and grew thin and pale. Her father thought to raise her spirits by marrying her, and bestowed her on the son of a neighbouring king, sending her off in full procession to his dominions. On the way, however, lay a desert, where the genie had power to raise a sand-storm, with which he overwhelmed the suite, and flew away with the princess. But he could not approach her; she kept him at bay with the sign of the cross, until, enraged, he drove her about on a whirlwind for three days, and finally dashed her dead upon this coast. There she lay, fair as an almond blossom, and royally robed, and the people of Hyères took her up and gave her honorable burial. When the king, her father, heard of it, he offered to reward them with a cross of gold of the same weight as his daughter; but, said the townsmen, "Oh, king, if we have a cross of gold, the Moors will come and slay us for its sake, therefore, give us the gold in coin, and let the cross be of iron."

"And there it stands," said the guest, looking up.

"I hope it does," said Honor, confronting, as usual, the common-sense led pupils of Miss Fennimore, with her willing demi-credulity.

"It is a beautiful story!" was the comment; "and, like other traditions, full of unconscious meaning."

A speech this, as if it had been made to delight Honor, whose eyes were met by a congratulatory glance from Phœbe. At the farther words, "It is very striking—the evil spirit's power ending with the slaying the body, never harming the soul, nor bending the will——"

"Bending the will is harming the soul," said Phœbe.

"Nay," was her companion's answer, "the fatal evil is, when both wills are bent."

of the ebe was too single-minded, too single-willed, at once was in erstand this, till Miss Charlecote whispered a refer-headack St. Paul's words of deep experience, "To will is charge, with me."

urgent see," she said; "she might even have preferred the her o, but as long as her principle and better will resisted, this was safe from herself as well as from him."

ber "Liked the nasty genie?" said Maria, who had listened only as to a fairy tale. "Why, Phœbe, genies come out of bottles, and go away in smoke, Lieschen told me."

"No, indeed," said Bertha, in a low voice of feeling, piteous in one of her years, "if so, it needed no outward whirlwind to fling her dead on the coast!"

"And there she found peace," answered the guest, with a suppressed, but still visible sigh of weariness. "Oh! it was worth the whirlwind!"

Phœbe was forced to attend to Maria, whose imagination had been a good deal impressed, and who was anxious to make another attempt on a pilgrimage to castle and cross.

"When Mervyn comes back, Maria, we may try."

The guest, who was speaking, stopped short in the midst. Had she been infected by Bertha's hesitation? She began again, and seemed to have forgotten what she meant to have said. However, she recovered herself; and there was nothing remarkable through the rest of the walk, but, on coming indoors, she managed to detain Phœbe behind the others, saying, lightly, "Miss Fulmort, you have not seen the view from my window." Phœbe followed to her little bedroom, and gazed out at the lovely isles, bathed in light so as to be almost transparent, and the ship of war in the bay, all shadowy and phantom-like. She spoke her admiration warmly, but met with but a half assent. The owner of the room was leaning her head against the glass, and, with an effort for indifference said, "Did I hear that—that you were expecting your brother?"

"You are Cecily!" exclaimed Phœbe, intead of answering.

And Cecily, turning away from the window, leant against the wall for support, and her pale face crimsoning, said, "I thought you did not know."

"My sisters do not," said Phœbe; "but he to Phœbe," when—when he hoped——"

"And now you will help me," said Cecily, hurry, her words, as if overpowering one of her wills. "You would go, I know! I have promised my father and uncle to hold out nothing to do with him. Do not let me be taken by surprise. Give me notice, that I may get Aunt Holmby—it is a before he comes."

"Oh! must it be so?" cried Phœbe. "He is not ^{duty,} ^{er-} what he used to be."

"I have promised," repeated Cecily; and grasping Phœbe's wrist, she added, "You will help me to keep my promise."

"I will," said Phœbe, in her grave, reliable voice, and Cecily drew a long breath.

There were five minutes of silence, while Phœbe stood studying Cecily, and thinking how much injustice she had done to her, how little she had expected a being so soft and feeling in her firmness, and grieving the more at Mervyn's loss. Cecily at last spoke, "When will he come?"

"We cannot tell; most likely not for a week, perhaps not for a fortnight. It depends on how he likes Corsica."

"I think my aunt will be willing to go," said Cecily. "My uncle has been talking of Nice."

"Then must we lose you," said Phœbe, "when you are doing Bertha so much good?"

"I should like to be with you while I can, if I may," said Cecily, her eyes full of tears.

"Did you know us at first," said Phœbe.

"I knew you were in this hotel; and after your sisters had spoken, and I saw Bertha's face, I was sure who she was. I thought no one was with you but Miss Charlecote, and that no one knew, so that I might safely indulge myself." The word was out before she could recall it, and trying, as it were, to hide it, she said, "But how, if you knew what had passed, did you not sooner know it was I?"

"Because we thought your name was Holmby."

"Did you, indeed? You did not know that my aunt Holmby is my mother's sister? She kindly took me when my uncle was ordered to spend this winter abroad?"

"You were ill and tried. Bertha read that in your face. Oh! when you see how much difference——!"

of the must not see. Do not talk of it, or we must not be was in it; and indeed it is very precious to me." She rested her head on Phœbe's shoulder, and put an arm round her charge, "Only one thing I must ask," she said, presently; "urgent, well?"

"Quite well," said Phœbe. "He has been getting better ever since we left home. Then you did not know he was better?"

"No. It is not right for me to dwell on those things, and they never mention any of you to me."

"But you will write to us now? You will not desert Bertha? You do not know how much you are doing for her."

"Dear child! She is so like what he was when first he came."

"If you could guess what she has suffered, and how fond he is of her, you would not turn away from her. You will let her be your friend?"

"If it be right," said Cecily with tearful eyes, but her mouth set into a steadfast expression, as resolute as sweetly sad.

"You know better what is right than I do," said Phœbe; "I who feel for him and Bertha. But if you have not heard from him for so long, I think there are things you ought to know."

"At home, at home," said Cecily; "there it may be right to listen. Here I am trusted alone, and I have only to keep my promise. Tell me when I am at home, and it will make me happy. Though, nonsense! my wizened old face is enough to cure him," and she tried to laugh. Phœbe regretted what she had said of Bertha's impression, and believed that the gentle, worn face ought to be far more touching than the most radiant charms, but when she strove to say that it was not beauty that Mervyn loved, she was hushed at once, and by the same mild authority turned out of the room.

Well for her that she could tell her story to Miss Charlecote without breach of confidence! Honor's first impulse was displeasure with the aunt, who she was sure had let her speak of, though not to, Miss Holmby without correcting her, and must purposely have kept the whole Ray-

mond connexion out of sight. "Depend upon it, Phœbe," said she, "she will keep her niece here."

"Poor Cecily, what will she do? I wish they would go, for I feel sure that she will think it her duty to hold out against him till she has her father's sanction; she will seem hard, and he——"

"Do not reckon too much on him, Phœbe. Yes, it is a hard saying, but men care so much for youth and beauty, that he may find her less attractive. He may not understand how superior she must have become to what she was when he first knew her. Take care how you plead his cause without being sure of his sentiments."

In fact, Honor thought Cecily Raymond so infinitely above Mervyn Fulmort, at his very best, that she could not regard the affair as hopeful under any aspect; and the parties concerned being just at the time of life when a woman becomes much the elder of a man of the same years, she fully expected that Cecily's loss of bloom would entirely take away his desire to pursue his courtship.

The next event was a diplomatic call from Mrs. Holmby, to sound Miss Charlecote, whose name she knew as a friend, both of the Fulmorts and Moorcroft Raymonds, and who, she had feared, would use her influence against so unequal a match for the wealthy young squire. When convinced of her admiration of Cecily, the good aunt proceeded to condemn the Raymond pride. They called it religion, but she was not so taken in. What reasonable person heeded what a young man might have done when he was sowing his wild oats? No, it was only that the Baronet blood disdained the distillery, whereas the Fulmorts represented that good old family, the Mervyns, and it was a very fine estate, was not it? She had no patience with such nonsense, not she! All Sir John's doing; for, between themselves, poor dear George Raymond had no spirit at all, and was quite under his brother's thumb. Such a family, and such a thing as it would be for them to have that girl so well married. *She* would not take her away. The place agreed with the Major, and she had told Cecily she could not think of leaving it.

Phœbe saw how close a guard Cecily must have learnt to keep on herself, for not a tone nor look betrayed that she was suffering unusual emotion. She occupied herself quietly, and was most tenderly kind to Bertha and Maria, exerting

herself to converse with Bertha, and to enter into her pursuits as cheerfully as if her mind were disengaged. Sometimes Phœbe fancied that the exceeding gentleness of her voice indicated when she was most tried, but she attempted no more *tête-à-têtes*, and Miss Charlecote's conjecture that in the recesses of her heart she was rejoiced to be detained by no fault of her own, remained unverified. Phœbe resigned Cecily for the present to Bertha's exclusive friendship. Competition would have been unwise, even if the forbidden subject had not been a restraint where the secret was known, while to soothe and cherish Bertha and settle her mind to begin life again was a welcome and fitting mission for Cecily, and inclination as well as discretion therefore held Phœbe aloof, preventing Maria from interfering, and trusting that Cecily was becoming Bertha's Mr. Charlecote.

Mervyn came back sooner than she had expected him, having soon tired of Corsica. His year of ill-health and of her attendance had made him dependent on her; he did not enter into novelty or beauty without Bertha; and his old restless demon of discontent made him impatient to return to his ladies. So he took Phœbe by surprise, walking in as she was finishing a letter to Augusta before joining the others in the olivettes.

"Well, Phœbe, how's Bertha? Ready to leave this hot vapour-bath of a hole?"

"I don't know what you will say to it now," she answered, looking down, and a little tremulous. "Who do you think is here?"

"Not Hastings? If he dares to show his nose here, I'll get him hissed out of the place."

"No, no, something very different."

"Well, make haste," he said, in the grim voice of a tired man.

