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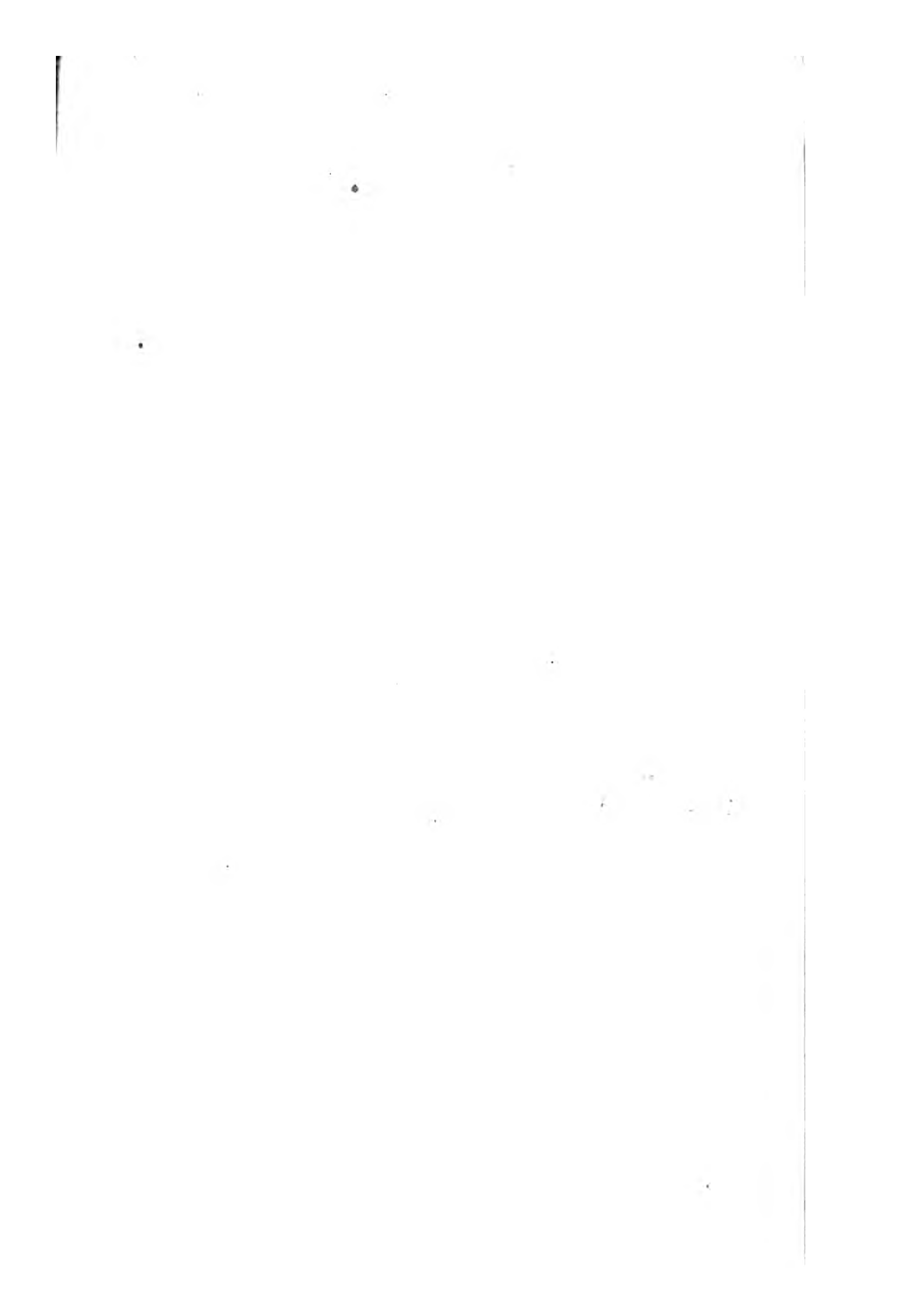


