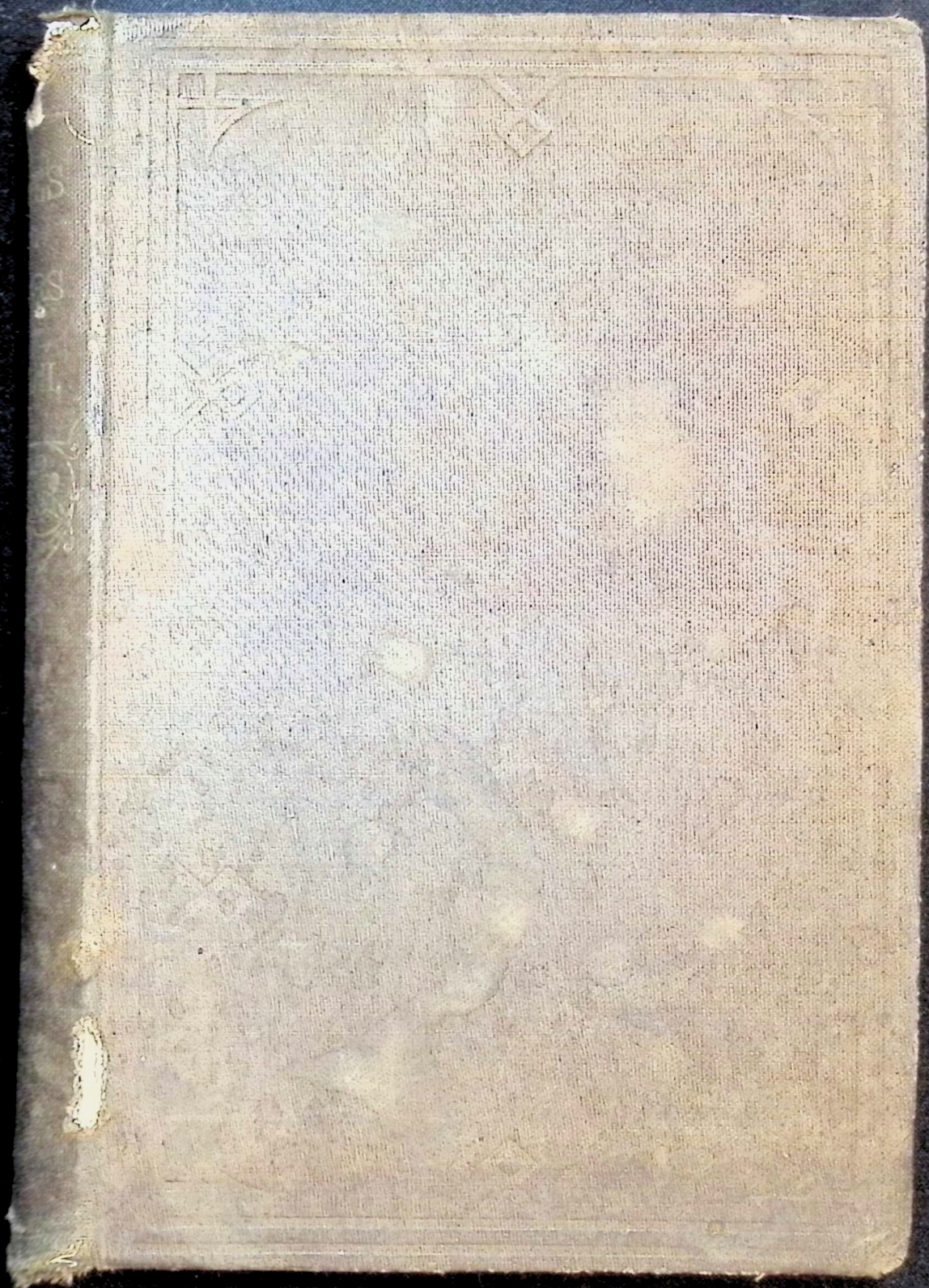
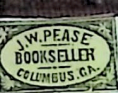






Mary Stuart Fortaine
1889

HOPES AND FEARS;

OR,

SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF A SPINSTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE,"
"HEARTSEASE," ETC.

This is the calm of the autumnal eve.
THE BAPTISTRY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
443 & 445 BROADWAY.
1861.

HOPES AND FEARS:

OR,

SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF A SPINSTER.

CHAPTER I.

An upper and a lower spring
To thee, to all are given ;
They mingle not, apart they gleam,
The joys of earth, of heaven on high ;
God grant thee grace to choose the spring,
Even before the nether spring is dry.

M.

"ONE moment, Phœbe, I'll walk a little way with you ;" and Honor Charlecote, throwing on bonnet and scarf, hurried from the drawing-room where Mrs. Saville was working.

In spite of that youthful run, and girlish escape from "company" to a confidante, the last fortnight had left deep traces. Every incipient furrow had become visible, the cheeks had fallen, the eyes sunk, the features grown prominent, and the auburn curls were streaked with silver threads never previously perceptible to a casual eye. While languid, mechanical talk was passing, Phœbe had been mourning over the change ; but she found her own Miss Charlecote restored in the freer manner, the long sigh, the tender grasp of the arm, as soon as they were in the open air.

"Phœbe," almost in a whisper, "I have a letter from him."

Phœbe pressed her arm, and looked her sympathy.

"Such a nice letter," added Honor. "Poor fellow ! he has suffered so much. Should you like to see it ?"

Owen had not figured to himself what eyes would peruse his letter; but Honor was in too much need of sympathy to withhold the sight from the only person who she could still hope would be touched.

"You see he asks nothing, nothing," she wistfully pleaded. "Only pardon! Not to come home; nor anything."

"Yes; surely, that is real contrition."

"Surely, surely it is: yet they are not satisfied—Mr. Saville and Sir John. They say it is not full confession; but you see he does refer to the rest. He says he has deeply offended in other ways."

"The rest?"

"You do not know? I thought your brother had told you. No? Ah! Robert is his friend. Mr. Saville went and found it out. It was very right of him, I believe. Quite right I should know; but——"

"Dear Miss Charlecote, it has pained you terribly."

"It is what young men do; but I did not expect it of him. Expensive habits, debts, I could have borne, especially with the calls for money his poor wife must have caused; but I don't know how to believe that he gave himself out as my heir, and obtained credit on that account—a bond to be paid on my death!"

Phoebe was too much shocked to answer.

"As soon as Mr. Saville heard of these troubles," continued Honor, "as, indeed, I put all into his hands, he thought it right I should know all. He went to Oxford, found out all that was against poor Owen, and then proceeded to London, and saw the lawyer in whose hands Captain Charteris had left those children's affairs. He was very glad to see Mr. Saville, for he thought Miss Sandbrook's friends ought to know what she was doing. So it came out that Lucilla had been to him, insisting on selling out nearly all her fortune, and paying off with part of it this horrible bond."

"She is paying his debts, rather than let you hear of them."

"And *they* are very angry with him for permitting it; as if he or anybody else had any power to stop Lucy! I know as well as possible that it is she who will not let him confess and make it all open with me. And yet, after this,

what right have I to say I *know*? How little I ever knew that boy! Yes, it is right it should be taken out of my hands—my blindness has done harm enough already; but if I had not bound myself to forbear, I could not help it, when I see the Savilles so much set against him. I do not know that they are more severe in action than—than perhaps they ought to be, but they will not let me pity him.”

“They ought not to dictate to you,” said Phœbe, indignantly.

“Dictate! Oh, no, my dear. If you could only hear his compliments to my discretion, you would know that he is thinking all the time there is no fool like an old fool. No, I don’t complain. I have been wilful, and weak, and blind, and these are the fruits! It is right that others should judge for him, and I deserve that they should come and guard me; though, when I think of such untruth throughout, I don’t feel as if there were danger of my ever being more than sorry for him.”

“It is worse than the marriage,” said Phœbe, thoughtfully.

“There might have been generous risk in that. This was—oh, very nearly treachery! No wonder Lucy tries to hide it! I hope never to say a word to her to show that I am aware of it.”

“She is coming home, then?”

“She must, since she has broken with the Charterises; but she has never written. Has Robert mentioned her?”

“Never; he writes very little. I long to know how it is with him. Now that he has signed his contract, and made all his arrangements, he cannot retract; but—we shall see,” said Honor, with one gleam of playful hope. “If she should come home to me, ready to submit and be gentle, there might be a chance yet. I am sure he is poor Owen’s only real friend. If I could only tell you half my gratitude to him for it! And I will tell you what Mr. Saville has actually consented to my doing—I may give Owen enough to cover his premium and outfit; and I hope that may set him at ease in providing for his child for the present from his own means, as he ought to do.”

“Poor little thing! what will become of it?”

“He and his sister must arrange,” said Honor, hastily, as if silencing a yearning of her own. “I do not need the

Savilles to tell me that I must not take it off their hands. The responsibility may be a blessing to him, and it would be wrong to relieve him of a penalty in the natural course of Providence."

"There, now you have put it into my head to think what a pleasure it would be to you ——"

"I have done enough for my own pleasure, Phœbe. Had you only seen that boy when I had him first from his father, and thought him too much of the angel to live!"

There was a long pause, and Honor at length exclaimed, "I see the chief reason the Savilles came here!"

"Why?"

"To hinder my seeing him before he goes."

"I am sure it would be sad pain to you," cried Phœbe, deprecatingly.

"I don't know. He must not come here; but since I have had this letter, I have longed to go up for one day, see him, and bring Lucy home. Mr. Saville might go with me. You don't favour it, Phœbe? Would Robert?"

"Robert would like to have Owen comforted," said Phœbe, slowly; "but not if it only made it worse pain for you. Dear Miss Charlecote, don't you think, if the worst had been the marriage, you would have tried everything to comfort him, but now that there is this other horrid thing, this presuming on your kindness, it seems to me as if you could not bear to see him."

"When I think of their enmity and his sorrow, I feel drawn thither; but when this deception comes before me, I had rather not look in his face again. If he petted me I should think he was taking me in again. He has Robert, he has his sister, and I have promised to let Mr. Saville judge. I think Mr. Saville would let me go if Robert said I ought."

Phœbe fondled her, and left her relieved by the outpouring. Poor thing! after mistakes which she supposed egregious in proportion to the consequences, and the more so because she knew her own good intentions, and could not understand the details of her errors, it was an absolute rest to delegate her authority, even though her affections revolted against the severity of the judge to whom she had delivered herself and her boy.

One comfort was, that he had been the adviser chosen for her by Humfrey. In obeying him, she put herself into

Humfrey's hands; and remembering the doubtful approval with which her cousin had regarded her connexion with the children, and his warnings against her besetting sin, she felt as if the whole was the continuation of the mistake of her life, her conceited disregard of his broad homely wisdom, and as if the only atonement in her power was to submit patiently to Mr. Saville's advice.

And in truth his measures were not harsh. He did not want to make the young man an outcast, only to prevent advantage being taken of indulgence which he overrated. It was rather his wife who was oppressive in her desire to make Miss Charlecote see things in a true light, and teach her, what she could never learn, to leave off loving and pitying. Even this was perhaps better for her than a solitude in which she might have preyed upon herself, and debated over every step in conscious darkness.

Before her letter was received, Owen had signed his agreement with the engineer, and was preparing to sail in a fortnight. He was disappointed and humiliated that Honor should have been made aware of what he had meant to conceal, but he could still see that he was mercifully dealt with, and was touched by, and thankful for, the warm personal forgiveness, which he had sense enough to feel, even though it brought no relaxation of the punishment.

Lucy was positively glad of the non-fulfilment of the condition that would have taken her back to the Holt; and without seeing the letter, had satisfaction in her resentment at Honor for turning on Owen vindictively, after having spoilt him all his life.

He silenced her summarily, and set out for his preparations. She had already carried out her project of clearing him of his liabilities. Mr. Prendergast had advised her strongly to content herself with the *post obit*, leaving the rest to be gradually liquidated as the means should be obtained; but her wilful determination was beyond reasoning, and by tyrannical coaxing she bent him to her will, and obliged him to do all in which she could not be prominent.

Her own debts were a sorer subject, and she grudged the vain expenses that had left her destitute, without even the power of writing grandly to Horatia to pay off her share of the foreign expenditure. She had, to Mr. Prendergast's great horror, told him of her governess-plan, but had pro-

ceeded no further in the matter than studying the advertisements, until finding that Honor only invited her, and not her nephew, home to the Holt, she proceeded to exhale her feelings by composing a sentence for the *Times*. "As Governess, a Lady ——"

"Mr. Prendergast."

Reddening, and abruptly hasty, the curate entered, and sitting down without a word, applied himself to cutting his throat with an ivory paper-knife. Lucilla began to speak, but at her first word, as though a spell were broken, he exclaimed, "Cilly, are you still thinking of that ridiculous nonsense?"

"Going out as a governess? Look there;" and she held up her writing.

He groaned, gave himself a slice under each ear, and viciously bit the end of the paper-knife.

"You are going to recommend me?" she said, with a coaxing look.

"You know I think it a monstrous thing."

"But you know of a place, and will help me to it!" cried she, clapping her hands. "Dear good Mr. Penty, always a friend in need!"

"Well, if you will have it so. It is not so bad as strangers. There's George's wife come to town to see a governess for little Sarah, and she won't do."

"Shall I do?" asked Lucilla, with a droll shake of her sunny hair. "Yes. I know you would vouch for me as a tutoress to all the Princesses; able to teach the physical sciences, the guitar, and Arabic in three lessons; but if Mrs. Prendergast be the woman I imagine, much she will believe you. Aren't they inordinately clever?"

"Little Sarah is—let me see—quite a child. Her father did teach her, but he has less time in his new parish, and they think she ought to have more accomplishment, polish, and such like."

"And imagine from the specimen before them that I must be an adept at polishing Prendergasts."

"Now, Cilla, do be serious. Tell me if all this meant nothing, and I shall be very glad. If you were in earnest, I could not be so well satisfied to see you anywhere else. You would find Mrs. Prendergast quite a mother to you."

"Only one girl! I wanted a lot of riotous boys, but

beggars must not be choosers. This is just right—people out of the way of those who knew me in my palmy days, yet not absolute strangers.”

“That was what induced me—they are so much interested about you, Cilla.”

“And you have made a fine heroic story. I should not wonder if all broke down when the parties met. When am I to be trotted out for inspection?”

“Why, I told her if I found you really intended it, and had time, I would ask you to drive to her with me this morning, and then no one need know anything about it,” he said, almost with tears in his eyes.

“That’s right,” cried Lucilla. “It will be settled before Owen turns up. I’ll get ready this instant. I say,” she added at the door, “housemaids always come to be hired minus crinoline and flowers, is it the same with governesses?”

“Cilla, how can you?” said her friend, excessively distressed at the inferior position, but his depression only inspired her with a reactionary spirit of mischief.

“Crape is inoffensive, but my hair! What shall I do with it? Does Mrs. Prendergast hold the prejudice against pretty governesses?”

“She would take Venus herself if she talked no nonsense; but I don’t believe you are in earnest,” growled the curate, angry at last.

“That is encouragement!” cried Lucilla, flying off laughing that she might hide from herself her own nervousness and dismay at this sudden step into the hard verity of self-dependence.

She could not stop to consider what to say or do, her refuge was always in the impromptu, and she was far more bent on forcing Mr. Prendergast to smile, and distracting herself from her one aching desire that the Irish journey had never been, than on forming any plan of action. In walking to the cab-stand they met Robert, and exchanged greetings; a sick faintness came over her, but she talked it down, and her laugh sounded in his ears when they had passed on.

Yet when the lodgings were reached, the sensation recurred, her breath came short, and she could hardly conceal her trembling. No one was in the room but a lady who would have had far to seek for a governess less beautiful

than herself. Insignificance was the first idea she inspired, motherliness the second, the third that she was a perfect lady, and a sensible woman. After shaking Lucilla kindly by the hand, and seating her on the sofa, she turned to her cousin, saying, "Sarah and her papa are at the National Gallery, I wish you would look for them, or they will never be in time for luncheon."

"Luncheon is not for an hour and a half."

"But it is twenty minutes' walk, and they will forget food and everything else unless you keep them in order."

"I'll go presently;" but he did not move, only looking piteous while Mrs. Prendergast began talking to Lucilla about the pictures, until she, recovering, detected the state of affairs, and exclaimed, with her ready grace and abruptness, "Now, Mr. Prendergast, don't you see how much you are in the way?"

"A plain truth, Peter," said his cousin, laughing.

Lucy stepped forward to him, saying, affectionately, "Please go; you can't help me, and I am sure you may trust me with Mrs. Prendergast," and she stretched out a hand to the lady with an irresistible child-like gesture of confidence.

"Don't you think you may, Peter?" asked Mrs. Prendergast, holding the hand; "you shall find her here at luncheon. I won't do anything to her."

The good curate groaned himself off, and Lucy felt so much restored that she had almost forgotten that it was not an ordinary call. Indeed she had never yet heard a woman's voice that thus attracted and softened her. Mrs. Prendergast needed not to be jealous of Venus, while she had such tenderness in her manner, such winning force in her tone.

"That was well done," she said. "Talking would have been impossible, while he sat looking on!"

"I am afraid he has given far too good an account of me," said Lucy, in a low and trembling voice.

"His account comes from one who has known you from babyhood."

"And spoilt me from babyhood!"

"Yes, Sarah knows what Cousin Peter can do in that line. He had little that was new to tell us, and what he had was of a kind——" She broke off, choked by tears.

What she had heard of the girl's self-devotion touched her trebly at the sight of one so small, young, and soft-looking. And if she had ever been dubious of "Peter's pet," she was completely fascinated.

"I must not be taken on his word," said Cilla, smiling.

"No, that would not be right by any of us."

"Then pray be very hard with me—as a thorough stranger."

"But I am so inexperienced. I have only had one interview with a governess."

"And what did she do?" asked Lucilla, as both recovered from a laugh.

"She gave so voluble an account of her *acquirements* and *requirements*, that I was quite alarmed."

"I'm sure I can't do that. I don't know what I can do."

A pause, broken by Lucy, who began to feel that she had more of the cool readiness of the great world. "How old is your daughter?"

"Nearly fifteen. While we had our small parish in Sussex we taught her ourselves, and her father brought her on in Latin and Euclid. Do you know anything of those, Miss Sandbrook? not that it signifies."

"Miss Charlecote used to teach me with my brother. I have forgotten, but I could soon get them up again."

"They will hardly be wanted, but Sarah will respect you for them. Now, at Southminster, our time is so taken up that poor Sarah gets neglected, and it is very trying to an eager, diligent girl to prepare lessons, and have them continually put off, so we thought of indulging her with a governess, to bring her on in some of the modern languages and accomplishments that have grown rusty with us."

"I think I could do that," said Lucilla. "I believe I know what other people do, and my languages are fresh from the Continent. Ought I to give you a specimen of my pronunciation?"

"Pray don't," laughed Mrs. Prendergast. "You know better than I what is right, and must prepare to be horrified by the sounds you will hear."

"I ought to have brought my sketches. I had two years of lessons from S——."

"Sarah is burning for teaching in that line. Music?"

Dr. Prendergast likes the grand old pieces, and hardly cares for modern ones."

"I hardly played anything newer than Mozart at Hilton-bury. Miss Charlecote taught me very well, I believe, and I had lessons from the organist from Elverslope, besides a good deal in the fashionable line since. I have kept that up. One wants it."

There was another shy pause, and Lucilla growing more scrupulous and more confidential, volunteered,—“Mine has been an idle life since I came out. I am three-and-twenty now, and have been diligently forgetting for the last six years. Did you know that I had been a fast young lady?”

But things had come to such a pass, that, say what she would, all passed for ingenious candour and humility, and the answer was,—

“I know that you have led a very trying life, but to have passed through such unscathed, is no disadvantage.”

“If I have,” said Lucy, sadly.

Mrs. Prendergast, who had learned all the facts of Lucilla's history through the Wrapworth medium, knew only the heroic side of her character, and admired her the more for her diffidence. So when terms were spoken of, the only fear on the one side was, that such a treasure must be beyond her means; on the other, lest what she needed for her nephew's sake might deprive her of such a home. However, seventy pounds a year proved to be in the thoughts of both, and the preliminaries ended with, “I hope you will find my little Sarah a pleasant companion. She is a good girl, and intelligent, but you must be prepared for a few angles.”

“I like angles. I don't care for commonplace people.”

“I am afraid you will find many such at Southminster. We cannot promise you the society you have been used to.”

“I am tired of society. I have had six years of it!” and she sighed.

“You must fix your own time,” said Mrs. Prendergast; “and indeed we will try to make you at home.”

“My brother will be gone in a fortnight,” said Lucilla. “After that I should like to come straight to you.”

Her tone and look made those two last words not merely *chez vous*, but to *you*, individually—to you, kind one, who will comfort me after the cruel parting. Mrs. Prendergast put her arm around her and kissed her.

"Don't," said Lucilla, with the sweetest April face. "I can't bear being made foolish."

Nevertheless Mrs. Prendergast showed such warm interest in all her concerns, that she felt only that she had acquired a dear friend by the time the others came in, father and daughter complaining, the one gaily, the other dolefully, that Cousin Peter had so hunted them that they could look at nothing in peace. Indeed he was in such a state of restless misery, that Mrs. Prendergast, in compassion to him, sent her daughter to dress, called her husband away, and left the place clear for him to say, in a tone of the deepest commiseration, "Well, my poor child?"

"O, Mr. Pendy, you have found me a true home. Be the others what they may, there must be rest in hearing *her* voice!"

"It is settled, then?"

"Yes. I only hope you have not taken them in. I did my best to let her know the worst of me, but it would make no impression. Seventy pounds a year. I hope that is not wicked."

"O, Cilla, what would your father feel?"

"Come, we won't fight that over again. I thought I had convinced you of the dignity of labour, and I do feel as if at last I had lit on some one whom I could allow to do me good."

She could not console him; he grieved over her changed circumstances with far more regret than she felt, and though glad for her sake that she should be with those whom he could trust, yet his connexion with her employers seemed to him undutiful towards his late rector. All that she saw of them reassured her. The family manners were full of well-bred good-humour, full of fun, with high intelligence, much real refinement, and no pretension. The father was the most polished, with the scholarly courtesy of the dignified clergyman; the mother was the most simple and caressing; the daughter somewhat uncouth, readily betraying both her feelings and her cleverness and drollery in the style of the old friend whom Lucilla was amused to see treated as a youth and almost a contemporary of her pupil. What chiefly diverted her was the grotesque aspect of Dr. Prendergast and his daughter. Both were on a large scale, with immense mouths, noses turned up to display wide nostrils,

great grey eyes, angularly set, yellow hair and eyebrows, red complexions, and big bones. The Doctor had the advantage of having outgrown the bloom of his ugliness; his forehead was bald and dignified, his locks softened by grizzling, and his fine expression and clerical figure would have carried off all the quaintness of his features if they had not been so comically caricatured in his daughter; yet she looked so full of life and character that Lucilla was attracted, and sure of getting on well with her. Moreover, the little elf felt the impression she was creating in this land of Brobdignag. Sarah was looking at her as a terra-cotta pitcher might regard a cup of egg-shell china, and Lucy had never been lovelier. Her mourning enhanced the purity of her white skin, and marked her slender, faultless shape, her flaxen hair hung in careless wreaths of ringlet and braid; her countenance, if pale, had greater sweetness in its dejection, now and then brightened by gleams of her courageous spirit. Sarah gazed with untiring wonder, pardoning Cousin Peter for disturbing the contemplation of Domenichino's art, since here was a witness that heroines of romance were no mere myths, but that beings of ivory and rose, sapphire eyes and golden hair, might actually walk the earth.

