

CHAPTER XV.

When will you marry?
Say the bells of St. Mary.
When I get rich,
Say the bells of Shoreditch.
When will that be?
Say the bells of Stepney.
I do not know,
Says the great bell of Bow.

Nursery Rhyme.

THERE was some truth in Lucilla's view of herself and Honor as belonging to two distinct classes of development. Honor had grown up among those who fed on Scott, Wordsworth, and Fouqué, took their theology from the *British Critic*, and their taste from Pugin; and moulded their opinions and practice on the past. Lucilla and Phœbe were essentially of the new generation, that of Kingsley, Tennyson, Ruskin, and the *Saturday Review*. Chivalry had given way to common sense, romance to realism, respect for antiquity to pitying patronage, the past to the future. Perhaps the present has lost in reverence and refinement as much as it has gained in clearness and confidence! Lucilla represented reaction, therefore her attitude was antagonistic; Phœbe was the child of the newer system, therefore she loved the elder one, and sought out the likenesses to, rather than the differences from, her own tone of thought. And well was it that she had never let slip her hold on that broad, unchanging thread of truth, the same through all changes, making faith and principle one, though the developments in practice and shades of thought shake off the essential wisdom on which it grew, only to adopt some more fatal aberration of their own!

Thus standing between the two, Phœbe was a great help to both in understanding each other, and they were far more at ease when she was with them. In October, all three went to Woolstone Lane for a brief stay. Honor wished that the physician should see Lucilla before the winter, and Phœbe was glad to avail herself of the opportunity of choosing furniture and hiring servants for her new establishment, free from the interference of Lady Bannerman, who was of course at Brighton.

She had been obliged to let her sisters go to Sutton without her, as the little parsonage had not room for three guests besides Lieschen, who was more indispensable to Maria than even herself, and both the others were earnestly set upon accepting the invitation. Cecily silenced her scruples by begging, as a proof of acceptance as a sister, that she might be entrusted with them, and promising that in her own quiet home, whence most of the family had been launched into life, they should meet with none of the excitements of merry Moorcroft; and Phœbe was obliged to resign her charge for these few weeks, and trust from Bertha's lively letters that all was well.

Another cause which made Honor and Lucy anxious to be in London, was the possibility of Owen's arrival. He had last been heard of on the shores of Lake Superior, when he spoke of returning as soon as the survey for a new line of railway should have been completed, and it was not unlikely that he might come even before his letter. News would await him that he would regret as much as did his sister. Uncle Kit's death had enabled Charles Charteris, or rather his creditors, to advertise Castle Blanch for sale, and Lucilla, who had a more genuine affection for the place than had any of the natives, grieved extremely over the family disgrace that was causing it to pass into other hands.

She had an earnest desire to take advantage of the display of the house and grounds to pay the scenes of her youth one last visit. The vehemence of this wish was her first recurrence to her old strength of will, and Honora beheld it as a symptom of recovery, though dreading the long and fatiguing day of emotion. Yet it might be taken as another token of improvement that she had ceased from that instinctive caution of feebleness which had made her shrink from all exertion or agitation.

Her chest was pronounced to be in a satisfactory state, her health greatly improved; and as there was no longer need for extra precaution, the three ladies set forth together on the first fine day.

The Indian summer was in full glory, every wood arrayed in brightness; and as they drove from the Wrapworth Station, the banks of the river were surpassingly lovely, brown, red, and olive, illuminated by sprays of yellow, like

fireworks, and contrasting with the vivid green of the meadows and dark blue water. Honor recollected the fairy boat that once had floated there, and glancing at the pale girl beside her, could not but own the truth of the similitude of the crushed fire-fly; yet the fire of those days had scorched, not lighted; and it had been the mirth that tendeth to heaviness.

Cilla was gazing, with all her soul in her eyes, in silence. She was trying to revive the sense of home that once had made her heart bound at the first glimpse of Wrapworth; but her spirit leapt up no more. The familiar scene only impressed the sense of homelessness, and of the severance of the last tie to her father's parish, her mother's native place. Honor asked if she would stop in the village. "Not yet," she said; "let us have the Castle first."

At the next turn they overtook Mr. Prendergast, and he was instantly at the carriage-door, exacting a willing promise of taking luncheon with him on the way back, a rest for which Honor was thankful, sure as she was that this visit was costing Lucy more than she had anticipated.

Without a word, she beheld the green space of park, scattered with groups of glowing trees, the elms spangled with gold, the maples blushing themselves away, the parterre, a gorgeous patchwork of scarlet, lilac, and orange, the Virginian creeper hanging a crimson mantle on the cloister. There was something inexpressibly painful in the sight of all this beauty, unheeded and cast away by the owners, and displayed as a matter of bargain and sale. Phœbe thought of the strange, uncomfortable dream that it had been to her when she had before looked and wondered at the scene before her. She retraced Robert's restless form in every window, and thought how little she had then augured the fruit of what he had suffered.

The rooms were opened, and set out for inspection. Honor and Phœbe made it their duty to occupy the chattering maid, a stranger to Lucilla, and leave her free to move through the apartments, silent and very white, as if it were a sacred duty to stand wherever she had stood, to gaze at whatever her eyes had once met.

Presently she stood still, in the dining-room, her hand grasping the back of a chair, as she looked up to a large picture of three children, two boys and a girl, fan-

cifully dressed, and playing with flowers. The waxen complexion, fair hair, and blue eyes of the girl were almost her own.

"This to be sold?" she said, turning round, and speaking for the first time.

"O yes, ma'am!—everything, unreservedly. That picture has been much admired—by the late Sir Thomas Lawrence, ma'am—the children of the late General Sir Christopher Charteris."

Lucilla, whiter than before, walked quickly away. In a few seconds Phœbe followed, and found her leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, her breathing heavily oppressed; but she smiled coldly and sternly, and tightened a stiff, cold grasp on Phœbe's arm, as she said—

"Honor has her revenge, Phœbe! These are the kindred for whom I broke from her! Well, if Charles sells his birthright and his own father, I don't know how I can complain of his selling my mother!"

"But, Lucy, listen. Miss Charlecote was asking about the agent. I am sure she means to try to get it for you."

"I dare say. It is right that I should bear it!"

"And the maid said that there had been a gentleman speaking about it, and trying to secure it. She thought he had written to Mr. Charteris about it."

"What gentleman?" and Lucy was ready to spring back to inquire.

"Miss Charlecote asked, and I believe it was Mr. Prendergast!"

There was a bright, though strange flickering of pleasure and pain over Cilla's face, and her eyelids quivered as she said, "Yes—yes—of course; but he must not—he must not do it! He cannot afford it! I cannot let him!"

"Perhaps your cousin only needed to be reminded."

"I have no hope of him. Besides, he cannot help himself; but at least—I say, Phœbe, tell Honor that it is kindness itself in her; but I can't talk about it to her——"

And Lucilla's steps sprang up-stairs, as desirous to escape the sight and speech of all.

After the melancholy round of deserted bedrooms, full of bitter recollections, Lucilla again descended first, and at the door met the curate. After a few words, she turned,

and said, "Mr. Prendergast would row us down to the Vicarage, if you liked."

"Indeed, my dear," said Honor, unwillingly, "I am afraid of the cold on the water for you."

"Then pray let me walk across the Park!" she said, imploringly; and Miss Charlecote yielded rather than try her submission too severely, though dreading her over-fatigue, and set off with Phœbe in the fly.

"You are sure it is not too far for you?" asked the curate.

"Quite. You know I always used to fly upon Wrapworth turf." After some silence—"I know what you have been doing," she said, with a choking voice.

"About the picture? I am sorry you do."

"Why?"

"It is of no use for you to know that your cousin has no more heart than a lettuce run to seed."

"When I knew that before, why may I not know that there are others not in the same case," she said, with full heart and eyes.

"Because the sale must take place, and the purchaser may be a brute, so it may end in disappointment."

"It can't end in disappointment."

"It may be far beyond my means," continued the curate, as if he had been answering her importunities for a new doll.

"That I know it is," she said. "If it can be done at all, the doing it may be left to Miss Charlecote—it is an expiation I owe to her generous spirit."

"You would rather she did it than I?" he asked, mortified.

"Nay—didn't I tell you that I let her do it as an expiation. Does not that prove what it costs me?"

"Then why not——" he began.

"Because," she interrupted, "in the first place, you have no idea of the price of Lawrence's portraits; and, in the second, it is so natural that you should be kind to me that it costs even my proud spirit—just nothing at all"—and again she looked up to him with beamy, tearful eyes, and quivering, smiling lip.

"What, it is still a bore to live with Miss Charlecote," cried he, in his rough eagerness.

"Don't use such words," she answered, smiling. "She

is all kindness and forgiveness, and what can it be but my old vixen spirit that makes this hard to bear?"

"Cilla!" he said.

"Well?"

"Cilla!"

"Well!"

"I have a great mind to tell you why I came to Southminster."

"To look at a living?"

"To look at you. If I had found you pining and oppressed, I had thought of asking if you could put up with your father's old friend."

She looked with eyes of wonder, drew her arm away, and stood still, partly bewildered. "You didn't?" she said, half in interrogation.

"I saw my mistake; you were too young and gay. But, Cilla," he added, more tremulously, "If you do wish for a home——"

"Don't, don't!" she cried; "I can't have you talk as if I only wanted a home!"

"And indeed I have none as yet," he said. "But do you indeed mean that you could think of it?"—and he came nearer.

"It! Nonsense! Of you?" she vehemently exclaimed. "How could you think of anything else?"

"Cilla," he said, in great agitation, "let me know what you are saying. Don't drive me crazy when it is not in the nature of things you should mean it!"

"Why not?" asked Lucilla. "It is only too good for me."

"Is it true, then?" he said, as he took both her hands in his. "Is it true that you understand me, and are willing to be—to be my own—darling charge!"

"Oh, it would be such rest!"

It was as if the storm-tossed bird was folding its weary wing in perfect calm and confidence. Nor could he contain his sudden joy, but spoke incoherent words, and well nigh wept over her.

"How did you come to think of it?" exclaimed she, as, the first gush of feeling over, they walked on arm-in-arm.

"I thought of it from the moment when I hoped I might be a resource, a comforter at least."

"Not before?" was the rather odd question.

"No. The place was forlorn enough without you; but I was not such a fool as to think of a young beauty, and all that."

"*All that* meaning my wickedness," said Lucilla. "Tell me again. You always did like the sprite even when it was wicked, only you were too good and right-minded."

"Too old and too poor."

"She is old and poor now," said Cilla; "worn out and washed out into a mere rag. And you like her the better?"

"Not washed out!" he said, as her countenance flushed into more than its wonted loveliness. "I used to wish you hadn't such a face when those insolent fellows talked of you—but you will get up your looks again when I have the care of you. The first college living—there are some that can't choose but drop before long! The worst is, I am growing no younger!"

"Ah! but I am growing older!" she cried, triumphantly. "All women from twenty-five to forty are of the same age as all men from thirty to fifty. We are of just the same standing, you see!"

"Seventeen years between us!"

"Nothing at all, as you will see when I put on my cap, and look staid."

"No, no; I can't spare all that yellow hair."

"Yellow, indeed! if you don't know better what to call it, the sooner it is out of sight the better."

"Why, what do you call it?"

"Flaxen, to be sure—*blonde cendrée*, if you like it better—that is the colour of tow and ashes!"

She was like a playful kitten for the next quarter of a mile, her prettiest sauciness returning in the exuberant, confiding gladness with which she clung to the affection that at length satisfied her spirit; but gravity came back to her as they entered the village.

"Poor Wrapworth!" she said, "you will soon pass to strangers! It is strange to know that, yet to feel the old days returning for which I have pined ever since we were carried away from home and Mr. Pendy."

"Yes, nothing is wanting but that we could remain here."

"Never mind! We will make a better Wrapworth for one another, free from the stains of my Castle Blanch errors and sorrows! I am even glad of the delay. I want a little time to be good with poor dear Honor, now that I have heart and spirit to be good."

"And I grudge every week to her! I declare, Cilla, you make me wish evil to my neighbour."

"Then follow my example, and be content with this present gladness."

"Ha! ha! I wonder what they'll say at Southminster. Didn't I row them for using you so abominably? I have not been near them since!"

"More shame for you! Sarah is my best correspondent, and no one ever did me so much good as Mrs. Prendergast."

"I didn't ask her to do you good!"

"You ought to have done so then; for I should not be the happy woman I am now if she had not done me good because she could not help it! I hope they won't take it to heart."

"I hope they will!"

"What?"

"Turning you out."

"Oh, I meant your throwing yourself away on a broken-down governess! There—let us have done with nonsense. Come in this way."

It was through the churchyard, past the three graves, which were as trim as if Lucilla had daily tended them. "Thank you," she said; then gazed in silence, till with a sigh she exclaimed:—

"Poor Edna! Monument of my faults! What perverse determination of mine it was that laid her here!"

"It was your generous feeling."

"Do not miscall and embellish my perverse tyranny, as much to defy the Charterises as to do her justice. I am more ashamed now that I have the secret of your yielding!" she added, with downcast eyes, yet a sudden smile at the end.

"We will take that child home and bring him up," said Mr. Prendergast.

"If his father wishes it, it will be right;" not as if it

were the pleasantest of charges. "Thank you," said Cilla. "Three o'clock! Poor Honor, she must be starving!"

"What about her?" stammered Mr. Prendergast, hanging back shyly. "Must she be told?"

"Not now," said Lucilla, with all her alert readiness. "I will tell her to-night. You will come in the first day you can!"

"To-morrow! Every possible day."

Honor had truly been uneasy, fearing that Lucilla was walking, sitting down, or fasting imprudently; but the brilliant colour, the joyous eyes, and lively manner spoke wonderfully for the effects of native air. Mr. Prendergast had become more absent and awkward than ever, but his extra shyness passed unremarked, and Lucilla's tact and grace supplied all deficiencies without obtrusiveness. Always at home in the vicarage, she made none of her former bantering display of familiarity, but only employed it quietly to secure the guests having what they wanted, and to awaken the host to his duties, when he forgot that any one save herself needed attention.

She was carried off before the river fog should arise, and her abstracted silence all the way home was not wondered at; although Phœbe, sitting opposite to her, was at a loss to read the furtive smiles that sometimes unclosed her lips, or the calm, pensive look of perfect satisfaction on her features; and Honor could not comprehend her entire absence of fatigue after so trying a day, and wondered whether it were really the old complaint—want of feeling.

At night, Honor came to her room, and began—"My dear, I want to make a little explanation to you, if you are not tired."

"Oh! no—I had a little explanation to make to you," she answered, with a flush and a smile.

"Perhaps it may be on the same subject," and as Cilla half laughed, and shook her head, she added—"I meant to tell you that long ago—from the time I had the Holt—I resolved that what remained of my income after the duties of my property were fulfilled, should make a fund for you and Owen. It is not much, but I think you would like to have the option of anticipating a part, in case it should be possible to rescue that picture."

"Dear, dear Honor," exclaimed Cilla; "how very kindly

you are doing it! Little did I think that Charles's heartlessness would have brought me so much joy and kindness."

"Then you would like it to be done," said Honor, delighted to find that she had been able so to administer a benefit as to excite neither offence nor resignation. "We will take care that the purchaser learns the circumstances, and he can hardly help letting you have it at a fair valuation."

"Thanks, thanks, dear Honor," repeated Lucy; "and now for *my* explanation. Mr. Prendergast has asked me to marry him."

Had it been herself, Honor could not have been more astounded.

"My child! impossible! Why, he might be your father! Is it that you want a home, Lucy? Can you not stay with me?"

"I can and I will for the present, sweetest Honey," said Cilly, caressingly drawing her arm round her. "I want to have been good and happy with you; but, indeed, indeed I can't help his being more to me!"

"He is a very excellent man," began bewildered Honor; "but I cannot understand——"

"His oddity? That's the very thing which makes him my own, and nobody else's, Mr. Pendy! Listen, Honor. Sit down, you don't half know him, nor did I know my own heart till now. He came to us, you know, when my father's health began to break after my mother's death. He was quite young, only a deacon; he lived in our house, and he was, with all his dear clumsiness, a daughter to my father, a nurse to us. I could tell you of such beautiful awkward tendernesses! How he used to help me with my sums—and tie Owen's shoes, and mince his dinner for him—and spare my father all that was possible! I am sure you know how we grieved after him."

"Yes, but——"

"And now I know that it was *he* that I cared for at Wrapworth. With him I never was wild and naughty as I was with others, though I did not know—oh! Honor, if I had but known—that he always cared for the horrid little thing I was, I could not have gone on so; but he was too good and wise, even while he *did* love me, to think of *this*,

till I had been tamed and come back to you ! I am sure I can't be so naughty now, since he has thought of me ! ”

“ Lucy, dearest, I am glad to see you so happy, but it is very strange to me. It is such a sudden change,” said Honor.

“ No change ! I never cared for any one half as much ! ”

“ Lucy ! ” confounded at her apparent oblivion.

“ It is true,” said Lucy, sitting down by her. “ Perhaps I thought I did, but if the other had ever been as much to me, I could never have used him as I did ! O, Honor, when a person is made of the stuff I am, it is very hard to tell which is one's heart, and which is one's flirting-machine ! for the other thing does simulate all the motions, and feel real true pain ! But I know now that Mr. Pendy was safe in my real heart of hearts all the time, though I never guessed it, and thought he was only a sort of father ; but you see that was why I was always in awe of getting under Robert's dominion, and why I survived his turning me off, and didn't at all wish him to bring it on again.”

“ No, that you did not,” said Honor, in a cheered voice, as if acquitting her.

“ And I am sure if Mr. Prendergast only looked like using me after my deserts, as *he* did, it would not be only a demi-decline that I should get into,” said Lucilla, her eyes full of tears. “ Oh ! Honor, think of his care of my father ! Kiss me and wish me joy in my father's name, and like him ; for when you know him, you will see he is the only person in the wide world to whom you could safely trust your little torment ! ”

Honor could not but be carried along to give the hearty kiss and motherly congratulation as they were sought, and she saw that she must believe what Lucy said of her own feelings, incomprehensible though they were. But she regretted to hear of the waiting for a college living, and at the first impulse wished she had heard of this attachment before Hiltonbury's fate had been fixed.

“ For shame, Honor, as if you ought not to respect Hiltonbury too much to tack it to my petticoat ! But at least thank you, for if you could once think of committing Hiltonbury to him, you must like it for me.”

"I must like what is so evidently well for you, my child! Will you tell Phœbe?"

"Not till we go home, I think," said Cilla, with a blush; and, as if to avoid farther discussion, she bade Honora good night. Decidedly, she wished Robert to feel more than she would like to see, or should he betray no feeling, she had rather not be aware of it.

But such news was already in town as to put to flight, for a time at least, the last remnants of coquetry.

Robert was in the house early in the morning, and called Miss Charlecote to speak to him in the study. He had a packet of letters in his hand, of which he gave one to herself, a long one in Owen's writing, but unfinished and undirected.

Lakeville, Newcastle District, August 14th.

"MY DEAR HONOR,

"There is no saying how much I rejoice that I can write to you and Lucy again under the same roof. I hope soon to see you together again, and revive old times, but we are delayed by the discovery that the swamp lying full in the Grand Ottawa and Superior Line is impracticable, and would not only be the death of all the navvies employed thereon, but would swallow bodily the funds of the G. O. and S. Company. So we are carrying our survey in other directions, before making out our report, after which I hope to be permanently engaged on the construction. This will give me three months to spend at home, in knitting up old links, and considering how to dispose of my poor little encumbrance till I can set him to make his way here. You or Lucy would perhaps look out for some lady who takes Indian children, or the like. I am my own man now, and can provide the wherewithal, for my personal expenses are small, and engineering is well paid. Lucy must not think of bringing him out, for even at her fastest the Far West would be no place for her. Let her think of Glendalough, and realize that if she were here she would look back on it as a temple of comfort, civilization, and civility, and this place is the last attempt at social habitation for 200 and odd miles. It stands on a lake of its own, with an Indian name, 'which no man can speak and no man can spell.' It is colonial to the highest degree, and inhabited by all denominations, chiefly agreed in worshipping us as priests of the G. O. and S. Line,

which is to make their fortune, and for their manners, least said soonest mended, though there are some happy exceptions, French Canadian, Lowland Scots, &c., and a wiry hard-working parson, whose parish extends nearly to Lake Superior, and whose remaining aroma of University is refreshing. There is also a very nice young lad, whose tale may be a moving example of what it is to come out here expecting to find in the backwoods Robinson Crusoe's life and that of the Last of the Mohicans combined. That is, it was not he, but his father, Major Randolph, an English officer, who, knowing nothing of farming, less of Canada, and least of all of speculation, got a grant of land, where he speculated only to lose, and got transferred to this forlorn tract, only to shiver with ague and die of swamp fever. During the twenty-five years of this long agony, he had contrived to have two wives, the first of whom left this son, whom he educated as a scholar, intending to finish him in England when the tide should turn, but whereas it never did, he must needs get a fresh partner into the whirlpool, a Yankee damsel out of a boarding-house. By the time she had had a couple of children, he died, and the whole weight remains bound about young Randolph's neck, tying him down to work for dear life in this doleful spot, without a farthing of capital, no stock, no anything. I came upon the clearing one day in the course of my surveying, and never did I see *Gone to the Dogs* more clearly written on any spot; the half-burnt or overthrown trees lying about overgrown with wild vines and raspberries, the snake fence broken down, the log-house looking as if a touch would upset it, and nothing hopeful but a couple of patches of maize and potatoes, and a great pumpkin climbing up a stump. My horse and myself were done up, so I halted, and was amazed at the greeting I received from the youth, who was hard at work on his hay, single-handed, except for the two children tumbling in it. The lady in her rocking-chair was contrast enough to make me heartily glad to find that she was his stepmother, not his wife. Since that, I have seen a good deal of him; he comes to Lakeville, five miles across the bush, and seven across the lake to church on Sunday, and spends the day with the parson, and Mr. Currie has given him work in our press of business, and finds him so effective, that he wants to take him on for good; but this can't be while he has got these

three stones about his neck, for whom he works harder and lives worse than any day-laborer at Hiltonbury; regular hand to mouth, no chance of making a start, unless the Company will fortunately decide on the line I am drawing through the heart of his house, which will force them to buy him out of it. I go out to-morrow to mark the said line for Mr. Currie to report upon, and will finish my letter to travel with said report."

"Aug. 21st.—Thanks to the Fire-King, he has done for the ancient log-house, though next time he mounts his 'hot copper filly,' I do not desire a second neck-and-neck race with him. A sprain of the leg, and contusion (or confusion) of the head, are the extent of the damage received, and you will say that is cheap, considering all things. I had done my 200 miles of marking, and was coming back on my last day's journey, debating whether to push on to Lakeville that night, camp out, or get a shake-down at Randolph's, bringing my own provender, for they live on hominy and milk, except for what he can shoot or catch. It was so dark that I had nearly fixed on sleeping in the bush, when it struck me that there must be an uncommonly fine aurora, but getting up a little rising ground where the trees were thinner, I observed it was to the south-west, not the north. That way there lies prairie land, at this season one ocean of dry bents, fit to burn like tinder, so that one spark would set fifty square miles alight at once. All the sky in that quarter was the colour of glowing copper, but the distance was so enormous that danger never occurred to me till I saw the deer scampering headlong, the birds awake and flying, and my horse trembling and wild to be off. Then I remembered that the wind was full from that direction, and not a bit of water between, nor all the way to the Lakeville lake. I never knew my beast's pace on the Kingston road what it was through that track, all the rustling and scuttling of the beasts and birds sounding round us, the glare gaining on us, and the scent of smoke beginning to taint the wind. There was Randolph's clearing at last, lonesome and still as ever, and a light in the window. Never was it so hard to pull in a horse; however, I did so. He was still up, reading by a pine torch, and in five minutes more the woman and her children were upon the horse, making for the lake. Randolph took his axe, and pocketed a book or two, and we dashed off together for a long arm of

swamp that he knew of, running out from the lake. When we got to the other end of the clearing, I thought it was all up with us. The wall of red roaring flame had reached the other side, and the flame was leaping from the top of one pine to another, making them one shape of quivering red, like Christmas evergreens in the fire, a huge tree perhaps standing up all black against the lurid light, another crashing down like thunder, the ribbon of flame darting up like a demon, the whole at once standing forth a sheet of blazing light. I verily believe I should have stood on, fascinated with the horror and majesty of the sight, and feeling it vain to try to escape, when the burning wings were spreading to enclose the clearing and us with it, but Randolph urged me on, and we plunged through the bush at the best speed we could make, the smoke rolling after us, and the heat glowing like a furnace, so as to consume all power out of us. It was hell itself pursuing after us, and roaring for his prey, the trees coming crashing down, and shaking the earth under our feet, the flame absolutely running on before us upon the dry grass and scrub, and the scorching withering every drop of moisture from us, though not ten minutes before, we had been streaming at every pore.

