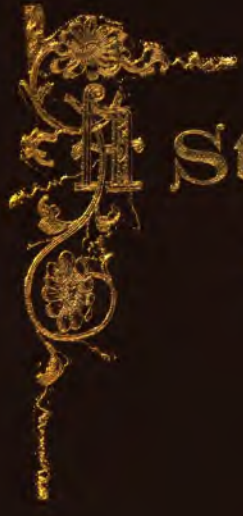

A Story of Two Years

OR

Gertrude Ellerslie

BY

Mrs. Meldrum

A STORY OF TWO YEARS.

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GERTRUDE ELLERSLIE

BY

MRS. MELDRUM

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

EDINBURGH
OLIPHANT, ANDERSON, & FERRIER
1882

' A life is measured not by years,
So many or so few ;
But by the truth it strives to teach,
The good it tries to do.'

A STORY OF TWO YEARS.

CHAPTER I.

'By fits, moreover, hide them as we may,
It frets us all, this tedious every day;
A longing throb, a germ of bold romance,
Is deep in every bosom; thirst for chance
And change.'

'I have immortal longings in me.'

'WELL, Gerty?'

'Well?'

'What—does—yo—u—r'—

'Oh, you needn't ask! What's the use of wasting words? What do you want?'

The young man thus addressed felt snubbed severely; but then he was used to it,—from his cousin Gertrude, at least,—so he meekly said:

'Are you to—go—abroad?'

'Of course not, Bruce; whoever thought I was?'

A gleam of ill-concealed satisfaction lit up Bruce's pale face, as he tried, however, to mutter something like condolence for his cousin's disappointment; but Gertrude swept down upon him like an eagle upon a fluttering bird, exclaiming:

'You do look sorry for me, truly! All the same, you have a queer way of showing it, sitting grinning there! What *do* you want? You have the oddest way, Bruce, of turning up at the most inconvenient times. I am nearly stupid with a headache, brought on—by—by—the cold, I suppose.'

Gertrude Ellerslie had drawn a low seat by the fire in the cosy drawing-room at the Fort, having just parted with Mrs. Heywood, who had been for the past hour closeted with her father, Colonel Ellerslie, in the library.

The subject of the confab was a proposal on the part of Mrs. Heywood, who was going abroad for the winter with her daughter, to take Gertrude with her.

Gertrude's health needed no flight to a warmer climate, she did not know the meaning of delicacy; but the mere possibility of being in Germany, where she should have facilities and stimulus for the prosecution of music and languages, had opened up a vista in the girl's mind which the sentence of the past half-hour had clouded and closed.

'Your father won't hear of it, my dear,' said Mrs. Heywood, coming into the drawing-room, where Gertrude, too excited to do anything but pace up and down the room, waited for her. 'He says he doesn't wish you to become foreign, that he likes you best as you are; and, in short, after an hour's entreaty and expostulation on my part, he has ended as

he began, by civilly yet resolutely declining to let you go.'

'Oh, Mrs. Heywood, how can'— but Gertrude checked herself ere the word crossed her lips, for the vision of a sweet face, now dead, as it committed to her care the father who would be so dependent on his child's sympathy and love, rose to her mind's eye. 'Won't he really? Every one said he wouldn't, but somehow I thought he would have given in to you.'

'No,' said Mrs. Heywood testily, for she didn't like the notion of not being given in to. 'He is as firm as a rock, no moving him; but I *am* horribly disappointed, and Rose will be wild when she hears it. How you would have revelled in the music at Stuttgart, and the paintings at Munich, and the'—

'Oh, please, stop! it almost drives me crazy to think of it; and then to stay on here, moping through the winter,—oh, it *is* disgusting!'

'Most; but then there's no help for it.'

'None. Papa is immoveable.'

'*You* might try; perhaps *you* would have more power of persuasion.'

'I! Thank you. You don't know Papa. He will never allude even to the subject with me, nor I with him. I shall just have to go on here in the most resigned, snail-gallop kind of way I can muster up.'

Mrs. Heywood was a Job's comforter sort of person, and continued for the next half-hour to enlarge on the fascinations

and advantages of Continental life as contrasted with the flat humdrum of a country house in the depth of winter. Nor had she been altogether sweetly disinterested in her desire to have Gertrude Ellerslie with her abroad! Her own daughter Rose, the idol and hope of her heart, was nevertheless so selfish and *exigeante* that she was often as much of a trial as a treasure! Besides, the advantage of having the handsome and generous daughter of one of the first county families in Lonshire, with plenty of money at her command, was not far to seek. But even her pertinacity had been forced to draw in by the courteous but cold determination of Colonel Ellerslie to keep his daughter at home.

'So, my dear, our castles in the air are demolished,' she wound up with, as she rose to go. 'I have done *mon petit possible* for you, I can do no more;' and with a shrug of her graceful shoulders, and a pretty little grimace, she glided away.

Gertrude went with her to the door, where her faded little pony-carriage was waiting for her; and as she tucked the white antelope-rug round her friend's mother, she could not help envying one who seemed able to go about the world at the dictates of her own sweet, if capricious, will, *sans peur et sans reproche.*

Gertrude had not recovered her equilibrium, as the reader must have perceived, when Bruce Morell entered. He *had* a knack somehow of turning up at wrong times, and his gaunt, angular figure, and awkward, stammering ways, were the reverse of soothing.

Had an ordinary visitor been at this moment ushered in, Gertrude would have summoned to the rescue her well-bred self-control; but for Bruce she would not trouble herself. He was her slave, her patient, long-suffering adorer and cousin, and her at present chafed feelings let themselves out upon him.

'Couldn't I re—a—d a little to you?' he said presently.

'Read! I should think not! It would drive me mad, with this headache, to hear you pounding away. Besides, it's too dark.'

'Let me ri—ng for the lamp,' and he pulled the bell.

'I don't want the lamp!' exclaimed Gertrude, who dreaded the revelation of her flushed and agitated face. 'How tiresome you are, Bruce!'

'My mother ho—p—es y—ou an—d—and Uncle Ellerslie will come on Thursday evening. A friend of Ja—ck's has come to stay a da—y or two, and he is ve—r—y musical, and will en—joy hearing you pl—ay.'

'I'm not well enough to go out to entertain visitors just now,' said Gertrude. 'Besides, I'm beginning rather to dislike music. One never hears any here, and it's stupid always playing oneself. But here is Papa!' she added, rising as her father entered. 'You can see what he says,' and she vanished from the room.

She flew up-stairs to her room, locked the door behind her, and, throwing herself into a low rocking-chair by the fire, buried her burning face in her hands, and burst into a passion of tears.

'Hard lines!' she muttered; 'the one golden prospect of my life dashed from me; shut up here with hardly a soul—a new soul, I mean—to see or rub ideas with; and all the glorious music, and German, and travelling, and everything lost!'

She abandoned herself to gloomy thoughts over her 'miserable fate,' and had just succeeded in persuading herself that she was the innocent victim of a cruel destiny, which was steadily opposing all her wishes and bright prospects, when a knock at the door roused her from her musings.

'Is it time to dress already?' she exclaimed, as she opened the door and found her maid outside.

'Yes, Miss. I have knocked at least five times. Are you ill, Miss?' she added, as the tear-stained face and tumbled hair of her young mistress met her eye.

'No—y—e—s—very—at least, rather,' answered Gertrude, as she rapidly began dressing, for punctuality was the soul of life at the Fort. 'What o'clock is it?'

'A quarter to seven, Miss,' and mistress and maid, roused alike to the gravity of their position, proceeded to the performance of a very hasty toilette.

Gertrude entered the drawing-room this evening with a beating heart and a flushed face. She had schooled herself into outward self-control; she had almost as great a hatred as men have of 'scenes;' and yet under all this self-restraint there was a deep current of angry irritation surging up against her father, who was the cause of her bitter disappointment.

He, as she entered, calmly laid down his magazine, glanced

at the timepiece, and led the way to the dining-room. Her brother Fred, who was spending his autumn holidays at home, and Bruce, who had 'hung on,' as was not uncommon with him, made up the little party.

Fred rattled away, with a mental conviction that he had the task of four to do this evening, for his three companions were each absorbed apparently in thought.

Colonel Ellerslie grumbled over the dishes, and called for his slate to note down the various defections for the edification of the cook next morning. The dinner-hour was usually a nervous era in Gertrude's day, for her father's fastidiousness about his food was trying to a degree. But even *she* seemed to-night quite impervious to the muttered anathemas over the faulty sauces, the under-done beef, and the roasted-to-a-cinder condition of the blackcock.

Bruce had an anxious, burdened expression, not usual with him, and kept dropping words into Gertrude's ear, which he intended to have a soothing effect on her ruffled spirit, but which in reality were as oil to the burning fire within her.

'You'll s—ee,' he murmured.

No answer.

'I'm su—re you will, Gerty. Ge—r—ty!' in a louder tone.

'What?'

'You *will* s—e—e!'

'What are you talking about?' with a not very gracious glance.

'You'll s—ee that a—ll th—is, some go—od reason will

come up for your'—in a hushed tone—'dis—ap—ap—point-ment.'

'Ridiculous nonsense! Do be quiet! How can you tell such lies, Bruce?' with a scornful glance from her dark-blue eyes.

'You should have seen the gallant forty to-day, Bruce,' said Fred, dashing to the rescue.

'Which forty?' asked Bruce, rallying his scared wits. 'The forty thiev'—

'The forty blackcock away up on the ridge at Crosgair. There they are, each blessed day we go, with their scouts out, and sentinels posted all over the place; and just before you get within shot, the signal is given, and off they all fly!'

'How clever they are!' exclaimed Gerty, rousing into interest.

'I should just think so! Collins and I *had* a time of it to-day after them. We dodged behind stooks, crept on all fours, manœuvred, so that we really thought the beggars had never spotted us; when, lo! just before we started up, the out-posts gave the signal, and away they all flew back into their stronghold, clean out of sight. A most horrid sell, I can tell you, for we lost the whole day.'

'Take this away,' Colonel Ellerslie is saying to the butler. 'What in the name of wonder is it?'

'Brained coquettes [brain crockets], sir.'

Colonel Ellerslie laid down the spoon, and, glancing across the table to Gertrude, said, 'I shall be obliged if you will tell Mrs. Cookson to teach Simmonds to give decent Christian names to her dishes.'

No reply.

'Did you hear, Gertrude?'

'Perfectly. I shall tell her.'

'What *is* the concern?' asked Fred, as Simmonds presented the dish to him.

'Mrs. Cookson told me, sir,' said Simmonds stoutly, his official dignity being much wounded by this public declaration of his ignorance,—'Mrs. Cookson told me, sir, that it was brained coquettes.'

'Well, wicked creatures though they be,' said Fred, stifling down his merriment, 'the dictates of my conscience, to say nothing of the dictates of my taste, forbid me to eat the mutilated remains of my greatest enemies. Bruce,' nodding across to his cousin, 'I commend to you these slain enemies. It will be a tasteful reminiscence to you all your life that fiery destruction does sometimes overtake these enemies of our peace.'

'And this?' asked the Colonel, glaring at the next *entrée* which Simmonds presented.

'Frisky chickens [fricasseed chickens], sir.'

'The scene is changed,' murmured Fred in a low tone, glancing at Gerty and Bruce with a world of fun in his eye. 'Battle and murder give place to life and fun!'

But the undercurrent of merriment was checked by the sound of Colonel Ellerslie's voice, tremblingly uttering some scathing soliloquy on the 'idiocy' generally of all his servants, and of Simmonds in particular, followed by what Fred called 'a written prologue' on the slate for next morning's drama, on 'the sins and shortcomings of last night's dinner-table!'

At last dinner was over, and Gertrude, alone in the drawing

room, abandoned herself to her melancholy musings. There were some letters to write for next morning's early post, a library book to finish, and the accompaniment of a song for Fred to practise; but she silenced their mute appeals by assuring herself that, in her present crushed state, ordinary humdrum duties would be self-inflicted cruelty. She therefore sat gazing dreamily into the fire, nursing the chafed feelings, which a little dutiful exertion would have helped to kill; and when the gentlemen joined her, they could scarcely recognise in the cross, gloomy creature before them, the usually charming presiding genius of their home.

'Now for *The Pirate*, Gerty!' said Fred, lifting his new song and placing it on the piano.

'I really can't,' she answered snappishly.

'Bruce wants to hear it.'

'Bruce can't get everything he wants, any more than other people.'

'Oh, never, nev—er mind,' said poor Bruce apologetically. 'It do—esn't matter. Cousin Gerty has a headache, I fear.'

'Never had a headache in my life, a—n—d hope I never shall. What makes you think that?'

'Oh, be—bec—ause'—

'Shall I have my revenge at chess to-night, Gertrude?' asked her father. The Colonel disapproved of abbreviations in names. The girl started. Was it possible that her father could expect her to sit and play with him just as if nothing had happened, without, too, a word of explanation for all his despotic crushing of her hopes?

'It's my turn to have revenge,' she answered coolly. 'I'm very tired. I'm going to bed.'

Her father glanced keenly and anxiously at her as she bade him good-night, but he merely said, 'I hope a night's rest will set you all to rights.'

'Are you ill, Gerty?' said Bruce, who, having said an abrupt good-night to his uncle and Fred as they seated themselves at the chess-board, followed her to the hall.

She was lighting her lamp, and as its flame fell across her face, the young man was startled at its paleness.

'Gerty, I'm so very ve—ry sorry, but I'm sure, qu—ite and cer—tain sure, that it wi—ll all turn out for your good, if only you, yo—u woul'—

Softened by the pathos of his voice, Gertrude pressed her lips together to keep back the words which rose to them. She held out her hand, and looked the question which she would not speak—'Would what?'

'I kn—ow what I me—mean, Gerty,' answered poor Bruce. 'But, you know, I can—'t sa—y it always, but,' and his voice quivered, 'when Al—ice died, I got such a calm—ing here,' placing his hand on his beating heart, 'when the words came to my mind, "What I do thou know—est n—ot now, but thou sh—alt know hereafter."' He spoke the words firmly, and with an inspired sort of look, Gertrude thought.

'Who do you mean said that?' she asked eagerly.

'Himself,' answered Bruce, as he reverently pressed his lips upon her hand, and was gone.

The words rang in Gertrude's ear, vibrated through her

throbbing frame, looked out upon her from the pages of the book she tried to read. While Arnot brushed her long golden hair, and when she laid her head upon her pillow, they seemed written on her very eye-balls, for she saw them when her eyes were shut.

Next morning, long before her usual time for rising, she awoke with a start. She had been dreaming that she was strolling along the banks of a river, gathering flowers and ferns; that imperceptibly the path led her higher and higher; that treacherous rocks, covered with tufted moss, fringed the banks of the precipice; that her eye caught sight of a fern she longed to possess, perched on the edge of what proved to be a crumbling rock; and that, as she sprang forward to seize it, Bruce dragged her back. She flung him off, but he held her fast, and, leading her a few steps higher up, showed her the danger she had escaped, as the thin, deceitful-looking ledge, which must have yielded to her weight, would have carried her into a yawning gulf below. And as she gazed down the giddy depth, the river seemed singing the words into her astonished ear, 'What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.'

Gertrude tried to remember who had uttered these words and where they were to be found, and began to search her Bible for them. Her quick, intelligent mind gleaned many a truth as she glanced through the pages of the New Testament, till at last her eye lighted on the memorable verse. As she laid her Bible back on the shelf, she resolved henceforth to try to read it with more patience and interest.

CHAPTER II.

'She reads, converses, studies, for applause;
And therefore all that she desires to know
Is just as much as she can fairly show.'

CRABBE.

'ARE the Colonel and Gerty coming to dinner on Thursday, Bruce?' asked Lady Morell of her son next morning.

Bruce started, and stammered out that he had given Gerty his mother's message, but that, th—at he could not remember, in fact, what the answer was. Lady Morell suppressed a look of annoyance, and said pleasantly, laying her hand on Bruce's shoulder:

'Well, my dear fellow, you will just have to go and get an answer now. Captain Egerton,' turning to her guest, 'says he can only give us a very short visit at present, and I should like him and the Colonel to meet, and have a talk about Trichinoply and Bellary!'

Captain Egerton expressed politely the pleasure it would give him, and Lady Morell explained the dislike, the positive antipathy, she had to writing notes and letters, and how she made all possible use of her obliging son instead.

Just as Bruce, nothing loth, was starting for the Fort, he spied Mrs. Heywood and Rose coming up the avenue. Could he have got out of their way he certainly would, but it was too late; he must, as he said to himself, 'face the enemy.'

'Is Lady Morell at home?' asked Rose. 'I hope she has not yet started on her morning walk.'

'My mother is, i—s in the—Hall, I believe—at least, s—he was when—I left!' answered Bruce.

'Will she still be in the Hall?' asked Rose mischievously. How that girl delighted in making fun of Bruce! 'Couldn't you just run back and see?'

'I w—ould, but—I—I—am going a mes—going to the Fort.'

'O Rose,' said Mrs. Heywood, 'don't let's keep Mr. Bruce. He is going to the Fort; we know the loadstar there, Mr. Bruce. But, tell me, who is that splendid looking man who came yesterday to visit you? An officer, I am sure.'

'Oh, it's Captain Egerton! He's in the Artillery. He's a fr—iend of Ja—ck's; at least, he kn—ows him; not a fr—iend exactly, but he once sa—ved Jack's li—fe wh—en h—e wa—s nearly drow—drowned, and my mother wanted to kn—ow him.'

'Naturally, in the circumstances!' said Rose.

'Is he of the Egertons of Egerton?' But aside to her daughter, 'He won't know anything about that. Well, we mustn't keep you, Mr. Bruce. Adieu.' And they moved on to the house.

They found her ladyship in the drawing-room, and were introduced to the very distinguished-looking visitor. The real

object of their visit was thus satisfactorily accomplished, although some fanciful questions about the best means of potting ferns and mosses were put.

'So nice that you should have happened to call this morning,' said easy, hospitable Lady Morell; 'it will save me a note. We are asking a few friends to dinner on Thursday, Mrs. Heywood. I hope you and Rose will kindly come at seven?'

'We shall be delighted,' answered Mrs. Heywood. 'It is always a pleasure to come to the Hall.'

While the elder ladies plunged into a little gossip, very dear to both of them, Rose and Captain Egerton struck up a brisk talk. It is wonderful sometimes how much two persons can gather of each other's history in a few minutes. A pretty accurate estimate of the existing circumstances of each was arrived at by the time Mrs. Heywood rose to go.

'When do you go abroad?' Captain Egerton asked, as he shook hands with Rose.

'Not for a week or a fortnight yet,' said Rose. 'Mamma has business which will keep her at home indefinitely till it is settled.'

'Who is he, mother? Is he rich?' asked Rose of her mother as they walked down the avenue, for she had caught snatches of the talk of the two ladies.

'He is an orphan, has scarcely a relative in the world, Lady Morell understands, and has inherited a large patrimony, but no estates. His father was whimsical, and left in his will that his lands were to be sold, and the capital divided among his four

children—this Captain Egerton being only a second son. But his elder brother was killed in the hunting-field, and his two sisters have since died, and he has come in for everything.'

'Has he retired?'

'No; Lady Morell says he doesn't mean to, and that he is as brave and good as he is wealthy.'

'Did you ask him to come to Garulee?'

'No, it doesn't do to rush at people, my dear. He is sure to be at the Yorke Ewing's dinner party to-night. We shall improve our acquaintance there, I hope.'

'I shall, anyhow,' retorted Rose.

'Well, try and play your cards better than you did with Major Charlton. We are in desperately low water, you know. I am thankful Garulee is let, and for a couple of years too. It will clear off some of our debts, and pay our way abroad; but it won't last for ever.'

'How disgusting it is to be poor!' said Rose; 'it's too bad. There's Gertrude, she can get whatever she wants—whatever—her father's so proud of her; and she has just to tell him she is getting such and such a thing, and send in the bills to him.'

'Yes, but she is the reverse of extravagant, Rose.'

'Is she?' with a sneer.

'Yes, her father told me so himself yesterday, and said he wished her to retain her straightforwardness and simplicity, and not get continental vagaries into her head! She is a splendid-looking girl, and so true and *naïve!*'

'Do you think so, mother? I shouldn't wonder if she became a great over-grown woman some day.'

'I should, her figure is so exquisitely moulded; besides which, her graceful bearing will never change.'

Now, if there is one person in the world of whom Rose Heywood is jealous it is Gertrude Ellerslie, yet they are intimates *par excellence;* and if there is not much sympathy of love, or pursuit, or taste,—such as form the elements of real friendship,—there is early association and companionship, and a community of interests, to make a strong and usually happy intimacy.

No greater contrast than exists between the two girls in appearance and disposition could be conceived. Gertrude, from her vantage-ground of wealth and position, looks kindly and feelingly on Rose, whose life is so hampered by straitened means; while Rose casts an envious eye upon Gertrude, grudging her the admiration she receives, and is inwardly resolved to eclipse her some day, by the splendid match she shall make and the position in the world to which she shall attain.

Was this Captain Egerton, she mentally soliloquized, as she relapsed into silence during the rest of the walk home—was he to be her fate? She should have to find out a little more about him, as to the prospect of titles and honours, as well as riches, and then she would set to work.

Two things helped to raise Rose's spirits during the course of the day—the one being that Gertrude was not to be at the Yorke Ewing's dinner party, and the second that Captain Egerton was next heir to a baronetcy.

Fred Ellerslie, who rode over in the afternoon to Garulee to

see Rose and break to her the unexpected news of his sudden recall to Edinburgh next day, was able to give her some of the information for which she thirsted, but which she contrived to ask for in a tone of quite disarming indifference. She expressed her surprise and regret at Fred's sudden start in a most becoming way, while she secretly congratulated herself on this convenient turn of affairs, as leaving her unobserved and unchallenged by her guileless but ardent lover, to manufacture and carry out her little game with this interesting stranger. Poor Fred — bright, generous Fred! single-hearted and unsuspicious—believed not more in his own true love for the artful girl before him than in the truth of her protestations of affection for him. She held him between herself and want in the matter of a husband, but had not the faintest intention of ever exalting him to such a connection. She condescended to take the fresh pure flowers he had brought her, and promised to wear them in the evening at dinner, adding as she bade him farewell, that all the heart of the party was taken out of it since he was not to be there. A prettily worded little invective against early trains and cross, fidgety 'governors,' who insisted on having everybody at home the night before a start, closed the interview; Fred, amid his own regrets, remarking that he couldn't make out the governor about journeys and departures, he always seemed so nervous when any of them left.

As soon as he had ridden away, Rose flew to her room, fluttering with expectation and hope, to make preparations for the dinner party.

Infinite were the pains she took over her toilette for the

eventful evening, and the effect was, to say the least, striking.

Rose is *petite*, but elegant in figure, and her face is beautiful. She has dark eyes, and a profusion of rich wavy black hair, which to-night is very carefully arranged, and in the thick tresses of which she artistically arranges artificial sprigs of scarlet geraniums.

'If only I knew if Captain Egerton goes in for art or nature,' she pondered, as she surveyed the effect of the flowers, and held in her hands one of the white camellias from Fred's bouquet. 'If only I knew! But as I don't, here goes for my favourite art!' and, flinging the camellias aside, she fastened the geraniums in her hair and in her black net dress.

The usual disappointment of 'always being sent in to dinner with the wrong person' was not in store for her this evening, for Captain Egerton was requested to hand her to dinner.

He politely expressed his pleasure at meeting her again, and she felt sure he admired her exceedingly. He remarked upon the scenery of the county, seen, as it had been by him, in a long ride with Bruce.

Rose, who had neither eye nor heart for scenery, diverged into talking of the families in the neighbourhood.

'Lady Morell is charming. Is she not?'

'Very.'

'So good-natured and funny.'

No answer.

'Have you known them long?'

'Oh no. I got acquainted with Mr. Morell about a year ago, and he kindly asked me to visit him.'

Rose noticed that he said nothing about saving him from drowning when the ice broke on the Serpentine.

'He *is* a character, but nothing to Bruce,' she went on.

Captain Egerton glanced anxiously at his friends on the other side of the table, hoping that they were not within earshot of these very personal remarks.

'Mr. Morell has always spoken so affectionately of his mother and brother,' said Captain Egerton gravely.

'So he may; they are devoted to him. Just look at him. Did you ever see anything so like a monkey?'

The Honourable Jack, as he is universally called, has nothing certainly to boast of in looks. Short and squat, with a reserved, shy manner, and not very much to say in company, at least, he stares through his eye-glass at his opposite neighbours in a somewhat exasperating way. It does not seem to occur to him that he has any special concern with his companions on either side of him, unless when it suits his own pleasure or inclination. Bruce, on the contrary, is labouring to talk to the Miss Yorke Ewing who is his special charge; and, judging from the interested expression of her face, his efforts are not in vain.

'I expected to have met your friends from the Fort this evening,' said Captain Egerton, changing the subject of their talk.

'Ah,' said Rose, with a thump at her heart, 'they were to have been here, but Fred had a telegram summoning him to

Edinburgh to-morrow, and Colonel Ellerslie said they must all stay at home the last evening. He is so odd when any one is going away; the day before is held like a kind of funeral, and they all stay together, and I suppose mope.'

'Really!' with interest.

'Have you seen Ger—Miss Ellerslie?'

'Only her photograph. She is all over the house at the Hall, but the pleasure of seeing herself is in store for me some evening, I am told. She is evidently a great favourite of Lady Morell.'

'Y—e—s, I fancy she is,' said Rose reluctantly. 'Her father and Lady Morell are cousins, and they are all very intimate. She and the girls are not great friends, however.'

'Are they not?'

'No; Gertrude is—well, she is pretty much kept in by Colonel Ellerslie, and not allowed to go in with their fast ways. Isn't it too bad, Captain Egerton? He has never sent her to school, just had governesses for her all her life; and now, when the splendid chance of going with us to France and Germany is given her, he refuses to let her go. Gertrude is in a dreadful way about it. My mother said she never saw a girl so cut up about anything as she was yesterday when he declined her offer to take her with us.'

Captain Egerton glanced up the table at the showily-dressed woman of the world, and then back to her pretty but affected daughter at his side, but did not speak.

'Adelaide and Hilda would have simply *made* their mother let them go, and so would I; but fathers are different.

By the bye, what has become of Adelaide and Hilda to-night?'

'Dash, Miss Morell's pet spaniel, was rather over-run to-day, and came home thoroughly knocked up, and she wouldn't leave it, and Miss Hilda stayed'—

'To help Adelaide to nurse it,' interrupted Rose, laughing. 'Just like them. They're simply mad about horses and dogs. But are they not handsome, Captain Egerton?'

'The horses, or the dogs?'

'Oh no, the girls; but, you know, they're both engaged.'

'A friendly hint to me not to lose my heart, eh, Miss Heywood? Thank you for your consideration,' said Captain Egerton, laughing. 'I'm not very susceptible, however, I think.'

This was damping; and the grave, somewhat pre-occupied expression of his face, when not forced to reply to the rattle of his companion, told of a heart often far away from the present scene.

'He needs rousing,' said Rose to herself; 'quiet men like lively people.' And she launched out into an amusingly clever, but very sarcastic, description of the neighbouring families, with their idiosyncrasies, and oddities, and whims.

Captain Egerton made a few feeble attempts to defend the to him unknown victims of Rose's sharp tongue; and at last when a breathing time succeeded, as the ice went round, he inquired if she were going to hear Mr. Morell's lecture next evening.

'Oh yes. Everybody's going there. All the county will turn out to hear him. I only hope he won't stick, which most

likely he will. He has taken up chemistry, just as he did botany. There are people in the world, Captain Egerton, who, as soon as they know a little about things, take for granted that their neighbours know nothing, and straightway proceed to enlighten them.'

'I wasn't aware that Morell knew anything about chemistry,' said Captain Egerton. 'I quite look forward to the lecture.'

'So do I,' said Rose. 'It will be great fun, I am sure.'

CHAPTER III.

'Loose as these events seem to hang upon one another, yet they are all knit and united together in a firm chain, and the highest link of that chain is held and managed by an unerring Providence. The chain indeed may wave and shake this way and that, but still the hand that holds it is steady and the eye that guides it is infallible.'

THE next morning rose fair and calm, promising one of those clear, charming days which in Scotland is often enjoyed in October. Gertrude was early up, full of loving attentions to Fred, who was to leave by the morning train to return to Edinburgh.

Poor Gertrude has had a time of remorse and repentance towards father and brother since her snubbing manners two nights ago. And while her father takes all her kind ways calmly, and as a matter of course, generous Fred, who is ardently attached to his sister, as she to him, is not slow to recognise them, and to let her know he does.

'How awfully good you are to me, Gerty!' he said, as she met him at his early breakfast, and laid on the table his luncheon-basket, packed with all sorts of tempting viands.

'Why, you must have been up in the middle of the night to make all these sandwiches and things!'

'O Fred, you know I would do anything for you!' said the girl, flushing deeply as she added, 'and yet—and yet—oh, I didn't play *The Pirate* for you the other night, and was so cross and horrid! I want to tell you how awfully sorry I am, Fred!'

She laid her hand on his arm, and forced back the tears which trembled in her eyes.

'When? What *is* the girl talking about?' said Fred, twining his arm round the slender waist, and laying for a second his head upon her shoulder. 'You play for me till I wonder you are not sick tired of my "Pirates" and "Vagabonds;" but'—suddenly looking up in her face—'you'll try and be happy and well when I'm away, Gerty, for I know it has been a horrid sell this staying at home. I feel most awfully for you!'

Gertrude stooped to strap the rugs with an energy quite unnecessary for the occasion, but did not speak; and Fred continued:

'Don't sit moping in the house over it. Fill up your time, and go tearing all over the place. It's the best plan; I've found it. You'll try, won't you?' looking up coaxingly into his sister's dear, beautiful face, as she sprang up.

'Won't I just!' she answered. 'And I'll have those new songs splendidly got up when you come home at Christmas, Fred.'

'Jolly!' he exclaimed, as the wheels of the dog-cart were

heard coming up the avenue. 'And you'll look after the pups,' as Fly and Wasp, two pretty fox-terriers, sprang into the room, and jumped upon him; 'and you'll tell me how Duke's lame leg gets on—oh! and everything just as you always do. Your letters are splendid, Gerty! Many a laugh they give me, coming in, as they always do, when I am in the thick of anatomy, or mathematics, or something dark. And you'll tell me about Rose? She is feeling leaving Garulee so much; she has the warmest heart that ever beat. She would have given anything to have come to dinner last night, as you asked her, but said she *had* to go to the Ewings, although she would a thousand times rather have come here. But she never thinks about herself. Perhaps I may take a run over to Stuttgart during the Christmas recess; it would be good for my German as well as for myself—eh, Gerty?'

'If only you might!' said his sister doubtfully.

'If only I hadn't lost my time going to sea, I might have had the practice in Kilbarton by this time. Rose would have been done with her money troubles and worries then.'

'Are you and she engagéd, Fred?' asked Gertrude, looking her brother straight in the face.

'As good as,' answered the young man, with a radiant smile. 'She accepted a ring from me yesterday, and we understand one another. But you mustn't speak of it to her.'

'Mustn't I? Why?'

'She said it must be a dead secret. Only you're different. I couldn't help telling you; I thought you'd be so glad;' and

pressing his sister in a brotherly hug, Fred sprang into the dog-cart, and seizing the reins, drove rapidly away.

Gertrude turned into the house, with a sad and weary feeling in her heart. She met her father, when precisely at nine o'clock he entered the breakfast-room, with much of her usually kind manner. Explanations with him she knew to be impossible. She could only hope to be dutiful, and that what she called 'right feelings' would come back again. But she was almost driven off the rails of her good resolutions by her father leading the conversation to the subject of Mrs. Heywood and Rose, and animadverting in very strong terms on the frivolity of both mother and daughter, and on his satisfaction that they were so soon to leave the country.

'They haven't paid their butcher and baker, I am told, for the last twelvemonth,' he exclaimed; 'and Rose has bewitched Fred, it seems. Conceive his idiocy in going over to Garulee yesterday, taking camellias and trash, and staying all the afternoon! He may save himself the trouble. Rose is not the girl to look over her shoulder at a younger son, a medical student whose foot is not even on the ladder yet!'

'Oh, Papa!' exclaimed Gertrude warmly; 'any girl would be proud of Fred, and Rose is so pretty!'

Colonel Ellerslie compressed his lips, and lifted his newspaper. Then presently, as Gertrude was leaving the room, he said, 'I've had it out with Simmonds about the other night. Order the dinner at five this evening, remember, Gertrude; and be sure to tell Cookson not to forget lemons for the pancakes.'

'At five, papa?' asked his daughter, astonished.

'Yes; this is Jack's lecture night, you know. I promised him we should go.'

'Goodness! It will never be a *lecture*, papa,' said Gerty, smiling.

'Why shouldn't it? The fellow has brains enough.'

'Hardly.'

'Nonsense, Gertrude!' dropping his eyes again upon his paper; 'at any rate, we shall go and hear him.'

'We shall all be covered with confusion, I expect,' murmured Gerty as she left the room. 'Whatever has possessed Jack to make a public spectacle of himself?'

An hour later, with Fred's words of counsel in her ear, —to occupy herself, and so to deaden the effects of her disappointment, — Gertrude, having completed her household arrangements, and seen her father ensconced in his chair, with his book, at the library fire, set forth, with a pretty covered basket in her hand, to make her usual weekly visit to Nurse Brown. Gertrude walked briskly along; yet her spirit was certainly not in tune with the calm beauty of the day.

'To think of Papa talking so against Rose and her mother when he knows what frien—how much we are—at least, how dreadfully I wanted to go abroad. And then never to say a word about being sorry to disappoint me. It's hard lines; but it's always the way with him. Well, Jip,' caressing her favourite little Scotch terrier, who always accompanied his young mistress in her walks, 'it's a queer world this. When

one person wants to stay at home, she hasn't money to do it, and must go away; and another who has, wants to go abroad, and can't budge. If you and I had to arrange things, what a grand time of it we should have!'

She flung a stone across the grass park through which they were walking, and Jip, barking and wagging his tail, tore away after it.

Presently she stopped at a cottage on a secluded hill-side, and knocked gently at the door.

'Come in,' a voice from within answered feebly.