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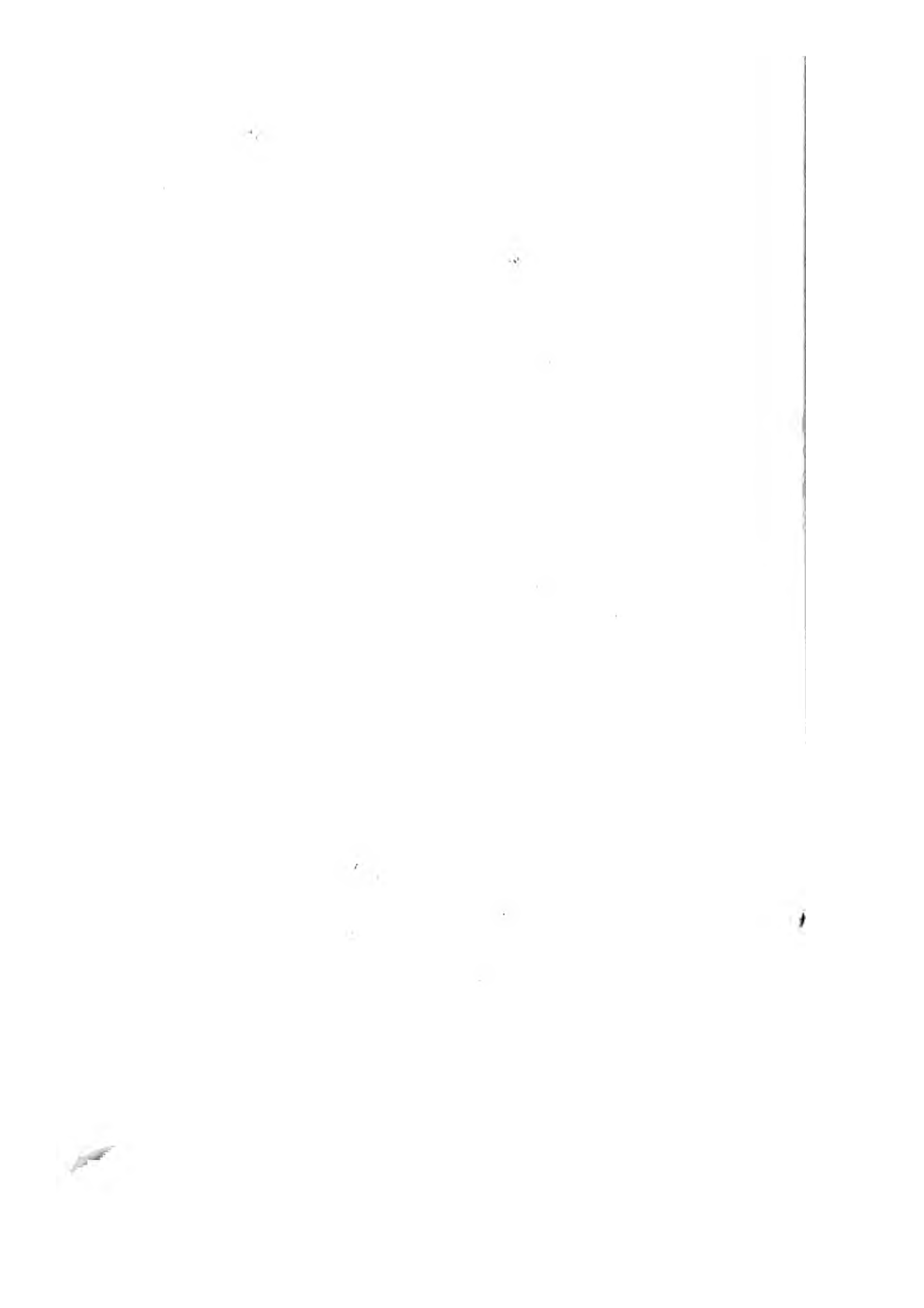




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THE INCUMBENT OF AXHILL.



THE INCUMBENT OF AXHILL.

A SEQUEL TO THE
"CHORISTER BROTHERS."

"ALAS, I HAVE GRIEVED SO, I'M HARD TO LOVE."
E. B. BROWNING.



LONDON :
J. MASTERS AND CO., 78, NEW BOND STREET.
MDCCLXXV.

251. c. 223.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY J. MASTERS AND CO.,
ALBION BUILDINGS, BARTHOLOMEW CLOSE, E.C.



THE INCUMBENT OF AXHILL.

CHAPTER I.

“ Whom poor men’s eyes and hearts consent to bless.”

KEBLE.

FOUR o’clock in the afternoon of a short dark January day, and the lamps were already glimmering in the great dreary station of a manufacturing town in one of the midland counties. The day mail from London, having deposited its quota of passengers on the platform, was steaming out again in continuation of its northern course ; and the Reverend Ambrose Hayward, who, with his mother and sister and all their little worldly goods, had just landed from the train, looked as though he felt himself something of a fish out of water.