"I saw green reeds before us, heard Randolph cry out, 'Thank God,' and thought I was plunging after him, when I found myself on the ground, and the branches of a hemlock covering me. Happily they were but the lesser boughs, and not yet alight; and at his own desperate peril, Randolph came back with his axe, and cut them off, then dragged me after him into the mud. Never bath more welcome! We had to dispute it with buffaloes, deer, all the beasts of the wood, tame and cowed with terror, and through them we floundered on, the cold of the water to our bodies making the burning atmosphere the more intolerable round our heads. At last we came to an island, where we fell upon the reeds so much spent that it was long before we found that our refuge was shared by a bear and by Randolph's old cow, to the infinite amaze of the bull-frogs. The Fire King was a hundred yards off, and a fierce shower, brought from other parts by his unwarrantable doings, began to descend, and finally quenched him in such smoke that we had to lie on our faces to avoid stifling. When the sun arose, there was Lakeville in its woods on one side, on the other the blackest desolation

conceivable. The population were all astir. Mrs. Randolph had arrived safely, and Mr. Currie was about to set forth in search of my roasted remains, when they perceived the signals of distress that we were making, after Randolph had done gallant battle with the bear in defence of the old cow. He is a first-rate hunter, and despatched the fellow with such little aid as I could give, with a leg not fit to stand upon; and when the canoes came off to fetch us, he would not leave the place till he had skinned the beast. My leg is unserviceable at present, and all my bones feel the effect of the night in the swamp, so I am to lay by, make the drawings, and draw up the report, while Mr. Currie and Randolph do my work over again, all my marks having been effaced by his majesty the Fire King, and the clearing done to our hand. If I could only get rid of the intolerable parching and thirst, and the burning of my brains! I should not wonder if I were in for a touch of swamp fever."

Here Owen's letter broke off, and Honor begged in alarm for what Robert evidently had in reserve. He had received this letter to her enclosed in one from Mr. Currie, desiring him to inform poor young Sandbrook's friends of his state. By his account, Owen's delay and surrender of his horse had been an act of gallant self-devotion, placing him in frightfully imminent danger, whence only the cool readiness of young Randolph had brought him off, apparently with but slight hurts from the fall of the tree, and exposure to the night air of the heated swamp. He had been left at Lakeville in full confidence of restoration after a week's rest, but on returning from Lake Superior, Mr. Currie found him insensible, under what was at first taken for an aggravated access of the local fever, until, as consciousness returned, it became evident that the limbs on the left side were powerless. Between a litter and water transport, the sufferer was conveyed to Montreal, where the evil was traced to concussion of the brain from the blow from the tree, the more dangerous because unfelt at first, and increased by application to business. The injury of the head had deprived the limbs of motion and sensation, and the medical men thought the case hopeless, though likely to linger through many stages of feebleness of mind and body. Under these circumstances, Mr. Currie, being obliged to return home himself, and unable to leave the poor young man in such a condition among strangers,

had decided on bringing him to England, according to his own most eager desire, as the doctors declared that the voyage could do no harm, and might be beneficial. Mr. Currie wrote from Quebec, where he had taken his passage by a steamer that would follow his letter in four days' time, and he begged Robert to write to him at Liverpool stating what should be done with the patient, should he be then alive. His mind, he said, was clear, but weak, and his memory, from the moment of his fall till nearly the present time, a blank. He had begged Mr. Currie to write to his sister or to Miss Charlecote, but the engineer had preferred to devolve the communication upon Mr. Fulmort. Of poor Owen he spoke with much feeling, in high terms of commendation, saying that he was a valuable friend and companion as well as a very right hand in his business, and that his friends might be assured that he (Mr. Currie) would watch over him as if he were his own son, and that his temporary assistant, Mr. Randolph, was devoted to him, and had nursed him most tenderly from the first.

"Four days' time!" said Honor, when she had taken in the sense of these appalling tidings. "We can be at Liverpool to meet him. Do not object, Robert. Nothing else will be bearable to either his sister or me."

"It was of his sister that I was thinking," said Robert. "Do you think her strong enough for the risks of a hurried journey, with perhaps a worse shock awaiting her when the steamer comes in? Will you let me go alone? I have sent orders to be telegraphed for as soon as the *Asia* is signalled, and if I go at once, I can either send for you if needful, or bring him to you. Will you not let me?"

He spoke with persuasive authority, and Honora half yielded. "It may be better," she said, "it *may*. A man may do more for him there than we could, but I do not know whether poor Lucy will let you, or—" (as a sudden recollection recurred to her) "whether she ought."

"Poor Owen is my friend, my charge," said Robert.

"I believe you are right, you kind Robin," said Honor. "The journey might be a great danger for Lucy, and if I went, I know she would not stay behind. But I still think she will insist on meeting him."

"I believe not," said Robert; "at least, if she regard submission as a duty."

"Oh, Robin, you do not know. Poor child, how am I to tell her?"

"Would you like for me to do so?" said Robert, in the quiet matter of course way of one to whom painful offices had become well-nigh natural.

"You? O Robin, if you——" she said, in some confusion, but at the moment the sound of the visitors' bell startled her, and she was about to take measures for their exclusion, when looking from the window, she saw that the curate of Wrapworth had already been admitted into the court. The next moment she had met him in the hall, and seizing his hand, exclaimed in a hurried whisper, "I know! I know! But there is a terrible stroke hanging over my poor child. Come in and help us to tell her!"

She drew him into the study, and shut the door. The poor man's sallowness had become almost livid, and in half-sobbing words he exclaimed—"Is it so? Then give her to me at once. I will nurse her to the last, or save her! I know it was only her being driven out to that miserable governess life that has been destroying her!" and he quite glared upon poor innocent Honor as a murderess.

"Mr. Prendergast, I do not know what you mean. Lucilla is nearly well again. It is only that we fear to give her some bad news of her brother."

"Her brother! Is that all?" said the curate, in a tone of absolute satisfaction. "I beg your pardon, Miss Charlecote; I thought I saw a doctor here, and you were going to sentence my darling."

"You do see Robert Fulmort, whom I thought you knew."

"So I do," said Mr. Prendergast, holding out his hand. "I beg your pardon for having made such a fool of myself; but you see, since I came to an understanding with that dear child, I have not thought of anything else, nor known what I was about."

Robert could not but look inquiringly at Miss Charlecote.

"Yes," she faltered, "Mr. Prendergast has told you—what I could not—what I had not leave to say."

"Yes," put in Mr. Prendergast, in his overflowing felicity, "I see you think it a shocking match for such a little gem of beauty as that; but you young men should have

been sharper. There's no accounting for tastes;" and he laughed awkwardly.

"I am heartily glad," said Robert—and voice, look, and grasp of the hand conveyed the fullest earnestness—"I am exceedingly rejoiced that the dear little friend of all my life should be in such keeping! I congratulate you most sincerely, Mr. Prendergast. I never saw any one so well able to appreciate her."

That is over, thought Honor; how well he has stood it! And now she ventured to recal them to the subject in hand, which might well hang more heavily on her heart than the sister's fate! It was agreed that Lucilla would bear the intelligence best from Mr. Prendergast, and that he could most easily restrain her desire for going to Liverpool. He offered himself to go to meet Owen, but Honor could not quite forgive the, "*Is that all?*" and Robert remained constant to his former view, that he, as friend both of Owen and Mr. Currie, would be the most effective. So therefore it stood, and Lucilla was called out of the drawing-room to Mr. Prendergast, as Honor and Robert entered it. It was almost in one burst that Phœbe learnt the brother's accident and the sister's engagement, and it took her several moments to disentangle two such extraordinary events.

"I am very glad," repeated Robert, as he felt rather than saw that both ladies were regarding him with concealed anxiety; "it is by far the happiest and safest thing for her! It is an infinite relief to my mind."

"I can't but be glad," said Honor; "but I don't know how to forgive her!"

"That I can do very easily," said Robert, with a smile on his thin lips that was very reassuring, "not only as a Christian, but as I believe nothing ever did me so much good. My fancy for her was an incentive which drew me on to get under better influences, and when we threw each other overboard, I could do without it. She has been my best friend, not even excepting you, Miss Charlecote; and as such I hope always to be allowed to regard her. There, Phœbe, you have had an exposition of my sentiments once for all, and I hope I may henceforth receive credit for sincerity."

Miss Charlecote felt that, under the name of Phœbe,

this last reproof was chiefly addressed to her; and perhaps Phœbe understood the same, for there was the slightest of all arch smiles about her full lip and downcast eye; and though she said nothing, her complete faith in her brother's explanation, and her Christian forgiveness of Lucilla, did not quench a strong reserve of wondering indignation at the mixed preferences that had thus strangely settled down upon the old curate.

She followed her brother from the room, to ask whether she had better not leave Woolstone Lane in the present juncture. But there was nowhere for her to go; Beauchamp was shut up, the cottage being painted, Sutton barely held the three present guests, and her elder sister from home. "You cannot go without making a disturbance," said Robert; "besides, I think you ought to stay with Miss Charlecote. Lucilla is of no use to her; and this unlucky Owen is more to her than all the world besides. You may comfort her."

Phœbe had no more to urge. She could not tell her brother that looks and words of Owen Sandbrook, and in especial his last farewell, which she was at that time too young and simple to understand, had, with her greater experience, risen upon her in an aspect that made her desirous of avoiding him. But, besides the awkwardness of such recollections at all, they seemed cruel and selfish when the poor young man was coming home crippled and shattered, only to die, so she dismissed them entirely, and set herself to listen and sympathize.

CHAPTER XVI.

Old isle and glorious, I have heard
Thy fame across the sea,
And know my father's homes are thine,
My father's rest with thee.

A Cleveland Lore.

"R. M. FULMORT to Miss Charlecote. The carriage to meet the 6 P. M. train."

That was all the intelligence that reached Woolstone Lane till the court-gates were opened, and Robert hurried

in before the carriage. "Much better," he said, "only he is sadly knocked up by the journey. Do not show yourselves till he is in his room. Which is it?"

Honora and Lucilla hastened to point it out, then drew back, and waited, Honor supporting herself against the wall, pale and breathless, Lucy hanging over the balusters, fevered with suspense. She heard the tread, the quick, muttered question and answer; she saw the heavy, helpless weight carried in; and as the steps came upwards, she was pulled back into the sitting-room by Honor, at first almost by force, then with passive, dejected submission, and held tight to the back of a chair, her lip between her teeth, as though withholding herself by force from springing forward as the familiar voice, weak, weary, and uncertain, met her ear.

At length Robert beckoned; and she flew at first, then slackened her pace, awestruck. Her brother lay on the bed, with closed eyes. The form was larger, more manly and robust than what she had known, the powerful framework rendering the wreck more piteous, and the handsome dark beard and moustaches and crisp, thick curls of hair made the straight, well-cut features resemble an old picture of a cavalier; nor had the bright, sunburnt complexion lost the hue of health; so that the whole gave the idea of present suffering rather than abiding illness. He seemed to her like a stranger, till at her step he looked up, and his dark grey eyes were all himself as he held out his hand and fondly spoke her name. She hung over him, restraining her exclamations with strong force; and even in the midst of her embrace he was saying, "Honor! Is Honor here?"

Trembling with emotion, Honor bent to kiss his brow, and felt his arm thrown about her neck, and the hairy lips kissing either cheek just as when, smooth and babyish, they had sought her motherly caress. "May I come home?" he asked. "They brought me without your leave!"

"And you could not feel sure of your Sweet Honey's welcome?"

He smiled his old smile of fondness, but dimmed by pain and languor; and the heavy lids sank over his eyes, but to be at once raised. "Lucy! Home, Honor! It is all I wanted," he said; "if you will be good to me, such as I am."

"We will sit close to you, my dear; only you cannot talk—you must rest."

"Yes. My head is very bad—my eyes ache," he said, turning his head from the light, with closed eyes, and hand over them; but then he added—"One thing first—where is he?"

"Your little boy?" said Lucilla. "Do you wish to see him? I will call him."

"No, no, I could not;" and his brow contracted with pain. "No; but did not I tell you all about him—your cousin, Honor? Do pull the curtain round, the light hurts me!"

Convinced that his mind was astray, there was no attempt at answering him; and all were so entirely occupied with his comforts, that Phœbe saw and heard no one until Robert came down, telling her that Owen had, in fact, improved much on the voyage, but that the long day's journey by train had brought on such severe and exhausting pain in the head, that he could scarcely speak or look up, and fatigue seemed to have confused the faculties that in the morning had been quite clear. Robert was obliged to go to his seven o'clock service, and Phœbe would fain have come with him, but he thought she might be useful at home.

"Miss Charlecote is so much absorbed in Owen," he said, "that I do not think she heard a word about that young Randolph. Mr. Currie is gone to spend to-morrow and Sunday with his father at Birmingham, but he let me have this young man to help to bring Owen home. Make Miss Charlecote understand that he is to sleep at my place. I will come back for him, and he is not to be in her way. He is such a nice fellow! And, Phœbe, I have no time, but there is Mrs. Murrell with the child in the study. Can you make her understand that Owen is far too ill to see them to-night? Keep them off poor Lucy, that's all."

"Lucy, that's all!" thought Phœbe, as she moved to obey. "In spite of all he says, Lucy will always be his first thought next to St. Matthew's; nor do I know why I should mind it, considering what a vast space there is between!"

"Now my pa is come, shan't I be a gentleman, and ride in a carriage?" were the sounds that greeted Phœbe's ears as she opened the door of the study, and beheld the small,

lean child dressed in all his best; not one of the grey linen frocks that Lucilla was constantly making for him, but in a radiant tartan, of such huge pattern that his little tunic barely contained a sample of one of each portentous check, made up crosswise, so as to give a most comical, harlequin effect to his spare limbs, and weird, black eyes. The disappointment that Phœbe had to inflict was severe, and unwittingly she was the messenger whom Mrs. Murrell was likely to regard with the most suspicion and dislike. "Come home along with me, Hoing, my dear," she said; "you'll always find poor granny your friend, even if your pa's 'art is like the nether millstone, as it was to your poor ma, and as others may find it yet."

"I have no doubt Mr. Sandbrook will see him when he is a little recovered after his journey," said Phœbe.

"No doubt, ma'am. I don't make a doubt, so long as there is no one to put between them. I have 'eard how the sight of an 'opeful son was as balm to the eyes of his father; but if I could see Mr. Fulmort——"

"My brother is gone to church. It was he who sent me to you."

Mrs. Murrell had real confidence in Robert, whose friendliness had long been proved, and it was less impossible to persuade her to leave the house when she learnt that it was by his wish; but Phœbe did not wonder at the dread with which an interview with her was universally regarded.

In returning from this mission, Phœbe encountered the stranger in the lamp-light of the hall, intently examining the balustrade of the stairs.

"This is the drawing-room," she courteously said, seeing that he seemed not to know where to go.

"Thank you," he said, following her. "I was looking at the wood. What is it? We have none like it.

"It is Irish bog oak, and much admired."

"I suppose all English houses can scarcely be like this?" said he, looking round at the carved wainscot.

"Oh, no, this house is a curiosity. Part was built before 1500."

"In the time of the Indians?" Then smiling, "I had forgotten. It is hard to realize that I am where I have so long wished to be. Am I actually in a room 360 years old?"

"No; this room is less ancient. Here is the date, 1605, on this panel."

"Then this is such a house as Milton might have grown up in. It looks on the Thames?"

"How could you tell that?"

"My father had a map of London that I knew by heart, and after we came under Temple Bar, I marked the bearings of the streets. Before that I was not clear. Perhaps there have been changes since 1830, the date of his map."

Phœbe opened a map, and he eagerly traced his route, pronouncing the names of the historical localities with a relish that made her almost sorry for their present associations. She liked his looks. He seemed to be about two or three-and-twenty, tall and well-made, with somewhat of the bearing of his soldier-father, but broad-shouldered and athletic, as though his strength had been exercised in actual bodily labour. His clear, light hazel eye was candid and well-opened, with that peculiar prompt vigilance acquired by living in a wild country, both steady to observe and keen to keep watch. The dark chesnut hair covered a rather square brow, very fair, though the rest of the face was browned by sun and weather; the nose was straight and sensible, the chin short and firm; the lips, though somewhat compressed when shut, had a look of good humour and cheerful intelligence peculiarly pleasant to behold. Altogether, it was a face that inspired trust.

Presently the entrance of the tea-things obliged the map to be cleared away; and Phœbe, while measuring out the tea, said that she supposed Miss Charlecote would soon come down.

"Then are not you a Charlecote?" he asked, with a tone of disappointment.

"Oh, no! I am Phœbe Fulmort. There is no Charlecote left but herself."

"It was my mother's name; and mine, Humfrey Charlecote Randolph. Sandbrook thought there was some connexion between the families."

Phœbe absolutely started, hurt for a moment that a stranger should presume to claim a name of such associations; yet as she met the bright, honest eyes, feeling glad that it should still be a living name, worthily borne. "It is

an old family name at Hiltonbury, and one very much honoured," she said.

"That is well," he said. "It is good to leave a name that calls one to live up to it! And what is more strange, I am sure Miss Charlecote once had my mother's hair."

"Beautiful ruddy gold?"

"Yes, yes; like no one else. I was wanting to do like poor Sandbrook." He looked up in her face, and stroked her hair as she was leaning over him, and said, "I don't like to miss my own curls."

"Ah!" said Phœbe, half indignantly, "he should know when those curls were hidden away and grew silvery."

"He told me those things in part," said the young man. "He has felt the return very deeply, and I think it accounts for his being so much worse to-night—worse than I have seen him since we were at Montreal!"

"Is he quite sensible?"

"Perfectly. I see the ladies do not think him so to-night; but he has been himself from the first, except that over-fatigue or extra weakness affects his memory for the time; and he cannot read or exert his mind—scarcely be read to. And he is sadly depressed in spirits."

"And no wonder, poor man," said Phœbe.

"But I cannot think it is as they told us at Montreal!"

"What?"

"That the brain would go on weakening, and he become more childish. Now I am sure, as he has grown stronger, he has recovered intellect and intelligence. No one could doubt it who heard him three days ago advising me what branch of mathematics to work up!"

"We shall hear to-morrow what Dr. F—— says. Miss Charlecote wrote to him as soon as we had my brother's telegram. I hope you are right!"

"For you see," continued the Canadian, eagerly, "injury from an external cause cannot be like original organic disease. I hope and trust he may recover. He is the best friend I ever had, except Mr. Henley, our clergyman at Lakeville. You know how he saved all our lives; and he persuaded Mr. Currie to try me, and give me a chance of providing for my little brothers and their mother better than by our poor old farm."

"Where are they?" asked Phœbe.

"She is gone to her sister at Buffalo. The price of the land will help them on for a little while there, and if I can get on in engineering, I shall be able to keep them in some comfort. I began to think the poor boys were doomed to have no education at all."

"Did you always live at Lakeville?"

"No; I grew up in a much more civilized part of the world. We had a beautiful farm upon Lake Ontario, and raised the best crops in the neighbourhood. It was not till we got entangled in the Land Company, five years ago, that we were sold up; and we have been sinking deeper ever since—till the old cow and I had the farm all to ourselves."

"How could you bear it?" asked Phœbe.

"Well! it was rather dreary to see one thing going after another. But somehow, after I lost my own black mare, poor Minnehaha, I never cared so much for any of the other things. Once for all, I got ashamed of my own childish selfishness. And then, you see, the worse things were, the stronger the call for exertion. That was the great help."

"Oh, yes, I can quite imagine that—I know it," said Phœbe, thinking how exertion had helped her through her winter of trial. "You never were without some one to work for."

"No; even when my father was gone"—and his voice was less clear—"there was the less time to feel the change, when the boys and their mother had nothing but me between them and want."

"And you worked for them."

"After a fashion," he said, smiling. "Spade-husbandry alone is very poor earth-scratching; and I don't really know whether, between that and my gun, we could have got through this winter."

"What a life!" exclaimed Phœbe. "Realities, indeed!"

"It is only what many colonists undergo," he answered; "if they do not prosper, it is a very hard life, and the shifting hopes render it the more trying to those who are not bred to it."

"And to those that are?" she asked.

"To those that are there are many compensations. It is

a free out-of-doors life, and the glorious sense of extent and magnificence in our woods, the sport one has there, the beauty of our autumns, and our white, grand, silent winters, make it a life *well* worth living."

"And would these have made you content to be a backwoodsman all your life?"

"I cannot tell," he said. "They—and the boys—were my delight when I was one. And, after all, I used to recollect it was a place where there was a clear duty to do, and so, perhaps, safer than what fancy or choice would point at."

"But you are very glad not to be still condemned to it."

"Heartily glad not to be left to try to prop up a tumble-down log-hut with my own shoulder;" he laughed. "This journey to England has been the great desire of my life, and I am very thankful to have had it brought about."

The conversation was broken off by Robert's entrance. Finding that it was nearly nine o'clock, he went up-stairs to remind Miss Charlecote that tea had long been awaiting her, and presently brought her back from the silent watch by Owen's side that had hitherto seemed to be rest and comfort to all the three.

Owen had begged that his cup might be sent up by his friend, on whom he was very dependent, and it was agreed that Mr. Randolph should sleep in his room, and remain as a guest at Woolstone Lane until Mr. Currie should come to town. Indeed, Miss Charlecote relied on him for giving the physician an account of the illness which Owen, at his best, could not himself describe; and she cordially thanked him for his evidently devoted attendance, going over every particular with him, but still so completely absorbed in her patient as to regard him in no light but as an appendage necessary to her boy.

"How did you get on with the backwoodsman, Phœbe?" asked Lucilla, when she came down to tea.

"I think he is a sterling character," said Phœbe, in a tone of grave, deep thought, not quite as if answering the question, and with an observable deepening of the red of her cheek.

"You quaint goose!" said Lucy, with a laugh that jarred upon Honor, who turned round at her with a look of reproachful surprise.

"Indeed, Honor dear," she said, in self-vindication, "I am not hard-hearted! I am only very much relieved! I don't think half so badly of poor Owen as I expected to do; and if we can keep Mrs. Murrell from driving him distracted, I expect to see him mend fast."

Robert confirmed her cheerful opinion, but their younger and better prognostications fell sadly upon Honor's ear. She had been too much grieved and shocked to look for recovery, and all that she dared to expect was to tend her darling's feebleness, her best desire was that his mind might yet have power to embrace the hope of everlasting Life, ere he should pass away from her. Let this be granted, and she was prepared to be thankful, be his decay never so painful to witness and attend.

She could not let Robert leave her that night without a trembling question whether he had learnt how it was with Owen on this point. He had not failed to inquire of the engineer, but he could tell her very little. Owen's conduct had been unexceptionable, but he had made scarcely any demonstration or profession, and on the few occasions when opinions were discussed, spoke not irreverently, but in the tone of one who regretted and respected the tenets that he no longer held. Since his accident, he had been too weak and confused to dwell on any subjects but those of the moment; but he had appeared to take pleasure in the unobtrusive, though decided religious habits of young Randolph.

There she must rest for the present, and trust to the influence of home, perhaps to that of the shadow of death. At least he was the child of many prayers, and had not Lucilla returned to her changed beyond her hopes? Let it be as it would, she could not but sleep in gratitude that both her children were again beneath her roof.

She was early dressed, and wishing the backwoodsman were anywhere but in Owen's room. However, to her joy, the door was open, and Owen called her in, looking so handsome as he lay partly raised by pillows, that she could hardly believe in his condition, except for his weak, subdued voice.

"Yes, I am much better this morning. I have slept off the headache, and have been enjoying the old sounds!"

"Where is your friend?"

"Rushed off to look at St. Paul's through the shaking

of door-mats, and pay his respects to the Thames. He has none of the colonial *nil admirari* spirit, but looks at England as a Greek colonist would have looked at Athens. I only regret that the reality must tame his raptures. I told him to come back by breakfast time."

"He will lose his way."

"Not he! You little know the backwoods power of topography! Even I could nearly rival some of the Arab stories, and he could guide you anywhere—or after any given beast in the Newcastle district. Honor, you must know and like him. He really is the New World Charlecote whom you always held over our heads."

"I thought you called him Randolph?"

"That is his surname, but his Christian name is Humphrey Charlecote, from his grandfather. His mother was the lady my father told you of. He saved an old Bible out of the fire, with it all in the fly-leaf. He shall show it to you, and it can be easily confirmed by writing to the places. I would have gone myself, if I had not been the poor creature I am."

"Yes, my dear," said Honora, "I dare say it is so. I am very glad you found so attentive a friend. I am most thankful to him for his care of you."

"And you accept him as a relation," said Owen, anxiously.

"Yes, oh, yes," said Honor. "Would you like anything before breakfast?"

Owen answered with a little plaintiveness. Perhaps he was disappointed at this cold acquiescence; but it was not a moment at which Honor could face the thought of a colonial claimant of the Holt. With Owen helpless upon her hands, she needed both a home and ample means to provide for him and his sister and child; and the American heir, an unwelcome idea twenty years previously, when only a vague possibility, was doubly undesirable when long possession had endeared her inheritance to her, when he proved not even to be a true Charlecote, and when her own adopted children were in sore want of all that she could do for them. The evident relinquishment of poor Owen's own selfish views on the Holt made her the less willing to admit a rival, and she was sufficiently on the borders of age to be pained by having the question of heirship brought forward. And she

knew, what Owen did not, that, if this youth's descent were indeed what it was said to be, he represented the elder line, and that even Humfrey had wondered what would be his duty in the present contingency.