The Doctor was pleasant and friendly, and after luncheon the whole party started together to "do" St. Paul's, whence Mr. Prendergast undertook to take Cilla home, but in no haste to return to the lonely house. She joined in the lionizing, and made a great impression by her familiarity with London, old and new. Little store as she had set by Honor's ecclesiology and antiquarianism, she had not failed to imbibe a tincture sufficient to go a long way by the help of ready wit, and she enchanted the Doctor by her odd bits of information on the localities, and by guiding him to out-of-the-way curiosities. She even carried the party to Woolstone Lane, displayed the Queen of Sheba, the cedar carving, the merchant's mark, and had lifted out Stow's *Survey*, where Sarah was delighted with Ranelagh, when the door opened, and Owen stood, surprised and blank. Poor fellow, the voices had filled him with hope that he should find Honor there. The visitors, startled at thus intruding on his trouble, and knowing him to be in profound disgrace, would have gone, but he, understanding them to be Mr. Prendergast's friends, and glad of variety, was eagerly

courteous and hospitable, detaining them by displaying fresh curiosities, and talking with so much knowledge and brilliance, that they were too well entertained to be in haste. Lucilla, accepting Mrs. Prendergast as a friend, was rejoiced that she should have such demonstration that her brother was a thorough gentleman; and in truth Owen did and said everything so well that no one could fail to be pleased, and only as an after-thought could come the perception that his ease hardly befitted the circumstances, and that he comported himself more like the master of the house than as a protégé under a cloud.

No sooner had he handed them into their vehicle than he sank into a chair, and burst into one of the prolonged, vehement fits of laughter that are the reaction of early youth unwontedly depressed. Never had he seen such visages! They ought at once to be sketched—would be worth any money to Currie the architect, for gurgoyles.

"For shame," said Lucilla, glad, however, once more to hear the merry peal; "for shame, to laugh at my master!"

"I'm not laughing at old Pendy, his orifice is a mere crevice comparatively. The charm is in seeing it classified—the recent sloth accounted for by the ancient megatherium."

"The megatherium is my master. Yes, I'm governess to Glumdalclitch!"

"You've done it?"

"Yes, I have. Seventy pounds a year."

He made a gesture of angry despair, crying, "Worse luck than I thought."

"Better luck than I did."

"Old Pendy thrusting in his oar! I'd have put a stop to your absurdity at once, if I had not been sure no one would be deluded enough to engage you, and that you would be tired of looking out, and glad to go back to your proper place at the Holt before I sailed."

"My proper place is where I can be independent."

"Faugh! If I had known it, they should never have seen the Roman coins! There! it is a lesson that nothing is too chimerical to be worth opposing!"

"Your opposition would have made no difference."

He looked at her silently, but with a half smile in lip

and eye that showed her that the moment was coming when the man's will might be stronger than the woman's.

Indeed, he was so thoroughly displeased and annoyed that she durst not discuss the subject with him, lest she should rouse him to take some strong authoritative measures against it. He had always trusted to the improbability of her meeting with a situation before his departure, when, between entreaty and command, he had reckoned on inducing her to go home; and this engagement came as a fresh blow, making him realize what he had brought on those nearest and dearest to him. Even praise of Mrs. Prendergast provoked him, as if implying Lucilla's preference for her above the tried friend of their childhood; he was in his lowest spirits, hardly speaking to his sister all dinner-time, and hurried off afterwards to pour out his vexation to Robert Fulmort. Poor Robert! what an infliction! To hear of such a step, and be unable to interfere; to admire, yet not approve; to dread the consequences, and perceive so much alloy as to dull the glitter of the gold, as well as to believe his own stern precipitation as much the cause as Owen's errors; yet, all the time to be the friend and comforter to the wounded spirit of the brother! It was a severe task; and when Owen left him, he felt spent and wearied as by bodily exertion, as he hid his face in prayer for one for whom he could do no more than pray.

Feelings softened during the fortnight that the brother and sister spent together. Childish as Owen had undergone the relations and troubles of more advanced life, pettishly as he had striven against feeling and responsibility, the storm had taken effect. Hard as he had struggled to remain a boy, manhood had suddenly grown on him; and probably his exclusion from Hiltonbury did more to stamp the impression of his guilt than did its actual effects. He was eager for his new life, and pleased with his employer, promising himself all success, and full of enterprise. But his banishment from home and from Honor clouded everything; and, as the time drew nearer, his efforts to forget and be reckless gradually ceased. Far from shunning Lucilla, as at first, he was unwilling to lose sight of her, and they went about together wherever his preparations called him, so that she could hardly make time for stitching, marking, and arranging his purchases.

One good sign was, that, though hitherto fastidiously expensive in dress and appointments, he now grudged himself all that was not absolutely necessary, in the endeavour to leave as large a sum as possible with Mrs. Murrell. Even in the tempting article of mathematical instruments he was provident, though the polished brass, shining steel, and pure ivory, in their perfection of exactitude, were as alluring to him as ever gem or plume had been to his sister. That busy fortnight of chasing after the "reasonable and good," speeding about till they were footsore, discussing, purchasing, packing, and contriving, united the brother and sister more than all their previous lives.

It was over but too soon. The last evening was come; the hall was full of tin cases and leathern portmanteaus, marked O. C. S., and of piles of black boxes large enough to contain the little lady whose name they bore. Southminster lay in the Trent Valley, so the travellers would start together, and Lucilla would be dropped on the way. In the cedar parlour, Owen's black knapsack lay open on the floor, and Lucilla was doing the last office in her power for him, and that a sad one, furnishing the Russia-leather housewife with the needles, silk, thread, and worsted for his own mendings when he should be beyond the reach of the woman-kind who cared for him.

He sat resting his head on his hand, watching her in silence, till she was concluding her work. Then he said, "Give me a bit of silk," turned his back on her, and stood up, doing something by the light of the lamp. She was kneeling over the knapsack, and did not see what he was about, till she found his hand on her head, and heard the scissors close, when she perceived that he had cut off one of her pale, bright ringlets, and saw his pocket-book open, and within it a thick, jet-black tress, and one scanty, downy tuft of baby hair. She made no remark; but the tears came dropping, as she packed; and, with a sudden impulse to give him the thing above all others precious to her, she pulled from her bosom a locket, hung from a slender gold chain, and held it to him—

"Owen, will you have this?"

"Whose? My father's?"

"And my mother's. He gave it to me when he went to Nice."

Owen took it, and looked at it thoughtfully.

"No, Lucy," he said; "I would not take it from you on any account, You have always been his faithful child."

"Mind you tell me if any one remembers him in Canada," said Lucilla, between relief and disappointment, restoring her treasure to the place it had never left before. "You will find out whether he is recollected at his mission."

"Certainly. But I do not expect it. The place is a great town now. I say, Lucy, if you had one bit of poor Honor's hair!"

"No; you will never forgive me. I had some once, made up in a little cross, with gold ends; but one day, when she would not let me go to Castle Blanch, I shied it into the river, in a rage."

She was touched at his being so spiritless as not even to say that she ought to have been thrown in after it.

"I wonder," she said, by way of enlivening him, "whether you will fall in with the auburn-haired Charlecote."

"Whereas Canada is a bigger place than England, the disaster may be averted, I hope. A colonial heir-at-law might be a monstrous bore. Moreover, it would cancel all that I can't but hope for that child."

"You might hope better things for him than expectations."

"He shall never have any! But it might come without. Why, Lucy, a few years in that country, and I shall be able to give him the best of educations and release you from drudgery; and when independent, we could go back to the Holt on terms to suit even your proud stomach, and might make the dear old thing happy in her old age."

"If that Holt were but out of your head."

"If I knew it willed to the County Hospital, shouldn't I wish as much to be with her as before? I mean to bring up my son as a gentleman, with no one's help! But you see, Lucy, it is impossible not to wish for one's child what one has failed in oneself—to wish him to be a better edition."

"I suppose not."

"For these first few years the old woman will do well enough for him, poor child. Robert has promised to look in on him."

"And Mrs. Murrell is to write to me once a month. I shall make a point of seeing him at least twice a year."

"Thank you; and by the time he is of any size I shall have a salary. I may come back, and we would keep house together, or you might bring him out to me."

"That will be the hope of my life."

"I'll not be deluded into reckoning on young ladies. You will be disposed of long before!"

"Don't, Owen! No, never."

"Never?"

"Never."

"I always wanted to know," continued Owen, "what became of Calthorp."

"I left him behind at Spitzwasserfitzung, with a message that ends it for ever."

"I am afraid that defection is to be laid to my door, like all the rest."

"If so, I am heartily obliged to you for it! The shock was welcome that brought me home. A governess? Oh! I had rather be a scullery-maid, than go on as I was doing there!"

"Then you did not care for him?"

"Never! but he pestered me, Rashe pestered me; nobody cared for me—I—I—" and she sobbed a long, tearless sob.

"Ha?" said Owen, gravely and kindly, "then there was something in the Fulmort affair after all. Lucy, I am going away; let me hear it for once. If I ever come back, I will not be so heedless of you as I have been. If he have been using you ill!"

"I used him ill," said Lucy, in an inward voice.

"Nothing more likely!" muttered Owen, in soliloquy. "But how is it, Cilla; can't you make him forgive?"

"He does, but as Honor forgives you. You know it was no engagement. I worked him up to desperation last year. Through Phœbe, I was warned that he would not stand my going to Ireland. I answered that it was no concern of his; I defied him to be able to break with me. They bothered me so that I was forced to go to spite them. He thought—I can't wonder at it—that I was irreclaimable; he was staying here, was worked on by the sight of this horrible district, and, between pique and goodness run mad, has devoted self and fortune. He gave me to understand that he has made away with every farthing. I don't know if he would wish it undone."

She spoke into the knapsack, jerking out brief sentences.

"He didn't tell you he had taken a vow of celibacy?"

"I should not think it worth while."

"Then it is all right!" exclaimed Owen, joyously. "Do you think old Fulmort, wallowing in gold, could see a son of his living with his curates, as in the old Sussex rhyme?—

There were three ghostisses
Sitting on three postisses,
Eating of three crustisses.

No, depend on it, the first alarm of Robert becoming a ghost, there will be a famous good fat living bought for him; and then——"

"No, I shall have been a governess. They won't consent."

"Pshaw! What are the Fulmorts? He would honour you the more! No, Lucy," and he drew her up from the floor, and put his arm round her, "girls who stick to one as you have done to me are worth something, and so is Robert Fulmort. You don't know what he has been to me ever since he came to fetch me. I didn't believe it was in his cloth or his nature to be so forbearing. No worrying with preachments; not a bit of "What a good boy am I;" always doing the very thing that was comfortable and considerate, and making the best of it at Hiltonbury. I didn't know how he could be capable of it, but now I see, it was for your sake. Cheer up, Lucy, you will find it right yet."

Lucilla had no conviction that he was right; but she was willing to believe for the time, and was glad to lay her head on his shoulder and feel, while she could, that she had something entirely her own. Too soon it would be over. Lengthen the evening as they would, morning must come at last.

It came; the hurried breakfast, pale looks, and trivial words. Robert arrived to watch them off; Mrs. Murrell brought the child. Owen took him in his arms, and called her to the study. Robert sat still, and said,—

"I will do what I can. I think, in case I had to write about the child, you had better leave me your address."

Lucilla wrote it on a card. The tone quashed all hope.

"We trust to you," she said.

"Mr. Currie has promised to let me hear of Owen," said Robert; but no more passed. Owen came back hasty and flushed, wanting to be gone and have it over. The cabs were called, and he was piling them with luggage; Robert was glad to be actively helpful. All were in the hall; Owen turned back for one more solitary gaze round the familiar room; Robert shook Lucilla's hand.

"O bid me good speed," broke from her; "or I cannot bear it."

"God be with you! God bless you!" he said.

No more! He had not approved, he had not blamed. He would interfere no more in her fate. She seated herself, and drew down her black veil, a chill creeping over her.

"Thank you, Robert, for all," was Owen's farewell. "If you will say anything to Phœbe from me, tell her she is all that is left to comfort poor Honor."

"Good-by," was the only answer.

Owen lingered still. "You'll write? Tell me of her; Honor, I mean, and the child."

"Yes, yes, certainly."

Unable to find another pretext for delay, Owen again wrung Robert's hand, and placed himself by his sister, keeping his head out as long as he could see Robert standing with crossed arms on the doorstep.

When, the same afternoon, Mr. Parsons came home, he blamed himself for having yielded to his youngest curate the brunt of the summer work. Never had he seen a man not unwell look so much jaded and depressed.

Nearly at the same time, Lucilla and her boxes were on the platform of the Southminster station, Owen's eyes straining after her as the train rushed on, and she feeling positive pain and anger at the sympathy of Dr. Prendergast's kind voice, as though it would have been a relief to her tumultuous misery to have bitten him, like Uncle Kit long ago. She clenched her hand tight, when with old-world courtesy he made her take his arm, and with true consideration, conducted her down the hill, through the quieter streets, to the calm, shady precincts of the old cathedral. He had both a stall and a large town living; and his abode was the grey freestone prebendal house, whose two deep windows under their peaked gables gave it rather a cat-like phys-

iogonomy. Mrs. Prendergast and Sarah were waiting in the hall, each with a kiss of welcome, and the former took the pale girl at once upstairs, to a room full of subdued sunshine, looking out on a green lawn sloping down to the river. At that sight and sound, Lucy's face lightened. "Ah! I know I shall feel at home here. I hear the water's voice!"

But she had brought with her a heavy cold, kept in abeyance by a strong will during the days of activity, and ready to have its way at once, when she was beaten down by fatigue, fasting, and disappointment. She dressed and came down, but could neither eat nor talk, and in her pride was glad to attribute all to the cold, though protesting with over-eagerness that such indisposition was rare with her.

She would not have suffered such nursing from Honor Charlecote as was bestowed upon her. The last month had made tenderness valuable, and without knowing all, kind Mrs. Prendergast could well believe that there might be more than even was avowed to weigh down the young head, and cause the fingers, when unobserved, to lock together in suppressed agony.

While Sarah only knew that her heroine-looking governess was laid up with severe influenza, her mother more than guessed at the kind of battle wrestled out in solitude, and was sure that more than brother, more than friend, had left her to that lonely suffering, which was being for the first time realized. But no confidence was given; when Lucilla spoke, it was only of Owen, and Mrs. Prendergast returned kindness and forbearance.

It was soothing to be dreamily in that summer room, the friendly river murmuring, the shadows of the trees lazily dancing on the wall, the cathedral bells chiming, or an occasional deep note of the organ stealing in through the open window. It suited well with the languor of sensation that succeeded to so much vehemence and excitement. It was not thought, it was not resignation, but a species of repose and calm, as if all interest, all feeling were over for her, and as if it mattered little what might further befall her, as long as she could be quiet, and get along from one day to another. If it had been repentance, a letter would have been written very unlike the cold announcement of her situation, the scanty notices of her brother, with which she wrung the heart that yearned after her at Hiltonbury!

But sorry she was, for one part at least, of her conduct, and she believed herself reduced to that meek and correct state that she had always declared should succeed her days of gaiety, when, recovering from her indisposition, she came down subdued in tone, and anxious to fulfil what she had undertaken.

"Ah! if Robert could see me now, he would believe in me," thought she to herself, as she daily went to the cathedral. She took classes at school, helped to train the St. Jude's choir, played Handel for Dr. Prendergast, and felt absolutely without heart or inclination to show that self-satisfied young curate that a governess was not a subject for such distant perplexed courtesy. Sad at heart, and glad to distract her mind by what was new yet innocent, she took up the duties of her vocation zealously; and quickly found that all her zeal was needed. Her pupil was a girl of considerable abilities—intellectual, thoughtful, and well taught; and she herself had been always so unwilling a learner, so willing a forgetter, that she needed all the advantages of her grown-up mind and rapidity of perception to keep her sufficiently beforehand with Sarah, whenever subjects went deep or far. If she pronounced like a native, and knew what was idiomatic, Sarah, with her clumsy pronunciation, had further insight into grammar, and asked perplexing questions; if she played admirably and with facility, Sarah could puzzle her with the science of music; if her drawing were ever so effective and graceful, Sarah's less sightly productions had correct details that put hers to shame, and, for mere honesty's sake, and to keep up her dignity, she was obliged to work hard, and recur to the good grounding that against her will she had received at Hiltonbury. "Had her education been as superficial as that of her cousins," she wrote to her brother, "Sarah would have put her to shame long ago; indeed nobody but the Fennimore could be thoroughly up to that girl."

Perhaps all her endeavours would not have impressed Sarah, had not the damsel been thoroughly imposed on by her own enthusiasm for Miss Sandbrook's grace, facility, alertness and beauty. The power of doing prettily and rapidly whatever she took up dazzled the large and deliberate young person, to whom the right beginning and steady thoroughness were essential, and she regarded her

governess as a sort of fairy—toiling after her in admiring hopelessness, and delighted at any small success.

Fully aware of her own plainness, Sarah adored Miss Sandbrook's beauty, took all admiration of it as personally as if it had been paid to her bulfinch, and was never so charmed as when people addressed themselves to the governess as the daughter of the house. Lucilla, however, shrank into the background. She was really treated thoroughly as a relation, but she dreaded the remarks and inquiries of strangers, and wished to avoid them. The society of the cathedral town was not exciting nor tempting, and she made no great sacrifice in preferring her pretty schoolroom to the dinners and evening parties of the Close; but she did so in a very becoming manner, and delighted Sarah with stories of the great world, and of her travels.

There could be no doubt that father, mother, and daughter all liked and valued her extremely, and she loved Mrs. Prendergast as she had never loved woman before, with warm, filial, confiding love. She was falling into the interests of the cathedral and the parish, and felt them, and her occupations in the morning satisfying and full of rest after the unsatisfactory whirl of her late life. She was becoming happier than she knew, and at any rate felt it a delusion to imagine the post of governess an unhappy one. Three years at Southminster (for Sarah strenuously insisted that she would come out as late as possible) would be all peace, rest, and improvement; and by that time Owen would be ready for her to bring his child out to him or else——

Little did she reckon of the grave, displeased, yet far more sorrowful letter in which Honor wrote, "You have chosen your own path in life, may you find it one of improvement and blessing! But I think it right to say, that though real distress shall of course always make what is past forgotten, yet you must not consider Hiltonbury a refuge if you grow hastily weary of your exertions. Since you refuse to find a mother in me, and choose to depend on yourself alone, it must be in earnest, not caprice."

CHAPTER II.

These are of beauty rare,
 In holy calmness growing,
 Of minds whose richness might compare
 E'en with thy deep tints glowing,
 Yet all unconscious of the grace they wear.

Like flowers upon the spray,
 All lowliness, not sadness,
 Bright are their thoughts, and rich, not gay,
 Grave in their very gladness,
 Shedding calm summer light over life's changeful day.
To the Fuchsia.—S. D.

PHŒBE FULMORT sat in her own room. The little round clock on the mantelpiece pointed to eleven. The fire was low but glowing. The clear gas shone brightly on the toilette apparatus, and on the central table, loaded with tokens of occupation, but neat and orderly as the lines in the clasped volume where Phœbe was dutifully writing her abstract of the day's reading and observation, in childishly correct miniature round-hand.

The curtain was looped up, and the moon of a frosty night blanched a square on the carpet beneath the window, at which she often looked with a listening gaze. Her father and brother had been expected at dinner-time; and though their detention was of frequent occurrence, Phœbe had deferred undressing till it should be too late for their arrival by the last train, since they would like her to preside over their supper, and she might possibly hear of Robert, whose doings her father had of late seemed to regard with less displeasure, though she had not been allowed to go with Miss Charlecote to the consecration of his church, and had not seen him since the Horticultural Show.

She went to the window for a final look. White and crisp lay the path, chequered by the dark defined shadows of the trees; above was the sky, pearly with moonlight, allowing only a few larger stars to appear, and one glorious planet. Fascinated by the silent beauty, she stood gazing, wishing she could distinguish Jupiter's moons, observing on the difference between his steady reflected brilliance and the sun-like glories of Arcturus and Aldebaran, and passing on to the moral Miss Charlecote loved, of the stars being with us all day unseen, like the great cloud of witnesses. She

hoped Miss Charlecote saw that moon; for sunrise or set, rainbow, evening gleam, new moon, or shooting star, gave Phœbe double pleasure by comparing notes with Miss Charlecote, and though that lady was absent, helping Mrs. Saville to tend her husband's mortal sickness, it was likely that she might be watching and admiring this same fair moon. Well that there are many girls who, like Phœbe, can look forth on the Creator's glorious handiwork as such, in peace and soothing, "in maiden meditation fancy free," instead of linking these heavenly objects to the feverish fancies of troubled hearts!

Phœbe was just turning from the window, when she heard wheels sounding on the frosty drive, and presently a carriage appeared, the shadow spectrally lengthened on the slope of the whitened bank. All at once it stopped where the roads diverged to the front and back entrances, a black figure alighted, took out a bag, dismissed the vehicle, and took the path to the offices. Phœbe's heart throbbed. It was Robert!

As he disappeared, she noiselessly opened her door, guardedly passed the baize door of the west wing, descended the stairs, and met him in the hall. Neither spoke till they were in the library, which had been kept prepared for the travellers. Robert pressed her to him and kissed her fervently, and she found voice to say, "What is it? Papa?"

"Yes," said Robert.

She needed not to ask the extent of the calamity. She stood looking in his face, while, the beginning once made, he spoke in low, quick accents. "Paralysis. Last night. He was insensible when Edwards called him this morning. Nothing could be done. It was over by three this afternoon."

"Where?" asked Phœbe, understanding, but not yet feeling.

"At his rooms at the office. He had spent the evening there alone. It was not known till eight this morning. I was there instantly, Mervyn and Bevil soon after, but he knew none of us. Mervyn thought I had better come here. Oh, Phœbe, my mother!"

"I will see if she have heard anything," said Phœbe, moving quietly off, as one in a dream, able to act, move, and decide, though not to think.

She found the household in commotion. Robert had spoken to the butler, and everywhere were knots of whisperers. Miss Fennimore met Phœbe with her eyes full of tears, tears as yet far from those of Phœbe herself. "Your mother has heard nothing," she said. "I ascertained that from Boodle, who only left her dressing-room since your brother's arrival. You had better let her have her night's rest."

Robert, who had followed Phœbe, hailed this as a relieve, and thanked Miss Fennimore, adding the few particulars he had told his sister. "I hope the girls are asleep," he said.

"Sound asleep, I trust," said Miss Fennimore. "I will take care of them," and laying her hand on Phœbe's shoulder, she suggested to her that her brother had probably not eaten all day, then left them to return to the library together. There had been more time for Robert to look the thought in the face than his sister. He was no longer freshly stunned. He really needed food, and ate in silence, while she mechanically waited on him. At last he looked up, saying, "I am thankful. A few months ago, how could I have borne it?"

"I have been sure he understood you better of late," said Phœbe.

"Sunday week was one of the happiest days I have spent for years. Imagine my surprise at seeing him and Acton in the church. They took luncheon with us, looked into the schools, went to evening service, and saw the whole concern. He was kinder than ever I knew him, and Acton says he expressed himself as much pleased. I owe a great deal to Bevil Acton, and, I know, to you. Now I know that he had forgiven me."

"You, Robin! There was nothing to forgive. I can fancy poor Mervyn feeling dreadfully, but you, always dutiful except for the higher duty!"

"Hush, Phœbe! Mine was grudging service. I loved opposition, and there was an evil triumph in the annoyance I gave."

"You are not regretting your work. O no!"

"Not the work, but the manner! Oh! that the gift of the self-willed son be not Corban."

"Robert! indeed you had his approval! You told me

so. He was seeing things differently. It was so new to him that his business could be thought hurtful, that he was displeased at first, or, rather, Mervyn made him seem more displeased than he was."

"You only make me the more repent! Had I been what I ought at home, my principles would have been very differently received!"

"I don't know," said Phœbe; "there was little opportunity. We have been so little with them."

"Oh! Phœbe, it is a miserable thing to have always lived at such a distance from them, that I should better know how to tell such tidings to any old woman in my district than to my mother!"