"She is here—Cecily Raymond."

"What of that?" He sat down, folded his arms, and crossed his ankles, the picture of dogged indifference.

"Mervyn!"

"What does it matter to me who comes or goes? Don't stop to rehearse arrivals, but ring for something to eat. An atrocious *mistral*! My throat is like a turnpike road! Call it January? It is a mockery!"

Phœbe obeyed him; but she was in a ferment of wrath

and consternation, and clear of nothing save that Cecily must be prepared for his appearance. She was leaving the room when he called to ask what she was doing.

"I am going to tell the others that you are come."

"Where are they?"

"In the olive yards behind the hotel."

"Don't be in such a hurry, and I'll come."

"Thank you, but I had better go on before. Miss Raymond is with them."

"It makes no odds to her. Stop a minute, I tell you. What is the matter with her?" (Said with some uneasiness, hidden by gruffness.)

"She is not here for her own health, but Major Holmby is rheumatic."

"Oh! that intolerable woman is here, is she? Then you may give Miss Charlecote notice to pack up her traps, and we'll set off to-morrow."

If a desire to box a man's ears ever tingled in Phœbe's fingers, it was at that moment. Not trusting herself to utter a word, she went upstairs, put on her hat, and walked forth, feeling as if the earth had suddenly turned topsy-turvy with her, and as if she could look no one in the face. Set off to-morrow! He might tell Miss Charlecote himself, she would not! Yet, after all, he had been rejected. His departure might not torture Cecily like the sight of his indifference. But what despair for Bertha, thought Phœbe, as she saw the friends pacing the paths between the rows of olives, while Miss Charlecote and Maria were gathering magnificent blue violets. At the first hint, Miss Charlecote called to Bertha, who came reluctantly, while Phœbe, with almost sickening pity, murmured her tidings to Cecily—adding, "I do not think he is coming out. He is having something to eat," in hopes that this tardiness might be a preparation. She was relieved that Bertha rushed back again to monopolize Miss Raymond, and overwhelm her with schemes for walks under Mervyn's escort. Cecily let her talk, but made no promises, and the soft gentleness of those replies thrilled as pangs of pain on Phœbe's pitying heart.

As they walked homewards, Mervyn himself appeared, slowly sauntering towards them. The younger sisters sprang to meet him, Cecily fell back to Miss Charlecote. Phœbe held her breath, and scarcely durst look. There was a touch

of the hand, a greeting, then Bertha pounced on her brother to tell the adventure of the ravine; and Cecily began to set Maria off about the flowers in her nosegay. Phœbe could only come close to Miss Charlecote and squeeze her hand vehemently.

The inn-door was reached, and Mervyn waiting till Cecily came up, said with grave formality, "I hear my sisters are indebted to you for your assistance in a very unpleasant predicament."

She bowed, and he bowed. That was all, and they were in their several apartments. Phœbe had never felt in such a fever. She could discern character, but love was but an external experience to her, and she could not read the riddle of Mervyn's repudiation of intercourse with their fellow-inmates, and his restlessness throughout the evening, checking Bertha for boring about her friend, and then encouraging her to go on with what she had been saying. At last, however, Bertha voluntarily ceased her communications and could be drawn out no farther; and when the candle was put out at night, she electrified Phœbe with the remark, "It is Mervyn, and you know it; so you may as well tell me all about it."

Phœbe had no choice but compliance; advising Bertha not to betray her knowledge, and anxious to know the conclusions which this acute young woman would draw from the present conjuncture. But Bertha was too fond of both parties not to be full of unmitigated hope. "Oh, Phœbe!" she said, "with Cecily there, I shall not mind going home, I shall not mind anything."

"If only she will be there."

"Stuff, Phœbe! The more Mervyn sulks, the more it shows that he cares for her; and if she cares for him, of course it will come right."

"Do you remember what she said about the two wills contending?"

"Well, if she ever *did* think Mervyn the genie, she has crossed him once, twice, thrice, till she may turn him from Urgan into Ethert Brand."

"She thinks it her duty not to hear that she has."

"Oh, ho! from you who know all about it; but didn't I tell her plenty about Mervyn's kindness to me? Yes, indeed I did. I couldn't help it, you know. It did not seem true

to let anybody begin to be my friend unless she knew—*all that*. So I told her—and oh! Phœbe, she was so dear and nice, better than ever after that,” continued Bertha, with what sounded like sobs; “and then you know she could not help hearing how good and patient he was with me—only growing kinder and kinder the more tiresome I was. She must feel that, Phœbe, must not she? And then she asked about Robert, and I told her how Mervyn has let him get a chaplain to look after the distillery people, and the Institute that that old gin-palace is to be made into.”

“Those were just the things I was longing to tell her.”

“She could not stop *me* you know, because I knew nothing,” cried Bertha, triumphantly. “Are not you satisfied, Phœbe?”

“I ought to be, if I were sure of his feelings. Don’t plunge about so, Bertha,—and I am not sure either that she will believe him yet to be a religious man.”

“Don’t say that, Phœbe. I was just going to begin to like religion, and think it the only true key to metaphysics and explanation of existence, but if it sticks between those two, I shall only see it as a weak, rigid superstition, parting those who were meant for one another.”

Phœbe was strongly tempted to answer, but the little travelling clock struck, and thus acted as a warning that to let Bertha pursue an exciting discussion at this time of night would be ruinous to her nerves the next day. So with a good-night, the elder sister closed her ears, and lay pondering on the newly disclosed stage in Bertha’s mind, which touched her almost as closely as the fate of her brother’s attachment.

The ensuing were days of suppressed excitement, chiefly manifested by the yawning fits that seized on Bertha whenever no scene in the drama was passing before her. In fact, the scenes presented little. Cecily was not allowed to shut herself up, and did nothing remarkable, though avoiding the walks that she would otherwise have taken with the Fulmort party; and when she found that Bertha was aware of her position, firmly making silence on that head the condition of their interviews. Mervyn let her alone, and might have seemed absolutely indifferent, but for the cessation of all complaints of Hyères, and for the noteworthy brightness, obligingness, and good humour of his manners. Even in her

absence, though often restless and strangely watchful, he was always placable and good-tempered, never even scolding Phœbe; and in her presence, though he might not exchange three words, or offer the smallest service, there was a repose and content on his countenance that gave his whole expression a new reading. He was looking particularly well, fined down into alertness by his disciplined life and hill climbing, his complexion cleared and tanned by mountain air, and the habits and society of the last year leaving an unconscious impress unlike that which he used to bring from his former haunts. Phœbe wondered if Cecily remarked it. She was not aware that Cecily did not know him without that restful look.

Phœbe came to the conclusion that Cecily was persuaded of the cessation of his attachment, and was endeavouring to be thankful, and to accustom herself to it. After the first, she did not hide herself to any marked degree; and, probably to silence her aunt, allowed that lady to take her on one of the grand Monday expeditions, when all the tolerably sound visiting population of Hyères were wont to meet, to the number of thirty or forty, and explore the scenery. Exquisite as were the views, these were not romantic excursions, the numbers conducing to gossip and chatter, but there were some who enjoyed them the more in consequence; and Mervyn, who had been loudest in vituperation of his first, found the present perfectly delightful, although the chief of his time was spent in preventing Mrs. Holmby's cross-grained donkey from lying down to roll, and administering to the lady the chocolate drops that he carried for Bertha's sustenance; Cecily, meantime, being far before with his sisters, where Mrs. Holmby would gladly have sent him if bodily terror would have permitted her to dismiss her cavalier.

Miss Charlecote and Phœbe, being among the best and briskest of the female walkers, were the first to enter the town, and there, in the *Place des Palmiers*, looking about him as if he were greatly amazed at himself, they beheld no other than the well-known figure of Sir John Raymond, standing beside the Major, who was sunning himself under the palm-trees.

"Miss Charlecote, how are you? How d'ye do, Miss Fulmort? Is your sister quite well again? Where's my little niece?"

"Only a little way behind with Bertha."

"Well, we never thought to meet in such a place, did we? What a country of stones I have come over to-day, enough to break the heart of a farmer; and the very sheep are no better than goats! Vineyards? What they call vineyards are old black stumps that ought to be grubbed up for firewood!"

"Nay, I was struck by the wonderful cultivation of every available inch of ground. It speaks well for the Provençals, if we judge by the proverb, '*Autant vaut l'homme que vaut sa terre.*'"

"Ah! there she comes;" and he hastened to join Cecily, while the deserted Bertha, coming up to her sister, muttered, "Wretched girl! I hear she had written to him to fetch her home. That was what made her stay so quietly, was it?"

No one could accuse Mervyn of indifference who saw the blank look that overspread his face on hearing of Sir John's arrival, but he said not a word, only hurried away to dress for the *table d'hôte*. The first notice the anxious ladies had that the tedious dinner was broken up, was a knock at their door, and Cecily's entrance, looking exceedingly white, and speaking very low, "I am come to wish you good-bye," she said. "Uncle John has been so kind as to come for me, and I believe we shall set out to-morrow."

Maria alone could dare to shriek out, "Oh! but you promised to show me how to make a crown of my pink heaths, and I have been out with Lieschen, and gathered such beauties."

"If you will come with me to my room I will show you while I pack up," said Cecily, reducing Bertha to despair by this most effectual barrier to confidence; but she entreated leave to follow, since seeing Cecily playing with Maria was better than not seeing her at all.

After some time, Mervyn came in, flushed and breathless, and Honor kindly made an excuse for leaving him alone with Phœbe. After diligently tossing a book from one hand to the other for some minutes, he observed, *sotto voce*, "That's a more decent old fellow than I gave him credit for."

"Who, Sir John?"

"Aye."

And that was the whole result of the *tête-à-tête*. He was in no mood for questions, and marched out of the room for a

moonlight cigar. Phœbe only remained with the conviction that something had happened.

Miss Charlecote was more fortunate. She had met the Baronet in the passage, and was accosted by him with, "Do you ever do such a thing as take a turn on that terrace?"