'Well, Brown, how is the rheumatism to-day?' she said, in a kindly, cheerful tone, hastening towards a fragile-looking woman seated on a low chair beside the fire.

'Unco weel, thank-ee, Miss Gerty. An' hoo's the Kornel an' Maister Fred?'

'Fred's away to Edinburgh this morning,' answered Gertrude, taking the offered chair beside Nurse. 'And Papa's just in his "ordnair." I'm the only member of the family in a drooping condition—*unco frail*, don't I look?'

Nurse Brown gazed at the dazzling creature before her as she said, 'Ye aye mind me, Miss Gerty, o' what I think Eve must have been. Maister John Milton describes her beautiful.'

Gerty was busy emptying her basket of its miscellaneous but carefully selected contents, and she exclaimed: 'Now, Nurse, you're to have part of this chicken for your dinner to-day, tell John when he comes in; and these cream tarts are Mrs. Cookson's last effort in the sweet line, and even Papa

declares they are a perfect success; and he sent you this,' holding up a tempting bunch of grapes.

She placed all neatly on plates, and filling a glass with water, arranged a few lovely flowers, and put them on the little table beside her.

'I'll not bother you with their names to-day,' she exclaimed, laughing. 'Wasn't it Mary Powell who said to her husband to be, your friend John Milton, that if Adam gave names to the beasts, Eve, she thought, must have named the flowers? I don't believe she ever gave them such jaw-breaking titles as our botanists have, all the same!'

'Oh, they're sweet, sweet, Miss Gerty,' said Brown, lifting the glass and drinking in their beauty and fragrance. 'I canna thank ye as I would.'

But soon her eye wandered away from the flowers to the young girl herself, as she stood there in her youth and beauty, tall and slight, yet with a figure betokening robust health. The unconscious grace in every movement lent a charm to her person. Her face was oval, and a pair of large lustrous blue eyes, varying with her moods, told ever the true tale of her heart within. The glow on her cheeks contrasted with the clear fairness of her complexion; and a small well-shaped mouth told of a certain firmness of character, as well as of openness of disposition; while a quantity of nut-brown hair was gathered simply back, and arranged in shining coils upon her well-set head.

Just as she was leaving the cottage, Bruce Morell and a stranger gentleman arrived.

'We saw J—i—p,' said Bruce, his whole face lighting up

with pleasure as he shook hands with her, 'and—I—knew y—ou would be here.'

Gerty glanced at the stranger,—Bruce had forgotten to introduce them,—and said, with perfect grace, 'Captain Egerton, I presume. I am Gertrude Ellerslie, Bruce's cousin. I heard you were at the Hall.'

Captain Egerton lifted his cap, smiled, and bowed, mentally wondering how all the good looks and *esprit* seemed to have concentrated on the female portion of the families among whom he found himself, to the very grievous disparagement of the men. For as he looked at Gerty, in her pretty navy-blue costume and country hat, with its bunches of scarlet poppies, never, he felt, had he beheld a fairer, sweeter face and form.

'Are you going in to see Brown?' Gerty asked of Bruce.

'Yes— n—o— I mean, we'll come a bit with you, a—nd then go in. Here—Nettle—Jip,' calling to the dogs. 'Captain Egerton—you—y—ou—will you—c—are to come a bit?'

'I should rather think so, if Miss Ellerslie will allow me.'

'Oh, certainly!' said Gerty, who always wearied of walks with Bruce. 'I'm just going down to the lodge-gate at St. Helen's to ask,' addressing Bruce, 'what time to-morrow they expect Miss Maitland home.'

'You live in the midst of lovely scenery, Miss Ellerslie,' said Captain Egerton, as they walked along the soft turf.

'Oh yes!' said Gerty indifferently.

'It is so much more undulating than I expected Scotch scenery to be.'

'Yes,' said Gerty, smiling. 'Did you expect to find nothing

but rocks and steep mountains?—no flowers, and the people going about in kilts? We in Lonshire, living so near the border-land, count ourselves a little more civilised than our northern friends. Is this your first visit to Scotland?'

'Oh no!' smiling. 'I know Edinburgh well. I have been a good deal there, and in some of the northern counties; but this sort of country is very different — so peaceful and quiet.'

'A great deal *too* quiet, Captain Egerton,' said Gertrude earnestly; 'quite fatiguingly quiet!'

'You prefer town life?' looking earnestly at his companion.

'No, I don't think I should,—not the town life that Rose and Adelaide and Hilda lead, when they get the chance,' she said, almost soliloquizing. 'At least, I don't *think* I should. But, then, they say it's because I know nothing about it that I fancy that I should hate it. I'm not at all sure that I can explain what I should like, but I sometimes wonder what's the use of life; I mean that I think something higher and nobler is intended for us than just to eat, and walk, and read, and try to amuse ourselves, and so forth; and I wanted so very, *very* much to travel, and get a little more stimulus into my life, and not just rust away here. Home-keeping youths, you know, Captain Egerton, have homely wits. I am ambitious; I have a great longing in my heart, and nothing satisfies or fills it. Everything at home seems so small. But I daresay you think me crazy,' she added impetuously, casting an earnest, searching glance at her companion as she spoke.

Captain Egerton did not speak, his mind and heart were too full for words.

'Here,' he thought, 'is a soul unsatisfied, thirsting for it knows not what. Oh, that I might help to lead her to the living water!'

They had left the meadows and the hill-side, and had reached Miss Maitland's lodge. Bruce, who had most reluctantly fallen behind, having had to extract a thorn from Jip's foot, now joined them, and Gertrude's heightened colour, for she felt abashed at her frankness in talking as she had done to a stranger, called forth his instant remark.

'O Gerty, how hot you are! Why did y—ou walk at such a trem—end—ous pace? Have you taken c—old, do you think? What will your father say?'

'Nonsense, Bruce! How ridiculous you are!' she answered impatiently, as she opened the gate, and knocked at the door of the lodge. 'You know I never had a cold in my life.'

'Well, Anne, by what train do you expect Miss Maitland home to-morrow? and are Mrs. Græme and the young ladies coming too?' asked Gerty of the tidy woman who opened the door.

'Eh, Miss Gerty, we have a note this mornin', and something's detained Miss Maitland, and she's obliged to put off comin' home indiscreetly.'

'Indefinitely,' said Gerty gently. 'Oh, I *am* sorry! *When* will she ever get home?'

'Dear knows, Miss. An' Miss Maitland has her Bible-class summonzied for Sabbath nicht, and naebody to tak' it. Wad ye try'd, Miss?'

'Me, Anne! you know I couldn't,' impatiently.

'An' she says in her letter to John,—for it's to John she aye writes, he's siccan a gran' scholar by me,—she says he bid to ask the Kornel to help to get owre Johnnie into the Effervescent Hospital, Miss. He's comed on rale weel in the Infirmary, but noo she says the Effervescent's the place for him. Maybe ye would ask the Kornel to speak to Dr. Wright, Miss Gerty?'

'I shall be sure to, Anne. Papa and I are going to Kilbarton this afternoon. I shall ask him to call at once on the Doctor. The Convalescent Home is the very thing for Johnnie.'

'Thank ye, Miss Gerty,' said Anne. 'You're unco prompt and kind.'

'Is Miss Maitland one of your county absentees?' asked Captain Egerton of Bruce as they walked away.

'No, n—o; oh, de—ar no!' answered the young man. 'She is the—wh—at do you call he—r, Gerty?'

'The Queen of Women, *I* call her!' said Gerty, turning to Egerton. 'She is, well, as near perfection as is possible.'

'Not *too* sublime!' said Egerton, smiling at her enthusiasm.

'Oh no; so infinitely superior to everybody, and yet so human and pitiful to others!'

'Does she live alone at that pretty place?' asked Egerton.

'No; she has a houseful of cousins with her, and they are as unlike her as fire to water. I often think they are too much for her; but I believe she met with great kindness from some member of the family once, and feels she can never do enough

to show her gratitude. She is most kind and devoted to them, and they have a happy home with her.'

Bruce stuck like a leech to his companions during the short walk from St. Helen's to the Fort, and Captain Egerton was grave and quiet. Just as they were parting, however, he said, 'Miss Ellerslie, believe me, you will never get your heart filled by any or all of the things of earth. God made your heart for Himself; He alone can satisfy or fill it. Ask Him and He will.'

He pressed her hand respectfully as they parted, and she hastened to her room, full of new strange thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

'If four times five were fifty,
And one made thirty more,
Then youth at one and twenty
Were wiser than fourscore.
But since by book and table
Our summing must be done,
A head at one and twenty
Is only twenty-one.'

TALLY ho, tally ho! was the stirring sound that woke the echoes this afternoon in the sleepy old town of Kilbarton. The notes proceeded from a shrill horn, blown by the rosy lips of the beautiful Adelaide Morell, who, standing conductor-fashion at the back of the coach her sister was driving, announced to all the advent of the party from the Hall. The equipage, whose coming was thus boisterously heralded, was by no means a very distinguished-looking turn-out, nor in any way remarkable, except for its occupants on the top.

Driving unicorn was Hilda Morell, whose dark, short-cut hair was adorned by a hat of grey felt and sweeping feather, placed sideways on her head; the rest of her person was

enveloped in a voluminous dust-cloak, or, more strictly speaking, hooded-coat. Beside her, looking on in apparent admiration of her feats, is seated a handsome Irishman, James Fitzgerald, Hilda's *fiancé;* while his cousin, Sam Tyes, who is engaged to Adelaide, a man of very fashionable and rather striking appearance, occupies a seat beside the fair horn-blower. Mrs. Heywood and Rose, Captain Egerton, Mr. Morell, and Bruce, make up the party, dispersed at various intervals on the top of the coach.

'I hope you won't blow us all up, Jack, with your experiments!' Adelaide exclaims, suddenly addressing her brother, who has a nervous, pre-occupied look about him.

'So that Gertrude is safe out of it, what would it signify if we were?' Hilda answers, nodding back her head, and then letting her whip touch gracefully the leader's head. Jack's devotion to Gertrude is a patent fact. If his present scientific efforts were stripped of all spurious motives, his aim, pure and simple, would be found to be not so much to benefit the Kilbarton 'Working-Men's Institute,' as to appear to fit in a little more than he usually does with her intellectual tastes. Chemistry has taken his fancy, and after a very short study of the subject he has resolved upon this lecture, to the dismay of his family, who, however, can only hope the experiments will 'go off;' and whose good taste, triumphing over their anxiety and dread, has brought them, with the exception of Lady Morell, who has 'one of her headaches,' to Kilbarton for the occasion.

They have driven in early to let Captain Egerton 'see the place.'

'Very likely Gerty won't come,' said Hilda.

Jack scowled. 'As likely as not; it's only lectures of a high order that she condescends to attend.'

'She *is* coming,' said Captain Egerton quietly, seeing Jack's rising ire.

'Have you seen Gert—Miss Ellerslie?' asked Rose, who had hoped her rival was as yet off the field.

'Yes, we met her this morning.'

'Where?' asked Hilda.

'At Nur—se Br—o—wn's,' answered Bruce.

'Ah, to be sure!' exclaimed Adelaide. 'Bruce haunts that region once a week, from sunrise to sundown, to be blessed with a glance of Gerty. Many a trap he sets—to catch —a sunbeam,' and as she spoke she lifted her horn, and blew a shrill blast, as if to scatter in the air the words she had uttered, and which carried confusion into her poor brother's heart and face.

'Fred has gone suddenly off,' said Adelaide, vexed with herself when too late, and anxious to change the subject. 'What's up, eh, Rose?'

'Nothing particular,' answered the young lady, trying to look conscious. 'His professor in Edinburgh wanted him for some secretary work or something, and it was thought a great distinction, so off he went.'

'Come, Morell,' said Tyes, 'let's hear the sound of your voice; give us the opening utterances of your lecture; good time for rehearsal!'

But Mr. Morell is evidently, in true *artiste* fashion, 'saving

his voice,' and a sickly smile is all the response. Presently they rattled into Kilbarton. The young ladies, who were smoking cigarettes, threw them away as they alighted at the inn, scrambling down by the wheels, without waiting for any assistance from the gentlemen.

While walking about the town the dust-cloaks were thrown open, displaying the rest of their picturesque, if not very lady-like, dress. Hilda wore a short scarlet petticoat, above which was festooned a short skirt of brown serge; scarlet stockings, and buckled shoes, showing off to advantage her well-shaped feet and ankles, completed her costume.

Adelaide's dress was pretty much like her sister's, the predominant colour, however, being blue, to suit her fairer complexion and hair. She retained her horn during their walk, now and then sending forth a flourish as the fancy seized her, the not unfamiliar sound bringing many a head to the shop-doors to catch a glimpse of the eccentric, but decidedly popular, young ladies from the Hall.

Rose, whose straitened means prevented her ever achieving the summit of her wishes in dress, but who exerted all her wits to produce a good effect, wore a short, black, well-fitting costume, with maize tie, and feather of the same colour in her bewitching hat, while rather too profuse a bedanglement of ornaments, than suited at least Captain Egerton's taste, glittered about her pretty person.

The Honourable Jack,—Honourable, as he is universally called, not from hereditary right, but as fitting in to his pom-

posity,—with Bruce, his assistant, went off to the Institute direct, while the rest of the party started to show Captain Egerton the lions of the place.

The gay spirits of the girls seemed to infect the rather stagnant inhabitants of the sleepy streets, and many were the smiles and respectful bows which greeted them as the party straggled up the long street; the substantial purchases they usually made rendering their visits to the town always most welcome. Sometimes their feats carried rather tragic results, as, for instance, to-day, when, seeing a decrepit old woman leaning half out of a window, in her eagerness to see 'the quality,' Adelaide lifted her horn, and blew it right into her face, making the poor old body tumble backwards in her astonishment and fright. At the same moment, the steed of an inoffensive young farmer, who was riding past, got a lash from Hilda's whip, which started it off tearing through the town in a most undignified way, to the no small confusion and dismay of its rider!

CHAPTER V.

'We sometimes think we could a speech produce
Much to the purpose, if our tongues were loose ;
But being tried, it dies upon the lip,
Faint as a chicken's note that has the pip ;
Our wasted oil unprofitably burns,
Like hidden lamps in old sepulchral urns.'

COWPER.

'WHAT a crowd we shall have!' said Rose to Captain Egerton, beside whom, at the end of a row of seats, she managed to get herself placed,

'Yes, indeed,' he replied gravely. 'I trust Morell will —will manage it—all!'

'Not he! But he's the great man about, and everybody will turn out.'

Captain Egerton's eyes wandered away rather too much towards the door for Rose's taste.

For whom was he looking? and what business had he to watch for any one when she was seated next him?

That Captain Egerton was unlike most men, she had soon discovered. That air of unconsciousness, of warm interest

in others, the sympathetic kindling of his dark eye, and the ineffable genuineness that was over and about him, marked him out from the common run of the county gentlemen of Lonshire. The interests of these were, for the most part, concentrated on themselves, their stables, and their hounds, and left them with little time, or means, or inclination for the benefit of the rest of mankind.

What his 'style' was of womankind she had not yet arrived at, for he seemed a better listener than talker; and, quick as she usually was to catch her cue, and throw her chameleon character into the mould of those she wished to please, she was yet in the dark as 'to what he liked, and what he might abhor.'

A goodly number of the members of the 'Working-Men's Institute' and their friends filled the chairs in the body of the hall. Many also of the *élite* of Kilbarton, not generally given to attending the Working-Men's Lectures, are drawn this evening by the fact that it is the Honourable Mr. Morell who is to be the exponent of science.

No one ever dreamt that he had a particle of science in him, but that may have been their ignorance, to be sure; and then he is the Honourable Jack! Any way, the hall is now packed; and as the door once more opens, and Colonel Ellerslie and Gertrude enter, they glance round the room vainly trying to discover seats.

Instantly Captain Egerton rises, and as the Colonel makes his way towards the Morell party, he offers Gertrude his seat, which she gracefully accepts, while room is made for the Colonel in the row before.

Captain Egerton manages to get the corner of a bench running parallel to the row of seats occupied by the Hall party, and close to Gertrude, and presently the lecturer and his assistant mount the platform, where their apparatus has already been placed.

'All went merry as a marriage bell,' and as the simple preliminary experiments were successfully explained and illustrated, the audience began to feel that a chemistry lecture was certainly most improving and edifying.

Colonel Ellerslie breathed freely, and a sigh of relief escaped Captain Egerton, which made Gertrude turn her eyes towards his flushed, eager face.

'If Jack were his own brother,' she thought, 'he couldn't be more anxious.'

In a trice, however, the feeling of relief is changed into one of anxiety. The lecturer is describing the ordinary candle-flame, and one experiment only has exemplified the principles enunciated; but now the candle *will* go out when it has been advertised to burn with increased brilliancy, and persists in burning like lime light when the lecturer prophesies immediate extinction. The lecturer, however, becomes re-assured, and proceeds to illustrate more scientific facts.

'Air,' he informs the audience, 'is composed of a mixture of gases,—oxygen and nitrogen,—in certain proportions.'

'Wonderful, really!' whispers Rose to Gertrude; 'quite surprising! So glad we came to hear all the modern novelties of science!'

To show this, the rising Faraday proceeded to burn

phosphorus in a bell-jar over water, but Kilbarton air seemed to object to be disintegrated, as the small china cup in which the phosphorus was placed persisted in sinking to the bottom of the pneumatic trough, thereby extinguishing the phosphorus. The lecturer, however, recovering from the effects of this unexpected and puzzling conduct on the part of the phosphorus, explained what ought to have happened, and passed undaunted to the next illustration.

'Facing the difficulty, and passing on,' whispered Tyes to Hilda. 'Jack has pluck enough, if rather short of science!'

The next experiment was the manufacture of oxygen by the application of heat to chlorate of potash.

Two jars were filled with the gas, and charcoal was successfully ignited in one of them, and, although scintillations were at the minimum, the spectators applauded, and the lecturer smiled, feeling that his triumph had at last come. The applause, however, had hardly subsided, when a brilliant light, followed by a suffocating smell, was noticed in the direction of Bruce, caused by a piece of phosphorus, which, carefully dried and deposited on the table, in anticipation of a future experiment, had, with most mistaken zeal, burst into flame, and refused to be extinguished. The lecturer, with admirable presence of mind, placed a hyacinth glass over it, and appealed to the spectators to calm themselves.

All would now have gone right had not Bruce moved the imprisoned phosphorus, which immediately re-ignited on his finger, to his evident confusion. This self-sacrifice on the part of Bruce, for the amusement of the spectators, was much

appreciated by the 'working-men' portion of the community, and the lecturer smiled, but the assistant failed to see the joke! By this time the atmosphere of the room was almost insupportable; several ladies were in a fainting condition, the Misses Morell were fidgety and flushed, Egerton was pale with mortification, while Colonel Ellerslie clenched his teeth and struck his stick with some violence on the floor.

Suffocation and other disagreeables were, however, kindly regarded by the audience as a *sine qua non* to a successful lecture; and the Hon. Jack prepared a raw bit of phosphorus, which was successfully ignited in the second jar of oxygen. The experiment of the sun in the bottle was displayed in all its magnificence, the spectators applauded, but the lecturer's smiles were sickly,—he had burned his fingers so badly!

Hydrogen was next introduced, and preparations were made for its manufacture. Sulphuric acid was poured into a Wolfe's bottle, which contained granulated zinc; and the lecturer proceeded to remark on the properties of the gas, explaining that it is the lightest of the gases, colourless, tasteless, and inodorous when pure, and scarcely ever found in a free state.

All further description, however, was interrupted by indications that the acid was disagreeing with the zinc to an alarming extent. A loud report followed, and the bottle was shivered into a thousand pieces, while the acid and acidulated zinc were scattered wildly in all directions. This was the straw that would have broken any ordinary lecturer's back, and it had a discomfiting effect even upon the self-conscious Jack.

Stammering out a few disjointed words of apology and regret, at the same time throwing out reflections on the quality of the zinc, and the quite intolerable heat of the room, he disappeared behind the pneumatic trough, to wipe the acid from his face and hands.

Further experiments were out of the question; everything on the table was broken and spilt, and the fumes of foul gas were insupportable. Bruce was engrossed with his burnt fingers, and the *lecture*, as it had been styled, was abruptly brought to an end!

CHAPTER VI.

'Le monde est rempli de gens qui portent des sons à l'oreille sans rien dire à l'esprit.'

CAPTAIN EGERTON hastened to join his friends while the crowd dispersed. He was astonished at the extraordinary excitement of the Honourable Jack, whom he found stamping up and down the side-room, anathematizing the whole apparatus and materials of the lecture as 'rotten,' and a 'clear swindle,' and himself as the innocent victim of 'cruel fate.'

'It might have been w—worse,' Bruce says gently.

'Worse! it couldn't—simply couldn't have been!' Jack replies fiercely, and then muttered to himself, 'When I saw *her* smiling—laughing—yes—she was—I felt—done for. Ha, Egerton,' as he caught sight of his friend, and rallying himself into almost immediate self-control, 'I hope you've enjoyed th—e—th—what are the people saying? Are they all out of the place yet? Is the Colonel gone? a—nd'—

'The Colonel asked me to say to you,' answered Captain Egerton, 'that as you must be hot he thinks you should take a seat in his brougham rather than on the coach.'

Jack brightened; his self-importance leaped back into its usual place. After all, he was himself—his own wealthy, well-born self. A slight failure at a chemistry lecture—pshaw!—that need not affect him after all!

Giving directions to his servant to look after everything, he hastened into the hall, all trace of discomfiture gone, and exclaiming, 'Well, I hope you have all enjoyed the evening!' succeeded in raising, by his own apparent *nonchalance*, the rather depressed spirits of his relatives.

'Quite as much as we expected,' said Adelaide, who had scouted from the first the notion of Jack lecturing on—anything.

'You have made a complete mull of yourself,' said Hilda hotly. 'I never suffered such agonies in my life before, and Rose has been nearly choked with laughing, while poor Gerty'—

'Come along,' broke in Colonel Ellerslie; 'it's time we were off. Jack, you come with us, and stay the night. I want to consult you about one or two matters.'

Jack glanced at Gerty, who had turned to speak to Captain Egerton.

'I have been thinking,' she is saying to him, 'so much of what you said to me to-day; but I don't understand. What a glorious sky!' as they moved to the door, and looked up into the clear moonlight. 'I feel such a longing, such a breaking off from things here!'

'May I come and see you, Miss Ellerslie?' asked Egerton respectfully, as he handed her into the carriage.

'I shall be so glad,' she answered warmly.

'Well, Gerty,' said Jack, as they drove away, 'you must not take my first lecture as a standing specimen of my powers. It wasn't so bad after all, Colonel, eh?'

'By no means—by no means; but you should have had that clever fellow Brown as your assistant; he would have pulled you through.'

'Bruce did very well,' said Gerty, who has a growing dislike to Jack, 'for him; I'm sure he did his best. But very few can lecture decently.'

'Then you don't think I did so badly?'

'I didn't say that.'

'But you meant it; and, Gertrude,' in a low voice,—the Colonel had dropped asleep,—'if *you* are pleased, I don't care what the world says! you are so literary a—nd—clever, and I want to like what you like—and'—

'O Papa, look at that splendid aurora!' exclaimed Gerty, thoroughly rousing her father, and determined to change the conversation. 'Did you ever see a more brilliant sky?' and she kept her companions absorbed during the rest of the drive by her animated questions and remarks on the planets, the stars, the currents of air, and the phenomena of the clouds.

'My next lecture shall be on astronomy, Gerty,' said Jack, as he helped her to alight; 'what an awful lot you do know!'

'*I* know! Oh no—no! I'm just panting for knowledge, and,' in a mournful tone, 'I don't know where to get it!'

'I'll help you,' said Jack desperately, for her indifference to himself, and what he called her 'proud superiority,' stung him

to the quick. 'I'm becoming a perfect walking compendium dictionary, or whatever you call it. I'm beginning to know a lot about everything.'

'Really!' said Gerty scornfully, as she hastened into the bright warm drawing-room, where refreshments were laid out. 'This *is* pleasant after the odour of phosphorus, and the mortification'—and some words of her favourite Bacon came to mind, where in substance he says, 'A little learning inclineth men's minds to pride and scepticism, but depth of philosophy bringeth them to humility and religion.'

Gertrude went to her room, but not to sleep. Her thoughts passed quickly over the ridiculous exhibition of the evening to her morning walk with the interesting stranger, who seemed so little surprised at the sudden revelation made to him of her listlessness and weariness, and was so roused to sympathy for her condition. She tried to recall all she had said, and more particularly what *he* had said to her; and a glad feeling took possession of her as she remembered the kindly look of interest in his dark-grey eye as he listened to her expressions of weariness of her present life, and of deep disappointment at her father's refusal to allow her to exchange it for even a few bright months abroad.

'There is something about that man quite different from the Jacks and Bruces of our humdrum county,' she thought. 'He inspires one with respect and admiration, and I feel,' thought poor Gerty, 'as if I could ask him to help me to get on. I am so glad we are to dine at the Hall to-morrow.'

There was no party next evening; Gertrude and the Colonel, Mrs. Heywood and Rose, being the only additions to the family party. Lady Morell, who delighted in Gertrude, and who made her much more of a *confidante* than her own 'horsey' daughters, dragged her, as soon as she entered the drawing-room, to the recess, to pour into her ear a few domestic matters of interest.

'Adelaide and Hilda are to be married in a couple of months, my dear,' she began. 'Their lords and masters to be —they won't have a sinecure—won't wait any longer. The girls say they must have another otter-hunt or two, and then that a month's honeymoon will bring them to Ireland in February for the hunting there. What my life has been since their father died, and only the boys were left to go with them to the meets, I cannot try to tell. But they are dear good girls, all the same,' with a tear trembling in her motherly eye, as she looked at her two dashing daughters, radiant in their flowing evening dresses, describing to Jack the perils of their homeward drive from Kilbarton the night before.

'Mick (the coachman) was dead drunk,' said Hilda; 'so I mounted the box again, though I had intended to be driven home, and we flung Mick inside. If it hadn't been for Captain Egerton, who got in a while beside him, and managed somehow to control him, he would have been quite boisterous. As it was, Mrs. Heywood was on the verge of hysterics, I understand. Neither Fitz nor Tyes would take the reins; I fancy the lecture upset their nerves. And, O Gerty, the row these spaniels made; the moon excited them, I believe,

for they barked and yelped. It was a hard draw, I can tell you, keeping the horses in.'

'The noise was something frantic,' said poor Lady Morell, who, it may be remembered, had remained at home with headache. 'I had just dropped over into a nice little nap when I was roused by the horn, and the dogs, and the stamping and prancing of the horses; but,' kindly, 'it soon passed off when I heard they were all safe home.'

'Mother is always taken by surprise when we all turn up without broken bones,' said Hilda. 'She expects each time we go out to be a child poorer before sunset, but we turn up, like the bad shilling,—eh, mother mine?'

At dinner Gertrude found herself seated between Jack, of course, and Captain Egerton. Rose, who was on Egerton's other side, contrived to keep him occupied in talk with herself, while Jack plied Gertrude with spasmodic thrusts about books and science, displaying to her intellectual and well-stored mind a most curious medley of ignorance, together with a certain smart smattering of knowledge on the subjects upon which he touched. For, at the best, it was but 'touching,' in no sense handling or discussing.

'What are you busy with just now?' asked Jack, after bringing to the front the miscellaneous half-dozen volumes he had lately dipped into.

'With this wing of a fowl, or, as our cook calls it, a "fool!"' said Gerty, dropping her eyes on her plate, from the palpable *soupçon* of *double entendre* that was in her sarcastic tone.

'No, no, I mean books!' said Jack eagerly. 'You are always at them.'

'Indeed, I'm not!'

'I've just been reading that fellow's Essays. What's his name again? He writes on all sorts of people and things. I heard you praising the book one day, and I ordered it at Page's. Oh, you know who I mean!'

'How can I? Who *do* you mean?' indifferently, for this sudden literary fit would, she knew, pass off like all Jack's other fits.

'It begins with Mac—not Macduff, no, nor Macdonald. Confound it, I had it this moment!'

'Macaulay,' said Gerty, with a flash of scorn in her eye. 'Surely you read *his* books at school or college, Jack? You *are* far behind; every schoolboy knows *his* works.'

This was crushing. He had stumbled at the outset of what he meant to be a very literary conversation upon an author whose works he did not know; and all hope of engaging Gerty on any further book talk was cut short, as Egerton, grasping a moment's pause in Rose's flow of gossip and scandal, turned to Gerty, and expressed his hope that she had not suffered from the heated room the night before.

'The whole thing was enough to have put one in a high fever,' she answered, glancing at Jack, who had taken refuge in Mrs. Heywood, and was recovering from his discomfiture amid her platitudes and flattery. 'But the drive home amid the glories of that sky cooled and calmed one's heart. When the flowers and leaves go in the autumn, I transfer my admira-

tion to the skies. They are magnificent in these autumn nights; yet, sometimes, they overwhelm me, Captain Egerton. I used to wish to be up there, away from the troubles and tiresomeness here; but now I lose myself terribly amid the vastness and the unknownness. If one was just sure where heaven is! But perhaps some day Piazzi Smyth, or Clark Maxwell, will be able to help us about it! What do you think about that?' turning her fair, eager face round upon him. 'Do you ever lose yourself—your reckonings—among the starry skies?'

Captain Egerton did not immediately reply, and Gertrude went on. 'It's curious I never feel the same quite during the day. Everything looks bright and clear, but—

"At night, when 'tis dark and lonely,"

a dreadful, awesome feeling sometimes comes over me when I look up at the heavens. I do dislike the darkness and the night. I'm not even very fond of the moon; she shines well enough in her own way, and it's better than nothing; but her light hints at illimitable space, which makes one's brain reel.'

'But I thought you said the skies calmed you last night!' said Captain Egerton.

'So they did, after all we had gone through. You know what I mean, Captain Egerton; but you may be fascinated yet bewildered by things. My usual feeling in studying the stars and admiring them, *is* pleasure and interest, but at times I am overwhelmed.'

'But,' in a low and earnest tone, 'if you felt that they belonged to your best Friend, and are His workmanship, the fear would give place to reverent admiration and delight.'

'Friend! Captain Egerton. God made them all. Our Heavenly Father.'

'Christ, the Father's dear Son, Miss Ellerslie, is He who hung the spacious vault with those heavenly lamps; whose hand painted the flowers, who created us, and whose hands uphold and preserve all. And these same sacred hands were struck through with the cruel nails upon the cross, that He might save us from the curse and condemnation of sin.'

'Is He *your* friend, Captain Egerton?' asked Gertrude, under her breath, as she fixed her eyes upon his face.

'He is, Miss Ellerslie, and He will be yours too, if you will but ask Him.'

At this moment, Lady Morell nodded down the table to Mrs. Heywood, and the little troop of ladies swept out of the dining-room.

As a matter of course, when there were no strangers, the girls led the way straight to the billiard-room. Lady Morell, whose headache had partly returned, declaring that the click of the balls made her nervous, and the dogs fidgetted her to-night, while the smoking stifled her, turned into the drawing-room, having extracted a promise from Gertrude to come in half an hour to sing to her some of her soothing songs.

'Well, girls,' said Hilda, as they gathered round the blazing fire, and a couple of favourite dogs took their accustomed

places at their young mistresses' feet, 'what is your verdict upon Jack's friend?'

'Jack's friend!' exclaimed Gerty, looking quickly up.

'Yes. Aren't they like, in *physique*, pursuits, everything,—eh, Gerty?' with a sly look.

'How in the world did Jack come to know him?' asked Gerty.

'Did you never hear? Oh yes, you must remember last year, when Jack was visiting the Talbots, he went with them to skate on the Serpentine, and of course he hoped to distinguish himself there, as elsewhere, and would go on a warned place, and fell in. Not a Talbot, or soul of any kind, tried to help him, and, just as he was sinking, this grand man, at the risk of his own neck, dived for him, and fished him out of the hole. No wonder mother has been dying to see him! If only he hunted, he would be perfect. He rides beautifully, and knows a horse as well as—as I do.'

'He is so remarkably handsome,' said Adelaide, playing with Corso and Dash; 'and he knows an awful lot.'

'He is rich, is he not?' asked Rose, trying to look indifferent.

'Dreadfully,' said Hilda, 'and of good family, and—no encumbrances—not a soul to bother any wife with. If I hadn't promised Fitz—poor old Fitz—I would have set my cap for him on the spot. Gerty, you span a good long yarn with him to-night. What was he saying?'

Gertrude coloured, and said with feeling, 'Oh, so much! I'm trying to remember it all. He *is* good and noble!'

'So he is, but he's queer,' said Adelaide; 'he's dismally queer, not only in the things he does *not* do, but in the things he does and says. I heard him and mother talking this morning about our county, and what was doing. Mother—meek soul—primed him with our meets and balls, not to speak of the weddings, and the chit-chat all about the place. He heard her so patiently, and then quietly remarked, "And the spiritual life, Lady Morell, what of it?" And then mother told him how Mr. Shaw was abroad, and how we had just young curates; a—n—d I came away, and left mother to battle the watch alone. It wasn't in my line, you know, Dash, darling!' bending her head caressingly over the knowing little black face in her lap,—'not in my line.'

'He seems to do what few of us trouble ourselves with,' said Gertrude; 'he takes an interest in people.'

'In you, Gerty, evidently,' said Hilda, who likes Gerty as much as she dislikes Rose.

'Gerty,' she went on, 'whatever will you do when everybody leaves? Adelaide and I slope the month after next, Captain Egerton away,—but perhaps he is coming back for our weddings,—Rose abroad, and Fred in Edinburgh. How I pity you! on my heart, I do, left to read cookery-books and mix up sauces with Mrs. Cookson!'

'Hilda, you know that isn't true,' exclaimed Adelaide. 'Think of the way Gerty studies and works,—German, Italian, music, reading,—a perfect dungeon of learning! I heard Jack saying to Captain Egerton to-day, Gerty, that your mind was as lovely as your person. I must say, men are far more generous than

we women are. Fancy Rose saying that of you, Gerty, to me!'

Rose bit her lip; the Misses Morell lit their cigars; and Gerty, remembering her promise to Lady Morell, glided away; while Rose, hearing the gentlemen's approach, and uncertain whether or not Captain Egerton would admire her as a smoker, poised her cigarette doubtfully in her hand.