Their consultations were broken by Miss Fennimore coming to insist on Phœbe's sleeping, in preparation for the trying morrow. Robert was thankful for her heedfulness, and owned himself tired, dismissing his sister with a blessing that had in it a tone of protection.

How changed was Phœbe's peaceful chamber in her eyes. Nothing had altered, but a fresh act in her life had begun—the first sorrow had fallen on her.

She would have knelt on for hours, leaning dreamily on the new sense of the habitual words, "Our Father," had not Miss Fennimore come kindly and tenderly to undress her, insisting on her saving herself, and promising not to let her oversleep herself, treating her with wise and soothing affection, and authority that was most comfortable.

Little danger was there of her sleeping too late. All night long she lay, with dry and open eyes, while the fire, groaning, sank together, and faded into darkness, and the moonbeams retreated slowly from floor to wall, and were lost as grey cold dawn began to light the window. Phœbe had less to reproach herself with than any one of Mr. Fulmort's children, save the poor innocent, Maria; but many a shortcoming, many a moment of impatience or discontent, many a silent impulse of blame, were grieved over, and every kindness she had received shot through her heart with mournful gladness and warmth, filling her with yearning for another embrace, another word, or even that she had known that the last good-bye had been the last, that she might have prized it—oh, how intensely!

Then came anxious imaginings for the future, such as

would not be stilled by the knowledge that all would settle itself over her head. There were misgivings whether her mother would be properly considered, fears of the mutual relations between her brothers, a sense that the family bond was loosed, and confusion and jarring might ensue; but, as her mind recoiled from the shoals and the gloom, the thought revived of the Pilot amid the waves of this troublesome world. She closed her eyes for prayer, but not for sleep. Repose even more precious and soothing than slumber was granted—the repose of confidence in the Everlasting Arms, and of confiding to them all the feeble and sorrowful with whom she was linked. It was as though (in the words of her own clasped book) her God were *more* to her than ever, truly a very *present* Help in trouble; and, as the dawn brightened for a day so unlike all others, her heart trembled less, and she rose up with eyes heavy and limbs weary, but better prepared for the morning's ordeal than even by sleep ending in a waking to the sudden shock.

When Miss Fennimore vigilantly met her on leaving her room, and surveyed her anxiously, to judge of her health and powers, there was a serious, sweet collectedness in air and face that struck the governess with loving awe and surprise.

The younger girls had known their father too little to be much affected by the loss. Maria stared in round-eyed amaze, and Bertha, though subdued and shocked for a short space, revived into asking a torrent of questions, culminating in "Should they do any lessons?" Where to Miss Fennimore replied with a decided affirmative, and, though Phœbe's taste disapproved, she saw that it was wiser not to interfere.

Much fatigued, Robert slept late, but joined his sister long before the dreaded moment of hearing their mother's bell. They need not have been fearful of the immediate effect; Mrs. Fulmort's perceptions were tardy, and the endeavours at preparation were misunderstood, till it was needful to be explicit. A long stillness followed, broken at last by Phœbe's question, whether she would not see Robert. "Not till I am up, my dear," she answered, in an injured voice; "do, pray, see whether Boodle is coming with my warm water."

Her mind was not yet awake to the stroke, and was

lapsing into its ordinary mechanical routine; her two breakfasts, and protracted dressing, occupied her for nearly two hours, after which she did not refuse to see her son, but showed far less emotion than he did, while he gave the details of the past day. Her dull, apathetic gaze was a contrast with the young man's gush of tears, and the caresses that Phœbe lavished on her listless hand. Phœbe proposed that Robert should read to her—she assented, and soon dozed, awaking to ask plaintively for Boodle and her afternoon cup of tea.

So passed the following days, her state nearly the same, and her interest apparently feebly roused by the mourning, but by nothing else. She did not like that Phœbe should leave her, but was more at ease with her maid than her son, and, though he daily came to sit with her and read to her, he was grieved to be unable to be of greater use, while he could seldom have Phœbe to himself. Sorely missing Miss Charlecote, he took his meals in the west wing, where his presence was highly appreciated, though he was often pained by Bertha's levity and Maria's imbecility. The governess treated him with marked esteem and consideration, strikingly dissimilar to the punctilious, but almost contemptuous courtesy of her behaviour to the other gentlemen of the family, and after her pupils were gone to bed, would fasten upon him for a discussion such as her soul delighted in, and his detested. Secure of his ground, he was not sure of his powers of reasoning with an able lady of nearly double his years, and more than double his reading and readiness of speech, yet he durst not retreat from argument, lest he should seem to yield the cause that he was sworn to maintain, "in season and out of season." It was hard that his own troubles and other people's should alike bring him in for controversy on all the things that end in "ism."

He learnt by letter from Sir Bevil Acton that his father had been much struck by what he had seen in Cecily-row, and had strongly expressed his concern that Robert had been allowed to strip himself for the sake of a duty, which, if it were such at all, belonged more to others. There might have been wrongheaded haste in the action, but if such new-fangled arrangements had become requisite, it was unfair that one member of the family alone should bear the whole burthen. Sir Bevil strongly supported this view, and Mr.

Fulmort had declared himself confirmed in his intention of making provision for his son in his will, as well as of giving him a fair allowance at present. There must have been warnings of failing health of which none had been made aware, for Mr. Fulmort had come to town partly to arrange for the safe guardianship of poor Maria and her fortune. An alteration in his will upon the death of one of the trustees had been too long neglected, and perhaps some foreboding of the impending malady had urged him at last to undertake what had been thus deferred. Each of the daughters was to have 10,000*l.*, the overplus being divided between them and their eldest brother, who would succeed both to the business, and on his mother's death to the Beauchamp estate, while the younger had already received an ample portion as heir to his uncle. Mr. Fulmort, however, had proposed to place Robert on the same footing with his sisters, and Sir Bevil had reason to think he had at once acted on his design. Such thorough forgiveness and approval went to Robert's heart, and he could scarcely speak as he gave Phœbe the letter to read.

When she could discuss it with him after her mother had fallen asleep for the night, she found that his thoughts had taken a fresh turn.

"If it should be as Bevil supposes," he said, "it would make an infinite difference." And after waiting for an answer, only given by inquiring looks, he continued—"As she is now, it would not be a violent change; I do not think she would object to my present situation."

"Oh, Robert, you will not expose yourself to be treated as before."

"That would not be. There was no want of attachment; merely over-confidence in her own power."

"Not *over*-confidence," it seems, murmured Phœbe, not greatly charmed.

"I understood how it had been, when we were thrown together again," he pursued. "There was no explanation, but it was far worse to bear than if there had been. I felt myself a perfect brute."

"I beg your pardon if I can't be pleased just yet," said Phœbe. "You know I did not see her, and I can't think she deserves it after so wantonly grieving you, and still choosing to forsake Miss Charlecote."

"For that I feel accountable," said Robert, sadly. "I cannot forget that her determination coincided with the evening I made her aware of my position. I saw that in her face that has haunted me ever since. I had almost rather it had been resentment."

"I hope she will make you happy," said Phœbe, dolefully, thinking it a pity he should be disturbed when settled in to his work, and forced by experience to fear that Lucy would torment him.

"I do not do it for the sake of happiness," he returned. "I am not blind to her faults; but she has a grand, generous character that deserves patience and forbearance. Besides, the past can never be cancelled, and it is due to her to offer her whatever may be mine. There may be storms, but she has been disciplined, poor dear, and I am more sure of myself than I was. She *should* conform, and my work should not be impeded."

Grimly he continued to anticipate hurricanes for his wedded life, and to demonstrate that he was swayed by justice and not by passion; but it was suspicious that he recurred constantly to the topic, and seemed able to dwell on no other. If Phœbe could have been displeased with him, it would have been for these reiterations at such a time. Not having been personally injured, she pardoned less than did either Robert or Miss Charlecote; she could not foresee peace for her brother; and though she might pity him for the compulsion of honour and generosity, she found that his auguries were not intended to excite compassionate acquiescence, but cheerful contradiction, such as both her good sense and her oppressed spirits refused. If he could talk about nothing better than Lucy when alone with her, she could the less regret the rarity of these opportunities.

The gentlemen of the family alone attended the funeral, the two elder sisters remaining in town, whither their husbands were to return at night. Mrs. Fulmort remained in the same dreary state of heaviness, but with some languid heed to the details, and interest in hearing from Maria and Bertha, from behind the blinds, what carriages were at the door, and who got into them. Phœbe, with strong effort, then controlled her voice to read aloud till her mother dozed as usual, and she could sit and think until Robert knocked, to summon her to the reading of the will. "You must

come," he said; "I know it jars, but it is Mervyn's wish, and he is right."

On the stairs Mervyn met her, took her from Robert, and led into the drawing-room, where she was kindly greeted by the brothers-in-law, and seated beside her eldest brother.

As a duty, she gave her attention, and was rewarded by finding that had he been living, her hero, Mr. Charlecote, would have been her guardian. The will dated fifteen years back, made Humphrey Charlecote, Esquire, trustee and executor, jointly with James Crabbe, Esquire, the elderly lawyer at present reading it aloud. The intended codicil had never been executed. Had any one looked at the downcast face, it would have been with wonder at the glow of shy pleasure thrilling over cheeks and brow.

Beauchamp of course remained with the heiress, Mrs. Fulmort, to whom all thereto appertaining was left; the distillery and all connected with it descended to the eldest son, John Mervyn Fulmort; the younger children received 10,000*l.* a piece, and the residue was to be equally divided among all except the second son, Robert Mervyn Fulmort, who, having been fully provided for, was only to receive some pictures and plate that had belonged to his great-uncle.

The lawyer ceased. Sir Bevil leant towards him, and made an inquiry which was answered by a sign in the negative. Then taking up some memoranda, Mr. Crabbe announced that, as far as he could yet discover, the brother and five sisters would divide about 120,000*l.* between them, so that each of the ladies had 30,000*l.* of her own; and, bowing to Phœbe, he requested her to consider him as her guardian. The Admiral, highly pleased, offered her his congratulations, and as soon as she escaped she hastened away, followed by Robert.

"Never mind, Phœbe," he said, taking her hand; "the kindness and pardon were the same, the intention as good as the deed, as far as *he* was concerned. Perhaps you were right. The other way might have proved a stumbling-block." Speak as he would, he could not govern the tone of his voice nor the quivering of his entire frame under the downfall of his hopes. Phœbe linked her arm in his, and took several turns in the gallery with him.

"Oh, Robin, if I were but of age to divide with you!"

"No, Phœbe, that would be unfit for you and for me. I am only where I was before. I knew I had had my portion. I ought not to have entertained hopes so unbecoming. But oh, Phœbe! that she should be cast about the world, fragile, sensitive as she is——"

Phœbe could have said that a home at the Holt was open to Lucilla; but this might seem an unkind suggestion, and the same moment Sir Bevil was heard impetuously bounding up the stairs. "Robert, where are you?" he called from the end of the gallery. "I never believed you could have been so infamously treated."

"Hush!"—said Robert, shocked; "I cannot hear this said. You know it was only want of time."

"I am not talking of your father. He would have done his best if he had been allowed. It is your brother!—his own confession, mind! He boasted just now that his father would have done it on the spot, but for his interference, and expected thanks from all the rest of us for his care of our interests."

"What is the use of telling such things, Acton?" said Robert, forcing his voice to calm rebuke, and grasping the baluster with an iron-like grip.

"The use! To mark my detestation of such conduct! I did my best to show him what I thought of it; and I believe even Bannerman was astounded at his coolness. I'll take care the thing is made public! I'll move heaven and earth, but I'll get you preferment that shall show how such treatment is looked upon."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Robert. "I am heartily obliged to you, Acton. You gained me the certainty of forgiveness, without which I should have felt a curse on my work. For the rest, I complain of nothing. I have had larger means than the others. I knew that I was to look for no more. I prefer my own cure to any other; and reflection will show you that our family affairs are not to be made public."

"At any rate, your mother might do something. Let me speak to her. What, not now? Then I will come down whenever Phœbe will summon me."

"Not now, nor ever," said Robert. "Even if anything were in her power, she could not understand; and she must not be harassed."

"We will talk that over on our way to town," said Sir Bevil. "I start at once. I will not see that fellow again, nor, I should think, would you."

"I stay till Saturday week."

"You had better not. You have been abominably treated; but this is no time for collisions. You agree with me, Phœbe; his absence would be the wisest course."

"Phœbe knows that annoyance between Mervyn and me is unhappily no novelty. We shall not revert to the subject, and I have reasons for staying."

"You need not fear," said Phœbe; "Robert always keeps his temper."

"Or rather we have the safeguard of being both sullen, not hot," said Robert. "Besides, Mervyn was right. I have had my share, and have not even the dignity of being injured."

The need of cooling his partisan was the most effective means of blunting the sharp edge of his own vexation. Hearing Mervyn cross the hall, he called to offer to take his share in some business which they had to transact together. "Wait a moment," was the answer; and as Sir Bevil muttered a vituperation of Mervyn's assurance, he said, decidedly, "Now, once for all, I desire that this matter be never again named between any of us. Let no one know what has taken place, and let us forget all but that my father was in charity with me."

It was more than Sir Bevil was with almost any one, and he continued to pace the gallery with Phœbe, devising impossible schemes of compensation until the moment of his departure for London.

Robert had not relied too much on his own forbearance. Phœbe met her two brothers at dinner—one gloomy, the other melancholy; but neither altering his usual tone towards the other. Unaware that Robert knew of his father's designs nor of their prevention, Mervyn was totally exempt from compunction, thinking, indeed, that he had saved his father from committing an injustice on the rest of the family, for the sake of a fanatical tormentor, who had already had and thrown away more than his share. Subdued and saddened for the time, Mervyn was kind to Phœbe and fairly civil to Robert, so that there were no disturbances to interfere with the tranquil intercourse of the brother and sister in

their walks in the woods, their paces in the gallery, or low-voiced conferences while their mother dozed.

True to his resolve, Robert permitted no reference to his late hopes, but recurred the more vigorously to his parish interests, as though he had never thought of any wife save St. Matthew's Church.

Home affairs, too, were matters of anxious concern. Without much sign of sorrow, or even of comprehension of her loss, it had suddenly rendered the widow an aged invalid. The stimulus to exertion removed, there was nothing to rouse her from the languid torpor of her nature, mental and physical. Invalid habits gave her sufficient occupation, and she showed no preference for the company of any one except Phœbe or her maid, to whose control her passive nature succumbed. At Boodle's bidding, she rose, dress, ate, drank, and went to bed; at Phœbe's she saw her other children, heard Robert read, or signed papers for Mervyn. But each fresh exertion cost much previous coaxing and subsequent plaintiveness; and when Phœbe, anxious to rouse her, persuaded her to come down stairs, her tottering steps proved her feebleness; and though her sons showed her every attention, she had not been in the drawing-room ten minutes before a nervous trembling and faintness obliged them to carry her back to her room.

The family apothecary, a kind old man, declared that there was nothing seriously amiss, and that she would soon "recover her tone." But it was plain that much would fall on Phœbe, and Robert was uneasy at leaving her with so little assistance or comfort at hand. He even wrote to beg his eldest sister to come for a few weeks till his mother's health should be improved; but Sir Nicholas did not love the country in the winter, and Augusta only talked of a visit in the spring.

Another vexation to Robert was the school-room. During the last few months Bertha had outgrown her childish distaste to study, and had exerted her mind with as much eagerness as governess could desire; her translations and compositions were wonders of ease and acuteness; she had plunged into science, had no objection to mathematics, and by way of recreation wandered in German metaphysics. Miss Fennimore rather discouraged this line, knowing how little useful brain exercise she herself had derived from Kant

and his compeers, but this check was all that was wanting to give Bertha double zest, and she stunned Robert with demonstrations about her "I" and her "not I," and despised him for his contempt of her grand discoveries.

He begged for a prohibition of the study, but Miss Fennimore thought this would only lend it additional charms, and added that it was a field which the intellect must explore for itself, and not take on the authority of others. When this answer was reported through Phœbe, Robert shrugged his shoulders, alarmed at the hotbed nurture of intellect and these concessions to mental independence, only balanced by such loose and speculative opinions as Miss Fennimore had lately manifested to him. Decidedly, he said, there ought to be a change of governess and system.

But Phœbe, tears springing into her eyes, implored him not to press it. She thoroughly loved her kind, clear-headed, conscientious friend, who had assisted her so wisely and considerately through this time of trouble, and knew how to manage Maria. It was no time for a fresh parting, and her mother was in no state to be harassed by alterations. This Robert allowed with a sigh, though delay did not suit with his stern, uncompromising youthfulness, and he went on to say, "You will bear it in mind, Phœbe. There and elsewhere great changes are needed. This great, disorderly household is a heavy charge. Acting for my mother, as you will have to do, how are you to deal with the servants?"

"None of them come in my way, except dear old Lieschen, and Boodle, and Mrs. Brisbane, and they are all kind and thoughtful."

"Surface work, Phœbe. Taking my mother's place, as you do now, you will, or ought to, become aware of the great mischiefs below stairs, and I trust you will be able to achieve a great reformation."

"I hope—" Phœbe looked startled, and hesitated. "Surely, Robert, you do not think I ought to search after such things. Would it be dutiful, so young as I am?"

"Perhaps you are right," said Robert; "only, Phœbe, Phœbe, never let toleration harden you to be indifferent to evil."

"I hope not," said Phœbe, gravely.

"My poor child, you are in for a world of perplexities! I wish I had not to leave you to them."

"Every labyrinth has a clue," said Phœbe, smiling; "as Miss Fennimore says when she gives us problems to work. Only you know the terms of the problem must be stated before the solution can be made out; so it is of no use to put cases till we know all the terms."

"Right, Phœbe. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"I cannot see the evil yet," said Phœbe; "the trouble has brought so much comfort. That happy Sunday with you, and my own year of being with them both have been such blessings! Last year, how much worse it would have been for us all, when I scarcely knew mamma or Mervyn, and could not go about alone nor to church! And Miss Charlecote will soon come home. There is so much cause for thankfulness, that I can't be afraid."

Robert said no more, but felt that innocent buoyance a mystery to his lower-pitched spirit. Never very gay or merry, Phœbe had a fund of happiness and a power of finding and turning outwards the bright side, which made her a most comfortable companion.

CHAPTER III.

Happy are they that learn in Him,
Though patient suffering teach
The secret of enduring strength,
And praise too deep for speech;
Peace that no pressure from without,
No strife within can reach.

A. L. WARING.

WELL was it for Phœbe that she had been trained to monotony, for her life was most uniform after Robert left home. Her school-room mornings, her afternoons with her mother, her evenings with Mervyn, were all so much alike that one week could hardly be distinguished from another. Bertha's vagaries and Mervyn's periodical journeys to London were the chief varieties, certainly not her mother's plaintiveness, her brother's discontent, or the sacrifice of her

own inclinations, which were pretty certain to be traversed, but then, as she said, something else happened that did as well as what she had wished.

One day, when Mervyn had been hunting, and had come home tired, he desired her to give him some music in the evening. She took the opportunity of going over some fine old airs, which the exigencies of drawing-room display had prevented her from practising for some time. Presently she found him standing by her, his face softer than usual. "Where did you get that, Phœbe?"

"It is Haydn's. I learnt it just after Miss Fennimore came."

"Play it again; I have not heard it for years."

She obeyed, and looked at him. He was shading his face with his hand, but he hardly spoke again all the rest of the evening.

Phœbe's curiosity was roused, and she tried the effect of the air on her mother, whose great pleasure was her daughter's music, since a piano had been moved into her dressing-room. But it awoke no association there, and "Thank you, my dear," was the only requital.

While the next evening she was wondering whether to volunteer it, Mervyn begged for it, and as she finished, asked, "What does old Gay say of my mother now?"

"He thinks her decidedly better, and so I am sure she is. She has more appetite. She really ate the breast of a partridge to-day!"

"He says nothing of a change?"

"She could not bear the journey."

"It strikes me that she wants rousing. Shut up in a great lonely house like this, she has nothing cheerful to look at. She would be much better off at Brighton, or some of those places where she could see people from the windows, and have plenty of twaddling old dowager society."

"I did ask Mr. Gay about the sea, but he thought the fatigue of the journey, and the vexing her by persuading her to take it would do more harm than the change would do good."

"I did not mean only as a change. I believe she would be much happier living there, with this great place off her hands. It is enough to depress any one's spirits to live in a corner like a shrivelled kernel in a nut."

"Go away!" exclaimed Phœbe. "Mervyn! it is her home! It is her own!"

"Well, I never said otherwise," he answered, rather crossly; "but you know very well that it is a farce to talk of her managing the house, or the estate either. It was bad enough before, but there will be no check on any one now."

"I thought you looked after things."

"Am I to spend my life as a steward? No, if the work is to be in my hands, I ought to be in possession at once, so as to take my place in the county as I ought, and cut the City business. The place is a mere misfortune and encumbrance to her as she is, and she would be ten times happier at a watering place."

"Mervyn, what do you mean? You have all the power and consequence here, and are fully master of all; but why should not poor mamma live in her own house?"

"Can't you conceive that a man may have reasons for wishing to be put in possession of the family place when he can enjoy it, and she can't? Don't look at me with that ridiculous face. I mean to marry. Now, can't you see that I may want the house to myself?"

"You are engaged!"

"Not exactly. I am waiting to see my way through the bother."

"Who is it? Tell me about it, Mervyn."

"I don't mind telling you, but for your life don't say a word to any one. I would never forgive you, if you set my Ladies Bannerman and Acton at me."

Phœbe was alarmed. She had little hope that their likings would coincide; his manner indicated defiance of opinion, and she could not but be averse to a person for whose sake he wished to turn them out. "Well," was all she could say, and he proceeded: "I suppose you never heard of Cecily Raymond."

"Of Moorcroft?" she asked, breathing more freely, "Sir John's daughter?"

"No, his niece. It is a spooney thing to take up with one's tutor's daughter, but it can't be helped. I've tried to put her out of my head, and enter on a more profitable speculation, but it won't work!"

"Is she very pretty—prettier than Lucilla Sandbrook?"

asked Phœbe, unable to believe that any other inducement could attach him.

"Not what you would call pretty at all, except her eyes. Not a bit fit to make a figure in the world, and a regular little parsoness. That's the deuce of it. It would be mere misery to her to be taken to London and made to go into society; so I want to have it settled, for if she could come here and go poking into cottages and schools, she would want nothing more."

"Then she is very good!"

"You and she will be devoted to each other. And you'll stand up for her, I know, and then a fig for their two ladyships. You and I can be a match for Juliana, if she tries to bully my mother. Not that it matters. I am my own man now; but Cecily is crotchety, and must not be distressed."

"Then I am sure she would not like to turn mamma out," said Phœbe, stoutly.

"Don't you see that is the reason I want to have it settled beforehand? If she were a party to it, she would never consent; she would be confoundedly scrupulous, and we should be all worried to death. Come, you just sound my mother; you can do anything with her, and it will be better for you all. You will be bored to death here, seeing no one."

"I do not know whether it be a right proposal to make."

"Right? If the place had been my father's, it would be a matter of course."

"That makes the whole difference. And even so, would not this be very soon?"

"Of course you know I am proposing nothing at once. It would not be decent, I suppose, to marry within the half year; but, poor little thing, I can't leave her in suspense any longer. You should not have played that thing."

"Then you know that she cares for you?"

He laughed consciously at this home question.

"It must be a long time since you were at Mr. Raymond's."

"Eight years; but I have made flying visits there since, and met her at her uncle's. Poor little thing, she was horridly gone off last time, and very ungracious, but we will find a remedy!"

"Then you could not gain consent to it?"

"It never came to that. I never committed myself."

"But why not? If she was so good, and you liked her, and they all wanted you to marry, I can't see why you waited, if you knew, too, that she liked you—I don't think it was kind, Mervyn."