It was a welcome invitation, and in no more time than it took to fetch a shawl, the two old friends were pacing the paved terrace together.

"Well, what do you think of him?" began Sir John. "There must be more good in him than I thought."

"Much more than I thought."

"He has been speaking to me, and I can't say but that I was sorry for him, though why it should have gone so hard with so sensible and good a girl as Cecily to give up such a scamp, I never could guess! I told George that seeing what I saw of him, and knowing what I knew, I could think it nothing better than a sacrifice to give her to him!"

"Exactly what I thought!"

"After the way he had used her too—talking nonsense to her, and then playing fast and loose, trying his luck with half the young ladies in London, and then fancying she would be thankful to him as soon as he wanted a wife to keep house! Poor child, that would not have weighed with her a moment though—it puts me out of patience to know how fond she is of him—but for his scampishness, which made it a clear duty to refuse him. Very well she behaved, poor thing, but you see how she pined away—though her mother tells me that not a fretful word was ever heard from her, as active and patient and cheerful as ever. Then the Holmbys took her abroad, the only thing to save her health, but I never trusted the woman, and when by and by she writes to her father that Fulmort was coming, and her aunt would not take her away, "George," I said, "never mind; I'll go at once, and bring her home—she shall not be kept there to be torn to pieces between her feelings and her duty. And now I am come, I declare I don't know what to be at—I should think nothing of it if the lad only talked of reforming—but he looks so downcast, and owns so honestly that we were quite right, and then that excellent little sister of his is so fond of him, and you have stood his company this whole year—that I declare I think he must be good for something! Now you who have looked on all his life, just say what you

think of him—such a way as he went on in last year, too—the crew that he got about him——”

“Phœbe thinks that was the consequence of his disappointment.”

“A man that could bring such a lot into the same house with that sister of his, had no business to think of Cecily.”

“He has suffered for it, and pretty severely, and I do think it has done him good. You must remember that he had great disadvantages.”

“Which didn’t hinder his brother from turning out well.”

“Robert went to a public school——” and there she perceived she was saying something awkward, but Sir John half laughed and assented.

“Quite right, Miss Charlecote; private pupils are a delusion! George never had one without a screw loose about him. Parish priests were never meant for tutors—and I’ve told my boy, Charlie, that the one thing I’ll never consent to is his marrying on pupils—and doing two good things by halves. It has well nigh worried his uncle to death, and Cecily into the bargain.”

“Robert was younger, and the elders were all worse managed. Besides, Mervyn’s position, as it was treated, made him discontented and uncomfortable; and this attachment, which he was too—too—I can find no word for it but contemptible—to avow, must have preyed on his temper and spirits all the time he was trying to shake it off. He was brought up to selfishness, and nothing but what he underwent last year could have shaken him out of it.”

“Then you think he is shaken out of it.”

“Where Bertha is concerned I see that he is—therefore I should hope it with his wife.”

“Well, well, I suppose what must be must be. Not that I have the least authority to say anything, but I could not help telling the poor fellow thus much—that if he went on steadily for a year or so, and continued in the same mind, I did not see why he should not ask my brother and Cecily to reconsider it. Then it will be for them to decide, you know.”

For them! As if Sir John were not in character as well as name the guiding head of the family.

“And now,” he added, “you will let me come to your rooms this evening, for Mrs. Holmby is in such displeasure

with me, that I shall get nothing but black looks. Besides, I want to see a little more of that nice girl, his sister."

"Ah! Sir John, if ever you do consent, it will be more than half for love of Phœbe!"

"Well, for a girl like that to be so devoted to him—her brother though he be—shows there must be more in him than meets the eye. That's just the girl that I would not mind John's marrying."

CHAPTER XIII.

Turn again, Whittington!

Bow Bells.

MAY had come round again before Robert Fulmort stood waiting at the Waterloo Station to welcome the travellers, who had been prohibited from putting Bertha's restored health to the test of east winds. It was a vista of happy faces that he encountered as he looked into the carriage window, yet the first questions and answers were grave and mournful.

"Is Mr. Henderson still alive?" asked Honora.

"No, he sank rapidly, and died on Sunday week. I was at the funeral on Saturday."

"Right; I am glad you went. I am sorry I was away."

"It was deeply felt. Nearly all the clergy in the arch-deaconry, and the entire parish, were present."

"Who is taking care of the parish?"

"Charlecote Raymond has been coming over for the Sundays, and giving great satisfaction."

"I say, Robert, where's the Bannerman carriage? Phœbe is to be victimized there—more's the pity," interposed Mervyn.

"There is their brougham. I meant to drive to Albury-street with her," said Robert, gazing at his brother as if he scarcely knew him without the characteristic knitting of the brow under a grievance, the scowl, or the half-sneering smile; and with the cleared and lightened air that he had worn ever since that little spark of hope had been left to

burn and shine undamped by dissipation or worldly policy. Bertha also was changed. She had grown tall and womanly, her looks beyond her age, and if her childish vivacity were gone, the softened gravity became her much better. It was Phœbe's report, however, for which he chiefly longed, and he was soon seated beside her on the way to Albury-street, while the others betook themselves citywards.

"So, Phœbe, it is all right, and you are satisfied?"

"Satisfied, grateful, thankful to the utmost," said Phœbe, fervently. "I think I never was so happy as all through the latter part of the journey."

"You think well of Bertha?"

"I cannot call her restored, for she is far more than she was before. That meeting with Cecily Raymond did for her what we could not do, and she is growing to be more than we knew how to wish for."

"Her spirits?"

"Never high, and easily shaken. Her nerves are not strong yet, and she will never, I fear, be quite girlishly careless and merry, but she is grave and sweet. She does not shrink from people now, and when I saw her among other girls at Paris, she seemed older, much deeper, and altogether superior."

"Does she think seriously?"

"She thinks and reads, but it is not easy to guess what she thinks, for she keeps silence, and has happily quite left off arguing with Miss Charlecote. I believe Cecily has great influence over her, and I think she will talk a great deal to Miss Fennimore. Robin, do you think we could have dear Miss Fennimore again?"

"I do not know what Mr. Parsons would say to you. As you know, she told him that she wanted to do the most useful work he could trust to her, so he has made her second mistress at the day-school for his tradesmen's daughters; and what they would do without her I cannot think!"

"She must have very insufficient pay?"

"Yes, but I think she is glad of that, and she had saved a good deal."

"I give you notice that I shall try hard to get her, if Mr. Crabbe will only let us be as we were before. Do you think there is any hope for us?"

"I cannot tell. I suspect that he will not consent to

your going home till Mervyn is married; and Augusta wants very much to have you, for the season at least."

"Mervyn and Miss Charlecote both say I ought to see a little of the London world, and she promises to keep Maria and Bertha till we see our way. I should not like them to be without me anywhere else. You have not told me of poor Bevil. You must have seen him often."

"Yes, he clings very much to me, poor fellow, and is nearly as much cast down as at first. He has persuaded himself that poor Juliana always continued what he thought her when they met in their youth. Perhaps she had the germs of it in her, but I sometimes hardly know which way to look when he is talking about her, and then I take shame to myself for the hard judgments I cannot put away even now!"

"Poor Juliana!" said Phœbe, saddened by her own sense that the difficulties of her present position were lessened by the removal of this sister. "And little Elizabeth?"

"She is a nice little thing, and her father hardly lets her out of his sight. I have sometimes speculated whether he might not ask you to keep house for him, but last time I saw him, I fancied that he was inclined to hold aloof from you."

"I had rather he did not ask us," said Phœbe.

"Why so?"

"Because I am afraid Bertha would not look up to him if she lived with him," said Phœbe.

Robert smiled, having himself become conscious of that weakness in his good brother-in-law which Phœbe felt, but did not name.

"And now, Phœbe," said Robert, suddenly changing the subject, "I have something for you to do; I want you to call on Miss Sandbrook."

On her astonished look, he explained that he had made it his business frequently to see Owen Sandbrook's child, and of late to give it some religious teaching. While thus engaged, he had been surprised by the entrance of Lucilla, looking wretchedly ill and exhausted, and though she had rallied her spirits after the first moment, talked of having come up from Essex for a day's holiday of shopping and seeing her nephew, and had inquired eagerly and warmly for Miss Charlecote; he had been sufficiently uneasy about her to go afterwards to Mrs. Murrell, from whom he had learnt

that she had avowed having consulted a physician in the morning, and had procured her address.

"And now," said Robert, "I want you, with whom she has never quarrelled, to call on her as an old friend just come into her neighbourhood, and find out what was the doctor's opinion. I am sure she is destroying herself."

The whole was said with perfect simplicity, without shrinking from Phœbe's eye, as though he had absolutely forgotten what sentiments he had once entertained; and Phœbe could, neither in kindness nor humanity, refuse to be the means of reopening communication with the voluntary exile. She proposed to write and offer a call, but Robert, fearing to rouse the old perverse pride, recommended that there should be no preparation. Indeed, the chances of an independent expedition seemed likely to be scanty, for Lady Bannerman pounced on her sister as a truant bond-slave, who, when captured, was to be useful all day, and go to parties all night.

"I have told all my friends that I was going to introduce my sister, and what expectations you have," she said. "See, here are two cards for to-morrow night, Lady Jane Hewett and Mrs. Gosling, the young widow that I want Mervyn to meet, you know. Clear 5,000*l.* a year, and such a charming house. Real first-rate suppers; not like Lady Jane's bread-and-butter and catlap, as Sir Nicholas says, just handed round. We would never go near the place, but as I said to Sir Nicholas, any sacrifice for my sister; and she has a son, you know, a fine young man; and if we manage well, we shall be in time for Carrie Gosling's supper. So mind that, Phœbe, and don't get engaged to too many dances."

"Is there to be dancing?"

"Most likely. I hope you have something to wear."

"I provided myself at Paris, thank you."