How her *pose* might have struck him we cannot tell, for he did not come near the billiard-room. Hearing strains of music in the drawing-room, he turned his steps thither, while the others hastened to join 'the girls,' with the exception of Colonel Ellerslie and Jack, who had county matters of importance to talk over in the library.

Egerton glided into a dark corner in the bay-window at the far end of the room, unobserved, and listened, spell-bound, to Gertrude's singing.

Her voice, a mellow, rich contralto, poured out some deep heart feelings in the purest Italian words. What a picture she was! Her slight, elegant figure draped in white, with white camellias in her hair and dress; no colour about her but the lovely rose-blush on her soft cheek, and the lustre of her deep-blue eyes.

She was pouring out the cry of an imprisoned heart for liberty—light, 'Where, where is the light?' being ever the refrain.

Lady Morell sat drinking in the song, and the picture of the singer too.

'Oh, Gerty, how it soothes me to hear you sing! What is that?'

'It is a canzonetta, Auntie'—the Ellerslies call their father's cousin by this title as more respectful; 'it is a canzonetta composed upon the last words uttered by Goethe, when he exclaimed, "Light, light! more light!" I have sometimes been puzzled to divine what he really wanted when he cried for light. What do you think about it?' addressing Captain Egerton, who had moved towards the piano. 'On the principle that great minds think humbly of themselves, was he counting all his acquired knowledge as nothing, compared with what he thirsted for? He was so self-satisfied, that *I* have dismissed that solution.'

'The words struck me differently,' said Egerton earnestly, 'and impressed me more than all the rest of his biography. They seem to me rather to have been the impassioned cry of one who, at that solemn moment, felt that, notwithstanding his intellect, his genius, he had missed his way through life, mistaken the object of his existence, and found himself at its close in the darkness. Like a man sailing to a distant shore through a difficult sea, with rocks ahead and storms above, but with the compass to guide him, and the lighthouse to flash its steady light across the waves, but who, slighting both, misses his way, and is at last swallowed up in the very sea which might have borne him safe to his goal, so does the man who—losing himself amid the fascinations of intellect or pleasure—neglects alike the dictates of conscience and the Word of God, and walking in sparks of his own kindling, which at last die out, finds himself in the darkness of a lost eternity.'

'But,' said Lady Morell, 'you don't disapprove of intellect, Captain Egerton?'

'I!' exclaimed Egerton, smiling; 'oh no! Intellect was the rock against which my frail bark was once nearly shivered. But, thank God, when the storms beat over me, they drove me into the one sheltering Rock, in whom is righteousness, and wisdom, and strength.'

'But,' chimed in Lady Morell, 'you don't disapprove of poetry, and history, and a good rousing novel when one is dull? Nothing is so reviving as an exciting romance.'

'I am devoted to reading,' answered Egerton; 'but such things no longer master me. My books are my best friends, and are meant, I am sure, to be so, but merely as means to an end.'

'You'll be publishing some day,' said Lady Morell knowingly. 'I've often told Gerty she should. You've no idea, Captain Egerton, what a student Miss Ellerslie is. Her father can't get her to hunt, or ride even sometimes, she's so busy with her books and music.'

'Oh, Aunt Julia!' said the girl, colouring deeply, 'you don't know how little I do.'

'And as for balls and dances,' Lady Morell went on, far off from the line of thought which was absorbing her young friends, 'she doesn't seem now to care for *them*. What she's to come to I don't know. She's far too good for the place.'

'I've had two seasons of ball-going, and I'm sick of the whole thing,' answered Gerty warmly. 'I would like, I sometimes think, to be a nun, if it was only to have time to think out things.'

'Goodness, child! don't talk such dreadful nonsense. A nun! You'd soon repent of *that.* A girl of your spirit to be tied down, and made to do things you hated, and to obey whether you chose or not! You would soon rebel, and fly in their face, and then'—

'I should be sent to the dungeon, and there's plenty of quicklime there,' interrupted Gerty. 'Well, it would only be the end of an utterly useless life.'

'The end, Miss Ellerslie?' said Egerton.

'If only it might be!' answered Gerty dreamily; 'and yet one shrinks from annihilation too.'

'It's a queer thing life,' said Lady Morell, 'a remarkably queer thing.'

'But,' said Gerty, returning to her old day-dream about nuns, and anxious to hear Captain Egerton's views, 'if one has to be good some time, which, I suppose, we all have, being a nun, however disagreeably you put it, Aunt Julia, would help one quickly on, only one would have—*I* should have, at least—to make up my mind to lifelong nundom; for I know *I*, if left to the freedom of my own will, never could go on long being religious and good unless *made* to.'

'Yes,' interrupted Egerton, 'you could.'

Gerty glanced keenly at him as she murmured, 'You don't know me or you would never say so, Captain Egerton. I am different from other people, I sometimes think. *They* seem satisfied enough with the humdrum life they lead; *I*, with all my books and thoughts, never am, but I'm simply the most restless, tired mortal living. What do you feel about it, Captain

Egerton? Do you never fail in trying to be good? and what power keeps you right?'

'There is such an infinite distance between mere morality and the religion of Jesus Christ,' said Egerton gravely and very earnestly, 'and the subject is so vast, that I hardly know where to begin. The power of the one seems like the cold, sleepless eye of the jailer watching the prisoner in his cell, and ready to swoop down on any infringement of the law; the other, like the warm love of a friend, rousing and sustaining in happy activity the whole energy of our being. I saw it well put in one of Joseph Cook's "Lectures," where, speaking of the recognition on the part of the ancients of the difference between morality and religion, he illustrates the great subject by the contrasted legends of Ulysses and Orpheus. Ulysses, when sailing past the isle of the Sirens,—whose songs charmed often to their destruction all who listened to them,—filled his own ears and those of his crew with wax, to keep out the alluring strains. Next he had himself bound to the mast with knotted thongs, and on pain of his severest displeasure forbade his sailors to unloose him, even should he in the moment of temptation bid them free him. And thus, according to the subtle Grecian legend, he sailed safely past the dangerous spot. But when Orpheus, in search of his golden fleece, went by this island, he discoursed grander, sweeter music than any the far-famed Sirens could produce, and so satisfied himself and charmed his crew that they passed the sea-nymphs' shore unallured—nay, even with disdain. It was the classic way of expressing what one

of your greatest doctors of divinity, Lady Morell, has so forcibly put; it was "the expulsive power of a new affection."'

As the thirsty flower drinks in the falling shower, so did Gertrude Ellerslie drink in Egerton's words; while Lady Morell, whose classic recollections were rather hazy and confused, exclaimed, as she rang for tea,—

'Well, Morpheus is not such a bad genius after all. I only wish *I* could attract him a little more than I usually do. "The arms of Morpheus,"—quite a proverb now.'

Presently the girls came rattling into the room, followed by the gentlemen and the dogs. Rose glanced at the trio by the fire, and a sharp pang struck her heart as she took in the flushed look on Gerty's face and the absorbed, earnest expression on Captain Egerton's. *He* had never entered the billiard-room, where *she* had been watching for his coming, and extracting meanwhile from Hilda what scraps of information she could about his pursuits and manner of life generally. It was after all but scraps; for Hilda was unsatisfactory on points which did not immediately concern herself.

'We've had a splendid game, mother,' said Adelaide, addressing Lady Morell; 'Fitz and I beat Hilda and Sam, and Dash looked on the whole time. If only I had leisure, I'm sure I could teach them to play. Isn't Dash intelligent-looking, Captain Egerton?'

'Sharp little creature,' answered Egerton, while Jack sat down beside Gerty.

'I'm sure dogs have sense of some kind or other,' went on Adelaide. 'A friend of Jack's in London, who goes into the

City every morning to business, found at the 'bus door one day a poor starved dog. It looked up in his face so piteously, that he was attracted by it, and took it with him to the nearest butcher's shop, where he bought some meat, and saw the creature eat it. Next morning, there was his friend, punctually awaiting the arrival of the 'bus; again he fed it, and so on for weeks. From being a skeleton, it grew to be a fine, handsome dog. In this improved state, one morning, when the gentleman alighted, he found Terry accompanied by a weak, puny little wretch of a friend. Terry glanced up appealingly at him, and then down at his companion, saying as plainly as words could speak, "Won't you do for my friend what you have done for me?" What was there *not* there? A combination of memory, hope, calculation, and brotherly love!'

'I had a fox-terrier,' said Captain Egerton, 'that belonged originally to a neighbour of my father in the country. I was at his house one day, when our friend said, looking at the dog as he lay on the hearth-rug, "That creature is old and stupid now, I must get it put out of the way." I was fond of the animal, and said, "Oh, rather let me have him." "Certainly, if you like," was the reply, and not another word did either of us speak on the subject. When I got home, a distance of three miles, the creature met me at the door!'

'Captain Egerton knows about dogs as well as horses,' said Adelaide to Rose; 'quite sparkling in his way.'

'Gertrude is going to sing,' said Jack to his mother.

'Could we try our new duet, do you think, Gerty? mother likes it so.'

'If you choose,' answered Gerty absently and indifferently.

The Morells are all more or less musical, and Jack, if he has not much of a voice, has a good ear, and some training.

While they are seeking out their music, Rose contrives to seat herself near Egerton, on the plea of showing him some photographs of the neighbouring scenery of which they had been talking.

At the first note of Gertrude's voice, however, Egerton's interest in the photographs wanes. He turns towards the piano, and his eyes rivet themselves upon her.

'Do you like that?' Rose asked, as the song ended.

'*Like it?*'

'Yes; Mr. Morell sings well, does he not? but his voice is too weak for Gertrude's.'

'They went beautifully, I thought,' said Egerton; 'they are accustomed to sing together?'

'Oh yes! Mr. Morell would walk on his head to please Gerty. He takes up whatever she does, but never makes much of it; you know they are en'—

But before the false word passed her lips, the Ellerslies rose to leave, and Egerton, who waited anxiously for the word, which did not come, but the meaning of which reached him, went to assist—not Gertrude to her carriage, but Mrs. Heywood and Rose.

CHAPTER VII.

'She must be told of it, and she shall; the office,
I'll take it upon me.'

'I ASKED Bruce and Captain Egerton to come over to-day,' said Colonel Ellerslie a week later to his daughter, one morning at breakfast. Captain Egerton had, to Lady Morell's infinite delight, got his leave extended, and he and Gertrude have had some pleasant meetings, though not many satisfactory talks together.

'Take an extra half-hour at the cookery-book, I beg of you, Gertrude,' he added, 'and put a few fresh ideas into Mrs. Cookson's head. That soup last night was vile, and the fish barbarously done. How in the name of wonder a woman, the business of whose life it is to cook, fails as she does, especially when one wants something good to the front, I know not! I've had her an hour already this morning. She threatens to give up her place!'

'O Papa!' exclaimed Gertrude in distress, 'do try and be pleased with her. She's so greatly better than the run of cooks,

and hasn't such a fearful temper as the last, and doesn't mind me interfering, a—n—d'—

'Well, look over these chapters on soups,' handing to Gerty the cookery-book he has been studying, 'and pitch into her; and bring her up to the mark,' he added in a more gentle tone, glancing at his daughter's troubled face as he left the room.

He laid the cookery-book on the side-table near another book, *Fénélon's Letters*, a copy of which Captain Egerton had given Gertrude as bearing upon the subject of some of their recent talks. She looked at the volumes, and a momentary struggle ensued in her mind.

Duty led to one; desire, and something more tender within her, drew her to the other.

'What *can* it signify,' she mentally exclaimed, 'whether or not there is a *soupçon* of chutney in the soup? I can't conceive how my father can tell so immediately if it is there or not! and oh, I do want to know how to get light'—

She laid the cookery-book down, and lifted the limp volume. 'Just a peep,' she said to herself.

But a voice somewhere said so distinctly, 'Not now,' that, starting, she involuntarily turned round to see who spoke.

But she was—alone.

'Alone!' did we say? Ah! God was there, not only in His omnipresence, but in her being, His voice—her conscience—speaking plainly out. She yielded to its dictates, and laying down the treasured volume, lifted the obnoxious cookery-book, and for the next half-hour laboured at its lessons. Having mastered the various receipts wanted for to-day's *ménu*, she

rose with a vexed, irritated look on her face, and glancing at the timepiece, discovered she was half-an-hour late for Mrs. Cookson. Flinging the cookery-book passionately on the table, while the hot tears started to her eyes, she muttered, 'What a miserable, trifling life for one with a mind—a soul! all to-day, all my life perhaps, I shall have to potter on like this!'

Then seizing the innocent victim of her indignation, she sallied forth to interview Mrs. Cookson. She found her in the kitchen, cross and defiant-looking. She did not speak when Gertrude entered, but turned leisurely round to the clock, the hands of which pointed to 10.50, and then silently faced her young mistress with a look of conscious superiority.

'Colonel Ellerslie says you forgot the chutney in the mulligatawny soup last night,' said Gertrude pleasantly, but without any preamble dashing on her attack, 'Please don't forget it to-day!'

'But, Miss,' said Mrs. Cookson promptly, 'the Colonel said to me when we was fixing of the mulliglitawny, he said—says he—mix in always, with your ingredients, a few grains of common sense—*always*, says he; so, Miss, when I come for to think over the mulliglitawny, I thought that the chutney, being of a hot temperament as well as the mulliglitawny'—

'Mulligatawny!' interrupted Gertrude impatiently, with a slight stamp of her foot.

'Mulliglitawny!' said Mrs. Cookson, quietly ignoring the correction. 'I thought them two hots is too much of a good thing; so, as the French says, I gave the chutney its con-gee.'

'Oh, by the bye!' said Gertrude, the murdered French of

poor cook recalling the scene of the 'brained coquettes,' 'do, for goodness' sake, teach Simmonds how to pronounce the dishes; you never heard such things as he calls them!'

'That's none of my department, Miss,' said Cookson, rearing her head. 'I can cook—and speaks French myself, for I was twelve months in a Paris hotel, and they said I picked up the tongue amazin'; but I does *not* take on hand to drive things into thick heads. Mr. Simmonds knows a good wine from a bad, that he does; but as for French, hey-lass!' (*hélas*) and she applied her apron to her face with an air that said as plainly as words, 'hopeless!'

Gertrude stood for a moment irresolute, feeling herself on the horns of a dilemma, her father's displeasure on the one hand if things went wrong, and the conceit and tiresomeness generally of Simmonds and the cook on the other; while the waste of time over such trifles and nonsense was, as usual, intolerable.

She grasped the cookery-book in a tight clutch, and pressed her lips firmly together, to keep back the angry words which flew to them.

After a moment she said, 'Well, cook, I don't know what I'm to do if you don't try to please Papa. What does it signify whether *you* think chutney should go into the soup, or camphor, or chalk, if *he* wants it. I'm sure, if it was only wholesome, I'd put anything under the sun into it to please him.'

'Against my professional ideas and experience, Miss!' Blazing up, 'I'd sooner give up my place on the spot than that!'

'Well, put it into the mulligatawny for to-day, *please*,'

exclaimed Gertrude in a conciliatory sort of tone. 'I *must* get on. Let us arrange the rest for to-day.'

At last the bill of fare was adjusted, and Gertrude found her morning study stand her in good stead with the experienced cook, who remarked to her kitchen-maid, as Gertrude left the kitchen, that 'Miss Ellerslie had a deal of head knowledge about cookery, and that if only she cared a little more about it and was more patientful, she would come on.'

On regaining the library, Gertrude found that Bruce and Captain Egerton had arrived.

All hope of study for this day was at an end, yet her chafed spirit felt soothed by the sight of her new friend, and the hope that a quiet talk with him might be in store for her to-day.

'Jack t—o—ld me to say he'll come over in the afternoon.'

'Did he?' answered Gertrude impatiently; 'I thought he was going to hunt!'

'B—ut he ch—ang—ed his mind when he heard we were coming here,' said Bruce, 'a—nd said h—e was sure you would be glad to see him.'

'Indeed!' said Gertrude haughtily.

Then changing the subject, she said pleasantly, 'Cousin Helen is home, Bruce, and I am going to see her now; would you care for a walk?' Turning to Captain Egerton, 'You drove over, of course?'

Both gentlemen expressed their pleasure at the proposal, and Gertrude went for her jacket and hat.

'When did Miss Mait—land come home?' asked Bruce as they set forth.

'Late last night,' answered Gertrude. 'She did not intend coming for another week at least, but something has hurried her, and I had a message from her this morning, saying she was home. How glad I am she is back at last!'

'I have heard a great deal about Miss Maitland,' said Egerton. 'She seems universally respected and beloved.'

'By every one,' said Gertrude warmly. 'She is mother's friend and cousin, Captain Egerton,' she continued eagerly. 'She is everything to me, and has been ever since mother died!'

They walked along silently, Bruce having fallen behind to speak to a lame boy.

'How I wish you had known *her*,' at last Gertrude said softly. 'So many things you say are like the things she used to say, yet you never saw each other. I seem now always wanting to hear you speak, Captain Egerton,' looking up at him.

He smiled gravely.

'When I wanted to die and go away to where she was, and got dull and unhappy, Cousin Helen came—every day she came—and cheered and comforted me. How I loved her, and do love her better than any living being!' she added impetuously.

Egerton looked keenly at her.

'And she is so clever and gracious, but so unselfish and humble, and full of love and sympathy; and if you are happy, it seems to make her happy too; and if you are vexed, she understands it all, and is sorry for you; and even when I grow

cross and angry, she seems to know all about it. And I always come away with a lighter heart than I go.'

'Does she live alone?'

'Oh no! she has heaps of people living with her, but she is alone just now for a little. St. Helen's is a gem of a place; but here we are,' as they came up to the lodge gate. 'I am thankful we live so close, I can come at any time.'

They found Miss Maitland in her *sanctum*, a small, well-proportioned room, into which the old butler ushered them.

'Darling!' said Miss Maitland, as she rose to welcome Gertrude, and folded her in a warm, loving embrace.

For a second the girl left herself in the dear arms, and then turned to introduce Captain Egerton.

Miss Maitland shook hands frankly with him, and found two cosy seats for her visitors near the fire.

Egerton glanced round the room, while Gertrude inquired about Miss Maitland's journey.

A well-filled book-case, the shelves of which seemed accustomed to having raids made upon them, a piano, an easel, and a davenport, at which Miss Maitland had been writing when they arrived, were prominent objects in the room. A small moveable book-stand was drawn near the davenport, on which Egerton's quick eye detected such volumes as Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, Dante, Milton, one or two new biographies and monthlies.

Round Miss Maitland there hung a sort of halo of repose, Egerton thought; and as he took in the tall, slight figure, the

look of high breeding, together with the keen, intellectual eye, and the air of absorbed interest in what her companion was saying, he felt thankful that the motherless girl, in whom he was becoming so intensely interested, had such a friend, and within such easy reach.

Presently Miss Maitland turned to him, inquiring how long he had been at the Hall, and after the miscellaneous members of the Morell household.

'I have been away so long this season,' she added, 'that I have every one to ask for, though your letters, Gerty, have kept me well up to everything. She is a famous correspondent,' smiling kindly on Gertrude.

'There seems a general rejoicing at your home-coming,' said Egerton heartily.

A flush tinged Miss Maitland's pale cheek as she replied simply, 'And I am no less glad to be back to my regular work again.'

And then they glided into talk about the many Christian schemes in London, where Miss Maitland had been staying; and by the end of the visit Miss Maitland and Egerton had become—friends.

Gertrude listened. At first she could follow their animated remarks about the Christian Institute for Young Women recently started in a west-end locality, of its success, and the home it had become to many friendless young women in the great metropolis.

Her eyes sparkled at the accounts Captain Egerton gave, in answer to Miss Maitland's questions, of the efforts, in his

regiment, for the good of the soldiers, and of the ready response that many of the fine, brave men gave to the various schemes for their good; but when, from such general facts, he passed to one or two particular cases, in which, as he expressed it, the light had sprung up in the darkness, the marvellous light of Christ's gospel, she felt that she could follow the talk no more. They got into depths beyond her—they talked in a language foreign to her, and yet their whole souls seemed steeped in the subject.

'Yes, after all,' said Miss Maitland, as her visitors rose to go,—'after all, this is the errand on which one and all of us have been sent into the world—to get our own souls saved, and to help others to get theirs!'

'And what would be a poor, wearying failure of a life is redeemed and ennobled,' said Egerton, as he bade his new friend good-bye.

'What a friend!' exclaimed Egerton, as they walked away; 'a true Christian lady!'

'Yes,' exclaimed Gertrude, 'and you haven't seen half. She is so clever, and reads and studies. We do German and Italian together regularly; and since Miss Pryde, our governess, left us, I am a great deal at St. Helen's. Miss Pryde was old and prim, and very stuck up. All work and no play with *her*, and, much as I loved my books, I seem to have far more heart in working with Cousin Helen than I ever had with her. Good old soul! the past few years, since I have been left free from *her*, have been, on the whole, fairly pleasant. But things go so cross-grainedly somehow with me, Captain Egerton!'

she went on ingenuously. 'I wonder if they go like that with you.'

'How do you mean?' he asked in a tone of genuine interest.

'Well, Miss Pryde comes and goes, and I reach one of my high hills. I am finished, Papa says. Fine finish, indeed! He says I have got enough of teaching, and am to simmer over what I have got, and go out a little into society, which means, go out to dinner with him everywhere within a dozen miles at least—he won't go farther to dinner; and there we meet all our neighbours, and round and round it goes, till we have exhausted every subject that the Lonshire people care to talk about, and cut up one another right and left! The dances are much the same, only that the hours are later and the people tiresomer. I have begged Papa to let me off from them this season.'

'And will he?'

'He hasn't said yet. Perhaps he may stand for the county at the next election. Oh, how I hope he won't! but if he does, then I shall have to go everywhere, I suppose, just as the Morells did when Sir Richard contested. Poor man! it killed him! Peak number two reached, and found to be very disheartening and unsatisfying. Then towering above me was one I coveted to reach, and which I am *sure* would have been satisfying. I wanted—panted—craved to go abroad. I have never been out of Great Britain, never. The Heywoods, our old friends, are going, and they asked me to accompany them. *Could* there have been anything nicer and better for me? I had set my heart upon it *so*, Captain Egerton, and I don't see a glimmer

of reason why I should not go. I wrote to an aunt in London, a favourite sister of Papa's, to ask her to come here and stay in my absence. I don't like her, and she has no particular favour for me, so I thought it would fit in nicely for her to come when I was away, and keep Papa company. And she wrote instantly to say how delighted she would be to come. Alas! I reckoned without my host; for when Mrs. Heywood asked Papa to let me go, he—refused!'

At this climax Gertrude fixed her eyes upon Egerton, and waited for him to speak; but he did not, so on she went. 'So I must try to lift my eyes off this peak, and every other peak, and to scramble on along the dull flats of my life as best I can; but it's hard lines, is it not? And, as I wrote to Cousin Helen, I've been so cross and impatient that everybody is hating me. And oh! one of the worst bits is to come yet. I wrote to Aunt Dorothy, to tell her I wasn't going, and all but said that we wouldn't expect *her;* but lo! back she writes that *her* plans are all made for her visit to the north, and that she means to come! And she pays such frantically long visits!'

'I feel much for your disappointment,' said Captain Egerton, 'very much, and yet, and yet, I am sure this new peak on which you had set your heart would have proved disappointing too.'

'It wasn't,' said Gertrude eagerly, 'as if I had wanted to go in for gaiety, or things like that. I wanted to go where I could follow out my bents, improve my mind, and cultivate my talents; travel, see something, and perhaps become something more than I am, at least.'

'You think you could shape your life better than your Heavenly Father can,' said Egerton gravely.

'Captain Egerton!' said Gertrude, flushing deeply.

'I am but putting into words the substance of your own candid recital, Miss Ellerslie.'

'But if you find within you longings after things you can't get where you are, does it not seem that you are meant to try to go where they may be met and satisfied?'

'In certain circumstances I should say yes.'

'But not in mine?'

'Not in yours.'

'Then you think I should quench all those passionately loved tastes and longings, and go on here all my life, amid its humdrum monotony?'

She stopped, and looked up at him anxiously, as if deprecating the answer she felt sure would come.

'I think, Miss Ellerslie, that if you had the Tree of Life rooted in your heart and home, it would sweeten the waters which are so bitter to your taste.'

'Then you don't think I should give up my—my—books, an—d—mind—work?'

'By no means.'

She drew a sigh of relief.

'Then surely you—such an intellectual man as you—must think it a sinful waste of time to be pottering over cookery-books, and keeping abreast of all the new *ménus* that *will* always be cropping up?'

'Indeed I do not. Pardon my plainness, Miss Ellerslie, but

I think a Christian will try to do the most irksome duty that falls to his hand in the best and most perfect way.'

'Do you?' thoughtfully. 'My idea is, that if a door stands open for you to get out of a tiresome life for a while,—of course, I was coming home again,—that you might walk straight in, and be thankful!'

'Conscience and prayer, and the Word of God, must, however, decide for one whether this supposed door is open for any other purpose than to be a test of our obedience. Jonah, when he had fled from God's command, found a vessel in the harbour, with her sails flowing and anchors up, starting for Tarshish, the opposite direction from Nineveh, where God had bidden him go. The circumstance fitted in with the bent of his inclinations; perhaps he tried to trick himself into the notion that it was a providential pointing for him to go on board. He must have winked hard to see it in that light. You know the result of his disobedient act. He is surely a beacon to warn men against the sin and danger of wilfully construing events which assimilate with their own longings into providential leadings in the direction of those desires.'

A glimpse into a new region of thought was given to Gertrude's mind as he spoke; then sadly she said, 'I know nothing about those refined sorts of distinctions, Captain Egerton. Do many understand them? I believe Cousin Helen will, but nobody else about here seems to do anything but just try to get what they like best, and keep clear of what is disagreeable. Stay; I do believe Bruce has some of these views,—poor Bruce; but he has such an uncomfortable way of

putting things, as, for instance, when he said to me after Papa had refused to let me go, that he thought if two ways were put before us to choose between, that the right one to take would, almost to a dead certainty, be the more disagreeable one, or the most self-denying. I told him to go away instantly, he provoked me so dreadfully, and yet I do believe he does it himself.'

Then turning to her companion as they just then reached the Fort, she said simply, but with deep feeling, 'I see that you and Cousin Helen have a stimulus, a great good of which I know nothing; and with a pleading look in her wistful eyes, she murmured, 'Help me—help me to find a rest, and an aim, and a stimulus such as you both have.'

CHAPTER VIII.

'There are in this loud stunning tide
Of human care and crime,
With whom the melodies abide
Of the everlasting chime,
Who carry music in their heart
Thro' dusty lane and wrangling mart,
Plying their daily task with busier feet
Because their secret souls a holier strain repeat.'

IT is a great blessing, whether at the time we realize it or not, to have some one in our circle of friends so distinctly and consistently a Christian that he is known and read of all men. A great additional cause of gratitude will be, if this exceptional friend be outstanding intellectually or even socially. A cultivated and refined Christian will have more influence for good than one who is uneducated and uncouth. Hence the strong incentive to all Christians conscientiously to find out what their peculiar gifts and talents are, and to put them out; not to wrap this one or the other up in a napkin, and bury it in the ground, supposing it, perhaps, to be too secular to be available in the

life of a Christian, but to use it, improve it, and trade diligently with it. Where no such talents as great intellect, music, painting, philosophy, etc. are bestowed, there are others, which will be discovered by the careful seeker, and they will be utilized and blessed.

In a case such as Gertrude Ellerslie's, all, humanly speaking, turned upon the fact that this new friend, who was revolutionizing her ideas, and leading her into divine paths of thought, was a man of robust intellect, of singular strength of character, and of great refinement of mind and manners; unlike the men around her, who were ever flattering her, ever chiming in with her views, however fanciful, and ever ready to fall in with, in short, whatever might cause them to find favour in her sight. This Captain Egerton, while so respectful and gentlemanly in all his bearing towards her, told her plain things about herself, and made no apology for doing so. Had he not been all this morning showing her that her plans about herself were selfish! that she was striving to get away from her duty, and to plunge into favourite pursuits for her own aggrandizement!

'What he must think of me!' she soliloquized, as she took off her walking dress, and hastily prepared for lunch; and she felt that she cared more for what *he* thought than the good opinion of all the rest of mankind put together. 'If only I can get another talk with him, and ask him what moves and keeps him going in this wonderfully noble path. I don't care what he thinks of me, compared with—compared with getting help and light. He can give it, I am sure; oh! I am sure he can,

and will!' A knock at her door, and the entrance of Rose Heywood cut short Gertrude's soliloquy.

'Ah, Rose!' she exclaimed, as she hastened to meet her friend.

'I've come over to spend the day with you, if I may,' said Rose. 'Mother has the lawyer with her, and I thought I might as well have a day with you, as our time is so short now.'

'Oh, I'm so glad!' said Gerty; 'but when do you start?'

'On Tuesday, and this is Thursday.'

'It was very good of you to come when you must have so much to do,' said Gerty heartily. 'Come along, there's the gong!' as Rose arranged her hair at the glass; 'Captain Egerton and Bruce are here.'

'Ah!' in a tone of well-affected surprise, and with a searching glance into her friend's fair, open face, 'Bruce, of course, is always about here, and Captain Egerton?'

'Papa asked them over,' said Gertrude simply. 'He wanted to have a talk with Captain Egerton about one of his brother officers, who is the son of an old friend of his.' As they entered the dining-room, they found Jack Morell, who had just arrived, in eager conversation with Colonel Ellerslie.

'Good morning, Gerty,' he said, hastening towards her, while a passing hasty recognition of Rose was all he had time to bestow on her.

'I want you to try the new bay mare I bought the other day; Barton brought her across for you.'

Gertrude coloured with vexation as she felt her hopes of

another talk with Captain Egerton fade under this proposition, and she answered hastily,

'Oh! I can't really to-day.'

'Yes, you will; your father says you may.'

'No, I won't;' then in an undertone, 'Don't bother me, Jack.' She felt Captain Egerton's eyes were upon her, and this only increased her confusion.

Rose, who had gone round to Captain Egerton, drew him into talk about a sick child in the village whom he had been visiting, and compelled him to listen to her.

Gerty was on thorns during lunch lest anything should be wrong, dreading an outbreak from her father, before Captain Egerton, over any faulty dish. But all passed smoothly off, and her flushed face began to regain a little composure as they rose from table.

'Now, Gerty, you will come!' said Jack.

'I won't,' she was just stoutly saying, when her father interrupted her.

'I should like you to try the bay, Gerty; run and get on your habit.'

'I hate bays!' she said. 'Rose, you will come too, then; you can ride Donald.'

Very reluctantly Rose complies, while Jack looks black as thunder; but Gerty, often enough the victim of strong wills, has a strong will too, and she will not ride alone with her cousin Jack.

In a few minutes, the little party are mounted, and start, while Colonel Ellerslie sallies forth with Captain Egerton and Bruce, to visit the kennels and stroll over the hills. They

returned just in time to meet the riders, and to help the young ladies to dismount.

'Well, how did the bay go?' asked the Colonel of Gerty.

'Horridly. Just as I thought. I particularly dislike bays,' she answered, as she tripped up the steps.

They all gathered round the drawing-room fire while Gertrude made the tea. As Captain Egerton passed, she said hurriedly,

'Can we have another talk? Oh, that tiresome ride! I want so much to ask you—to ask you—what—where'—

'Has the tea warmed you?' said Jack, who came for another cup, glancing at her glowing face.

'Would you believe it,' turning to Captain Egerton, 'she was as pale and cold as that plate—all the way—wanted to turn, and goodness knows what, and the mare carried her so splendidly. It knew the difference between you and Hilda on its back,' looking admiringly at the pretty, sylph-like figure which showed to such advantage in the dark-grey riding-habit.

The afternoon wore away, as afternoons in country houses usually do between tea and dinner. No one felt inclined for anything; indeed, they all appeared to be very impracticable, Gertrude thought, and unready to do anything but hang about till the dressing-bell rang, and a general dispersion took place.

'Captain Egerton leaves the Hall on Tuesday,' said Rose, as the two girls went up-stairs.

Gertrude started.

'Are you sure?'

'Quite. He told me so to-day.'

'I thought he had got his leave still further extended. His battery is at Woolwich, is it not?'

'Yes, but it will probably go abroad in spring, he says.'

'Rose!'

'Gerty!'

At this moment Arnot entered to assist the young ladies. She carried in her hand a bouquet of choice greenhouse flowers, which she said Mr. Morell begged Miss Gertrude would wear this evening.

Rose looked enviously at the jessamine and primulas and heaths, and thought how well they would look in her own dark hair.

'I shan't wear any flowers to-night,' said Gerty. 'Put them away, Arnot; or Rose, do you have them, they will look lovely in your hair.'

'But Mr. Morell?'

'He will never know they are his flowers,' said Gerty—'not he.'

So Rose arranged them tastefully in her own dress and hair.

Gertrude's toilette was soon completed, a soft, creamy, clinging dress with coral ornaments. A strange light is in her lovely blue eyes, and a deep glow is on her cheeks.

Leaving Rose in Arnot's embellishing hands, she hastened down-stairs to remind Simmonds of some special order of her father. Passing into the drawing-room, she found Captain Egerton alone. He was reading, but rose as she entered, and placed a chair for her.

'Are you going away?' she abruptly began. 'Away from Lonshire, I mean?'

'In a few days, I fear I must.'

'And I have so much to say to you—so much to ask, and there are always people interrupting us, and, a—nd — oh! Captain Egerton, tell me, tell me, what I am to do to be different, to do better in my home, a—nd'—

She involuntarily stretched out her hands, but he did not touch them. With a strong effort he repressed the emotion he felt, and while his face kindled with interest, he quietly said,

'You are, Miss Ellerslie, craving for what God is waiting to give you.'

'What?' eagerly.

'Himself.'

'Captain Egerton!'

'Yes, you are casting about for something to satisfy you. But God made your heart for Himself, Miss Ellerslie; and not all the world, if you had it, *could* satisfy that which He has formed for Himself.'

'But how? I know that God created me, and created everything, but?'—

'And has a right to the love and homage of your heart. Have you ever given Him your heart?'

'No, no.'

'Then you are under the condemnation of His broken law; and yet He loves you, and has given His Son to die for you, to bring you into reconciliation with Himself.'