"Ah! women always hang by one another. See here, Phœbe, it began when I was as green as yourself, a mere urchin, and she a little unconscious thing of the same age. Well, when I got away, I saw what a folly it was—a mere throwing myself away! I might have gone in for rank or fortune, as I liked; and how did I know that I was such a fool that I could not forget her? If Charles Charteris had not monopolized the Jewess, I should have been done for long ago! And apart from that, I wasn't ready for domestic joys, especially to be Darby to such a pattern little Joan, who would think me on the highway to perdition if she saw *Bell's Life* on the table, or heard me bet a pair of gloves."

"You can't have any affection for her," cried Phœbe, indignantly.

"Didn't I tell you that she spoilt the taste of every other transaction of the sort? And what am I going to do now? When she has not a halfpenny, and I might marry anybody!"

"If you cared for her properly, you would have done it long before."

"I'm a dutiful son," he answered, in an indifferent voice, that provoked Phœbe to say with spirit, "I hope she does not care for you, after all."

"Past praying for, kind sister. Sincerely, I've been sorry for it; I would have disbelieved it, but the more she turns away, the better I know it; so you see, after all, I shall deserve to be ranked with your hero, Bevil Acton."

"Mervyn, you make me so angry that I can hardly answer! You boast of what you think she has suffered for you all this time, and make light of it!"

"It wasn't my fault if my poor father would send such an amiable youth into a large family. Men with daughters should not take pupils. I did my best to cure both her and myself, but I had better have fought it out at once when she was younger and prettier, and might have been more conformable, and not so countrified, as you'll grow, Phœbe, if you

stay rusting here, nursing my mother and reading philosophy with Miss Fennimore. If you set up to scold me, you had better make things easy for me."

Phoebe thought for a few moments, and then said, "I see plainly what you ought to do, but I cannot understand that this makes it proper to ask my mother to give up her own house, that she was born to. I suppose you would call it childish to propose your living with us; but we could almost form two establishments."

"My dear child, Cecily would go and devote herself to my mother. I should never have any good out of her, and she would get saddled for life with Maria."

"Maria is my charge," said Phoebe, coldly.

"And what will your husband say to that?"

"He shall never be my husband, unless I have the means of making her happy."

"Ay, there would be a frenzy of mutual generosity, and she would be left to us. No; I'm not going to set up house-keeping with Maria for an ingredient."

"There is the Underwood."

"Designed by nature for a dowager-house. That would do very well for you and my mother, though Cheltenham or Brighton might be better. Yes, it might do. You would be half a mile nearer your dear Miss Charlecote."

"Thank you," said Phoebe, a little sarcastically; but repenting, she added, "Mervyn, I hope I do not seem unkind and selfish; but I think we ought to consider mamma, as she cannot stand up for herself just now. It is not unlikely that when mamma hears you are engaged, and has seen and grown fond of Miss Raymond, she may think herself of giving up this place; but it ought to begin from her, not from you; and as things are now, I could not think of saying anything about it. From what you tell me of Miss Raymond, I don't think she would be less likely to take you without Beauchamp than with it; indeed, I think you must want it less for her sake than your own."

"Upon my word, Mrs. Phoebe, you are a cool hand!" exclaimed Mervyn, laughing; "but you promise to see what can be done as soon as I've got my hand into the matter."

"I promise nothing," said Phoebe; "I hope it will be settled without me, for I do not know what would be most right or most kind, but it may be plainer when the time

comes, and she, who is so good, will be sure to know. O Mervyn, I am very glad of that!"

Phœbe sought the west wing in such a tingle of emotion that she only gave Miss Fennimore a brief good night instead of lingering to talk over the day. Indignation was foremost. After destroying Robert's hopes for life, here was Mervyn accepting wedded happiness as a right, and after having knowingly trifled with a loving heart for all these years, coolly deigning to pick it up, and making terms to secure his own consequence and freedom from all natural duties, and to thrust his widowed mother from her own home. It was Phœbe's first taste of the lesson, so bitter to many, that her parents' home was not her own for life, and the expulsion seemed to her so dreadful that she rebuked herself for personal feeling in her resentment, and it was with a sort of horror that she bethought herself that her mother might possibly prefer a watering-place life, and that it would then be her part to submit cheerfully. Poor Miss Charlecote! would not she miss her little moonbeam? Yes, but if this Cecily were so good, she would make up to her. The pang of suffering and dislike quite startled Phœbe. She knew it for jealousy, and hid her face in prayer.

The next day was Sunday, and Mervyn made the unprecedented exertion of going twice to church, observing that he was getting into training. He spent the evening in dwelling on Cecily Raymond, who seemed to have been the cheerful guardian elder sister of a large family in narrow circumstances, and as great a contrast to Mervyn himself as was poor Lucilla to Robert; her homeliness and seriousness being as great hindrances to the elder brother, as fashion and levity to the younger. It was as if each were attracted by the indefinable essence, apart from all qualities, that constitutes the self; and Haydn's air, learnt long ago by Cecily as a surprise to her father on his birthday, had evoked such a healthy shoot of love within the last twenty-four hours, that Mervyn was quite transformed, though still rather unsuitably sensible of his own sacrifice, and of the favour he was about to confer on Cecily in entering on that inevitable period when he must cease to be a gentleman at large.

On Monday he came down to breakfast ready for a journey, as Phœbe concluded, to London. She asked if he would return by the next hunting day. He answered vaguely,

then rousing himself, said, "I say, Phœbe, you must write her a cordial sisterly sort of a letter, you know; and you might make Bertha do it too, for nobody else will."

"I wrote to Juliana on Friday."

"Juliana! Are you mad?"

"Oh! Miss Raymond! But you told me you had said nothing! You have not had time since Friday night to get an answer."

"Foolish child, no; but I shall be there to-night or to-morrow."

"You are going to Sutton?"

"Yes; and, as I told you, I trust to you to write such a letter as to make her feel comfortable. Well, what's the use of having a governess, if you don't know how to write a letter?"

"Yes, Mervyn, I'll write, only I must hear from you first."

"I hate writing. I tell you, if you write—let me see, on Wednesday, you may be sure it is all over."

"No, Mervyn, I will not be so impertinent," said Phœbe, and the colour rushed into her face as she recollected the offence that she had once given by manifesting a brother's security of being beloved. "It would be insulting her to assume that she had accepted you, and write before I knew, especially after the way you have been using her."

"Pshaw! she will only want a word of kindness; but if you are so fanciful, will it do if I put a cover in the post? There! and when you get it on Wednesday morning, you write straight off to Cecily, and when you have got the notion into my mother's understanding, you may write to me, and tell me what chance there is of Beauchamp."

What chance of Beauchamp! The words made Phœbe's honest brow contract as she stood by the chimneypiece, while her brother went out into the hall. "That's all he cares for," she thought. "Poor mamma! But, oh! how unkind. I am sending him away without one kind wish, and she must be good—so much better than I could have hoped!"

Out she ran, and as he paused to kiss her bright cheek, she whispered, "Good-bye, Mervyn; good speed. I shall watch for your cover."

She received another kiss for those words, and they had been an effort, for those designs on Beauchamp weighed

heavily on her, and the two tasks that were left to her were not congenial. She did not know how to welcome a strange sister, for whose sake the last of the Mervyns was grudging her own inheritance, and still less did she feel disposed to harass her mother with a new idea, which would involve her in bewilderment and discussion. She could only hope that there would be inspiration in Mervyn's blank cover, and suppress her fever of suspense.

Wednesday came—no cover, blank or unblank. Had he been taken with a fit of diffidence, and been less precipitate than he intended? Womanhood hoped so, and rather enjoyed the possibility of his being kept a little in suspense. Or suppose he had forgotten his cover, and then should think the absence of a letter her fault? Thursday—still no tidings. Should she venture a letter to him? No; lovers were inexplicable people, and after all, what could she say? Perhaps he was only waiting for an opportunity, and if Cecily had been ungracious at the last meeting, she might not afford one. Day after day wore on, and still the post-bag was emptied in vain, and Phœbe's patience was kept on tenterhooks, till, when a full fortnight had passed, she learnt through the servants that Mr. Mervyn's wardrobe and valet, grooms and horses, had been sent for to London.

So he had been refused, and could not bear to tell her so! And here she was disappointed and pitying, and as vexed with Miss Raymond as if it had not been no more than he deserved. But poor Mervyn! he had expected it so little, and had been so really attached, that Phœbe was heartily grieved for him, and longed to know how he bore it. Nay, with all the danger of removal, the flatness of the balked excitement was personally felt, and Phœbe would have been glad, in her monotonous life, of something to hope or to fear.

Her greatest pleasure was in Miss Charlecote's return. The long watch over her old friend was over. Honor had shared his wife's cares, comforted and supported her in her sorrow, and had not left her till the move from her Parsonage was made, and she was settled among her own relations. Much as Honor had longed to be with Phœbe, the Savilles had nearer claims, and she could not part with them while there was any need of her. Indeed, Mr. Saville, as once the husband of Sarah Charlecote, the brother-in-law of Humfrey, and her own friend and adviser, was much esteemed

and greatly missed. She felt as if her own generation were passing away, when she returned to see the hatchment upon Beauchamp, and to hear of the widow's failing health. Knowing how closely Phœbe was attending her mother, Honor drove to Beauchamp the first day after her return, and had not crossed the hall before the slender black figure was in her arms.

Friends seem as though they must meet to know one another again, and begin afresh, after one of the great sorrows of life has fallen on either side, and especially when it is a first grief, a first taste of that cup of which all must drink. As much of the child as could pass from Phœbe's sweet, simple nature had passed in those hours that had made her the protector and nurse of her mother, and though her open eyes were limpid and happy as before, and the contour of the rounded cheek and lip as youthful and innocent, yet the soft gravity of the countenance was deepened, and there was a pensiveness on the brow, as though life had begun to unfold more difficulties than pleasures.

And Honor Charlecote? That ruddy golden hair, once Owen's pride, was mingled with many a silvery thread, and folded smoothly on a forehead paler, older, but calmer than once it had been. Sorrow and desertion had cut deeply, and worn down the fair comeliness of healthful middle age; but something of compensation there was in the less anxious eye, from which had passed a certain restless, strained expression; and if the face were more habitually sad, it was more peaceful. She did not love less those whom she "had seen," but He Whom she "had not seen" had become her rest and her reliance, and in her year of loneliness and darkness, a trust, a support, a confiding joy had sprung up, such as she had before believed in, but never experienced. "Her Best, her All;" those had been words of devotional aspiration before, they were realities at last. And it was that peace that breathed into her fresh energy to work and love on, unwearied by disappointment, but with renewed willingness to spend and be spent, to rejoice with those who rejoiced, to weep with them that wept, to pray and hope for those who had wrung her heart.

Her tears were flowing as she tenderly embraced Phœbe, and the girl clung fast to her, not weeping, but full of warm, sweet emotion. "Dear Miss Charlecote, now you are come, I have help and comfort!"

"Dear one, I have grieved to be away, but I could not leave poor Mrs. Saville."

"Indeed, I know you could not; and it is better to have you now than even at the time. It is a new, fresh pleasure, when I can enjoy it better. And I feel as if we had a right to you now—since you know what I told you," said Phœbe, with her pretty, shy, lover-like colouring.

"That you are Humfrey's ward?—my legacy from him? Good!" said Honora, ratifying the inheritance with a caress, doubly precious to one so seldom fondled. "Though I am afraid," she added, "that Mr. Crabbe would not exactly recognise my claim."

"Oh, I don't want you for what Mr. Crabbe can do for us, but it does make me feel right and at ease in telling you of what might otherwise seem too near home. But he was intended to have taken care of us all, and you always seem to me one with him——"

Phœbe stopped short, startled at the deep, bright, girlish blush on her friend's cheek, and fearing to have said what she ought not; but Honor, recovering in a moment, gave a strange bright smile and tightly squeezed her hand. "One with him! Dear Phœbe, thank you. It was the most undeserved, unrequited honour of my life that he would have had it so. Yes, I see how you look at me in wonder, but it was my misfortune not to know on whom or what to set my affections till too late. No; don't try to repent of your words. They are a great pleasure to me, and I delight to include you in the charges I had from him—the nice children he liked to meet in the woods."

"Ah! I wish I could remember those meetings. Robert does, and I do believe Robert's first beginning of love and respect for what was good was connected with his fondness for Mr. Charlecote."

"I always regard Bertha as a godchild inherited from him, like Charlecote Raymond, whom I saw ordained last week. I could not help going out of my way when I found I might be present, and take his sister Susan with me."

"You went."

"Yes. Susan had been staying with her uncle at Sutton, and met me at Oxford. I am glad we were able to go. There was nothing that I more wished to have seen."

Irrepressible curiosity could not but cause Phœbe to ask

how lately Miss Raymond had been to Sutton, and as Miss Charlecote answered the question she looked inquisitively at her young friend, and each felt that the other was initiated. Whether the cousin ought to have confided to Miss Charlecote what she had witnessed at Sutton was an open question, but at least Honor knew what Phoebe burnt to learn, and was ready to detail it.

It was the old story of the parish priest taking pupils, and by dire necessity only half fulfilling conflicting duties, to the sacrifice of the good of all. Overworked between pupils and flock, while his wife was fully engrossed by children and household cares, the moment had not been perceived when their daughter became a woman, and the pupil's sport grew to earnest. Not till Mervyn Fulmort had left Sutton for the University were they aware that he had treated Cecily as the object of his affection, and had promised to seek her as soon as he should be his own master. How much was in his power they knew not, but his way of life soon proved him careless of deserving her, and it was then that she became staid and careworn, and her youth had lost its bloom, while forced in conscience to condemn the companion of her girlhood, yet unable to take back the heart once bestowed, though so long neglected.

But when Mervyn, declaring himself only set at liberty by his father's death, appeared at Sutton, Cecily did not waver, and her parents upheld her decision, that it would be a sin to unite herself to an irreligious man, and that the absence of principle which he had shown made it impossible for her to accept him.

Susan described her as going about the next morning looking as though some one had been killing her, but going through her duties as calmly and gently as ever, though preyed on by the misery of the parting in anger, and the threat that if he were not good enough for her, he would give her reason to think so! Honor had pity on the sister, and spared her those words, but Phoebe had well-nigh guessed them, and though she might esteem Cecily Raymond, could not but say mournfully that it was a last chance flung away.

"Not so, my dear. What is right comes right. A regular life without repentance is sometimes a more hopeless state than a wilder course, and this rejection may do him more good than acceptance."

"It is right, I know," said Phœbe. "I could advise no one to take poor Mervyn; but surely it is not wrong to be sorry for him."

"No, indeed, dear child. It is only the angels who do not mourn, though they rejoice. I sometimes wonder whether those who are forgiven, yet have left evil behind them on earth, are purified by being shown their own errors reduplicating with time and numbers."

"Dear Miss Charlecote, do not say so. Once pardoned, surely fully sheltered, and with no more punishment!"

"Vain speculation, indeed," answered Honor. "Yet I cannot help thinking of the welcome there must be when those who have been left in doubt and fear of shipwreck come safely into haven; above all, for those who here may not have been able to 'fetch home their banished.'"

Phœbe pressed her hand, and spoke of trying whether mamma would see her.

"Ah!" thought Honora, "neither of us can give perfect sympathy. And it is well. Had my short-sighted wish taken effect, that sweet face might be clouded by such grief as poor Cecily Raymond's."

Mrs. Fulmort did see Miss Charlecote, and though speaking little herself, was gratified by the visit, and the voices talking before her gave her a sense of sociability. This preference enabled Phœbe to enjoy a good deal of quiet conversation with her friend, and Honora made a point of being at Beauchamp twice or three times a week, as giving the only variety that could there be enjoyed. Of Mervyn nothing was heard, and house and property wanted a head. Matters came to poor Mrs. Fulmort for decision which were unheard-of mysteries and distresses to her, even when Phœbe, instructed by the steward, did her utmost to explain, and tell her what to do. It would end by feeble, bewildered looks, and tears starting on the pale cheeks, and "I don't know, my dear. It goes through my head. Your poor papa attended to those things. I wish your brother would come home. Tell them to write to him."

"They" wrote, and Phœbe wrote, but in vain, no answer came; and when she wrote to Robert for tidings of Mervyn's movements, entreating that he would extract a reply, he answered that he could tell nothing satisfactory of his

brother, and did not know whether he were in town or not; while as to advising his mother on business, he should only make mischief by so doing.

Nothing satisfactory! What could that imply? Phœbe expected soon to hear something positive, for Bertha's teeth required a visit to London, and Miss Fennimore was to take her to Lady Bannerman's for a week, during which the governess would be with some relations of her own.

Phœbe talked of the snugness of being alone with her mother and Maria, and she succeeded in keeping both pleased with one another. The sisters walked in the park, and brought home primroses and periwinkles, which their mother tenderly handled, naming the copses they came from, well-known to her in childhood, though since her marriage she had been too grand to be allowed the sight of a wild periwinkle. In the evening Phœbe gave them music, sung infant-school hymns with Maria, tried to teach her piquet; and perceived the difference that the absence of Bertha's teasing made in the poor girl's temper. All was very quiet, but when good night was said, Phœbe felt wearied out, and chid herself for her accesses of yawning, nay, she was shocked at her feeling of disappointment and tedium when the return of the travellers was delayed for a couple of days.

When at length they came, the variety brightened even Mrs. Fulmort, and she was almost loquacious about some mourning pocket-handkerchiefs with chessboard borders, that they were to bring. The girls all drank tea with her, Bertha pouring out a whole flood of chatter in unrestraint, for she regarded her mother as nobody, and loved to astonish her sisters, so on she went, a slight hitch in her speech giving a sort of piquancy to her manner.

She had dined late every day, she had ridden with Sir Bevil in the Park, her curly hair had been thought to be *crépé*, she had drunk champagne, she would have gone to the Opera, but the Actons were particular, and said it was too soon—so tiresome, one couldn't do any thing for this mourning. Phœbe, in an admonitory tone, suggested that she had seen the British Museum.

"Oh yes, I have it all in my note-book. Only imagine, Phœbe, Sir Nicholas had been at Athens, and knew nothing about the Parthenon! And, gourmet as he is, and so long in the Mediterranean, he had no idea whether the Spartan black broth was made with sepia."

"My dear," began her mother, "young ladies do not talk learning in society."

"Such a simple thing as this, mamma, every one must know. But they are all so unintellectual! Not a book about the Bannerman's house except Soyer and the London Directory, and even Bevil had never read the *Old Red Sandstone* nor Sir Charles Lyell. I have no opinion of the science of soldiers or sailors."

"You have told us nothing of Juliana's baby," interposed Phœbe.

"She's exactly like the Goddess Pasht, in the Sydenham palace! Juliana does not like her a bit, because she is only a girl, and Bevil quite worships her. Everything one of them likes, the other hates. They are a study of the science of antipathies."

"You should not fancy things, Bertha."

"It is no fancy; every one is observing it. Augusta says she has only twice found them together in their own house since Christmas, and Mervyn says it is a warning against virulent constancy."

"Then you saw Mervyn?" anxiously asked Phœbe.

"Only twice. He is at deadly feud with the Actons, because Bevil takes Robert's part, and has been lecturing him about the withdrawing all the subscriptions!"

"What?" asked Phœbe again.

"Oh! I thought Robert told you all, but there has been such a row! I believe poor papa said something about letting Robert have an evening school for the boys and young men at the distillery, but when he claimed it, Mervyn said he knew nothing about it, and wouldn't hear of it, and got affronted, so he withdrew all the subscriptions from the charities and everything else, and the boys have been mobbing the clergy, and Juliana says it is all Robert's fault."

"And did you see Robert?"

"Very little. No one would come to such an old foggy's as Sir Nicholas, that could help it."

"Bertha, my dear, young ladies do not use such words," observed her mother.

"Oh, mamma, you are quite behindhand. Slang is the thing. I see my line when I come out. It would not do for you, Phœbe—not your style—but I shall sport it when I come out and go to the Actons. I shall go out with them."

Augusta is too slow, and lives with nothing but old admirals and *gourmands*; but I'll always go to Juliana for the season, Phœbe, wear my hair in the Eugenie style, and be piquante."

"Perhaps things will be altered by that time."

"Oh no. There will be no retrograde movement. Highly educated women have acquired such a footing that they may do what they please."

"Are we highly educated women?" asked Maria.

"I am sure you ought to be, my dear. Nothing was grudged for your education," said her mother.

"Well, then, I'll always play at bagatelle, and have a German band at the door," quoth Maria, conclusively.

"Did you go to St. Matthew's?" again interrupted Phœbe.

"Yes, Bevil took me. It is the oddest place. A white brick wall with a red cross built into it over the gate, and the threshold is just a step back four or five hundred years. A court with buildings all round, church, schools, and the curates' rooms. Such a sitting-room; the floor matted, and a great oak table, with benches, where they all dine, schoolmaster, and orphan boys, and all, and the best boy out of each class."

"It is a common room, like one at a college," explained Phœbe. "Robert has his own rooms besides."

"Such a hole!" continued Bertha. "It is the worst of all the curates' sitting-rooms, looking out into the nastiest little alley. It was a shame he did not have the first choice, when it is all his own."

"Perhaps that is the reason he took the worst," said Phœbe.

"A study in extremes," said Bertha. "Their dinner was our luncheon—the very plainest boiled beef, the liquor given away; and at dinner, at the Bannermans', there were more fine things than Bevil said he could appreciate, and Augusta looking like a full-blown dahlia. I was always wanting to stick pins into her arms, to see how far in the bones are. I am sure I could bury the heads."

Here, seeing her mother look exhausted, Phœbe thought it wise to clear the room; and after waiting a few minutes to soothe her, left her to her maid. Bertha had waited for her sister, and clinging round her, said, "Well, Phœbe, aren't you glad of us? Have you seen a living creature?"

"Miss Charlecote twice, Mr. Henderson once, besides all the congregation on Sunday."

"Matter-of-fact Phœbe! Perhaps you can bear it, but does not your mind ache, as if it had been held down all this time?"

"So that it can't expand to your grand intellect?" said Phœbe.

"It is no great self-conceit to hope one is better company than Maria! But come, before we fall under the dominion of the Queen of the West Wing, I have a secret for you." Then, after a longer stammer than usual, "How should you like a French sister-in-law?"

"Nonsense, Bertha!"

"Ah! you've not had my opportunities. I've seen her—both of them. Juliana says the mother is his object; Augusta, the daughter. The mother is much the most brilliant; but then she has a husband—a mere matter of faith, for no one ever sees him. Mervyn is going to follow them to Paris, that's certain, as soon as the Epsom day is over."

"You saw them!"

"Only in the Park—oh, no! not in a room! Their ladyships would never call on Madame la Marquise; she is not received, you know. I heard the sisters talk it all over when they fancied me reading, and wonder what they should do if it should turn out to be the daughter. But then Juliana thinks Mervyn might never bring her home, for he is going on at such a tremendous rate, that it is the luckiest thing our fortunes do not depend on the business."

Phœbe looked quite appalled as she entered the school-room, not only at Mervyn's fulfilment of his threat, but at Bertha's flippancy and shrewdness. Hitherto she had been kept ignorant of evil, save what history and her own heart could tell her. But these ten days had been spent in so eagerly studying the world, that her girlish chatter was fearfully precocious.

"A little edged tool," said Miss Fennimore, when she talked her over afterwards with Phœbe. "I wish I could have been with her at Lady Bannerman's. It is an unsafe age for a glimpse of the world."

"I hope it may soon be forgotten."

"It will never be forgotten," said Miss Fennimore. "With so strong a relish for society, such keen satire, and

reasoning power so much developed, I believe nothing but the devotional principle could subdue her enough to make her a well-balanced woman. How is that to be infused?—that is the question.”

“It is, indeed.”