"Not mourning, I trust! That will never do! Nobody thinks of mourning for a sister more than six months, and it makes me so low to think of poor Juliana, and this horrid complaint being in the family. It is quite a duty to keep one's spirits up. But there's Robert always so lugubrious; and poor Sir Bevil looks as deplorable, and comes up to town with that poor little girl all in crape, and won't eat any luncheon! I declare it gave me such a turn that I was obliged to have my little cordial before I could swallow a

mouthful! And now you come in black! It is quite provoking! You must and shall get some colours to-morrow."

"Thank you, what I have is white and lilac."

On which neutral ground Phœbe took her stand, and the French style and fashion so impressed Augusta's maid, that she forced her ladyship to accept even simplicity as "the thing," and to sink back rebuked for the barbarism of hinting at the enlivenment of pink ribbons or scarlet flowers.

Though thus fortified against shopping on her own account, liberty even to go to see her sisters was denied her, in Augusta's infinite disgust at the locality, and consideration for the horses. She was forced to be contented with the report of Mervyn, who came to dinner and to go to the evening parties, and who spoke of the girls as well and happy; Maria "in her native element" at the infant school, and both in a perfect rapture at receiving Miss Fennimore, whom their hostess had asked to spend the evening in Woolstone Lane.

Mervyn professed that he came entirely to see Phœbe's *début* in her Parisian costume, and amused himself maliciously with endeavouring to delay the start from Lady Jane's till too late for Mrs. Gosling's supper; but Phœbe, who did not wish to enhance the sacrifice, would not abet him, and positively, as he declared, aided Augusta in her wild-goose chase.

He contrived to have a good deal of conversation with Phœbe in the course of the evening, and she heard from him that old Crabbe was more crusty than ever, and would not hear of his taking his sisters home, but, said he, that mattered the less, considering that now they would be able to be at the parsonage.

"The parsonage?"

"What! did you not know the living was in Miss Charlecote's gift?"

"Do you mean that she has offered it to Robert?"

"Yes—no—at least she has told me of her intentions. Highly proper in the old girl, isn't it? They will settle it to-night, of course. I'll have the grounds laid out, and make quite a pretty modern place of it. It has quite taken a weight off my mind to know he is so well provided for."

"It will make us all very happy; but I think he will be sorry for St. Matthew's too."

"Oh! parsons think nothing of changes. He can appoint his own successor, and I'll not let things die away. And now, Phœbe, is there anything you want to do? I will not have Augusta tie you by the leg. I will look out a lady's horse to-morrow, and come to ride with you; or if you want to do anything, you can have the brougham any day."

"Thank you; there is one thing I want very much to do," and she explained.

"Ha!" said Mervyn, "a romantic meeting. If I remember right, Mr. Robin used to be much smitten with that little thing. Don't reckon too much on the parsonage, Phœbe."

"What are we to do if both brothers turn us out?" smiled Phœbe.

"Don't talk of that. I should be glad enough to get you in—and I am far enough from *the other thing* yet."

So Phœbe obtained the use of the brougham for the next day, and set off for her long Essex drive, much against Augusta's will, and greatly wondering what it would produce; compassionate of course for poor Lucilla, yet not entirely able to wish that Robert should resign the charge for which he was so eminently fitted, even for the sake of Hiltonbury and home. Lucy must be altered, indeed, if he would not be happier without her.

Phœbe had written a few lines, saying that hearing that Lucy was so near, she could not help begging to see her. This she sent in with her card, and after a little delay, was invited to come in. Lucilla met her at the top of the stairs, and at first Phœbe only felt herself clasped, clung to, kissed, fondled with a sudden, gasping, tearful eagerness. Then, as if striving to recal the ordinary tone, Lucilla exclaimed—"There—I beg your pardon for such an obstreperous greeting, but I am a famished creature here, you see, and I did not expect such kindness. Luckily some of my pupils are driving out with their mamma, and I have sent the others to the nurse. Now then, take off your bonnet, let me see you; I want to look at a home face, and you are as fresh and as innocent as if not a year had passed over you."

Lucilla fervently kissed her again, and then holding her hand, gazed at her as if unwilling that either should break the happy silence. Meantime Phœbe was shocked to see

how completely Robert's alarms were justified by Lucy's appearance. The mere absence of the coquettish ringlets made a considerable difference, and the pale colour of the hair, as it was plainly braided, increased the wanness of her appearance. The transparent complexion had lost the lovely carnation of the cheek, but the meandering veins of the temples and eyelids were painfully apparent; and with the eyes so large and clear as to be more like veronicas than ever, made the effect almost ghastly, together with the excessive fragility of the form, and the shadowy thinness of the hand that held Phœbe's. Bertha's fingers, at her weakest, had been more substantial than these small things, which had, however, as much character and force in their grasp as ever.

"Lucy, I am sure you are ill! How thin you are!"

"Well, then, cod-liver oil is a base deception! Never mind that—let me hear of Honor—are you with her?"

"No, my sisters are, but I am with Augusta."

"Then you do not come from her?"

"No; she does not know."

"You excellent Phœbe; what have you done to keep that bonny honest face all this time to refresh weary eyes—being a little heroine, too. Well, but the Honor—the old sweet Honey—is she her very self?"

"Indeed, I hope so; she has been so very kind to us."

"And found subjects in you not too cross-grained for her kindness to be palatable? Ah! a good hard plunge into the world teaches one what one left in the friendly ship! Not that mine has been a hard one. I am not one of the pathetic governesses of fiction. Every one has been kinder to me than I am worth.—But, oh! to hear myself called Lucy again!"—and she hid her face on Phœbe's shoulder in another excess of emotion.

"You used not to like it."

"My Cilly days were over long ago. Only one person ever used to call me Cilla;" and she paused, and went on afresh—"So it was for Bertha's sake and Mervyn's that Honor escorted you abroad. So much Robert told me; but I don't understand it yet. It had haunted me the whole winter that Robert was the only Mr. Fulmort *she* could nurse; and if he told you I was upset, it was that I did not

"Not only in that line," said Phœbe, suppressing a smile at the truth of the surmise, "but she is all kindness to sick English——"

"She tried to convert you all!—confess it. Rashe converting dear old Honor! Oh! of all comical conjunctions!"

"Miss Charlecote hushed it down," said Phœbe; "and, indeed, nobody could be with her and think that she needed rousing to religious thoughts."

"By this attempt on Honor, I feel she has not succeeded with Lolly, who, poor Owen used to call an Eastern woman with no soul."

"She does everything for Mrs. Charteris—dresses her, works for her—I do believe cooks for her. They live a strange rambling life."

"I have heard Lolly plays as deeply as Charles, does not she? All Castle Blanch mortgaged—would be sold but that Uncle Kit is in the entail! It breaks one's heart to hear it! They all live on generous old Ratia, I suppose."

"I believe she pays the bills when they move. We were told that it was a beautiful thing to see how patiently and resolutely she goes on bearing with them and helping them, always in hopes that at last they may turn to better things."

Lucy was much touched. "Poor Rashe!" she said; "there was something great in her. I have a great mind to write to her."

They diverged into other subjects, but every minute she became more open and confidential; and as the guarded reserve wore off, Phœbe contrived to lead to the question of her spirits and health, and obtained a fuller answer.

"Till you try, Phœbe, you can't guess the wear of living with minds that have got nothing in them but what you have put in yourself. There seems to be a fur growing over one's intellects for want of something to rub against."

"Miss Fennimore must often have felt that with us."

"No, you were older; and besides, you have some originality in a sober way; and I don't imagine Miss Fennimore had the sore heart at the bottom—the foolishness that took to moaning after home as soon as it had cast it off past recal!"

"Oh, Lucy! not past recal."

"Not past pardon, I am trying to hope. At least, there are some people who, the more unpardonable one is, pardon the more readily. When Owen comes home I mean to try."

"Ah! I saw you had been going through a great deal."

"No, no, don't charge my looks on sentiment," said Cilla, hastily; "there's plenty to account for them besides. One never falls into those foibles when one is quite strong."

"Then you have been unwell?"

"Not to the point of giving in. Oh, no! 'Never say die' was always my motto, you know."

"To what point, dear Lucy?"

"To that of feeling as if the entire creation was out of joint—not one child here and there, but everybody was cross; and I could not walk with the children, and my bones ached, and all that sort of thing."

"You had advice?"

"Yes, I thought it economical to patch myself up in time; so I asked for a holiday to go to the doctor."

"Well?"

"He did after the nature of doctors; poked me about, and asked if there were decline in the family;" and in spite of the smile, the great blue eyes looked ghastly; "and he forbade exertion, and ordered good living and cod-liver oil."

"Then surely you should be taking care."

"So I am. These are very good-natured people, and I'm a treasure of a governess, you know. I have refectations ten times a day, and might swim in port wine, and the little Swiss *bonne* walks the children, and gives them an awful account, which their mamma thinks the correct thing."

"Change—rest—you should have them."

"I shall, when Owen comes. It is summer time, and I shall hold on till then, when it will be plenty of time to see whether this is nonsense."

"Whether what is?"

"About my lungs. Don't look horrified. He could only trace the remains of a stupid old cold, and if it were more, I know of no fact of so little moment to anybody."

"You should not say that, Lucy; it is wrong and cruel."

"It is your fault; I did not want to have talked of it,

and in good time here comes half my flock; Edie, Reggie, Flo, come and show Miss Fulmort what my torments are."

They ran in, apparently on excellent terms with her, and greeted her guest without shyness; but after a little whispering and shoving, the youngest spoke. "Edie and Reggie want to know if she is the lady that put out the light?"

"Ah! you heroine," said Lucy, 'you don't know how often I have told of your doughty deeds! Ay, look at her, she is the robber-baffler; though now I look at her I don't quite believe it myself."

"But it is true?" asked the little girl, puzzled.

"Tell us all the story," added the boy.

"Yes; tell us," said Lucilla. "I read all your evidence, so like yourself as it was, but I want to know where you were sleeping."