'For me?'

'You acknowledge yourself to be a sinner, and it is for such Christ died. Miss Ellerslie, pray God to reveal His Son in you, and to give you faith to believe on Him. Promise me you will.'

'I will; oh, indeed I will!'

Over Gertrude Ellerslie that night, glad angels breathed the words, 'Behold she prayeth!'

Like the parched flower opening its petals to the falling shower, so did her heart turn towards the friend who was leading her into these new, wondrous paths, with an eagerness almost painful in its intensity. He was going away immediately, and she should be left among mists, she feared, for she was only as yet groping her way into the light; and it seemed as if Captain Egerton felt this too, for now, by mutual instinct, whenever they met, they passed from ordinary topics straight to the one subject of engrossing interest. Open as the day, Gertrude made no secret of her anxiety.

'I shall lose myself in mists of speculation as soon as I am left alone,' she said on one such occasion, when her father and she having ridden over to the Hall, she and Captain Egerton were for a few minutes together.

'Not if you have put yourself into Christ's hands,' said Egerton. 'Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.'

'Yes.'

'Christ will do His part. Be sure you do yours, and keep seeking Him.'

'Yes; and even now I feel something of His love. And

oh, how lovely His works are!' glancing from the window at which they stood, out on the landscape before them, which, in the glow of the autumn sunshine, gleamed in golden tints.

'Beautiful, and all Christ's works. These hills, that stream, these clouds, the fringe on the weeds, the petals of these flowers, those songs in the woods—all His works!'

'How very good of Him to give us so much to enjoy and love!' said Gertrude, her beautiful face flushing with emotion. 'I never before thought of them all being Christ's work till you taught me. I do love Him!' and she gazed almost rapturously on the peaceful landscape before them.

Captain Egerton fixed his dark, searching eyes upon her. His heart beat violently, but he did not speak.

'I have been like a blind person about everything,' she said presently turning towards him; 'and might have been all my life, if you hadn't come, Captain Egerton. How can I thank you for all the *wonderful* trouble you have taken about me?'

He pressed his lips.

'And they are all the same,' glancing from the recess into the drawing-room.

'*All?* I think your Cousin Bruce is'—

'But he is so, so very, *very* tiresome, Captain Egerton. Good as gold, but he wearies me.'

'Oh, but he is a right genuine good man!'

'He is so much improved since he became religious; it

was after his sister Alice's death he became so different; before that, in his own stupid way, he was as worldly as Jack.'

'Morell has many thoughts about the great subject,' said Egerton contemplatively; 'your influence will be very great.'

'Mine?' with a gesture of impatience.

He looked inquiringly at her, then said hastily, as if afraid the opportunity would pass before the words would come, 'I was told—I understood, at least, that you were engaged to Morell'—

'I—oh—Captain Egerton, you didn't believe it?'

'I could only fear it, Miss Ellerslie!'

Their eyes met. 'Can you then be—fr'— But ere the word was uttered, Rose Heywood glided up, and passing her arm through Gertrude's, said, in the sweetest imaginable tones,

'Lady Morell wants you in the boudoir; she has had to go and lie down, this weather tries her terribly.'

'I will come, Rose,' said poor Gerty, almost piteously, with a 'go-away-for-a-moment' look.

But Rose, addressing Hilda, who appeared in the lawn outside, drew her in at the open window, whither Jack presently followed; and Gertrude, quivering with emotion, and afraid to trust herself to speak, gave one timid glance at Captain Egerton, and hastened to the boudoir.

'Must you really go on Tuesday, Captain Egerton?' asked Lady Morell of her guest, this evening at dinner. 'I had hoped our county—stupid though it be—had attractions enough to keep you a little longer still among us, though I am thankful for the few extra days you have been able to give us.'

'Indeed it has attractions of no ordinary kind, Lady Morell,' answered Egerton heartily, 'and much I wish I could have still further prolonged my visit; but I have had a long leave for this season, and am due at Woolwich on Wednesday.'

'Do you go abroad soon?'

'In spring, probably, we shall embark for India, but possibly sooner.'

'Well, but you will get a day or two, and come up for the weddings, I hope,' persevered Lady Morell, who has not only taken the greatest liking for her guest, but has confided to him many family secrets, to his no small astonishment.

'I shall only be too delighted,' he replied, 'if possible, but one can never tell who may be off on leave.'

'I am in constant terror that the girls will break something or other when they are out hunting,' continued Lady Morell. 'What would they be like with arms in splints, or broken noses, on the wedding-day!'

'You wouldn't get rid of us then, mother,' said Adelaide; 'both Fitz and Tye would sheer off.'

'And they are to be married in brown silk dresses and hats!' Lady Morell went on. 'I wish you would put them off such notions, Captain Egerton. I shouldn't have thought I was married, nor, for that part, would their father either—if I hadn't had a white dress. White satin, and orange wreath, with honiton veil, was *my* costume, and your father said I looked like a—a—a—' But Lady Morell's emotion at the remembrance of her bridal days got the better of her, and the illustration died

away on her faded lips. Yet her own departed joys did not dim her interest in the connubial prospects of others, although her daughters' determination to carry out *their* weddings in their own whimsical fashion seriously dulled the prospect in her eyes.

They are to be married in walking-dresses very early in the morning, to have 'a hunting-breakfast,' and start in time to be present at a race across the Border, having stakes in more than one of the horses.

'I have a heavy bet on Judy,' said Hilda, 'and I wouldn't miss seeing her for any number of weddings. I bought her at the great horse-fair at Singleton. Ada and I went— Jack always gets us to buy horses; he's no judge.'

'And just think, Captain Egerton,' said Lady Morell, rallying from her emotion; 'they went to the fair, bought four horses, each rode home on a saddleless horse, and each leading one.'

'Well, you wouldn't let Mick come with us; what else could we do?' said Hilda.

'The poor man's wife was dying, and he begged me to let him stay with her,' said Lady Morell.

'Duty before pleasure,' said Hilda warmly; 'we couldn't risk losing the horses for *that*.'

'Jack says you have a magnificent horse, Captain Egerton,' said Adelaide; 'why, in the name of wonder, don't you hunt?'

'I don't like it.'

'And you ride well, far better than any of the men hereabouts, and you are a V.C. man, brave and steady. *I* wouldn't care to *live* without hunting.'

'Riding is the best exercise going,' said Egerton; 'and your county abounds in beautiful rides. I have enjoyed them immensely.'

'But still you won't hunt,' said Hilda.

'No, I don't like it,' said Egerton.

'You'll never allow your wife to follow,' said Adelaide, who has the curiosity to know if he disapproves of ladies hunting; for Egerton had inspired all the womankind with admiration for himself, and his talents, and his famed bravery.

'Never,' he answered, smiling.

'Poor wretch!' said Hilda. 'You needn't look in *this* county for a helpmeet, then, Captain Egerton. Every woman among us, worth calling a woman, hunts.'

'No, Hilda,' said Lady Morell. 'You forget, Gertrude doesn't hunt.

'Ah well,' reddening, 'the exception proves the rule, and besides, that's her up-bringing. Her father would never let her, for fear of her being lamed, or deformed, or killed. If you let these paltry considerations enter into the question, you'd better keep off the field.'

'And that's precisely what he has done with Gerty,' said Lady Morell. 'She's a splendid horsewoman, and rides constantly with her father, but she never comes in for'—

'Croppers!' interrupted Hilda, 'adventures which make up, if not the business of life, at least its value and pleasure.'

'But she's a bold, fearless creature,' Lady Morell went on; 'no want of pluck in her, but just her father won't let her do dangerous things.'

'Much better, *mater*,' said Hilda, with a rare dash of tenderness in her eye, 'much better to have a dear noodle of a mother, who lets you do everything you want, than a sharp tyrant of a father who won't let you do any one thing you have a mind to. I'd put in stakes for my mother against any amount of fathers!'

'O Hilda,' said Lady Morell, with a look of gratification on her baby features, 'how can you speak so of your poor old mother!'

'Not much of a compliment after all,' said Egerton, who took no pains to conceal his astonishment at the way her daughters treated their garrulous but gentle mother, and whose warm interest and sympathy in all her motherly and domestic anxieties had endeared him to her heart.

Not less interested in him was Miss Maitland, on whom he had several times called since his first introduction. The refreshment to his spirit which a talk with her always gave was in the truest sense reciprocal.

Her quick woman's eye soon saw the profound interest created by Gertrude Ellerslie in Egerton's heart, and their mutual concern about her highest welfare drew them closely together.

'Gertrude is too honest to say what she does not feel,' said Miss Maitland to Egerton on the occasion next day of one of his last visits to her, and after he had told her of his hopes and conviction that Miss Ellerslie was now like-minded with themselves in the 'one thing.'

'Much.'

'But she is so easily influenced by those—she—she esteems, and—admires, that it is possible she might deceive herself as to the true state of matters.'

'I do not think so, Miss Maitland,' said Egerton warmly; 'but how is it that you and she never got upon these subjects? she is so much with you, and loves you so greatly.'

'We have more than once got upon them, as you may well believe,' replied Miss Maitland. 'She is the child of many prayers; her mother cast her upon me with her latest breath. But the subject was evidently so distasteful to her, really roused her opposition so keenly, that I have hitherto kept off it. She is thoroughly dissatisfied with her present life; her hungry heart is crying, craving for satisfaction and rest. We know who alone can fill and bless it.'

'I believe,' said Egerton, 'the deep dissatisfaction of her heart is now being met in the one way, Miss Maitland.'

Egerton's usually well-controlled heart had been in a strange tumult the two last days of his visit at the Hall. His interest in Gertrude had deepened with his influence over her; his conviction that she was now a child of grace, and was in the strait way, though groping each step, like one who has just stepped out of dungeon-darkness into the noon-day sunshine,—all drew him in strong affection towards her. Had he now found the treasure which probably every man, whether he knows it or not, believes in his heart of hearts he must find, to fill up and make complete his earthly lot? But would she—could she—the bright centre of attraction at home, and in the circle she adorned—could she return the love of such a one as he?

If he couldon ly see her once alone again, he thought he could decide.

Walking down Miss Maitland's little avenue this afternoon, he saw three figures approaching him, Gertrude, the Honourable Jack, and Bruce. The two former seemed in deep conversation, while Bruce, whose presence neither of his companions seemed to notice or mind, walked rather dejectedly along. At sight of Egerton the colour mounted to Gertrude's cheeks, and she sprang lightly forward to meet him.

'Ha, Egerton! one knows now whither you wend your footsteps in your solitary walks,' exclaimed Jack good-naturedly. 'Miss Maitland has thrown her glamour over *you*, has she?'

'Completely and utterly,' said Egerton, smiling; 'I have been paying her a long visit—possibly my last one, I am sorry to say.'

'For the present only, old fellow,' said Jack.

'Well, I hope so,' said Egerton; 'that depends'—

'Oh, it depends on nothing! You *must* come for the weddings—mustn't he, Gerty?'

'Indeed I hope he will!' said Gerty.

'I was coming on to the Fort,' said Egerton; 'but'—

'The Colonel is at home,' said Bruce, 'I'll go back with you.'

'But *I'm* not at home, Bruce!' said Gertrude impatiently, and reddening all over as she spoke.

Egerton and Gertrude had little snatches of talk together during the walk home, enough to send a tumult of happiness

through Gertrude's heart, and to encourage the most sanguine hopes in Egerton's.

When, in the quiet of her own room at night, she tried to analyze her feelings, and the new-born joy that filled her heart, she assured herself the root of it was in the divine grace and love she now tasted, while the delicious fruit she felt at liberty to eat was held out to her by Egerton's hand!

The morning before he was to leave Lonshire, Egerton appeared once more at the Fort.

'Colonel and Miss Ellerslie have gone out riding, sir,' said the footman; then, noting the look of disappointment on Egerton's face, he added, 'but they will be home to luncheon, sir, won't you walk in and wait?'

'Thank you,' in an absent tone, 'no. Will you give this note to Colonel Ellerslie?'

'Yes, sir,' said the man, and Captain Egerton walked away. As he sauntered along in an absorbed, abstracted state of mind, he was roused from his reverie by a silvery voice saying,

'Good morning, Captain Egerton! do you prefer walking among briars and thorns to keeping on the smooth road or grassy path?' and Rose Heywood and her mother stood smiling before him.

They had just been to the Hall, and having extracted everything from unsuspicious Lady Morell as to Egerton's movements, had adjusted their own plans, and were now on their way to meet Captain Egerton, feeling sure they would do so at or about the Fort.

'Pardon my obtuseness in not seeing you till this moment,' said Egerton, raising his hat and shaking hands with the ladies.

'I suppose you have just been doing what we are going to do, saying "Adieu" up there?' said Mrs. Heywood, glancing towards the Fort.

'But Colonel and Miss Ellerslie are out riding,' said Egerton.

'Really!' said Rose. They had seen the riders in the distance, but knowing that Egerton was in this direction had come on. 'Ah well, we need not persevere.'

'I want to speak to Arnot about something of importance,' said Mrs. Heywood; 'but I think, Rose, *you* had better not go further.'

'Well, if I shan't be intruding on Captain Egerton's day-dreams,' said Rose, laughing, 'I will turn.'

What could he say but that he would do his best to keep Miss Heywood out of the ditches and briars into which it seemed he had been unconsciously wandering himself. All the plans of this designing mother and daughter turned out marvellously, and Rose, during their half-hour's walk, contrived to insert into Egerton's mind enough of poisonous doubt to lift him out of bright day-dreams into the most real condition of anxious suspense.

'We leave for London to-morrow morning,' she began; 'mother has at last got her business settled.'

'Really,' falling into the trap, 'so do I.'

'You don't say so! ah, but you won't want to tack on to us.

Gentlemen don't like having to look after ladies as a rule, though I can quite believe *you* are an exception, Captain Egerton.'

Rose can say anything the most deprecatory of herself and her attractions to gentlemen, when alone with them, to win and interest them, while before those of her own sex she treats them most cavalierly.

'Indeed, if I can be of the smallest service to you and Mrs. Heywood, I shall be most glad.'

'Thank you; mother will be very grateful, I am sure. All our heavy boxes are gone. We shan't have much luggage.'

At a turn of the road they came full upon Colonel Ellerslie and Gertrude, and the 'inevitable Jack,' as Rose called him.

'I thought you were to be at home this morning, Miss Ellerslie?' said Egerton.

'So did I,' answered Gertrude eagerly, 'but Papa took a fancy for an early ride, and I just had to go. He wanted to go to Kilbarton to see his lawyer. These lawyers are a nuisance; but,' lowering her voice, 'I have been schooling myself into patience about annoyances; and then, Captain Egerton, then—surely meeting you—instead of—missing you altogether, is a little reward.'

He looked his thanks for her kind, ingenuous words, and answered hurriedly but earnestly,

'And we meet to-night at Miss Maitland's, and I shall get my—hear my—I have writ'—

'Come, Gerty,' said Colonel Ellerslie; 'we shall be late for lunch.'

Gerty wished lunch at the bottom of the sea.

'Good morning, Rose. Good morning, Captain Egerton. Come, Jack!'

'Whatever did Egerton say to you, Gerty?' asked Jack as he helped her to alight; 'you are as white as paper, and you haven't spoken a word since.'

'You are mistaken if you think I shall make *you* my father-confessor,' said Gertrude haughtily, as she swept into the house.

'I can't go out this evening,' said Colonel Ellerslie to his daughter at luncheon. 'Write an apology to Miss Maitland, Gertrude.'

'Not go!' gasped the girl in dismay; then, recovering herself, for Jack's eyes were upon her, she added, 'You're not ill, are you?'

'Not exactly,' answered the Colonel in a fencing sort of way, 'but I'm not quite the thing. A game at chess will put me to rights.'

'Well, Cousin Helen will be charmed to play with you!' said Gertrude, brightening.

'No, I'm afraid of the night air, I have a twinge of that pain in my left side. I must stay at home to-night. Write and say we can't go.'

'We,' murmured poor Gerty in an agony, under her breath, for well she knew, however unreasonable her father might be in his decisions for her, that fulfilled they would be; but

determined to make a final effort on her own behalf, she said,

'Oh well, I can go down later in the evening after our chess —I want so much to go!'

Her father would not meet the wistful look of the blue eyes fixed upon him, but answered,

'No, no, we've had enough of visiting lately. I don't want you to be exposing yourself to these cold, damp nights. Write and say we cannot go.'

Such was the burden of his song, and the reason of it was this. He had, all unknown to Gertrude, been a keen observer of Egerton, and had marked his evident pleasure and interest in her society. The eager little interview, which he had cut short this forenoon, had excited his jealous displeasure, and it was with very ruffled feelings that he found on his library-table, on going in from his ride, the packet which Egerton had left for him. His colour came and went as he read the note addressed to himself, and the look of displeasure in his keen grey eye, as he took off his spectacles after reading it twice over, told ominously for the writer.

In a few respectful, manly words Egerton laid bare to the father of her to whom his heart clave in strongest, tenderest love his deep devotion and affection, praying him, if he approved of the step, to hand to Miss Ellerslie the letter which he ventured to enclose. He told him particulars enough about his position and family to satisfy the most exacting parent, adding his fervent hope that his suit might be approved of by Colonel Ellerslie, and that he might have his

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the party, and entered into conversation with Miss Maitland.

All Rose's attacks missed fire to-night, Egerton was impervious; and even a song of Gertrude's which he specially liked, and which, in the hope of pleasing him, Rose had learned, was listened to by him as though he heard it not. And when, roused by her inquiry as to how he liked *her* rendering of it, he stammered out, as an apology for inability to criticize it, his ignorance of it, she got a deep insight into the true state of his feelings towards Gertrude; and every bad passion in her heart was roused to frustrate the happiness of those devoted hearts, and to win for herself the coveted prize of Egerton's hand, with or without his heart.

CHAPTER IX.

'*To die* for what we love! Oh! there is power
In the true heart, and pride, and joy for this.
It is *to live* without the vanished light
That strength is needed.'

TEN days after the events recorded in our last chapter, Gertrude stood beside Miss Maitland in her boudoir. Her kind friend was shocked with the girl's looks. The colour had faded from her cheeks, and such a look of sadness was over her, that Miss Maitland, drawing her to her kind arms, folded the motherless girl in a strong, tender embrace. And on her true, loving breast, Gertrude's frozen tears flowed out in a blessed shower.

'I am broken-hearted, Cousin Helen,' she said at last, glancing up through her tears into the kind face bent so lovingly over her. 'And I have come to tell you all, if you have time,' she added hesitatingly, and glancing at Miss Maitland's davenport with its letters and papers.

'I am perfectly free,' said Miss Maitland very warmly. 'I have got to-day's letters answered, and am so glad to have

you, Gerty. I have not had one good talk with you since my return home.'

'No, indeed, there has been so much going on; but now it is all over!' in the tone of one whose last hour had come, and who was just going to be executed. 'What a time it has been, Cousin Helen! I have been more wretched, and more happy, this past fortnight, than ever in all my life before!'

'You do not look very happy to-day,' said Miss Maitland, stroking the soft hair.

'No, no, I'm back to the misery; rather there is far more misery now than then. You know about Papa refusing to let me go abroad. I wrote you all about *that*. Well, Cousin Helen, I want to ask you, who are so fair in your judgments, and so wise and good, *why* do you think Papa will not let me go away anywhere from home? I don't choose to speak to Rose or anybody about all the feelings that rise up in my heart about him. But I may, I can, speak to you about everything; what can it be?'

'I can tell you.'

Gertrude settled herself on a stool at Miss Maitland's feet, and looked up eagerly to hear her speak.

'Your mother,' said Miss Maitland, 'your dear mother—my best earthly friend—died, as you know, when your father was from home, and never since has he, as you also know, slept a night out of his own house. The same morbid, timid feeling has seized him about you, and he cannot tolerate the thought of you being a day away from him.'

'That is why he never sent me to school, like other

girls, but kept me cooped up under Miss Pryde's enfolding wings?'

'Yes, Gerty,' said Miss Maitland gently; 'but if you chafe under the restraint, you see there is love through it all. If he did not love you, he would not be so overweening in his anxiety about you.'

'It's not a manly love, though, Cousin Helen!' said Gerty, her eyes flashing, as she added, 'not the way Captain Egerton would act. I know you will say I *ought* meekly to submit to all his tiresome whims about me; but my own power to judge about things *will* rise up, and I *cannot* see either the love or justice of his treatment of me. But about mother'— in a softened tone.

'They were so devoted to each other, Gerty! What he has suffered from losing her, and does suffer, and will to the end, touches my heart deeply. *You* have much in your power to soften and sweeten his lot. And, Gertrude, you have tasted of the love, have you not, that constraineth to live, not for ourselves, but for Him who loved us and who died for us?' She bent her face over Gertrude as she spoke.

'I thought I had, Cousin Helen,' said Gertrude ingenuously, 'but, somehow, since—since—Captain Egerton, who taught me about it, has gone away, I feel as if it must have been not so real as I thought. I believed I loved Christ, and felt so happy in it; and when he spoke of His hand in all creation, and in everything that is beautiful, I loved Him too. But now—but now—when he is gone, and I am so lonely and miserable, I don't seem to have anything to fall back upon;

the change doesn't seem to have been real. You know what I mean?' looking eagerly up to Miss Maitland.

'Perfectly.'

'And everything seems so strange; for, Cousin Helen, you know I am not vain, but he *did* seem to care for me, and he is—I never cared for any one before, and'—under her breath —'never shall.'

'But has he not—? What has happened, dear?'

'Just that he has gone away.'

'But he told you of his—?'

'No, no, he didn't,—he all *but*, once or twice, and would have told me all here that night, but then, you know, Papa wouldn't come.'

Miss Maitland looked grave, and sat silently absorbed over Gertrude's words.

'Cousin Helen,' said Gertrude, breaking in upon the silence, 'were *you* ever in love?'

She repented instantly of her question, as something like a great spasm of pain passed over the pure, soft face before her, and the colour came and went violently.

'Cousin Helen, have I hurt you?' said the girl, clasping the small hands eagerly within her own. 'Do not mind my reckless words. I never meant to vex you so.'

But in another moment Miss Maitland had recovered her composure, and answered quietly,

'I should not be so easily hurt. Yes, Gertrude, I *have* loved. It's an old story, and I never thought to go over it again, but it may help and strengthen *you* to hear of it. A

more idolatrous heart,' she went on, 'never, perhaps, beat than mine. Rudolph Græme lived next place to ours, in Northshire. Our parents were related, and we grew up together, scarcely remembering the time when we had not known and loved each other. His father died, and his elder brother succeeded to the place. Rudolph was clever, but lacked perseverance; he would settle to no study to fit him for any profession; and, being his mother's favourite child, she secretly supplied him with money, and during his father's lifetime he lived in luxury, and with no care for the morrow. I was too thoughtless of life and its responsibilities, and too happy in his society, to burden myself with anxiety for the future. But the death of his father brought many changes; and after several fruitless endeavours to get anything to do at home, Rudolph made up his mind to go to New Zealand, a colony then opening up with many allurements to young men. My parents resisted his wish that we should be married, and then emigrate. They said as soon as he had made a home for himself and me, they would let me join him, but meanwhile he must go alone. A sad, desolating time it was for me, but we could not help ourselves. He succeeded in a fashion, wrote kind letters, if spasmodically, and my heart kept strong and glad.

'Things, of course, changed at home. My sisters married, and went to their new homes; my father died, in a good old age, and I was left to nurse my gentle mother in her broken health and declining years. My great hope, which grew and strengthened as time went on, was that Rudolph, who had by his own account got on exceptionally well, would come home;

that, somehow, circumstances would right themselves, and that we should be married.'

'Well, Cousin Helen?' in almost breathless interest.

'One day a letter came. It was shorter than usual, but it asked me to go out to him at once. I noticed nothing in the letter then savouring of coldness or change; but mother was ill, and altogether dependent on me for care and love. I could not leave her; and I wrote to Rudolph, telling him of her state, and of my inability to leave her in her present condition. There was plenty of hope in my letter about us both, and of joyful anticipation for our future. A long interval elapsed. What shall I say of the dreariness of those days and weeks? My brother was dead, and his son, a child, inherited, of course, our old home. His mother—an imperious and selfish woman—did not trouble herself with our affairs, which, by the absconding of our man of business, were in an almost ruined state. We were reduced from luxury to poverty—at least, to the kindness of relatives for our support. Rudolph knew all, and he was the star in that darksome night. One morning—how I recall each circumstance of that day! —one morning a letter came. My mother was a little better. It was summer, and the window of her room in our cottage was open; the scent of the sweet-peas and mignonette in our little plot was wafted in; the hum of the bees, and the song of the birds was our music; I opened my still young heart to the sweet influences in God's beautiful world, and to the glad hope that mother was going to be well, and all was to be happy and bright again.

'The letter—his letter—mine! it seemed the crowning blessing of that blissful morning as it was put into my hand. I opened it; it looked short, but how greedily I devoured it! Oh, how much misery may be distilled unto a few drops!

'He had received my last, he wrote, and my refusal to go to him had cancelled our engagement. He thought a woman—like a man—was to leave father and mother for her husband; he had been mistaken in me. No doubt I had wearied of my engagement; he now set me free.'

Gertrude buried her face in Miss Maitland's lap, and neither spoke.

'I never expected to have gone over all this with any one on earth!' said Miss Maitland at last, 'nor would I but for the hope that it may help you.'

Gertrude raised her flushed, tearful face with a look of gratitude, and pressed the hands she held within her own.

'How I got through with everything that had to be done I cannot recall,' continued Miss Maitland. 'It seems a dull blank. But I know that I got through it, and no one but my mother knew that I had suffered.'

'But did he—this Rudolph, not write again? What became of him?'

'When I was able, I wrote to him. I felt it was due to myself to tell him how mistaken he was, how unchanged my feelings were towards him, and yet how impossible it was for me to leave my mother alone—and ill. While my letter was on its way, tidings reached me of his marriage!'

'Cold, cruel wretch!' exclaimed Gertrude, with flashing eyes. 'What a pity your letter went!'

'So I, at first, thought,' said Miss Maitland quietly; 'but I felt it was right. It showed him the unchanged state of my heart towards him.'

'Cousin Helen! what happened? did she die?'

'No, but'—while a quiver shot through her slender frame —'he died.'

Gertrude looked up, perplexed and astonished. 'What could it signify what happened next, if he died and all hopes of re-union were at an end!'

'Put yourself in his place, as I tried to do, and here was his situation. He had been reared in luxury, and to do nothing. He had no application, and of course did not really succeed out there any more than he did at home. We were poor and separated, and if absence does *not* make the heart grow fonder, it cools and often alienates it.'

'If it does not—oh! Cousin Helen!'

'I said *if*, darling! Then Adèle crossed his path, a winsome if self-willed girl, with nuggets of gold. She fell in love with him; others were at her feet. You can fill up my sketch, Gerty. They were married.'

'And I hope did *not* live happily all their days?' interrupted Gertrude impatiently.

'Ah no! their life was wretched. I heard it all related by friends who came home, and knew nothing of my interest in Rudolph. She held him in her golden fetters, and his proud spirit chafed under a thraldom out of which he could not get.

Her restlessness and passion for gambling led them hither and thither, until at last it brought them home—not to his old home,—that, like mine, was broken up,—but to London, where they came for medical skill for his shattered health, and for safety from temptation to her besetting sin.'

'And you, Cousin Helen?' asked Gerty, whose pity for the false Rudolph was not to be kindled even by the recital of his blighted hopes and ruined health. 'What kept happening to you all this dreadful time?'

'A wealthy cousin of my mother, an eccentric old bachelor in London, who it seems had watched our career, but who had never by sign or deed let us know that he had, died and left the bulk of his fortune to mother and me. None of my sisters —no member of our family besides ourselves—was named in his settlement, and mother and I, to our extreme surprise, found ourselves lifted out of our obscure poverty into affluence and position.'

'If only it had come in time,' groaned Gerty; 'and yet, this Rudolph didn't deserve it—didn't deserve *you*, at any rate, Cousin Helen!'

'I thought just as you did at first, that it had all come too late,' said Miss Maitland with a faint smile, 'and wondered how things seemed so often just to miss falling in to make people happy—a hair's-breadth opening up often a chasm of separation. But I learnt to judge differently.'

'And did you leave the little cottage and come here?'

'No; the doctor wished my mother to have further advice, and we went to London, taking up our abode

in the charmingly appointed town-house of our kind old uncle.'

'Oh! I am so glad to think of you there,' said Gerty, squeezing Miss Maitland's hand.

'How mother enjoyed our drives, and the parks and the flowers! and we had many friends coming and going, and she had a time of partially restored health and happiness.'

'And *you*, Cousin Helen?'

'I found rest for my poor weary heart, Gertrude, and look back upon this time as the best and most memorable of all my life. Under the faithful preaching of our clergyman there I was brought to believe, and know that man's chief end is not to secure the greatest amount possible of happiness here, but to know and glorify *God* here, and to enjoy Him hereafter!'

'And *did* that satisfy you—fill up the dreadful blank—and fit you to live your beautiful life, dear Cousin Helen?' said the girl enthusiastically.

'O Gertrude—yes—He satisfied, and satisfies daily, my longing soul; and He will yours, if only you will let Him.'

'And did it all come quickly, Cousin Helen?'

'Yes—and no—must be my answer. I seemed to feel that Christ could satisfy my craving heart, but I had to be taught my sinfulness, my need of Him as my Saviour, step by step.'

'Some day you will tell me more about it,' said Gertrude, noticing the look of exhaustion on Miss Maitland's face.

'Oh yes! many talks we shall have, I hope. Meanwhile, Gerty,—trust my word,—that whatever—yes, *whatever* brings us to a true knowledge of ourselves and to the feet of Jesus,

is the greatest blessing that could come to us, and is from the hand of that divine Friend who loves us better, infinitely better, than the dearest of earthly friends:

> '" Earthly friends may faint and fail us,
> One day love, the next day leave us.
> But this Friend will ne'er forsake us!
> Oh, how He loves!"'

'Did you never hear from Rudolph again?' asked Gerty under her breath.

'I saw him frequently.'

'Saw him?'

'Yes, saw him; we met in London,' answered Miss Maitland quietly. 'I was stepping out of the carriage one day, to go into a shop in Oxford Street, when my attention was drawn to a delicate-looking man leaning heavily on a little girl's arm. We almost knocked against each other, and I at once recognised the Rudolph of my early days in the broken-down, dying-looking man before me.'

'And what did you do?' asked Gerty.

'I stopped, and held out my hand. He gazed at me. Of course, I was changed too, but immediately he recognised me. "Helen," was all he said; and I really feared he would have fallen on the street. I begged him to get into the carriage, into which he was helped, and little Helène took her place beside him. We hardly exchanged a word during our long drive to one of the East-End suburbs, where they were in shabby apartments. Hesitatingly he asked me in, and his whole domestic miseries stood revealed before me. His wife

looked—ah! well, I shall not speak of how she looked, but her inveterate love of gambling and her sadly intemperate habits had dragged them down to this. From one continental gaming town and table after another he had snatched her, and now, in search of health and of restoration to some sort of social comfort, they had taken refuge in the great city.'

'*What* was she like, dear Cousin Helen? Tell me, *please*.'

'She had lost all trace of beauty when I saw her, but the look of misery and of despair touched my heart.'

'O Cousin Helen! your worst enemy!'

'Oh no! she knew nothing of me, or of our past, and the wreck of everything about her was pitiable to see.'

'But *she* brought it all on.'

'So she did; but it was such misery!'

'And did you actually go often to see them, and let them come to you?'

'I did not go often,' answered Miss Maitland; 'I *could* not,' with deep meaning in her words. 'But she and the children came constantly to us.'

'And Rudolph?'

'Ah, Gertrude! he was brought home from New Zealand to get eternal life in London. Our pastor visited him—drew out his confidence—led him to the discovery of his state in God's sight, and to the knowledge of God's love in Christ. And he lived long enough to testify to the reality of the great and blessed change.'

'And did he ever speak to you—beg your pardon—explain?'

'We never had *any* talks alone—it was better not. But before he died, and in presence of his wife, he thanked me, told me of his faith and hope, and commended his family to my care.'

'What a handful! I hope you did not see it to be your duty to accept such a strange and most unnatural charge!'

'We took them home at once!'

'Adèle!'

'Yes, you know her; but indeed you would scarcely recognise in the lady-like little woman—my cousin so-called—the once self-willed and flighty Adèle.'

'Where have I seen her, Cousin Helen? She's no relation of Mrs. Adèle here?'

'She is—herself.'

Gertrude was as if struck dumb. All her life she—and for that part every one else in Lonshire, as she believed—had looked upon Mrs. Græme and her family as the real cousins of Miss Maitland; and the revulsion of feeling from indignation at the treatment Cousin Helen had received, and the noble generosity of her conduct towards the wife and family of the man who had played her false, rose to a high pitch of enthusiasm. 'I always thought they—some of them at least—had done you a good turn once, Cousin Helen,' exclaimed Gerty, when at last speech returned. 'They don't go on like people that owe *everything* to you.'

'She was very young when she was left a widow, and had been so spoiled and indulged all her life, that at first she took things pretty much as a matter of course; but she is *so* improved.'

'But what would she ever have been without you, Cousin Helen? Does she think as she should of that side of the question?'

'If only you had known her as she was, Gerty,' answered Miss Maitland, 'you would see the remarkable improvement in her whole character and ways. She is of French extraction, and was frivolous to a degree, caring for nothing but dress and admiration and excitement. Now she can live with only occasional changes in our quiet country style, and strives hard to set a good example before her daughters.'

'To think that the obligation is all on their side!' said Gerty hastily, recalling the impatient way in which Helène and Clotilde had often spoken of their secluded country life at St. Helen's.

'Not so, Gerty,' said Miss Maitland earnestly. 'The bitterness of these early days of my life, the crushing disappointment of my young and ardent hopes, were the means God took to lead me to Himself as the sure portion of my life. Enthusiastic, sanguine, strong—even amid the reverses of our fortune—in Rudolph's love, and in the utter devotion of my heart to him, I found myself, when he failed me, stranded, wrecked. Looking back on that time, I see that there was no room in my heart for God, for Christ. No, there was not; and God in His mercy made room for Himself.'

'O Cousin Helen!'