“I believe,” pursued the governess, “that devotional temper is in most cases dependent upon uncompromising, exclusive faith. I have sometimes wondered whether Bertha, coming into my hands so young as she did, can have imbibed my distaste to dogma; though, as you know, I have made a point of non-interference.”

“I should shudder to think of any doubts in poor little Bertha’s mind,” said Phœbe. “I believe it is rather that she does not think about the matter.”

“I will read Butler’s *Analogy* with her,” exclaimed Miss Fennimore. “I read it long ago, and shall be glad to satisfy my own mind by going over it again. It is full time to endeavour to form and deepen Bertha’s convictions.”

“I suppose,” said Phœbe, almost to herself, “that all naughtiness is the want of living faith——”

But Miss Fennimore, instead of answering, had gone to another subject.

“I have seen St. Matthew’s, Phœbe.”

“And Robert?” cried Phœbe. “Bertha did not say you were with her.”

“I went alone. No doubt your brother found me a great infliction; but he was most kind, and showed me everything. I consider that establishment a great fact.”

Phœbe showed her gratification.

“I heard him preach,” continued Miss Fennimore. “His was a careful and able composition, but it was his sermon in brick and stone that most impressed me. Such actions only arise out of strong conviction. Now, the work of conviction may be only a proof of the force of the will that held it; and thus the effect should not establish the cause. But when I see a young man, brought up as your brother has been, throwing himself with such energy, self-denial, and courage into a task so laborious and obscure, I must own that, such is the construction of the human mind, I am led to reconsider the train of reasoning that has led to such results.”

And Miss Fennimore’s sincere admiration of Robert was Phœbe’s one item of comfort.

Gladly she shared it with Miss Charlecote, who, on her side, knew more than she told Phœbe of the persecution that Robert was undergoing from a vestry notoriously under the influence of the Fulmort firm, whose interest it was to promote the vice that he came to withstand. Even the lads employed in the distillery knew that they gratified their employer by outrages on the clergy and their adherents, and there had been moments when Robert had been exposed to absolute personal danger, by mobs stimulated in the gin-shops; their violence against his attacks on their vicious practices being veiled by a furious party outcry against his religious opinions. He meanwhile set his face like a rock, and strong, resolute, and brave, went his own way, so unmoved as apparently almost to prefer his own antagonistic attitude, and bidding fair to weary out his enemies by his coolness, or to disarm them by the charities of which St. Matthew's was the centre.

As Phœbe never read the papers, and was secluded from the world's gossip, it was needless to distress her with the knowledge of the malignity of the one brother, or the trials of the other; so Honor obeyed Robert by absolute silence on this head. She herself gave her influence, her counsel, her encouragement, and, above all, her prayers, to uphold the youth who was realizing the dreams of her girlhood.

It might be that the impress of those very dreams had formed the character she was admiring. Many a weak and fragile substance, moulded in its softness to a noble shape, has given a clear and lasting impress to a firm and durable material, either in the heat of the furnace, or the ductility of growth. So Robert and Phœbe, children of the heart that had lost those of her adoption, cheered these lonely days by their need of her advice and sympathy.

Nor was she without tasks at home. Mr. Henderson, the vicar, was a very old man, and was constantly growing more feeble and unequal to exertion. He had been appointed by the squire before last, and had the indolent conservative orthodoxy of the old school, regarding activity as a perilous innovation, and resisting all Miss Charlecote's endeavours at progress in the parish. She had had long patience, till when his strength failed, she ventured to entreat him to allow her to undertake the stipend of a curate, but this was rejected with displeasure, and she was forced to redouble her own ex-

ertions; but neither reading to the sick, visiting the cottages, teaching at school, nor even setting up a night-school in her own hall, availed to supply the want of an active pastor and of a resident magistrate.

Hiltonbury was in danger of losing its reputation as a pattern parish, which it had retained long after the death of him who had made it so. The younger race who had since grown up were not such as their fathers had been, and the disorderly household at Beauchamp had done mischief. The primitive manners, the simplicity, and feudal feeling, were wearing off, and poor Honor found the whole charge laid to her few modern steps in education! If Hiltonbury were better than many of the neighbouring places, yet it was not what it had been when she first had known it, and she vexed herself in the attempt to understand whether the times or herself were the cause.

Even her old bailiff, Brooks, did not second her. He had more than come to the term of service at which the servant becomes a master, and had no idea of obeying her, when he thought he knew best. Backward as were her notions of modern farming, they were too advanced for him, and either he would not act on them at all, or was resolved against their success when coerced. There was no dismissing him, and without Mr. Saville to come and enforce her authority, Honor found the old man so stubborn that she had nearly given up the contest, except where the welfare of men, not of crops, was concerned.

A maiden's reign is a dreary thing, when she tends towards age. And Honor often felt what it would have been to have had Owen to back her up, and infuse new spirit and vigour.

The surly ploughboy, who omitted to touch his cap to the lady, little imagined the train of painful reflections roused by this small indication of the altering spirit of the place!

CHAPTER IV.

Even in our ashes glow the wonted fires.
GREY.

"MY dear, I did not like the voice that I heard just now."
"I am sure I was not out of temper."

"Indeed?"

"Well, I am sure any one would be vexed."

"Cannot you tell me what was the matter without being sure so often?"

"I am sure—there, mamma, I beg your pardon—I am sure I did not mean to complain."

"Only, Sarah, neither your voice had such a ring, nor are you so sure when nothing has gone wrong. What was it?"

"It is that photography, mamma. Miss Sandbrook is so busy with it! I could not copy in my translation that I did yesterday, because she had not looked over it, and when she said she was coming presently, I am afraid I said it was always presently and never present. I believe I did say it crossly, and I am sorry I denied it," and poor Sarah's voice was low and meek enough.

"Coming? Where is she?"

"In the dark chamber, doing a positive of the Cathedral."

Mrs. Prendergast entered the schoolroom, outside which she had been holding this colloquy. The powerful sun of high summer was filling the room with barred light through the Venetian blinds, and revealing a rather confused mass of the appliances of study, interspersed with saucers of water in which were bathing paper photographs, and every shelf of books had a fringe of others on glass set up to dry. On the table lay a paper of books, a three-tailed artificial minnow, and another partly clothed with silver twist, a fly-book, and a quantity of feathers and silks.

"I must tell Francis that the schoolroom is no place for his fishing tackle!" exclaimed Mrs. Prendergast.

"O, mamma, it is Miss Sandbrook's. She is teaching him to dress flies, because she says he can't be a real fisherman without, and the trout always rise at hers. It is quite beautiful to see her throw. That delicate hand is so strong and ready."

A door was opened, and out of the housemaid's closet, defended from light by a yellow blind at every crevice, came eager exclamations of "Famous," "Capital," "The tower comes out to perfection," and in another moment Lucilla Sandbrook, in all her bloom and animation, was in the room, followed by a youth of some eighteen years, Francis Beaumont, an Indian nephew of Mrs. Prendergast.

"Hit off at last, isn't it, aunt? Those dog-tooth mouldings will satisfy even the uncle."

"Really it is very good," said Mrs. Prendergast, as it was held up to the light for her inspection.

"Miss Sandbrook has bewitched the camera," continued he. "Do you remember the hideous muddles of last summer? But, oh! Miss Sandbrook, we must have one more; the sun will be off by-and-by."

"Only ten minutes," said Lucilla, in a deprecating tone. "You must not keep me a second more, let the sun be in ever such good humour. Come, Sarah, come and show us the place you said would be so good."

"It is too hot," said Sarah, bluntly, "and I can't waste the morning."

"Well, you pattern-pupil, I'll come presently. Indeed I will, Mrs. Prendergast."

"Let me see this translation, Sarah," said Mrs. Prendergast, as the photographers ran down-stairs.

She looked over it carefully, and as the ten minutes had passed without sign of the governess's return, asked what naturally followed in the morning's employment.

"Italian reading, mamma; but never mind."

"Find the place, my dear."

"It is only while Francis is at home. Oh, I wish I had not been cross." And though Sarah usually loved to read to her mother, she was uneasy all the time, watching the door, and pausing to listen at the most moving passages. It was full half-an-hour before the voices were heard returning, and then there was a call, "Directly, Sarah!" the dark chamber was shut up, and all subsided.

Mrs. Prendergast stayed on, in spite of an imploring glance from her daughter, and after an interval of the mysterious manipulations in the closet, the photograph was borne forth in triumph.

Lucilla looked a little abashed at finding Mrs. Prendergast in presence, and began immediately, "There, Mr. Beaumont, you see! I hope Mrs. Prendergast is going to banish you forthwith; you make us shamefully idle!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Prendergast, gravely, "I am going to carry him off at once, and make a law against future invasions."

Francis attempted loud appeals, but his aunt quashed

them with demeanour that showed that she was in earnest, and drove him away before her.

"Indeed, Miss Sandbrook," said Sarah, with affectionate compunction, "I did not mean to speak so loud and so crossly."

"My dear," said Lucilla, leaning back and fanning herself with her hat, "we all know that we reverse the laws of teacher and pupil! Small blame to you if you were put out, and now I hope your mamma will keep him to herself, and that I shall have time to get cool. There! read me some French, it is a refreshing process—or practise a little. I declare that boy has dragged me in and out so often, that I haven't energy to tell a noun from a verb."

Mrs. Prendergast had hardly descended to the drawing-room before her husband's voice called her to the study, where he stood, his broad mouth distended by a broader smile, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

"Old woman," (his favourite name for her,) "do you know what a spectacle I have been witnessing?" and as she signed inquiry, "Mrs. Sprydene, with numerous waggings of the head, and winkings of the eyes, inveigled me into her den, to see—guess."

"Francis and Miss Sandbrook in the cloister photographing."

"Old woman, you are a witch."

"I knew what they were about, as well as Mrs. Sprydene's agony to open my eyes."

"So your obstinate blindness drove her to me! She thought it right that I should be aware—The Close, it seems, is in a fever about that poor girl. What do you know? Is it all gossip?"

"I know there is gossip, as a law of nature, but I have not chosen to hear it."

"Then you think it all nonsense?"

"Not *all*."

"Well, what then? The good ladies seem terribly scandalized by her dress. Is there any harm in that? I always thought it very becoming."

"Exactly so," said his wife, smiling.

"If it is too smart, can't you give her a hint?"

"When she left off her mourning she spoke to me, saying that she could not afford not to wear out what she already

had. I quite agreed; and though I could wish there were less stylishness about her, it is pleasant to one's own eye, and I see nothing to object to."

"I'm sure it is no concern of the ladies, then! And how about this lad? One of their wild notions, is not it? I have heard her tell him half-a-dozen times that she was six years his elder."

"Four-and-twenty is just the age that young-looking girls like to boast of. I am not afraid on her account; she has plenty of sense and principle, and I believe, too, there is a very sore spot in her heart, poor girl. She plays with him as a mere boy; but he is just at the time of life for a passion for a woman older than himself, and his devotion certainly excites her more than I could wish."

"I'll tell you what, Peter didn't like it at all."

"Peter was certainly not in a gracious mood when he was here last week. I could not make out whether seeing her a governess were too much for him, or whether he suspected me of ill-using her."

"No, no; it was rivalry between him and Master Francis!" said the Doctor, laughing. "How he launched out against young men's conceit when Francis was singing with her. Sheer jealousy! He could see nothing but dilapidation, dissent, and dirt at Laneham, and now has gone and refused it."

"Refused Laneham!—that capital college living!—with no better dependence than his fellowship, and such a curacy as Wrapworth?"

"Indeed he has. Here's his letter. You may read it and give it to Miss Sandbrook if you like—he seems quite dispirited."

"'Too old to enter on a new field of duties,'" read Mrs. Prendergast indignantly. "Why, he is but forty-four! What did he think of us for coming here?"

"Despised me for it," said the Doctor, smiling. "Never mind; he will think himself younger as he grows older—and one can't blame him for keeping to Wrapworth as long as the old Dean of — lives, especially as those absentee Charterises do so much harm."

"He does not expect them to give him the living? They ought, I am sure, after his twenty years' labour there already."

"Not they! Mr. Charteris gratuitously wrote to tell him that, on hearing of his burying that poor young Mrs. Sandbrook there, all scruples had been removed, and the next presentation was offered for sale. You need not tell Miss Sandbrook so."

"Certainly not; but pray how does Peter mean to avoid the new field of duty, if he be sure of turning out on the Dean's death? Oh! I see—'finish his days at his College, if the changes at the University have not rendered it insupportable to one who remembers elder and better days.' Poor Peter! Well, these are direful consequences of Miss Sandbrook's fit of flightiness! Yes, I'll show her the letter, it might tame her a little; and poor thing, I own I liked her better when she was soft and subdued."

"Ha! Then you are not satisfied? Don't go. Let me know how it is. I am sure Sarah is distracted about her—more than even Francis. I would not part with her for a great deal, not only on Peter's account, but on her own and Sarah's; but these ladies have raked up all manner of Charteris scandal, and we are quite in disgrace for bringing her here."

"Yes," said Mrs. Prendergast, "while we lived at our dear old country home, I never quite believed what I heard of jealous ill-nature, but I have seen how it was ever since those Christmas parties, when certainly people paid her a great deal of attention."

"Who would not?—the prettiest, most agreeable young woman there."

"It may be vexatious to be eclipsed not only in beauty, but in style, by a strange governess," said Mrs. Prendergast. That set all the mothers and daughters against her, and there have been some spiteful little attempts at mortifying her, which have made Sarah and me angry beyond description! All that they say only impels me towards her. She is a rare creature, most engaging, but I do sometimes fear that I may have spoilt her a little, for she has certainly not done quite so well of late. At first she worked hard to keep in advance of Sarah, saying how she felt the disadvantage of superficial learning and desultory habits; she kept in the background, and avoided amusements; but I suppose reaction is natural with recovered spirits, and this summer she has taken less pains, and has let Francis occupy her too much,

and—what I like least of all—her inattention brings back the old rubs with Sarah's temper."

"You must take her in hand."

"If she were but my daughter or niece!"

"I thought you had made her feel as such."

"This sort of reproof is the difficulty, and brings back the sense of our relative positions. However, the thing is to be done as much for her sake as for our own."

Lucilla knew that a lecture was impending, but she really loved and esteemed Mrs. Prendergast too much to prepare to champ the bit. That lady's warmth and simplicity, and, above all, the largeness of mind, that prevented her from offending or being offended by trifles, had endeared her extremely to the young governess. Not only had these eight months past without the squabble that Owen had predicted would send her to Hiltonbury in a week, but Cilla had decidedly, though insensibly, laid aside many of the sentiments and habits in which poor Honor's opposition had merely confirmed her. The effect of the sufferings of the past summer had subdued her for a long time, the novelty of her position had awed her, and what Mrs. Prendergast truly called the reaction had been so tardy in coming on that it was a surprise even to herself. Sensible that she had given cause for displeasure, she courted the *tête à tête*, and herself began thus—"I beg your pardon for my idleness. It is a fatal thing to be recalled to the two passions of my youth—fishing and photography."

"My husband will give Francis employment in the morning," said Mrs. Prendergast. "It will not do to give Sarah's natural irritability too many excuses for out-breaks."

"She never accepts excuses," said Lucilla, "though I am sure she might. I have been a sore trial to her diligence and methodicalness; and her soul is too much bent on her work for us to drag her out to be foolish, as would be best for her."

"So it might be for her; but, my dear, pardon me, I am not speaking only for Sarah's sake."

With an odd jerk of head and hand, Cilly exclaimed, "Oh! the old story—the other f—flirting, is it?"

"I never said that! I never thought that," cried Mrs. Prendergast, shocked at the word and idea that had never crossed her mind.

"If not," said Cilla, "it is because you are too innocent to know flirting when you see it! Dear Mrs. Prendergast, I didn't think you would have looked so grave."

"I did not think you would have spoken so lightly; but it is plain that we do not mean the same thing."

"In fact, you, in your quietness, think awfully of that which for years was to me like breathing! I thought the taste was gone forever, but, you see"—and her sweet, sad expression pleaded for her—"you have made me so happy that the old self is come back." There was a silence, broken by this strange girl saying, "Well, what are you going to do to me?"

"Only," said the lady, in her sweet, full, impressive voice, "to beg you will indeed be happy in giving yourself no cause for self-reproach."

"I'm past that," said Lucilla, with a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye. "I've not known that sensation since my father died. My chief happiness since that has lain in being provoking, but you have taken away that pleasure. I couldn't purposely vex you, even if I were your adopted child!"

Without precisely knowing the full amount of these words, Mrs. Prendergast understood past bitterness and present warmth, and, gratified to find that at least there was no galling at their mutual relations, responded with a smile and a caress that led Lucilla to continue—"As for the word that dismayed you, I only meant to acknowledge an unlucky propensity to be excited about any nonsense, in which any *man* kind is mixed up. If Sarah would take to it, I could more easily abstain, but you see her coquetries are with nobody more recent than Horace and Dante."

"I cannot wish it to be otherwise with her," said Mrs. Prendergast, gravely.

"No! It is a bad speculation," said Lucilla, sadly. "She will never wish half her life could be pulled out like defective crochet! nor wear out good people's forbearance with her antics. I did think they were outgrown and beat out of me, and that your nephew was too young; but I suppose it is ingrain, and that I should be flattered by the attentions of a he-baby of six months old! But I'll do my best, Mrs. Prendergast; I promise you I'll not be the schoolmistress abroad in the morning, and you shall see what terms I will keep with Mr. Beaumont."

Mrs. Prendergast was less pleased after than before this promise. It was again that freedom of expression that the girl had learnt among the Charterises, and the ideas that she accepted as mere matters of course that jarred upon the matron, whose secluded life had preserved her in far truer refinement. She did not know how to reply, and, as a means of ending the discussion, gave her Mr. Prendergast's letter, but was amazed at her reception of it.

"Passed the living? Famous! He will stick to Wrapworth to the last gasp! That is fidelity! Pray tell him so from me."

"You had better send your message through Dr. Prendergast. We cannot but be disappointed, though I understand your feeling for Wrapworth, and we are sorry for the dispirited tone about the letter."

"Well he may be, all alone there, and seeing poor Castle Blanch going to rack and ruin. I could cry about it whenever I think of it; but how much worse it would have been if he had deserted too! As long as he is in the old vicarage there is a home spot to me in the world! Oh, I thank him, I do thank him for standing by the old place to the last."

"It is preposterous," thought Mrs. Prendergast. "I won't tell the Doctor. He would think it so foolish in him, and improper in her: but I verily believe it is her influence that keeps him at Wrapworth! He cannot bear to cross her wishes nor give her pain. Well, I am thankful that Sarah is neither beautiful nor attractive."

Sincere was Lucilla's intention to resume her regular habits, and put a stop to Francis Beaumont's attentions, but the attraction had already gone so far that repression rendered him the more assiduous, and often bore the aspect (if it were not absolutely the coyness) of coquetry. While deprecating from her heart any attachment on his part, her vanity was fanned at finding herself in her present position as irresistible as ever, and his eagerness to obtain a smile or word from her was such an agreeable titillation, that everything else became flat, and her hours in the school-room an imprisonment. Sarah's methodical earnestness in study bored her, and she was sick of restraint and application. Nor was this likely to be merely a passing evil, for Francis's parents were in India, and Southminster was his only English home. Nay, even when he had returned to his tutor,

Lucilla was not restored to her better self. Her craving for excitement had been awakened, and her repugnance to mental exertion had been yielded to. The routine of lessons had become bondage, and she sought every occasion of variety, seeking to outshine and dazzle the ladies of Southminster, playing off Castle Blanch fascinations on curates and minor canons, and sometimes flying at higher game, even beguiling the Dean himself into turning over her music when she sang.

She had at first, by the use of all her full-grown faculties, been just able to keep sufficiently ahead of her pupil; but her growing indolence soon caused her to slip back, and not only did she let Sarah shoot ahead of her, but she became impatient of the girl's habits of accuracy and research; she would give careless and vexatious answers, insist petulantly on correcting by the ear, make light of Sarah and her grammar, and hastily reject or hurry from the maps, dictionaries, and cyclopædias with which Sarah's training had taught her to read and learn. But her dislike of trouble in supporting an opinion did not make her the less pertinacious in upholding it, and there were times when she was wrathful and petulant at Sarah's presumption in maintaining the contrary, even with all the authorities in the bookshelves to back her.

Sarah's temper was not her prime quality, and altercations began to run high. Each dispute that took place only prepared the way for another, and Mrs. Prendergast, having taken a governess chiefly to save her daughter from being fretted by interruptions, found that her annoyances were tenfold increased, and irritations were almost habitual. They were the more disappointing because the girl preserved through them all such a passionate admiration for her beautiful and charming little governess, that, except in the very height of a squabble, she still believed her perfection, and was her most vehement partisan, even when the wrong had been chiefly on the side of the teacher.

On the whole, in spite of this return to old faults, Lucilla was improved by her residence at Southminster. Defiance had fallen into disuse, and the habit of respect and affection had softened her and lessened her pride; there was more devotional temper, and a greater desire after a religious way of life. It might be that her fretfulness was the

effect of an uneasiness of mind, which was more hopeful than her previous fierce self-satisfaction, and that her aberrations were the last efforts of old evil habits to re-establish their grasp by custom, when her heart was becoming detached from them.

Be that as it might, Mrs. Prendergast's first duty was to her child, her second to the nephew entrusted to her, and love and pity as she might, she felt that to retain Lucilla was leading all into temptation. Her husband was slow to see the verification of her reluctant opinion, but he trusted to her, and it only remained to part as little harshly or injuriously as might be.

An opening was afforded when, in October, Mrs. Prendergast was entreated by the widow of one of her brothers to find her a governess for two girls of twelve and ten, and two boys younger. It was at a country-house, so much secluded that such temptations as at Southminster were out of reach, and the younger pupils were not likely to try her temper in the same way as Sarah had done.

So Mrs. Prendergast tenderly explained that Sarah, being old enough to pursue her studies alone, and her sister, Mrs. Willis Beaumont, being in distress for a governess, it would be best to transfer Miss Sandbrook to her. Lucilla turned a little pale, but gave no other sign, only answering, "Thank you," and "Yes," at fit moments, and acceding to everything, even to her speedy departure at the end of a week.

She left the room in silence, more stunned than even by Robert's announcement, and with less fictitious strength to brave the blow that she had brought on herself. She repaired to the school-room, and leaning her brow against the window-pane, tried to gather her thoughts, but scarcely five minutes had passed before the door was thrown back, and in rushed Sarah, passionately exclaiming—

"It's my fault! It's all my fault! Oh, Miss Sandbrook, dearest Miss Sandbrook, forgive me! Oh! my temper! my temper! I never thought—I'll go to papa! I'll tell him it is my doing! He will never—never be so unjust and cruel!"

"Sarah, stand up; let me go, please," said Lucy, unclasping the hands from her waist. "This is not right. Your father and mother both think the same, and so do I. It is just that I should go——"

"You shan't say so! It is my crossness! I won't let you go. I'll write to Peter! He won't let you go!" Sarah was really beside herself with despair, and as her mother advanced, and would have spoken, turned round sharply, "Don't, don't, mamma; I won't come away unless you promise not to punish her for my temper. You have minded those horrid, wicked, gossiping ladies. I didn't think you would!"

"Sarah," said Lucilla, resolutely, "going mad in this way just shows that I am doing you no good. You are not behaving properly to your mother."

"She never acted unjustly before."

"That is not for you to judge, in the first place; and in the next, she acts justly. I feel it. Yes, Sarah, I do; I have not done my duty by you, and have quarrelled with you when your interest shamed me. All my old bad habits are come back, and your mother is right to part with me."

"There! there, mamma; do you hear that?" sobbed Sarah, imploringly. "When she speaks in that way, can you still—? Oh! I know I was disrespectful, but you can't—you can't think that was her fault!"