Perhaps it was not altogether to be wondered at. He had been born in London, and spent his life there hitherto : his early manhood as a City clerk, till unexpectedly enabled to carry out his original strong wish of reading for Holy Orders. Ordained at twenty-seven, he had worked for six years as curate No. 4 of a large well-organised London parish ; and now for the first time in his life he was appointed to a living in the country.

It was through the same uncle who had furnished

him with the means of finishing his education that he had received this appointment ; his uncle having been known to and officially connected with the patron of the living, and having interested himself in his nephew's favour on the death of the old incumbent. He did not however live to see the fruits of his success. Within the six months which intervened between Ambrose Hayward's appointment and his induction, his uncle died suddenly : and, dying rich and childless, (his wife had pre-deceased him) left a considerable sum of money to his only sister and her children.

Ambrose Hayward was considered a very lucky fellow by all his acquaintance, especially those who remembered the time when the poor organist's widow was considerably straitened to make both ends meet. He could not himself be insensible to his good fortune, nor was he ungrateful for it ; but that evening, as he stood on the threshold as it were of his new life, feeling a stranger to every one and every one strange to him, he might be excused for wishing himself back in his London harness once more.

It was not the duty from which he shrank. He was an earnest and energetic worker, and the poor loved him ; but he was not a man easily to form new friendships, or to become a "popular minister" with the better classes. He was too silent, too blunt, too uncompromising. At twenty he had been a shy awkward reserved youth, painfully conscious of his own defects ; at thirty-three he was little changed, except that much of the shyness and self-consciousness was rubbed off, or to speak more truly, was lost in the single-hearted desire to fulfil his duties in the sight of GOD, and to think of others rather than himself. Very unselfish people are not often self-conscious. Kindness and warmth of heart and feeling he did not lack, though so undemonstrative outwardly that few gave him the credit for them which he really deserved.

Having given this retrospective glance at his history

for the benefit of those who are unacquainted with it, let us take a look into his church next morning. He had only arrived at his new home on Saturday night, so he had to face his difficulties, whatever they might be, at once.

The church of S. Martin, Axhill, was a fine old building, possessing much real architectural beauty; but just at present it stood under the disadvantage of having been partially restored while in cold and careless hands. Whitewash and unsightly pews and galleries had been removed; and the body of the church, with substantial oaken seats, looked well enough, but the chancel end was meagre. Behind the Altar by way of reredos were stone tablets with the Commandments, the Creed, and the LORD'S Prayer, painted in a flaring style of illumination. Some of the windows were really good and of old glass, while others had been filled in here and there according to the individual taste of the donors, and had a raw patchwork effect.

There were good chancel stalls, but both sides were appropriated—one by a private family, the other by a mixed body of singers. The new incumbent felt strange as he passed alone into the railed-off reading-desk that morning. It was as well for him that he was outwardly at least cool and composed, for he had to stand the critical stare of some sixty pairs of eyes, all more or less unblushingly turned upon him. The congregation of S. Martin's generally were not overburdened with reverence either towards their church or the ministers thereof.

What did the flock see in their new shepherd? Only a tall, thin, black-haired, black-bearded man, with a pale grave face, and a most unobtrusive though devout and earnest manner. Some of them, among whom the distantly known name of his London parish was as a byword, were on the look-out for Ritualism and Popery; but the sharpest critic could find nothing more alarming than that he turned to the east at the

Creed, and omitted a prayer before the sermon ; and amongst the temporary occupiers of his place, one at least had done this before, and no harm had come of it. But for their further opinions and ideas respecting Ambrose Hayward, at least those of such of his parishioners as have to do with our story, we must turn to another chapter.

CHAPTER II.

“ Then the world were not so bitter
But a smile could make it sweet.”

TENNYSON.

SUNNYWOOD was one of the nicest and prettiest residences in the village of Axhill. It stood in grounds of its own, a little off the high road, and was fenced in by a belt of trees, which formed a pleasant shelter from the winds of winter. The house itself was a moderate-sized one facing south, and with its bright cheerful aspect was quite worthy of its name.