Phœbe found her present audience strangely more embarrassing than the whole assize court, perhaps because there the solemn purpose swallowed up the sense of admiration; but she laughed at last at the boy's disappointment at the escape of the thieves; "he would have fired a pistol through the keyhole and shot them!" When she rose to go, the children entreated her to stay and be seen by the others, but this she was glad to escape, though Lucilla clung to her with a sort of anguish of longing, yet stifled affection, that would have been most painful to witness, but for the hopes for her relief.

Phœbe ordered her brother's carriage in time to take her to breakfast in Woolstone Lane the next morning, and before ten o'clock Honor had heard the account of the visit in Essex. Tearfully she thanked the trusty reconnoitrer as for a kindness to herself, dwelling on the tokens of relenting, yet trembling at the tidings of the malady. To write and recal her child to her motherly nursing was the foremost thought in her strange medley of grief and joy, hope and fear.

"Poor Robert," she said, when she understood that he had organized Phœbe's mission; "I am glad I told him to give no answer for a week."

"Mervyn told me how kind you were about Hiltonbury."

"Kind to myself, my dear. It seems like a crime when I look at St. Matthew's; but when I think of you all, and of home, I believe it is right that he should have the alter-

native. And now, if poor Lucy come, and it be not too late——”

“Did he say anything?” said Phœbe.

“I only wrote to him; I thought he had rather not let me see his first impulse, so I told him to let me hear nothing till Thursday evening. I doubted before, now I feel sure he will take it.”

“Lucy has the oldest claim,” said Phœbe, thoughtfully, wishing she could feel equally desirous of success in this affair as in that of Mervyn and Cecily.

“Yes, she was his first love, before Whittingtonia. Did you mention the vacancy at Hiltonbury?”

“No; there was so much beside to talk of.”

“That is well; for perhaps if she knew, that spirit of hers might keep her aloof. I feel like Padre Cristoforo dispensing Lucia from her vow! If she will only get well! And a little happiness will do more than all the cuds in Hammerfest! Phœbe, we will have a chapel-school at the hamlet, and a model kitchen at the school; and Robert will get hold of all the big boys. His London experience is exactly what we want to brighten Hiltonbury, and all our clergy.”

Hiltonbury had a right to stand first with Honora, and Whittingtonia had sunk into a mere training-school for her pattern parson. If there were a sigh to think that Owen was exactly of the right age to have been ordained to Hiltonbury, she put it away, for this was next best.

Her note to Lucilla was penned with trembling caution, and each word was reconsidered day and night, in case the perverse temper might take umbrage. The answer came.

“MY DEAR HONOR,

“It is beyond my deserts to be so kindly taken home. I have learnt what that means now. I can be spared for a fortnight; and as Mr. Bostock dines in town the day after to-morrow, he will set me down.

“Your affectionate,

“L. SANDBROOK.”

“Miss Charlecote is like a person ten years younger,” observed Bertha to Phœbe, when she came with the rest to “quite a family party,” at Albury-street. Robert alone was absent, it being what Augusta called “a fast or something;”

i. e. a meeting of the St. Wulstan's Young Men's Institute. Bertha heartily wished she could call herself a young man, for her morbid sense of disgrace always recurred with those whom she knew to be cognizant of her escapade. However, this evening made a change in her ladyship's views, or rather she had found Phœbe, no longer the mere submissive hand-maid of school-room days, but a young woman accustomed to liberty of action and independence of judgment; and though perfectly obliging and unselfish, never admitting Augusta's claims on her time to the exclusion of those of others of the family, and quietly but decidedly carrying out her intentions. Bertha's shrinking silence and meekness of demeanour persuaded her sister that she would be more conformable, and her womanly appearance not only rendered the notion of school ridiculous, but inspired the desire of bringing her out. Phœbe might dedicate herself to Maria if she pleased; Bertha should shine through the season under her sister's patronage.

Not since the adventure with the Hyères peasants had Bertha's tongue been so unmanageable, as when she tried to protest against going into society; and when Mervyn came to her help, Augusta owned that such hesitation was indeed an objection, but it might easily be cured by good management; cordials would prevent nervousness, and, after all, no one would care when a girl had such a fortune. Poor Bertha crept away, feeling as if she could never open her mouth again.

Meanwhile Mervyn and Augusta amicably agreed on the excellence of Hiltonbury parsonage as a home for the girls, the latter only regretting what Robert had sunk on his fancies at Whittingtonia. "I don't know that," returned Mervyn; "all I regret is that we never took our share. It is a different thing now, I assure you, to see the turn-out from the distillery since the lads have come under his teaching! I only hope his successor may do as well!"

"Well, I don't understand about such things," said Augusta, crossly. "Poor papa never made such a rout about the hands. It would not have been thought good taste to bring them forward."

"If you wish to understand," said Mervyn, maliciously, "you had better come and see. Robert would be very glad of your advice for the kitchen he is setting going—sick cookery and cheap dinners."

"And pray who pays for them? Robert has made himself a beggar. Is it you?"

"No! those who eat. It is to be self-supporting. I do nothing but lend the house. You don't remember it. It is the palace at the corner of Richard Alley."

"It is no concern of mine, I know; but what is to become of the business if you go giving away the houses?"

"Oh! I am getting into the foreign and exportation line. It is infinitely less bother."

"Ah! well! I am glad my poor father does not see it. He would have said the business was going to the dogs!"

"No; he was fast coming into Robert's views, and I heartily wish I had not hindered him."

Augusta told her admiral that evening that there was no hope for the family, since Robert had got hold of Mervyn as well as of the rest of them. People in society actually asked her about the schools and playground at Mr. Fulmort's distillery; there had been an educational report about them. Quite disgusting!

There passed a day of conflicting hope and fear, soothed by the pleasure of preparation, and at seven in the evening there came the ring at the house door, and Lucilla was once more in Honora's arms. It was for a moment a convulsive embrace, but it was not the same lingering clinging as when she met Phoebe, nor did she look so much changed as then, for there was a vivid tint of rose on either cheek; she had restored her hair to the familiar fashion, and her eyes were bright with excitement. The presence of Maria and Bertha, which Miss Charlecote had regretted, was probably a relief; for Lucilla, as she threw off her bonnet, and sat down to the "severe tea" awaiting her, talked much to them, observed upon their growth, noticed the little Maltese dog, and compared her continental experiences with Bertha's. To Honor she scarcely spoke voluntarily, and cast down her eyes as she did so, making brief work of answers to inquiries, and showing herself altogether disappointingly the old Cilly. Robert's absence was also a disappointment to Honor, though she satisfied herself that it was out of consideration.

Lucy would not go up to her room till bedtime; and when Honor, accompanying her thither, asked tender and anxious questions about her health, she answered them, not indeed petulantly, as of old, but with a strange, absent man-

ner, as if it were duty alone that made her speak. Only when Honor spoke of her again seeing the physician whom she had consulted, she at first sharply refused, then, as if recollecting herself, meekly said; "As you think fit, but I had rather it was not the same."

"I thought he was your own preference," said Honor, "otherwise I should have preferred Dr. F."

"Very well, let it be," said Lucy, hastily.

The good-nights, the kisses past, and Honor went away, with a heavy load of thwarted hopes and baffled yearning at her heart—yearnings which could be stilled only in one way.

A knock. She started up, and called "Come in," and a small, white, ghostly figure glided in, the hands tightly clasped together."

"Lucy, dear child, you are ill!"

"I don't know what is the matter with me," said a husky, stifled voice; "I meant it—I wanted it. I longed after it when it was out of reach, but now—"

"What, my dear?" asked Honor, appalled at the effort with which she spoke.

"Your pardon!" and with a pressure of hands and contraction of the brow as of physical agony, she exclaimed, "Honor, Honor, forgive me!"

Honor held out her arms, she flung herself prone into them, and wept. Tears were with her an affection as violent as rare, and her sobs were fearful, heaving her little fragile frame as though they would rend it, and issuing in short cries and gasps of anguish. Honor held her in her arms all the time, much alarmed, but soothing and caressing, and in the midst, Lucilla had not lost all self-control, and though unable to prevent the paroxysm, restrained it as much as possible, and never attempted to speak; but when her friend laid her down, her whole person still quivering with the long swell of the last uncontrollable sobbing, she looked up with the sweetest smile ever seen by Honor, who could not help thinking that such a sight might have met the eyes of the mother who found the devil gone out and her daughter laid on the bed.

The peace was such that neither could bear to speak for many seconds. At last Lucy said, "Dear Honor!"

"My dearest."

"Lie down by me; please put your arms round me.

There! Oh! it is so comfortable. Why did I never find it out before? I wish I could be a little child, and begin again from the time my father made me over to you."

"Ah! Lucy, we all would begin again if we could. I have come to the perception how often I exasperated you."

"An angel who did his duty by me would have exasperated me in your place."

"Yes, that was one error of mine. I thrust myself in against the wishes of your nearest relative."

"My thanklessness has made you feel that."

"Don't talk on, dear one—you are exhausting yourself."

"A little more I must say before I can sleep under your roof in peace, then I will obey you in all things. Honor, these few years have shown me what your education did for me against my will. What would have become of me if I had been left to the poor Castle Blanch people? Nothing could have saved me but my spirit of contradiction! No; all that saved my father's teaching from dying out in me—all that kept me at my worst from the Charteris standard, all that has served me in my recent life, was what you did for me! There! I have told you only the truth."

Honor could only kiss her, and whisper something of unlooked-for happiness, and Lucilla's tears flowed again at the tenderness for which she had learnt to hunger; but it was a gentle shower this time, and she let herself be hushed into calmness, till she slept peaceably on Honor's bed, in Honor's arms, as she had never done, even as a young child. Honor watched her long, in quiet gladness and thankfulness, then likewise slept; and when awakened at last by a suppressed cough, looked up to see the two stars of blue eyes, soft and gentle under their swollen lids, gazing on her full of affection.

"I have wakened you," Lucy said.

"Have you been awake long?"