'Thus Rudolph—yes, Rudolph—was the means of my conversion; of my poor, bleeding, hungering, craving heart being at last filled with the love of Him who alone can satisfy the

longing soul. To bring one and all of his family to share in the salvation and love, which, thank God, he at last knew and possessed, has been the one great object of my life.'

'What a life's work!' said Gerty, who felt herself as far away from the mere conception of it as one pole is from the other.

'I feel it was God's work for me,' said Miss Maitland; '*that* has nerved me, nothing short of that could.'

'Did you never repent of it—wish you could shove it all off you, and live alone in peace, or with friends more congenial to you?'

'I have had every imaginable thought and temptation, Gerty, but *that* has driven me to my knees, and the answers and help I have got have strengthened me in my work.'

'For instance—do tell me how, Cousin Helen?'

Miss Maitland paused as if to gather out of the crowd of recollections some one to put before her eager young friend.

'Once,' at last she said, 'when the extreme petulance of Adèle and her want of taste, to put it mildly, in grumbling over the monotony of our London life were vexing me greatly,—all the more, that from my mother's increased age and delicacy I had to keep from her all such irritations,—I was very sad, and the temptation to throw off the burden pressed upon me. I was so depressed that, on the Sunday following, I felt as if I could not go to church; a wave of temptation seemed submerging me, and the inclination to stay at home and rest both mind and body almost prevailed to keep me back. A friend, however, called to accompany me, and rousing myself, I went. Our pastor's text was, "What! could ye not watch with me

one hour?" O Gerty, it was a word in season for me. He noted the cry in Christ's heart for human sympathy in His hour of agony, and that went home to me first; next, His disappointment at not getting it. And then he added,—I remember his very words, they are burned in upon my heart,—"It *is* possible to fling off burdens from our shoulders, God-imposed burdens—yes, it is; we may refuse to bear them, and virtually say to God, I will not endure this any longer, and God may let us take our own determined way. We may fling them off, but presently Christ will come and say, 'Sleep on now and take your rest. The time was when you might have watched with me, might have borne this burden for me, might have been a fellow-worker with me; but you would not. You had your opportunity of showing your love for me by bearing this trial, conquering sloth, or exercising self-denial; that time is gone. I do not need you now! Sleep on now, and take your rest.'"'

Miss Maitland paused, then went on, while Gertrude drank in the passionate words which followed.

'I felt as if I had nearly lost *my* opportunity; I could hardly, as I listened, from my oppressed heart breathe the prayer which, nevertheless, rose up:

'O my Lord! I thank Thee for this help. I thank Thee that Thou hast yet left me my opportunity to watch with Thee, to work for Thee. My feet had well-nigh slipt from Thy paths, Thy right hand has upheld me.'

A long pause ensued.

At last Miss Maitland said softly, 'So now, Gertrude, I have made you my *confidante*—my first, and last.'

CHAPTER X.

'Before the curing of a strong disease,
Even in the instant of repair and health,
The fit is strongest; evils that take leave
On their departure most of all show evil.'

'The grace of heaven
Before, behind thee, and on every hand
Envolve thee round.'

AS Gertrude walked home this afternoon, her mind reviewed more calmly the picture of 'Cousin Helen's strange but splendid life,' as she found herself calling it. The excitement of listening to such an unexpected romance, in the history, too, of one whom all her life she had known and looked upon as one singularly sheltered and unruffled by any of the heart's stormy passions, gave place to the most enthusiastic admiration for her beloved friend, who had acted so nobly and disinterestedly in such trying circumstances. 'I could have imagined her doing good and self-denying work,' she found herself saying, 'if—if—yes, if Rudolph had been alive, and true to her. But what a life, after the blight, the cruel blight, which would have withered

my heart, I know, and have shrivelled me up into a sour, selfish old maid.' A look of bitterness came over Gertrude's face. She was tasting of that strange solitude of heart which sets in after the affections have been stirred and warmed by the dearest human love, and have suddenly been cast out of the sweet resting-place they had found into the cold dreariness of forsakenness. Like the ivy which finds its freshness, its life, from the strong oak round which it clings, climbing ever upwards, heavenwards, but which, when wrenched and torn from the heart of oak, lies withering amid the damp earth and weeds below, so poor Gertrude found her heart, in this blank and dreary time, not anchored, as she had hoped it was, on the Rock of Ages, but stranded amid the shifting shoals of disappointment and surprise.

'I loved, or thought I loved and trusted Christ,' she soliloquized, 'when *he* spoke of Him, when *together* we had sweet converse on these great subjects. And I did, I do, love Him in His beautiful works of creation; in thee, O sun! in you, O clouds!' glancing upwards, while tears filled her eyes. 'But now all is changed without him; the very sun seems dim, and the earth full of shadows. What Egerton has, what Cousin Helen has had through all these years of disappointment and loneliness, *I know nothing of.* But, O Christ! give me to know it; give me to know Thee, as Thou art to them, my *satisfying portion!*'

Such a prayer was never uttered in vain. A foretaste of blessing seemed breathed into Gertrude's heart. She even then experienced something of the promise, 'Let the heart of

every one rejoice that seeks the Lord.' It is good to know where exactly we stand in the divine life; better still, if we are not yet in it at all, to know and believe that, and to set out instantly upon it; best when the soul has actually found and taken its resting-place at the cross of Christ.

Afterwards, when Gertrude came calmly to look back on this crisis in her life, she saw all the love and wisdom which had guided her; saw how, had she thus got the desire of her heart in the fulfilment of its dearest earthly affections, 'the root of the matter' might have been wanting in her spiritual life, and instead of becoming a living branch of the living Vine, she might have been like a flower in a child's garden, stuck in, fair and sweet for an hour, but laid low to fade and perish with the first storm or pelting shower.

'Herod heard the word gladly.' 'He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it, yet hath he no root in himself, but dureth for a while, for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.'

When Gertrude reached home, she heard that her father had gone out riding. He had asked for her, and she could gather from Simmonds' look that he had grumbled a good deal over her long absence. She felt thankful to be alone.

'This is for you, Miss,' said the old butler, handing a parcel to Gertrude.

She seized it from him, and glancing at the hand-writing, hastened to her room. With eager fingers she undid the parcel. It contained a copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. There

was no word of writing on the fly-leaf; but a little ribbon-mark at a certain page drew her attention to the page, and she read greedily these words:

'Now I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending, and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death."'

Gertrude had read *The Pilgrim's Progress* long, long ago at her mother's knee, and that dear parent had dropped many a lesson into the little head.

She had done her part with her child, storing the young mind with divine truth. She had filled the water-pots with water, trusting to God's faithful Spirit to turn that water into wine. If all parents would do likewise, they would, sooner or later, find that God will fulfil His part. And now, as Gertrude read from the wonderful book,—for, next to the Bible, what book *is* so wonderful?—many of the lessons taught her in these far-back days revived, and stood forth before her mind's eye. She became absorbed in her book. Instead of going

forward in the allegory, she went back from the Cross to get, as she called it, 'the pilgrim's start.' What was it that first made him set forth? What was the burden that weighed him so grievously down? And what allured him to the Christian's life? To her surprise, she found that no such discontent, no such unsatisfied longings as abounded in her heart and life, had been the moving spring in his pilgrimage. On the contrary, he had the tenderest social ties binding him to the world, and to his home, but something stronger still had drawn him forth from these, and impelled him to a pilgrim's life. With the keenest interest Gertrude read and scanned his motives—read, not for the classic beauty of the style or the interest of the story, but as having now herself a stake in the great concern.

His burden was the burden of sin. Ah! she knew little of that; but before she finished her reading to-day, some sort of conviction was forced home upon her that she was a sinner, and needed the same deliverance that Christian got.

Then her little marker—*his* marker—pointed her to the cross of Christ, and the words, 'He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death,' struck her heart. Something of the nature of His great substitution became visible to her mind's eye, while His personality in human nature, suffering and dying to make salvation for such as her possible, touched the deep currents of feeling within her.

An affectionate nature is fine soil for the grace of God to work in!

After a long, quiet 'poring' over her book, Gertrude laid it

reverently down, and thought over all she had heard and read. Of one thing she became assured, that her past life, especially its later years, had been a train of selfishness and grumbling; also that the better feelings she had lately had towards God were mixed and unreal, and that as regarded her relations with Him, she was altogether in a dangerously wrong condition.

Perplexed and surprised at the retrospect of her life, and with a great cry in her heart for God—how she longed for *his* sympathy and guidance, who had first made her think!

But he was not there. She was alone. Alone! Ah no! Something within her told her she was not, and falling on her knees, she poured out her heart before the Lord, and found in Him a refuge.

We often speak of God's providences as 'mysteries,' and so they doubtless frequently are. But a close observer will discover the most evident connection between these and the circumstances and temperament of the one 'mysteriously' dealt with. Christ's object is to save the soul, to bring the sin-sick soul to Himself, the Great Physician.

An analysis of the way in which an earthly physician treats his patient may lift us to the contemplation of the higher spiritual case. The disease, let us suppose, has concentrated itself in the limb, and some such dialogue as this takes place: 'I have exhausted,' says the doctor to his patient,—'I have exhausted my skill to relieve you, but the complaint which has insidiously spread, has now concentrated itself in your right arm; amputation of *that* may save your life.'

'Alas! is this all you have to tell me after the suffering of these long days and nights?'

'All.'

'I almost wish you had not told me this!'

'Then you *must* have died.'

'But I *may die* from the effects of the amputation?'

'You may.'

The patient relapses into a long muse over his condition, and when the doctor returns, he says eagerly, 'Doctor, life is sweet; I had rather want my arm and live.'

'Remember, you *may* die.'

'So you told me; but as I am, I *must?*'

'Certainly.'

'I will risk it.'

And for hope of the life that now is, the stricken man undergoes the pain and loss of his limb.

Christ, the Physician of souls, watches over and notes the insidious spread of besetting sin in the heart, be it in the heart of a sinner on its way to Him, or of one already in His keeping. He sits as a refiner; the fine gold must be purged of its dross, must be put into the fire. Unlike the earthly physician, He knows that He can have no consultation with His patient, because he will choose death rather than part with his idol of gold or clay.

Frequently the stricken one and those about him call his trials 'mysterious;' cannot see the point or issue of them. But now and then the poor bleeding heart is conscious of the discipline being the very kind it needed, and bows meekly to the rod.

I have known young wives tremble at their very happiness; have seen their lips quiver as they drank from their cup of bliss, lest, while they drank, they should forget God, and lose, in the greatness of the gift, the heavenly Giver Himself; and now and then, as, yielding to the fascination of their lot, they have sat under the boughs of the sheltering roof-tree plucking the pleasant fruit, and losing themselves in the delights of their happy home-life, they have been startled by the gleam of the shining axe which even then was being laid to the root of their Eden-tree of bliss. And when the blow fell which laid them low, quenching the light of their eyes, sending them on their way bruised and crushed, they could look up through their tears and say, 'It is better to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.'

CHAPTER XI.

'Life does not make us; we make life.'

'HAVE you called on the new people at Garulee?' asked Lady Morell of Gertrude one morning.

'No; indeed I forgot all about them,' said Gertrude, smiling. 'It is a bit of a trial, besides, to go there now Rose is gone.'

'Ah yes! have you heard from Rose?'

'Oh yes!'

'Where are they?'

'Still in Paris; but I think they will be moving on soon now. They are *en route* not for Germany, but for Zurich.'

'What takes them there at this season? why don't they go to Rome, or some nice sort of place, during the winter? Switzerland is all very well in the summer.'

'They can't, Aunt Julia. They haven't money; they have to go to places that are cheap, whether they're nice or not. Rose feels it dreadfully. I'm so sorry for her; but she says, by hook or by crook, she'll be back to Paris in May. Perhaps they'll just stay on. She says it's nicer than ever it was, that

they have some charming friends, and are seeing a great deal.'

'It's a pity for them being so poor,' said Lady Morell absently. She had never known anything but luxury, and could not grasp the notion even of money straits. 'But about these Murrie people; they are the funniest set. We went to call,—I went, I should more properly say, for the girls never make these sort of visits, you know; but they were all out, so I got our pack of cards left. But there's surely a screw loose somewhere! Major Murrie is a most fascinating man, quite a man of the world. He was in the Indian army, you know, but is retired. The girl is sweet-looking, but with a terribly depressed air. She had such a scared appearance the day they returned our visit. When Jack asked the Major to go to the billiard-room, and ordered in brandy and soda, she turned as white as a sheet, and seemed on the point of asking them not to go. Evidently, however, she did not dare. I knew Mrs. Murrie before she was married. She was a Miss Welsby, of a good English family, and poor young Murrie had a handsome patrimony; but the peep I got of the *menage* the day I called made me wonder what sort of people they were. A girl, a mere girl, bare-headed and with her sleeves tucked up, came to the door after Barton had knocked and better knocked, and in answer to his inquiries about her mistress, could get nothing but, "Not at home, sir."'

'Well, what more did he want?' asked Gertrude merrily, always a little tempted to be impatient over Lady Morell's very minute descriptions of things.

'Well, of course, my dear—but it was said in a queer way, you know; she *must* have been the kitchen maid.'

'A case of when the cat's out the mice will play. Miss Murrie is very clever, is she not? What age is she?'

'She might be any age, she has such an anxious, fatigued look about her. But how she drew to me the day she was here when I told her I had known her mother! Two tears stood in her large eyes,—they're just the colour of my grey stockings,—but she kept them back. I quite drew to the poor thing. There is something about a motherless child that draws one, and when I said I hoped she would come and see me soon again, she clasped her small hands and said, "Oh, if I might! Carruthers can spare me sometimes. 'Tis lovely here," and she gazed round the room and at the conservatory, and then back to me, with a strange, dreamy look; it made me positively creep! I mean to ask them to the ball here on the night of the weddings.'

'Aunt Julia, that's just what I came to say—to ask you to excuse me coming,' at last Gertrude got out.

'To the weddings, child? What *do* you mean? why, I'd never get on without you. Gerty, what's the matter?'

'I can tell *you*, Aunt Julia; I'm coming to the weddings, oh yes! but'—

'You'll be my daughter, Gerty, when—wh—en they're away, in a tone rather of relief and expectation than of regret at the prospect. 'Oh that you would be my real daughter!' she added in a low, nervous tone.

'But, Aunt Julia,' interrupted Gertrude, 'I'm not coming to the dance in the evening; I cannot.'

'Where are you going?'

'Nowhere.'

'Then you *must* come. What does all this mean? Jack will be very—very—angry. It will spoil the whole thing, Gerty.'

'Jack will have plenty of other partners, Aunt Julia; but whether or not,' in a tone of gathering strength, '*I'm* not coming.'

'Well, then, I shall either give up the whole concern, Gerty, —the dance, I mean,—or go to bed!'

'I am sure you will be ready to go to your room, dear Auntie,' said Gerty affectionately; 'what a day it will be for you!'

'Yes; and the girls leave everything for me and their maids to do; except their riding-habits, they don't seem to care whether their dresses fit or not. But are the wedding-dresses not queer, Gerty? Upon my word, they're the funniest brides! What sort of wives they will make I don't know. And neither Fitz nor Sam have large incomes. I'm just terrified the girls will ruin them, their tastes are so expensive; and they've never been accustomed to take care of money or look after the house, or do anything but ride and hunt.'

'Well, but Fitz and Sam know all that,' interrupted Gerty; 'they've stayed here often enough to see exactly what they are.'

'So they have; but, my dear, when poverty comes in at the door, love often flies out at the window!'

'Poverty! Aunt Julia?'

'Well, Fitz is a younger son of a very extravagant Irish family; his father helps him. And Hilda will have something; but if she tires of the regiment, and they leave it, they'll have enough to do. Sam, again, though Belcom Park is his own, and his position is all we could desire, is burdened with annuitants on the property, and is by no means so wealthy as people think. But I'm thankful he lives in Bedfordshire, and not in Ireland.'

'Well, at any rate they're getting the husbands they love,' said Gertrude.

'Well—yes—as much as they're likely to, at least; but it's not the kind of love that would have pleased *me*, Gerty,' said Lady Morell, who was of a sentimental and, it must be confessed, an affectionate nature.

'But *they* are pleased,' said Gertrude, who dreaded Lady Morell's backward flights into the days of her courtship.

'I hope so; and to think that to-morrow month is the wedding day! If only they would have worn white dresses and veils,' keeping Gertrude, who rose to go.

'Take care of yourself, Aunt Julia,' said Gerty kindly.

'Yes, yes; if only you will come over often and help me, I'll get on nicely.'

'That I will,' said the girl heartily. 'Aunt Dorothy comes to-morrow, and she will go out with Papa, so he won't want me so much.'

'Aunt Dorothy! Oh! I forgot she was coming. What a nuisance for you! She is so pernicketty and prim, so sharp-tempered too.'

Gertrude did not speak.

'You never *do* get on, you two, but I suppose she has to be asked now and then.'

'She lives all alone, Aunt Julia, and she is very, very fond of Papa.'

'So she is. Well, I wish you joy of her, my dear; but be sure and come across here as often as you can. I can't get on without you!'

CHAPTER XII.

'Why should we dream youth's draught of joy
If pure would sparkle less;
Or that the cup would sooner clog
The Saviour deigned to bless?'

'I DON'T know what we are all coming to,' said Hilda Morell one evening a few nights later, as the little family party, free for once of visitors, chatted round the drawing-room fire.

'Your dance is up, Jack, I hear,' addressing that luminary, who was cutting up the pages of a new *Punch*.

'*My* dance!'

'Certainly; you didn't expect *us* to worry ourselves about such frivolities, especially when we're not to take part?'

'Assuredly not,' with a sneer.

'You'll have to start on a new tack, Jack,' said Adelaide, sinking into a low seat near her brother, and pretending to quiet the yelping of Corso and Dash.

Jack did not seem to hear.

'Yes, you needn't go in for lectures any more, or science,

but strike up a prayer meeting, or take a class in the Sunday-school.'

Jack scowled.

'What are you saying, my dear?' said Lady Morell, letting down a few stitches of her knitting in her eagerness.

'I was remarking,' said Adelaide, 'that to find favour in certain quarters now, Jack will have to go in for the pious dodge.'

'Be quiet, will you!' muttered Jack.

'Me or Dash?' mischievously.

'What is it all about?' asked Lady Morell, one of the trials of whose life it is, that, being a little deaf, and always wanting to know what everybody is saying, she is in a chronic state of fidget to catch up every one's meaning at such little domestic gatherings as the present. 'What is it, my dear?'

'Yes; what is it, indeed?' said Hilda. 'Gerty has taken a class in the Sunday-school.'

Lady Morell's knitting fell out of her hands, and Jack angrily flung down his *Punch*, while Corso and Dash, urged on by Adelaide, set up a furious barking.

'The Sunday-school!' gasped Lady Morell.

'The Sunday-school, *mater*,' shouted Adelaide, putting her lips to a new horn she wished to 'try.'

'Miss Maitland's doing, of course,' said Hilda.

'She'll be catching small-pox and all sorts of horrors from the low children,' said Lady Morell in a tone of dismay. 'I remember taking a great fancy to the gamekeeper's children,

wanting to have them to tea in the drawing-room sometimes; but your father — ah! how things come back to me!— wouldn't hear of it; he was so afraid of me risking myself, and'—

'And you never have risked yourself, and never will, *mater* mine,' interrupted Hilda, 'to your dying day.'

'There's no harm surely in going to—to teach in a Sunday-school,' said Jack, stooping to pick up his *Punch*. 'I shouldn't mind'—

'Going yourself some day to teach,' interrupted Hilda. 'Ada, mark my words—after we've cleared out, everything will be turned topsy-turvy. The whole family will flock meekly after Gerty and her daft on-goings. What rubbish to go on like that!'

'We shan't know the place,' replied Adelaide. 'Methodists at Garulee, instead of the widow and the bewitching Rose! Everybody teaching in Sunday-schools, Jack and Bruce presiding at prayer meetings! I think we've hit the right time for our escape! I never before felt so thankful I was going to be married! We shall hardly manage to get Sam and Fitz to come with us on a short visit even.'

'Oh, they'll all tire of it,' said Hilda; 'by the time we pay our first visit home, they'll all be at their old games. You never see the religious fit last long—never. Show me one case,' appealing all round.

'Of wh—at?' asked Bruce.

'Of any one that changes from a rational, gay sort of life to a melancholy religious one sticking to it.'

'Miss Maitland,' said Lady Morell, 'was once the gayest of the gay.'

'Oh, but *she's* not melancholy,' struck in Jack; 'she's one of the brightest and cleverest, nicest women I know.'

'But she'll do nothing but what she chooses,' said Adelaide. 'She won't go to races or things of that kind.'

'But she's very lady-like about it,' said Hilda, who, in spite of herself, venerates Miss Maitland's consistent, beautiful life, 'and she is a busy, clever soul.'

'She certainly has often capital people staying with her,' said Adelaide.

'And it's a nice house to visit at,' said Jack. 'They say she has a rag-tag kind of population going about her. I never see any but the best society there.'

'When do the Græmes return home?' asked Hilda.

'Next week, Miss Maitland told me to-day,' said Lady Morell. 'They've been detained in London by business.'

'Perhaps Helène is picking up a husband for herself,' said Adelaide. 'She'll go off before Clotilde, I expect.'

'Well, I must write to Fitz, I suppose,' said Hilda, seating herself wearily at the writing-table, 'or I shall be getting another thunderer to-morrow. How I *do* hate writing letters! Mother, you won't think I am brained on the hunting field if I don't write you every fortnight—will you, honey? I shall be speaking the most exquisite Irish when I come back. Whoy did you give me your good ear, mother? I can't help speaking as the people about me do.'

CHAPTER XIII.

'The heart that trusts for ever sings,
And feels as light as it had wings;
A well of peace within it springs,
Come good or ill.
Whate'er to-day, to-morrow brings,
It is His will.'

'I HAVE so much to tell you,' wrote Gertrude to Fred, 'and my heart is so full, I scarcely know where to begin. But, Fred, I must tell you all. We have never any secrets from each other. You remember how mother, dear mother, used to take us sometimes together, sometimes separately, to teach us the Bible and talk to us about Jesus. I used to wonder how she liked the Bible so much. And you recollect how she used to come when we were in bed, and sing to us, and talk to us; and I thought it, oh! so unkind of God to take her away from us. I am always wanting her so much. But now I know all about it. Do you remember that picture in the big Bible of a shepherd carrying a tired sheep in his arms, and the little lambs trotting after him, and always looking up because it

is their mother he is carrying. Well, now I see that Jesus often takes away our mothers and dearest friends just that we may look up after them, and be made to think about our souls. And now I feel there is nothing so important or so good as to belong to Christ. I can't put it in proper words, but I have been made to know what a frivolous, selfish life I have always led, and have found that, notwithstanding it all, Jesus is willing to forgive me everything. And I have asked Him to do it, and to be my Saviour and Friend. He says, "I will in no wise cast thee out," and I am quite sure He means what He says. So you see, Fred darling, I belong now to Christ, and I want, above everything else, to be what He wants me to be, and to live as He would have me. I have got a *Pilgrim's Progress*, and it helps me so! I feel as if, wherever I am, I have now something to live for; and oh! I am so much happier, and I want you to belong to Christ too, and I shall never be satisfied till you do. You know how frightened I have always been at the very thought of death. Often I have lain awake just trembling, and even in the gayest times it would come in and make me miserable. But now, although I am still afraid of it, it is not in the same way, because I know Jesus will be with me, and help me through. Oh, it is a wonderful change! Be quick and write me, Fred, my own beloved brother, and believe me, ever your loving sister, 'GERTY.'

Fred got this letter in the evening, on his return to his lodgings after a busy day.

How he looked forward to Gerty's letters! they were always

so full of home-news, of fun, and often of sharp but most amusing ridicule.

Aunt Dorothy, with all her whims and angles of character, was at the Fort, and he expected no end of diversion over the picture of her doings, and of Gertrude's wild impatience at them, in his letter to-night.

He had a disagreeable, shivery sensation about him this chill winter night, and his work in the Infirmary had not improved his physical condition.

Leaving his dinner untasted, he placed his chair close to the blazing fire, and opened his letter.

He read it through, then laid it on his knee, and gazed at the flames. He was conscious of only one sensation next to that of surprise, and that was, of thankfulness that he was alone.

Gertrude, his high-spirited, dashing, beautiful sister! what change is this? what does it mean? The touching reference to his mother made his heart beat fast. How well he remembered those times,—sweet, hallowed times! and the Family-Bible! and that particular picture too, over which their two heads had bent so eagerly!

Ah! and then as he thought over the past the bright form of his mother passed away, and their home seemed for long empty and desolate. Their father grew more morose and stern, and but for Gertrude he felt as if he would have long ago run away from home. With no attempt to rule or lord it over him, she had nevertheless always exerted a powerful influence upon him. She was just the sort of girl 'a fellow' was proud of, and she was

so transparent and 'aefauld,' that whatever she said you knew she entirely meant.

'And she is so steady and unchanging,' he mused on, 'never loses a friend, faithful as well as enthusiastic in her love, and generous to a fault in her estimate of others.'

Such was the substance of the reflections that filled Fred's mind. This change, he felt sure, was no passing fancy. It was something real she had undergone, something, too, that was satisfying her, and of such excellence that she could not rest till she had poured out her heart to him about it, and entreated him to seek it for himself.

'It doesn't seem to make her moody, at any rate,' he kept on thinking; 'and she says she has been so afraid of death, but that now'—taking up the letter, and reading it very carefully—'she isn't afraid, at least not so much so; yes, she wouldn't exaggerate a hair-breadth. Well, that's something, for it is awful to see death, whatever some of the fellows may pretend,' and the spectacle of two deaths he had witnessed during the day in the surgical ward stood out vividly before him. The one was that of a workman who had been terribly injured by machinery in the manufactory where he worked, and who was brought into the Infirmary, as it proved, to die. The case had interested Fred deeply, and he had attended him with unwearied care.

At the end, and with his last breath, the dying man whispered into Fred's ear, 'Young master, take warning by me. I have scoffed at religion, and hardened my heart against the advice of my best friends. Now I'm dying, a—n—d a

lost eternity is before me.' And with his head on Fred's shoulder, and a look of agony in his glazed eye, he died.

The other case was that of a young married woman who had slipped her foot in the crowded street, and been ridden over by a cab; too poor to call a doctor to her home, she was taken to the Infirmary. Her peaceful resignation in her great sufferings struck all who came near her, and her gratitude for the care bestowed upon her was touching to see. When some of those around her spoke of her accident as 'cruel' and 'hard,' she gently rebuked them, and looked as pained, one woman remarked, as if 'they had been speaking ill of her father.'

'And so you are,' she answered plainly. 'It *is* my Father in heaven you are calling cruel.'

'What!' retorted the caviller, 'Father! na, na! Nae father would send his child out and run her over by a wild horse!'

'Besides,' said another who knew her Bible, 'what does that mean where it says, "He shall give His angels charge over thee, lest at any time thou shouldest dash thy foot against a stone," and, "Thy foot He'll not let slide"? The very thing's happened to you that He said He would keep from you. I used to think, when I was a silly child, that the angels actually did keep us from falls and bruises. It's a whiley since all that was knocked out of me! Humph!' with a defiant toss of the head.

'The exception only proves the rule!' answered the suffering woman. 'I believe God's angels do watch over His people, and that but for their care our lives would be full of accidents.'

This woman's patience told on all near her in the ward, and was not without its influence on the bright young assistant who ministered to her. Many a little delicacy he brought her, and gently and carefully he dressed her painful wounds. And when his master, the great doctor, told her in answer to her earnest question, 'Would she ever get better?' that while there was life there was hope, but that her case was a serious one, she felt that sentence of death was on her. She involuntarily clasped her hands and exclaimed, 'Oh, how delightful to think that I shall so soon be with Jesus!' And this same day her gentle spirit had winged its flight without fear, ah! in the most joyful anticipation of being with her Lord.

In far less time than we have taken to write these lines did these scenes, and the reflections to which they gave rise, pass through Fred's mind. From thinking he fell to dosing; and when his landlady, far on in the night, came to see why he had never rung, she found the fire gone out, and the young gentleman fast asleep in his chair.

'Ah! and my notes not transcribed, no work done!' he exclaimed as he shook himself awake. 'I must sit up, Mrs. Clarke; but what queer dreams I've had,' he soliloquized, 'about Rose, and mother, and Gerty, and that dying man. I feel quite giddy,' he said aloud, as he grasped a chair to save him from staggering. 'After all, I believe I must give up work for to-night. So, Mrs. Clarke,

> "If you're waking, call me,
> Call me early, mother dear."'

CHAPTER XIV.

'It is not enough to speak, but to speak true.'

THE short December days have set in, and the whole country is wrapped in a white mantle of snow. Gertrude has risen from the breakfast table this clear, crisp morning, and is preparing to take flight to her little sanctum, a small sitting-room opening from her bedroom, when her father said abruptly, 'You and Mrs. Cookson are much improved, Gertrude. The dinner last night was A, 1; I'm sure the Murries never tasted better curry in Madras itself, and the *entrées* might have been cooked at the "Grand Hotel."'

'I'm so very glad,' said Gerty, whose study of cookery-books during the last few weeks had been unremitting, with sparkling eyes.

'Didn't you think the whole thing a success, Dorothea?' turning to his sister, a little hurt that she should not have given her opinion spontaneously.

'I did, Archibald; but I wish Gerty hadn't forgotten the dinner-rolls, bread has such a shabby look!'

'O Aunt Dorothy!' Gertrude began, blazing up at this

very unnecessary and public exposure of what had apparently escaped her father.

'No dinner-rolls!' throwing down his paper. 'I had one. What do you mean? not possible you forgot *them*, Gertrude?'

'Yes, I did,' she answered promptly, falling from her momentary pinnacle of exaltation into a very slough of mortification. 'I quite forgot them; but if you had only been quiet, Aunt Dorothy, the thing would have passed. But it's just like you, you always try to provoke and bully me,' and hastening to the door, she swept out of the room, closing it with a bang.

'Nice, pleasant-tempered young woman,' said Miss Ellerslie, walking to the window. 'Gertrude is not improved in her temper; I am sorry to see the same uncontrolled outbursts, not to put it stronger. I am surprised, Archibald, that you have never sent her from home. It's the only way to teach young people self-control and the ways of the world. Just fancy the Ladies Berry or any of my London friends going on like that. I shouldn't at all like them to see Gertrude in one of her flare-ups.'

No reply.

'If only she had more of your manner, Archibald. I always think you are the most perfectly well-bred man I *ever* saw; but from your childhood you were that.'

This small piece of delicate flattery worked effectually on the rising anger in Colonel Ellerslie's breast.

'You do not think Gertrude's manners b—a—d—wanting

in any way?' he at last said. 'I think she is, as a rule, so self-possessed and well-bred.'

'Oh! she has a dash and beauty certainly, but that outspokenness and rudeness often, to me at least,' in a tone intended to be pathetic, 'are very trying. My nature is so sensitive, and'—

'Bothersome,' was the word that rose to Colonel Ellerslie's lips, but it did not pass them. He was sincerely attached to his sister, but her jealous *exigeante* nature was often inconvenient, although she rarely allowed it to show itself before him.

'Gertrude is so very true and honest,' he remarked. 'No beating about the bush with her. I wouldn't have her changed in that for all the cold polish and veneering in the world. I couldn't put up with it.'

'But surely you may have refinement and truth together, Archibald?'

'Well ye—s, yes, certainly.'

'Besides—it is really perhaps a trifle—but—I didn't quite like the solitary dinner-roll, over, I suppose, from the night before, when we had them, and baked up to make it soft; didn't think it so very straightforward to put that to you. From what Gertrude herself said, you saw how she had counted upon her little preconcerted plan blinding you to her forgetfulness. I happened to pass the dining-room as she was giving Simmonds some directions about the table, and I overheard her say to him, "Don't forget about the Colonel's dinner-roll."'

Colonel Ellerslie looked put out, but made no answer, and

presently his sister left the room. He got up and walked to the window, thrust his hands down into his coat-pockets, and remained buried in thought. He was satisfied of his daughter's transparent honesty of heart and purpose even in such small particulars as this. But how, without asking her, and so hurting her feelings by even an insinuation, he should be able to clear her to his sister was a puzzle.

At this moment Simmonds entered to clear away the breakfast things, and at the risk of a little sacrifice of dignity, Colonel Ellerslie took a direct line of action.

'You had no dinner-rolls last night, Simmonds. How was that?'

'Well, sir, they was forgotten to be ordered in Kilbarton till just the last moment, when it was too late.'

'Humph! Some people have so many weighty matters on their minds that I fancy they consider things of this kind not worth remembering. But I just want to inform you, Simmonds, that an oversight like this stamps the whole character of a dinner. It has already been remarked upon to me.'

'Aweel, sir,' said the privileged old servant, 'they've little to do that would pass ony sic a remark; for to my thinkin', your dinner last night was the perfectest entertainment that ever graced mahogany. Miss Gertrude has been at thae cookery books morning, noon, and night; and her and Mrs. Cookson is as anxious to please you as if you was her Majesty hersel'.'

This was crushing, and the Colonel did not immediately reply.

'And for the dinner-rolls! there was one to your napkin, sir.'

'Ah yes!' coming back to the original subject of attack. 'How was that? Did Miss Ellerslie not wish *me* to want it?'

'Aweel, sir, it was *my* doing, that. I wanted to put it in your napkin, and Miss Gerty at first said yes. She didn't mind the others missing it if you was right. But after it was in, an' everything complete, she came runnin' in to say for to take it out, it wasna just straightforward-like; that she would rather you knew the worst, an' get the scold herself, than have you maybe misled to fancyin' a' was right. You're that thrang carvin', you see, sir, that you'd never notice maybe what the others had if you was right yourself. And that was *my* hope and *intention* too; but Miss Gerty cam' to see through me, and feared it might be deceivin' you. It's an unco pity you wudna have the dinners alley Rooshians; no that I have any favour to *them*, but it wud save *you*, sir.'

'Then how was the roll there, if Miss Ellerslie desired you to take it away from my place?'

'I just didna do it, sir,' answered Simmonds with a dogged shake of his head. 'I thought, thinks I, if the Cornel would only just *think* the rolls was a' right, he would have an easy mind—have no call up of the slate afore folk, and enjoy a good dinner. So I never let on to Miss Gerty, but just let the roll sit in your napkin.'