The owner of the place was the widow of an officer in the army, of the name of Grey. At the time of which we speak Mrs. Grey's husband had been dead many years, and very soon after his death she had bought the little property of Sunnywood, and had lived there ever since with her son and daughter—the former now a schoolboy of fifteen. The latter, who was nearly eighteen and had done with the schoolroom, was her mother's inseparable companion and stay.

The winter sun was shining brightly into Mrs. Grey's drawing-room as she sat there on the morning after the new incumbent's first Sunday in Axhill church, her daughter Laura beside her, bending over a small sewing machine. Mrs. Grey was a lady of middle age, rather small stature, and a comfortable motherly-looking de-

gree of stoutness which did not in the least interfere with her activity. Her face was still handsome, though with lines here and there which spoke of past sorrow or anxiety. She was dressed in sober blacks and violets, as became a widow of long standing. Her daughter needed only a passing glance to be pronounced a remarkably pretty girl. Taller in stature and slighter in build than her mother, neither decidedly fair nor dark, but inclining to the latter colouring, with soft brown hair and delicately pencilled, though decidedly marked arched eyebrows, which gave a somewhat dreamy expression to her clear blue-grey eyes. The rest of her features were well formed, and her movements graceful, as she made the very substantial work on which she was employed fly under her hands with the deftness of an accomplished machiniste, until her mother went up and laid a hand on her shoulder.

“When you come to what you call a ‘full stop,’ Laura, we will put on our bonnets and make this call at once, for it is so fine that some one is sure to stop us if we don’t.”

“Ready, mamma!” said Laura, with pleasant alacrity, preparing to put by her work: starting almost immediately after with the exclamation, “Positively there *is* a ring at the bell, just as you said, mamma!”

“The Miss Harts,” was the announcement of the maid in a few moments, and there entered two maiden ladies—sisters, but widely separated in age, inasmuch as one was the eldest, the other the youngest of a once large family, now all dispersed or deceased. The elder sister was about fifty, and looked even older, from her general appearance of delicate health: the younger could not have been far from forty, but was a brisk sharp little woman, dressed, though simply and inexpensively, with a certain affectation of youthfulness. Both greeted Mrs. Grey and her daughter warmly, bestowing a kiss on the latter; and after a few common-places had passed, both together began eagerly:

"Oh! dear Mrs. Grey, what *do* you think of our new minister? We have been quite anxious to know your opinion. Rather a contrast to his predecessor, is he not? Is he likely to be an acquisition?"

"It is rather soon to form an opinion, I think," said Mrs. Grey; "but on the whole I should say my impression was favourable."

"Was it? Oh, I am so glad," said both ladies, impulsively; and Miss Hart added, "Nothing particularly striking, at any rate: rather a monotonous style, didn't you think?"

"Oh! that's because he's used to intoning," said Miss Matilda, the younger sister, "Don't you know how badly we always thought Mr. Wylde read when he took the duty? It's just that. I hope he won't introduce it here, I must say. Don't you, Mrs. Grey?"

"What, intoning? He would require to get up a choir first."

"And that he won't find very easy here," said Miss Matilda, rather maliciously. "However, we *might* be better in the way of singing."

"I thought he gave a very good plain sermon," said Mrs. Grey.

"Very plain," said Miss Hart, pointedly. "Very good for the poor people."

"Have you made acquaintance with his family yet? We were going to call to-day," said Miss Matilda; "at least, you thought of it, Annette."

"Yes. But, of course, dear Mrs. Grey, you have not seen them? There is a sister, too; I wonder if she is agreeable. I didn't think very much of what I saw of her in church: no beauty, at any rate."

"Neither is he," said Laura, who till now had not taken part in the discussion.

"H'm, I don't know that you could call him bad-looking," Miss Hart prosed on, in her rather sleepy tones. "Nice height, dark hair, nice dark beard—

though I don't know that I quite like the fashion of clergymen wearing beards. I dare say, though, he wears it for his chest; many do. I should fear he was not strong."

"He is rather lugubrious-looking," said her sister. "As if he might have had some disappointment—crossed in love, perhaps."

These interesting speculations were interrupted by the servant bringing in a card. Mrs. Grey held it up for her friends to see, and the eyes of the ladies met with rather a conscious smile, for the name on the card was "Reverend Ambrose Hayward."

The maid re-opened the door, and in he walked. It was perhaps rather a formidable assemblage of ladies for a stranger to face, even though he did not know they had just been so freely discussing him; and he felt that Miss Matilda Hart's sharp black eyes took him in at once—even to the cut of his coat and the style of his broad-brimmed wideawake. He shook hands with them all, and then sat down on a chair with his hat on his knees, looking straight before him, without saying a word.