"It was," said Lucilla, looking at Mrs. Prendergast. "I know she has lost the self-control she once had. Sarah, this is of no use. I would go now, if your mother begged me to stay—and that," she added, with her firm smile, "she is too wise to do. If you do not wish to pain me, and put me to shame, do not let me have any more such exhibitions."

Pale, ashamed, discomfited, Sarah turned away, and not yet able to govern herself, rushed into her room.

"Poor Sarah!" said her mother. "You have rare powers of making your pupils love you, Miss Sandbrook."

"If it were for their good," sighed Lucilla.

"It has been much for her good; she is far less uncouth, and less exclusive. And it will be more so, I hope. You will still be her friend, and we shall often see you here."

Lucilla's tears were dropping fast; and looking up, she said with difficulty—"Don't mind this; I know it is right; I have not deserved the happy home you have given me here. Where I am less happy, I hope I may keep a better guard on myself. I thought the old ways had been destroyed, but they are too strong still, and I ought to suffer for them."

Never in all her days had Lucilla spoken so humbly!

CHAPTER V.

Though she's as like to this one as a crab is like to an apple, I can tell what I can tell.—*King Lear*.

OFTEN a first grief, where sorrow has hitherto been a stranger, is but the foretaste to many another, like the first hail-storm, after long sunshine, prelude to a succession of showers, the clouds returning after the rain, and obscuring the sky of life for many a day.

Those who daily saw Mrs. Fulmort scarcely knew whether to attribute her increasing invalidism to debility or want of spirits; and hopes were built on summer heat, till, when it came, it prostrated her strength, and at last, when some casual ailment had confined her to bed, there was no rally. All took alarm; a physician was called in, and the truth was disclosed. There was no formed disease; but her husband's death, though apparently hardly comprehended, had taken away the spring of life, and she was withering like a branch severed from the stem. Remedies did but disturb her to, por by feverish symptoms that hastened her decline, and Dr. Martyn privately told Miss Charlecote that the absent sons and daughters ought to be warned that the end might be very near.

Honor as lovingly and gently as possible, spoke to Phœbe. The girl's eyes filled with tears, but it was in an almost well-pleased tone that she said, "Dear mamma, I always knew she felt it."

"Ah! little did we think how deeply went the stroke that showed no wound!"

"Yes! She felt that she was going to him. We could never have made her happy here."

"You are content, my unselfish one?"

"Don't talk to me about myself, please!" implored Phœbe. "I have too much to do for that. What did he say? That the others should be written to? I will take my case and write in mamma's room."

Immediate duty was her refuge from anticipation, gentle tendance from the sense of misery, and, though her mother's restless feebleness needed constant waiting on, her four notes

were completed before post-time. Augusta was eating red mullet in Guernsey, Juliana was on a round of visits in Scotland. Mervyn was supposed to be at Paris, Robert alone was near at hand.

At night, Phœbe sent Boodle to bed; but Miss Fennimore insisted on sharing her pupil's watch. At first there was nothing to do; the patient had fallen into a heavy slumber, and the daughter sat by the bed, the governess at the window, unoccupied save by their books. Phœbe was reading Miss Maurice's invaluable counsels to the nurses of the dying. Miss Fennimore had the Bible. It was not from a sense of appropriateness, as in pursuance of her system of re-examination. Always admiring the Scripture in a patronizing temper, she had gloried in critical inquiry, and regarded plenary inspiration as a superstition, covering weak points by pretensions to infallibility. But since her discussions with Robert, and her readings of Butler with Bertha, she had begun to weigh for herself the internal, intrinsic evidence of Divine origin, above all, in the Gospels, which, to her surprise, enchained her attention and investigation, as she would have thought beyond the power of such simple words.

Pilate's question, "What is truth?" was before her. To her it was a link of evidence. Without even granting that the writer was the fisherman he professed to be, what, short of Shakspearian intuition, could thus have depicted the Roman of the early Empire in equal dread of Cæsar and of the populace, at once unscrupulous and timid, contemning Jewish prejudice, yet, with lingering mythological superstition, trembling at the hint of a present Deity in human form; and lost in the bewilderment of the later Greek philosophy, greeting the word *truth* with the startled inquiry, what it might be. What is truth? It had been the question of Miss Fennimore's life, and she felt a blank and a disappointment as it stood unanswered. A movement made her look up. Phœbe was raising her mother, and Miss Fennimore was needed to support the pillows.

"Phœbe, my dear, are you here?"

"Yes, dear mamma, I always am."

"Phœbe, my dear, I think I am soon going. You have been a good child, my dear; I wish I had done more for you all."

"Dear mamma, you have always been so kind."

"They didn't teach me like Honora Charlecote," she faltered on; "but I always did as your poor papa told me. Nobody ever told me how to be religious, and your poor papa would not have liked it. Phœbe, you know more than I do. You don't think God will be hard with me, do you? I am such a poor creature; but there is the Blood that takes away sin."

"Dear mother, that is the blessed trust."

"The *Truth*," flashed upon Miss Fennimore, as she watched their faces.

"Will He give me His own goodness?" said Mrs. Fulmort, wistfully. "I never did know how to think about Him—I wish I had cared more. What do you think, Phœbe?"

"I cannot tell how to answer fully, dear mamma," said Phœbe; "but indeed it is safe to think of His great loving-kindness and mercy. Robert will be here to-morrow. He will tell you better."

"He will give me the Holy Sacrament," said Mrs. Fulmort, "and then I shall go——"

Presently she moved uneasily. "Oh, Phœbe, I am so tired. Nothing rests me."

"There remaineth a rest," gently whispered Phœbe—and Miss Fennimore thought the young face had something of the angel in it—"no more weariness there."

"They won't think what a poor dull thing I am there," added her mother. "I wish I could take poor Maria with me! They don't like her here, and she will be teased and put about."

"No, mother, never while I can take care of her!"

"I know you will, Phœbe, if you say so. Phœbe, love, when I see God, I shall thank Him for having made you so good and dear, and letting me have some comfort in one of my children."

Phœbe tried to make her think of Robert, but she was exhausted, dozed, and was never able to speak so much again.

Miss Fennimore thought instead of reading. Was it the mere effect on her sympathies that bore in on her mind that Truth existed, and was grasped by the mother and daughter? What was there in those faltering accents that impressed her with reality? Why, of all her many instruc-

tors, had none touched her like poor, ignorant, feeble-minded Mrs. Fulmort?

Robert arrived the next day. His mother knew him, and was roused sufficiently to accept his offices as a clergyman. Then, as if she thought it was expected of her, she asked for her younger daughters, but when they came, she looked distressed and perplexed.

"Bless them, mother," said Robert, bending over her, and she evidently accepted this as what she wanted; but "How—what?" she added; and taking the uncertain hand, he guided it to the head of each of his three sisters, and prompted the words of blessing from the failing tongue. Then as Bertha rose, he sank on his knees in her place, "Bless me, bless me, too, mother; bless me, and pardon my many acts of self-will."

"You are good—you—you are a clergyman," she hesitated, bewildered.

"The more reason, mamma; it will comfort him." And it was Phœbe who won for her brother the blessing needed as balm to a bleeding heart.

"The others are away," said the dying woman; "may be, if I had made them good when they were little, they would not have left me now."

While striving to join in prayer for them, she slumbered, and in the course of the night she slept herself tranquilly away from the world where even prosperity had been but a troubled maze to her.

Augusta arrived, weeping profusely, but with all her wits about her, so as to assume the command, and provide for her own, and her Admiral's, comfort. Phœbe was left to the mournful repose of having no one to whom to attend, since Miss Fennimore provided for the younger ones; and in the lassitude of bodily fatigue and sorrow, she shrank from Maria's babyish questions and Bertha's levity and curiosity, spending her time chiefly alone. Even Robert could not often be with her, since Mervyn's absence and silence threw much on him and Mr. Crabbe, the executor and guardian; and the Bannermans were both exacting and self-important. The Actons, having been pursued by their letters from place to place in the Highlands, at length arrived, and Mervyn last of all, only just in time for the funeral.

Phœbe did not see him till the evening after it, when having spent the day nearly alone, she descended to the late dinner, and after the quietness in which she had lately lived, and with all the tenderness from fresh suffering, it seemed to her that she was entering on a distracting turmoil of voices. Mervyn, however, came forward at once to meet her, threw his arm round her, and kissed her rather demonstratively, saying, "My little Phœbe, I wondered where you were;" then putting her into a chair, and bending over her, "We are in for the funeral games. Stand up for yourself!"

She did not know in the least what he could mean, but she was too sick at heart to ask; she only thought he looked unwell, jaded, and fagged, and with a heated complexion.

He handed Lady Acton into the dining-room; Augusta, following with Sir Bevil, was going to the head of the table, when he called out, "That's Phœbe's place!"

"Not before my elders," Phœbe answered, trying to seat herself at the side.

"The sister at home is mistress of the house," he sternly answered. "Take your proper place, Phœbe."

In much discomfort she obeyed, and tried to attend civilly to Sir Nicholas's observations on the viands, hoping to intercept a few, as she perceived how they chafed her eldest brother.

At last, on Mervyn himself roundly abusing the flavour of the ice-pudding, Augusta not only defended it, but confessed to having herself directed Mrs. Brisbane to the concoction that morning.

"Mrs. Brisbane shall take orders from no lady but Miss Fulmort, while she is in my house," thundered Mervyn.

Phœbe, in agony, began to say, she knew not what, to Sir Bevil, and he seconded her with equal vehemence and incoherency, till by the time they knew what they were talking of, they were with much interest discussing his little daughter, scarcely turning their heads from one another, till, in the midst of dessert, the voice of Juliana was heard,— "Sir Bevil, Sir Bevil, if you can spare me any attention— What was the name of that person at Hampstead that your sister told me of?"

"That person! What, where poor Anne Acton was boarded? Dr. Graham, he called himself, but I don't believe he was a physician. Horrid vulgar fellow!"

"Excellent for the purpose, though," continued Lady Acton, addressing herself as before to Mr. Crabbe; "advertisers for nervous or deficient ladies, and boards them on very fair terms: would take her quite off our hands."

Phoebe turned a wild look of imploring interrogation on Sir Bevil, but a certain family telegraph had electrified him, and his eyes were on the grapes that he was eating with nervous haste. Her blood boiling at what she apprehended, Phoebe could endure her present post no longer, and starting up, made the signal for leaving the dinner-table so suddenly that Augusta choked upon her glass of wine, and carried off her last macaroon in her hand. Before she had recovered breath to rebuke her sister's precipitation, Phoebe, with boldness and spirit quite new to the sisters, was confronting Juliana, and demanding what she had been saying about Hampstead.

"Only," said Juliana, coolly, "that I have found a capital place there for Maria—a Doctor Graham, who boards and lodges such unfortunates. Sir Bevil had an idiot cousin there who died. I shall write to-morrow."

"I promised that Maria should not be separated from me," said Phoebe.

"Nonsense, my dear," said Augusta; "we could not receive her; she can never be made presentable."

"You?" said Phoebe.

"Yes, my dear; did you not know? You go home with us the day after to-morrow; and next spring I mean to bring you out, and take you everywhere. The Admiral is so generous!"

"But the others?" said Phoebe.

"I don't mind undertaking Bertha," said Lady Acton. "I know of a good school for her, and I shall deposit Maria at Dr. Graham's as soon as I can get an answer."

"Really," continued Augusta, "Phoebe will look very creditable by-and-by, when she has more colour, and not all this crape. Perhaps I shall get her married by the end of the season; only you must learn better manners first, Phoebe—not to rush out of the dining-room in this way. I don't know what I shall do without my other glass of wine—when I am so low, too!"

"A fine mistress of the house, indeed," said Lady Acton. "It is well Mervyn's absurd notion is impossible."

"What was that? To keep us all?" asked Phœbe, catching at the hope.

"Not Maria nor the governess. You need not flatter yourself," said Juliana; "he said he wouldn't have them at any price; and as to keeping house alone with a man of his character, even you may have sense to see it couldn't be for a moment."

"Did Robert consent to Maria's going to Hampstead?" asked Phœbe.

"Robert—what has he to do with it? He has no voice!"

"He said something about getting the three boarded with some clergyman's widow," said Augusta; "buried in some hole, I suppose, to make them like himself—go to church every day, and eat cold dinners on Sunday."

"I should like to see Bertha doing that," said Juliana, laughing.

But the agony of helplessness that had oppressed Phœbe was relieved. She saw an outlet, and could form a resolution. Home might have to be given up, but there was a means of fulfilling her mother's charge, and saving Maria from the private idiot asylum; and for that object Phœbe was ready to embrace perpetual seclusion with the dullest of widows. She found her sisters discussing their favourite subject—Mervyn's misconduct and extravagance—and she was able to sit apart, working, and thinking of her line of action. Only two days! She must be prompt, and not wait for privacy or for counsel. So, when the gentlemen came in, and Mr. Crabbe came towards her, she took him into the window, and asked him if any choice were permitted her as to her residence.

"Certainly; so nearly of age as you are. But I naturally considered that you would wish to be with Lady Bannerman, with all the advantages of London society."

"But she will not receive Maria. I promised that Maria should be my charge. You have not consented to this Hampstead scheme?"

"Her Ladyship is precipitate," half whispered the lawyer. "I certainly would not, till I had seen the establishment, and judged for myself."

"No, nor then," said Phœbe. "Come to-morrow, and see her. She is no subject for *an establishment*. And I

beg you will let me be with her; I would much prefer being with any lady who would receive us both."

"Very amiable," said Mr. Crabbe.

"Ha!" interrupted Mervyn, "you are not afraid I shall let Augusta carry you off, Phœbe. She would give the world to get you, but I don't mean to part with you."

"It is of no use to talk to her, Mervyn," cried Augusta's loud voice from the other end of the room. "She knows that she cannot remain with you. Robert himself would tell her so."

"Robert knows better than to interfere," said Mervyn, with one of his scowls. "Now then, Phœbe, settle it for yourself. Will you stay and keep house for me at home, or be Augusta's companion? There! the choice of Hercules. Virtue or vice?" he added, trying to laugh.

"Neither," said Phœbe, readily. "My home is fixed by Maria's."

"Phœbe, are you crazy?" broke out the three voices; while Sir Nicholas slowly and sententiously explained that he regretted the unfortunate circumstances, but Maria's peculiarities made it impossible to produce her in society; and that when her welfare and happiness had been consulted by retirement, Phœbe would find a home in his house, and be treated as Lady Bannerman's sister, and a young lady of her expectations deserved.

"Thank you," said Phœbe; then turning to her brother, "Mervyn, do you, too, cast off poor Maria?"

"I told you what I thought of that long ago," said Mervyn, carelessly.

"Very well, then," said Phœbe, sadly; "perhaps you will let us stay till some lady can be found of whom Mr. Crabbe may approve, with whom Maria and I can live."

"Lady Acton!" Sir Bevil's voice was low and entreating, but all heard it.

"I am not going to encumber myself," she answered. "I always disliked girls, and I shall certainly not make Acton Manor an idiot asylum."

"And mind," added Augusta, "you won't come to me for the season! I have no notion of your leaving me all the dull part of the year for some gay widow at a watering-place, and then expecting me to go out with you in London."

"By Heaven!" broke out Mervyn, "they *shall* stay here, if only to balk your spite. My sisters shall not be driven from pillar to post the very day their mother is put under ground."

"Some respectable lady," began Robert.

"Some horrid old harridan of a boarding-house keeper," shouted Mervyn, the louder for his interference. "Ah, you would like it, and spend all their fortunes on parsons in long coats! I know better! Come here, Phœbe, and listen. You shall live here as you have always done, Maria and all, and keep the Fennimore woman to mind the children. Answer me, will that content you? Don't go looking at Robert, but say yes or no."

Mervyn's innuendo had deprived his offer of its grace, but in spite of the pang of indignation, in spite of Robert's eye of disapproval, poor desolate Phœbe must needs cling to her home, and to the one who alone would take her and her poor companion. "Mervyn, thank you; is it right?"

"Right! What does that mean? If anyone has a word to say against my sisters being under my roof, let me hear it openly, not behind my back. Eh, Juliana, what's that?"

"Only that I wonder how long it will last," sneered Lady Acton.

"And," added Robert, "there should be some guarantee that they should not be introduced to unsuitable acquaintance.

"You think me not to be trusted with them."

"I do not."

Mervyn ground his teeth, answering, "Very well, sir, I stand indebted to you. I should have imagined, whatever your opinion of me, you would have considered your favourite sky-blue governess an immaculate guardian, or can you be contented with nothing short of a sisterhood?"

"Robert," said Phœbe, fearing lest worse should follow, "Mervyn has always been good to us; I trust to him." And her clear eyes were turned on the eldest brother with a grateful confidence that made him catch her hand with something between thanks and triumph, as he said—

"Well said, little one! There, sir, are you satisfied?"

"I must be," replied Robert.

Sir Bevil, able to endure no longer, broke in with some

intelligence from the newspaper, which he had been perusing ever since his unlucky appeal to his lady. Every one thankfully accepted this means of ending the discussion.

"Well, Miss," was Juliana's good night; "you have attained your object. I hope you may find it answer."

"Yes," added Augusta, "when Mervyn brings home that Frenchwoman, you will wish you had been less tenacious."

"That's all an idea of yours," said Juliana. "She'll have punishment enough in Master Mervyn's own temper. I wouldn't keep house for him, no, not for a week."

"Stay till you are asked," said Augusta.

Phœbe could bear no more, but slipped through the swing-door, reached her room, and sinking into a chair, passively let Lieschen undress her, not attempting to raise her drooping head, nor check the tears that trickled, conscious only of her broken, wounded, oppressed state of dejection, into the details of which she durst not look. How should she, when her misery had been inflicted by such hands? The mere fact of the unseemly broil between the brothers and sisters on such an evening was shame and pain enough, and she felt like one bruised and crushed all over, both in herself and Maria, while the one drop of comfort in Mervyn's kindness was poisoned by the strife between him and Robert, and the doubt whether Robert thought she ought to have accepted it.

When her maid left her, she only moved to extinguish her light, and then cowered down again as if to hide in the darkness; but the soft summer twilight gloom seemed to soothe and restore her, and with a longing for air to refresh her throbbing brow, she leant out into the cool, still night, looking into the northern sky, still pearly with the last reminiscence of the late sunset, and with the pale large stars beaming calmly down.

"Oh, mother, mother! Well might you long to take your poor Maria with you—there where the weary are at rest—where there is mercy for the weak and slow! Home! home! we have none but with you!"

Nay, had she not a home with Him Whose love was more than mother's love; Whose soft stars were smiling on her now; Whose gentle breezes fanned her burning cheeks, even as a still softer breath of comfort was stilling her

troubled spirit! She leant out till she could compose herself to kneel in prayer, and from prayer rose up quietly, weary, and able to rest beneath the Fatherly Wings spread over the orphan.

She was early astir, though with heavy, swollen eyelids; and anxious to avoid Bertha's inquiries till all should be more fully settled, she betook herself to the garden, to cool her brow and eyes. She was bathing them in the dewy fragrant heart of a full-blown rose, that had seemed to look at her with a tearful smile of sympathy, when a step approached and an arm was thrown round her, and Robert stood beside her.

"My Phœbe," he said tenderly, "how are you? It was a frightful evening!"

"Oh! Robert, were you displeased with me?"

"No, indeed. You put us all to shame. I grieved that you had no more preparation, but some of the guests stayed late, afterwards I was hindered by business, and then Bevil laid hands on me to advise me privately against this establishment for poor Maria."

"I thought it was Juliana who pressed it?"

"Have you not learnt that whatever he dislikes she forwards?"

"Oh! Robert, you can hinder that scheme from ever being thought of again?"

"Yes," said Robert; "*there* she should never have been, even had you not made resistance."

"And, Robert, may we stay here?" asked Phœbe, trembling.

"Crabbe sees no objection," he answered.

"Do you, Robert? If you think we ought not, I will try to change; but Mervyn is kind, and it is home! I saw you thought me wrong, but I could not help being glad he relented to Maria."

"You were right. Your eldest brother is the right person to give you a home. I cannot. It would have shown an evil, suspicious temper if you had refused him."

"Yet you do not like it."

"Perhaps I am unjust. I own that I had imagined you all happier and better in such a home as Mrs. Parsons or Miss Charlecote could find for you; and though Mervyn would scarcely wilfully take advantage of your innocence, I do

not trust to his always knowing what would be hurtful to you or Bertha. It is a charge that I grudge to him, for I do not think he perceives what it is."

"I could make you think better of him. I wonder whether I may."

"Anything—anything to make me think better of him," cried Robert, eagerly.

"I do not know it from him alone, so it cannot be a breach of confidence," said Phœbe. "He has been deeply attached, not to a pretty person, nor a rich nor grand one, but she was very good and religious—so much so that she would not accept him."

"How recently?"

"The attachment has been long; the rejection this spring."

"My poor Phœbe, I could not tell you how his time has been passed since early spring."

"I know in part," she said, looking down; "but, Robin, *that* arose from despair. Oh, how I longed for him to come and let me try to comfort him!"

"And how is this to change my opinion," asked Robert, "except by showing me that no right-minded woman could trust herself with him?"

"Oh, Robert, no! Sisters need not change, though others ought, perhaps. I meant you to see that he does love and honour goodness for itself, and so that he will guard his sisters."

"I will think so, Phœbe. You deserve to be believed, for you draw out his best points. For my own part, the miserable habits of our boyhood have left a habit of acrimony, of which, repent as I will, I cannot free myself. I gave way to it last night. I can be cool, but I cannot help being contemptuous. I make him worse, and I aggravated your difficulties by insulting him."

"He insulted you," said Phœbe. "When I think of those words I don't know how I can stay with him."

"They fell short! They were nothing," said Robert. "But it was the more unbefitting in me to frame my warning as I did. Oh, Phœbe, your prayers and influence have done much for me. Help me now to treat my brother so as not to disgrace my calling."

"You—when you freely forgive all the injuries he has done you!"

"If I freely forgave, I suppose I should love;" and he murmured sadly, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer."

Phœbe shrank, but could not help thinking that if the spirit of Cain existed among them, it was not with the younger brother.

When she next spoke, it was to express her fear lest Miss Fennimore should refuse to remain, since the position would be uncomfortable. Her talent was thrown away on poor Maria, and Bertha had been very vexing and provoking of late. Phœbe greatly dreaded a change, both from her love for her governess, and alarm lest a new duenna might be yet more unwelcome to Mervyn, and she was disappointed to see that Robert caught at the hope that the whole scheme might be baffled on this score.

Phœbe thought a repetition of the dinner-table offence would be best obviated by taking her place as tea-maker at once. Mervyn first came down, and greeted her like something especially his own. He detected the red blistered spot on her cheek, and exclaimed, "Eh! did they make you cry? Never mind; the house will soon be clear of them, and you my little queen. You have nothing to say against it. Has any one been putting things in your head?" and he looked fiercely at his brother.

"No, Mervyn; Robert and I both think you very kind, and that it is the right thing."

"Yes," said Robert, "no arrangement could be more proper. I am sorry, Mervyn, if my manner was offensive last night."

"I never take offence, it is not my way," said Mervyn, indifferently, almost annoyed that his brother had not spirit to persevere in the quarrel.

After the breakfast, where the elder sisters were cold and distant, and Sir Bevil as friendly as he durst, Mervyn's first move was to go, in conjunction with Mr. Crabbe, to explain the arrangement to Miss Fennimore, and request her to continue her services. They came away surprised and angry: Miss Fennimore would "consider of it." Even when Mervyn, to spare himself from "some stranger who might prove a greater nuisance," had offered a hundred in addition to her present exorbitant salary, she courteously

declined, and repeated that her reply should be given in the evening.

Mervyn's wrath would have been doubled had he known the cause of her delay. She sent Maria to beg Robert to spare her half an hour, and on his entrance, dismissing her pupils, she said, "Mr. Fulmort, I should be glad if you would candidly tell me your opinion of the proposed arrangement. I mean," seeing his hesitation, "of that part which relates to myself."