"Not very; but to lie and look at the old windows, and smell the cedar fragrance, and see you, is better than sleep."

Still the low morning cough and the pallor of the face filled Honor with anxiety; and though Lucilla attributed much to the night's agitation, she was thoroughly languid and unhinged, and fain to lie on the sofa in the cedar parlour, owning that no one but a governess could know the full charm of doing nothing.

The physician was the same who had been consulted by her father, and well remembered the flaxen-haired child whom he had so cruelly detached from his side. He declared her to be in much the same reduced and enfeebled condition as that in which her father had brought on his malady by reckless neglect and exposure, and though he found no positive disease in progress, he considered that all would depend upon anxious care, and complete rest for the autumn and winter, and he thought her constitution far too delicate for governess life, positively forbidding her going back to her situation for another day.

Honor had left the room with him. She found Lucilla with her face hidden in the sofa cushions, but the next moment met a tremulous half spasmodic smile.

"Am I humbled enough?" she said. "Failed, failed, failed! One by my flirting, two by my temper, three by my health! I can't get my own living, and necessity sends me home, without the grace of voluntary submission."

"Nay, my child, the very calling it home shows that it need not humble you to return."

"It is very odd that I should like it so much!" said Lucy; "and now," turning away as usual from sentiment, "what shall I say to Mrs. Bostock? What a wretch she will think me! I must go over and see all those children once more. I hope I shall have a worthy successor, poor little rogues. I must rouse myself to write!"

"Not yet, my dear."

"Not while you can sit and talk. I have so much to hear of at home! I have never inquired after Mr. Henderson! Not dead?"

"You have not heard? It was a very long, gradual decay. He died on the 12th."

"Indeed! He was a kind old man, and home will not be itself without his white head in the reading-desk. Have you filled up the living?"

"I have offered it"—and there was a pause—"to Robert Fulmort."

"I thought so! He won't have it."

Honor durst not ask the grounds of this prediction, and the rest of that family were discussed. It was embarrassing to be asked about the reports of last winter, and Lucy's keen penetration soon led to full confidence.

"Ah! I was sure that a great flood had passed over that poor child! I was desperate when I wrote to Phœbe, for it seemed incredible that it should be either of the others, but I might have trusted her. I wonder what will become of her. I have not yet seen the man good enough for her."

"I have seen one—and so have you—but I could not have spared him to her, even if she had been in his time."

Truly Lucilla was taken home when Honor was moved to speak thus.

For her sake Honor had regretted that the return dinner to the Albury-street household and the brothers was for this day, but she revived towards evening, and joined the party, looking far less pretty and piquante, and her dress so quiet as to be only just appropriate, but still a fair bright object, and fitting so naturally into her old place, that Lady Bannerman was scandalized at her presumption and Miss Charlecote's weakness. Honor and Phœbe both watched the greeting between her and Robert, but could infer nothing, either from it, or from their deportment at dinner, both were so entirely unembarrassed and easy. Afterwards Robert sought out Phœbe, and beguiled her into the window where his affairs had so often been canvassed.

"Phœbe," he said, "I must do what I fear will distress you, and I want to prepare you."

Was it coming? But how could he have guessed that she had rather not?

"I feel deeply your present homeless condition. I wish earnestly that I could make a home for you. But, Phœbe, once you told me you were content to be sacrificed to my foremost duty——"

"I am," she said.

"Well, then, I love this smoky old black wife of mine, and don't want to leave her even for my sisters."

"I never thought of your leaving her for your sisters, but——" and as Lucilla's music effectually veiled all words—"I had thought that there might be other considerations." Her eyes spoke the rest.

"I thought you knew that folly had passed away," he said, somewhat sternly. "I trust that no one else has thought of it!" and he indicated Miss Charlecote.

"Not when the offer was made to you, but since she heard of my mission."

"Then I am glad that on other grounds my mind was made up. No," after a pause, "there is a great change. She is far superior to what she was in the days of my madness, but it is over, and never could be renewed. She herself does not desire it."

Phœbe was called to the piano, not sorry that such should be Robert's conviction, and glad that he should not be disturbed in work that suited him so well as did St. Matthew's, but thinking him far too valuable for Lucy not to suffer in losing her power over him.

And did she?

She was alone in the cedar parlour with Honor the next day, when the note was brought in announcing his refusal on the ground that while he found his strength and health equal to the calls of his present cure, and his connexion with the Fulmort firm gave him unusual facilities in dealing with the workmen, he did not think he ought to resign his charge for another for which many better men might be found.

"Quite right; I knew it," said Lucilla, when Honor had with some attempt at preparation shown her the note.

"How could you know it?"

"Because I saw a man in his vocation."

A long silence, during which Cilly caught a pitying glance.

"Please to put that out of your head!" she exclaimed.

"There's no pity, no ill-usage in the case. I wilfully did what I was warned that he would not bear, and there was an end of it."

"I had hoped not past recal."

"Well, if you will have the truth, when it was done and not to be helped, we were both very sorry; I can answer at least for one, but he had bound himself heart and soul to his work, and does not care any longer for me. What, you, the preacher of sacrifice, wishing to see your best pupil throw up your pet work for the sake of a little trumpery crushed fire-fly?"

"Convict me out of my own mouth," said Honor, sadly, "it will not make me like to see my fire-fly crushed."

"When the poor fire-fly has lit the lamp of learning for six idle children, no other cause for dimness need be sought. No, I was well and wicked in the height of the pain, and long after it wore out—for wear out it did—and I am glad

he is too wise to set it going again. I don't like emotions. I only want to be left alone. Besides, he has got into such a region of goodness, that his wife ought to be super-excellent. I know no one good enough for him unless you would have him ! ”

As usual, Honor was balked of bestowing sympathy, and could only wonder whether this were reserve, levity, or resignation, and if she must accept it as a fact that in the one the attachment had been lost in the duties of his calling, in the other had died out for want of requital. For the present, in spite of herself, her feeling towards Robert verged more on distant, rather piqued admiration than on affection, although he nearly approached the ideal of her own first love, and Owen Sandbrook's teaching was, through her, bearing good fruit in him, even while recoiling on her woman's heart through Owen's daughter.

Mervyn was easily reconciled to the decision, not only because his brother was even more valuable to him in London than in the country, but because Miss Charlecote's next alternative was Charlecote Raymond, Sir John's second son, a fine, open-tempered young man of thirty, who had made proof of vigour and judgment in the curacy that he had just left, and who had the farther recommendation of bearing the name of the former squire, his godfather. Anything called Raymond was at present so welcome to Mervyn that he felt himself under absolute obligations to Robert for having left the field clear. When no longer prejudiced, the sight of Robert's practical labours struck him more and more, and his attachment grew with his admiration.

“ I'll tell you what, Phœbe,” he said, when riding with her, “ I have a notion of pleasing the parson. Yesterday we got obstructed by an interminable procession of school children going out for a lark in the country by an excursion train, and he began envying their keepers for being able to give them such a bath of country air. Could we not let him do the same by his lot at Beauchamp ? ”

“ Oh, Mervyn, what a mass of happiness you would produce ! ”

“ Mass of humbug ! I only want to please Robin and have no trouble. I shan't come near it. You only tell me what it will cost, carriage, provender, and all, and let me hear no more of it.”

He was destined to hear a good deal more. The proposal caused the utmost gratitude and satisfaction, except that Honor and Robert doubted whether it were a proper moment for merry-making at Hiltonbury. They were in full consultation when in walked Sir John Raymond, who could not help coming to town at once to express his thanks at having his son settled so near him. Ere long he learned what was under discussion, and made the amendment that the place should be the Forest, the occasion the horticultural show. He knew of a capital spot for the whole troop to dine in, even including the Wulstonians proper, whom Honor, wondering she had never thought of it before, begged to include in the treat at her own expense. But conveyance from the station for nearly two thousand?

"Never mind," said Sir John; "I'll undertake for that! We'll make it a county concern, and get the farmers to lend their wagons, borrow all the breaks we can, and I know of some old stage-coaches in dock. If there's not room for all, they must ride and tye. It is only three miles from the little Forest station, and we'll make the train stop there. Only, young ladies, you must work Whittington's cat upon all the banners for your kittens."

Lucilla clapped her hands, and undertook that the Whittingtonians should be marshalled under such an array of banners as never were seen before. Maria was in ecstasies, and Bertha was, in the excitement, forgetting her dread of confronting the county.

"But where's Miss Phoebe?" asked Sir John, who had sat half an hour waiting in vain for her to appear; and when he heard, he declared his intention of calling on her. And where was Mervyn himself? He was at the office, whither Robert offered to conduct the Baronet, and where Mervyn heard more of his proposal than he had bargained for; though, perhaps, not more than he liked. He was going to an evening party at the Bannermans', and seeing Sir John's inclination to see Phoebe, proposed to call for him and take him there.

"What is the use, Phoebe," demanded Lady Bannerman, after the party was over, "of my getting all these young men on purpose to dance with you, if you get up in a corner all the evening to talk to nobody but Mervyn and old Sir John? It can be nothing but perverseness, for you are not

a bit shy, and you are looking as delighted as possible to have put me out."

"Not to have put you out, Augusta, but I am delighted."

"Well, at what?"

"We are asked to stay at Moorcroft, that's one thing."

"Stupid place. No wines, no dinners," said Augusta; "and so ridiculous as you are! If the son is at home you'll do nothing but talk to Sir John. And if ever a girl ought to get married off I am sure it is you."

"How do you know what good use I may make of my opportunities?"

Phœbe positively danced upstairs, and indulged in a private polka round her bed-room. She had been told not only of the Forest plan, but that Sir John was going to "run down" to his brother's at Sutton the next day, and that he had asked Mervyn to come with him.

Mervyn had not this time promised to send her a blank cover. He thought he had very little present hope, for the talk had been of a year's probation—of his showing himself a changed character, &c. And not only was this only half that space, but less than a month had been spent in England. This time he was not setting off as one about to confer a favour.