"Nonsense!" said she to herself. "There is no need as yet to think of it! The place is my own by every right! Humfrey told me so! I will take time to see what this youth may be, and make sure of his relationship. Then, if it be right and just, he shall come after me. But I *will* not raise expectations, nor notice him more than as Owen's friend and a distant kinsman. It would be fatally unsettling to do more."

Owen urged her no farther. Either he had not energy to enforce any point for long together, or he felt that the succession might be a delicate subject, for he let her lead to his personal affairs, and he was invalid enough to find them fully engrossing.

The Canadian came in punctually, full of animation and excitement, of which Phœbe had the full benefit, till he was called to help Owen to dress. While this was going on, Robert came into the drawing-room to breathe, after the hard task of pacifying Mrs. Murrell.

"What are you going to do to-day, Phœbe?" he asked. "Have you got through your shopping?"

"Some of it. Do you mean that you could come out with me?"

"Yes; you will never get through business otherwise."

"Then if you have an afternoon to spare, could not we take Mr. Randolph to the Tower?"

"Why Phœbe!"

"He has only to-day at liberty, and is so full of eagerness about all the grand old historical places, that it seems hard that he should have to find his way about alone, with no one to sympathize with him—half the day cut up, too, with nursing Owen."

"He seems to have no difficulty in finding his way."

"No; but I really should enjoy showing him the old armour. He was asking me about it this morning. I think he knows nearly as much of it as we do."

"Very well. I say, Phœbe, would you object to my taking Brown and Clay—my two head boys? I owe them a treat, and they would just enter into this."

Phœbe was perfectly willing to accept the two head boys, and the appointment had just been made when the doctor arrived. Again he brought good hope. From his own examination of Owen, and from Mr. Randolph's report, he was convinced that a considerable amelioration had taken place, and saw every reason to hope that in so young and vigorous a nature the injury to the brain might be completely repaired, and the use of the limbs might in part, at least, return, though full recovery could not be expected. He wished to observe his patient for a month or six weeks in town, that the course of treatment might be decided, after which he had better be taken to the Holt, to enjoy the pure air, and be out of doors as much as the season would permit.

To Honor this opinion was the cause of the deepest, most thankful gladness; but on coming back to Owen she found him sitting in his easy-chair, with his hand over his eyes, and his look full of inexpressible dejection and despondency. He did not, however, advert to the subject, only saying, "Now then! let us have in the young pauper to see the old one."

"My dear Owen, you had better rest."

"No, no; let us do the thing. The grandmother, too!" he said impatiently.

"I will fetch little Owen; but you really are not fit for Mrs. Murrell."

"Yes, I am; what am I good for but such things? It will make no difference, and it must be done."

"My boy, you do not know to what you expose yourself."

"Don't I?" said Owen, sadly.

Lucilla, even though Mr. Prendergast had just come to share her anxieties, caught her nephew on his way, and popped her last newly completed pinafore over his harlequinism, persuading him that it was most beautiful and new.

The interview passed off better than could have been hoped. The full-grown, grave-looking man was so different from the mere youth whom Mrs. Murrell had been used to scold and preach at, that her own awe seconded the lectures upon quietness that had been strenuously impressed on her; and she could not complain of his reception of his "hopeful son," in form at least. Owen held out his hand to her, and bent to kiss his boy, signed to her to sit down, and patiently

answered her inquiries and regrets, asking a few civil questions in his turn.

Then he exerted himself to say, "I hope to do my best for him and for you, Mrs. Murrell, but I can make no promises; I am entirely dependent at present, and I do not know whether I may not be so for life."

Whereat, and at the settled mournful look with which it was spoken, Mrs. Murrell burst out crying, and little Owen hung on her, almost crying too. Honor, who had been lying in wait for Owen's protection, came hastily in and made a clearance, Owen again reaching out his hand, which he laid on the child's head, so as to turn up the face towards him for a moment. Then releasing it almost immediately, he rested his chin on his hand, and Honor heard him mutter under his moustache, "Flibbertigibbet!"

"When we go home, we will take little Owen with us," said Honor, kindly. "It is high time he was taken from Little Whittington-street. Country air will soon make a different looking child of him."

"Thank you," he answered, despondingly. "It is very good in you; but have you not troubles enough already?"

"He shall not be a trouble, but a pleasure."

"Poor little wretch! He must grow up to work, and to know that he must work while he can;" and Owen passed his hand over those useless fingers of his as though the longing to be able to work were strong on him.

Honor had agreed with Lucilla that father and son ought to be together, and that little "Hoing's" education ought to commence. Cilla insisted that all care of him should fall to her. She was in a vehement, passionate mood of self-devotion, more overset by hearing that her brother would be a cripple for life than by what appeared to her the less melancholy doom of an early death. She had allowed herself to hope so much from his improvement on the voyage, that what to Honor was unexpected gladness was to her grievous disappointment. Mr. Prendergast arrived to find her half captious, half desperate.

See Owen! Oh, no! he must not think of it. Owen had seen quite people enough to-day; besides, he would be letting all out to him as he had done the other day.

Poor Mr. Prendergast humbly apologized for his betrayal; but had not Owen been told of the engagement?

Oh, dear, no! He was in no state for fresh agitations. Indeed, with him, a miserable, helpless cripple, Lucy did not see how she could go on as before. She could not desert him—oh, no!—she must work for him and his child.

"Work! Why, Cilla, you have not strength for it."

"I am quite well. I have strength for anything now I have some one to work for. Nothing hurt me but loneliness."

"Folly, child! The same home that receives you will receive them."

"Nonsense! As if I could throw such a dead weight on any one's hands!"

"Not on *any one's*," said Mr. Prendergast. "But I see how it is, Cilla; you have changed your mind."

"No," said Lucilla, with an outbreak of her old impatience; "but you men are so selfish! Bothering me about proclaiming all this nonsense, just when my brother is come home in this wretched state! After all, he was my brother before anything else, and I have a right to consider him first!"

"Then, Cilla, you shall be bothered no more," said Mr. Prendergast rising. "If you want me, well and good—you know where to find your old friend; if not, and you can't make up your mind to it, why, then we are as we were in old times. Good bye, my dear; I won't fret you any more."

"No," said he to himself, as he paused in the Court, and was busy wiping from the sleeve of his coat two broad dashes of wet that had certainly not proceeded from the clouds, "the dear child's whole heart is with her brother now she has got him back again. I'll not torment her any more. What a fool I was to think that anything but loneliness could have made her accept me—poor darling! I think I'll go out to the Bishop of Sierra Leone!"

"What can have happened to him?" thought Phœbe, as he strode past the little party on their walk to the Tower. "Can that wretched little Cilly have been teasing him? I am glad Robert has escaped from her clutches!"

However, Phœbe had little leisure for such speculations in the entertainment of witnessing her companion's intelligent interest in all that he saw. The walk itself—for which she had begged—was full of wonder; and the Tower, which Robert's slight knowledge of one of the officials enabled them

to see in perfection, received the fullest justice, both historically and loyally. The incumbent of St. Matthew's was so much occupied with explanations to his boys, that Phœbe had the stranger all to herself, and thus entered to the full into that unfashionable but most heart-stirring of London sights, "the Towers of Julius," from the Traitors' Gate, where Elizabeth sat in her lion-like desolation, to her effigy in her glory upon Tilbury Heath—the axe that severed her mother's "slender neck"—the pistol-crowned stick of her father—the dark cage where her favourite Raleigh was mewed—and the whole series of the relics of the disgraces and the glories of England's royal line—well fitted, indeed, to strike the imagination of one who had grown up in the New World without antiquity.

If it were a satisfaction to be praised and thanked for this expedition, Phœbe had it; for on her return she was called into Owen's room, where his first words to her were of thanks for her good-nature to his friend.

"I am sure it was nothing but a pleasure," she said. "It happened that Robert had some boys whom he wanted to take." Somehow she did not wish Owen to think she had done it on his own account.

"And you liked him?" asked Owen.

"Yes, very much indeed," she heartily said.

"Ah! I knew you would;" and he lay back as if fatigued. Then, as Phœbe was about to leave him, he added—"I can't get my ladies to heed anything but me. You and Robert must take pity on him, if you please. Get him to Westminster Abbey, or the Temple Church, or somewhere worth seeing to-morrow. Don't let them be extortionate of his waiting on me. I must learn to do without him."

Phœbe promised, and went.

"Phœbe is grown what one calls a fine young woman instead of a sweet girl," said Owen to his sister, when she next came into the room; "but she has managed to keep her innocent, half-wondering look, just as she has the freshness of her colour."

"Well, why not, when she has not had one *real* experience?" said Lucilla, a little bitterly.

"None?" he asked, with a marked tone.

"None," she answered, and he let his hand drop with a sigh; but as if repenting of any half betrayal of feeling,

added, "she has had all her brothers and sisters at sixes and sevens, has not she?"

"Do you call that a real experience?" said Lucilla, almost with disdain; and the conversation dropped.

Owen's designs for his friend's Sunday fell to the ground. The backwoodsman fenced off the proposals for his pleasure, by his wish to be useful in the sick room; and when told of Owen's desire, was driven to confess that he did not wish for fancy church-going on his first English Sunday. There was enough novelty without that; the cathedral service was too new for him to wish to hear it for the first time when there was so much that was unsettling.

Honor, and even Robert, were a little disappointed. They thought eagerness for musical service almost necessarily went with church feeling; and Phœbe was the least in the world out of favour for the confession that though it was well that choirs should offer the most exquisite and ornate praise, yet that her own country-bred associations with the plain, unadorned service at Hiltonbury rendered her more at home where the prayers were read and the responses congregational, not choral. To her it was more devotional, though she fully believed that the other way was the best for those who had begun with it.

So they went as usual to the full service of the parish church, where the customs were scrupulously rubrical without being ornate. The rest and calm of that Sunday were a boon, coming as they did after a bustling week.

All the ensuing days Phœbe was going about choosing curtains and carpets, or hiring servants for herself or Mervyn. She was obliged to act alone, for Miss Charlecote, on whom she had relied for aid, was engrossed in attending on Owen, and endeavouring to wile away the hours that hung heavily on one incapable of employment or even attention for more than a few minutes together. So constantly were Honor and Lucy engaged with him, that Phœbe hardly saw them morning, noon, or night; and after being out for many hours, it generally fell to her lot to entertain the young Canadian for the chief part of the evening. Mr. Currie had arrived in town on the Monday, and came at once to see Owen. His lodgings were in the City, where he would be occupied for some time in more formally mapping out and reporting on the various lines proposed for the G. O. and S. line; and

finding how necessary young Randolph still was to the invalid, he willingly agreed to the proposal that while Miss Charlecote continued in London, the young man should continue to sleep and spend his evenings in Woolstone Lane.

CHAPTER XVII.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touched it,
Have you marked but the fall of the snow,
Before the soil hath smutched it?

BEN JONSON.

At the end of a week Mervyn made his appearance in a vehement hurry. Cecily's next sister, an officer's wife, was coming home with two little children, for a farewell visit before going to the Cape, and Maria and Bertha must make way for her. So he wanted to take Phoebe home that afternoon to get the Underwood ready for them.

"Mervyn, how can I go? I am not nearly ready."

"What can you have been doing then?" he exclaimed, with something of his old temper.

"This house has been in such a state."

"Well, you were not wanted to nurse the sick man, were you? I thought you were one that *was* to be trusted. What more is there to do?"

Phoebe looked at her list of commissions, and found herself convicted. Those patterns ought to have been sent back two days since. What had she been about? Listening to Mr. Randolph's explanations of the *Hiawatha* scenery! Why had she not written a note about that hideous hearth-rug? Because Mr. Randolph was looking over Stowe's *Survey of London*. Methodical Phoebe felt herself in disgrace, and yet, somehow, she could not be sorry enough; she wanted a reprieve from exile at Hiltonbury, alone and away from all that was going on. At least she should hear whether *Macbeth*, at the Princess's Theatre, fulfilled Mr. Randolph's conceptions of it; and if Mr. Currie approved his grand map of the Newcastle district with the little trees that she had taught him to draw.

Perhaps it was the first time that Mervyn had ever been justly angry with her ; but he was so much less savage than in his injustice that she was very much ashamed and touched ; and finally, deeply grateful for the grace of this one day in which to repair her negligence, provided she would be ready to start by seven o'clock next morning. Hard and diligently she worked, and very late she came home. As she was on her way upstairs she met Robert coming out of Owen's room.

"Phœbe," he said, turning with her into her room, "what is the matter with Lucy ?"

"The matter ?"

"Do you mean that you have not observed how ill she is looking ?"

"No ; nothing particular."

"Really, Phœbe, I cannot imagine what you have been thinking about. I thought you would have saved her, and helped Miss Charlecote, and you absolutely never noticed her looks !"

"I am very sorry. I have been so much engaged."

"Absorbed, you should call it ! Who would have thought *you* would be so heedless of her ?"

He was gone. "Still crazy about Lucy," was Phœbe's first thought ; her second, "Another brother finding me heedless and selfish ! What can be the matter with me ?" And when she looked at Lucilla with observant eyes, she did indeed recognise the justice of Robert's anxiety and amazement. The brilliant prettiness had faded away as if under a blight, the eyes were sinking into purple hollows, the attitude was listless, the whole air full of suffering. Phœbe was dismayed and conscience-stricken, and would fain have offered inquiries and sympathy, but no one had more thoroughly than Lucy the power of repulsion. "No, nothing was amiss—of course she felt the frost. She would not speak to Honor—there was nothing to speak about ;" and she went up to her brother's room.

Mr. Randolph was out with Mr. Currie ; and Phœbe, still exceedingly busy writing notes and orders, and packing for her journey, did not know that there was an unconscious resolution in her own mind that her business *should* not be done till he came home, were it at one o'clock at night !

He did come at no unreasonable hour, and found her fastening directions upon the pile of boxes in the hall.

"What are you doing? Miss Charlecote is not going away?"

"No; but I am going to-morrow."

"You!"

"Yes; I must get into our new house, and receive my sisters there the day after to-morrow."

"I thought you lived with Miss Charlecote."

"Is it possible that you did not know what I have been doing all this week?"

"Were you not preparing a house for your brother?"

"Yes, and another for myself. Did you not understand that we set up housekeeping separately upon his marriage?"

"I did not understand," said Humfrey Randolph, disconsolately. "You told me you owed everything to Miss Charlecote."

"I am afraid your colonial education translated that into £ s. d."

"Then you are not poor?"

"No, not exactly," said Phœbe, rather puzzled and amused by his downcast air.

"But," he exclaimed, "your brother is in business; and Mr. Fulmort of St. Matthew's——"

"Mr. Fulmort of St. Matthew's is poor because he gave all to St. Matthew's," said Phœbe; "but our business is not a small one, and the property in the country is large."

He pasted on her last direction in disconsolate silence, then reading, "Miss Fulmort, The Underwood, Hiltonbury, Elverslope Station," resumed with fresh animation, "At least you live near Miss Charlecote?"

"Yes, we are wedged in between her park and our own—my brother's I mean."

"That is all right then! She has asked me for Christmas."

"I am very glad of it," said Phœbe. "There, thank you; good night."

"Is there nothing more that I can do for you?"

"Nothing—no, no, don't hammer that down, you will wake Owen. Good night, good-bye; I shall be gone by half-past six."

Though Phœbe said good-bye, she knew perfectly well

that the hours of the morning were as nothing to the backwoodsman, and with spirits greatly exhilarated by the Christmas invitation, she went to bed, much too sleepy to make out why her wealth seemed so severe a shock to Humfrey Randolph.

The six o'clock breakfast was well attended, for Miss Charlecote was there herself, as well as the Canadian, Phœbe, and Mervyn, who was wonderfully amiable considering the hour in the morning. Phœbe felt in some slight degree less unfeeling when she found that Lucilla's fading looks had been no more noticed by Miss Charlecote than by herself; but Honor thought Owen's illness accounted for all, and only promised that the doctor should inspect her.

A day of exceeding occupation ensued. Mervyn talked the whole way of Cecily, his plans and his prospects; and Phœbe had to draw her mind out of one world and immerse it into another, straining ears and voice all the time to hear and be heard through the roar of the train. He left her at the cottage; and then began the work of the day, presiding over upholsterers, hanging pictures, arranging books, settling cabinets of collections, disposing of ornaments, snatching meals at odd times, in odder places, and never daring to rest till long after dark, when, with fingers freshly purified from dust, limbs stiff with running up and down stairs, and arms tired with heavy weights, she sat finally down before the drawing-room fire with her solitary cup of coffee, and a book that she was far too weary to open.

Had she never been tired before, that her heart should sink in this unaccountable way? Why could she not be more glad that her sisters were coming home, and dear Miss Fennimore? What made every one seem so dull and stupid, and the comings and goings so oppressive, as if everything would be hateful till Christmas? Why had she belied all her previous good character for method and punctuality of late, and felt as if existence only began when—one person was in the room?

Oh! can this be falling in love?

There was a chiffonier with a looking glass back just opposite to her, and, raising her eyes, poor Phœbe beheld a young lady with brow, cheeks, and neck perfectly glowing with crimson!

"You shan't stand there long, at any rate," said she,

almost vindictively, getting up and pushing the table with its deep cover between her and the answering witness.

"Love! Nonsense! Yet I don't see why I should be ashamed! Yes! He is my wise man, he is the real Humphrey Charlecote! His is the very nature I always thought some one must still have—the exact judgment I longed to meet with. Not stern like Robin's, not sharp like Mervyn's, nor high-flying like dear Miss Charlecote's, nor soft like Bevil's, nor light like Lucy's, nor clear and clever like Miss Fennimore's—no, but considerate and solid, tender and true—such as one can lean upon! I know why he has the steadfast eyes that I liked so much the first evening. And there is so much more in him than I can measure or understand. Yes, though I have known him but ten days, I have seen much more of him than of most men in a year. And he has been so much tried; and has had such a life, that he may well be called a real hero in a quiet way. Yes, I well may like him. And I am sure he likes me!" said another whisper of the heart, which, veiled as was the lady in the mirror, made Phœbe put both hands over her face, in a shamefaced ecstatic consciousness. "Nay—I was the first lady he had seen, the only person to speak to. No, no; I know it was not that—I feel it was not! Why, otherwise, did he seem so sorry I was not poor? Oh! how nice it would be if I were! We could work for each other in his glorious new land of hope! I, who love work, was made for work! I don't care for this mere young lady life! And must my trumpery thousand a year stand in the way? As to birth, I suppose he is as well or better born than I—and, oh! so far superior in tone and breeding to what ours used to be! He ought to know better than to think me a fine young lady, and himself only an engineer's assistant! But he won't! Of course he will be honourable about it—and—perhaps never dare to say another word till he has made his fortune—and when will that ever be? It will be right——" "But," (and a very different but it was this time) "what am I thinking about? How can I be wishing such things when I have promised to devote myself to Maria? If I could rough it gladly, she could not; and what a shameful thing it is of me to have run into all this long day dream and leave her out. No, I know my lot! I am to live on here, and take care of Maria, and grow to be an old maid! I shall hear about him, when

he comes to be a great man, and know that the Humfrey Charlecote I dream about is still alive! There, I won't have any more nonsense!"

And she opened her book; but finding that Humfrey Randolph's remarks would come between her and the sense, she decided that she was too tired to read, and put herself to bed. But there the sense of wrong towards Maria filled her with remorse that she had accepted her rights of seniority, and let the maids place her in the prettiest room, with the best bay window, and most snug fireplace; nor could she rest till she had pacified her self-reproach, by deciding that all her own goods should move next day into the chamber that did not look at the Holt firs, but only at the wall of the back yard.

"Yes," said Phœbe, stoutly, in her honest dealing with herself in her fresh, untried morning senses. "I do love Humfrey Charlecote Randolph, and I think he loves me! Whether anything more may come of it, will be ordered for me; but whether it do so or not, it is a blessing to have known one like him, and now that I am warned, and can try to get back self-control, I will begin to be the better for it. Even if I am not quite so happy, this is something more beautiful than I ever knew before. I will be content!"

And when Bertha and Maria arrived, brimful of importance at having come home with no escort but a man and maid, and voluble with histories of Sutton, and wedding schemes, they did not find an absent nor inattentive listener. Yet the keen Bertha made the remark, "Something has come over you, Phœbe. You have more countenance than ever you had before."

Whereat Phœbe's color rushed into her cheeks, but she demanded the meaning of countenance, and embarked Bertha in a dissertation.

When Phœbe was gone, Robert found it less difficult to force Lucilla to the extremity of a *tête-à-tête*. Young Randolph was less in the house, and, when there, more with Owen than before, and Lucilla was necessarily sometimes to be caught alone in the drawing-room.

"Lucy," said Robert, the first time this occurred, "I have a question to ask you."

"Well!"—she turned round half defiant.

"A correspondent of Mervyn, on the Spanish coast, has

written to ask him to find a chaplain for the place, guaranteeing a handsome stipend."

"Well," said Lucilla, in a cold voice this time.

"I wished to ask whether you thought it would be acceptable to Mr. Prendergast."

"I neither know nor care."

"I beg your pardon," said Robert, after a pause; "but though I believe I learnt it sooner than I ought, I was sincerely glad to hear——"

"Then unhear!" said Lucilla, pettishly. "You, at least, ought to be glad of that."

"By no means," returned Robert, gravely. "I have far too great a regard for you not to be most deeply concerned at what I see is making you unhappy."

"May not I be unhappy if I like, with my brother in this state?"

"That is not all, Lucilla."

"Then never mind! You are the only one who never pitied me, and so I like you. Don't spoil it now!"

"You need not be afraid of my pitying you if you have brought on this misunderstanding by your old spirit!"

"Not a bit of it! I tell you he pitied me. I found it out in time, so I set him free. That's all."

"And that was the offence?"

"Offence! What are you talking of? He didn't offend—No, but when I said I could not bring so many upon him, and could not have Owen teased about the thing, he said he would bother me no more, that I had Owen and did not want him. And then he walked off."

"Taking you at your word?"

"Just as if one might not say what one does not mean when one wants a little comforting," said Lucy, pouting; "but, after all, it is a very good thing—he is saved a great plague for a very little time, and if it were all pity, so much the better. I say, Robin, shall you be man enough to read the service over me, just where we stood at poor Edna's funeral?"

"I don't think that concerns you much," said Robert.

"Well, the lady in Madge Wildfire's song was gratified at the 'six braw gentlemen' who 'kirkward should carry her.' Why should you deprive me of that satisfaction?"

Really, Robin, it is quite true. A little happiness might have patched me up, but——”

“The symptoms are recurring? Have you seen F——?”

“Yes. Let me alone, Robin. It is the truest mercy to let me wither up with as little trouble as possible to those who don't want me. Now that you know it, I am glad I can talk to you, and you will help me to think of what has never been enough before my eyes.”

Robert gave no answer but a hasty good-bye, and was gone.

Lucilla gave a heavy sigh, and then exclaimed, half-aloud—

“Oh, the horrid little monster that I am. Why can't I help it? I verily believe I shall flit in my shroud, and if I were canonized, my first miracle would be like St. Philomena's, to make my own relics presentable!”

Wherewith she fell a laughing, with a laughter that soon turned to tears, and the exclamation, “Why can I make nobody care for me but those I can't care for? I can't help disgusting all that is good, and it will be well when I am dead and gone. There's only one that will shed tears good for anything, and he is well quit of me!”

The poor little lonely thing wept again, and after her many sleepless nights, she fairly cried herself to sleep. She awoke with a start, at some one being admitted into the room.

“My dear, am I disturbing you?”

It was the well-known voice, and she sprang up.

“Mr. Pendy, Mr. Pendy, I was very naughty! I didn't mean it. Oh, will you bear with me again, though I don't deserve it?”

She clung to him like a child weary with its own naughtiness.

“I was too hasty,” he said; “I forgot how wrapped up you were in your brother, and how little attention you could spare, and then I thought that in him you had found all you wanted, and that I was only in your way.”

“How could you? Didn't you know better than to think that people put their brothers before their—Mr. Pendys?”

“You seemed to wish to do so.”

“Ah! but you should have known it was only for the

sake of being coaxed ! ” said Lucilla, hanging her head on one side.

“ You should have told me so.”

“ But how was I to know it ? ” And she broke out into a very different kind of laughter. “ I’m sure I thought it was all magnanimity, but it is of no use to die of one’s own magnanimity, you see.”

“ You are not going to die ; you are coming to this Spanish place, which will give you lungs of brass.”

“ Spanish place ? How do you know ? I have not slept into to-morrow, have I ? That Robin has not flown to Wrapworth and back since three o’clock ? ”

“ No, I was only inquiring at Mrs. Murrell’s.”

“ Oh, you silly, silly person, why couldn’t you come here ? ”

“ I did not want to bother you.”

“ For shame, for shame ; if you say that again I shall know you have not forgiven me. It is a moral against using words too strong for the occasion ! So Robert carried you the offer of the chaplaincy, and you mean to have it ! ”

“ I could not help coming, as he desired, to see what you thought of it.”