"I do not quite understand you," he said.

"I mean, whether, as the person whose decision has the most worth in this family, you are satisfied to leave your sisters under my charge? If not, whatever it may cost me to part with that sweet and admirable Phœbe," and her voice showed unwonted emotion, "I would not think of remaining with them."

"You put me in a very strange position, Miss Fennimore; I have no authority to decide. They could have no friend more sincerely anxious for their welfare or so welcome to Phœbe's present wishes."

"Perhaps not; but the question is not of my feelings nor theirs, but whether you consider my influence pernicious to their religious principles. If so, I decline their guardian's terms at once." After a pause, she added, pleased at his deliberation, "It may assist you if I lay before you the state of my own mind."

She proceeded to explain that her parents had been professed Unitarians, her mother, loving and devout to the hereditary faith, beyond which she had never looked—"Mr. Fulmort," she said, "nothing will approve itself to me that condemns my mother!"

He began to say that often where there was no wilful rejection of truth, saving grace and faith might be vouchsafed.

"You are charitable," she answered, in a tone like sarcasm, and went on. Her father, a literary man of high ability, set aside from work by ill-health, thought himself above creeds. He had given his daughter a man's education, had read many argumentative books with her, and died, leaving her liberally and devoutly inclined in the spirit of Pope's universal prayer—"Jehovah, Jove, or Lord." It was all aspiration to the Lord of nature, the forms, adaptations to humanity, kaleidoscope shapes of half-comprehended

fragments, each with its own beauty, and only becoming worthy of reprobation where they permitted moral vices, among which she counted intolerance.

What she thought reasonable—Christianity, modified by the world's progress—was her tenet, and she had no scruple in partaking in any act of worship; while naturally conscientious, and loving all the virtues, she viewed the terrors of religion as the scourge of the grovelling and superstitious; or if suffering existed at all, it could be only as expiation, conducting to a condition of high intellect and perfect morality. No other view, least of all that of a vicarious atonement, seemed to her worthy of the beneficence of the God whom she had set up for herself.

Thus had she rested for twenty years; but of late she had been dissatisfied. Living with Phœbe, "though the child was not naturally intellectual," there was no avoiding the impression that what she acted and rested on was substantial truth. "The same with others," said Miss Fennimore, meaning her auditor himself. "And, again, I cannot but feel that devotion to any system of faith is the restraint that Bertha is deficient in, and that this is probably owing to my own tone. These examples have led me to go over the former ground in the course of the present spring; and it has struck me that, if the Divine Being be not the mere abstraction I once supposed, it is consistent to believe that He has a character and will—individuality, in short—so that there might be one single revelation of absolute truth. I have not thoroughly gone through the subject, but I hope to do so; and when I mark what I can only call a supernatural influence on an individual character, I view it as an evidence in favour of the system that produced it. My exposition of my opinions shocks you; I knew it would. But knowing this, and thinking it possible that an undoubting believer might have influenced Bertha, are you willing to trust your sisters to me?"

"Let me ask one question—why was this explanation never offered before, to those who had more right to decide?"

"My tenets have seldom been the subject of inquiry. When they have, I have concealed nothing; and twice have thus missed a situation. But these things are usually taken for granted; and I never imagined it my duty to volunteer

my religious sentiments, since I never obtruded them. I gave no scandal by objecting to any form of worship, and concerned myself with the moral and intellectual, not the religious being."

"Could you reach the moral without the religious?"

"I should tell you that I have seldom reared a pupil from childhood. Mine have been chiefly from fifteen to eighteen, whose parents required their instruction, not education, from me; and till I came here, I never fully beheld the growth and development of character. I found that whereas all I could do for Phœbe was to give her method and information, leaving alone the higher graces elsewhere derived, with Bertha, my efforts were inadequate to supply any motive for overcoming her natural defects; and I believe that association with a person of my sceptical habit has tended to prevent Phœbe's religion from influencing her sister."

"This is the reason you tell me?"

"Partly; and likewise because I esteem you very differently from my former employers, and know that your views for your sisters are not like those of the persons with whom I have been accustomed to deal."

"You know that I have no power. It rests entirely with my brother and Mr. Crabbe."

"I am perfectly aware of it; but I could not allow myself to be forced on your sisters by any family arrangement contrary to the wishes of that member of it who is most qualified to judge for them."

"Thank you, Miss Fennimore; I will treat you as openly as you have treated me. I have often felt indignant that my sisters should be exposed to any risk of having their faith shaken; and this morning I almost hoped to hear that you did not consent to Mervyn's scheme. But what you have said convinces me that, whatever you may have been previously, you are more likely to strengthen and confirm them in all that is good than half the people they would meet. I know that it would be a heavy affliction to Phœbe to lose so kind a friend; it might drive her from the home to which she clings, and separate Bertha, at least, from her; and under the circumstances, I cannot wish you to leave the poor girls at present." He spoke rather confusedly, but there was more consent in manner than words.

"Thank you," she replied fervently. "I cannot tell you

what it would cost me to part with Phœbe, my living lesson."

"Only let the lesson be still unconscious."

"I would not have it otherwise for worlds. The calm reliance that makes her a ministering spirit is far too lovely to be ruffled by a hint of the controversies that weary my brain. If it be the effect of credulity, the effects are more beauteous than those of clear eyesight."

"You will not always think it credulity."

"There would be great rest in being able to accept all that you and she do," Miss Fennimore answered with a sigh; "in finding an unchanging answer to 'What is truth?' Yet even your Gospel leaves that question unanswered."

"Unanswered to Pilate; but those who are true find the truth; and I verily trust that your eyes will become cleared to find it. Miss Fennimore, you know that I am unready and weak in argument, and you have often left me no refuge but my positive conviction; but I can refer you to those who are strong. If I can help you by carrying your difficulties to others, or by pointing out books, I should rejoice ——"

"You cannot argue—you can only act," said Miss Fennimore, smiling, as a message called him away.

The schoolroom had been left undisturbed, for the sisters were otherwise occupied. By Mr. Fulmort's will, the jewels, excepting certain Mervyn heirlooms, were to be divided between the daughters, and their two ladyships thought this the best time for their choice, though as yet they could not take possession. Phœbe would have given the world that the sets had been appropriated, so that Mervyn and Mr. Crabbe should not have had to make her miserable by fighting her battles, insisting on her choosing, and then overruling her choice as not of sufficiently valuable articles, while Bertha profited by the lesson in harpyhood, and regarded all claimed by the others as so much taken from herself; and poor Maria clasped on every bracelet one by one, threaded every ring on her fingers, and caught the same lustre on every diamond, delighting in the grand exhibition, and in her own share, which by general consent included all that was clumsy and ill-set. No one had the heart to disturb her, but Phœbe felt that the poor thing was an eyesore to them all, and was hardly able to endure Augusta's com-

pliment. "After all, Phœbe, she is not so bad; you may make her tolerably presentable for the country."

Lady Acton patronized Bertha, in opposition to Phœbe; and Sir Bevel was glad to have one sister to whom he could be good-natured without molestation. The young lady, heartily weary of the monotony of home, was much disappointed at the present arrangement; Phœbe had become the envied elder sister instead of the companion in misfortune, and Juliana was looked on as the sympathizing friend who would fain have opened the prison doors that Phœbe closed against her by making all that disturbance about Maria.

"It is all humbug about Maria," said Juliana. "Much Phœbe will let her stand in her way when she wants to come to London for the season—but I'll not take her out, I promise her."

"But you will take me," cried Bertha. "You'll not leave me in this dismal hole always."

"Never fear, Bertha. This plan won't last six months. Mervyn and Phœbe will get sick of one another, and Augusta will be ready to take her in—she is pining for an errand girl."

"I'll not go there to read cookery books and meet old fogies. You will have me, Juliana, and we will have such fun together."

"When you are come out, perhaps—and you must cure that stammer."

"I shall die of dulness before then! If I could only go to school!"

"I wouldn't be you, with Maria for your most lively companion."

"It is much worse than when we used to go down into the drawing-room. Now we never see any one but Miss Charlecote, and Phœbe is getting exactly like her!"

"What, all her sanctimonious ways? I thought so."

"And to make it more aggravating, Miss Fennimore is going to get religious too. She made me read all Butler's *Analogy*, and wants to put me into *Paley*, and she is always running after Robert."

"Middle-aged governesses always do run after young clergymen—especially the most *outrés*."

"And now she snaps me up if I say anything the least comprehensive or speculative, or if I laugh at the conven-

tionalities Phœbe learns at the Holt. Yesterday I said that the progress of common sense would soon make people cease to connect dulness with mortality, or to think a serious mistiness the sole evidence of respect, and I was caught up as if it were high treason."

"You must not get out of bounds in your talk, Bertha, or sound unfeeling."

"I can't help being original," said Bertha. "I must evolve my ideas out of my individual consciousness, and assert my independence of thought."

Juliana laughed, not quite following her sister's metaphysical tone, but satisfied that it was anti-Phœbe, she answered by observing, "An intolerable fuss they do make about that girl!"

"And she is not a bit clever," continued Bertha. "I can do a translation in half the time she takes, and have got far beyond her in all kinds of natural philosophy!"

"She flatters Mervyn, that's the thing; but she will soon have enough of that. I hope he won't get her into some dreadful scrape, that's all!"

"What sort of scrape?" asked Bertha, gathering from the smack of the hope that it was something exciting.

"Oh, you are too much of a chit to know—but I say, Bertha, write to me, and let me know whom Mervyn brings to the house."

With somewhat the like injunction, only directed to a different quarter, Robert likewise left Beauchamp.

As he well knew would be the case, nothing in his own circumstances was changed by his mother's death, save that he no longer could call her inheritance his home. She had made no will, and her entire estate passed to her eldest son, from whom Robert parted on terms of defiance, rather understood than expressed. He took leave of his birthplace as one never expecting to return thither, and going for his last hour at Hiltonbury to Miss Charlecote, poured out to her as many of his troubles as he could bear to utter. "And," said he, "I have given my approval to the two schemes that I most disapproved beforehand—to Mervyn's giving my sisters a home, and to Miss Fennimore's continuing their governess! What will come of it?"

"Do not repent, Robert," was the answer. "Depend upon it, the great danger is in rashly meddling with existing

arrangements, especially by a strain of influence. It is what the young are slow to learn, but experience brings it home."

"With you to watch them, I will fear the less."

Miss Charlecote wondered whether any disappointment of his own added to his depression, and if he thought of Lucilla.



CHAPTER VI.

My sister is not so defenceless left
As you imagine. She has a hidden strength
Which you remember not.—*Comus*.

PHOEBE was left to the vacancy of the orphaned house, to a blank where her presence had been gladness, and to relief more sad than pain, in parting with her favourite brother, and seeing him out of danger of provoking or being provoked.

To have been the cause of strife and object of envy weighed like guilt on her heart, and the tempest that had tossed her when most needing peace and soothing, left her sore and suffering. She did not nurse her grief, and was content that her mother should be freed from the burthen of existence that had of late been so heavy; but the missing the cherished recipient of her care was inevitable, and she was not of a nature to shake off dejection readily, nor to throw sorrow aside in excitement.

Mervyn felt as though he had caught a lark, and found it droop instead of singing. He was very kind, almost oppressively so; he rode and drove with her to every ruin or view esteemed worth seeing, ordered books for her, and consulted her on improvements that pained her by the very fact of change. She gave her attention sweetly and gratefully, was always at his call, and amused his evenings with cards or music, but she felt herself dull and sad, and saw him disappointed in her.

Then she tried bringing in Bertha as entertainment for both, but it was a downright failure. Bertha was far too sharp and pert for an elder brother devoid both of wit and temper, and the only consequence was that she fathomed his shallow acquirements in literature and the natural sciences,

and he pronounced her to be eaten up with conceit, and the most intolerable child he ever saw—an irremediable insult to a young woman of fifteen; nor could Bertha be brought forward without disappointing Maria, whose presence Mervyn would not endure, and thus Phœbe was forced to yield the point, and keep in the background the appendages only tolerated for her sake.

Greatly commiserating Bertha's weariness of the school-room, she tried to gratify the governess and please her sisters by resuming her studies; but the motive of duty and obedience being gone, these were irksome to a mind naturally meditative and practical, and she found herself triumphed over by Bertha for forgetting whether Lucca were Guelf or Ghibelline, putting oolite below red sandstone, or confusing the definition of ozone. She liked Bertha to surpass her; but inattention she regarded as wrong in itself, as well as a bad example, and her apologies were so hearty as quite to affect Miss Fennimore.

Mervyn's attentions wore off with the days of seclusion. By the third week he was dining out, by the fourth he was starting for Goodwood, half inviting Phœbe to come with him, and assuring her that it was just what she wanted to put her into spirits again. Poor Phœbe—when Mr. Henderson talking to Miss Fennimore, and Bertha at the same time insisting on Decandolle's system to Miss Charlecote, had seemed to create a distressing whirl and confusion!

Miss Fennimore smiled, both with pleasure and amusement, as Phœbe asked her permission to walk to the Holt, and be fetched home by the carriage at night.

"Don't laugh at me," said Phœbe. "I am so glad to have some one's leave to ask."

"I will not laugh, my dear, but I will not help you to reverse our positions. It is better we should both be accustomed to them."

"It seems selfish to take the carriage for myself," said Phœbe; "but I think I have rather neglected Miss Charlecote for Mervyn, and I believe she would like to have me alone."

The solitude of the walk was a great boon, and there was healing in the power of silence—the repose of not being forced to be lively. Summer flowers had passed, but bryony mantled the bushes in luxuriant beauty, and kingly teasles

raised their diademed heads, and exultingly stretched forth their sceptred arms. Purple heather mixed with fragrant thyme, blue harebells and pale bents of quiver-grass edged the path, and thistledown, drifting from the chalk uplands, lay like snow in the hollows, or danced like living things on the path before her. A brood of goldfinches, with merry twitter and flashing wings, flitted round a tall milk thistle with variegated leaves, and a little farther on, just at the opening of a glade from the path, she beheld a huge dragonfly, banded with green, black, and gold, poised on wings invisible in their rapid motion, and hawking for insects. She stood to watch, collecting materials to please Miss Charlecote, and make a story for Maria.

"Stand still. He is upon you."

She saw Miss Charlecote a few yards off, nearly on all-fours in the thymy grass.

"Only a grasshopper. I've only once seen such a fellow. He makes portentous leaps. There! on your flounce!"

"I have him! No! He went right over you!"

"I've got him under my handkerchief. Put your hand in my pocket—take out a little wide-mouthed bottle. That's it. Get in, sir, it is of no use to bite. There's an air-hole in the cork. Isn't he a beauty?"

"O the lovely green! What saws he wears on his thighs! See the delicate pink lining! What horns! and a quaint face, like a horse's."

"The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses.' Not that this is a locust, only a *gryllus*, happily for us."

"What is the difference?"

"Long or short horns, since Bertha is not here to make me call them antennæ. I must take him home to draw, as soon as I have gathered some willow for my puss. You are coming home with me?"

"I meant to drink tea with you, and be sent for in the evening."

"Good child. I was almost coming to you, but I was afraid of Mervyn. How has it been, my dear?"

Phœbe's "he is very kind" was allowed to stand for the present, and Honora led the way by a favourite path, which was new to Phœbe, making the circuit of the Holt; sometimes dipping into a hollow, over which the lesser scabious cast a

tint like the grey of a cloud ; sometimes rising on a knoll so as to look down on the rounded tops of the trees, following the undulations of the grounds ; and beyond them the green valley, winding stream, and harvest fields, melting into the chalk downs on the horizon. To Phœbe, all had the freshness of novelty, with the charm of familiarity, and without the fatigue of admiration required by the show-places to which Mervyn had taken her. Presently Miss Charlecote opened the wicket leading to an oak coppice. There was hardly any brushwood. The ground was covered with soft grass and round elastic cushions of grey lichen. There were a few brackens, and here and there the crimson midsummer men, but the copsewood consisted of the redundant shoots of the old, gnarled, knotted stumps, covered with handsome foliage of the pale sea-green of later summer, and the leaves far exceeding in size those either of the sapling or the full-sized tree—vigorous playfulness of the poor old wounded stocks.

“ Ah ! ” said Honor, pausing, “ here I found my purple emperor, sunning himself, his glorious wings wide open, looking black at first, but turning out to be of purple velvet, of the opaque mysterious beauty which seems nobler than mere lustre.”

“ Did you keep him ? I thought that was against your principles.”

“ I only mocked him by trying to paint him. He was mine because he came to delight me with the pleasure of having seen him, and the remembrance of him that pervades the path. It was just where Humfrey always told me the creatures might be found.”

“ Was Mr. Charlecote fond of natural history ? ” asked Phœbe, shyly.

“ Not as natural history, but he knew bird, beast, insect, and tree with a friendly hearty intimacy, such as Cockney writers ascribe to peasants, but which they never have. While he used the homeliest names, a dishwasher for a wag-tail, cuckoo’s bread and cheese for wood-sorrel (partly I believe to tease me), he knew them thoroughly, nests, haunts and all.”

Phœbe could not help quoting the old lines, “ He prayeth well that loveth well both man and bird and beast.”

“ Yes, and some persons have a curious affinity with the

gentle and good in creation—who can watch and even handle a bird's nest without making it be deserted, whom bees do not sting, and horses, dogs, and cats love so as to reveal their best instincts in a way that seems fabulous. In spite of the *Lyra Innocentium*, I think this is less often the case with children than with such grown people as—like your guardian, Phœbe—have kept something of the majesty and calmness of innocence."

Phœbe was all in a glow with the pleasure of hearing him so called, but bashful under that very delight, she said, "Perhaps part of Solomon's wisdom was in loving these things, since he knew the plants from the cedar to the hyssop."

"And spoke of Nature so beautifully in his Song, but I am afraid as he grew old he must have lost his healthful pleasure in them, when he was lifted up."

"Or did he only make them learning and ornament, instead of a joy and devotion?" said Phœbe, thinking of the difference between Bertha's love and Miss Charlecote's.

"Nor does he say that he found vanity in them, though he did in his own gardens and pools of water. No, the longer I live, the more sure I am that these things are meant for our solace and minor help through the trials of life. I assure you, Phœbe, that the crimson leaf of a Herb-Robert in the hedge has broken a strain of fretful repining, and it is one great blessing in these pleasures that one never can exhaust them."

Phœbe saw that Miss Charlecote was right in her own case, when on coming in, the grasshopper's name and history were sought, and there followed an exhibition of the "puss" for whom the willow had been gathered, namely, a grass-green caterpillar, with a kitten's face, a curious upright head and shoulders, and two purple tails, whence on irritation two pink filaments protruded,—lashes for the ichneumons, as Honora explained. The lonely woman's interest in her quaint pet showed how thickly are strewn round us many a calm and innocent mode of solace and cheerfulness if we knew but how to avail ourselves of it.

Honora had allowed the conversation to be thus desultory and indifferent, thinking that it gave greater rest to Phœbe, and it was not till the evening was advancing that she began to discharge herself of an urgent commission from Robert,

by saying, "Phœbe, I want you to do something for me. There is that little dame's school in your hamlet. It is too far off for me to look after, I wish you would."

"Robin has been writing to me about parish work," said Phœbe, sadly. "Perhaps I ought, but I don't know how, and I can't bear that any change in our ways should be observed;" and the tears came more speedily than Honor had expected.

"Dear child," she said, "there is no need for that feeling. Parish work, at least in a lay family, must depend on the amount of home duty. In the last years of my dear mother's life I had to let everything go, and I know it is not easy to resume, still less to begin, but you will be glad to have done so, and will find it a great comfort."

"If it be my duty, I must try," said Phœbe, dejectedly, "and I suppose it is. Will you come and show me what to do? I never went into a cottage in my life."

I have spoken too soon! thought Honor; yet Robert urged me, and besides the evil of neglecting the poor, the work will do her good; but it breaks one's heart to see this meek, mournful obedience.

"While we are alone," continued Phœbe, "I can fix times, and do as I please, but I cannot tell what Mervyn may want me to do when he is at home."

"Do you expect that he will wish you to go out with him?" asked Honora.

"Not this autumn," she answered; "but he finds it so dull at home, that I fully expect he will have his friends to stay with him."

"Phœbe, let me strongly advise you to keep aloof from your brother's friends. When they are in the house, live entirely in the schoolroom. If you begin at once as a matter of course, he will see the propriety, and acquiesce. You are not vexed?"

"Thank you, I believe it is all right. Robert will be the more at ease about us. I only do not like to act as if I distrusted Marvyn."

"It would not be discreet for any girl so young as you are to be entertaining her brother's sporting friends. You could hardly do so without acquiring the same kind of reputation as my poor Lucy's Rashe, which he would not wish."

"Thank you," said Phœbe more heartily. "You have shown me the way out of a difficulty. I need not go into company at all this winter, and after that, only with our old country neighbours."

Honora was infinitely relieved at having bestowed this piece of advice, on which she had agreed with Robert as the only means of ensuring Phœbe's being sheltered from society that Mervyn might not esteem so bad for his sister as they did.

The quietness of Mervyn's absence did much for the restoration of Phœbe's spirits. The dame's school was not delightful to her; she had not begun early enough in life for ease, but she did her tasks there as a duty, and was amply rewarded by the new enjoyment thus afforded to Maria. The importance of being surrounded by a ring of infants, teaching the alphabet, guiding them round the gooseberry bush, or leading their songs and hymns, was felicity indescribable to Maria. She learnt each name, and, with the reiteration that no one could endure save Phœbe and faithful Lieschen, rehearsed the individual alphabetical acquirements of every one; she painted pictures for them, hemmed pinafores, and was happier than she had ever been in her life, as well as less fretful and more manageable, and she even began to develope more sense and intelligence in this direction than she had seemed capable of under the dreary round of lessons past her comprehension.

It was a great stimulus to Phœbe, and spurred her to personal parish work, going beyond the soup and subscriptions that might have bounded her charities for want of knowing better. Of course the worst and most plausible people took her in, and Miss Charlecote sometimes scolded, sometimes laughed at her, but the beginning was made, and Robert was pleased.

Mervyn did bring home some shooting friends, but he made no difficulties as to the seclusion that Miss Charlecote had recommended for his sister; accepting it so easily that Phœbe thought he must have intended it from the first. From that time he was seldom at home without one or more guests—an arrangement that kept the young ladies chiefly to the west wing, and always, when in the garden, forced them to be on their guard against stumbling upon smoking gentlemen. It was a late-houred, noisy company, and the sounds

that reached the sisters made the younger girls curious, and the governess anxious. Perhaps it was impossible that girls of seventeen and fifteen should not be excited by the vicinity of moustaches and beards whom they were bidden to avoid; and even the alternate French and German which Miss Fennimore enforced on Bertha more strongly than ever, merely produced the variety of her descanting on their *knebel-barten*, or on *l'heure à quelle les voix de ces messieurs-là entonnaient sur le grand escalier*, till Miss Fennimore declared that she would have Latin and Greek talked if there were no word for a gentleman in either! There were always stories to be told of Bertha's narrow escapes of being overtaken by them in the garden or corridor, till Maria, infected by the panic, used to flounder away as if from a beast of prey, and being as tall as, and considerably stouter than, Phœbe, with the shuffling gait of the imbecile, would produce a volume of sound that her sister always feared might attract notice, and irritate Mervyn.