Phœbe heard no more for two days. At last, as she was finishing her toilette to go out with Augusta, a hasty knock came to her door, and Mervyn entreated to be let in. His face told more than his tongue could utter. He had little guessed the intensity of the happiness of which he had so long deprived himself, and Cecily's acceptance had filled him with a flood of bliss, tinctured, however, by the sense of his own unworthiness of her constant affection, and increasing compunction for what he had made her endure.

"I don't know how she could do it, or why she cared for such a miserable scamp, breaking her heart all this time!" he exclaimed.

"You will make up for it now."

"I wish I may; but, bless me, Phœbe, she is a perfect little nun, and what is she to do with a graceless dog like me?"

"You will see," said Phœbe, smiling.

"What do you think, then?" he demanded, in some

alarm. "You know I can't take to the pious tack. Will nothing else satisfy her?"

"You are not the same as you were. You don't know what will happen to you yet," said Phœbe playfully.

"The carriage is ready, ma'am; my Lady is waiting," said a warning voice.

"I say," quoth Mervyn, intercepting her, "not a word to my Lady. It is all conditional, you understand—only that I may ask again, in a year, or some such infernal time, if I am I don't know what—but they do, I suppose."

"Perhaps you will by that time. Dear Mervyn, I am sorry, but I must go, or Augusta will be coming here."

He made a ludicrous gesture of shrinking horror, but still detained her to whisper, "You'll meet her at Moorcroft; they will have her for the Forest to-do."

Phœbe signed her extreme satisfaction, and ran away.

"I am surprised at you, Phœbe; you have kept me five minutes."

"Some young ladies do worse," said the Admiral, who was very fond of her; "and her time was not lost. I never saw her look better."

"I don't like such a pair of milkmaid's cheeks, looking so ridiculously delighted, too," said Lady Bannerman, crossly. "Really, Phœbe, one would think you were but just come up from the country, and had never been to a concert before. Those stupid little white marabouts in your hair again, too!"

"Well," said Sir Nicholas, "I take them as a compliment—Phœbe knows I think they become her."

"I don't say they are amiss in themselves, but it is all obstinacy, because I desired her to buy that magnificent ruby bandeau! How is any one to believe in her fortune if she dresses in that twopenny half-penny fashion? I declare I have a great mind to leave her behind."

Phœbe could almost have said "pray do," so much did she long to join the party in Woolstone Lane, where the only alloy was that poor Maria's incapacity for secrecy forbade her hearing the good news.

Miss Charlecote, likewise, was secretly a little scandalized at the facility with which the Raymonds had consented to the match; she thought Mervyn improved, but neither religious nor repentant, and could not think Cecily or her family justified in accepting him. Something of the kind

became perceptible to Robert when they first talked over the matter together.

"It may be so," he said, "but I really believe that Mervyn will be more susceptible of real repentance when he has imperceptibly been led to different habits and ways of thinking. In many cases, I have seen that the mind has to clear itself, and leave old things behind before it has the capacity of perceiving its errors."

"Repentance must precede amendment."

"Some repentance must, but even the sense of the inexpedience and inconvenience of evil habits may be the first step above them, and in time the power of genuine repentance may be attained."

"Still, glad as I am for all your sakes, I cannot understand it on Cecily's part, or how a girl of her tone of mind can marry where there can as yet be no communion of the highest kind. You would be sorry to see Phœbe do so."

"Very sorry. It is no example, but there may be claims from the mere length of the attachment, which seems to mark her as the appointed instrument for his good. Besides, she has not fully accepted him; and after such change as he has made, she might not have been justified in denying all encouragement."

"She did not seek such justification," said Honor, laughing, but surprised to find Robert thus lenient in his brother's case, after having acted so stern a part in his own.



CHAPTER XIV.

Then Robin Hood took them both by the hands,
And danced about the oak tree,
For three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men we be.

Old Ballad.

THE case of the three sisters remained a difficulty. The Bannermans professed to have "washed their hands of them," their advice not being taken, and Mr. Crabbe could not think himself justified in letting them return to the protection that had so egregiously failed. Bertha was fretted by

the uncertainty, and became nervous, and annoyed with Phœbe for not showing more distress—but going on from day to day in the confidence that matters would arrange themselves.

Phœbe, who had come of age during her foreign tour, had a long conference with her guardian when he put her property into her hands. The result was that she obtained his permission to inhabit with her sisters the Underwood, a sort of dowager-house belonging to Beauchamp, provided some elderly lady could be found to chaperon them—Miss Fennimore, if they preferred her.

Miss Fennimore was greatly touched with the earnestness of the united entreaties of her pupils, and though regretting the field of usefulness in which she had begun to work, could not resist the pleasure of keeping house with Phœbe, and resuming her studies with Bertha on safer ground. She could not, however, quit her employment without a half year's notice, and when Mervyn went down for a day to Beauchamp, he found the Underwood in such a woful state of disrepair, that turn in as many masons, carpenters, and paperers as he would, there was no hope of its being habitable before Martinmas. Therefore the intermediate time must be spent in visiting, and though the headquarters were at the Holt, the Raymonds of Moorcroft claimed the first month, and the promise of Cecily's presence allured Bertha thither, though the Fulmort mind had always imagined the house highly religious and dull. Little had she expected to find it ringing with the wild noise and nonsense of a joyous home party of all ages, full of freaks and frolics, laughter and merriment. Her ready wit would have made her shine brilliantly if her speech had been constantly at command, but she often broke down in the midst of a repartee, and was always in danger of suffering from over-excitement. Maria, too, needed much watching and tenderness. Every one was very kind to her, but not exactly knowing the boundary of her powers, the young people would sometimes have brought her into situations to which she was unequal, if Phœbe had not been constantly watching over her.

Between the two sisters, Phœbe's visit was no sinecure. She was always keeping a motherly eye and hand over one or the other, sometimes over both, and not unseldom incur-

ring Bertha's resistance under the petulance of overwrought spirits, or anger at troublesome precautions. After Cecily's arrival, however, the task became easier. Cecily took Bertha off her hands, soothing and repressing those variable spirits, and making a wise and gentle use of the adoration that Bertha lavished on her, keeping her cousins in order, and obviating the fast and furious fun that was too great a change for girls brought up like the Fulmorts. Maria was safe whenever Cecily was in the room, and Phœbe was able to relax her care and enjoy herself doubly for feeling all the value of the future sister.

She thought Miss Charlecote and Lucilla both looked worn and dispirited, when one day she rode with Sir John to see them and inspect the Underwood, as well as to make arrangements for the Forest Show. Poor Honora was seriously discomposed at having nothing to show there. It was the first time that the Holt had failed to shine in its produce, but old Brooks had allowed the whole country round to excel so palpably in all farm crops, and the gardener had taken things so easily in her absence, that everything was mediocre, and she was displeased and ashamed. Moreover, Brooks had controverted her strictest instructions against harbouring tenants of bad character; he had mismanaged the cattle, and his accounts were in confusion. He was a thoroughly faithful servant, but like Ponto and the pony, he had grown masterful with age. Honor found that her presiding eye had certainly done some good, since going away had made things so much worse, and she took Sir John with her to the study to consult him on her difficulties. Phœbe and Lucilla were left together.

"I am afraid you are not much better," said Phœbe, looking at the languid fragile little being, and her depressed air.

"Yes, I am," she answered, "in essentials—but, oh! Phœbe, if you could only teach me to get on with Honor."

"Oh," said Phœbe, with a tone of disappointment; "I hoped all was comfortable now."

"So it ought to be! I am a wretch that it is not; but somehow I get tired to death. I should like it to be my own fault, but with her I always have a sense of *fluffiness*. There is so much figurativeness and dreamy sentiment that one never gets to the firm, clear surface."

"I thought that her great charm," said Phœbe. "It is a pity to be so dull and unimaginative as I am."

"I like you best as you are! I know what to be at."

"Besides, how sensibility and poetry are a fund of happy youthfulness. Abroad, her enjoyment was multiplied because every place was full of associations, lighted up by her fancy."

"Made unsubstantial by her fluff! No, I cannot like mutton with the wool on it! It is a shame, though, good creature as she is! I only wanted to make out the philosophy of the wearied, worried condition that her conversation is so apt to bring on in me. I can't think it pure wickedness on my own part, for I esteem, and love, and venerate the good soul with all my heart. I say, Phœbe, were you never in an inward rage when she would say she would not *let* some fact be true, for the sake of some mythical, romantic figment? You smile. Own that you have felt it."

"I have thought of Miss Fennimore's theory, that legends are more veritable exponents of human nature than bare facts."

"Say it again, Phœbe. It sounds very grand! Whipped cream is a truer exponent of milk than cheese, especially when it tastes of soap-suds? Is that it?"

"It is a much prettier thing, and not near so hard and dry," said Phœbe; "but, you see, you are talking in figures after all."

"The effect of example. Look here, my dear, the last generation was that of mediævalism, ecclesiology, chivalry, symbolism, whatever you may call it. Married women have worked out of it. It is the middle-aged maids that monopolize it. Ours is that of common sense."

"I don't know that it is better or prettier," said Phœbe.

"And it may be worse. But how are the two to live together, when there is no natural conformity—only undeserved benefits on one side, and gratitude on the other?"

"You will be more at ease when you are stronger and better," said Phœbe. "Your brother will make you feel more natural with her."

"Don't talk of it, Phœbe. Think of the scene those two will get up! And the showing him that terrible little Cockney, Hoeing, as the old woman calls him. If I could

only break the neck of his h's before poor Owen hears them."

"Miss Charlecote did say something of having him here, but she thought you were not strong enough."

"Justly judged! I shall have enough of him by and bye, if I take him out to Canada. Once I used to think that would be deliverance; now it has become nothing but a gigantic trouble!"

"If you are really equal to it, you will not feel it so, when the time comes. Bertha was miserable at the thought of moving, till just when she had come to the right point, and then she grew eager for it."