Mrs. Grey opened the conversation by inquiring after Mrs. Hayward.

"She is quite well, thank you; rather tired."

"I hope she likes her new house?"

"Yes; I think she will like it. It is rather an uprooting for her, leaving London now after living there so many years."

"I dare say your sister likes the change."

"Oh, yes; *she's* delighted with the country—especially the garden. She says we shall not have to buy or beg flowers for the church now. I fancy the church looks as if it didn't very often get any," with a little laugh.

"What, decorations?" Miss Hart broke in. "Ah, Mr. Hayward, I fear you find us sadly behind the times in such things. Poor dear Mr. Smedley—your

predecessor, you know—he did not care about that kind of thing. Though at Christmas you made some very pretty wreaths, Matilda dear, and no one objected.”

“They have beautiful decorations at Mr. Wylde’s church, in the town,” said Mrs. Grey; “at Easter especially.”

“Very much overdone, mamma,” put in Laura; “the chancel was like a greenhouse, exactly.”

“I suppose you haven’t seen many of your poorer parishioners yet, Mr. Hayward,” said Miss Hart.

“I believe I have seen pretty nearly all, this forenoon.”

“What! been round the parish already? That is energetic,” and both sisters laughed. “You must be a pretty good walker.”

“It is not a very long round,” said the clergyman. “And after London, where you find five or six families under one roof, the visiting seems very soon over.”

“Ah, yes; you come from a very poor parish, I believe?”

“And a very fine church, is it not?” said Mrs. Grey.

For once the grave impassive face broke into a very pleasant smile. “*We* think it perfect. But there are differences of opinion.”

“The incumbent holds rather extreme views, does he not?” Miss Matilda asked.

“Oh, no; he is quite an old-fashioned parish priest now-a-days.”

“Matilda, dear, I think we ought to wish our friends good-bye,” said Miss Hart rising. Matilda looked as if she would have very much liked to cross-question her new pastor a little longer, but was obliged to follow her sister’s lead.

When they were gone, Mr. Hayward addressed himself to Mrs. Grey. “I believe you take great interest in the poor; at least, I have heard your name from

many lips this morning. I was thinking you would be able to give me some useful information about my new charges."

"Indeed, Mr. Hayward, you give me more credit than I deserve. Having lived here so long, it would be strange if I did not know them all, and interest myself in them. My rheumatism often prevents my going amongst them as I would wish."

"There are not many resident gentry here."

"No, not many. And many of the occupiers of these smart villas are dissenters, which is greatly against the parish."

"There appear to be very few communicants by what I can learn, for the number of the population."

"Sadly few. We have been under a great disadvantage here with such infrequent celebrations—only three a year."

"Yes; terrible! I intend beginning with monthly celebration at once, increasing to fortnightly and weekly as soon as practicable. People require to be worked up to it gradually."

"Have you made acquaintance with your churchwardens yet?"

"Yes; at least with Mr. Bayliss. He seems a straightforward sort of man."

"I think he is—a very well-meaning one, but he is rather old-fashioned in his notions. He would be difficult to lead I am afraid, except with great care."

"Will the other one give any trouble, do you think?"

"Mr. Mortlock? No; I think he is one of the few people here who have some idea of Churchmanship. And he is so young, too; he would be quite open to influence."

"Do you take any interest in parish work, Miss Grey?" said Mr. Hayward, for the first time addressing Laura.

"Oh, I don't know," she was beginning, but her mother answered for her,—“Laura has been used to

visit the poor with me—sometimes I fear instead of me—and to take a class at the Sunday school. She will be happy to make herself of use in any way you may wish her.”

“ Thank you. That is the first offer of help I have had to-day. I have not spoken to the Miss Harts, but I believe they visit the school?”

“ Yes; Miss Hart is too great an invalid to do much, but Miss Matilda is very energetic. She always attends the Sunday school.”

“ We are used to so many district visitors and school helpers in London, that one would feel quite lost without some.”

“ The two Miss Baylisses take a Sunday class, don't they, Laura?” said Mrs. Grey.

“ Yes, mamma, always, and Miss Smith and Miss Whitehead. I think for the number of children, we have plenty of teachers.”

“ I hope I may reckon you one, Miss Grey,” said the clergyman.