Colonel Ellerslie made no further remark, but turned on his heel and made for the library.

An hour later, when Gertrude sought him there, she was struck by his gentler manner towards her, and by him looking

almost wistfully at her as he murmured, 'My good, honest child.'

'O Papa!' she exclaimed, 'I'm not good, and you know that, but I am trying to keep down my temper; and I've just been asking Aunt Dorothy's pardon for my rudeness to her this morning,'

Her father gazed at her in surprise, but did not speak.

'And I've been searching in that *Country House Cookery-book*, to see if there is any way of extemporizing dinner-rolls out of plain loaf-bread, and have found out such a neat dodge,' she added with sparkling eyes. 'So the next time I forget, you shall see what a dainty *petit pain* will be produced!'

'I'm a true prophet, Gerty,' said her father. 'I always said you would get to love cookery if only you would concentrate your mind upon it. You're getting quite enthusiastic!'

'Quite,' she answered, rather drearily, however, as she left the room. 'How wonderful,' she thought, as she flew back to her little boudoir. 'What has changed Papa since breakfast-time? are my prayers about it answered already?'

CHAPTER XV.

'If loving hearts were never lonely,
If what they wished might always be,—
Accepting what they looked for only,—
They might be glad, but not in Thee.
We need as much the cross we bear,
As air we breathe, as light we see;
It brings us to Thy side in prayer,
It binds us to our faith in Thee.'

FOR the last few weeks Gertrude has been 'holding on' in the new and narrow path on which she has so hopefully entered. She has had sundry sharp fights with her temper, but has managed, prayerfully and watchfully, to keep it in some sort of check. A mingled feeling of self-pleasing at her success, and of certainty of future progress in this victory over her besetting sins, has unconsciously entwined itself with the fabric of more humble thoughts; and this morning, without the buckling on of the heavenly armour, she has rushed into the conflict and been worsted.

She has lost peace; and although she has sought forgiveness from her Lord, following up her confession by going to ask Aunt Dorothy's forgiveness too, a dull sense of failure

and defeat has seized upon her. The temporary flush of pleasure from the victory she has achieved—for it is no light matter for *her* to have begged Aunt Dorothy's pardon —gives place to a feeling of weariness. She sinks down in her rocking-chair by the fire with empty hands and a great tumult of thoughts in her head.

'Temptation rarely comes,' says a wise man, 'in working hours. It is in their leisure that men are made or marred.' This saying may be emphasized in the case of women. A tendency prevails with many a woman to be busy enough at set times, or with special duties, but to dawdle or let the hands hang down when no special effort calls forth her energy; and it is precisely at such times of relaxation and rebound that temptation streams in. The subtle wave spreads through the chambers of the imagination, searches into their every corner, and suits itself to each peculiar temperament and taste. Satan knows this work well. He is at it every moment. Alas! how many fall unconscious victims into his net, which he so assiduously spreads for them, and out of which they might keep their feet if their hands were full.

'I can't think why there is no letter from Fred this morning,' Gertrude muses, 'nor Rose, nor anybody; and there, I declare it has begun to snow again,' glancing at the window, 'and Papa will be saying ever so many things about my going out, although I promised Kate Murrie last night to go over to Garulee this afternoon. It's just Aunt Dorothy who has put him up to that too, and I shall be having constant skirmishes with her. Whatever made me ask her to come! but then I thought, of

course, I was to be away. If only she hadn't been here I might have got on better, and I do want to get on. What a nice girl Kate Mûrrie seems! I did like her last night. But what a family, and no mother! just Kate and that crab-tree-looking factotum body of a nurse, or housekeeper, or whatever she is! How Kate has to be constantly working among that tribe of brothers and sisters! Well, it's cheerful; very different from me, having nobody, worse than nobody, for I have actually to fly up here to get out of Aunt Dorothy's way for a while. And she doesn't care for music or German, and prefers driving to working. *Ahime!* a fine time I shall have! And nobody to fall back upon but Cousin Helen, and she is so busy one can't always be seeing her, though, oh! she is good and kind to me. And *what* an unselfish, beautiful life hers is! and nobody to cheer her on, but everybody hanging upon her for everything, and never a grumble or a frown. And the weddings over, the girls gone, and Rose away, and everybody getting flat and dull. The very year just about run out. And Fred perhaps not coming home for Christmas even.' And of one other she thought as gone, whose presence would have blessed and cheered her, and who had his own solitary and self-denying path, she knew, to tread, but who was treading it, she felt sure, in that noble, disinterested way which had so arrested and impressed her. Then their talks came back to mind, while the freshness of her hope in the new life, as she too had set out on it, contrasted painfully with her present listless and grumbling state of mind. 'I'm sure,' she mused, '*I* don't feel to-day like a Christian, I seem so cold and dull

about the whole thing, so unlike what I've been. I believe it's all Aunt Dorothy! Oh! if only she'd go away I know I should get on better; but how can I ever come to be like Christ,' with a hush over her heart, 'when I'm for ever crossed and irritable because of her?'

A great and terrible feeling of discontent at her circumstances succeeded this train of thought; doubts of God's goodness in appointing her such a hard battlefield in which to fight her way, came sweeping over her.

The tide of suspicion and distrust grew strong. She almost started with horror at the terrible state into which she felt herself drifting. She had no one at hand to help her.

As if to increase her distress, a view of her past life seemed to rise in a succession of scenes before her now retrospective eye, and in particular, the desperate selfishness of her life as in broad contrast with Cousin Helen's, and with that of other true Christians of whom she had heard and read. For with the usual quick-sightedness of one recently converted, Gertrude mentally separated persons—professing Christians, too—into distinct classes. Times when she had triumphed over others, when she had been reckless of the feelings of others in the delicious gratification of her own, start forth before her mind's eye; times when she had shirked, openly too,—for concealment or subterfuge was no part of her character,—unpleasant duty, or let others shift for themselves, so that she should be left undisturbed to follow her own pursuits, troop up and range themselves before her mental gaze. Ah! upon what a dark, dismal, backward track she found herself being forced to look! In

particular, one act, the blackness of which in the long distance of a year had begun to grow fainter, stood out again, looming and remorseful, when, by her wit and dash, she had drawn from Clotilde Græme a certain Walter Freer, who, meeting Clotilde in London, had followed her to Lonshire, believing himself to be in love with her. Gertrude, however, crossed his path, and soon captivated the high intellect and the not very deep feelings of the young barrister. Gertrude, heart-whole, amused herself in her sparkling, thoughtless way, while Clotilde, who had little experience in such affairs, but whose warm feelings went out trustfully to her lover, saw him with dismay disengaging himself from her society and losing his heart to the beautiful but inconsiderate Gertrude.

'*She* has plenty to love and admire her,' thought poor Clotilde, when she came to guess the painful truth, 'she might have left Walter alone; all the world at her feet, but Walter, she might have had!'

On just such a day as this a year ago, when all the young people in the neighbourhood were skating on the lake at the Fort, Walter had said his say to Gertrude, and she wakened up to the fact of his devotion, which others had plainly seen.

She had not meant to lead him on, she had not meant to crush poor Clotilde's happy hopes, nor to wound this man in his affections. But her thoughtlessness of the feelings of others, her enjoyment of the society of clever men, her want of observation of the pale face and listless expression of poor Clotilde as she began to miss Walter from her own side and

find him ever at Gertrude's, all this most real and cruel mischief she had done.

Clotilde had been away ever since, but was coming home to-day. How would she act to Gertrude? and of what a painful date in both their lives was this day the anniversary!

For Gertrude had known all the original relations between Walter and Clotilde. Yes, all; and she had blighted the happiness of two young lives.

Strange her conduct had never appeared in such dark colours as to-day! It had pained her, it had put a barrier between Clotilde and her, it had driven Walter in anger from her side. But to-day the thing rose up before her as a sin against God, standing sharply to the front of a crowd of other sins.

An overwhelming sense of shame came over her, of her having missed the aim of her existence, of having lost time and opportunity to make her life noble and good.

Hitherto, since she had become so deeply interested in divine things, the love of God and the grace of Christ had filled her soul. The beauty of His works of creation, their majesty, their music, had occupied her heart; His goodness in drawing her, His care in giving her friends to arouse her, and help her in the new life, these had occupied her heart and mind. She had, like Jacob of old, been seeing God but as in a dream. But this is not enough. The ladder has been there, down which the angels have brought messages of love to her from heaven, and up which they have been carrying her prayers. But not till now has she felt herself

truly a sinner; and falling on her knees in an agony of contrition and grief, she confessed, because she felt herself a sinner. Her self-satisfaction and reliance are gone. She is no longer enough for herself. She wrestled; and as she fancied she saw the figure of a retreating God, she prayed yet more earnestly, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.' And she was blessed. She saw God, after she saw herself,—saw Him face to face in the face of Jesus Christ.

She is no longer solitary, lonely, or misunderstood; she finds herself one of a large and peculiar, but blessed family. She is now a daughter of the Heavenly Father, and Christ is her Elder Brother.

CHAPTER XVI.

'Do not, then, stand idly waiting
For some greater work to do;
Oh! improve each passing moment,
For the moments may be few.
Go and toil in any vineyard,
Do not fear to do or dare;
If you want a field of labour,
You can find it anywhere.'

AS Gertrude set out after lunch for St. Helen's, having seen her father and Aunt Dorothy off on a drive to the Hall, she had a hope in her heart which sent the warm glow to her cheek and a bound into her step. She may change and fail, and according to her present estimate of herself she certainly will; but she has now a refuge and strength which cannot change and will never fail, and to Him she may repair in the crowd or in the present solitude, and to Him she may unburden all her heart. A certain independence of circumstances, too, found its way into her soul, together with a great longing to serve her Lord, and to be counted worthy to work for Him, or even to suffer.

No wonder that as she took her place beside Cousin Helen, her bright, glowing face should call forth the remark, 'Why,

Gerty — surely — surely you have seen the King in His beauty!'

'Oh yes! Cousin Helen, I have,' said Gerty simply but almost passionately,—'I have seen Him in His beauty, and found Him in the grace of His love to me. I feel His presence in all these beauties,' pointing to the white, undulating hills that, like a *garde moulante*, lay glistening in the sunshine round St. Helen's, 'and in that sky, and in *everything!*'

'He is not far from any one of us,' said Cousin Helen, laying her hand tenderly on Gertrude's shoulder; 'and remember the clouds and mists which hide the sun from us, rise from *earth*, and the sun is there all the same though they often hinder us from seeing him.'

Then Gertrude told her friend of her morning's experience. Miss Maitland listened attentively.

'I just hope this dreadful suspicion and discontent won't come back,' said Gerty, 'and that I shall have this peace always. Do you think they will?' with a very anxious look.

'That will depend on where your peace is.'

'How do you mean, Cousin Helen? It is here,' placing her hand on her heart.

'When the storm ceases,' said Miss Maitland, 'there is a quietness and a calm. But the winds are in the caves. When sudden temptation comes, the winds rush from their caves. They buffet and beat upon the soul, and if one's peace is in one's self—one's *renewed* self even—it goes; but if it is in Jesus,—if He Himself is our peace,—the fiercest storms may assail, but they cannot move the Rock.'

'Yet it is terrible to think of the storms, Cousin Helen.'

'So it is; but what surprises me is not the storms, but the quantity of sunshine God gives. It always seems so wonderful that in a world on which sin brought a curse, there should be so much comfort and blessing left. None but God could have managed it so. And whether in your life and mine the storm or sunshine is to predominate, our true peace and happiness will be in having our wills—His—level with God's. Look often at His life—spotless, pure, simple, heavenly-minded; His meat and drink to do the will of His Father—the very thing we often think a cross.'

Gertrude did not speak, but the words sank into her heart.

'And now, dear,' said Miss Maitland, 'I have heavy news; Dr. Wright says I must go away!'

'Away! Cousin Helen?' said Gertrude, looking anxiously up into the sweet, calm face, and noticing for the first time to-day how pale it was, and yet how the colour came and went in the thin cheeks.

'Yes; he was here yesterday—indeed I had to send for him; and he says I should never have come north in October, and that I must go the first milder day.'

Gertrude laid her head on Miss Maitland's lap, and groaned out, 'Where to?'

'To Mentone or Cannes. The only difficulty is to get there so late, but he says I must try. This is our first frost; you see it always tries me.'

'O Cousin Helen! would staying in two rooms, as you did one winter before, not do?'

'Dr. Wright says no; that I am not really so strong as I was then, and would be sooner brought down. But, Gerty, when the summer comes, please our heavenly Father, I shall be back.'

Gertrude could not speak.

'I feel the winds rushing out of the caves already, Cousin Helen,' she said presently; 'it does seem—hard!'

'No—oh no!' said Miss Maitland, laying her hand upon the impatient lips, 'stop the port-holes, and keep them out at once.'

'And what about Mrs. Græme and the girls? They were to have been home to-day, were they not?'

'Yes, but I telegraphed to them this sudden change. And now I have a great deal I want you to do for me when I am away, and one thing specially,—these Murries, I am taken up about them.'

'And Kate was just talking about you last night, and saying what a help you would be to *her* too, and now'—

'I want *you* to help her,' said Miss Maitland.

'*Me!* Cousin Helen.'

'Dear girl, she has a heavy handful. Hers is no play-life.'

'They seem dreadfully poor,' said Gerty, rousing into interest about her new friend, while some of the winds began to fall back into their caves. 'I never saw such a *ménage* as they have at Garulee. There is some mystery besides mere poverty about them.'

'I can tell you,' said Miss Maitland. 'Major Murrie drinks. What was the original cause of this I do not know; but his wife, to whom he was devotedly attached, managed somehow

to keep him tolerably straight, and being in India, it was simply as much as his life was worth to indulge in such habits. But on his return home, and with her subsequent death, all restraint went, and he fell deeper and deeper. They have been living in Aberdeen for the last year or two; but as a forlorn hope, the doctors have got him to leave the temptations of a large city, and try a country life. His only hope, I believe, is in *never* touching drink of any kind.'

Gertrude thought of her father's fine wines the night before, and of Kate's white, troubled little face and Major Murrie's excited red one. The thought made her shiver.

'Have they kind friends?' at last she asked.

'Yes; his wife's relations are most generous to him. They are to pay the rent of Garulee, and give him a new start. The eldest son is in the army, and the eldest daughter was married in India, but died there. Two of these small children are hers, and I fancy what their father pays for them is one chief means of support for the entire family!'

'Who is that hard-featured woman who seems to live with them?'

'Carruthers—Miss Carruthers. She is an old upper sort of servant, and very much attached to the children of her late mistress. Indeed, they were sent from India to her care, and now she'—

'Rules them with a rod of iron, I should say,' interrupted Gertrude; 'how I feel for Kate!'

'She *is* to be felt for, and I think you may be a great comfort and help to her if you will.'

'Will! O Cousin Helen, how glad I should be if I could!'

'You could teach her many things. Her education seems to have been neglected. She has a perfect thirst for knowledge, and is a clever girl. But she is very speculative and queer in her views.'

At the end of a long talk about the Murries, Gertrude came away. A new hope was in her heart; she was going to try to help another—she, who had been counting on getting help by drinking it in from another, was to get it by imparting what she had to another with less than herself, it seemed.

She walked smartly along the crisp roads, short cuts across fields being out of the question to-day, and by the time she reached Garulee it was far on in the afternoon.

This is her second visit only to the Murries. The only members of the family whom she knows are Major Murrie and Kate, whom she has met on several occasions in the evening.

Garulee—never in the perfection of order so characteristic of both the Fort and the Hall—has to-day a very tumble-down look, Gertrude thought.

The gate opening from the high-road into the avenue stands on its hinges; big stones lie here and there across the road; while the black, leafless trees, from which the kindly covering snow seems to have been shaken, have a dreary look.

As Gertrude approaches the door, a confused sound of voices falls upon her ear, and after knocking with the end of her

umbrella against the front door, the bell being broken, she moves in the direction of the clamour.

The house of Garulee is a long, low, two-storied building, with a great many very small windows looking out upon the rough road forming the so-called 'avenue,' while those to the back are a little more ornamental, and open, several of them, upon some very rank grass called 'the lawn.' An orchard to the right, and a broad, beautiful stream, beyond which meadows stretch away towards the neighbouring hills, make up a landscape which even on this winter's afternoon is most picturesque, and suggestive of rare loveliness in spring and summer.

The sounds increased, and Gertrude's curiosity rose high. Turning the corner at the gable-end, she found a tribe of children apparently being run after by the individual Carruthers. She seemed newly to have discovered and pounced upon them, and is giving chase to the luckless little creatures, a large pair of brown 'taws' dangling from her side, which every now and then she brandishes over their heads, letting them fall but lightly on the successive victims of her 'just?' indignation.

'That's for you, Dick,' aiming a slap at a sturdy little urchin, who, however, neatly jinked the not very well-aimed intention, 'for venturin' to clim' that tree when I daured ye to't, and tearin' yer jacket to that degree that I'll hae to sit up till midnight mendin' at it; an' if ever I see *you near* the milk-house' —a delusive term for the shelf with a couple of bowls of milk—'if ever I see *you*, Frank Murrie, *near* the milk-house,

it'll be ten pawmies instead o' five,' coming down on a little up-turned brown hand with a very light infliction.

So followed in rapid, breathless succession a series of castigations, the small victims tearing about the 'green,' jinking, shouting, tumbling, rolling themselves up again, and offering themselves anew with the pertest of faces and gestures to the panting Carruthers.

'I've caught you, you wicked boy,' seizing by the back of the neck a small, fair, rather delicate-looking boy; 'now, Gussy, if *ever* I catches you at the damson jar again, you'll get a whole half of a paraphrase to learn by heart.'

Gussy Trevor looked very frightened, and putting his finger in his mouth, began to cry, whereupon his sister Flora, a young lady of six, rushed to the rescue, and began dragging him away. But Miss Carruthers made a clutch at her, exclaiming that no one should interfere with her authority, language quite over Miss Flora's head, but which set her off crying too.

Leaving the two 'silly bairns' to cry themselves content, Miss Carruthers, catching sight of the twins, Alice and May, ploughing through the snow-field instead of taking the conventional road, called out, 'Have ye on yir Sunday boots? My certies, if ye hae, they'll be done for!' But the twins shouted back, that they had on their 'everyday shoes,' which information had a mollifying effect on Miss Carruthers; and calling to Dick and Flora, who had set off to meet the twins, and waving to Charlie and Ned—who had run from the field of battle on the principle that discretion, not to say flight, was the better part of valour—to come all away into 'their

teas,' the scene of clamour became speedily deserted and still.

By this time Kate had joined Gerty, finding her at the end of the house in silent wonderment at the scene which had just been enacted.

'What does it all mean?' she asked of Kate, as they turned into the house.

'Oh! the children are always in scrapes, and Carruthers sometimes waits till the end of the day for the punishments. It would take her up too much to do it at the time. They are *such* pickles! I wonder if everybody's children are like ours?' added Kate, with a moistening in her grey eyes.

'You speak as if you were the mother of them all!' said Gerty, laughing.

'Well, I and Carruthers are all the mothers they have, poor things!'

'What an awful creature *she* seems!' significantly.

'Who?' opening her eyes wide.

'That Carruthers body.'

'Carruthers!' in a tone of perfect bewilderment. 'She is—oh—Miss Ellerslie! she is the best of people. She does everything for everybody— She is our—one— What *should* we ever do without Carruthers!'

'But evidently her system doesn't work,' continued Gerty; 'they'll *never* improve.'

This seemed to put things in a perfectly new light to Kate; but there was such a dash of treason in the suggestion that her loyal heart put it away.

'She isn't *really* hard to them; but if she hadn't the look of it, they would never do anything they are told.'

'I'm not sure of that,' with a shake of the head. 'I'm sure *you* get them to do what you tell them without all that flourishing of taws and galloping all over the place?'

'Yes—yes—but then I'm their sister; and Carruthers says, too, that you may lecture and task *girls*, but that nothing of the kind will impress *boys*. *They* must be made to feel what she says.'

'What's going to be done now?' asked Gerty, whose heart went out after the chubby, rollicking boys as they somersaulted and shouted on their way to the house.

'We're going to have tea,' answered Kate, who did not press her visitor to go in, but proposed rather to accompany her down the avenue.

'I want to see Dick again,' said Gerty. 'I never saw such a pair of mischievous black eyes; and besides, you haven't introduced me to Miss Carruthers!'

So there was no help for it, and Kate, with an anxious heart, led the way to the school-room.

What a room! The dirty walls, with quite a small gallery of grotesque pictures adorning them; some of these were original, —worked out on any available clean spot,—others were stuck on; a ghost of a carpet, a plain deal table with a snowy white cloth at the tea-tray end, and a couple of backless forms, made up the furniture, while a very doubtful fire burned in the rusty grate. Books and slates, broken fishing-rods, one or two headless dolls, a large basket of stockings to darn, and a big

band-box, with a collection of hats needing mending,—to put it mildly,—formed some of the outstanding objects in the room.

'This is Miss Ellerslie, Carruthers, from the Fort, where we were dining last night,' said Kate, leading her new acquaintance straight up to that functionary.

She was standing 'sugaring the cups.' As the girls approached her, she raised her eyes, and stopping her operations for a second, 'made a bow,' as Dick whisperingly expressed it into Frankie's ear.

She was a striking-looking woman, and Gerty felt the force of her character with that first quick, penetrating glance. She had oval black eyes, a sallow complexion, with a quantity of dark hair hanging in lank curls about her face, while many a line and wrinkle told of anxiety and care. She was tall and lithe, with a capacity for whisking about which was extraordinary. A thorough Scotchwoman, she delighted in her nationality, and was proud of her accent.

'You've a busy time of it,' said Gerty, glancing round the table at which the children began to range themselves.

No answer.

'How is Major Murrie?' she next asked, turning to Kate, and wondering what the head of the family did with himself.

'He—s—he went to Kilbarton to-day,' Kate answered.

Gertrude felt the oval eyes fix upon her, but the next moment a thud was heard on the table, and Miss Carruthers, lifting her hands and closing her eyes, while the whole party stood up, uttered the words:

'Some hae meat,
An' canna eat;
An' some can eat,
But want it;
But we hae meat,
An' we can eat,
An' so the Lord be thankit.'

'What's the maitter?' exclaimed Carruthers as little Flora Trevor began to cry.

'She'll not have her porridge,' answered Dick, brandishing his spoon preparatory to diving it into his own plateful.

'Oh yes, dearie!' said Kate, turning round to her small niece. 'Take this first, and then you'll have white tea, nice and sweet.'

'No, I won't,' making a thrust at Kate's eyes with her chubby fingers.

'I'll help you,' said Dick presently, having polished off his own share, and pulling Flora's plate before him.

But this was the signal for a wild burst from Flora, who pulled Dick's hair and pinched his cheek, while he steadily held on at her porridge, and soon cleared the plate.

There was plenty of porridge, Gerty felt glad to observe, with a scant enough supply of milk, however, or golden syrup for each.

Gertrude came away as the 'content' course—viz. milk and water with a *soupçon* of sugar in it—began, nodding and smiling round to the children, and shaking hands with Miss Carruthers in her usual gracious way.

Kate walked along the avenue with her.

'What makes the boys so quiet at tea-time?' Gerty asked; 'they're not like the same little rogues they were outside.'

'Oh! they're afraid of losing the tea and bread after their porridge if they're naughty. They don't mind the palmies much, but they're awfully hungry always.'

'And would she—Miss Carruthers—keep their *tea* from them?' in a tone of displeasure.

'She doesn't often; but it's the only way sometimes to manage the boys, she says.'

'Why doesn't your father look after *them?*'

'Oh!' with a cold shiver, 'he hasn't time, he says. He worked hard for us all in India, you see, Miss Ellerslie, and he says it's fair he should rest now and not be troubled.'

'You must come and see me very soon again, will you?' said Gerty, shaking hands warmly with Kate as they parted.

'Oh! I should like to, but I don't know when I'll get away. This was washing-week, you see, and we've all the stockings to darn and the clothes to mend.'

'Well, try and come, and bring some of the children with you, Dick and Flora especially. And if you really can't, I'll be over to see you.'

'Was she a angel?' asked Flora of Kate, as she was putting the child to bed, and answering some of her questions about 'the pretty lady.'

'No, she's just a girl, and she has asked me to take you to see her in her beautiful house.'

The child clapped her hands, and dragging Kate's head

down, whispered in her ear, 'Will Miss Cruthers go too?'

'No, darling.'

'Just you and me?'

'Perhaps.'

'O auntie, how lubly! Will we go to-morrow?

'I can't tell; but go to sleep now, and we'll see when to-morrow comes.'

And Flora went to sleep to dream of angels, and of Kate, and of the vision of beauty that had flitted before her this bleak winter's day.

Far on in the night the slumbers of the soundest sleeper were broken by loud knocking at the hall-door, followed by sounds and words which made the children cower in their beds and lie trembling in the dark. It was their father tumbling home drunk, and shouting for more of the liquid fire which was burning out the human heart within him and reducing him to the level of the 'beasts that perish.'

CHAPTER XVII.

'Thou cam'st not to thy place by accident,
It is the very place God meant for thee;
And should'st thou there small scope for actions see,
Do not for this give room to discontent;
Nor let the time thou ow'st to God be spent
In idly dreaming how thou mightest be,
In what concerns thy spiritual life, more free
From outward hindrance and impediment!'

GERTRUDE had been so interested in the novelties of her visit to-day, that she had taken

'No note of time save by its flight.'

The moon was up as she walked home amid the snow, and the stillness and solitude of the scene contrasted strangely with the scrambling, noisy household she had just left.

Her long absence had fortunately not been observed. Aunt Dorothy, who always rested before dinner, was in her room, and her father had gone out with Bruce, who, as he so frequently did, had turned up at the Fort.

As usual, Gertrude took a book while Arnot dressed her hair; but her thoughts would not settle to read, but busied themselves with Kate and her surroundings and home.

For the first time in her life she felt almost ashamed of herself in her pretty pale pink cashmere dress with its trimmings of swan's down and soft lace ruffles. Her home had never before seemed so luxurious; while her father, stiff and pompous though he was, was easy and well-pleased to-night.

Aunt Dorothy, who had been introduced to one or two persons of distinction in the course of her afternoon drive, was eloquent in her description of the marked attentions they had paid to her; and Bruce had the latest news of his sisters to retail.

The dinner was unchallenged, and the usual air of refinement and quiet was over everything. In what vivid contrast was all about her to the poor, threadbare sort of existence of the household at Garulee!

Gertrude was the quietest of the little family party; but when, later in the evening, her father and Aunt Dorothy drew their small table to the drawing-room fire, and lost themselves in the intellectual perplexities of the chessboard, she exclaimed suddenly, dropping her embroidery work—

'I was at Garulee to-day, Bruce.'

'We—re—you?'

'Yes. Have you been?'

'N—no.'

'You've no idea what amusing children the young Murries are—and Kate—*is*—a brick. You *must* go and see them!'

Bruce, whose shyness was almost proverbial, did not immediately reply.

'I believe you and I could help them—a little!' she continued eagerly. 'Have you any work planned out now that lame Johnny is away to the Infirmary, and that Mick's boys are at school?'

'N—no, but wh—at cou—ld *I* ev—er do for *them*—these Mur—r—i—e boys, Gerty?'

'They have no man person about them. Their father takes no interest in his children seemingly, and is often away for days at a time, Kate says. They can't afford a tutor, and you know so much, Bruce.'

Bruce's eyes gleamed at the unusual though quite just compliment from Gerty, but he expressed many doubts as to how he could benefit those forlorn little fellows.

'Go and call on Major Murrie, Bruce. You have such a nice way with children. Stuff your pockets with apples and nuts, you'll find your way to their hearts, I'm sure, and that accomplished, you'll find out how to help them. I mean to try and help Kate and the twins. They read tremendously, but their education is poor and queer of its kind. Kate can repeat *In Memoriam* without a slip; ditto *The Lord of the Isles*, and the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and Mrs. Browning's *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, but she does not know French or German, and hardly anything of music. But remember, you must carry along with you that Miss Carruthers,—she rules the roost,—and we shall only really succeed as we take her with us. I've been thinking so much about them, Bruce. It was Cousin Helen who put it into my head.'

Bruce fell readily into the scheme, as indeed he fell into

anything which Gerty proposed or wished. He felt almost too happy about it all. What a change had come over his cousin herself! what sympathy there was now between them on the one thing! and what unlooked-for happiness was this, that she should ask *him* to help her in this self-denying, interesting work! They talked over every detail, and laid their plans, agreeing to seek higher wisdom than their own to direct them in what, however useful and good in itself, would require discretion and tact to start it well.

Next morning Bruce set off on his mission. He would call at Garulee and reconnoitre his ground, and lay his plans accordingly. The frost was intense, and the clear crisp air sent a glow all over him. Hope was strong in the young man's heart, and life seemed to him full of opportunity and privilege. He had just got into Hilton, the neighbouring village, where everybody went for all that could be got short of Kilbarton, when he spied, coming out of Johnnie Cramm's shop,—the 'Tammie a'thing' of the place,—two boys laden with parcels and bundles of various sizes. Johnnie and his shop being quite an institution in the place, we must pause and give the reader a glance at both. In appearance he is tall and lank, with a lithe figure, which whisks about, and is ready for everything in the way of business. He has light blue eyes, which it is alleged he keeps open even while he is asleep. His head is low and angular; a small quantity of light hair, somewhat on end, protrudes from the crown, while a 'wee pickle' of a much darker hue, intended to defy detection, is artistically introduced. He has large bony hands, which wriggle, eel-like, among his different

wares; and a voice varying in its tone according to the station and purse of his customer.

A more wonderful repository of goods than Mr. Cramm's shop could not be imagined. A corner shop, one part fronting the principal street, the other displaying its small-paned but glittering window in the road which stretches away up into the country, it is intended to attract and draw over its threshold customers from the four quarters of the country. Such is the variety—and excellence, of course—of all Mr. Cramm's articles for sale, that he drives a roaring trade. In the street-window are Indian boxes of tea, sugars white and brown, cheese, butter, eggs, leeches, brushes, sugar-candy, castor oil; while boots and shoes dangle in the doorway, and dresses 'just in' flutter in the breeze. In the other window, directed country-wards, are hats, bonnets, gaudy flowers, jewellery, capes, frilling, reapers' hooks, seeds, toffy, Gregory's mixture, an old *Punch* or two, the *Day of Rest*, and an inevitable jar of leeches!

Occasionally Johnnie comes to his door to survey his daily re-arrangement of his articles, and now and then he addresses blandly a word of encouragement to hopeful-looking customers breathing in at the windows, assuring them that if they want anything that is not visible, it is certain to be inside. If only the interior arrangements of this wonderful *magasin* equalled those externally visible, it would stand peerless. But absolute chaos reigns within. The shelves are crowded with pamphlets and shawls, toys, biscuits, needles and pins, hair-oil, scents, soap, etc. Yet, in the midst of this hopelessness, Johnnie—to his customers—is always good-

natured and garrulous, a man with a perpetual smile. But that is 'all in the way of business,' as he remarks to his wife, a delicate, down-trodden creature, on whom he lets out his irritation, and who one day ventured to remark on the contrast of his temper and manner in public and in private. 'A man in my position is like a mirror, Janet. Smile on it, and it'll smile on you; frown on it, and it'll frown on you.' Janet felt there must be a great deal in such oracular words, though somehow she failed to grasp their meaning, and muttered under her breath something to the effect that Johnnie and his shop were 'a' face.'

Over the doorway hung a sign-board, intended to show forth a few of the outstanding features of the shop.

'JOHN CRAMM, BARBER.'

So it ran. 'Shaving done by me. Also sold here—Coals, drugs, bend-leather, and other sweetmeats. *Christians* sold or exchanged; poultry killed to order.'

Johnnie's conscience is elastic. He can attend revival meetings one week, to please his minister, who is influential, and the Kilbarton races the next,—at which, it must be confessed, he is much more in his element than at the 'meetin's,'—where the gentry and nobility flock. It is, of course, merely to 'show face,' as he remarks to Janet,—who puzzles herself hopelessly over the incongruity of his tastes,—and keep himself, or rather his shop, before the public notice. Sometimes, however, this chameleon-like character overshoots its mark, or rather shoots in the wrong direction, and the well-merited discomfiture and defeat of such time-serving hypocrisy as Johnnie Cramm's overtake his false heart. Instead, how-

ever, of multiplying instances of his character and style of doing business, we shall sufficiently describe them both by relating one or two incidents which occurred in the earlier part of this winter day.

It was during a time of 'revival' in the country-side, and Johnnie had been 'thrang at the meetin's' after shop-hours. No wonder that his minister had 'hopes' of this erratic member of his flock.

'Johnnie,' he said one night, 'do you ever speak to people?'

'Speak! bless ye, sir,' with an appalling grin, 'I'm aye speakin'! If it wasna for a thimblefu' o' speerits at night, to clear my win'pipe, I wad never open my mouth again.'

'Yes, yes! but I mean speak to them about—ahem—their souls, and death, you know. I think if you tried that a little more you would find it to your advantage.'

'Div ye, sir?' quite mistaking the minister's meaning, who of course was thinking of spiritual growth; 'aweel, aweel, I'll try.'

This morning, full of the new idea, Johnnie entered his shop. Presently a customer, requiring his services as barber, came in, and was formally seated behind the screen where such operations were privately conducted. The initial stages of shaving were proceeded with in perfect silence, Johnnie meanwhile working himself up to the necessary pitch of assurance; then seizing the razor, to which, in his zeal, he had given an extra sharpening, he exclaimed, while the razor gleamed in his customer's eye, 'Sir, are you prepared for instant death?'

Believing himself to be in the hands of a lunatic, the

gentleman sprang up, and freeing himself from the towel carefully tucked round his neck, and flinging out his arm to defend himself from the supposed murderer, he seized his hat, bolted out at the door, and fled, leaving Johnnie, with his mouth wide open, to dilate to Janet on this failure of his first, and as he vowed his last, endeavour to speak to folks about things with which he had 'naething ado.' Johnnie had scarcely recovered from this defeat, when a lady from one of the 'county seats,' as he expressed it, came in, and asked for 'this month's *Leisure Hour*;' she understood Mr. Cramm had 'everything in his shop.'