It was wonderful how much freshened Lucy was by this brief contact with Phœbe's clear, practical mind; but only for the time. Ever since her arrival at the Holt she had sadly flagged, though making every effort against her depression. There was something almost piteous in her obedience and submission. All the employments once pressed upon her and then spurned, were solicitously resumed; or if Honor remonstrated against them as over-fatiguing, were relinquished in the same spirit of resigned meekness. Her too visible desire to make an onerous atonement pressed with equal weight on both, and the essential want of sympathy rendered the confidences of the one mysteries to the other.

Honora was grieved that her child had only returned to pine and droop, charging much of her melancholy lassitude upon Robert, and waiting on her with solicitude and tenderness that were, unhappily, only an additional oppression; and all Lucilla's aversion to solitude did not prevent her friend's absence from being a relief. It was all that she could at present desire to be released from the effort of being companionable, and be able to indulge her languor without remark, her wayward appetite without causing distress, and her dejection without caresses, commiseration, or secret imputations on Robert.

Tidings came from Vancouver's land of her uncle's death by an accident. Long as it was since she had seen him, the loss was deeply felt. She better appreciated what his care of her father had been, and knew better what gratitude he deserved, and it was a sore disappointment that he should not live to see her prove her repentance for

all her flightiness and self-will. Moreover, his death, without a son, would enable his nephew to alienate the family estate; and Lucy looked on this as direful shame and humiliation. Still there was something soothing in having a sorrow that could be shared with Miss Charlecote; and the tangible cause for depression and retirement was a positive comfort.

"Trouble" was the chief dread of her wearied spirit; and though she had exerted herself to devise and work the banners, she could not attempt being present at the grand Forest show, and marvelled to see Honor set off, with twice her years and more than twice her sorrows, yet full of the fresh eagerness of youthful anticipation, and youthful regrets at leaving her behind, and at having nothing to figure at the show!

But vegetables were not the order of that day, the most memorable the Forest had, perhaps, ever known, since six bold Lancastrian outlaws had there been hung, on the very knoll where the flag of England was always hoisted, superior to the flags of all the villages.

The country population and the exhibitors were all early in the field, and on the watch for the great feature of the day—the Londoners. What cheering rent the air as the first vehicle from the little Forest station appeared, an old stage coach, clustered within and without by white bibs, tip-pets, and caps, blue frocks, and grave, demure faces, uncertain whether to be charmed or frightened at their elevation and reception, and almost dazzled by the bright sunshine and pure air, to their perception absolutely thin, though heavy laden with the scents of new-mown hay and trodden ferns.

The horses are stopped, down springs Mr. Parsons from the box, releases the staid mistress from within, lifts or jumps down the twenty girls, and watches them form in well-accustomed file, their banner at their head, just pausing to be joined by the freight of a rattling omnibus, the very roof laden with the like little Puritan damsels. The conveyances turn back for another load, the procession is conducted slowly away, through the road lined by troops of country children, regarding the costume as the latest London fashion, and holding out many an eager gift of nosegays of foxgloves, marigolds, southernwood, and white pinks. Meanwhile,

break, cart, fly, van, barouche, gig, cart, and wagon continue in turn to discharge successive loads, twenty children to each responsible keeper. White caps are over! Behold the parish school of St. Wulstan's. Here is fashion! Here are hats, polkas, and full short skirts, but pale faces and small limbs. The country mothers cry "Oh!" and "Poor little dears, they look very tuly," and complacently regard their own sturdy, sunburnt offspring, at whose staring eyes and ponderous boots the city mice glance with disdain.

Endless stream! Here waves a proud blue banner, wrought with a noble tortoiseshell cat; and behind it, each class led by a cat-flag, marches the Whittingtonian line, for once no ragged regiment, but arrayed by their incumbent's three sisters in lilac cotton and straw bonnets, not concealing, however, the pinched and squalid looks of the denizens of the over-crowded lanes and alleys.

That complaint cannot be made of these sixteen wearers of grey frocks and checked jackets. Stunted, indeed, they are, several with the expressionless, almost featureless, visages of hereditary misery, others with fearfully refined loveliness, but all are plump, well-fed, and at ease. They come from the orphanage of St. Matthew's, under the charge of the two ladies who walk with them, leading two lesser younglings, all but too small to be brought to the festival. Yes, these are the waifs and strays, of home and parents absolutely unknown, whom Robert Fulmort has gathered from the streets—his most hopeful conquest from the realm of darkness.

Here, all neatly, some stylishly dressed, are the St. Wulstan's Young Women's Association, girls from fifteen upwards, who earn their own livelihood in service or by their handiwork, but meet on Sunday afternoons to read, sing, and go to church together, have books lent out for the week, or questions set for those who like them. It is Miss Fennimore who is the nucleus of the band; she sits with them in church, she keeps the books, writes the questions, and leads the singing; and she is walking between her two chief friends, answering their eager and intelligent questions about trees and flowers, and directing their observation.

Boys! boys! boys! Objects in flat caps and little round buttons atop, knee-breeches, and short-tailed coats, funnier to look at than their white-capped sisters, gentlemanly choris-

ters, tidy sons of artisans and warehousemen, ragged, half-tamed little street vagabonds, all file past, under curate, schoolmaster, or pupil teacher, till the whole multitude is safely deposited in a large mead running into the heart of the forest, and belonging to the ranger, Sir John Raymond, who has been busy there, with all his family, for the last three days.

Policemen guard the gates from intruders, but all can look over the low hedge at the tents at either end, the cord dividing boy from girl, and the scattered hay, on which the strangers move about, mostly mazed by the strange sights, sounds, and smells, and only the petted orphans venturing to tumble about that curious article upon the ground. Two little sisters, however, evidently transplanted country children, sit up in a corner where they have found some flowers, fondling them and lugging them with ecstasy.

The band strikes up, and, at the appointed signal, grace is said by the archdeacon from the centre, the children are seated on the grass, and "the nobility, clergy, and gentry" rush to the tents, and emerge with baskets of sandwiches of the largest dimensions, or cans full of Sir John's beer. The Whittingtonians devour as those that have eaten nothing this morning, the Wulstonites as though country air gave great keenness of appetite; the subdued silence of awe passes off, and voices, laughing, and play begin to betray some real enjoyment and familiarity.

Such as are not too perfectly happy in the revelry of tumbling on the grass are then paraded through the show, to gaze at peas, currants, and potatoes, pyramids of geraniums, and roses peeping through white paper. Thence the younger ones return to play in the field; such of the elder ones as prefer walking, are conducted through forest paths to gather flowers, and to obtain a closer view of that oft-described sight, a corn-field. Some of the elder Wulstonians get up a dance, tall girls dancing together with the utmost enjoyment; but at four o'clock the band plays *Dulce Domum*, the captains of twenties count heads and hunt up stragglers, all gather together in their places, plum buns and tea are administered till even these thirsty souls can drink no more. Again the files are marshalled, the banners displayed, and the procession moves towards the little Forest church, a small, low-walled, high-roofed building, enclosed by stately

benches, making a sort of outer cathedral, around the little elevation where it stood in its railed-in churchyard.

Two thousand children besides spectators in a building meant for three hundred! How came it to be devised? There is a consultation among the clergy. They go from one portion to another of the well-generalled army, and each division takes up a position on the ground strewn with dry beech leaves; hassocks and mats are brought to the ladies, a desk set at the gate, and a chair for the archdeacon; the choristers are brought near, and the short out-door service is begun.

How glorious and full the responses, "as the voice of many waters," and the chanted Psalms, the beautiful songs of degrees of the 27th of the month, rise with new fulness and vividness of meaning among the tall trees and sunlit foliage. One lesson alone is read, in Charlecote Raymond's fine, powerful voice, and many an eye is filled with tears at the words, "One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all," as he gazes on the troops on troops of young and old, rich and poor, strangers and homeborn, all held together in that great unity, typified by the overshadowing sky, and evidenced by the burst of the Creed from every voice and every heart.

Then follow the Versicles, the Collects, the Thanksgiving, and the Blessing, and in a few warm, kind words the archdeacon calls on all to keep the bond of peace and brotherly love, and bade the strangers bear home with them the thought of the wonderful works of God. Then—

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,

arises from the congregation in all its simple exultant majesty, forcing, as it were, every voice to break forth into singing, unless it be choked by heart-swelling.

The last note has died away, but there is a sweet hush, as though lingering still, ere breaking the sense that this is none other than the gate of heaven.

Rattle and rumble, the vehicles are coming! The children rise, and somewhere begins the indispensable cheer. The gentlemen take the lead. "Three times three for Mr. Fulmort!" "Three cheers for Sir John Raymond!"

"Three for the Forest show!" Shouting and waving of hats will never cease, the gentlemen are as crazy as the boys, and what will become of the train?

Tumble them in—hoist up the girls while mankind is still vociferous. What's all this, coming in at the omnibus windows? Stand back, child, you don't want to be set down in London! Your nosegay, is it? Here are the prize nosegays, prize potatoes, prize currants, prize everything showering in on the Londoners to display or feast on at home. Many a family will have a first taste of fresh country green meat to-morrow; of such freshness, that is, as it may retain after eight hours of show and five of train. But all is compared! How the little girls hug their flowers. If any nosegays reach London alive, they will be cherished to their last hour, and may be the leaves will live in prayer-books for many a year.

Poor little things! It has been to them apparently a rather weary and oppressive pleasure, too strange for the most part to be thoroughly enjoyed; but it will live in their memories for many a day, and as time goes on, will clear itself from the bewilderment, till it become one of the precious days that make gems on the thread of life.

Mervyn! Where has he been all this time? True, he once said he would see nothing of it, and seems to have kept his word. He did not even acknowledge the cheers for Mr. Fulmort!

Is not something visible behind the broad smooth bole of yonder beech tree? Have Mervyn and Cecily been there all the time of the evening service?

It is a remarkable fact, that though nobody has told anybody, every person who is curious, and many who are not, know who is to be Mrs. Fulmort of Beauchamp.