Laura lifted up her eyes and met his, and their glance struck Ambrose Hayward between the joints of the harness of his cold exterior. Not because they were fine eyes, or belonged to an otherwise pretty and pleasing face; but because, by one of those unaccountable freaks of likeness often to be seen between total strangers, they reminded him of the only eyes that had looked up to him with undivided love, and confidence, and sympathy, till they were closed in death—those of his one brother, whom he had so loved, and so early lost.

Not that Laura Grey's eyes expressed anything like confidence or sympathy. There was a look more like mischievous defiance in them just then, as she answered in her quiet little voice that often seemed to have a touch of satire in it, “ I shall be very glad to go on doing as I have done hitherto, if I may.”

Then Mr. Hayward stood up abruptly to take leave. Mrs. Grey said she had intended calling on Mrs. Hay-

ward that day, but as it was now somewhat late—the days were so short—she would hope to do so to-morrow; and the visitor departed. The door had scarcely closed behind him before Laura seized upon her mother with an impatient interrogatory,—

“ Well, mamma?”

“ Well, Laura?”

“ What do you think of him, mamma?”

“ What do *you* think of him, Laura? I suppose your opinion is already formed.”

“ I wish to know yours,” said Laura, with the playful imperiousness she often, though always perfectly respectful, assumed towards her mother.

“ Well, as I told Miss Hart, it is early to form an opinion. I think he looks like a *working* man, which is what we want. What do you say?”

“ I think him very presuming, and very disagreeable!”

“ Presuming, my dear! poor man, that is the last thing I should say of him.”

“ Well, I call it presuming to go on talking as if nothing had ever been done before he came, and we were all infidels and heathens, and wanted to be taught the first principles of religion. That horrid grin he gave, too, with that hint about the flowers—and it's very evident that it's his mouth, not his chest, that he wears that beard and moustache for. He would be just like ‘ Sir Macklin’ in the Bab Ballads, without it. Did you ever see such a row of teeth?”

“ Laura, seriously, I don't like that sarcastic way of talking about a clergyman.”

“ Well, I won't say that then, mamma, but you'll agree with Matilda that he *is* lugubrious-looking. Don't you like her idea—‘ crossed in love?’ Perhaps she thinks she's got a chance.”

“ For shame, Laura.”

“ I'm very angry with you for what you said about me, mamma. I should hope I *might* go on teaching

my poor little Sunday class, which dear old Mr. Smedley wished me to do, without *his* leave."

"At least remember he stands in Mr. Smedley's place."

"Yes, worse luck! That's what makes it so horrible, mamma."

"Laura, do you know what you did when papa's old servant went away after we came here, and Matthew came in his place?"

"What?"

"The first time Matthew came in to prayers, you never took your eyes off him, but sat frowning and glowering at him the whole time, just because it was a new face in the place of your old friend."

"Very wise of me," said Laura.

"Wise at three years old, I dare say; but it is hardly wise at eighteen to take a violent dislike to a stranger who may be quite unworthy of it, just because he is come in an old friend's place. Of course, I know you couldn't but be attached to poor Mr. Smedley, whom you remembered so long, and who was always kind to you; but with all due respect to him, my dear, you can't deny that he took things rather too easily."

"I *hate* change," said Laura emphatically.

"So do I, but there may be changes for the better as well as the worse. Mr. Hayward comes from a very well organized parish indeed, and naturally he cannot think much of the state of things here. If he sets to work to mend them honestly and judiciously, we must be careful not to put discouragement in his way. There will be only too few to help him, I fear; there is so little Churchmanship here," and Mrs. Grey sighed. She had been brought up to better things.

"Well, I still think him very presuming and very disagreeable," Laura wound up by repeating: "and if what you call good Churchmen are like him, I for one shall not admire them!"

CHAPTER III.

“ I rather woo the soothing art
Which only souls in sufferings tried
Bear to their suffering brethren’s side.”

KEBLE.

MRS. Grey and Laura fulfilled their intention of calling at the parsonage next day, and made the acquaintance of the new incumbent’s mother and sister. Mrs. Grey, always kind and sympathizing, took a liking at once to the gentle, ladylike widow, whom her many anxieties and heavy losses had aged before her time ; and the two, who had so far something in common, had a pleasant long chat. Laura was less successful with the daughter. Though really ten years her senior, Emily Hayward, from her shy, retiring manner, seemed, if anything, younger ; and Laura, though having a good deal of self-possession, found her very difficult to get on with, and was glad when the visit was over.