'Certainly,' he replied with his broadest grin, placing a chair for the lady. Poor woman! well for her she had a seat! Then began a wild hunt among the crowded shelves, varied with the crack of pulling out drawers and the thud of pushing them in, but no vestige of a *Leisure Hour*.

'I see nothing like it,' the lady kept saying; but Johnnie merely smiled, and resumed the hunt in a fresh corner. At last her patience gave way; she rose to go, when Johnnie started forward and said, 'I can't lay my hands upon it, mem, but I can give you six weeks of *Christians*.' The lady, however, bowed and walked out.

'Come awa', my man,' exclaimed Johnnie, as he watched from his door the retreating 'county lady,' and saw Davie Duncan ambling down the street towards the shop,—'come awa' in frae the cauld.' Davie was a half-witted creature who lived upon the public, making the round of the country, and faring not badly at the hands of the householders and farmers,

who were always willing to give the 'puir cratur' a 'bit and a sup.' He was a body who could do a good turn or a bad, as the whim seized him; and Johnnie, for the sake of business, always gave him something—never much, it must be confessed. To-day, as the reader can believe, Johnnie was not a little put out with his two rather painful business failures, so he hastily placed a plate before Davie with something like a bare bone on it, which Davie instantly attacked, being extra hungry on this appetizing winter morning. Johnnie, whose morality seemed quickened by the morning's experience, though his temper was not improved, turned suddenly upon Davie, and said, 'You've forgotten yir grace, man, Davie!' Folding his hands and closing his eyes, Davie exclaimed in a loud tone, 'Lord bless the bane, an' pit mair meat upon't;' and as he afterwards explained, Johnnie never 'fasht him again about his grace.'

It was, then, out from this shop that Bruce saw the two boys emerge, hung all over with parcels of every imaginable size.

They stumped on till they were clear of the village, when one of them, disentangling himself from all his encumbrances, which he flung upon the ground, set off for a slide on a smooth bit of the road, which the village children had obligingly prepared.

'Come away, Frank,' Dick (for it was he) said—'come along, it's first rate!' Frank, who is but the echo of his elder and more adventurous brother, hastens to free himself of his bundles, and presently the boys are lost to all surroundings in their sport and fun.

Bruce hung about, convinced that in them he saw the object

of his morning call, and feeling that he might introduce himself easily to them on the road.

When at last they tore themselves away, and went to gather up their parcels, a cry of terror burst from Frankie on finding a great rent in his biggest paper parcel, and seeing the flour—for which Miss Carruthers was waiting to bake the scones—breaking through.

'O Dick, Dick!' he cried, but could say no more; for as he attempted to lift the flour, it fell in heaps all about him, and the more he tried to save it, the faster it scattered its dusty shower.

'I say, man, hold hard,' Dick shouted, dashing to the rescue; but his eager little hands did not mend matters, and soon the entire contents of the deceitful brown paper bag were cleared out.

The scene was grotesque: Dick with the last fragment of the bag clenched in his hand, and Frankie whitened all over with flour! Something like despair was in Frank's brown eyes, and an irresistible twinkle of fun in Dick's black ones, although he was keenly alive to the danger of the situation.

'O Dick, what *will* she say?' Frank at last groaned out.

No answer.

'I say, could we brush it off—some of it?' beginning to slap himself right and left.

'No good,' answered Dick gloomily.

'Is the tea all right?' he suddenly exclaimed, much in the tone that might have befitted a general inquiring after the right flank of his army. 'And the castor oil, and the herrings, and the eggs in the pitcher?'

Yes, these and a few other—trifles perhaps you, my reader, might call them, but they were all-important to the boys—were safe. But the flour! After a prolonged council of war on the subject, and many suggestions from poor Frankie, which were all, however, pronounced by Dick to be 'humbug,' it was decided that more flour they must get,—home without it they didn't dare to go,—so they must return to Johnnie Cramm's, lay the case before him, and hope for his help in their plight. Frank acquiesced in this 'good plan,' and back they trudged.

'Weel, young maisters,' said Johnnie, coming forward simperingly as they entered, 'ye'll hae forgot something. What can I serve ye tae?'

'We've spilt all the flour,' said Dick, exhibiting the last shred of the brown paper bag between his finger and thumb, 'and we've come back to ask you to help us.'

'With the greatest of plissur,' answered Johnnie. 'I'll mak' up anither grand parcel in the twinkle of an eye,' and he bustled away to the flour barrel.

'But,' called Dick after him, 'it's not to go down here,' pulling a pass-book out of his pocket.

'What's yir wull?' with a look and gesture of anxiety, not to say suspicion, as he re-appeared behind the counter.

'It's not to go down here, Mr. Cramm,' very earnestly.

'What for no?' taking it from Dick.

'Oh! because— Stop a minute, Mr. Cramm,' seizing the pass-book and thrusting it into his pocket. 'No—no'—

'Dear keep me, but I maun. Miss Cruthers thraipit that intil me the first day she cam' here; everything, she says, is to

go, says she, in *there*,' nodding in the direction of Dick's pocket, '*everything*.'

A momentary silence fell upon all.

'What's come ower the flour?' Johnnie asked at last.

Dick briefly explained.

'Could ye no' mak' oot that it was a dog flew at it, or somebody pushed ye, or'—

'Tell a lie, do you mean?' interrupted Dick, flushing scarlet. 'No, Mr. Cramm, I could not do *that*,' with a proud shake of his head. 'I'd rather go without my tea to-night, all the nights, than do *that*. But,' pulling out his knife, one of his very few treasures, and giving an affectionate glance at it, he said, 'would you take this, and give us a bag of flour? Kate,' aside to Frank, 'once gave her little locket to a man and got a lot of money for it when—when father was'— The end of the sentence was whispered into Frankie's ear. 'Will you, Mr. Cramm?' placing the knife into Johnnie's hands.

Whether or not Mr. Cramm would have come to any bargain with Dick remains unknown, for at this moment Bruce entered the shop. Johnnie, who was examining the blade, laid it down, and made a profound bow, asking in his most obsequious manner how he could serve Mr. Bruce to-day.

Bruce gave one or two orders, and then turning to the depressed and still flour-besprinkled little fellows, said kindly, 'You've h—a—d an ac—ci—acci—dent?'

Frank nodded.

'Will it sig—ni—fy?' not at all grasping the danger of the situation.

'She'll be most awful angry,' answered Frank, catching hope from the inquiry.

'W—h—o?'

'Miss Cruthers.'

In a moment the vision of this dread personage, as set forth by Gerty, stood before his mind's eye. The whole case was revealed, and taking out his purse, Bruce said to the subservient Johnnie, 'Another pa—par—cel of fl—our, please.'

In the twinkling of an eye a parcel, the *facsimile* of that which had caused so much distress, was handed to Dick, who, as he embraced it in his arms, turned to Bruce and thanked him as only a very grateful but manly little gentleman could have done.

'I wa—s ju—st com—ing to—t—o call,' said Bruce as he left the shop with the boys. 'Couldn—'t I he—lp y—ou t—o car—ry s—ome of yo—ur par—cels? Wh—at have you got?' looking at Frankie, who, having given up his new big parcel to Dick's safer custody, had taken Dick's instead.

'It's a sheep's head.'

'Isn't it he—a—vy?'

'Oh! middling.'

'Let me car—ry it fo—r you.'

'Thank you,' said Frankie as he resigned the sheep's head without a sigh into Bruce's careful hands.

'You are th—e—the s—ons of Major Mur—Murrie?' Bruce said presently as they trudged along. 'W—ho do y—ou think I a—m?'

'The minister,' answered Dick promptly.

'The min—mi'—

But before Bruce could finish his sentence, Dick went on, 'Yes, sir; Miss Cruthers has been expecting you to call.'

'Wh—at mak—es y—ou think I—I'm th'—

'You're so awful good and kind,' said Dick, walking along complacently by the side of his new friend with a light step and a still lighter heart.

'Is th—is a—a—ho—liday?' asked Bruce. 'Had you n—o —no lessons to-day?'

'Oh! a few, sir, but Miss Carruthers wanted flour.'

'But w—hy n—ot s—end a—a—a servant?'

'Grizzel! Oh! *she* hasn't time,' Dick answered simply.

'But th—e—the gr—oom o—r th—e coach—co—achman, ra—ther than you sh—ould lo—se—miss y—our les—sons.'

'Oh! we don't mind that,' said Dick with a twinkle in his eye. 'We'd go messages every day rather than have lessons; but we hate eggs,—they break with the least thing,—and flour,' with a rather dismal look.

'Do y—ou li—ke li—ke sh—eep's he—ad?' continued Bruce, greatly amused with his new little friends.

'I do,' said Dick promptly, 'but some of them don't; but *I* think the trotters is the best part.'

'Of the he—ad,' said Bruce, laughing.

'Yes, by far; we have it always on Sundays when—when father's—not in.'

'He does—n't fanc—fancy it?'

'No, but—he—he's not often in—now.'

There was something of the 'shut up' in Dick's tone

when talking of his father, and Bruce changed the subject.

'Who te—ach—es you an—d y—o—u—r brother?'

'Oh! Katie; she's my sister, you know,—she teaches us all.'

'H—o—w ma—ny are th—ere of y—ou?'

'There's Hugh in England, and Katie and me and Frank, and the two twins, and Charlie and Ned; and there's Gussy and Flo from India, but they're *quite* small.'

'B—ut y—our sist—er does—n't te—a—ch the wh—ole of y—ou?'

'Oh yes! but Miss Carruthers takes the little ones when Katie's too busy'—

'Ca—n y—ou ride?'

With a look which said, 'I should think so, rather,' Dick proceeded to explain, however, that they hadn't very much of anything to ride upon, as Puck had only one eye, and was lame in his right leg, besides which he had a little carting of coals to do and fetching of wood, with an occasional journey to Kilbarton for what couldn't be got in Johnnie Cramm's.

By and by the trio reached Garulee. Dick, who knew that they were a good hour late, marched, however, boldly into the house, followed timidly by Frankie and wonderingly by Bruce.

They were confronted at the door by Miss Carruthers, looking dark and angry; but when Dick stepped up to her and in a stage whisper said, 'This is the minister come to call,' every trace of displeasure in her hard features died away, and she came forward with a smile to welcome the visitor.

'Come away, sir,' she exclaimed, 'ye're hearty welcome; ye've

been lang o' comin' atweel, but ye've been away for yer health. I hope ye're improved, sir; but ye *have* a thin look. Come away off the door, sir, an' into the fire,' bustling him towards a chair, and stirring the minute fire into an imaginary blaze.

'I b—eg yo—ur pard—on, but—I—'m—I'm'—

'No' dressed as ye sud be. Mak' nae apology for that, sir—never ye mind that. I think it's a clean disgrace that the minister sud aye hae on shoots o' guid blacks ilka day as well as Sabbath day; it's fair ruination.'

'I w—as go—ing t—o t—o exp—lain th—at—tha—t I—'m —I—'m'—

'Dinna fash, sir, wi' explanitudes; sit ye doun an' rest ye.'

As she spoke, Miss Carruthers pushed him into the arm-chair.

It was hopeless to make clear his identity, for amid the torrent of Miss Carruthers' words his reiterated feeble attempts were swept away.

Miss Carruthers' respect for 'ministers' was great. To belong to the cloth was in itself a sure passport to her favour, and to be associated with them in any parish work was the goal of her ambition. The frequent change of residence on the part of the Murrie family was a serious drawback to much intimacy between them and any minister who happened to be placed over them. This, however, did not affect her enthusiasm for them, nor her undisguised satisfaction when any one of their number honoured her with 'a call.' They furnished, besides, the almost solitary chance she had for pouring out her troubles

into human ears, and extracting some few drops of sympathy. Her loyalty to her beloved mistress's family and affairs kept her lips sealed to all outsiders, but 'the minister' was a fit and proper receptacle for the heavy secret which burdened her honest heart.

'I br—ou—ght you a—a fe—w grapes,' Bruce at last stammered, relinquishing the hope of explaining himself, and taking the cover off a neat basket, which along with the sheep's head he had managed to carry safe.

'Eh, sir, grapes!' exclaimed the delighted Carruthers; 'that *is* a present forby yer call! It's maist uncommon kind an' mindfu' of ye, sir.'

'You m—u—st ha—ve a bu—s—y ti—me with all th—e—se—these children,' glancing round the room, where, however, no vestige of a child was to be seen!

'O sir! it *is* a handfu', as you've remarkit,—a *heavy* handfu',—but I was with their ma when the eldest—that's Hugh, he's in a regiment—was born, an' they're a' jist like my ain bairns.'

'A—nd Major Mur—Mur—rie!'

'O sir! *he's* a heart-break. If it wasna tae the minister, I would be dumb, but it's a clear duty to tell yer minister, and it's most fearsome. We never know when he's to be straight an' when he's to be aff the rails.'

Bruce fidgetted uneasily, but his attempts to speak were hopeless.

'When he's to come hame sober or when he'll come reelin' in. He *has* sober fits, though, nows and thens,—oh, 'deed

yes!—but the touts is aye worser after the sober fits when once he's set off again. We cam' here for quiet, an' because there was less temptation an' fewer publicks aboot. He had been keepin' richt, an' Miss Murrie an' me was that happy; but t'other nicht he was at the Fort, an' what wi' wines and lickoures, he got the taste again, an' has been desperate bad. The puir bairns is clean frightened oot o' their bits o' wits; an' what to do Miss Murrie an' me does *not* know.'

'Y—o—u re—ally mu—st must al—al—l—low me t—o ex—pl—ain,' said Bruce almost desperately, feeling that in spite of himself he was getting confidence under altogether false colours; but Miss Carruthers burst in with, 'An' aboot the boys' edication, sir, us women folk canna *go on* with that, an' yet we can nither send them to a boarding schule nor hire in a man for to teach them. We've teached them English an' grammar, an' the Catechism, together wi' jography an' sums; but as for Latin an' them ither dead languages—I only wish they were dead an' buried too—they fair beat us.'

'But wh—wh—y can't th—eir fath—father se—nd hi—s s—ons like o—ther bo—boys to sch—ool?'

'Hasna the money, sir—we're gettin' puirer an' puirer; an' the law gentleman told Miss Murrie when we cam' here, that unless her father pulled himself up, an' lived more economicly, we wad find oursel's a' landed some day i' the puirshouse. He spends his pinchon mostly on drink an' cigars, an' I can tell ye it's hard lines on the hoose.'

Bruce seized his opportunity about the boys, enlarging on

his love for these same dead languages, and what an interest it would be if Miss Carruthers would allow him in his abundant leisure to come now and then and give the boys a lesson; and at the close of an earnest talk on the subject, found himself, to his exceeding satisfaction and delight, in possession of the redoubtable Miss Carruthers' permission to come now and again and give 'the boys a whin Latin an' Greek.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

'Wherever in the world I am,
In whatsoe'er estate,
I have a fellowship of hearts
To keep and cultivate,
And a work of lowly love to do
For the Lord on whom I wait.

'So I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with cheerful smiles,
And to wipe the tearful eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathize.'

'BUT, Gerty,' said Bruce, to whom he went straight and communicated the result of his visit, 'a—l—l the ti—me sh—e thinks I'—m th—e the minister.'

'Never mind what she thinks,' Gerty replied, 'you can't help it; it's her own fault for not hearing you out. If you keep on with the grapes and things till you're fairly installed, she'll be only too glad to have you, minister or no—you'll do the boys such good!'

One other anxiety remained, how would Major Murrie relish the plan? Careless about his children,—with the exception of Kate, to whom he was ardently attached,—he went his own selfish ways as long as he conveniently could. But he was

proud as well as poor, always talked largely, and sometimes played the wealthy man, and would sacrifice to an occasional entertainment the comfort of his poor children for many subsequent days.

This little cloud of uncertainty, however, passed away, thanks to the straightforwardness of Bruce, who, in conversation with Major Murrie, told him of his interest in his 'splendid boys,' and of the pleasure it would be to him, in his monotonous country life, to rub up his Latin and Greek with them.

Major Murrie acquiesced in the proposal. He liked the intimacy with Bruce, who belonged to one of the first families in the county; and not troubling himself to ascertain the amount of regular instruction his children received, contented himself with believing that the whole thing put a little life into the rather dull existence of a very dull young man.

Bruce drew out a regular plan of study, and set to work with his young friends with energy and heart. Twice a week he 'held his klesses,' as Miss Carruthers called it, at Garulee.

He was a thoroughly well-educated and well-read man, and this stimulus to benefit others quickened his rather indolent powers.

> 'The quality of mercy is not strained;
> It droppeth as the gentle rain
> Upon the earth beneath.
> It is twice bless'd:
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.'

A course of history and geography was begun with Dick and Frankie, the second hour being devoted to the younger boys, Charlie and Ned, while occasionally Gussy, who with

his little sister Flo remained Kate's peculiar charge, was invited to have a lesson too.

By degrees Bruce lost his nervousness, and the stammer, which in ordinary conversation was so painful, passed greatly off as he threw himself into the work of reading or explaining.

He brought his maps and globes, and by their means took the boys many journeys and voyages, linking on their lessons in history with the places at which they touched, and creating, by his own interesting and at the same time thorough style of teaching, a perfect thirst for knowledge even in Dick's unstudious and pleasure-loving disposition.

He induced habits of study, and as rewards invited them to the Hall on Saturdays, where riding, skating, or scouring the beautiful grounds as the spring advanced for botanical specimens, formed endless sources of enjoyment. There, too, they met other boys from the neighbouring houses, and formed some pleasant and life-long friendships among them.

Lady Morell was charmed with the unconventional but innately well-bred young Murries. It was an endless subject of interest to her to study their faces, and find out resemblances among them to their mother, of whom she told them many delightful stories; while for Kate, the pale, feminine, marvellously self-controlled girl, she imbibed a great affection.

Meanwhile Gerty took up her own share of the work. For reasons which the reader can understand, she at first was not in such favour with Miss Carruthers as Bruce. Miss Carruthers associated her and her luxurious table with the first serious defalcation of Major Murrie in Lonshire. This, however, wore

off when she found how innocent Gertrude personally was of the temptation which had been—and ever would be, she felt sure—put before Major Murrie when at the Fort, in the shape of fine wines; when, too, Gerty's genuine love for Kate, and interest in the family, took form in the many pleasant things she devised for their good, and the substantial benefits she conferred.

Gertrude invited Kate to come and read with her at certain set and regularly kept times. 'It is just what I have been longing for,' she said to her when they were arranging their plans, 'some one to go on with things.'

Fortunately for both of them, Kate had one or two recommendations in Colonel Ellerslie's eyes. She was quiet and lady-like, and being always on the outlook for hints to help on things at home, became a genuine and declared admirer of his *ménage* and of the many novelties that were ever appearing at table. She was also a good chess player; and when Aunt Dorothy was indisposed for a beating—her almost invariable fate—Kate would gladly take her place, and play her part to the Colonel's entire satisfaction, being a sufficiently good player to be worth beating, and yet so amiable as not to be ruffled by the many defeats she sustained!

Gerty, who had no taste for games, and a distinct aversion to being beaten, very thankfully yielded her place to her friend.

Now and then little golden-haired Flo accompanied Aunt Kate to the Fort, and became an endless source of pleasure to Gerty, while neither the twins nor the boys were overlooked. The intimacy thus formed grew and strengthened.

CHAPTER XIX.

'As when the soft spring shower
Falls on the thirsty ground,
Its fertilizing power
In every leaf is found.

So, Fount of Life eternal,
Thy gentle dews distil,
Till parchèd hearts are softened
Beneath Thy sovereign will;

'Till every thought and feeling,
Renewed with life divine,
Buds forth, sweet fruit revealing,
And owns the glory Thine.'

IF the intimacy between Kate and Gertrude grew slowly, perhaps, it was all the more sure.

The entire absence of anything like patronage on Gertrude's part towards the peculiarly situated and proud-spirited girl, and her generosity—not to speak of her personal and intellectual attractions—drew Kate's heart towards her; while Kate's independence of character, in spite of her poverty and seclusion, had a peculiar charm for Gertrude.

This independence, strong in the intellectual and thinking

part of Kate's being, moulded her words and actions; yet a marked reticence in giving expression to her thoughts on any subject, except the most commonplace, threw a veil almost of mystery around her,—a veil which few ever managed to lift, or, as Kate in the bitterness of her heart came to discover, ever cared to raise.

She had an all-over settled look of sadness, deepening often into one of despair, sometimes into one of defiance. She relaxed a little when with Gertrude; any such relaxation, however, giving place, as soon as she returned home, to the usual predominant sadness, and when again she and Gertrude met, the old stony look was on her face.

She became profoundly interested in the study of German with her young preceptress, but for music she declared her aversion, and could never be brought to express admiration for the works of nature. 'She is a flower that has been trampled upon,' thought Gertrude, when puzzling over this girl's character; 'will she ever regain her lost elasticity?' That she had sorrows and trials of no ordinary kind, Gertrude knew, but her persistent gloominess of heart was unnatural in one so young. Gertrude hoped to help to lift her out of it. She laid no plans,—she 'hated plans,'—but in accordance with the instincts of her 'aefauld' and generous nature, she let out her frank, kind heart naturally towards her, nor did she forget to remember her daily where it is best worth being remembered. She did not attempt to draw out Kate's confidences; but by the way she endeared herself to the lonesome creature, she unconsciously melted the frozen barrier of reserve round

the poor heart, and drew at last, from its hiding-place, the secret of her gloom.

It was a pleasant afternoon in the early spring, and Kate had walked over to the Fort for her usual reading. As the two friends finished their study, Gertrude exclaimed, as she laid aside their books and drew Kate to the window, 'Oh, how beautiful and hopeful everything looks to-day! My very heart rises to Him who gives us the springtime of the year. I want so to talk about Him! I have so often wanted, Kate!' She looked eagerly at her companion, expecting a response, which, however, did not come.

'It is quite lately that I have begun to think of Christ as the Creator of everything. I used to think it was God the Father; but if you read the Bible carefully, you find it is Christ who did it all,—He who died to save us, Kate,' putting her arm round the slender waist,—'He created everything, everybody, you and me!'

Gertrude's heightened colour alone showed the effort it was costing her to say all this.

'I wish, oh, how I wish, He had never created me!' came at last through Kate's half-clenched teeth.

Gertrude started.

'It seems too bad,' Kate went on, 'that whether we will or not, we must—be. If people could be asked'—a weird sort of smile passing over her face as she felt the 'queerness' of her supposition—'if people could only be asked before they existed, whether they would be or not, and had only a glimmer of the wretchedness of this life, it would be a thinly peopled world!'

'I don't believe it,' answered Gertrude bluntly; 'mere curiosity, not to speak of the hope which is in every heart, would make everybody wish to be.'

'Perhaps,' glancing from Gertrude round the *recherché* little room, with its perfect furnishings, its snowy curtains swaying in the soft breeze which came in at the open window, its flowers and books, and then back to Gertrude herself in her beauty, and cleverness, and luxury,—'perhaps, yes. Yes, I can believe, in your case, life may be endur — bright and happy. But in most cases, at least most that I know,—*mine*, most certainly, — no life would have been a blessing, while life, my life, is a simple curse!'

'Kate, are you so unhappy? You haven't at any rate always been. You have some little happy spots to look back upon. And oh, how much to hope for!'

'Most women have happy childhood, or girlhood, or something happy in their lots. *I* can remember no such moments; and to look forward, oh!' with a shrill laugh, 'if only we had the end of everything at last! but no! our irrevocable fate is never to be done with this woful being, or rather to enter into something a great deal worse. I saw in a paper the other day, that the Japanese are such an unhappy people, that when some good men told them about eternal life, they wouldn't listen to anything more they had to say, because they said it was too terrible to think of, far less to wish for, and the mission-men were consulting whether they couldn't change their tactics.'—

'But these good men want to tell them about God's love, and then'—

'Love!' interrupted Kate with a wild laugh. 'You mustn't talk to me of that. I know nothing of that—nothing. My life, my fate, has none of that element in it.'

'Kate,' said Gertrude, seating her friend, and trying to compose herself to listen to an outburst which she saw was coming, 'you have been reading some of these hurtful books you will pore over, and they have put all sorts of notions int your poor little head.'

'I need no books to put any such notions into me, Miss Ellerslie; my miserable heart speaks for itself. If God really, as you and such as you hold, shapes our lives,—if He arranges, determines our lots, He must have a deep hatred at me surely. Listen,' with kindling excitement, which lighted up her usually lustreless eyes and sent the hot blood mantling to her cheeks. 'My childhood, spent among natives in India, who, when mother was ill, tossed me about like a shuttlecock, or left me to die in the broiling sun; oh that I had!—When old enough to take in the state of matters, I discover that father is delicate, has very little money but his pay and some trifle of mother's to feed and clothe and bring up eleven! Two babies die, fortunately, but nine are left. I love my parents passionately, but mother, O mother! mother dear! after months of dreadful suffering, dies, and is laid in the hateful grave in Ireland, too, where the regiment then was. Our eldest sister,—I'm the second girl,—our beauty, marries an officer in our regiment; goes to India. I was to go to her when old enough, but she dies too!'—

with a hysterical laugh,—'and *her* two poor little things are sent home to us, Gussy and Flo. Yes, and we have little to live upon ourselves; so Captain Brooks sends father something for them, or rather Carruthers gets it. Mother's relations pay our rent and give us something for clothes, and Carruthers says if we hadn't that, we must all go to the poorhouse!'

'Surely not! your father must have something left or saved?'

'But he was once just going to be put in prison,' said Kate, clasping her hands, 'and the people said if he would sign a paper he wouldn't have to go, and he did; but he told me it was to say that he gave up nearly all he had to these cruel men.'

'Cruel man himself!' exclaimed Gertrude in the impulse of the moment, for she knew enough of Major Murrie to feel that he was the fruitful source of all the misery of his family.

In a moment Kate's face changed, and drawing herself up, she said hurriedly, but with the air of a queen, 'My father, Miss Ellerslie, cruel! Please never speak so of the one idol of my heart. He has been the victim of a hard Providence; and whatever you may hear of him, he is the noblest man living.'

'O Kate, don't be so grandiloquently absurd!' said Gertrude, her outspoken sincerity getting the better of her patience at such infatuated blindness on Kate's part. 'I wouldn't tell lies to screen *my* father, if he drank and dragged *us* down, I can tell you.'

'Who ever *dared* to say my father dr—an'—

'Who doesn't know it?' interrupted Gertrude, who longed to deliver Kate out of a wilful blindness that made her sacrifice

everything to screen this man. 'We may hold our tongues about those who offend, but to deceive, or try to deceive ourselves about them, is no true kindness; we do nothing then to try and save them. I firmly believe that if you acted more decidedly with yo—u—r—with Major Murrie, you might help him; but screening him as you do, and not letting him feel the selfishness of his conduct, and the degradation to which he is dragging you all, he goes calmly on in his ruinous ways.'

'Who told you that h—e'—

'Told me? why, everybody knows it. He can't go anywhere, to dinner or anywhere, but he—h—e—well—Kate, it is hard to talk so, but I do so want to help you.'

'He is so clever and handsome, a—nd wh—en he i—s himself,' said poor Kate.

'"Handsome is that handsome does," as our good Simmonds says,' interrupted Gerty; 'you must pray and try to help your father to get over his wretched habit.'

'Pray!' scoffingly.

'Yes, pray. God will help you and him, if you ask Him.'

'But who,'—unconsciously dropping the screen she was ever holding between her father and his sin,—'who gives such appetites and cravings, who?'

'Not God,' decidedly.

'Who did you say just now created us, began at the beginning of us?'

Gertrude was startled.

'Here we are,' continued Kate, 'launched *nolens volens*

into this beautiful, *you* say, *I* call it bleak, briery world. We awaken with desires, thirstings. In this same beautiful world,' with growing irony in her tone, 'are the means of supplying these natural desires. We put out our hand and obey the instincts of our being, lo! we are pulled up, called sinful, degraded, told we are preparing ourselves for eternal misery,—it is bad enough here and now, I am sure,—and that unless we give up everything we like, and become canting hypocrites, it will be tenfold worse with us hereafter.'

Kate had heard her father and a few choice spirits rhyme over these theories till she had imbibed them all, till they were now part of her very being.

'I never heard such things before,' said Gerty. 'I must think over them before I can speak back. But I have come to know that I am a sinner, and—as—so'—

'Where did you get your sin?'

Gertrude was silent.

'You would rather not have had it, I presume,' Kate went on, the sluice-gates of the poisoned waters of her heart being now unlocked. 'You would have preferred being without what all the ministers say is the source of all our sorrows and miseries. Where did *it* come from?'

'I know not,' said Gertrude musingly. 'I have not thought about that either.'

'There it is!' exclaimed Kate exultingly. 'Some minds take everything for granted; others, deep, thoughtful spirits, must know the why and wherefore of things before *they* can be taken in with old wives' twaddle.'

Gertrude was silent with astonishment. Was this sharp, bitter creature really the same impassive, meek girl she had hitherto considered Kate to be? 'Well, at any rate,' she at last said, 'it is plain enough to our own consciousness that we are sinners;' and very earnestly, 'O Kate, there is a real Saviour at hand, and He will help us to be different. Just this morning I was reading a book written by a great man whose words I like, not only because he is so intellectual and good, but because all through there are such loving touches of humanity, of weakness and proneness to temptation, and all that. Well, in the place I was reading, Dr. Chalmers, after remarking on our sins, says: "The sinner is like a man in a boat on the waters of Niagara. He is drifting towards the Falls, where certain death awaits him; but a strong arm appears to drag him back. If he yields to it, he is saved; if he fling it off, he goes down to destruction."'

Kate sat silent for a few seconds, and then exclaimed, 'But if this man inherits insanity, which makes him think that it would be rather pleasant than otherwise to be dashed over the Falls, is he guilty? Is he to be judged and condemned as a sane man would be, because he obeyed his instincts, his inherited instincts? I see no justice in a judge who could condemn such a poor victim of fate; surely love has no place in his heart!'

Gertrude relapsed into silence, then suddenly exclaimed, 'O Kate, I hope you are all wrong! No wonder you are sad and weary if you think all this. Before I knew anything about these things, I mean with my heart, I was weary and

tired too, not with your sort of tiredness, but just of all the pottering sort of life one had to go on leading.'

'Well?' said Kate.

'At first I was determined to excel in music and languages, and worked hard at them. People admired my execution, and I had great enjoyment in the study of my favourite arts and sciences. But I thought there was more to come, and fancied I would be in a sort of elysium when I was old enough to go to balls and dances. For several seasons I "assisted" at them, as the French say, but I soon lost heart with them too. The whole thing seemed so shallow and heartless, we girls trying to outshine one another, and the men meaning nothing by the grandest, tenderest speeches. I used to get on Ruby's back, and ride into the loneliest places just to get away from the whole thing. It was the only resource I had. I went back to the arts and sciences, but somehow they did not satisfy me.'

'If I had had your life,' said Kate, 'I don't think I would have come out of it in despair. *My* recreations are stocking-darning and frock and hat-mending. If it wasn't for Sunday, I would never get a book read, nor a stitch put in for myself; but I *insist* on having that day.'

'Does Carruthers keep you so hard at work?'

'No, no; but she slaves so herself for us all, good soul, that she shames me out of idleness.'

'Does she go in for—hold these dreadful thoughts about God,' in a hushed tone, 'and life—and everything?'

'We never speak about them now. She swears by ministers

—I don't believe in them either now,—and goes to church and takes the children; but the bigger ones drop off as they grow up.'

'O Kate!'

'I'm no mere child or girl now, Miss Ellerslie. I'm eight-and-twenty, so I've experience to back up my theories, as you call them.'

'Kate!'

'Now I must go. I'm due at home; Carruthers needs me, poor thing, to help with the children's tea.'

CHAPTER XX.

'We are so tired, my heart and me.'

GERTRUDE, left alone, could think of nothing but of Kate and her theories and her misery. Clearly her 'views,' right or wrong, had a depressing and deteriorating effect upon her heart and life.

In what vivid contrast did she thus stand out with the chastened spirits and devoted lives of those who had allured her into the Christian life! Ah! but what about this Christianity? The poison dropped into her mind worked. Kate's openly expressed hard thoughts of God, and her defiant bitterness against her lot, which had so shocked Gertrude as she listened to them, seemed, as she brooded over them, capable of apology in one placed in such exceptionally painful circumstances. Why should she have such a blighted, wretched existence? Why, for that part, as she mused on, should there be such crosses in almost every home? Her mind reverted to the neighbouring families, her familiar friends, every one of whom, however externally bright their lots might seem, had, she knew, a skeleton hid away in some corner or other! Why, as she withdrew her

mental eye from others and fixed it on her own lot, was her mother taken from her when she needed her, craved for her with her hungry heart? why was every one that she specially loved away from her—Fred, Rose, those too who could have helped her in her soul's concerns—Cousin Helen, Captain Egerton, spirited away just when she so sorely needed them? And was it not a simple aggravation of all this to have the irritation of Aunt Dorothy's company, and the cold, unsympathizing society of her self-contained father? Yes; wrong as it was of Kate to have spoken so irreverently, there was a vein of truth in all she had said. Gertrude began to feel this, by and by to sympathize in it.

The poisoned current of her thoughts flowed on, and the opposition with which she had at first met Kate's unbelief wore off. 'She is so clever,' she mused on, 'has made the whole thing the subject of such careful study; what an absurd simpleton she must take me for, never to have even thought of her side of the question!'

Think now poor Gertrude did, and of nothing else, and somehow the more she thought, the more her faith seemed to give way, till, when a few days afterwards Kate re-appeared for their German reading, she felt as if the ground of her peace and hope was fast crumbling beneath her.

'I couldn't get up last Thursday, Miss Ellerslie,' said Kate in her most ironical tone. 'Some fresh flowers cropped up in my path, and I had, of course, to gather and enjoy them! But how pale and tired you look! are you ill?'

'Indeed I am not well,' said Gertrude, turning her clear,

truth-speaking eyes full upon her friend. 'I have been very unhappy all the week since you were here, Kate.'

'My evil star rising over your fair head, eh? But sooner or later misery comes; go where you will, do what you like, life is a sea of trial:

> "Men must work, and women must weep,
> *And* the sooner it's over, the sooner to *sleep*"

—eh? I hope so.'