“ I only know,” she said, half crying, yet laughing, “ that you had better marry me out of hand before I get into any more mischief.”

The chaplaincy was promising. The place was on the lovely coast of Andalusia. There was a small colony of English engaged in trade, and the place was getting into favour with invalids. Mervyn’s correspondent was anxious to secure the services of a good man, and the society of a lady-like wife, and offered to guarantee a handsome salary such as justified the curate in giving up his chance of a college living ; and though it was improbable that he would ever learn a word of Spanish, or even get so far as the pronunciation of the name of the place, the advantages that the appointment offered were too great to be rejected, when Lucilla’s health needed a southern climate.

“ Oh ! yes, yes, let us go,” she cried. “ It will be a great deal better than anything at home can be.”

“ Then you venture on telling Owen, now ! ”

“ Oh, yes ! It was a mere delusion of mine that it would cost him anything. Honor is all that he wants, I am

rather in their way than otherwise. He rests on her down-pillow-ship, and she sees, hears, knows nothing but him!"

"Is Miss Charlecote aware of—what has been going wrong?"

"Not she! I told her before that I should take my own time for the communication, and I verily believe she has forgotten all about it! Then little demure Phoebe fell over head and ears in love with the backwoodsman on the spot, and walked about in a dream such as ought to have been good fun to watch, if I had had the spirit for it; and if Robert had not been sufficiently disengaged to keep his eyes open, I don't know whether anything would have roused them short of breaking a blood-vessel or two."

"I shall never rest till you are in my keeping! I will go to Fulmort at once, and tell him that I accept."

"And I will go to Owen, and break the news to him. When are you coming again?"

"To-morrow, as soon as I have opened school."

"Ah! the sooner we are gone the better! Much good you can be to poor Wrapworth! Just tell me, please, that I may know how badly I served you, how often you have inquired at Mrs. Murrell's."

"Why—I believe—each day except Saturday and Sunday; but I never met him there till just now."

Lucilla's eyes swam with tears; she laid her head on his shoulder, and in a broken voice of deep emotion, she said, "Indeed, I did not deserve it! But I think I shall be good now, for I can't tell why I should be so much loved!"

Mr. Prendergast was vainly endeavouring to tell her why, when Humfrey Randolph's ring was heard, and she rushed out of the room.

Owen's first hearty laugh since his return was at her tidings. That over, he spoke with brotherly kindness.

"Yes, Lucy," he said, "I do think it is the best and happiest thing for you. He is the only man whom you could not torment to death, or who would have any patience with your antics."

"I don't think I shall try," said Lucy. "What are you shaking your head for, Owen? Have I not had enough to tame me?"

"I beg your pardon, Cilly. I was only thinking of the

natural companionship of bears and monkeys. Don't beat me!"

"Some day you shall come out and see us perform, that's all," said Lucilla, merrily. "But indeed, Owen, if I knew myself at all, unmerited affection and forbearance, with no nonsense about it, is the only way to keep me from flying out. At any rate, I can't live without it!"

"Ah!" said Owen, gravely, "you have suffered too much through me for me to talk to you in this fashion. Forgive me, Lucy; I am not up to any other, just yet."

Whatever Lucilla might have said in the first relief of recovering Mr. Prendergast, she could not easily have made up her mind to leave her brother in his present condition, and flattered herself that the "*at once*" could not possibly be speedy, since Mr. Prendergast must give notice of his intention of leaving Wrapworth.

But when he came the next morning, it proved that things were in a far greater state of forwardness than she had thought possible. So convinced were both the curate and Robert of the need of her avoiding the winter cold, that the latter had suggested that one of his own curates, who was in need of change and country air, should immediately offer himself as a substitute at Wrapworth, either for a time or permanently, and Lucy was positively required to name a day as early as possible for the marriage, and told, on the authority of the physician, that it might almost be called suicide to linger in the English frosts.

The day which she chose was the 1st of December, the same on which Mervyn was to be married. There was a purpose in thus rendering it impracticable for any Fulmort to be present; "And," said Owen, "I am glad it should be before I am about. I could never keep my countenance if I had to give her away to brother Peter!"

"Keeping his countenance" might have two meanings, but he was too feeble for agitation, and seemed only able to go through the time of preparation and parting, by keeping himself as lethargic and indifferent as possible, or by turning matters into a jest when necessarily brought before him. Playing at solitaire, or trifling desultory chat, was all that he could endure as occupation, and the long hours were grievously heavy. His son, though nearly four years old, was no companion or pleasure to him. He was, in his help-

less and morbid state, afraid of so young a child, and little Owen was equally afraid of him; each dreaded contact with the other, and more than all the being shut into a room together; and the little boy, half shy, half assured, filled by the old woman with notions of his own grandeur, and yet constrained by the different atmosphere of Woolstone Lane, was never at ease or playful enough before him to be pleasant to watch. And, indeed, his Cockney pronunciation and ungainly vulgar tricks had been so summarily repressed by his aunt, that his fear of both of the ladies rendered him particularly unengaging and unchildlike. Nevertheless, Honora thought it her duty to take him home with her to the Holt, and gratified Robert by engaging a nice little girl of fourteen, whom Lucilla called the crack orphan, to be his attendant when they should leave town. This was to be about a fortnight after the wedding, since St. Wulstan's afforded greater opportunities for privacy and exemption from bustle than even Hiltonbury, and Dr. Prendergast and his daughter could attend without being in the house.

The Prendergasts of Southminster were very kind and friendly, sending Lucilla warm greetings, and not appearing at all disconcerted at welcoming their former governess into the family. The elders professed no surprise, but great gladness; and Sarah, who *was* surprised, was trebly rejoiced. Owen accused his sister of selecting her solitary bridesmaid with a view to enhancing her own beauty by force of contrast; but the choice was prompted by real security of the affectionate pleasure it would confer. Handsome presents were sent both by the Beaumonts and Bostocks, and Lucilla, even while half-fretted, half-touched by Mrs. Bostock's patronizing felicitations, could not but be pleased at these evidences that her governess-ship had not been an utter failure.

Her demeanour in the fortnight before her marriage was unlike what her friends had ever seen, and made them augur better for Mr. Prendergast's venture. She was happy, but subdued; quiet and womanly, gentle without being sad, grave but not drooping; and though she was cheerful and playful, with an entire absence of those strange effervescences that had once betrayed acidity or fermentation. She had found the power of being affectionately grateful to Honor, and the sweetness of her tender ways towards her and Owen would have made the parting all the sadder to them if it

had not been evident that, as she said, it was happiness that thus enabled her to be good. The satisfied look of rest that had settled on her fair face made it new. All her animation and archness had not rendered it half so pleasant to look upon.

The purchaser of Castle Blanch proved to be no other than Mr. Calthorp! Lucilla at first was greatly discomfited, and begged that nothing might be said about the picture; but the next time Mr. Prendergast arrived, it was with a request from Mr. Calthorp that Miss Sandbrook would accept the picture as a wedding gift! There was no refusing it—indeed, the Curate had already accepted it; and when Lucilla heard that “the Calthorp” had been two years married to what Mr. Prendergast called “a millionairess, exceedingly hideous,” she still had vanity enough to reflect that the removal of her own resemblance might be an act of charity! And the sum that Honor had set apart for the purchase was only too much wanted for the setting up housekeeping in Spain, whither the portrait was to accompany her, Mr. Prendergast declared, like the Penates of the pious Æneas!

Robert brought in his gift on the last day of November, just before setting off for Sutton. It was an unornamented, but exquisitely-bound Bible and Prayer Book, dark brown, with red-edged leaves.

“Good-bye, Lucilla,” he said; “you have been the brightest spot to me in this life. Thank you for all you have done for me.”

“And for all I never intended to do?” said Lucilla, smiling, as she returned his pressure of the hand.

He was gone, not trusting her to speak, nor himself to hear a word more.

“Yes, Robin,” proceeded Lucy, half-aloud, “you are the greater man, I know very well; but it is in human nature to prefer flesh and blood to mediæval saints in cast-iron, even if one knows there is a tender spot in them.”

There was a curious sense of humiliation in her full acquiescence in the fact that he was too high, too grand for her, and in her relief, that the affection, that would have lifted her beyond what she was prepared for, had died away, and left her to the more ordinary excellence and half-paternal fondness of the man of her real choice, with whom she

could feel perfect ease and repose. Possibly the admixture of qualities that in her had been call *fast* is the most contrary to all real aspiration!

But there was no fault to be found with the heartfelt affection with which she loved and honoured her bridegroom, lavishing on him the more marks of deference and submission just because she knew that her will would be law, and that his love was strong enough to have borne with any amount of caprice or seeming neglect. The sacrifices she made, without his knowledge, for his convenience and comfort, while he imagined hers to be solely consulted, the concessions she made to his slightest wish, the entire absence of all teasing, would not have been granted to a younger man more prepossessing in the sight of others.

It was in this spirit that she rejected all advice to consult health rather than custom in her wedding dress. Exactly because Mr. Prendergast would have willingly received her in the plainest garb, she was bent on doing him honour by the most exquisite bridal array; and never had she been so lovely—her colour such exquisite carnation, her eyes so softened, and full of such repose and reliance, her grace so perfect in complete freedom from all endeavour at attracting admiration.

The married pair came back from Church to Owen's sitting-room—not bear and monkey, not genie and fairy, as he had expected to see; but as they stood together, looking so indescribably and happily one, that Owen smiled and said, "Ah! Honor, if you had only known twenty years ago that this was Mrs. Peter Prendergast, how much trouble it would have saved."

"She did not deserve to be Mrs. Peter Prendergast," said the bride.

"See how you deserve it now."

"That I never shall!"

Brother and sister parted with light words but full hearts, each trying to believe, though neither crediting Mr. Prendergast's assurance that the two Owens should come and be at home for ever if they liked in Santa Maria de X—. Neither could bear to face the truth that henceforth their courses lay apart, and that if the sister's life were spared, it could only be at the sacrifice of expatriation for many years, in lands where, well or ill, the brother had no

call. Nor would Lucilla break down. It was due to her husband not to let him think she suffered too much in resigning home for him; and true to her innate hatred of agitation, she guarded herself from realizing anything, and though perfectly kind and respectful to Honora, studiously averted all approaches to effusion of feeling.

Only at the last kiss in the hall, she hung round her friend with a vehement embrace, and whispered, "Forgive! You have forgiven!"

"Forgive me, Lucilla!"

"Nay, that I have forgiven you for all your pardon and patience is shown by my enduring to leave Owen to you now."

Therewith surged up such a flood of passionate emotions that, fleeing from them as it were, the bride tore herself out of Honor's arms, and sprang hastily into the carriage, nervously and hastily moving about its contents while Mr. Prendergast finished his farewells.

After all, there was a certain sense of rest, snugness, and freedom from turmoil, when Honor dried her eyes and went back to her convalescent. The house seemed peaceful, and they both felt themselves entering into full enjoyment of being all in all to one another.

There was one guest at the Sutton wedding, whose spirit was at St. Wulstan's. In those set eyes, and tightly closed lips, might be traced abstraction in spite of himself. Were there not thoughts and prayers for another bride, elsewhere kneeling? Was not the solitary man struggling with the last remnants of fancies at war with his life of self-devotion, and crushing down the few final regrets, that would have looked back to the dreams of his youth? No marvel that his greatest effort was against being harsh and unsympathizing, even while his whole career was an endeavour to work through charities of deed and word into charities of thought and judgment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Untouched by love, the maiden's breast
Is like the snow on Rona's crest
High seated in the middle sky,
In bright and barren purity;
But by the sunbeam gently kissed,
Scarce by the gazing eye 'tis missed,
Ere down the lonely valley stealing,
Fresh grass and growth its course revealing;
It cheers the flock, revives the flower,
And decks some happy shepherd's bower.

SCOTT.

SLOW to choose, but decided in her choice, Phœbe had always been, and her love formed no exception to this rule. She was quite aware that her heart had been given away, and never concealed it from herself, though she made it a principle not to indulge in future castle buildings, and kept resolute guard over her attention. It was impossible to obviate a perpetual feeling of restlessness and of tedium in whatever she was about; but she conquered oftener than she gave way, and there was an indescribable sense of peace and sweetness in a new and precious possession, and an undefined hope through all.

Miss Fennimore, who came the day after the girls' return from Sutton, saw only the fuller development of her favourite pupil, and, in truth, Maria and Bertha had so ineffably much to narrate, that her attention would have been sufficiently engrossed to hinder her observation of the symptoms, even had the good lady been as keen and experienced in love as in science.

Poor little Phœbe! equable as she was, she was in a great perturbation when, four days before Christmas, she knew that Miss Charlecote, with Owen Sandbrook and Humfrey Randolph, had arrived at the Holt. What was so natural as for her to go at once to talk over the two weddings with her dear old friend? Yes, but did her dear old friend want her, when these two young men had put an end to her solitude? Was she only making Miss Charlecote an excuse? She would wait in hopes that one of the others would ask if she were going to the Holt! If so, it could not but be natural and proper—if not— This provoking throbbing of her heart showed that it was not only for Honor Charlecote that she wished to go.

That ring at the bell! What an abominable goose she was to find a flush of expectation in her cheek! And after all it was only Sir John. He had found that his son had heard nothing from the Holt that morning, and had come in to ask if she thought a call would be acceptable. "I knew they were come home," he said, "for I saw them at the station yesterday. I did not show myself, for I did not know how poor young Sandbrook might like it. But who have they got with them?"

"Mr. Randolph, Owen Sandbrook's Canadian friend."

"Did I not hear he was some sort of relation?"

"Yes; his mother was a Charlecote."

"Ha? that accounts for it. Seeing him with her, I could almost have thought it was thirty years ago, and that it was my dear old friend."

Phœbe could have embraced Sir John. She could not conceal her glow of delight so completely that Bertha did not laugh and say, "Mr. Charlecote is what the Germans would call Phœbe's *Bild*. She always blushes and looks conscious if he is mentioned."

Sir John laughed, but with some emotion, and Phœbe hastily turned her still more blushing face away. Certainly, if Phœbe had had any prevision of her present state of mind, she never would have bought that chiffoniere.

When Sir John had sufficiently admired the details of the choice little drawing-room, and had been shown by the eager sisters all over the house, he asked if Phœbe would walk up with him to the Holt. He had hoped his eldest son, who had ridden over with him, would have come in, and gone up with them, but he supposed Charlie had seized on him. (Poor Sir John, his attempt at match-making did not flourish.) However, he had secured Phœbe's most intense gratitude by his proposal, and down she came, a very pretty picture, in her dark brown dress, scarlet cloak, and round, brown felt hat, with the long, curly, brown feather tipped with scarlet, her favourite winter robin colouring. Her cheeks were brilliant, and her eyes not only brighter, but with a slight drooping that gave them the shadiness they sometimes wanted. And it was all from a ridiculous trepidation which made it well-nigh impossible to bring out what she was longing to say—"So you think Mr. Randolph like Mr. Charlecote."

Fortunately he was beforehand with her, for both the likeness and the path through the pine woods reminded him strongly of his old friend, and he returned to the subject. "So you are a great admirer of dear old Charlecote, Phœbe: you can't remember him?"

"No, but Robert does, and I sometimes think I do." (Then it came.) "You think Mr. Randolph like him?" Thanks to her hat, she could blush more comfortably now.

"I did not see him near. It was only something in air and figure. People inherit those things wonderfully. Now, my son Charles sits on horseback exactly like his grandfather, whom he never saw; and John——"

Oh! was he going to run away on family likenesses? Phœbe would not hear the "and John;" and observed, "Mr. Charlecote was his godfather, was he not?"

Which self-evident fact brought him back again to "Yes; and I only wish he had seen more of him! These are his plantations, I declare, that he used to make so much of!"

"Yes, that is the reason Miss Charlecote is so fond of them."

"Miss Charlecote! When I think of him, I have no patience with her. I do believe he kept single all his life for her sake; and why she never would have him, I never could guess. You ladies are very unreasonable sometimes, Phœbe."

Phœbe tried to express a rational amount of wonder at poor Honor's taste, but grew incoherent in fear lest it should be irrational, and was rather frightened at finding Sir John looking at her with some amusement; but he was only thinking of how willingly the poor little heiress of the Mervyns had once been thrown at Humfrey Charlecote's head! But he went on to tell her of all that her hero had ever been to him and to the country, and of the blank his death had left and never since supplied, till she felt more and more what a "wise" man truly was!

No one was in the drawing-room, but Honor came down much more cheerful and lively than she had been for years, and calling Owen materially better—the doctors thought the injury to the head infinitely mitigated, and the first step to recovery fairly taken—there were good accounts of the Prendergasts, and all things seemed to be looking well. Presently Sir John, to Phœbe's great satisfaction, spoke of

her guest, and his resemblance, but Honor answered with half-resentful surprise. Some of the old servants had made the same remark, but she could not understand it, and was evidently hurt by its recurrence. Phœbe sat on, listening to the account of Lucilla's letters, and the good spirits and health they manifested; forcing herself not too obviously to watch door or window, and when Sir John was gone, she only offered to depart, lest Miss Charlecote should wish to be with Owen.

"No, my dear, thank you; Mr. Randolph is with him, and he can read a little now. We are getting above the solitaire board, I assure you. I have fitted up the little room beyond the study for his bedroom, and he sits in the study, so there are no stairs, and he is to go out every day in a chair or the carriage."

"Does the little boy amuse him?"

"No, not exactly, poor little fellow. They are terribly afraid of each other, that is the worst of it. And then we left the boy too long with the old woman. I hear his lessons for a quarter of an hour a-day, and he is a clever child enough; but his pronunciation and habits are an absolute distress, and he is not happy anywhere but in the house-keeper's room. I try to civilize him, but as yet I cannot worry poor Owen. You can't think how comfortable we are together, Phœbe, when we are alone. Since his sister went we have got on so much better. He was shy before her; but I must tell you, my dear, he asked me to read my Psalms and Lessons aloud, as I used to do; and we have had such pleasant evenings, and he desired that the servants might still come into prayers in the study. But then he always was different with me."

And Phœbe, while assenting, could not silence a mis-giving that she thought very cruel. She would believe Owen sincere if Humfrey Randolph did. Honor, however, was very happy, and presently begged her to come and see Owen. She obeyed with alacrity, and was conducted to the study. No Randolph was there, only pen, ink, paper, and algebra. But as she was greeting Owen, who looked much better and less oppressed, Honor made an exclamation, and from the window they saw the young man leaning over the sundial, partly studying its mysteries, partly playing with little Owen, who hung on him as an old playmate.

"Yes," said Owen, "he has taken pity on the boy—he is very good to him—has served an apprenticeship."

Mr. Randolph looked up, saw Phœbe, gave a start of recognition and pleasure, and sped towards the house.

"Yes, Phœbe, I do see *some* likeness," said Honor, as though a good deal struck and touched.

All the ridiculous and troublesome confusion was so good as to be driven away in the contentment of Humfrey Randolph's presence, and the wondrous magnetic conviction that he was equally glad to be with her. She lost all restlessness, and was quite ready to amuse Owen by a lively discussion and comparison of the two weddings, but she so well knew that she should like to stay too long, that she cut her time rather over short, and would not stay to luncheon. This was not like the evenings that began with Hiawatha and ended at Lakeville, or on Lake Ontario; but one pleasure was in store for Phœbe. While she was finding her umbrella, and putting on her clogs, Humfrey Randolph ran down stairs to her, and said, "I wanted to tell you something. My stepmother is going to be married."

"You are glad?"

"Very glad. It is to a merchant whom she met at Buffalo, well off, and speaking most kindly of the little boys."

"That must be a great load off your mind."

"Indeed it is, though the children must still chiefly look to me. I should like to have little George at a good school. However, now their immediate maintenance is off my hands, I have more to spend in educating myself. I can get evening lessons now, when my day's work is over."

"Oh! do not overstrain your head," said Phœbe, thinking of Bertha.

"Heads can bear a good deal when they are full of hope," he said, smiling.

"Still after your out of doors life of bodily exercise, do you not find it hard to be always shut up in London?"

"Perhaps the novelty has not worn off. It is as if life had only begun since I came into the city."

"A new set of faculties called into play?"

"Faculties—yes, and everything else."

"I must go now, or my sisters will be waiting for me, and I see your dinner coming in. Good-bye."

"May I come to see you?"

"O yes, pray let me show you our cottage."

"When may I come?"

"To-morrow, I suppose."

She felt, rather than saw him watching her all the way from the garden gate to the wood. That little colloquy was the sunshiny point in her day. Had the tidings been communicated in the full circle, it would have been as nothing compared with their reservation for her private ear, with the marked "I want to tell *you*." Then she came home, looked at Maria threading holly-berries, and her heart fainted within her. There were moments when poor Maria would arise before her as a hardship and an infliction, and then she became terrified, prayed against such feelings as a crime, and devoted herself to her sister with even more than her wonted patient tenderness.

The certainty that the visit would take place kept her from all flutterings and self debate, and in due time "Mr. Randolph" arrived. Anxiously did Phœbe watch for his look at Maria, for Bertha's look at him, and she was pleased with both. His manner to Maria was full of gentleness, and Bertha's quick eyes detected his intellect. He stood an excellent examination from her and Miss Fennimore upon the worn channel of Niagara, which had so often been used as a knockdown argument against Miss Charlecote's cosmogony; and his bright terse powers of description gave them, as they agreed, a better idea of his woods than any travels which they had read.

It was no less interesting to observe his impression of the English village-life at Hiltonbury. To him, the aspect of the country had an air of exquisite miniature finish, wanting indeed in breadth and freedom, but he had suffered too much from vain struggling single-handed with Nature in her might, not to value the bounds set upon her; and a man who knew by personal experience what it was to seek his whole live stock in an interminable forest, did not complain of the confinement of hedges and banks. Nay, the "hedgerow elms and hillocks green" were to him as classical as Whitehall; he treated Maria's tame robins with as much respect as if they had been Howards or Percies; hol-

ly and mistletoe were handled by him with reverential curiosity; and the church and home of his ancestors filled him with a sweet loyal enthusiasm, more eager than in those to whom these things were familiar.

Miss Charlecote herself came in for some of these feelings. He admired her greatly in her Christmas aspect of Lady Bountiful, in which she well fulfilled old visions of the mistress of an English home, but still more did he dwell upon her gentleness, and on that shadowy resemblance to his mother, which made him long for some of that tenderness which she lavished upon Owen. He looked for no more than her uniformly kind civility and hospitality, but he was always wishing to know her better; and any touch of warmth and affection in her manner towards him was so delightful that he could not help telling Phœbe of it, in their next brief *tête-à-tête*.

He was able to render a great service to Miss Charlecote. Mr. Brooks's understanding had not cleared with time, and the accounts that had been tangled in summer were by the end of the year in confusion worse confounded. He was a faithful servant, but his accounts had always been audited every month, and in his old age, his arithmetic would not carry him farther, so that his mistress's long absence abroad had occasioned such a hopeless chaos, that but for his long services, his honesty might have been in question. Honora put this idea away with angry horror. Not only did she love and trust the old man, but he was a legacy from Humfrey, and she would have torn the page from her receipts rather than rouse the least suspicion against him. Yet she could not bear to leave any flaw in Humfrey's farm books, and she toiled and perplexed herself in vain; till Owen, finding out what distressed her, and grieving at his own incapacity, begged that Randolph might help her; when behold! the confused accounts arranged themselves in comprehensible columns, and poor old Brooks was proved to have cheated himself so much more than his lady as to be entirely exonerated from all but puzzle-headedness. The young man's farmer life qualified him to be highly popular at the Holt. He was curious about English husbandry, talked to the labourers, and tried their tools with no unpractised hand, even with the flail which Honora's hatred of steam still kept as the winter's employment in the

barn; he appreciated the bullocks, criticized the sheep, and admired the pigs, till the farming men agreed "there had not been such an one about the place since the Squire himself."

Honora might be excused for not having detected a likeness between the two Humfreys. Scarcely a feature was in the same mould, the complexion was different, and the heavily built, easy going Squire, somewhat behind his own century, had apparently had nothing in common with the brisk modern colonial engineer, yet still there was something curiously recalling the expression of open honesty, and the whole cast of countenance, as well as the individuality of voice, air, and gestures, and the perception grew upon her so much in the haunts of her cousin, where she saw his attitudes and habits unconsciously repeated, that she was almost ready to accept Bertha's explanation that it was owing to the influence of the Christian name that both shared. But as it had likewise been borne by the wicked disinherited son who ran away, the theory was somewhat halting.

Phœbe's intercourse with Humfrey the younger was much more fragmentary than in town, and therefore, perhaps, the more delicious. She saw him on most of the days of his fortnight's stay, either in the mutual calls of the two houses, in chance meetings in the village, or in walks to or from the holy day services at the church, and these afforded many a moment in which she was let into the deeper feelings that his first English Christmas excited. It was not conventional Christmas weather, but warm and moist, thus rendering the contrast still stronger with the sleighing of his prosperous days, the snow-shoe walk of his poorer ones. A frost hard enough for skating was the prime desire of Maria and Bertha, who both wanted to see the art practised by one to whom it was familiar. The frost came at last, and became reasonably hard in the first week of the new year, one day when Phœbe, to her regret, was forced to drive to Elverslope to fulfil some commissions for Mervyn and Cecily, who were expected at home on the 8th of January, after a Christmas at Sutton.