Honora Charlecote tried to give pleasure to the sisters by having them at the Holt, and would fain have treated Bertha as one of the inherited godchildren. But Bertha proved by reference to the brass tablet that she *could* not be godchild to a man who died three years before her birth, and it was then perceived that his sponsorship had been to an elder Bertha, who had died in infancy, of water on the head, and whom her parents, in their impatience of sorrow, had absolutely caused to be forgotten. Such a delusion in the exact Phœbe could only be accounted for by her tenderness to Mr. Charlecote, and it gave Bertha a subject of triumph of which she availed herself to the utmost. She had imbibed a sovereign contempt for Miss Charlecote's capacity, and considered her as embodying the passive individual who is to be instructed or confuted in a scientific dialogue. So she lost no occasion of triumphantly denouncing all "cataclysms" of the globe, past or future, of resolving all nature into gases, or arguing upon duality—a subject that fortunately usually brought on her hesitation of speech, a misfortune of which Miss Fennimore and Phœbe would unscrupulously avail themselves to change the conversation. The bad taste and impertinence were quite as apparent to the governess as to the sister, and though Bertha never admitted a doubt of having carried the day against the old world prejudices, yet

Miss Fennimore perceived, not only that Miss Charlecote's notions were not of the contracted and unreasonable order that had been ascribed to her, but that liberality in her pupil was more uncandid, narrow and self-sufficient than was "credulity" in Miss Charlecote. Honor was more amused than annoyed at these discussions; she was sorry for the silly, conceited girl, though not in the least offended nor disturbed, but Phœbe and Miss Fennimore considered them such an exposure that they were by no means willing to give Bertha the opportunity of launching herself at her senior.

The state of the household likewise perplexed Phœbe. She had been bred up to the sight of waste, ostentation, and extravagance, and they did not distress her; but her partial authority revealed to her glimpses of dishonesty; detected falsehoods destroyed her confidence in the housekeeper; her attempts at charities to the poor were intercepted; her visits to the hamlet disclosed to her some of the effects on the villagers of a vicious, disorderly establishment; and she understood why a careful mother would as soon have sent her daughter to service at the lowest public-house as at Beauchamp.

Mervyn had detected one of the footmen in a flagrant act of peculation, and had dismissed him, but Phœbe believed the evil to have extended far more widely than he supposed, and made up her mind to entreat him to investigate matters. In vain, however, she sought for a favourable moment, for he was never alone. The intervals between other visitors were filled up by a Mr. Hastings, who seemed to have erected himself into so much of the domesticated friend that he had established a bowing and speaking acquaintance with Phœbe; Bertha no longer narrated her escapes of encounters with him; and, being the only one of the gentlemen who ever went to church, he often joined the young ladies as they walked back from thence. Phœbe heartily wished him gone, for he made her brother inaccessible; she only saw Mervyn when he wanted her to find something for him or to give her a message, and if she ventured to say that she wanted to speak to him, he promised—"Some time or other"—which always proved *sine die*. He was looking very ill, his complexion very much flushed, and his hand heated and unsteady, and she heard through Lieschen of his having severe morning headaches, and fits

of giddiness and depression, but these seemed to make him more unable to spare Mr. Hastings, as if life would not be endurable without the billiards that she sometimes heard knocking about half the night.

However, the anniversary of Mr. Fulmort's death would bring his executor to clear off one branch of his business, and Mervyn's friends fled before the coming of the grave old lawyer, all fixing the period of their departure before Christmas. Nor could Mervyn go with them; he must meet Mr. Crabbe, and Phœbe's heart quite bounded at the hope of being able to walk about the house in comfort, and say part of what was on her mind to her brother.

"Whose writing is this?" said Phœbe to herself, as the letters were given to her, two days before the clearance of the house. "I ought to know it—It is! No! Yes, indeed it is—poor Lucy. Where can she be? What can she have to say?"

The letter was dateless, and Phœbe's amaze grew as she read.

"DEAR PHŒBE,

"You know it is my nature to do odd things, so never mind that, but attend to me, as one who knows too well what it is to be motherless and undirected. Gossip is long-tongued enough to reach me here, in full venom as I know and trust, but it makes my blood boil, till I can't help writing a warning that may at least save you pain. I know you are the snowdrop poor Owen used to call you, and I know you have Honor Charlecote for philosopher and friend, but she is nearly as unsophisticated as yourself, and if report say true, your brother is getting you into a scrape. If it is a fact that he has Jack Hastings dangling about Beauchamp, he deserves the lot of my unlucky Charteris cousins! Mind what you are about, Phœbe, if the man is there. He is plausible, clever, has no end of amusing resources, and keeps his head above water; but I *know* that in no place where there are womankind has he been received without there having been cause to repent it! I hope you may be able to laugh—if not, it may be a wholesome cure to hear that his friends believe him to have secured one of the heiresses at Beauchamp. There, Phœbe, I have said my say, and I fear it is cutting and wounding, but it came out of

the love of a heart that has not got rid of some of its old feelings, and that could not bear to think of sorrow or evil tongues busy about you. That I write for your sake, not for my own, you may see by my making it impossible to answer.

“LUCILLA SANDBROOK.

“If you hold council with Honor over this—as, if you are wise, you will—you may tell her that I am learning gratitude to her. I would ask her pardon if I could without servility.”

“Secured one of the heiresses!” said Phœbe to herself. “I should like to be able to tell Lucy how I can laugh! Poor Lucy, how very kind in her to write. I wonder whether Mervyn knows how bad the man is! Shall I go to Miss Charlecote? Oh, no; she is spending two days at Moorcroft! Shall I tell Miss Fennimore? No, I think not; it will be wiser to talk to Miss Charlecote; I don’t like to tell Miss Fennimore of Lucy. Poor Lucy—she is always generous! He will soon be gone, and then I can speak to Mervyn.”

This secret was not a serious burthen to Phœbe, though she could not help smiling to herself at the comical notion of having been secured by a man to whom she had not spoken a dozen times, and then with the utmost coldness and formality.

The next day she approached the letter-bag with some curiosity. It contained one for her from her sister Juliana, a very unusual correspondent, and Phœbe’s mind misgave her lest it should have any connexion with the hints in Lucilla’s note. But she was little prepared for what she read.

“Acton Manor, Dec. 24th.

“MY DEAR PHŒBE,

“Although, after what passed in July, I cannot suppose that the opinion of your elders can have any effect on your proceedings, yet, for the sake of our relationship, as well as of regard to appearances, I cannot forbear endeavouring to rescue you from the consequences of your own folly and obstinacy. Nothing better was to be expected from Mervyn; but at your age, with your pretences to religion, you cannot

plead simplicity, nor ignorance of the usages of the world. Neither Sir Bevil nor myself can express our amazement at your recklessness, thus forfeiting the esteem of society, and outraging the opinion of our old friends. To put an end to the impropriety, we will at once receive you here, overlooking any inconvenience, and we shall expect you all three on Tuesday, under charge of Miss Fennimore, who seems to have been about as fit as Maria to think for you. It is too late to write to Mervyn to-night, but he shall hear from us to-morrow, as well as from your guardian, to whom Sir Bevil has written. You had better bring my jewels, and the buhl clock from my mother's mantelshelf, which I was to have. Mrs. Brisbane will pack them. Tell Bertha, with my love, that she might have been more explicit in her correspondence.

"Your affectionate sister,
"JULIANA ACTON."

When Miss Fennimore entered the room, she found Phœbe sitting like one petrified, only just able to hold out the letter, and murmur—"What does it mean?" Imagining that it could only contain something fatal about Robert, Miss Fennimore sprang at the paper, and glanced through it, while Phœbe again faintly asked, "What have I done?"

"Lady Acton is pleased to be mysterious!" said the governess. "The kind sister she always was!"

"Don't say that," exclaimed Phœbe, rallying. "It must be something shocking, for Sir Bevil thinks so, too," and the tears sprang forth.

"He will never think anything unkind of you, my dear," said Miss Fennimore, with emphasis.

"It must be about Mr. Hastings!" said Phœbe, gathering recollection and confidence. "I did not like to tell you yesterday, but I had a letter from poor Lucy Sandbrook. Some friends of that man, Mr. Hastings, have set it about that he is going to be married to me," and Phœbe laughed outright. "If Juliana has heard it, I don't wonder that she is shocked, because you know Miss Charlecote said it would never do for me to associate with those gentlemen, and besides, Lucy says that he is a very bad man. I shall write to Juliana, and say that I have never had anything to do with him, and he is going away to-morrow, and Mervyn

must be told not to have him back again. That will set it all straight at Acton manor."

Phœbe was quite herself again. She was too well accustomed to gratuitous unkindness and reproaches from Juliana to be much hurt by them, and perceiving, as she thought, where the misconception lay, had no fears that it could not be cleared up. So when she had carefully written her letter to her sister, she dismissed the subject until she should be able to lay it before Miss Charlecote, dwelling more on Honor's pleasure on hearing of Lucy than on the more personal matter.

Miss Fennimore, looking over the letter, had deeper misgivings. It seemed to her rather to be a rebuke for the whole habit of life, than a warning against an individual, and she began to doubt whether even the seclusion of the west wing had been a sufficient protection in the eyes of the family from the contamination of such society as Mervyn received. Or was it a plot of Lady Acton's malevolence for hunting Phœbe away from her home? Miss Fennimore fell asleep, uneasy and perplexed, and in her dreams beheld Phœbe as the Lady in Comus, fixed in her chair, and resolute against a cup effervescing with carbonic acid gas, proffered by Jack Hastings, who thereupon gave it to Bertha, as she lay back in the dentist's chair, and both becoming transformed into pterodactyles, flew away while Miss Fennimore was vainly trying to summon the brothers by electric telegraph.

There was a whole bevy of letters for Phœbe the following morning, and first, a kind, sensible one from her guardian, much regretting to learn that Mr. Fulmort's guests were undesirable inmates for a house where young ladies resided, so that, though he had full confidence in Miss Fulmort's discretion, and understood that she had never associated with the persons in question, he thought her residence at home ought to be reconsidered, and should be happy to discuss the point on coming to Beauchamp, so soon as he should have recovered from an unfortunate fit of the gout, which at present detained him in town. Miss Fulmort might, however, be assured that her wishes should be his chief consideration, and that he would take care not to separate her from Miss Maria.

That promise, and the absence of all mention of Lucilla's object of dread, gave Phœbe courage to open the missive from her eldest sister.

"MY DEAR PHÆBE,

"I always told you it would never answer, and you see I was right. If Mervyn will invite that horrid man, whatever you may do, no one will believe that you do not associate with him, and you may never get over it. I am telling everybody what children you are, quite in the school-room, but nothing will be of any use but your coming away at once, and appearing in society with me, so you had better send the children to Acton Manor and come to me next week. If there are any teal in the decoy bring some, and ask Mervyn where he got that Barton's dry champagne.

"Your affectionate sister,

"AUGUSTA BANNERMAN."

She had kept Robert's letter to the last as refreshment after the rest.

St. Matthew's, Dec. 16th.

"DEAR PHÆBE,

"I am afraid this may not be your first intimation of what may vex and grieve you greatly, and what calls for much cool and anxious judgment. In you we have implicit confidence, and your adherence to Miss Charlecote's kind advice has spared you all imputation, though not, I fear, all pain. You may, perhaps, not know how disgraceful are the characters of some of the persons whom Mervyn has collected about him. I do him the justice to believe that he would shelter you from all intercourse with them as carefully as I should; but I cannot forgive his having brought them beneath the same roof with you. I fear the fact has done harm in our own neighbourhood. People imagine you to be associating with Mervyn's crew, and a monstrous report is abroad which has caused Bevil Acton to write to me and to Crabbe. We all agree that this is a betrayal of the confidence that you expressed in Mervyn, and that while he chooses to make his house a scene of dissipation, no seclusion can render it a fit residence for women or girls. I fear you will suffer much in learning this decision, for Mervyn's sake as well as your own. Poor fellow! if he will bring evil spirits about him, good angels must depart. I would come myself, but that my presence would embitter Mervyn, and I could not meet him prop-

erly. I am writing to Miss Charlecote. If she should propose to receive you all at the Holt immediately, until Crabbe's most inopportune gout is over, you had better go thither at once. It would be the most complete vindication of your conduct that could be offered to the county, and would give time for considering of establishing you elsewhere, and still under Miss Fennimore's care. For Bertha's sake as well as your own, you must be prepared to leave home, and resign yourself to be passive in the decision of those bound to think for you, by which means *you* may avoid being included in Mervyn's anger. Do not distress yourself by the fear that any blame can attach to you or to Miss Fennimore; I copy Bevil's expressions—'Assure Phœbe that though her generous confidence may have caused her difficulties, no one can entertain a doubt of her guileless intention and maidenly discretion. If it would not make further mischief, I would hasten to fetch her, but if she will do me the honour to accept her sister's invitation, I hope to do all in my power to make her happy and mark my esteem for her.' These are his words; but I suppose you will hardly prefer Acton Manor, though should the Holt fail us, you might send the other two to the Manor, and come to Albury-street as Augusta wishes, when we could consult together on some means of keeping you united, and retaining Miss Fennimore, who must not be thrown over, as it would be an injury to her prospects. Tell her from me that I look to her for getting you through this unpleasant business.

"Your ever affectionate,
"R. M. FULMORT."

Phœbe never spoke, but handed each sheet, as she finished it to her governess.

"Promise me, Phœbe," said Miss Fennimore, as she came to Robert's last sentence, "that none of these considerations shall bias you. Make no struggle for me, but use me as I may be most serviceable to you."

Phœbe, instead of answering, kissed and clung to her.

"What do you think of doing?" asked the governess.

"Nothing," said Phœbe.

"You looked as if a thought had occurred to you."

"I only recollected the words, 'your strength is to sit still,'" said Phœbe, "and thought how well they agreed

with Robert's advice to be passive. Mr. Crabbe has promised not to separate us, and I will trust to that. Mervyn was very kind in letting us stay here, but he does not want us, and will not miss us,"—and with those words, quiet as they were, came a gush of irrepressible tears, just as a step resounded outside, the door was burst open, and Mervyn hurried in, purple with passion, and holding a bundle of letters crushed together in his hand.

"I say," he hoarsely cried, "what's all this? Who has been telling infamous tales of my house?"

"We cannot tell—" began Phœbe.

"Do you know anything of this?" he interrupted, fiercely turning on Miss Fennimore.

"Nothing, sir. The letters which your sister has received have equally surprised and distressed me."

"Then they have set on you, Phœbe! The whole pack in full cry, as if it mattered to them whether I chose to have the Old Gentleman in the house, so long as he did not meddle with you!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Fulmort," interposed the governess, "the remonstrance is quite just. Had I been aware of the character of some of your late guests, I could not have wished your sisters to remain in the house with them."

"Are these your sentiments, Phœbe?" he asked, sternly.

"I am afraid they ought to be," she sadly answered.

"Silly child; so this pack of censorious women and parsons have frightened you into giving me up."

"Sisters do not give up brothers, Mervyn. You know how I thank you for having me here, but I could not amuse you, or make it pleasant to you, so there must be an end of it."

"So they hunt you out to be bullied by Juliana, or slaved to death by Augusta, which is it to be? Or may be Robert has got his sisterhood cut and dried for you; only mind, he shan't make way with your £30,000 while I live to expose those popish tricks."

"For shame, Mervyn," cried Phœbe, all in a glow; "I will not hear Robert so spoken of; he is always kind and good, and has taught me every right thing I know!"

"Oh, very well; and pray when does he summon you from among the ungodly? Will the next train be soon enough?"

"Don't, Mervyn! Your friends go to-day, don't they?"

Mr. Crabbe does not desire any change to be made before he comes to see about it. May we not stay till that time, and spend our Christmas together?"

"You must ask Robert and Juliana, since you prefer them."

"No," said Phœbe, with spirit; "it is right to attend to my elder sisters, and Robert has always helped and taught me, and I must trust his guidance, as I always have done. And I trust you too, Mervyn. You never thought you were doing us any harm. I may trust you still," she added, with so sweet and imploring a look that Mervyn gave an odd laugh, with some feeling in it.

"Harm? Great harm I have done this creature, eh?" he said, with his hand on her shoulder.

"Few could do *her* harm, Mr. Fulmort," said the governess, "but report may have done some mischief."

"Who cares for report! I say, Phœbe, we will laugh at them all. You pluck up a spirit, stay with me, and we'll entertain all the county, and then get some great swell to bring you out in town, and see what Juliana will say!"

"I will stay with you while you are alone, and Mr. Crabbe lets me," said Phœbe.

"Old fool of a fellow! Why couldn't my father have made me your guardian, and then there would have been none of this row! One would think I had had her down to act barmaid to the fellows. And you never spoke to one, did you, Phœbe?"

"Only now and then to Mr. Hastings. I could not help it after the day he came into the study when I was copying for you."

"Ah, well! that is nothing—nobody minds old Jack. I shall let them all know you were as safe as a Turk's wife in a harem, and may be old Crabbe will hear reason if we get him down here alone, without a viper at each ear, as he had last time."

With which words Mervyn departed, and Miss Fennimore exclaimed in some displeasure, "You can never think of remaining, Phœbe."

"I am afraid not," said Phœbe; "Mervyn does not seem to know what is proper for us, and I am too young to judge, so I suppose we must go. I wish I could make him happy with music, or books, or anything a woman could do! If

you please, I think I must go over to the Holt. I cannot settle to anything just yet, and I shall answer my letters better when I have seen Miss Charlecote."

In fact Phœbe felt herself going to her other guardian; but as she left the room, Bertha came hurriedly in from the garden, with a plaid thrown round her. "What—what's the matter?" she hastily asked, following Phœbe to her room. "Is there an end of all these mysteries?"

"Yes," said Phœbe. "Miss Fennimore is ready for you."

"As if that were all I wanted to know. Do you think I did not hear Mervyn storming like a lion?"

"I am sorry you did hear," said Phœbe, "for it was not pleasant. It seems that it is not thought proper for us to live here while Mervyn has so many gentleman-guests, so," with a sigh, "you will have your wish, Bertha. They mean us to go away?"

"It is not my wish now," said Bertha, pulling pins in and out of Phœbe's pincushion. "I am not the child I was in the summer. Don't go, Phœbe; I know you can get your way, if you try for it."

"I must try to be put in the right way, Bertha, that is all I want."

"And you are going to the Holt for the most precise, narrow-minded way you can get. I wish I were in your place, Phœbe."

Scarcely had Phœbe driven from the door, before she saw Miss Charlecote crossing the grass on foot, and after the interchange of a few words, it was agreed to talk while driving on towards Elverslope. Each was laden with the same subject, for not only had Honor heard from Robert, but during her visit to Moorcroft she had become enlightened on the gossip that seldom reached the Holt, and had learnt that the whole neighbourhood was scandalized at the Beaucamp doings, and was, therefore, shy of taking notice of the young people there. She had been incredulous at first, then extremely shocked and distressed, and though in part convinced that more than she guessed had passed beyond the west wing, she had come primed with a representation which she cautiously administered to Phœbe. The girl was more indignant on her brother's account than alarmed on her own.

"If that is the way the Raymonds talk of Mervyn," cried

she, "no wonder they made their niece cast him off, and drive him to despair."

"It was no unkindness of the Raymonds, my dear. They were only sorry for you."

"I do not want them to be sorry for me; they ought to be sorry for Mervyn," said Phœbe, almost petulantly.

"Perhaps they are," said Honor. "It was only in kindness that they spoke, and they had almost anticipated my explanation that you were kept entirely apart. Every gentleman hereabouts who has been at Beauchamp has declared such to be the case."

"I should think so!" said Phœbe; "Mervyn knows how to take care of us better than that!"

"But all ladies do not seem willing to believe as much, shame on them," said Honor; "and, tell me, Phœbe, have people called on you?"

"Not many, but I have not called on them since they left their cards of inquiry. I had been thinking whether I ought."

"We will consider. Perhaps I had better take you round some day, but I have been a very remiss protector, my poor child, if all be true that I am told of some of Mervyn's friends. It was an insult to have them under the same roof with you."

"Will you look at this letter?" said Phœbe. "It is very kind—it is from Lucy."

Those plain words alone occurred to Phœbe as a preparation for a letter that was sure to move Miss Charlecote greatly, if only by the slight of not having written to her, the most obvious person. But the flighty generosity, and deep though inconsistent feeling were precious, and the proud relenting of the message at the end touched Honor with hope. They laughed at the report that had elicited Lucilla's letter, but the reserve of the warning about Mr. Hastings, coming from the once unscrupulous girl, startled Honor even more than what she had heard at Moorcroft. Was the letter to be answered? Yes, by all means, cried Honor, catching at any link of communication. She could discover Lucilla's address, and was sure that even brief thanks and explanations from Phœbe would be good for Lucy.

Like Miss Fennimore, Honor was surprised by Phœbe's composure under her share of the evil report. The stric-

tures which would have been dreadful to an older person seemed to fly over her innocent head, their force either uncomprehended or unfelt. She yielded implicitly to the propriety of the change, but her grief was at the family quarrel, the leaving home, and the unmerited degree of blame cast on Mervyn, not the aspersions on herself; although, as Honor became vexed at her calmness, she withheld none of them in the desire to convince her of the expediency of leaving Beauchamp at once for the Holt. No, even though this was Robert's wish, Phœbe could still not see the necessity, as long as Mervyn should be alone. If he should bring any of his discreditable friends, she promised at once to come to Miss Charlecote, but otherwise she could perceive no reason for grieving him, and astonishing the world, by implying that his sisters could not stay in his house. She thought him unwell, too, and wished to watch him, and, on the whole, did not regret her guardian's gout, which would give her a little more time at home, and put off the discussion till there should be less anger.

Is this weak? is it childish indifference? thought Honor, or is it a spirit superior to the selfish personal dread that would proclaim its own injured innocence by a vehement commotion?

Phœbe rejoiced that she had secured her interview with her friend, for when the guests were gone, Mervyn claimed her whole attention, and was vexed if she were not continually at his beck. After their *tête-à-tête* dinner, he kept her sitting over the dessert while he drank his wine. She tried this opportunity of calling his attention to the frauds of the servants, but he merely laughed his mocking laugh at her simplicity in supposing that everybody's servants did not cheat.

"Miss Charlecote's don't."

"Don't they! Ha—ha! Why, she's the very mark for imposition, and hypocrisy into the bargain."

Phœbe did not believe it, but would not argue the point, returning to that nearer home. "Nonsense, Phœbe," he said; "it's only a choice who shall prey upon one, and if I have a set that will do it with a civil countenance, and let me live out of the spoil, I'll not be bothered."

"I cannot think it need go on so."

"Well, it won't; I shall break up the concern, and let the house, or something."

"Let the house? Oh, Mervyn! I thought you meant to be a county man."

"Let those look to that who have hindered me," said Mervyn, fiercely swallowing one glassful, and pouring out another.

"Should you live in London?"

"At Jericho, for aught I care, or any one else."

Her attempt to controvert this remark brought on a tirade against the whole family, which she would not keep up by reply, and which ended in moody silence. Again she tried to rise, but he asked why she could not stay with him five minutes, and went on absently pouring out wine and drinking it, till, as the clock struck nine, the bottom of the decanter was reached, when he let her lead the way to the drawing-room, and there, taking up the paper soon fell asleep, then awoke at ten at the sound of her moving to go to bed, and kept her playing piquet for an hour and a half.

An evening or two of this kind convinced Phoebe that even with Mervyn alone it was not a desirable life. She was less shocked than a girl used to a higher standard at home might have been, but that daily bottle and perpetual cards weighed on her imagination, and she felt that her younger sisters ought not to grow up to such a spectacle. Still her loving heart yearned over Mervyn, who was very fond of her, and consulted her pleasure continually in his own peculiar and selfish way, although often exceedingly cross to her as well as to every one else; but this ill-temper was so visibly the effect of low spirits that she easily endured and forgave it. She saw that he was both unwell and unhappy. She could not think what would become of him when the present arrangement should be broken up; but could only cling to him, as long as she could pity him. It was no wonder that on the Sunday, Honora seeing her enter the church, could not help being reminded of the expression of that child-saint of Raffaele, wandering alone through the dragon-haunted wood, wistful and distressed, yet so confident in the Unseen Guide and Guardian that she treads down evils and perils in innocence, unconscious of her full danger and of their full blackness.