'But,' said poor Gertrude, 'Kingsley, who wrote these lines, had a very happy life. Don't you think people write sometimes in a sentimental sort of style, not meaning always what they say? I remember, as a child, writing lines about the most dolorous things: blighted hopes, and broken hearts, and death, and the grave, and I knew nothing about them, nor felt a scrap melancholy over them all!'

'The author of *Yeast* knew well about them.'

'I don't think people should write melancholy, *imaginary* things.'

'There's enough of them without imagining, certainly.'

'Yes, if people would write true things in a true way, to cheer and help.'

'But they can't. The imaginary people may—those who write books to order on certain subjects, pill-gilders—trump up lovely tales, but if they don't tell about the woes of life, they're a delusion and a snare!'

'I've been so wretched thinking over what you said,' said Gerty, coming back to herself.

'I don't wonder,' coldly.

'A—nd—I think it's holding these views that makes you s—o so miserable.'

'What views?'

'About God and His love,' with a tremor in her voice and a moisture in her eye.

'They're not *views*, Miss Ellerslie, they're facts, and they're intended to make us wretched.'

'O Kate, God does *not intend* to make us unhappy! He has given His own dear Son to lift us out of our sin and misery; for God so *loved* the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should *not* perish, but have everlasting life. The happiness which these words have given me, wh—en I believed them, and rested myself in this great love of God and Christ, is equalled only by the distress which the suspicion of its reality has caused me!'

'Where do you find these words?'

'In the Bible, in St. John's Gospel; do you not know them? I thought you told me you had studied the Bible, searched into its evidences, and come to the conclusion that i—t it was a—a—my'—

'A myth! Oh, so I have!'

'Not very profoundly surely, if you have missed such a glorious passage as that!'

'Oh, yes! but it's some time since I gave up reading it. You don't keep *studying* a book you don't believe in; only an idiot or a hypocrite would do that. Besides, doesn't the Bible say that people who believe in it are to be self-denying,

forgiving, kind, generous, and so forth—models of love an—d goodness? Where do you find any such paragons?' with kindling eyes, and in a tone of bitterness. 'Your Christians, forsooth! are as selfish, and censorious, and uncharitable, and harsh, more so often than those who fling such notions to the winds, and exercise their own reason upon the things that *are*. Believe me, Miss Ellerslie, there's no such thing as a heart of love moving the wheels of this wretched life; and if there's something worse even than this meeting us at the other side, I end where I began, and say it's a cruel, unjust shame to make a poor wretch live, whether he will or not, in a dark, howling wilderness, and to punish him at the end of that with something worse than death, for what? for obeying the natural instincts of his being which were born with him. *I* do not believe in the Bible, or the Bible's God.' And Kate went away, leaving upon Gertrude's heart a deeper sense of defeat even than the week before, and a felt helplessness to meet the terrible unbelief with which Kate's being seemed saturated, or to rid herself of its unwelcome influence.

Gertrude had promised to spend an hour this afternoon with Lady Morell, who was very dependent on her society, and presently she started on her walk to the Hall.

What a change during the past week had come over everything! The sunshine and the skies, and the flowers and the birds, in which she had been revelling as His workmanship, seemed less beautiful. Ah! it was the mist round her own heart that bedimmed them—that subtle, dreadful mist of doubt which had come up from the dark and dismal

caverns of Kate's unbelieving heart, and had crept round hers.

Lady Morell was ailing, and soon poured out a list of grievances into Gerty's rather abstracted ear. The girls wrote grumblingly, Hilda's favourite mare was lamed, and Adelaide had lost heavily in some betting affair.

'They seldom speak of their husbands,' Lady Morell went on, 'and never as loving wives, if they do mention them; so different from their father and me. I never was happy if he was from home; there was no one to tell all about the rows in the servants' hall, and to consult with about wages and things.'

Gertrude could not help thinking Sir John would often go from home.

'And then, when I had those headaches, I liked him beside me, though he always would insist that to be quiet and alone was the best thing for me. But the girls never were domestic, and, poor things, you can't help people's natures; as we are born, there we are!'

Gertrude's wandering thoughts rallied at the words.

'You can no more change your natural disposition than you can change the colour of your skin, my dear; and it is a weary world after all. I have always felt that I never could do enough to make it as happy as possible for my children, having been the means of them coming into it whether they would or not.'

Gertrude started. How strange it is, that, in particular circumstances or moods, we seem to come into contact with persons in the same case as ourselves! Break your leg, for instance, and you will be surprised to discover, not that this

and the other whom you meet have broken theirs, but that sound limbs are quite the exception!

'How curious!' Gertrude unconsciously exclaimed.

'So it is, my dear,' not at all taking up the thread of Gerty's thoughts; 'but when you have lived as long as I have, you will find there are many queer things in the world that are most puzzling.'

'So I begin to think,' said poor Gerty, who was feeling as if the solid earth beneath her feet was giving way.

'But don't you read and worrit your mind so much, my dear. You've been looking very white of late; take things easy, and enjoy life as long as you can!'

'Eat, drink, and be merry, in short, for to-morrow—ah!' thought Gertrude as she bade Lady Morell good-bye, 'we may die; and if there is n—o Saviour, O God! O Christ!' she cried in her heart, 'help me, I am drifting, sinking!'

The Hall was about a quarter of an hour's walk from Hilton, and on the farther side of the village were Mr. Stewart's church and manse. He had but recently been appointed to the charge, but Gertrude had imbibed the highest admiration for his talents and earnestness. She greatly liked him and his wife, and felt thankful for their coming. Something within prompted her to call and tell Mrs. Stewart her new-born but most painful doubts. She walked hurriedly towards Hilton. It was—to her, impulsive and fearless as she was—a bold step. What would she think of her? Be shocked, doubtless, and consider her a hopeless case! Well, but she must, for her own sake, in

whom the poison was working fast, as well as for Kate's also, get help.

'Mrs. Stewart is from home,' the servant replied to Gertrude, as with a beating heart she stood at the manse door.

'Oh, I'm so very sorry!' with a blank look.

'But Mr. Stewart is in, mem.'

'Oh, I couldn't disturb *him*,' decidedly.

'He's used to *that*, mem.'

'But no, no, I couldn't really; when will Mrs. Stewart be back?'

'She's away seein' her sister-in-law, who's ill, and we don't know when she'll get home, mem.'

'Oh dear!' dejectedly.

'But if ye would just step into the drawndrum, I'll tell Mr. Stewart,' and she opened the door wide.

'No, I really cannot!'

'Who will I say was callin', mem?'

'Oh, nobody!' turning away.

At the garden-gate she met little Norman and Maggie, the younger children of the manse, and stopped to speak to them.

'Mamma's away, Maggie!'

'Yes, but Papa's in. I know by the study window; it's always up when he's out.'

'But he's busy.'

'Oh, but he'll be done now; for he said if we came home soon, he would come and work in our gardens with us for a whole half-hour,' with sparkling eyes. 'And we want to know how to weed the beds and not pull up the flowers.'

'Ah, that's just what I want to learn about something else!' exclaimed Gerty.

'Well, stay, and Papa will show you.'

'Oh no, dearie! he wouldn't care about me staying.'

'But he would!' exclaimed Maggie; and darting off, she flew to the study window, and tapping lightly but fearlessly against the pane, brought up the minister from his books at once.

'Papa, here's Miss Ellsy, the pretty lady that gave me and Norman the box of chocolate drops. She wants to see you weeding our gardens; mayn't she?'

Mr. Stewart stepped out upon the grass, and taking his little girl by the hand, hastened towards Gertrude.

'I fear we, in our small way, can give you little help, Miss Ellerslie,' he said, smiling, as he shook her hand heartily, 'but'—

'O Mr. Stewart!' flushing deeply, 'it's not that sort of weeding I meant. It is weeds of doubt—a—nd—a—n—d—suspicion that have come into my mind, and I came to have a talk with Mrs. Stewart, but she is away, and y—ou—are'—

'Ready to talk to you if you wish it,' said the minister warmly.

'Oh, thank you. I do wish it; it's more than I ever thought of!'

'If you won't feel it cold, shall we sit here?' leading the way to a seat in front of the house.

'Thank you, but the children's weeding?'

'They can wait. Maggie, Norman, go and rake the walks in mamma's garden there,' pointing to some plots before them;

'you did your own so well yesterday that I can trust you to do these, and we'll weed a bit afterwards.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you!' exclaimed the children as they went off to rake, and Gertrude opened her mind to the pastor.

'I have been so happy,' she said,—'so happy in thinking of Christ as my Creator, and,' very earnestly, 'as my Saviour; everything has seemed so full of meaning and of stimulus, but now *I am shaken about it all.*'

'What exactly has shaken you?'

'A talk with a friend who doesn't believe in the Bible or God's love, and thinks it isn't love at all to have created us.'

'Is she, or he, perfectly sane?'

'Perfectly; but her life has been a very miserable one always, she says!'

'Has she ever *tried* to think of God as the Bible reveals Him?'

'I cannot tell. She doesn't read it, I fear; but she speaks, too, as if she believed part of it, as, for instance, the way she talks of our creation, of sin and the fall, and the terrible things about us.'

'Well, is she, is any one, at liberty to take up certain parts of any book, specially of a book professing to be, and bearing internal evidence of being, the Word of God, and to leave out portions at their will? What an outcry we should have against any one who thus treated a book of science!'

'So we should!'

'Assured, then, that by her own incidental confessions she believes in the Bible, or part of it, we must find out

what it is in her that prejudices her against some portions of it.'

'She denies that God is the God of love, because, she says, no such Being would create us into such a wretched existence and world; hers is really a most miserable life.'

'Believe me, Miss Ellerslie, we have very much the making or marring of our lives here in our own hands. I have known, I do know, some Christians whose earthly lot is mournful, and yet whose hearts are so gracious, that from dear love to their Lord they seek to follow Him fully; so that if this world is a desert, they are certainly oases in it. From what you say of this lady, of her irritation at her lot, I should be inclined to think that she is struggling against the convictions of conscience, or is in love with some sin, from which sooner than part, she will try to persuade herself of the injustice and cruelty of the holy God of love.'

'She doesn't seem to care about anything,' said Gertrude, whose inexperience prevented her following the pastor's line of argument.

'Besides, all that any creature may say, or try to persuade himself or others to believe, does not by a hair's breadth affect the being and character of God. If I choose to look at that brilliant sun,' glancing upwards, 'through a blackened glass, I lose its beauty, but it is the same untarnished, glorious orb.'

'Oh yes!' with a smile of intelligence; 'but,' relapsing into her anxious look, 'ho—w can we be *sure* about the Bible, which tells us of God, Mr. Stewart? Wh—o—wrote it? So much depends upon it. I cannot help the dreadful thoughts

that have been coming up into my mind, and that are making me so utterly wretched.'

'Let us look at your question, Who wrote the Bible? Clearly not man; he would not have spoken of himself as the Bible does. Certainly not Satan; else we should have had another version of himself and his doings. The conviction to which the earnest and unprejudiced mind is brought, is that the Bible is what it professes to be, the word of the living and true God.'

'Well, Mr. Stewart!' with kindling interest and hope.

'You will generally find that an atheist is ignorant of the Bible, and yet one of his stock arguments is that he has gone over all the question of Christian evidence, that he has studied and sifted the subject, and has found nothing in it. Read Leslie Stephen, or Morley, any of the advanced atheists of the day, and you will find them asserting this, and holding up to ridicule the feeble and old-fashioned intellects, as they call them, of those who believe such fables! It is true, the atheist often knows more about the question than the easy-going Christian does, though it is false that, as a class, atheists have given more attention to such investigation than Christians.'

'I had nothing to meet Ka—my friend's arguments with,' said Gertrude sadly; 'they fell upon me as a thunder-clap, and stunned me, and my misery since has been terrible. And suspicion is a dreadful thing against one, too, you have been learning to know and love.'

'It is; yet this sort of doubt is against certain innate intuitions of our being, the instinct of a future life, for example, and the moral law; of the belief, too, in a Christ. Seek to destroy

these innate ideas, and you plunge your victim into a state of wretchedness.'

'Yes, indeed,' heartily.

'But all such attempts to undermine the Christian faith have been ably met and answered by Christians. The field is in their hands, though the war is ever breaking out again; the new weapons of advancing science, entering the lists with the old weapons of the truth, will be worsted in the long run. And Christianity changes not, but, like its Divine Author, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; while infidelity is ever shifting its ground, and daily making concessions to us. The Bible bears marks all through of the perfect character of its Author, of His holy hatred of sin, but of His unquenchable love for the sinner.'

'But about sin, Mr. Stewart; Miss Murrie—my friend,' correcting her mistake in mentioning the caviller's name,—'my friend says we are not responsible for our sin, and that it is very unjust we should suffer here and hereafter for what we would much rather be without.'

'She has a remedy at hand if she would be rid of her sin; but such objectors are generally those who love their sins, and are determined to keep them, but who try to lift the blame from themselves and lay it at God's door!'

'But, Mr. Stewart, where did sin come from? My friend says from God, but that I am *sure* is wrong; yet how did a holy and loving God, with all power, not prevent it coming to us?'

'I cannot tell. It is one of God's at present locked-up mysteries.'

'Does that satisfy you?'

'Man came innocent from his Creator's hand, but although innocent, would he have considered himself a true man had his will been coerced into obedience—had he not rather been left to the freedom of his own will? In the exercise of that he yielded to temptation, and fell.'

'Lost his innocence, and happiness, and heaven!'

'The word of God says, "Without *holiness* no man shall see God!" Now, Miss Ellerslie, I do not know through what progressive stages innocent humanity would have had to pass to be made meet for heaven, but I do know this,—and I call upon you to fix your intelligent thought on this fact, and to catch up my meaning as I try to throw it out,—I do know that innocence does not furnish a sufficient title to heaven. Holiness alone does. Innocence is not having known or done evil; holiness is having the choice put between good and evil, and leaving the evil for the good. Do you feel that had you been in Adam's place, or Eve's, you would have abstained from the evil and cleaved to the good?'

'No—no—no,' earnestly.

'Well, leave all thought of any fancied righteousness of our own, and fasten your heart and mind on One who, as God, was holy, and who, as Man, was innocent, as He lay in His cradle, as He grew to boyhood and manhood, and who, by fulfilling the commandments of God, went from innocence to holiness. There was nothing to prevent Him, according to God's law, entering heaven; everything rather to give Him a right and title to it. Can you not see that whatever we lost

in losing our innocence in Adam, we have more than made up to us by the innocence and holiness of Jesus Christ?'

'I see.'

'And while it is true that the evidences of Christianity are such as satisfy the candid inquirer, it is no less true that the heart's own experience of them is their best evidence to himself. When my hungry child comes clamorous to me for food, and I offer him bread, does he, before he will eat it, demand from me proof that it *is* bread? insist on knowing how its integral parts were put together, and whether or not it will satisfy him?'

'No—oh no!' said Gertrude, with a brightening look.

'He, in the trustfulness of his heart, believes my word that it is what it professes to be, and he proves this to his own consciousness by—eating it:

> 'Oh taste and see that God is good,
> Who trusts in Him is blessed.'

'I see! I see!' exclaimed Gertrude.

'You have a copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, I presume?'

'Oh yes!'

'Read in it of the meeting of Christian and Hopeful with Atheist. There is nothing finer in the book than the account of the conversation which this gives rise to between the pilgrims; and the result of the sarcastic but shallow arguments of Atheist upon their minds, especially on that of young Hopeful, was to strike the roots of his faith deeper and stronger round the "Rock of Ages." It brought him to his knees, and brought the love and power of the Father to His child. Use the means, Miss Ellerslie, God has given to prove all things:

If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine. Be earnest in prayer; tell the Lord all you have told me,—all that is in your heart,—and see if, in answer to this unburdening of yourself to Him, He will not pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.'

'I will indeed, Mr. Stewart,' said Gertrude as she rose to go; 'and do you think my—m—y—faith and peace will be as before?'

'"Oh that my people had hearkened to my commandments," says God, "then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea!"'

'Thank you—oh—so much!' said Gertrude, shaking hands with the pastor; 'how you have helped and lightened me!'

Gertrude walked homewards with a lightened heart. This scholarly, earnest man had not spurned her, as she had had a secret misgiving he would have done, when he heard her 'doubts,' and his line of argument was convincing; while the practical part to which he had led her, and by which her own experience was to test the validity of those things which were now dear to her heart, was within her reach. From the way he talked, she felt he must have passed through some such sifting process as she had experienced. Well, plainly he had weathered the storm with which the tempter had assailed him; his feet were firm on the Rock round which again she in her thankfulness felt herself clinging more trustfully than ever. Her heart rebounded in gratitude to Him who, by His providential guidance of her to-day, had led her to such a means of help.

The impression burned in upon her heart by Mr. Stewart's words was one of deeper reverential love to God for His great plan of redemption than any of which she had as yet been conscious; while the stirrings of mind to which they gave rise left with her the thankful conviction that the heart of God, with its warm, rescuing love, was infinitely more revealed to poor fallen man than ever it could have been towards him while innocent. 'This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.' This life was hers; the further knowledge was to be got in the appointed way.

At night, and when alone in her quiet room, she sought, in her Concordance, for the texts Mr. Stewart had quoted, and which, by their fitness to her case, had impressed her deeply. She turned up the passage, too, in the *Pilgrim's Progress* to which he referred, and it seemed to her that she was looking into a mirror where her own image was reflected. Hers was, then, no solitary case,—ah no! and as she read on, she found it recorded: There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. 'He will—He has,' she murmured as she poured out her heart before the Lord.

CHAPTER XXI.

'And the lady prayed in heaviness
That looked not for relief;
But swiftly did her succour come,
And a patience to her grief.
Oh! there is never sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of Him to be our friend.'

THE soft sunshine of the early part of this spring day gave place to a cold, squally afternoon, and Kate shivered as she walked home from the Fort. Everything was bleak within her and without. Her father had been from home longer than usual; he had not written, as he sometimes did, announcing his return, so that things generally might assume their best aspect; their money was dwindling away, and it would take some hard sewing and patching to turn out the children in anything like spring or summer costumes. Far on into the night, after the household was asleep, Kate sat with Carruthers at work, scarcely uttering a word, but with her stoniest, most defiant look upon her face.

'The wind is rising fiercely,' said Carruthers after a long silence; 'I fear it will blow off all our blossom.'

'Most likely.'

The branches of an apple tree outside beat against the window as if echoing the grim expectation.

'I had so set my heart on apple-dumplings for the twins' birthday!' said Carruthers.

'If you hadn't cared a straw whether there would be an apple in the garden or not, we might have had a good crop,' said Kate. 'How bitterly cold it is!'

The room was dreary enough,—this long, low, schoolroom place,—fireless, and with only the light of the small lamp pulled close to the workers. The wind whistled through the casement, the rats played hide-and-seek in the wainscot, and the loud ticking of the hall-clock sounded eerily as it tolled out the midnight hour.

Suddenly Kate started. Her quick ear had caught, amid the storm, the sound of wheels, and presently a loud knocking, as if made with the end of a driving-whip, was heard at the hall-door. A meaning look passed between Kate and Carruthers, and seizing the lamp, Kate hurried to the door.

'Open, Miss Murrie,' said the voice of Dr. Wright outside. 'We've brought home your'— but before his sentence was ended, the door was flung open, and Kate stepped out, giving Carruthers the lamp. Major Murrie was helped out of the dog-cart, and shambled up the steps. He had an idiotic smile on his face, and spoke inarticulately.

'Get him to bed,' Dr. Wright said to Carruthers.

At last this was done with no little amount of scuffling, and after sundry interruptions on the Major's part, as when he

yelled out one instant, 'Murder!' and the next threw his arms round the doctor's neck, and hugged him violently, uttering some endearing exclamations.

'Where has he been?' asked Carruthers.

'First in Edinburgh, and for the last couple of days in Kilbarton, drinking hard, the brute!' he muttered aside through his teeth.

Kate hovered about her father, trying to soothe his restlessness.

'Give him this,' Dr. Wright said, coming up to her, for he knew she would not leave him,—'give him half of this,' holding up a phial, 'to-night; it may calm him—only half, remember. Keep the rest for to-morrow night.'

'Is he very ill this time?' asked Kate in an anxious tone.

'It's the worst attack I've seen him in!'

'But—he will—oh! he won—'t di—e? he will get over it, Dr. Wright?' said Kate with a look of agonized suspense.

'He may calm down to sleep after this,' holding up the phial, 'but possibly he will become more excited. Should that go on through to-night and to-morrow, give him the second half of this early to-morrow evening.'

'Oh yes! and that will save him?' eagerly.

'If anything can, it will. Should it not calm him, then, Miss Murrie, he will, I fear, succumb.'

One wild shriek burst from Kate, and falling on her knees beside the unconscious mass on the bed, she exclaimed, 'You shall *not* die, my beautiful one! I will hold you in my arms, and *keep* you there.'

'You had better leave him alone, he has fallen into a doze,' said Dr. Wright; 'you will have work enough when he comes to a bit. And take the watching by turns,' he added kindly as he bade Kate good-night.

'What a determined and devoted creature she is!' he said to Carruthers as she 'lighted him down the stair.'

'Oh, she'd die for him, she's that fond o' him!'

'Well, keep a look-out after her, and don't let her sacrifice herself for such a selfish animal,' said the doctor as he tucked himself into the dog-cart, and throwing the reins to his man, lighted his cigar, and presently disappeared in the darkness.

'He's home?' said Alice next morning to Kate, who, pale and worn, entered the dining-room at a late hour to prepare the breakfast.

'Father? Yes.'

'Ill?'

'Very.'

'*Miserabile.* Same old scenes over again. How long is this wretchedness to last? And what a horrible morning it is! Our room shook last night with the wind; and what with the knocking and scuffling, it was something awful.'

'The children didn't hear?' asked Kate, the desire of whose heart it is to save her father from degradation in the eyes of his family and the public.

'Didn't they just!' said Alice; 'I could hardly control Flo at all; she wanted to fly to you. How is he?' in a cold tone.

'Better; but, girls, he must be kept very quiet all day. Dr.

Wright says to-night will be a crisis,' and she quivered with emotion.

At this moment Miss Ellerslie was ushered into the room by Grizzel. She had promised to spend the whole day with Kate, and to have a long, quiet time together, while the young people were spending their Saturday holiday at the Hall.

'How will you manage to get over in such a storm?' asked Gerty, shaking hands all round. 'I would have kept the brougham for you, but Papa has to attend a county meeting at Kilbarton, and it has to take him.'

The rain battered against the window as she spoke, and the wind shook the crazy casement.

'In the dog-cart!' Alice exclaimed.

'The dog-cart! Gussy and Flo will be'—

'Oh, we're not going to be bothered with *them*,' interrupted Alice; 'one must have a free day now and then. We'll just say to Lady Morell that we couldn't bring them out in such a day.'

'And she'll say,' struck in May, throwing herself into her ladyship's attitude, and mimicking her voice, '"Sweet lambs! angelic lambs! ah, the elements are too severe for their fragile, innocent limbs," and tell us what Sir John used to say to her about exposing herself to a shower—a sunny shower, perhaps. My word, some people are well cared for, while others may drift or die, and nobody cares.'

Kate, dismayed at the unexpected state of matters in which Miss Ellerslie found her, knowing what a day of ceaseless watching and anxiety was before her, was stung too with the cool indifference of the twins in leaving the children—in addition

to the brunt of every other thing—on her tired heart and shoulders. She did not, however, speak, and the whole household, with the exception of Carruthers, who was left to watch the 'patient,' being assembled, they seated themselves at the breakfast table. The boys were in high spirits; they had slept through storm and scuffle, and, bright and rosy, talked with delight over the hopes of the holiday at the Hall.

'Mr. Bruce said we were to have the ponies to-day,' exclaimed Dick, 'but this awful wind and rain will put an end to that.'

'Oh! but we'll have billiards in the house,' said Frank.

'And there's the gold-fish to feed, and the pups to play with, and oh! lots of things,' struck in Charlie and Ned.

'Why can't *I* go?' whined Gussy.

'Because you—'re such a—a baby,' answered Alice.

'It's not fair,' he retorted.

'No matter, you're not going,' said May; 'so be quiet.'

The twins were 'got up' in their best—not much to boast of after all; but their neat, clean dresses, and bright eyes and shining hair, over which, by the way, they spent a great deal of time, were a pleasant picture.

They all sat down, and breakfast went on. It was nearly over, when suddenly the door burst open, and Major Murrie, in his waterproof, and holding a large umbrella over his head, entered! Advancing, with a staggering gait, to the table, he took hold of one end of the table-cloth, and with a great jerk pulled it towards him, while tea-pot, and porridge plates, hot water and milk jugs, cups and plates, rolled helter-skelter over each other, and fell with a crash upon the floor. Every one

rose, but no one spoke or had presence of mind to avert the catastrophe.

'Y—ou were all bl—ack-balling me be—hind m—y face —a—nd y—ou're all drin—k—drinking a—t my ex—pense,' and he glared round. 'Go, ev—ery on—e of you, abo—a—bout your business.'

In the twinkling of an eye the room was cleared. Too glad to get out of his way, the children slunk off, followed by Gertrude, and the father was left alone with Kate.

'Father,' was all she could utter as she went up to him and laid her trembling hand on his arm.

'Ah, there they are again!' he screamed, cowering at sight of some imaginary spirits; 'come away, Kate, they'll have me! Ah—look—look!' pointing to a corner of the room. 'Come! quick, quick!' and he dragged her from the room.

She was used to this, and went. Soon the effects of the house-quake passed off, and she could see from the drawing-room window the rickety dog-cart being filled, the twins muffled up in old rusty waterproofs and holding on their hats, and the boys patting Puck, who, with his one eye and three soundish legs, was to hobble along with his cargo to the Hall. Dick acted as charioteer, while Frank was ready to jump down to take a stone out of Puck's shoe, or try to avert any stumble that might threaten. There was a subdued, almost sad look over the young faces as, glancing at the window where they believed their father to be, they drove off; but Kate knew how soon their spirits would rise when away from their depressing home influences and amid cheerful scenes.

'Kate! Kate!' her father suddenly cried,—he had been walking up and down the room with his umbrella up, picking his steps as if on dangerous, or at least dirty ground,—'Kate, the roof's falling! Mercy! the demons will get at me after all;' and with a terribly scared look, he dragged her down, and squatting under the table, insisted on her sitting or crouching beside him there. 'Don't go,' as after a protracted *séance* she attempted to rise. 'They'll be at me; look there! look there!' and pulling the umbrella towards him, he tried vainly to put it up over his own head and Kate's.

Here Carruthers with Gertrude found them a couple of hours afterwards. Gertrude kept out of the way after this spectacle, and devoted herself to amusing Gussy and Flo, the kindest thing she could do, while Kate and Carruthers watched over their pitiful charge. This quieter mood, however, changed; as the day wore away, the craving for drink became terrible. Every pretext was used to soothe him, with but very indifferent success; all persuasions to make him eat failed; and as night came on Kate's anxiety increased tenfold. Suddenly, after a short lull, he started up and cried out in frenzied tones, his eyes rolling wildly, and his whole frame quivering, 'Give me brandy—give me it—one glass—just one glass, or I'll—fling myself from the tower; do you hear? There they are; don't you see them?' pointing to a corner of the room, and opening the door, he rushed out. Whether in his dazed state he ever would have reached the tower is doubtful. Any high window, however, would have answered the purpose as well, and Kate flew after him, promising to give him something. She thought

of her precious little bottle, and succeeded, at last, in forcing him to his room.

One more appeal she made as he quieted down somewhat: 'Father, the doctor said if you took brandy to-day when you are ill, you would perhaps—per—haps'—

'Get me—brandy,' peremptorily; 'I'm suffocated.'

'Kill yourself!' she at last gasped. She said it purposely, though with a bursting heart, for this idea was the one thing that kept him when in semi-rational moments from drinking to self-destruction. He seemed staggered, and rolled about the room, then sank on the ground, shading his eyes from the sight of the imaginary haunting demons who had followed on his track.

Leaving him apparently exhausted with Carruthers, Kate rushed to her room for the bottle, the contents of which were their last hope. If after taking it he slept, Dr. Wright had said he might waken on this side of time, if not—

It was dark, pitch dark, but by the light of the small lamp she carried, Kate found the bottle. Snatching it up, she examined it; it looked empty! She shook it and listened, but not a sound! It must be the wrong one! But no; this was it, and every drop was gone! Summoning Grizzel, she asked her in an icy tone what had happened to the bottle.

'Eh, mem, I was jist smellin' it, an' it fell oot o' my hand; the cork jamp oot, but it didna break, an' I hopet it wadna signifee. Eh, div ye hear the thunder, mem?' as a long clap came rumbling through the storm. 'What a maist awfu' nicht!'

'I must go for more,' was all Kate said, taking down her ulster and hat.

'Never, mem, in this storm!'

No reply. Hastily equipping herself, and snatching the bottle from Grizzel, Kate said, 'Put the children to bed; and if Miss Ellerslie or Carruthers ask for me, say I have gone to Hilton for this,' holding up the phial. 'I'll be back soon.'

It was useless to remonstrate,—'the young Missus was that determined, she would take her own way,'—and Kate started.

Under that cold exterior, passions not less angry than the fierce winds which blew and shook her slight frame raged. But a great human love nerved her to brave the stormy elements. She knew a short cut across the hills, which would bring her out close to Johnnie Cramm's door, and she struck at once into that. It was pitch dark; rain and sleet beat pitilessly upon her as she breasted the open hill-side. 'A God of love!' she kept muttering, as she stumbled up, 'how can people say that? they don't believe it!'

'Battle and murder,
Tempest and thunder,
Anguish and pain,
Dying and slain,
Anger and strife,
Such is our life.'

'Not the life a God of love would send any poor creature into!' Kate, the current of whose thoughts was always running on these subjects, had, almost unconsciously, to back up her rebellious views by reiterating them; and there hovered round her a good angel, who, at certain seasons, went down into the deadly pool of her heart and troubled its waters,

sending drops of healing through her unbelieving soul. He was at his blessed work to-night.

Up the steep, lonesome way she scrambled, drenched by the deluge of black rain, and battered by the driving wind. Several times she fell, cutting her hands and feet against big, sharp stones, but only to rise and clamber on, bleeding and bruised. For a time it seemed as if for every step she advanced she was driven two back, but after a long and terrible struggle she gained the highest point. Here the fury of the storm burst over her; the blind forces of Nature seemed arrayed against her; and the thunder, which had been rumbling in the valleys, rolled nearer and nearer. Gasping, terrified, it seemed as if she must yield; but no, her father's life depended on her reaching the village, and lifting her clenched hand, she shook it in the darkness, and vowed to accomplish her object in spite of tempest or fiends. In her rage the little bottle fell out of her trembling hand! In an agony she groped about for it, but in the blackness all around, her search was vain.

After all, her father must die. She knew nothing of the nature of the precious drug; and the bottle, on which the prescription was marked, was lost! Down she sank, dripping and desolate, amid the darkness and driving sleet, on the sodden ground. It was an awful moment, this utter aloneness on the grim hill-top! 'Oh that I might die!' she began, as she so often did, to murmur, when a terrific crash of thunder, nearer than it had yet been, made the word fade upon her lips, and for the first time in her life she felt consciously afraid to die.

'How easily I might be struck by the lightning, and then

all would be—over!' Nay, in her heart of hearts she felt assured it would not, and she shook with fear. 'The thunder is close to me; a—nd—yes—yes—I deserve to be struck down,' as a rush of sinful memories rose to mind. 'An—d father will die—too!' and his life stood out next in characters of lurid shame. She closed her eyes, believing that the next flash would answer with vengeance the impious prayer of her heart. But a momentary calm stole over her spirit, the sweet vision of her mother's dear face rose before her, and a prayer she had learned long years ago at that parent's knee spoke within her, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee.' Raising herself, she fell upon her knees, and with clasped hands, in the energy of despair, she cried, 'God—Thou Bible-God—my mother's God—if Thou art near, help *me;* oh, help *me* in *my* trouble!' Still trembling, she opened her eyes, wondering what would happen. Suddenly a vivid flash lighted up the hill-top; it revealed something shining at her side, and, while the awful thunder broke over her head, she stooped, and her hand touched, then grasped, the precious phial! The light was deadly that had discovered it to her. It had not, however, struck her dead; nay, it had answered her cry for help, it had 'delivered' her. Fresh hope pulsed through her heart, and starting to her feet, she determined to push on. She felt sure the ground was beginning to descend. During a lull in the wind, she caught sight of the distant glimmer of lights in the village below; they seemed to her strained eyes to be waving to her—beckoning her on. And on she went, with many a slip and tumble, still making way; by and by the storm, which

had raged so steadily, became more fitful, until at last, with stained garments, and dripping hair, and a terrified, scared look in her large grey eyes, she stood at Johnnie Cramm's counter and thrust the bottle into his hand.

Johnnie, who was very superstitious, started as if she had been a ghost; whereupon she cried out, 'Fill this, Mr. Cramm, do you hear? oh, be quick! be quick!'

Reassured that his customer was flesh and blood, although so spectral-like, Johnnie filled the bottle, making, as he proceeded, some hospitable offers of tea, or a fire to dry herself at. But no word fell from Kate's lips; she watched his slow movements with feverish haste, and snatching the bottle from his hand, as he was preparing leisurely to 'wrap it up,' she fled from the shop out into the darkness, to meet over again the awful scenes through which she had just passed. But not so. The wind was at her back, and drove her along, and darting through the village, she flew up the hill-side. The lashing rain was ceasing, or falling only in large drops, and the heavy thunder-clouds were parting. As she reached the hill-top, the moon struggled through the sky-rifts, casting a fitful but blessed light across her path, while a star, over which no cloud drifted, kept its friendly twinkle in her eye, and guided her across the dripping heather and the sodden plain—home. Gliding in at the back-door, her ear caught sound of her father's voice, now groaning, now shrieking against his 'spirit' (forgive, reader, the *double entendre*) foes, and calling to her to come and save him.

In a moment she was by his side, as calm as if she had

only come down-stairs, and holding to his lips the draught which it had nearly cost her her life to get, she had the satisfaction of seeing him drink it off. It worked like a charm; gradually the restlessness and excitement calmed down, and at last he fell asleep. At the same moment Kate dropped unconscious into Gertrude's arms.

END OF VOL. I.

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