However, she had a reward. "I do think," said Miss Fennimore to her, as she entered the drawing-room, "that Mr. Randolph is the most good-natured man in the world! For full three-quarters of an hour this afternoon did he hand Maria up and down a slide on the pond at the Holt!"

"You went up to see him skate?"

"Yes; he was to teach Bertha. We found him helping the little Sandbrook to slide, but when we came he sent him in with the little maid, and gave Bertha a lesson, which did not last long, for she grew nervous. Really her nerves will never be what they were! Then Maria begged for a slide, and you know what any sort of monotonous bodily motion is to her; there is no getting her to leave off, and I never saw anything like the spirit and good nature with which he complied."

"He is *very* kind to Maria," said Phœbe.

"He seems to have that sort of pitying respect which you first put into my mind towards her."

"Oh, are you come home, Phœbe?" said Maria, running into the room. "I did not hear you. I have been sliding on the ice all the afternoon with Mr. Randolph. It is so nice, and he says we will do it again to-morrow."

"Ha, Phœbe!" said Bertha, meeting her on the stairs, "do you know what you missed?"

"Three children sliding on the ice," quoted Phœbe.

"Seeing how a man that is called Humfrey can bear with your two sisters making themselves ridiculous. Really I should set the backwoods down as the best school of courtesy, but that I believe some people have that school within themselves. Hollo!"

For Phœbe absolutely kissed Bertha as she went upstairs.

"Ha?" said Bertha, interrogatively; then went into the drawing-room, and looked very grave, almost sad.

Phœbe could not but think it rather hard when, on the last afternoon of Humfrey Randolph's visit, there came a note from Mervyn ordering her up to Beauchamp to arrange some especial contrivances of his for Cecily's morning room—her mother's, which gave it an additional pang. It was a severe, threatening, bitter cold day, not at all fit for sliding, even had not both the young ladies and Miss Fennimore picked up a suspicion of cold; but Phœbe had no doubt that there would be a farewell visit, and did not like to lose it.

"Take the pony carriage, and you will get home faster," said Bertha, answering what was unspoken.

No; the groom sent in word that the ponies were gone to be rough-shod, and that one of them had a cold.

"Never mind," said Phœbe, cheerfully; "I shall be warmer walking."

And she set off, with a lingering will, but a step brisk under her determination that her personal wishes should never make her neglect duty or kindness. She did not like to think that he would be disappointed, but she had a great trust in *his* trust in herself, and a confidence, not to be fretted away, that some farewell would come to pass, and that she should know when to look for him again.

Scanty sleety flakes of snow were falling before her half-hour's walk was over, and she arrived at the house, where anxious maids were putting their last touches of preparation for the mistress. It was strange not to feel more strongly the pang of a lost home; and had not Phœbe been so much preoccupied, perhaps it would have affected her strongly, with all her real joy at Cecily's installation; but there were new things before her that filled her mind too full for regrets for the rooms where she had grown up. She only did her duty scrupulously by Cecily's writing-table, piano, and pictures, and then satisfied the housekeeper by a brief inspection of the rooms, more laudatory than particular. She rather pitied Cecily, after her comfortable parsonage, for coming to all those state drawing-rooms. If it had been the west wing, now!

By this time the snow was thicker, and the park beginning to whiten. The housekeeper begged her to wait and order out the carriage, but she disliked giving trouble, and thought that an unexpected summons might be tardy of fulfilment, so she insisted on confronting the elements, confident in her cloak and India-rubber boots, and secretly hoping that the visitor at the cottage might linger on into the twilight.

As she came beyond the pillars of the portico, such a whirl of snow met her that she almost questioned the prudence of her decision, when a voice said, "It is only the drift round the corner of the house."

"You here?"

"Your sister gave me leave to come and see you home through the snow-storm."

"Oh, thank you! This is the first time you have been

here," she added, feeling as if her first words had been too eagerly glad.

"Yes, I have only seen the house from a distance before. I did not know how large it was. Which part did you inhabit?"

"There—the west wing—shut up now, poor thing!"

"And where was the window where you saw the horse and cart? Yes, you see I know that story; which was your window?"

"The nearest to the main body of the house. Ah! it is a dear old window. I have seen many better things from it than that!"

"What kind of things?"

"Sunsets and moonsets, and the Holt first best of all."

"Yes, I know better now what you meant by owing all to Miss Charlecote," he said, smiling. "I owe something to her, too."

"Oh, is she going to help you on?" cried Phœbe.

"No, I do not need that. What I owe to her is—knowing you."

It had come, then! The first moment of full assurance of what had gleamed before; and yet the shock, sweet as it was, was almost pain, and Phœbe's heart beat fast, and her downcast look betrayed that the full force of his words—and still more, of his tone—had reached her.

"May I go on?" he said. "May I dare to tell you what you are to me? I knew, from the moment we met, that you were what I had dreamt of—different, but better."

"I am sure I knew that you were!" escaped from Phœbe, softly, but making her face burn, as at what she had not meant to say.

"Then you can bear with me? You do not forbid me to hope?"

"Oh! I am a great deal too happy!"

There came a great wailing, driving gust of storm at that moment, as if it wanted to sweep them off their feet, but it was a welcome blast, for it was the occasion of a strong arm being flung around Phœbe, to restrain that fluttering cloak. "Storms shall only blow us nearer together, dearest," he said, with recovered breath, as, with no unwilling hand, she clung to his arm for help.

"If it be God's will," said Phœbe, earnestly.

"And indeed," he said, fervently, "I have thought and debated much whether it were His will; whether it could be right, that I, with my poverty and my burthens, should thrust myself into your wealthy and sheltered life. At first, when I thought you were a poor dependent, I admitted the hope. I saw you spirited, helpful, sensible, and I dared to think that you were of the stuff that would gladly be independent, and would struggle on and up with me, as I have known so many do in my own country."

"Oh! would I not?"

"Then I found how far apart we stand in one kind of social scale, and perhaps that ought to have overthrown all hope; but, Phoebe, it will not do so! I will not ask you to share want and privation, but I will and do ask you to be the point towards which I may work, the best earthly hope before me."

"I am glad," said Phoebe, "that you knew too well to think there was any real difference. Indeed, the superiority is all yours, except in mere money. And mine, I am sure, need not stand in the way, but there is one thing that does."

"What? Your brothers?"

"I do not know. It is my sister Maria. I promised, long ago, that nothing should make me desert her;" and, with a voice faltering a little, but endeavouring to be firm, "a promise to fulfil a duty appointed by Providence must not be repented of when the cost is felt."

"But why should you think of deserting her?" he said. "Surely I may help to bear your cares; and there is something so good, so gentle and loveable about her, that she need be no grievance. I shall have to bring my little brothers about you, too, so we shall be even," he added, smiling.

"Then," she said, looking in his face as beginning to take counsel with him, "You think it is right to assume a new tie that must have higher claims than the prior one that Heaven sent me."

"Nay, dearest, is not the new one instituted by Heaven? If I promise that I will be as entirely Maria's brother as you are her sister, and will reverence her affliction, or more truly her innocence, in the same way, will you not trust her, as well as yourself, with me?"

"Trust, oh! indeed I do, and am thankful. But I am

thinking of you! Poor dear Maria might be a drag, where I should not! And I cannot leave her to any of the others. She could not be long without me."

"Well, faithless one, we may have to wait the longer; though I feel that you alone would be happiest fighting up the hill with me."

"Oh, thank you for knowing that so well."

"But as we both have these ties, and as besides, I should be a shabby adventurer to address you but on equal terms, we must be content to wait till—as with God's blessing I trust to do—I have made a home smooth enough for Maria as well as for you! Will that do, Phœbe?"

"Somehow it seems too much," murmured Phœbe: "and yet I knew it of you."

"And as you both have means of your own, it may bring the time nearer," he said. "There you see I can calculate on your fortune, though I still wish it were out of the way."

"If it were not for Maria, I should."

"And now, with this hope and promise, I feel as if, even if it were seven years, they would be like so many days," said Humfrey. "You will not be of those, my Phœbe, who suffer and are worn by a long engagement?"

"One cannot tell without a trial," said Phœbe; "but indeed, I do not see why security and rest, or even hope deferred, should hurt me. Surely, having a right to think about you cannot do so?"

And her look out of those honest, clear, grey eyes was one of the most perfect reliance and gladness.

"May I be worthy of those thoughts!" he fervently said. "And you will write to me—even when I go back to the Ottawa?"

"I shall be so glad to tell you everything, and have your letters! Oh! no, with them I am not going to pine," and her strong young nature laughed at the folly.

"And while God gives me strength, we will not be afraid," he answered. "Phœbe, I looked at the last chapter of Proverbs last night, and thought you were like that woman of strength and skill on whose 'lips is the law of kindness.' And you are not afraid of the snow, as if to complete the likeness."

"I did not quite know it was snowing, I like it, for it suits your country."

"I like it because you are as clear, firm, and pure, as my own clear crystal ice," he said; "only not quite so cold! And now, what remains? Must your brothers be consulted?" he added, reluctantly.

"It will be right that I should tell them," said Phœbe. "From Robert I could not keep such a thing, and Mervyn has a right to know. I cannot tell how he may take it, but I do not think that I owe him such implicit obedience as if he were my father. And by the time you really ask for me, you know you are to be such a rising engineer that they are all to be almost as proud of you as I am!"

"God helping me," he gravely answered, his eyes raised upwards, and as it were carrying with them the glance that had sought them in almost playful confidence.

And thus they looked forth upon this life. Neither was so young as not to be aware of its trials. She knew the sorrows of suspense, bereavement, and family disunion; and he, before his twenty-fourth year, had made experience of adversity, uncongeniality, disappointment, and severe—almost hopeless—everyday labor. It was not in the spirit of those who had not braced on their armour, but of those who had made proof of it, that they looked bravely and cheerfully upon the battle, feeling their strength doubled as faithful companions-in-arms, and willing in that strength and trust to bear patiently with the severest trial of all—the delay of their hopes. The cold but bracing wind, the snow driving and whirling round them in gusts, could not daunt nor quench their spirits—nay, rather gave them additional vigour and enjoyment, while even the tokens of the tempest that they bore away were of perfect dazzling whiteness.

Never was shelter less willingly attained than when the park wicket of the Underwood was reached, just as the early twilight was becoming darkness. It was like a foretaste for Phœbe of seeing him go his own way in the storm while she waited safely housed; but they parted with grave, sweet smiles, and a promise that he would snatch a moment's farewell on the morrow. Phœbe would rather not have been met by Bertha at the front door, in some solicitude—"You are come at last! Are you wet?—are you cold?"

"Oh, no, thank you! Don't stand in the draught," said

Phœbe, anxious to shake her off; but it was not to be done. Bertha preceded her up-stairs, talking all the way in something of her old mischievous whisper. "Am I in disgrace with you, too, Phœbe? Miss Fennimore says I have committed an awful breach of propriety; but really I could not leave you to the beating of the pitiless storm alone. I am afraid Malta's sagacity and little paws would hardly have sufficed to dig you out of a snow-drift before life was extinct. Are you greatly displeased with me, Phœbe?" And being by this time in the bedroom, she faced about, shut the door, and looked full at her sister.

"No—no—dear Bertha, not displeased in the least; only if you would go——"

"Now, Phœbe, indeed that is not kind of you," said Bertha, pleadingly, but preparing to obey.

"No, Bertha, it is not," said Phœbe, recovering herself in a moment. "I am sorry for it; but oh! don't you know the feeling of wanting to have one's treasure all to oneself for a little moment before showing it? No, don't go;" and the two sisters flung their arms round one another. "You shall hear now."

"No, no," said Bertha, kissing her; "my time for obtrusive, childish curiosity is over! I only was so anxious;" and she looked up with tearful eyes, and almost the air of an elder sister. Phœbe might well requite the look with full-hearted tenderness and caresses, as she said, calmly, "Yes, Bertha, I am very happy."

"You ought to be," said Bertha, seriously.

"Yes," said Phœbe, taking the *ought* in a different sense from what she meant; "he is all, and more than I ever thought a man wise in true wisdom should be."

"And a man of progress, full of the dignity of labour," said Bertha. "I am glad he is not an old bit of county soil like John Raymond! My dear Phœbe, Sir John will tear his hair!"

"For shame, Bertha!"

"Well, I will not tease you with my nonsense; but you know it is the only thing that keeps tears out of one's eyes. I see you want to be alone. Dear Phœbe!" and she clung to her neck for a moment.

"An instant more, Bertha. You see everything, I know; but has Miss Fennimore guessed?"

"No, my dear, I do not think any such syllogism has ever occurred to her as, Lovers look conscious; Phœbe looks conscious; therefore Phœbe is in love! It is defective in the major, you see, so it could not enter her brain."

"Then, Bertha, do not let any one guess it. I shall speak to Mervyn to-morrow, and write to Robin. It is their due, but no one else must know it—no, not for a long time—years perhaps."

"You do not mean to wait for years?"

"We must."

"Then what's the use of having thirty thousand pounds?"

"No, Bertha, it would not be like him to be content with owing all to my fortune, and beginning life in idleness. It would be just enough to live on, with none of the duties of property, and that would never do! I could not wish it for him, and he has his brothers to provide for."

"Well, let him work for them, and have your money to make capital! Really, Phœbe, I would not lose such a chance of going out and seeing those glorious Lakes!"

"I have Maria to consider."

"Maria! And why are you to be saddled with Maria?"

"Because I promised my mother—I promised myself—I promised Mervyn, that she should be my care. I have told him of that promise, and he accepts it most kindly."

"You cannot leave her to me? Oh! Phœbe, do you still think me as hateful as I used to be?"

"Dear, dear Bertha, I have full trust in your affection for her; but I undertook the charge, and I cannot thrust it on to another, who might ——"

"Don't say that, Phœbe," cried Bertha, impetuously, "I am the one to have her! I who certainly never can, never shall, marry—I who am good for nothing but to look after her. Say you do not think me unworthy of her, Phœbe."

"I say no such thing," said Phœbe, affectionately, "but there is no use in discussing the matter. Dear Bertha, leave me, and compose yourself."

Truly, during that evening Bertha was the agitated one, her speech much affected, and her gestures restless while Phœbe sat over her work, her needle going swiftly and evenly, and her eyes beaming with her quiet depth of thankful bliss.

In the morning, again, it was Bertha who betrayed an

uneasy restlessness, and irrepressible desire to banish Miss Fennimore and Maria from the drawing-room, till the governess, in perplexity, began to think of consulting Phœbe whether a Jack Hastings affair could be coming over again.

Phœbe simply trusted to the promise, and went about her morning's avocations with a heart at rest, and when at last Humfrey Randolph did hurry in for a few moments, before he must rush back to the Holt, her greeting was so full of reliance and composure that Miss Fennimore perceived nothing. Bertha, however, rested not. As well as she could, under a fearful access of stammering, she insisted that Mr. Randolph should come into the dining-room to look at a—a—a—a—a——”

“Ah, well!” thought Miss Fennimore, “Phœbe is gone, too, so she will keep guard.”

If Miss Fennimore could have looked through the door, she would have seen the astonished Maria pounced upon, as if in sport, pulled upstairs, and desired by Bertha to find her book of dried flowers to show Mr. Randolph. Naughty Bertha, who really did not believe the dried flowers had ever been brought home from Woolstone Lane! It served the manœuvrer right, that Maria, after one look at the shelves, began to cry out for Phœbe to come and find them. But it signified the less since the lovers had not left the hall, and had exchanged all the words that there was time for before Bertha, at the sound of the re-opening door, flew down to put her hand into Humfrey's and grasp it tightly, looking in his face instead of speaking. “Thank you,” he said, returning the pressure, and was gone. “We improve as we go on. Number three is the best of my brothers-in-law, Phœbe,” said Bertha, lightly. Then leaving Phœbe to pacify Maria about the flowers, she went into her own room, and cried bitterly and overpoweringly.

CHAPTER XIX.

Thekla. I should love thee.
 Whate'er thou hadst chosen, thou wouldst still have acted
 Nobly and worthy of thee; but repentance
 Shall ne'er disturb thy soul's fair peace.
Mar. Then I must leave thee; must part from thee!
Thekla. Being faithful
 To thine own self, thou art faithful too to me.

Wallenstein.

PHŒBE and Maria went alone to the Park to receive the bridal pair, for poor Bertha was so nervous and unhinged as not even to wish to leave the fireside. It was plain that she must not be deprived of an elder sister's care, and that it would be unlikely that she would ever have nerve enough to undertake the charge of Maria, even if Phœbe could think of shifting the responsibility, or if a feeble intellect could be expected to yield the same deference to a younger sister as came naturally to an elder one.

Thus Phœbe's heart was somewhat heavy as she braced herself for her communication to Mervyn, doubtful as to the extent of his probable displeasure, but for that very cause resolved on dealing openly from the first, while satisfied that, at her age, his right was rather to deference than to surrender of judgment. Maria roamed through the house, exclaiming at the alterations, and Phœbe sat still in the concentrated, resolute stillness that was her form of suspense.

They came! The peals of the Hiltonbury bells rung merrily in the cold air, the snow sparkled bridal, the icicles glittered in the sunset light, the work-people stood round the house to cheer the arrival, and the sisters hurried out.

It was no more the pale, patient face! The cheeks were rounded, the brown eyes smiled, the haggard air, that even as a bride Cecily had worn, was entirely gone, and Mervyn watched exultingly Phœbe's surprise at what he had made of the wan, worn girl they had met at Hyères. The only disappointment was Bertha's absence, and there was much regret that the newcomers had not heard of her cold so as to have seen her at the Underwood on their way. They had spent the previous day in town in going over the distillery, by Cecily's particular wish, and had afterwards assisted at a grand impromptu entertainment of all the workpeople, at

their own expense and Robert's trouble. Mervyn did certainly seem carried out of his own knowledge of himself, and his wife had transgressed every precedent left by his mother, who had never beheld Whittingtonia in her life!

Phœbe found their eager talk so mazy and indistinct to her perception, that she became resolved to speak and clear her mind at the first opportunity; so she tarried behind, when Cecily went up, under Maria's delighted guidance, to take off her bonnet, and accosted Mervyn with the ominous words, "I want to speak to you."

"Make haste, then; there is Cecily left to Maria."

"I wanted to tell you that I am engaged."

"The deuce you are!"

"To Mr. Randolph, Miss Charlecote's Canadian cousin."

Mervyn, who had expected no less than John Raymond, whirled round in indignant surprise, and looked incredulously at her, but was confronted by her two open, unabashed eyes, as she stood firm on both her feet, and continued: "I have been thrown a good deal with him, so as to learn his goodness and superiority. I know you will think it a very bad match, for he has nothing but his hands and head; but we mean to wait till he can offer what are considered as equal terms. We thought it right you should know."

"Upon my word, that's a clever fellow!"

Phœbe knew very well that this was ironical, but would not so reply. "He has abilities," she said, "and we are ready to wait till he has made proof of them."

"Well, what now?" he cried in despair. "I *did* think you the sensible one of the lot."

"When you know him," she said, with her fearless smile, "you will own that I *was* sensible there!"

"Really, the child looks so complacent that she would outface me that this mad notion was a fine thing! I declare it is worse than Bertha's business; and you so much older! At least Hastings was a man of family, and this is a Yankee adventurer picked out of the back of a ditch by that young dog, Sandbrook. Only a Yankee could have had the impudence! I declare you are laughing all the time. What have you to say for yourself?"

"His father was major in the —th dragoons, and was one of the Randolfs of —shire. His mother was a Charlecote. His birth is as good as our own, and you saw that he

is a gentleman. His character and talents have gained his present situation, and it is a profession that gives every opening for ability; nor does he ask for me till his fortune is made."

"But hinders you from doing better! Pray, what would Augusta say to you?" he added, jocosely, for even while lashing himself up, his tone had been placable.

"He shall satisfy her."

"How long has this been going on?"

"We only spoke of it yesterday. Bertha found it out; but I wish no one else to know it except Robert."

"Somehow she looks so cool, and she is so entirely the last girl I expected to go crazy, that I can't laugh at the thing as I ought! I say, what's this about Miss Charlcote; will she do anything for him?"

"I believe not."

"And pray who vouches for his antecedents, such as they are?"

"Mr. Currie and Owen Sandbrook both know the whole."

"Is Sandbrook at the Holt?"

"Yes," answered Phœbe, suppressing her strong distaste against bringing him into the affair.

"Well, I shall make inquiries, and—and—it is a horrid unlucky business, and the old girl should be sacrificed for putting you in his way. The end will be that you'll marry on your own means, and be pinched for life. Now, look here, you are no fool at the bottom; you will give it up if I find that he is no go."

"If it be proved that I ought," said Phœbe. "And if you find him what I have told you, you will make no opposition. Thank you, Mervyn."

"Stay," said he, laughing, and letting her kiss him, "I have made no promises, mind!"

The confidence that Phœbe had earned had stood her in good stead. Mervyn had great trust in her judgment, and was too happy besides for severity on other people's love. Nor were her perfect openness, and fearless though modest independence, without effect. She was not one who invited tyranny, but truly "queen o'er herself," she ruled herself too well to leave the reins loose for others to seize.

The result of the interview had surpassed her hopes, and

she had nothing to regret but her brother's implied purpose of consulting Owen Sandbrook. Friend of Humfrey though he were, she could not feel secure of his generosity, and wished the engineer had been the nearer referee; but she did not say so, as much for shame at her own uncharitableness, as for fear of rousing Mervyn's distrust; and she was afraid that her injunctions to secrecy would be disregarded. Fully aware that all would be in common between the husband and wife, she was still taken by surprise when Cecily, coming early next day to the Underwood to see Bertha, took her aside to say, "Dearest, I hope this is all right, and for your happiness."

"You will soon know that it is," said Phœbe, brightly.

"Only, my dear, it must not be a long engagement. Ah! you think that nothing now, but I could not bear to think that *you* were to go through a long attachment."

Was this forgiving Cecily really fancying that her sorrows had been nothing worse than those incidental to a long attachment?

"Ah!" thought Phœbe, "if she could ever have felt the full reliance on which I can venture, she need never have drooped! What is time to trust?"

Mervyn kept his word, and waiving ceremony, took his wife at once to the Holt, and leaving her with Miss Charle-cote, made a visit to Owen in the study, wishing, in the first place, to satisfy himself of the young man's competence to reply to his questions. On this he had no doubt; Owen had made steady progress ever since he had been in England, and especially during the quiet time that had succeeded his sister's marriage. His mental powers had fully regained their keenness and balance, and though still incapable of sustained exertion of his faculties, he could talk as well as ever, and the first ten minutes convinced Mervyn that he was conversing with a shrewd sensible observer, who had seen a good deal of life, and of the world. He then led to the question about young Randolph, endeavouring so to frame it as not to betray the occasion of it.

The reply fully confirmed all that Phœbe had averred. The single efforts of a mere youth, not eighteen at the time of his father's failure, without capital, and set down in a wild uncleared part of the bush, had of course been

inadequate to retrieve the ruined fortunes of the family; but he had shown wonderful spirit, patience, and perseverance, and the duteous temper in which he had borne the sacrifice of his prospects by his father's foolish speculations and unsuitable marriage, his affectionate treatment of the wife and children when left on his hands, and his cheerful endurance of the severest and most hopeless drudgery for the bare support of life, had all been such as to inspire the utmost confidence in his character. Of his future prospects, Owen spoke with a sigh almost of envy. His talent and industry had already made him a valuable assistant to Mr. Currie, and an able engineer had an almost certain career of prosperity open to him. Lastly, Mervyn asked what was the connexion with Miss Charlecote, and what possibilities it held out. Owen winced for a moment, then explained the second cousinship, adding, however, that there was no entail, that the disposal of Miss Charlecote's property was entirely in her own power, and that she had manifested no intention of treating the young man with more than ordinary civility, in fact that she had rather shrunk from acknowledging his likeness to the family. His father's English relatives had, in like manner, owned him as a kinsman; but had shown no alacrity in making friends with him. The only way to be noticed, as the two gentlemen agreed, when glad to close their conference in a laugh, is to need no notice.

"Uncommon hard on a fellow," soliloquized Owen, when left alone. "Is it not enough to have one's throat cut, but must one do it with one's own hands? It is a fine thing to be magnanimous when one thinks one is going off the stage, but quite another thing when one is to remain there. I'm no twelfth century saint, only a nineteenth century beggar, with an unlucky child on my hands! Am I to give away girl, land, and all to the fellow I raked out of his swamps? Better have let him grill and saved my limbs! And pray what more am I to do? I've introduced him, made no secret of his parentage, puffed him off, and brought him here, and pretty good care he takes of himself! Am I to pester poor Honey if she does prefer the child she bred up to a stranger? No, no, I've done my part; let him look out for himself!"

Mervyn allowed to Phoebe that Randolph was no impostor,

but warned her against assuming his consent. She suspected that Owen at least guessed the cause of these inquiries, and it kept her aloof from the Holt. When Miss Charlecote spoke of poor Owen's want of spirits, discretion told her that she was not the person to enliven him; and the consciousness of her secret made her less desirous of confidences with her kind old friend, so that her good offices chiefly consisted in having little Owen to the Underwood to play with Maria, who delighted in his society, and unconsciously did much for his improvement.

Honor herself perceived that Phœbe's visits only saddened her convalescent, and that in his present state he was happiest with no one but her, who was more than ever a mother to him. They were perfectly at ease together, as she amused him with the familiar books, which did not strain his powers like new ones, the quiet household talk, the little playful exchanges of tender wit, and the fresh arrangement of all her museum on the natural system, he having all the entertainment, and she all the trouble, till her conversion astonished Bertha. The old religious habits of the Holt likewise seemed to soothe and give him pleasure; but whether by force of old association, or from their hold on his heart, was as yet unknown to Honora, and perhaps to himself. It was as if he were deferring all demonstration till he should be able again to examine the subject with concentrated attention. Or it might be that, while he shrank from exerting himself upon Randolph's behalf, he was not ready for repentance, and therefore distrusted, and hung back from, the impulses that would otherwise have drawn him to renew all that he had once cast aside. He was never left alone without becoming deeply melancholy, yet no companionship save Honor's seemed to suit him for many minutes together. His brain was fast recovering the injury, but it was a trying convalescence; and with returning health, his perfect helplessness fretted him under all the difficulties of so tall and heavy a man being carried from bed to sofa, from sofa to carriage.

"Poor Owen!" said Phœbe to herself, one day when she had not been able to avoid witnessing this pitiable spectacle of infirmity; "I can't think why I am always fancying he is doing Humfrey and me some injustice, and that he knows it. He, who brought Humfrey home, and has prais-

ed him to Mervyn ! It is very uncharitable of me, but why will he look at me as if he were asking my pardon ? Well, we shall see the result of Mervyn's inspection ! ”

Mervyn and his wife were going for two nights to the rooms at the office, in the first lull of the bridal invitations, which were infinitely more awful to Cecily than to Phœbe. After twenty-nine years of quiet clerical life, Cecily neither understood nor liked the gaieties even of the county, had very little to say, and, unless her aunt were present, made Phœbe into a protector, and retired behind her, till Phœbe sometimes feared that Mervyn would be quite provoked, and remember his old dread lest Cecily should be too homely and bashful for her position. Poor dear Cecily ! She was as good and kind as possible ; but in the present close intercourse it sometimes would suggest itself to Phœbe, “ was she quite as wise as she was good ? ”

And Miss Fennimore, with still clearer eyes, inwardly decided that though religion should above all form the morals, yet the morality of common sense and judgment should be cultivated with an equal growth.

Cecily returned from London radiant with sisterly congratulation, in a flutter of delight with Mr. Randolph, and intimating a glorious project in the background, devised between herself and Mervyn, then guarding against possible disappointment by declaring it might be all her own fancy.

The meaning of these prognostics appeared the next morning. Mervyn had been much impressed by Humfrey Randolph's keen business-like appearance and sensible conversation, as well as by Mr. Currie's opinion of him ; and, always detesting the trouble of his own distillery, it had occurred to him that to secure an active working partner, and throw his sister's fortune into the business, would be a most convenient, generous, and brotherly means of smoothing the course of true love ; and Cecily had been so enchanted at the happiness he would thus confer, that he came to the Underwood quite elevated with his own kindness.

Phœbe heard his offer with warm thankfulness, but could not answer for Humfrey.

“ He has too much sense not to take a good offer,” said Mervyn, “ otherwise, it is all humbug his pretending to care for you. As to Robert's folly, have not I given up all that any rational being could stick at ? I tell you, it is the giv-

ing up those houses that makes me in want of capital, so you are bound to make it up to me."

Mervyn and Phœbe wrote by the same post. "I will be satisfied with whatever you decide upon as right," were Phœbe's words; but she refrained from expressing any wish. What was the use of a wise man, if he were not to be let alone to make up his mind? She would trust to him to divine what it would be to her to be thus one with her own family, and to gain him without losing her sisters. The balance must not be weighted by a woman's hand, when ready enough to incline to her side; and why should she add to his pain, if he must refuse?

How ardently she wished, however, can be imagined. She could not hide from herself pictures of herself and Humfrey, sometimes in London, sometimes at the Underwood, working with Robert, and carrying out the projects which Mervyn but half acted on, and a quarter understood.

The letter came, and the first line was decisive. In spite of earnest wishes and great regrets, Humfrey could not reconcile the trade to his sense of right. He knew that as Mervyn conducted it, it was as unobjectionable as was possible, and that the works were admirably regulated; but it was in going over the distillery as a curiosity he had seen enough to perceive that it was a line in which enterprise and exertion could only find scope by extending the demoralizing sale of spirits, and he trusted to Phœbe's agreeing with him, that when he already had a profession fairly free from temptation, it was his duty not to put himself into one that might prove more full of danger to him than to one who had been always used to it. He had not consulted Robert, feeling clear in his own mind, and thinking that he had probably rather not interfere.

Kind Humfrey! That bit of consideration filled Phœbe's heart with grateful relief. It gave her spirits to be comforted by the tender and cheering words with which the edge of the disappointment was softened, and herself thanked for her abstinence from persuasion. "Oh, better to wait seven years, with such a Humfrey as this in reserve, than to let him warp aside one inch of his sense of duty! As high minded as dear Robert, without his ruggedness and harshness," she thought as she read the manly, warm-heart-

ed letter, to Mervyn, which he had enclosed, and which she could not help showing to Bertha.

It was lost on Bertha. She thought it dull and poor spirited not to accept, and manage the distillery just as he pleased. Any one could manage Mervyn, she said, not estimating the difference between a petted sister and a junior partner, and it was a new light to her that the trade—involving so much chemistry and mechanic ingenuity—was not good enough for anybody, unless they were peacocks too stupid to appreciate the dignity of labour! For the first time Phœbe wished her secret known to Miss Charlecote, for the sake of her appreciation of his triumph of principle.

"This is Robert's doing!" was Mervyn's first exclamation, when Phœbe gave him the letter. "If there be an intolerable plague in the world, it is the having a fanatical fellow like that in the family. Nice requital for all I have thrown away for the sake of his maggots! I declare I'll resume every house I've let him have for his tomfooleries, and have a gin bottle blown as big as an ox as a sign for each of them."

Phœbe had a certain lurking satisfaction in observing, when his malediction had run itself down, "He never consulted Robert."

"Don't tell me that! As if Robert had not run about with his mouth open, reviling his father's trade, and pluming himself on keeping out of it."

"Mervyn, you know better! Robert has said no word against you! It is the facts that speak for themselves."

"The facts? You little simpleton, do you imagine that we distil the juices of little babies?"

Phœbe laughed, and he added kindly, "Come, little one, I know this is no doing of yours. You have stuck by this wicked distiller of vile liquids through thick and thin. Don't let the parson lead you nor Randolph by the nose; he is far too fine a fellow for that; but come up to town with me and Cecily, as soon as Lady Caroline's bear fight is over, and make him hear reason."

"I should be very glad to go and see him, but I cannot persuade him."

"Why not?"

"When a man has made up his mind, it would be wrong to try to over-persuade him, even if I believed that I could."

"You know the alternative?"

"What?"

"Just breaking with him a little."

She smiled.

"We shall see what Crabbe, and Augusta, and Acton will say to your taking up with a dumpy leveller. We shall have another row. And you'll all be broken up again!"

That was by far the most alarming of his threats; but she did not greatly believe that he would bring it to pass, or that an engagement, however imprudent, conducted as hers had been, could be made a plea for accusing Miss Fennimore or depriving her of her sisters. She tried to express her thankfulness for the kindness that had prompted the original proposal, and her sympathy with his natural vexation at finding that a traffic which he had really ameliorated at considerable loss of profit, was still considered objectionable; but he silenced this at once as palaver, and went off to fetch his wife to try her arguments.

This was worse than Phœbe had expected! Cecily was too thorough a wife not to have adopted all her husband's interests, and had totally forgotten all the objections current in her own family against the manufacture of spirits. She knew that great opportunities of gain had been yielded up, and such improvements made as had converted the distillery into a model of its kind; she was very proud of it, wished every one to be happy, and Mervyn to be saved trouble, and thought the scruples injurious and overstrained. Phœbe would not contest them with her. What the daughter had learnt by degrees, might not be forced on the wife; and Phœbe could only protest against trying to shake a fixed purpose, instead of maintaining its grounds. So Cecily continued affectionately hurt, and unnecessarily compassionate, showing that a woman can hardly marry a person of tone inferior to her own without some deterioration of judgment, beneficial and elevating as her influence may be in the main.

Poor Cecily! she did the very thing that those acquainted with the ins and outs of the family had most deprecated! She dragged Robert into the affair, writing a letter, very pretty in wifely and sisterly goodwill, to entreat him to take Mr. Randolph in hand, and persuade him of the

desirableness of the spirit manufacture in general, and that of the Fulmort house in particular.

The letter she received in return was intended to be very kind, but was severely grave, in simply observing that what he had not thought fit to do himself, he could not persuade another to do.

Those words somehow acted upon Mervyn as bitter and ungrateful irony; and working himself up by an account, in his own colouring, of Robert's behaviour at the time of the foundation of St. Matthew's, he went thundering off to assure Phœbe that he *must* take an active partner, at all events; and that if she and Robert did not look out, he should find a moneyed man who knew what he was about, would clear off Robert's waste, and restore the place to what it had once been.

"What is your letter, Phœbe?" he asked, seeing an envelope in Robert's handwriting on her table.

Phœbe coloured a little. "He has not said one word to Humfrey," she said.

"And what has he said to you? The traitor, insulting me to my wife!"

Phœbe thought for one second, then resolved to take the risk of reading all aloud, considering that whatever might be the effect, it could not be worse than that of his surmises.

"Cecily has written to me, greatly to my surprise, begging for my influence with Randolph to induce him to become partner in the house. I understand by this that he has already refused, and that you are aware of his determination; therefore, I have no scruple in writing to tell you that he is perfectly right. It is true that the trade, as Mervyn conducts it, is free from the most flagrant evils that deterred me from taking a share in it; and I am most thankful for the changes he has made."

"You show it, don't you?" interjected Mervyn.

"I had rather see it in his hands than those of any other person, and there is nothing blameworthy in his continuance in it. But it is of questionable expedience, and there are still hereditary practices carried on, the harm of which he has not hitherto perceived, but which would assuredly shock a new comer such as Randolph. You can guess what would be the difficulty of obtaining alteration, and acquiescence would be even more fatal. I do not tell you

this as complaining of Mervyn, who has done and is doing infinite good, but to warn you against the least endeavour to influence Randolph. Depend upon it, even the accelerating your marriage would not secure your happiness if you saw your husband and brother at continual variance in the details of the business, and opposition might at any moment lead Mervyn to undo all the good he has effected."

"Right enough there;" and Mervyn, who had looked furious at several sentences, laughed at last. "I must get another partner, then, who can and will manage; and when all the gin-palaces are more splendiferous than ever, what will you and the parson say?"

"That to do a little wrong in hopes of hindering another from doing worse, never yet succeeded!" said Phœbe, bravely.

She saw that the worst was over when he had come to that laugh, and that the danger of a quarrel between the brothers was averted. She did not know from how much terror and self-reproach poor Cecily was suffering, nor her multitudinous resolutions against kindly interferences upon *terra incognita*.

That fit of wrath subsided, and Mervyn neither looked out for his moneyed partner, nor fulfilled his threat of bringing the united forces of the family displeasure upon his sister. Still there was a cloud overshadowing the enjoyment, though not lessening the outward harmony of those early bridal days. The long, dark drives to the county gaieties, shut up with Mervyn and Cecily, were formidable by the mere existence of a topic never mentioned, but always secretly dwelt on. And in spite of three letters a week, Phœbe was beginning to learn that trust does not fully make up to the heart for absence, by the distance of London to estimate that of Canada, and by the weariness of one month, the tedium of seven years!

"Yet," said Bertha to Cecily, "Phœbe is so stupidly like herself now she is engaged, that it is no fun at all. Nobody would guess her to be in love! If they cared for each other one rush, would not they have floated to bliss even on streams of gin?"

Cecily would not dispute their mutual love, but she was not one of those who could fully understand the double force of that love which is second to love of principle. Obedience,

not judgment, had been her safeguard, and, like most women, she was carried along, not by the abstract idea, but by its upholder.

Intuition, rather than what actually passed before her, showed Phœbe more than once that Cecily was sorely perplexed by the difference between the standard of Sutton and that of Beauchamp. Strict, scrupulous, and deeply devout, the clergyman's daughter suffered at every deviation from the practices of the Parsonage, made her stand in the wrong places, and while conscientiously and painfully fretting Mervyn about petty details, would be unknowingly carried over far greater stumbling-blocks. In her ignorance she would be distressed at habits which were comparatively innocent, and then fear to put forth her influence at the right moment. There was hearty affection on either side, and Mervyn was exceedingly improved, but more than once Phœbe saw in poor Cecily's harassed, puzzled, wistful face, and heard in her faltering remonstrances, what it was to have loved and married without perfect esteem and trust.

CHAPTER XX.

Get thee an ape, and trudge the land
The leader of a juggling band.

SCOTT.

"MASTER HOWEN, Master Howen, you must not go up the best stairs."

"But I will go up the best stairs. I don't like the nasty, dark, back stairs!"

"Let me take off your boots, then, sir; Mrs. Stubbs said she could not have such dirty marks——"

"I don't care for Mrs. Stubbs! I won't take my boots off! Get off—I'll kick you if you touch them! I shall go where I like! I'm a gentleman. I shall 'ave hall the Olt for my very hown!"

"Master Howen! Oh my!"

For Flibbertigibbet's teeth were in the crack orphan's neck, and the foot that she had not seized kicking like a

vicious colt, when a large hand seized him by the collar, and lifted him in mid-air; and the crack orphan, looking up as though the oft-invoked "ugly man" of her infancy had really come to bear off naughty children, beheld for a moment, propped against the door-post, the tall figure and bearded head hitherto only seen on the sofa.

The next instant the child had been swung into the study, and the apparition, stumbling with one hand and foot to the couch, said breathlessly to the frightened girl, "I am sorry for my little boy's shameful behaviour! Leave him here. Owen, stay."

The child was indeed standing, as if powerless to move or even cry, stunned by his flight in the air, and dismayed at the terrific presence in which he was for the first time left alone. Completely roused and excited, the elder Owen sat upright, speaking not loud, but in tones forcible from vehement feeling.

"Owen, you boast of being a gentleman! Do you know what we are? We are beggars! I can neither work for myself nor for you. We live on charity! That girl earns her bread—we do not! We are beggars! Who told you otherwise?"

Instead of an answer, he only evoked a passion of frightened tears, so piteous, that he spoke more gently, and stretched out his hand; but his son shook his frock at him in terror, and retreated out of reach, backwards into a corner, replying to his calls and assurances with violent sobs, and broken entreaties to go back to "granma."

At last, in despair, Owen lowered himself to the floor, and made the whole length of his person available; but the child, in the extremity of terror at the giant crawling after him, shrieked wildly, and made a rush at the door, but was caught, and at once drawn within the grasp of the sweeping arm.

All was still. He was gathered up to the broad breast; the hairy cheek was gently pressed against his wet one. It was a great, powerful, encircling caress that held him. There was a strange thrill in this contact between the father and son—a new sensation of intense loving pity in the one, a great but soothing awe in the other, as struggling and crying no more, he clung ever closer and closer, and drew the arm tighter round him.

"My poor little fellow!" And never had there been such sweetness in those deep, full tones.

The boy responded with both arms round his neck, and face laid on his shoulder. Poor child! it was the affection that his little heart had hungered for ever since he had left his grandmother, and which he had inspired in no one.

A few more seconds, and he was sitting on the floor, resting against his father, listening without alarm to his question—"Now, Owen, what were you saying?"

"I'll never do it again, pa—never!"

"No, never be disobedient, nor fight with girls. But what were you saying about the Holt?"

"I shall live here—I shall have it for my own."

"Who told you so?"

"Granma."

"Grandmamma knows nothing about it."

"Sha'n't I, then?"

"Never! Listen, Owen. This is Miss Charlecote's house as long as she lives—I trust till long after you are a man. It will be Mr. Randolph's afterwards, and neither you nor I have anything to do with it."

The two great black eyes looked up in inquiring, disappointed intelligence. Then he said, in a satisfied tone—

"We ain't beggars—we don't carry rabbit-skins and lucifers!"

"We do nothing so useful or profitable," sighed poor Owen, striving to pull himself up by the table, but desisting on finding that it was more likely to overbalance than to be a support. "My poor boy, you will have to work for me!" and he sadly stroked down the light hair.

"Shall I?" said the little fellow. "May I have some white mice? I'll bring you all the halfpence, pa!"

"Bring me a footstool, first of all. There—at this rate I shall be able to hop about on one leg, and be a more taking spectacle!" said Owen, as dragging himself up by the force of hand and arm, he resettled himself on his couch, as much pleased as amazed at his first personal act of locomotion after seven months, and at the discovery of recovered strength in the sound limbs. Although with the reserve of convalescence, he kept his exploit secret, his spirits visibly rose; and whenever he was left alone, or only with his little boy, he repeated his experiments, launching

himself from one piece of furniture to another; and in spite of the continued deadness of the left side, feeling life, vigour, and hope returning on him.

His morbid shyness of his child had given way to genuine affection, and Owen soon found that he liked to be left to the society of Flibbertigibbet, or as he called him for short, Giblets, exacting in return the title of father, instead of the terrible "pa." Little Owen thought this a preparation for the itinerant white-mouse exhibition, which he was permitted to believe was only delayed till the daily gymnastic exertions should have resulted in the use of crutches, and till he could safely pronounce the names of the future mice, Hannibal and Annabella, and other traps for aspirates! Nay, his father was going to set up an exhibition of his own, as it appeared; for after a vast amount of meditation, he begged for pen and paper, ruler and compasses, drew, wrote, and figured, and finally took to cardboard and penknife, begging the aid of Miss Charlecote, greatly to the distress of the little boy, who had thought the whole affair private and confidential, and looked forward to a secret departure early in the morning, with crutches, mice, and model.

Miss Charlecote did her best with needle and gum, but could not understand; and between her fears of trying Owen's patience and letting him overstrain his brain, was so much distressed that he gave it up; but it preyed on him, till one day Phœbe came in, and he could not help explaining it to her, and claiming her assistance, as he saw her ready comprehension. For two afternoons she came and worked under him; and between card, wire, gum, and watch-spring, such a beauteous little model locomotive engine and train were produced, that Owen archly assured her that "she would be a fortune in herself to a rising engineer," and Honor was struck by the sudden crimson evoked by the compliment.

Little Owen thought their fortune made, and was rather disappointed at the delay, when his father confirming his idea that their livelihood might depend on the model, insisted that it should be carried out in brass and wood, and caused his chair to be frequently wheeled down to the blacksmith's and carpenter's, whose comprehension so much more resembled their lady's than that of Miss Fulmort, and who made such intolerable blunders, that he bestowed on them more

vituperation than, in their opinion, "he had any call to;" and looked in a passion of despair at the numb, nerveless fingers, once his dexterous servants.

Still his spirits were immensely improved, since resolution, hope, and independence had returned. His mental faculties had recovered their force, and with the removal of the disease, the healthfulness and elasticity of his twenty-five years were beginning to compensate for the lost powers of his limbs. As he accomplished more, he grew more enterprising and less disinclined to show off his recovered powers. He first alarmed, then delighted Honor; begged for crutches, and made such good use of them, that Dr. Martin held out fair hopes of progress, though advising a course of rubbing and sea-air at Brighton.

Perhaps Honor had never been happier than during these weeks of improvement, with her boy so completely her own, and more than she had ever known him; his dejection lessening, his health returning, his playfulness brilliant, his filial fondness most engaging. She did not know the fixed resolution that actuated him, and revived the entire man! She did not know what was kept in reserve till confidence in his efficiency should dispose her to listen favourably. Meantime the present was so delightful to her that she trembled and watched lest she should be relapsing into the old idolatry. The test would be whether she would put Owen above or below a clear duty.

The audit of farm accounts before going to Brighton was as unsatisfactory as the last. Though not beyond her own powers of unravelling, they made it clear that Brooks was superannuated. It was piteous to see the old man seated in the study, racking his brains to recollect the transaction with Farmer Hodnet about seed-wheat and working oxen; to explain for what the three extra labourers had been put on, and to discover his own meaning in charging twice over for the repairs of Joe Littledale's cottage; angered and overset by his mistress's gentle cross-examination, and enraged into absolute disrespect when that old object of dislike, Mr. Sandbrook, looked over the books, and muttered suggestions under his moustache.

"Poor old man!" both exclaimed, as he left the room, and Honor sighed deeply over this failure of the last of the supports left her by Humfrey. "I must pension him off," she

said. "I hope it will not hurt his feelings much!" and then she turned away to her old-fashioned bureau, and applied herself to her entries in her farming-books, while Owen sat in his chair, dreamily caressing his beard and revolving the proposition that had long been in his mind.

At last the tall, red book was shut, the pen wiped, the bureau locked, and Honor came back to her place by the table, and resumed her needlework. Still there was silence, till she began: "This settles it! I have been thinking about it ever since you have been so much better. Owen, what should you think of managing the property for me?"

He only answered by a quick interrogative glance.

"You see," she continued, "by the help of Brooks, who knew his master's ways, I have pottered on, to my own wonderment; but Brooks is past work, my downhill-time is coming, high farming has outrun us both, and I know that we are not doing as Humfrey would wish by his inheritance. Now I believe that nothing could be of greater use to me, the people, or the place, than that you should be in charge. We could put some deputy under your control, and contrive for your getting about the fields. I would give you so much a year, so that your boy's education would be your own doing, and we should be so comfortable."

Owen leant back, much moved, smiled and said, "Thanks, dear Honor; you are much too good to us."

"Think about it, and tell me what would be right. Brooks has 100*l.* a year, but you will be worth much more, for you will develop all the resources, you know."

"Best Honor, sweetest Honey," said Owen, hastily, the tears rising to his eyes, "I cannot bear to frustrate such kind plans, nor seem more ungrateful than I have been already. I will not live on you for nothing longer than I can help; but indeed this must not be."

"Not?"

"No. There are many reasons against it. In the first place, I know nothing of farming."

"You would soon learn."

"And vex your dear old spirit with steam-ploughs and haymaking machines."

She smiled, as if from him she could endure even steam.

"Next, such an administration would be highly distasteful here. My overweening airs as a boy have not been for-

gotten, and I have always been looked on as an interloper. Depend on it, poor old Brooks fancies the muddle in his accounts was a suggestion of my malice! Imagine the feelings of Hiltonbury, when I, his supplanter, begin to tighten the reins."

"If it be so, it can be got over," said Honor, a little aghast.

"If it ought to be attempted," said Owen; "but you have not heard my personal grounds for refusing your kindness. All your goodness and kind teaching cannot prevent the undesirableness of letting my child grow up here, in a half-and-half position, engendering domineering airs and unreasonable expectations. You know how in spite of your care and warnings, it worked on me, though I had more advantages than that poor little man. Dear Honor, it is not you, but myself that I blame. You did your utmost to disabuse me, and it is only the belief that my absurd folly is in human nature that makes me thus ungracious."

"But," said Honora, murmuring, as if in shame, "you know you, and therefore your child, must be my especial charge, and always stand first with me."

"First in your affection, dearest Honey," he said, fondly; "I trust I have been in that place these twenty years; I'll never give that up; but if I get as well as I hope to do, I mean to be no charge on any one."

"You cannot return to your profession?"

"My riding and surveying days are over, but there's plenty of work in me still; and I see my way to a connexion that will find me in enough of writing, calculating, and drawing, to keep myself and Owen, and I expect to make something of my invention too, when I am settled in London."

"In London?"

"Yes; the poor old woman in Whittington-street is breaking—pining for her grandchild, I believe, and losing her lodgers, from not being able to make them comfortable; and, without what she had for the child, she cannot keep an effective servant. I think of going to help her out."

"That woman?"

"Well, I do owe her a duty! I robbed her of her own child, and it is cruel to deprive her of mine when she has had all the trouble of his babyhood. Money would not do the

thing, even if I had it. I have brought it on myself, and it is the only atonement in my power; so I mean to occupy two or three of her rooms, work there, and let her have the satisfaction of 'doing for me.' When you are in town, I shall hop into Woolstone-lane. You will give me holidays here, won't you? And whenever you want me, let me be your son! To that you know I reserve my right," and he bent towards her affectionately.

"It is very right—very noble," she was faltering forth. He turned quickly, the tears, ready to fall, springing quite forth.

"Honor! you have not been able to say that since I was a child! Do not spoil it. If this be right, leave it so."

"Only one thing, Owen, are you sufficiently considering your son's good in taking him there out of the way of a good education?"

"A working education is the good one for him," said Owen, "not the being sent at the cost of others—not even covertly at yours, sweet Honey—to an expensive school. He is a working man's son, and must so feel himself. I mean to face my own penalties in him, and if I see him in a grade inferior to what was mine by birth, I shall know that though I brought it on him, it is more for his real good and happiness to be a man of the people, than a poor half-acknowledged gentleman. So much for my Americanisms, Honor!"

"But the dissent—the cant!"

"Not so much cant as real piety obtrusively expressed. Poor old thing! I have no fear but that little Giblets will go my way! he worships me, and I shall not leave his *h's* nor more important matters to her mercy. He is nearly big enough for the day school Mr. Parsons is setting on foot. It is a great consideration that the place is in the St. Matthew's district!"

"Well, Owen, I cannot but see that it may be your rightest course; I hope you may find yourself equal to it," said Honor, struggling with a fresh sense of desertion, though with admiration and esteem returning, such as were well worth the disappointment.

"If not," said Owen, smiling, to hide deeper feelings, "I reserve to you the pleasure of maintaining me, nursing me, or what not! If my carcase be good for nothing, I

suspect the principal parties settled it on that snowy Twelfth-day——”

“But which of them, Owen?”

“Which?” exclaimed Owen, laughing. “The goggle or the squint?”

“For shame, Owen. But I cannot believe that Phœbe would not have told me!”

“Having a sister like Lady Bannerman may hinder confidences to friends.”

“Now, Owen, are you sure?”

“As sure as I was that it was a moonstruck man that slept in my room in Woolstone Lane. I knew that Cynthia’s darts had been as effective as though he had been a son of Niobe!”

“I don’t believe it yet,” cried Honor; “an honourable man—a sensible girl! Such a wild thing!”

“Ah! Queen Elizabeth! Queen Elizabeth! shut up an honourable man and a sensible girl in a cedar parlour every evening for ten days, and then talk of wild things! Have you forgotten what it is to be under twenty-five?”

“I hate Queen Elizabeth,” said Honor, somewhat tartly.

He muttered something of an apology, and resumed his book. She worked on in silence, then looking up said, rather as if rejoicing in a valid objection, “How am I to know that this man is first in the succession? I am not suspecting him of imposition. I believe that, as you say, his mother was a Charlecote, but how do I know that she had not half-a-dozen brothers. There is no obligation on me to leave the place to any one, but this youth ought not to come before others.”

“That is soon answered,” said Owen. “The runaway, your grandfather’s brother, led a wild, Leather-Stocking life, till he was getting on in years, then married, luckily not a squaw, and died at the end of the first year, leaving one daughter, who married Major Randolph, and had this only son.”

“The same relation to me as Humfrey! Impossible! And pray how do you prove this?”

“I got Currie to make notes for me which I can get at in my room,” said Owen. “You can set your lawyer to write to the places, and satisfy yourself without letting him know anything about it.”

"Has he any expectations?"

"I imagine not. I think he has never found out that our relationship is not on the Charlecote side."

"Then it is the more—impertinent, I really must say, in him to pay his addresses to Phœbe, if he have done so."

"I can't agree with you. What was her father but an old distiller, who made his fortune and married an heiress? You sophisticated old Honey, to expect him to be dazzled with her fortune, and look at her from a respectful distance! I thought you believed that 'a man's a man for a' that,' and would esteem the bold spirit of the man of progress."

"Progress, indeed!" said Honor, ironically.

"Listen, Honor," said Owen. "You had better accuse me of this fortune-hunting which offends you. I have only obeyed Fate, and so will you. From the moment I met him, he seemed as one I had known of old. It was Charlecotism, of course; and his signature filled me with presentiment. Nay, though the fire and the swamp have become mere hearsay to me now, I still retain the recollection of the impression throughout my illness that he was to be all that I might have been. His straightforward good sense and manly innocence brought Phœbe before me, and Currie tells me that I had fits of hatred to him as my supplanter, necessary as his care was to me."

Honor just stopped herself from exclaiming, "Never!" and changed it into "My own dear, generous boy!"

"You forget that I thought it was all over with me! The first sensations I distinctly remember were as I lay on my bed at Montreal, one Sunday evening, and saw him sitting in the window, his profile clearly cut against the light, and retracing all those old silhouettes over the mantelshelf. Then I remembered that it had been no sick delusion, but truth and verity that he was the missing Charlecote! And feeling far more like death than life, I was glad that you should have some one to lean on of your own sort; for, Honor, it was his Bible that he was reading!—one that he had saved out of the fire. I thought it was a lucid interval allowed me for the sake of giving you a better son and support than I had been, and looked forward to your being happy with him. As soon as I could get Currie alone, I told him how it stood, and made him take notes of the evidence of his identity, and promise to make you understand

it if I were dead or childish. My best hope was to see him accepted as my expiation; but when I got back, and you wouldn't have him at any price, and I found myself living and lifelike, and had seen her again——"

"Her? Phœbe? My poor boy, you do not mean——"

"I do mean that I was a greater fool than you even took me for," said Owen, with rising colour. "First and last, that poor child's face and honest, plain words had an effect on me which nothing else had. The other affair was a mere fever by comparison, and half against my will!"

"Owen!"

"Yes, it was. When I was with that poor thing, her fervour carried me along; and as to the marriage, it was out of short-sighted dread of the uproar that would have followed if I had not done it. Either she would have drowned herself, or her mother would have prosecuted me for breach of promise, or she would have proclaimed all to Lucy or Mr. Prendergast. I hadn't courage for either; though, Honor, I had nearly told you the day I went to Ireland, when I felt myself done for."

"You were married then?"

"Half-an-hour!" said Owen, with something of a smile, and a deep sigh. "If I had spoken, it would have saved a life! but I could not bear to lose my place with you, nor to see that sweet face turned from me."

"You must have known that it would come out in time, Owen. I never could understand your concealment."

"I hardly can," said Owen, "except that one shuffles off unpleasant subjects! I did fancy I could stave it off till Oxford was over, and I was free of the men there; but that notion might have been a mere excuse to myself for putting off the evil day. I was too much in debt, too, for an open rupture with you; and as to her, I can truly say that my whole shadow of an excuse is that I was too young and selfish to understand what I was inflicting!" He passed his hand over his face, and groaned as he added—"Well, that is over now; and at last I can bear to look at her child!" Then recurring in haste to the former subject—"You were asking about Phœbe! Yes, when I saw the fresh face, ennobled, but as simple as ever, the dog in the manger seemed to me a reasonable beast! Randolph's admiration was a bitter pill. If I were to be nailed here for ever, I could not well spare

the moonbeams from my prison! But that's over now—it was a diseased fancy! I have got my boy now, and can move about; and when I get into harness, and am in the way of seeing people, and maturing my invention, I shall never think of it again."

"Ah! I am afraid that is all I can wish for you!"

"Don't wish it so pitifully, then," said Owen, smiling. "After having had no hope of her for five years, and being the poor object I am, this is no such great blow; and I am come to the mood of benevolence in which I really desire nothing so much as to see them happy."

"I will think about it," said Honor.

And though she was bewildered and disappointed, the interview had, on the whole, made her happier, by restoring the power of admiring as much as she loved. Yet it was hard to be required to sacrifice the interests of one whom she adored, her darling, who might need help so much, to do justice to a comparative stranger; and the more noble and worthy Owen showed himself, the less willing was she to decide on committing herself to his unconscious rival. Still, did the test of idolatry lie here?

She perceived how light-hearted this conversation had rendered Owen, as though he had thrown off a weight that had long been oppressing him. He was overflowing with fun and drollery throughout the journey; and though still needing a good deal of assistance at all changes of carriage, showed positive boyish glee in every feat he could accomplish for himself; and instead of shyly shrinking from the observation and casual help of fellow-travellers, gave ready smiles and thanks.

Exhilarated instead of wearied by the journey, he was full of enjoyment of the lodgings, the window, and the view; a new spring of youthfulness seemed to have come back to him, and his animation and enterprise carried Honor along with him. Assuredly she had never known more thorough pleasant pleasure than in his mirthful, affectionate talk, and in the sight of his daily progress towards recovery; and a still greater happiness was in store for her. On the second day, he begged to accompany her to the week-day service at the neighbouring church, previously sending in a request for the offering of the thanks of Owen Charteris Sandbrook for

preservation in a great danger, and recovery from severe illness.

"Dearest," she said, "were I to recount my causes of thanksgiving, I should not soon have done! This is best of all."

"Not fully *best* yet, is it?" said Owen, looking up to her with eyes like those of his childhood.

"No; but it soon will be."

"Not yet," said Owen; "I must think first; perhaps write or talk to Robert Fulmort. I feel as if I *could* now."

"You long for it?"

"Yes, as I never even *thought* I did," said Owen, with much emotion. "It was strange, Honor, as soon as I came home to the old places, how the old feelings, that had been set aside so long, came back again. I would have given the world to recover them in Canada, but could only envy Randolph, till they woke up again of themselves at the sight of the study, and the big Bible we used to read with you."

"Yet you never spoke."

"No; I *could* not till I had proved to myself that there was no time-serving in them, if you must know the truth!" said Owen, colouring a little. "Besides, having been told my wits would go, how did I know but that they were a symptom of my second childhood?"

"How could any one have been so cruel as to utter such a horrible presage?"

"One overhears and understands more than people imagine, when one has nothing to do but to lie on the broad of one's back and count the flies," said Owen. "So, when I was convinced that my machine was as good as ever, but only would not stand application, I put off the profession, just to be sure what I should think of it when I could *think*."

"Well!" was all Honor could say, gazing through glad tears.

"And now, Honor dear," said he, with a smile, "I don't know how it is. I've tried experiments on my brains. I have gone through half-a-dozen tough calculations. I have read over a Greek play, and made out a problem or two in mechanics, without being the worse for it; but somehow I can't for the life of me hark back to the opinions that had such power over me at Oxford. I can't even recollect the

half of them. It is as if that hemlock spruce had battered them out of my head."

"Even like as a dream when one awaketh."

"Something like it! Why, even *unknownst* to you, sweet Honey, I got at one or two of the books I used to swear by, and somehow I could not see the force of what they advanced. There's a futility about it all, compared with the substance."

"Before, you did not believe with your heart, so your understanding failed to be convinced."

"Partly so," said Owen, thoughtfully. "The fact is, that religion is so much proved to the individual by personal experience and actual sensation, that those who reason from without are on different ground, and the *avocato del diavolo* has often apparently the advantage, because the other party's security is that witness in his own breast which cannot be brought to light."

"Only apparently."

"Really sometimes, with the lookers-on who have accepted the doctrines without feeling them. They have no experience, feel the failure of evidence where the tangible ends."

"Do you mean to say that this was the case with yourself, my dear? I should have thought, if ever child were good——"

"So did I," said Owen, smiling. "I simulated the motions to myself and every one else; and there was a grain of reality, after all; but neither you nor I ever knew how much was mere imitation and personal influence. When I outgrew implicit faith in *you*, I am afraid my higher faith went with it—first through recklessness, then through questioning. After believing more than enough, the transition is easy to doubting what is worthy of credit at all."

"From superstition to rationalism."

"Yes; overdoing articles of faith and observances, while the mind and conscience are young and tender, brings a dangerous reaction when liberty and independent reflection begin."

"But, Owen, I may have overdone observances, yet I did not teach superstitions," said Honor.

"Not consciously," said Owen. "You meant to teach me dogmatically only what you absolutely believed yourself. But you did not know how boundless is a child's readiness to

accept what comes as from a spiritual authority, or you would have drawn the line more strongly between doctrine and opinion, fact and allegory, the true and the edifying."

"In effect, I treated you as the Romish Church began by doing to the populace."

"Exactly so. Like the mediæval populace, I took legend for fact; and like the modern populace, doubted of the whole together, instead of sifting. There is my confession, Honor dear. I know you are happier for hearing it in full; but remember, my errors are not chargeable upon you. If I had ever been true towards myself or you, and acted out what I thought I felt, I should have had the personal experience that would have protected the truth when the pretty superstructure began to pass away."

"What you have undertaken now is an acting out!"

"I hope it is. Therefore it is the first time that I have ever trusted myself to be in earnest. And after all, Honor, though it is a terrible past to look back on, it is so very pleasant to be coming *home*, and to realize mercy and pardon, and hopes of doing better, that I can't feel half the broken-down sorrow that perhaps ought to be mine. It won't stay with me, when I have you before me."

Honor could not be uneasy. She was far too glad at heart for that. The repentance was proving itself true by its fruits, and who could be anxious because the gladness of forgiveness overpowered the pain of contrition?

Her inordinate affection had made her blind and credulous where her favourite was concerned, so as to lead to his seeming ruin, yet when the idol throne was overturned, she had learnt to find sufficiency in her Maker, and to do offices of love without excess. Then after her time of loneliness, the very darling of her heart had been restored, when it was safe for her to have him once more; but so changed that he himself guarded against any recurrence to the old exclusive worship.

CHAPTER XXI.

But the pine woods waved,
And the white streams raved.
They told me in my need,
That softness and feeling
Were not soul-healing;
And so it was decreed—

That the marvellous flowers of woman's duty,
Should grow on the grave of buried beauty.

FABER.

EASTER was at hand, and immediately after it, Mr. Currie was to return to Canada to superintend the formation of the Grand Ottawa and Superior line. He and his assistants were hard at work on the specifications, when a heavy tap and tramp came up the stairs, and Owen Sandbrook stood before them, leaning on his crutch, and was greeted with joyful congratulations on being on his legs again.

"Randolf," he said, hastily, "Miss Charlecote is waiting in the carriage to speak to you. Give me your pen."

"I shall be back in an instant."

"Time will show. Where are you?—'such sleepers to be——' I see. Down with you."

"Yes; never mind hurrying back," said the engineer; "we can get this done without you"—and as the door closed—"and a good deal beside. I hear you have put it in train."

"I have every reason to hope so. Does he guess?"

"Not a whit, as far as I can tell. He has been working hard, and improving himself in his leisure. He would have made a first-rate engineer. It is really hard to be robbed of two such assistants one after the other."

Meanwhile Honor had spent those few moments in trepidation. She had brought herself to it at last! The lurking sense of injustice had persuaded her that it was crossing her conscience to withhold the recognition of her heir, so soon as she had received full evidence of his claims and his worthiness. Though she had the power, she felt that she had not the right to dispose of her property otherwise; and such being the case, it was a duty to make him aware of his prospects, and offer him such a course as should best enable him to take his future place in the county. Still it was a severe struggle. Even with her sense of insufficiency, it was

hard to resign any part of the power that she had so long exercised ; she felt that it was a risk to put her happiness into unknown hands, and perhaps because she had had this young man well-nigh thrust on her, and had heard him so much lauded, she almost felt antagonistic to him as a rival of Owen, and could have been glad if any cause for repudiating him would have arisen. Even the favour that he had met with in Phœbe's eyes was no recommendation. She was still sore at Phœbe's want of confidence in her ; she took Mervyn's view of his presumption, and moreover it was another prize borne off from Owen. Poor dear Honor ; she never made a greater sacrifice to principle than when she sent her William off to Normandy to summon her Edgar Atheling.

She did not imagine that she had it in her to have hated any one so much.

Yet, somehow, when the bright, open face appeared, it had the kindred, familiar air, and the look of eagerness so visibly fell at the sight of her alone in the carriage, that she could not defend herself from a certain amusement and interest, while she graciously desired him to get in, and drive with her round the Park, since she had something to tell him that could not be said in a hurry. Then, as he looked up in inquiry, suspecting, perhaps, that she had heard of his engagement, she rushed at once to the point.

"I believe you know," she said, "that I have no nearer relation than yourself?"

"Not Sandbrook?" he asked, in surprise.

"He is on my mother's side. I speak of my own family. When the Holt came to me, it was as a trust for my lifetime to do my best for it, and to find out to whom afterwards it should belong. I was told that the direct heir was probably in America. Owen Sandbrook has convinced me that you are that person."

"Thank you," began young Randolph, somewhat embarrassed ; "but I hope that this will make little difference to me for many years!"

Did he underrate the Holt, the wretch, or was it civility. She spoke a little severely? "It is not a considerable property, but it gives a certain position, and it should make a difference to you to know what your prospects are."

The colour flushed into his cheeks as he said, "True! It may have a considerable effect in my favour. Thank you for telling me;" and then paused, as though considering whether to volunteer more, but as yet her manner was not encouraging, but had all the dryness of effort.

"I have another reason for speaking," she continued. "It is due to you to warn you that the estate wants looking after. I am unequal to the requirements of modern agriculture, and my faithful old bailiff, who was left to me by my dear cousin, is past his work. Neither the land nor the people are receiving full justice."

"Surely Sandbrook could find a trustworthy steward," returned the young man.

"Nay, had you not better, according to his suggestion, come and live on the estate yourself, and undertake the management, with an allowance in proportion to your position as the heir?"

Her heart beat high with the crisis, and she saw his colour deepen from scarlet to crimson as he said, "My engagement with Mr. Currie——"

"Mr. Currie knows the state of things. Owen Sandbrook has been in communication with him, and he does not expect to take you back with him, unless you prefer the variety and enterprise of your profession to becoming a country gentleman of moderate means." She almost hoped that he would, as she named the rental and the proposed allowance, adding, "The estate must eventually come to you, but it is for you to consider whether it may not be better worth having if, in the interim, it be under your superintendence."

He had had time to grow more familiar with the idea, and spoke readily and frankly. "Indeed, Miss Charlecote, I need no inducement. It is the life I should prefer beyond all others, and I can only hope to do my duty by you, and whatever you may think fit to entrust to me." And, almost against her will, the straightforward honesty of his look brought back to her the countenance where she had always sought for help.

"Then your past misfortunes have not given you a distaste to farming?"

"They did not come from farming, but speculation. I was brought up to farm work, and am more at home in it

than in anything else, so that I hope I could be useful to you."

She was silent. Oh, no, she had not the satisfaction of being displeased. He was ready enough, but not grasping; and she found herself seeing more of the Charlecote in him, and liking him better than she was ready to grant.

"Miss Charlecote," he said, after a few moments' thought, "in the relations you are establishing between us, it is right that you should know the full extent of the benefits you are conferring."

It was true, then? Well, it was better than a New World lady, and Honora contrived to look pleasantly expectant.

"I know it was very presumptuous," he said; "but I could not help making my feelings known to one who is very dear to you—Miss Fulmort."

"Indeed she is," said Honor; though maybe poor Phoebe had of late been a shade less dear to her.

"And with your consent," said he, perhaps a little disconcerted by her want of warmth, "I hope this kindness of yours may abridge the term of waiting to which we looked forward."

"What were you waiting for?"

"Until such time as I could provide a home to which she could take her sister Maria. So you see what you have done for us."

"Maria?"

"Yes. She promised her mother, on her deathbed, that Maria should be her charge, and no one could wish her to lay it aside."

"And the family are aware of the attachment?"

"The brothers are, and have been, kinder than I dared to expect. It was thought better to tell no one else until we could see our way; but you have a right to know now, and I have the more hope that you will find comfort in the arrangement, since I know how warmly and gratefully she feels towards you. I may tell her?" he added, with a good deal of affirmation in his question.

"What would you do if I told you not?" she asked, thawing for the first time out of her set speeches.

"I should feel very guilty and uncomfortable in writing."

"Then come home with me to-morrow, and let us talk it over," she said, acting on a mandate of Owen's which she had strenuously refused to promise to obey. "You may leave your work in Owen's hands. He wants to stay a few days in town, to arrange his plans, and, I do believe, to have the pleasure of independence; but he will come back on Saturday, and we will spend Easter together."

"Miss Charlecote," said Humfrey, suddenly, "I have no right to ask, but I cannot but fear that my having turned up is an injury to Sandbrook."

"I can only tell you that he has been exceedingly anxious for the recognition of your rights."

"I understand now!" exclaimed Humfrey, turning towards her quickly; "he betrayed it when his mind was astray. I am thrusting him out of what would have been his!"

"It cannot be helped," began Honor; "he never expected——"

"I can say nothing against it," said the young man, with much emotion. "It is too generous to be talked of, and these are not matters of choice, but duty; but is it not possible to make some compensation?"

"I have done my best to lay up for those children," said Honor; "but his sister will need her full half, and my City property has other claimants. I own I should be glad to secure that, after me, he should not be entirely dependent upon health which, I fear, will never be sound again."

"I know you would be happier in arranging it yourself, though he has every claim on my gratitude. Could not the estate be charged with an annuity to him?"

"Thank you!" said Honor, warmly. "Such a provision will suit him best. I see that London is his element; indeed, he is so much incapacitated for a country life that the estate would have been a burthen to him, could he have rightly inherited it. He is bent on self-maintenance; and all I wish is, that when I am gone, he should have something to fall back upon."

"I do not think that I can thank you more heartily for any of your benefits than for making me a party to this!" he warmly said. "But there is no thanking you; I must try to do so by deeds."

She was forced to allow that her Atheling was winning upon her !

"Two points I liked," she said to Robert, who spent the evening with her, while Owen was dining with Mr. Currie—"one that he accepted the Holt as a charge, not a gift—the other that he never professed to be marrying for *my* sake."

"Yes, he is as true as Phœbe," said Robert. "Both have real power of truth from never deceiving themselves. They perfectly suit one another."

"High praise from you, Robin. Yet how could you forgive his declaration from so unequal a position?"

"I thought it part of his consistently honest dealing. Had she been a mere child, knowing nothing of the world, and subject to parents, it might have been otherwise; but independent and formed as she is, it was but just to avow his sentiments, and give her the choice of waiting."

"In spite of the obloquy of a poor man paying court to wealth?"

"I fancy he was too single-minded for that idea, and that it was not wealth which he courted was proved by his rejection of Mervyn's offer. Do you know, I think his refusal will do Mervyn a great deal of good. He is very restless to find out the remaining objections to his management, and Randolph will have more influence with him than I ever could, while he considers parsons as a peculiar species."

"If people would only believe the good of not compromising!"

"They must often wait a good while to see the good!"

"But, oh! the fruit is worth waiting for! Robin," she added, after a pause, "you have been in correspondence with my boy."

"Yes," said Robert; "and there, indeed, you may be satisfied. The seed you sowed in the morning is bearing its increase!"

"I sowed! Ah, Robert! what I sowed was a false crop, that had almost caused the good seed to be rooted up together with it!"

"Not altogether," said Robert. "If you made any mistakes that led to a confusion of real and unreal in his mind, still, the real good you did to him is incalculable."

"So he tells me, dear boy! But when I think what he

was as a child, and what he has been as a youth, I cannot but charge it on myself."

"Then think what he is, and will be, I trust, as a man," said Robert. "Even at the worst, the higher, purer standard that had been impressed on him saved him from lower depths; and when 'he came to himself,' it was not as if he had neither known his Father's house, nor the way to it. Oh, Miss Charlecote! you must not come to me to assure you that your training of him was in vain! I, who am always feeling the difference between trying to pull him and poor Mervyn upwards! There may be more excuse for Mervyn, but Owen knows where he is going, and he springs towards it; while Mervyn wonders at himself at every stage, and always fancies the next some delusion of my straitlaced imagination."

"Ah! once I spurned, and afterwards grieved over, the saying that very religious little boys either die or belie their promise."

"There is some truth in it," said Robert. "Precocious piety is so beautiful that it is apt to be fostered so as to make it insensibly imitative and unreal, or depend upon some individual personal influence; and there is a certain reaction at one stage of growth against what has been overworked."

"Then what would you do with such a child as my Owen if it were all to come over again? His aspirations were often so beautiful that I could not but reverence them greatly; and I cannot now believe that they were prompted by aught but innocence and baptismal grace!"

"Looking back," said Robert, "I believe they were genuine, and came from his heart. No; such a devotional turn should be treated with deep reverence and tenderness; but the expression had better be almost repressed, and the test of conduct enforced, though without loading the conscience with details not of general application, and sometimes impracticable under other circumstances."

"It is the practicalness of dear Owen's reformation that makes it so thoroughly satisfactory," said Honora; "though I must say that I dread the experiment. You will look after him, for this week, Robert; I fear he is overdoing himself in his delight at moving about and working again."

"I will see how he gets on. It will be a good essay for the future."

"I cannot think how he is ever to bear living with Mrs. Murrell."

"She is a good deal broken and subdued, and is more easily repressed than one imagines at her first onset. Besides, she is very proud, and rather afraid, of him, and will not molest him much. Indeed, it is a good arrangement for him; he ought to have care above that of the average landlady."

"Will he get it?"

"I trust so. She has the ways of a respectable servant; and her religious principle is real, though we do not much admire its manifestations. She will be honest and careful of his wants, and look after his child, and nurse him tenderly if he require it!"

"As if any one but myself would do that! But it is right, and he will be all the better and happier for accepting his duty to her while she lives, if he can bear it."

"As he says, it is his only expiation."

"Well! I should not wonder if you saw more of me here than hitherto. A born Cockney like me gets inclined to the haunts of men as she grows old, and if your sisters and Charlecote Raymond suffice for the parish, I shall be glad to be out of sight of the improvements *he* will make."

"Not without your consent?"

"I shall have to consent in my conscience to what I hate in my heart."

"I am not the man to argue you away from here," said Robert, eagerly. "If you would take up the Young Woman's Association, it would be the only thing to make up for the loss of Miss Fennimore. Then the St. Wulstan's Asylum wants a lady visitor."

"My father's foundation, whence his successor ousted me, in a general sweep of troublesome ladies," said Honor. "How sore I was, and how things come round."

"We'll find work for you," cried Robert, highly exhilarated. "I should like to make out that we can't do without you."

"Why, Robin, you of all men taking to compliments!"

"It is out of self-interest. Nothing makes so much difference to me as having this house inhabited."

"Indeed," she said, highly gratified; "I thought you wanted nothing but St. Matthew's."

"Nay," said Robert, as a bright colour came over his usually set and impassive countenance. "You do not want me to say what you have always been to me, and how better things have been fostered by your presence, ever since the day you let me out of Hiltonbury Church. I have often since thought it was no vain imagination that you were a good spirit sent to my rescue by Mr. Charlecote."

"Poor Robin," said Honor, her lip quivering; "it was less what I gave than what you gathered up. I barely tolerated you."

"Which served me right," said Robert, "and made me respect you. There are so few to blame me now that I need you all the more. I can hardly cede to Owen the privilege of being your only son."

"You are my autumn-singing Robin," said Honor, too true to let him think that he could stand beside Owen in her affections, but with intense pleasure at such unwonted warmth from one so stern and reserved; it was as if he was investing her with some of the tenderness that the loss of Lucilla had left vacant, and bestowing on her the confidences to which new relations might render Phœbe less open. It was no slight preferment to be Robert Fulmort's motherly friend; and far beyond her as he had soared, she might still be the softening element in his life, as once she had been the ennobling one. If she had formed Robert, or even given one impulse such as to lead to his becoming what he was, the old maid had not lived in vain.

She was not selfish enough to be grieved at Owen's ecstasy in emancipation; and trusting to being near enough to watch over him without being in his way, she could enjoy his overflowing spirits, and detect almost a jocund sound in the thump of his crutch across the hall, as he hurried in, elated with hopes of the success of his invention, eager about the Canadian railway, delighted with the society of his congeners, and pouring out on her all sorts of information that she could not understand. The certainty that her decision was for his happiness ought surely to reconcile her to carrying home his rival in his stead.

Going down by an early train, she resolved, by Robert's advice, to visit Beauchamp at once, and give Mervyn a distinct explanation of her intentions. He was tardy in taking

them in, then exclaimed—"Phœbe's teetotaller! Well, he is a sharp fellow! The luck that some men have!"

"Dear Phœbe," cried Cecily, "I am so thankful that she is spared a long attachment. It was telling on her already!"

"Oh, we should have put a stop to the affair if he had gone out to Canada," roundly asserted Mervyn; "but of course he knew better——"

"Not at all—this was quite a surprise."

Mervyn recollected in time that it was best that Miss Charlecote should so imagine, and reserved for his wife's private ear his conviction that the young fellow had had this hope in his eye when refusing the partnership. Such smartness and foresight commanded his respect as a man of the world, though maybe the women would not understand it. For Phœbe's interest, he must encourage the lady in her excellent intentions.

"It is very handsome in you, Miss Charlecote—very handsome—and I am perfectly unprejudiced in assuring you that you have done the very best thing for yourself. Phœbe is a good girl, and devoted to you already."

"Indeed she is," said Cecily. "She looks up to you so much!"

Somehow Honor did not want Mrs. Fulmort to assure her of this.

"And as to the place," continued Mervyn, "you could not put it into better hands to get your people out of their old world ways. A young man like that, used to farming, and with steam and mechanics at his fingers' ends, will make us all look about us."

"Perhaps," murmured poor Honor, with quailing heart.

"John Raymond and I were looking about the Holt the other day," said Mervyn, "and agreeing how much more could be made of it. Clear away some of those hedgerows—grub up a bit of copse or two—try chemical manures—drain that terrible old marsh beyond the plantation—and have up a good engine-house where you have those old ramshackle buildings at the Home Farm! Why, the place will bring in as much again, and you've hit on the very man to carry it out. He shall try all the experiments before I adopt them."

Honora felt as if she must flee! If she were to hear any more she should be ready to banish young Randolph to Canada, were he ten times her heir. Had she lived to hear Humfrey's

new barn, with the verge boards conceded to her taste, called ramshackle? And she had given her word!

As she left Beauchamp, and looked at her scraggy pine-trees cresting the hill, she felt as though they were her own no longer, and as if she had given them up to an enemy.

She assured herself that nothing could be done without her free will, and considered of the limitations that must be imposed on this frightful reformer, but her heart grew sick at the conviction that either she would have to yield, or be regarded as a mere incubus and obstruction.

With almost a passionate sense of defence of Humfrey's trees, and Humfrey's barns, she undid the gate of the fir plantations—his special favourites. The bright April sun shed clear gleams athwart the russet boles of the trees, candied by their white gum, the shadows were sharply defined, and darkened by the dense silvered green canopy, relieved by fresh light young shoots, culminating in white powdery clusters, or little soft crimson conelets, all redolent of fresh resinous fragrance. The wind whispered like the sound of ocean in the summit of the trees, and a nightingale was singing gloriously in the distance. All recalled Humfrey, and the day, thirty years back, when she had given him such sore pain in those very woods, grasping the shadow instead of the substance, and taking the sunshine out of his life as well as from her own. Never had she felt such a pang in thinking of that day, or in the vain imagination of how it might have been!

"Yet I believe I am doing right," she thought. "Humfrey himself might say that old things must pass away, and the past give place to the present! Let me stand once more under the tree where I gave him that answer! Shall I feel as if he would laugh at me for my shrinking, or approve me for my resolution?"

The tree was a pinaster, of lengthy foliage and ponderous cones, standing in a little shooting-path, leading from the main walk. She turned towards it and stood breathless for a moment.

There stood the familiar figure—youthful, well-knit, firm, with the open, steadfast, kindly face, but with the look of crowned exultant love that she had only once beheld, and that when his feet were already within the waters of the dark river. It was his very voice that exclaimed, "Here she is!" Had her imagination indeed called up Humfrey before her,

or was he come to upbraid her with her surrender of his charge to modern innovation? But the spell was broken, for a woodland nymph in soft grey, edged with green, was instantly beside him, and that calmly-glad face was no reflection of what Honora's had ever been.

"Dear, dear Miss Charlecote," cried Phœbe, springing to her; "we thought you would come home this way, so we came to meet you, and were watching both the paths."

"Thank you, my dear," said Honor. Could that man, who looked so like Humfrey, be thinking how those firs would cut up into sleepers?"

"Do you know," said Phœbe eagerly, "he says this wood is a little likeness of his favourite place in his old home."

"I am afraid," he added, as if apologizing, "I shall always feel most at home in the smell of pine trees."

Mervyn's predictions began to lose their force, and Honor smiled.

"But," said Phœbe, turning to her, "I was longing to beg your pardon. I did not like to have any secret from you."

"Ah! you cunning children," said Honor, finding surface work easiest; "you stole a march upon us all."

"I could not help it," said Phœbe.

They both laughed, and turning to him, she said, "Now, could I? When you spoke to me, I could only tell the truth."

"And I suppose he could not help it," said Honor.

"Of course not, if there was no reason for helping it," he said.

There could be no dwelling on the horrible things that he would perpetrate, while he looked so like the rightful squire, and while both were so fair a sight in their glad gratitude; and she found herself saying, "You will bear our name."

There might be a pang in setting aside that of his father, but he looked at the glowing cheeks and glistening eyes beside him, and said, "Answer for me."

"It is what I should like best of all," Phœbe said, fervently.

"If we can deserve to bear it," he gravely added.

And something in his tone made Honora feel confident that, even if he should set up an engine-house, it would be only if Humfrey would have done so in his place.

"It will be belonging to you all the more," said Phœbe.

"It is one great pleasure that now I shall have a right to you!"

"Yes, Phoebe, the old woman will depend on you, her 'Eastern moon brightening as day's wild lights decline.' But she will trouble you no longer. Finish your walk with Humfrey." It was the first time she had called him by that name.

"No," they said, with one voice, "we were waiting to walk home with you, if we may."

There was something in that walk, in the tender, respectful kindness with which she was treated, in the intelligent interest that Humfrey showed in the estate, his clear-headed truthfulness on the need of change, and his delicate deference in proposing alteration, that set her heart at rest, made her feel that the "goodly heritage" was in safe hands, and that she had a staff in her hands for the first time since that Sunday in harvest.

Before the next harvest, Hiltonbury bells rang out, and the church was crowded with glad faces; but there was none more deeply joyful than that of the lonely woman with silvering hair, who quietly knelt beside the grey slab, lettered H. C., 1840, convinced that the home and people of him who lay there would be in trusty hands, when she should join him in his true inheritance. Her idols set aside, she could with clearer eyes look to that hope, though in no weariness of earth, no haste to depart, but still in full strength, ready to work for man's good and God's glory.

Beside her, as usual, was Owen, leaning on his crutch, but eminent in face and figure as the handsomest man present, and full of animation, betraying neither pain nor regret, but throughout the wedding festivities showing himself the foremost in mirth, and spurring Hiltonbury on to rejoicings that made the villagers almost oblivious of the Forest Show.

The saddest face in church was that of the head bridesmaid. Even though Phoebe was only going as far as the Holt, and Humfrey was much loved, Bertha's heart was sore with undefined regret for her own blotted past, and with the feeling of present loss in the sister whose motherly kindness she had never sufficiently recognised. Bertha knew not how much gentler and more loveable she herself was growing in that very struggle with her own sadness, and in her endeavours

to be sufficient protectress for Maria. The two sisters were to remain at the Underwood with Miss Fennimore, and in her kindness, and in daily intercourse with Phoebe and Cecily, could hardly fail to be happy. Maria was radiantly glad, in all the delight of her bridesmaid's adornments and of the school feasting, and above all in patronizing her pretty little niece, Elizabeth Acton, the baby bridesmaid.

It was as if allegiance to poor Juliana's dislikes had hitherto kept Sir Bevil aloof from Phoebe, and deterred him from manifesting his good will; but the marriage brought him at last to Beauchamp, kind, grave, military, and melancholy as ever, and so much wrapped up in his little girl and his fancied memory of her mother, that Cecily's dislike of long attachments was confirmed by his aspect; and only her sanguine benevolence was bold enough to augur his finding a comforter in her cousin Susan.

Poor man! Lady Bannerman had been tormenting him all the morning with appeals to his own wedding as precedents for Cecily's benefit! Her instructions to Cecily were so overwhelming as to reduce that meek little lady to something approaching to annihilation; and the simple advice given by Bertha, and backed by Phoebe herself, "never to mind," appeared the summit of audacity! Long since having ceased to trouble herself as to the danger of growing too stout, Lady Bannerman, in her brocades and laces, was such a mountain of a woman that she was forced to sail up the aisle of Hiltonbury church alone in her glory, without space for a cavalier beside her!

The bridegroom's friend was his little seven years' old brother, whom he had sent for to place at a good school, and who fraternized with little Owen, a brisk little fellow, his *h's* and his manners alike doing credit to the paternal training, and preparing in due time to become a blue-gowned and yellow-legged Christ's Hospital scholar—a nomination having been already promised through the Fulmort City Influence.

Robert assisted Charlecote Raymond in the rite which joined together the young pair. They were goodly to look upon, in their grave, glad modesty and self-possession, and their youthful strength and fairness—which, to Honor's mind, gave the idea of the beauty of simple strength and completeness, such as befits a well-built vessel at her launch, in all

her quiet force, whether to glide over smooth waters or to battle with the tempest. Peaceful as those two faces were, there was in them spirit and resolution sufficient for either storm or calm, for it was steadfastness based upon the only strong foundation.

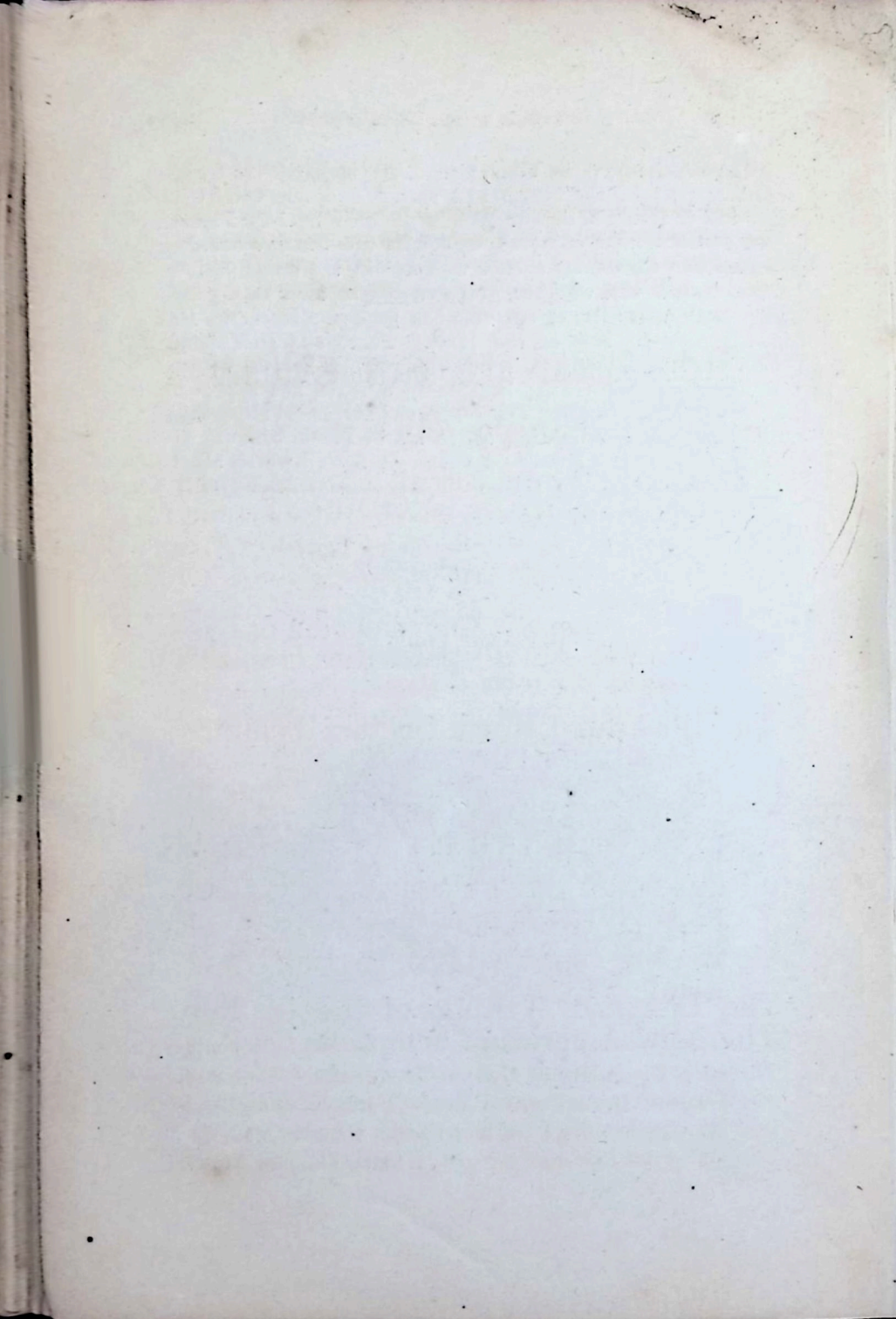
For the last time was signed, and with no unsteady hand, the clear, well made letters of the maiden Phœbe Fulmort, and as, above it, the bride read the words, "Humfrey Charlecote Randolph Charlecote," she looked up to her husband with a sweet half-smile of content and exultation, as though his name were doubly endeared, as recalling her "wise man," the revered guardian of her imagination in her orphaned girlhood.

There are years when the buds of spring are nipped by frost or blight, and when summer blossoms are rent by hail and storm, till autumn sets in without one relenting pause. Then, even at the commencement of decline, comes an interval, a renewal of all that former seasons had proffered of fair and sweet; the very tokens of decay are lovely—the skies are deep calm blue, the sunsets soft gold, and the exquisite serenity and tranquil enjoyment are beyond even the bright, fitful hopes of spring. There is a tinge of melancholy, for this is a farewell, though a lingering farewell; and for that very cause the enduring flowers, the brilliant leaves, the persevering singing birds, are even more prized than those which, in earlier months, come less as present boons than foretastes of the future.

Such an Indian summer may be Honor Charlecote's present life. It is not an old age, for she has still the strength and health of her best days, but it is the later stage of middle life, with experience added to energy. Her girlhood suffered from a great though high-minded mistake, her womanhood was careworn and sorrow-stricken. As first the beloved of her youth, so again the darling of her after-age, was a disappointment; but she was patient, and patience has met with a reward, even in this life. Desolateness taught her to rely no longer on things of earth, but to satisfy her soul with that Love which is individual as well as Infinite; and that lesson learnt, the human affection that once failed her is come back upon her in full measure. She is no longer forlorn; the children whom she bred up, and those whom she led by her influence, alike vie with one another in their love and gratitude.

The old house in Woolstone Lane is her home for the greater part of the winter and spring, and her chief work lies in her father's former parish, directed by Mr. Parsons and Robert, and enjoying especially the Sunday evenings that Owen constantly spends with her in the cedar parlour, in such converse, whether grave or gay, as men rarely seek save with a mother, or one who has been as a mother. But she is still the lady of the Holt. There she still spends autumn and Christmas, resuming her old habits, without feeling them a burthen; bemoaning a little, but approving all the while, Humfrey's moderate and successful alterations, and loving and delighting above all in Phœbe's sweet wisdom in her happy household rule. It is well worth all the past to return to the Holt with the holiday feeling of her girlhood.

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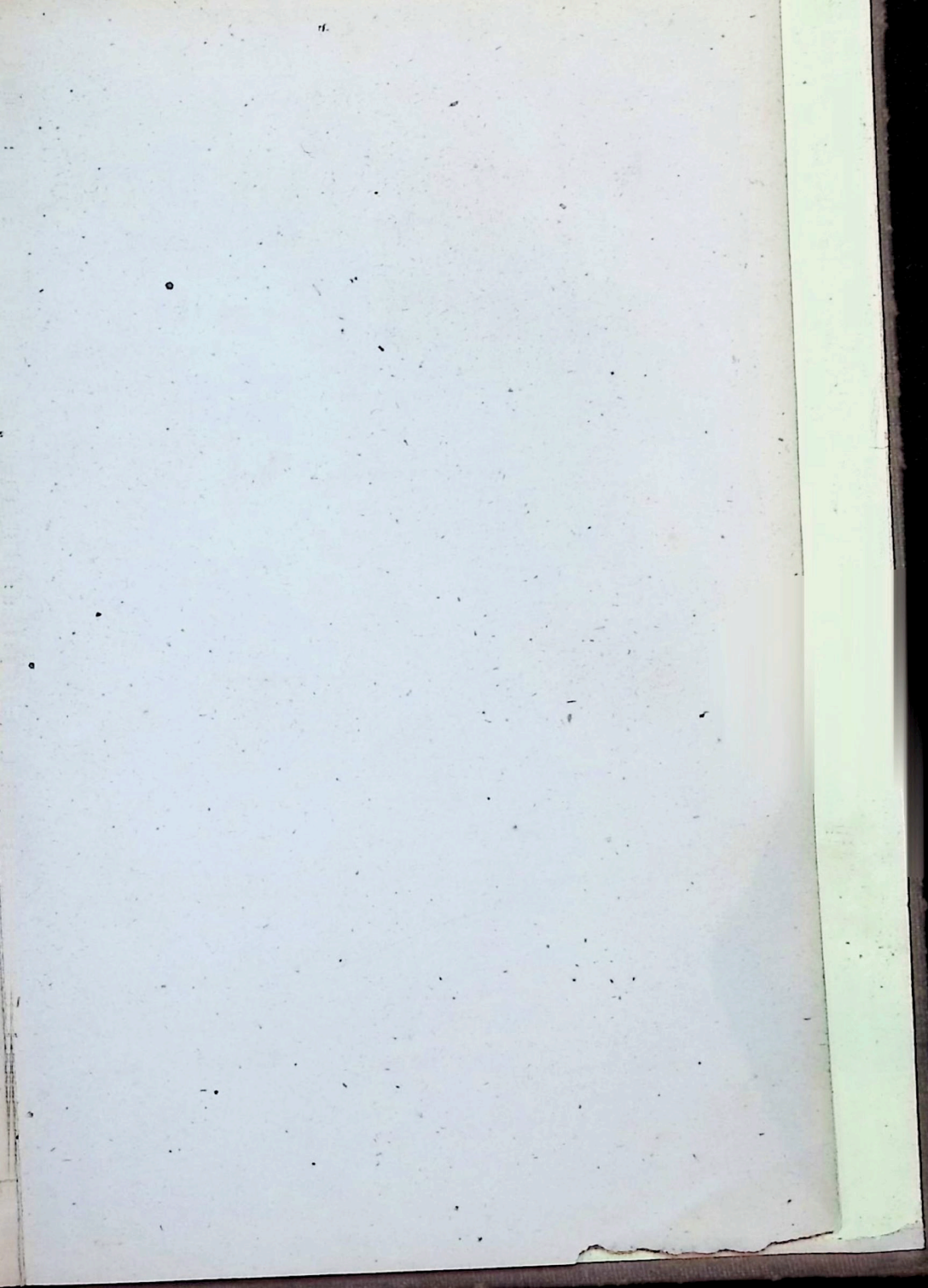
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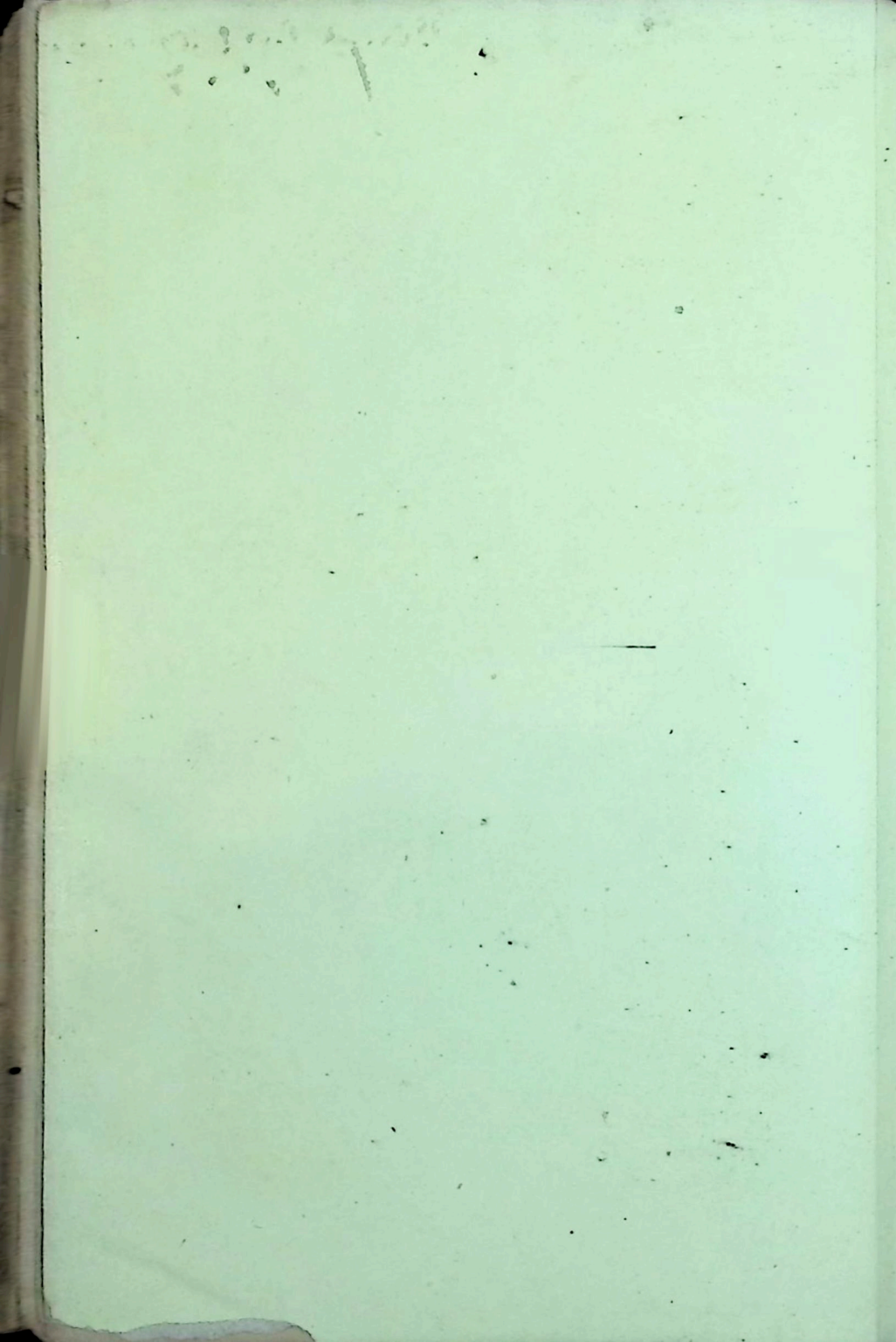
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