They did not happen to meet the new clergyman again that week. Spite of her slighting opinion of him, it was with some secret nervousness that Laura looked forward to the Sunday school under his auspices, for it had not assembled on the first Sunday after his arrival. She was always accustomed to walk alone to the school, which was near their house, joining her mother afterwards between it and the church. Perhaps she may have been a little later in starting, for some reason or other, that morning ; however it was, she found herself going into the school after Miss Whitehead, another teacher, the daughter of a tradesman, and the rest were all assembled, each teacher with her class before her. Ambrose Hayward stood beside the master’s desk, dressed in his long black cassock—which to Laura’s eyes, used to the jovial

secular presence of "dear old Mr. Smedley," had something mysterious and Romish-looking. She slipped into her place without catching his eye or speaking to any one, and the schoolmaster calling for silence, the whole assemblage knelt for prayers.

The old-established custom at Axhill Sunday school was to give the unfortunate children, who were already going to spend at least three weary hours in church, the greater portion of the morning service, before hearing the Sunday tasks. To-day, however, they were surprised by the new parson only reading two or three short collects, followed by the LORD'S Prayer, in a tuneful monotone which the children were not slow to take up. Then the tasks were commenced.

Laura found it very difficult to give her ears and attention to the stammering utterances of her little scholars, the third class girls, for she could not help wanting to hear what Mr. Hayward was saying to his class of boys. It was a very good plain practical question-and-answer lesson on the collect for the day, and she could not help thinking that it would be much more profitable for all to listen to it than to the teaching of the others.

When the school broke up and she with the rest left for church, Miss Matilda Hart joined company with her, talking fast and eagerly.

"What a capital lesson he gave, did he not, dear? I was so glad I happened to be next him, for I shut up shop altogether, and told my boys to listen to Mr. Hayward. I am sure it would have been quite presumptuous to have gone on teaching. I hope he will begin the catechizing in church soon!" and as Laura did not immediately answer, the talkative little woman went on, "What did you think of the dress? something quite new—it made the children all stare at any rate, and some of the big children too. Do you know, I don't think the Baylisses were quite comfortable—I saw them look and whisper when they came in, and

Bessie Bayliss quite coloured up. I hope he won't introduce any *other* vestments, for I'm sure Mr. Bayliss will be set against him if he does. Oh! how do you do, dear Mrs. Grey?" as that lady here joined them, much to Laura's satisfaction; "we have had a most delightful school this morning, as I was saying to dear Laura," &c., &c., &c., and she proceeded to give Mrs. Grey a repetition of her sentiments, almost up to the church porch.

It would take too long to mention in detail the various practices which Ambrose Hayward found in need of reformation, in his church and parish: many more, and more important, than in the conduct of the Sunday school. One of his earliest reforms, he felt, must be directed against the singing. The mode in which he found the church music conducted was as follows. The organ was in possession of a female professor of music, attached to a school just out of the nearest town. Her daily duties prevented her giving any time in the week to choir practice, even had she wished it; but her Sundays being at her own disposal she bestowed them for a very small remuneration on the congregation of S. Martin's. About an hour before morning service began she was in the habit of meeting, in the church, a mixed class consisting of a handful of school children (boys and girls) and a sprinkling of "young ladies" past schooling, with one or two men of different ages and indifferent musical talent. She spent the spare time in instructing them in such burlesques of Church song as she thought meet, interspersed with rehearsals of her own voluntaries, which were chosen by way of advertisement of her skill and execution as a pianist. In this worthy lady was vested the absolute right of choosing not only the tunes but the hymns which were sung to them. Ambrose was positively alarmed the first Sunday after his arrival, when, after a loud knock at the vestry door, Miss Simpson presented herself, dressed in a high hat and

feathers, and other fashionable attire to match, laid a paper with the numbers of certain hymns before him with official dignity, and retired with a sweeping professional curtsey.

Of course this was a state of things that the new incumbent, fresh from the splendid choir and full Gregorian service of his old home, could never allow to continue. He knew it would be difficult to reform it. To train and properly seat any choir, let alone a surpliced one, would be a work of time and care—especially as though the “singers” did occupy the north side of the chancel already, the south was in full possession of the Bayliss family—and Mr. Bayliss, the churchwarden, was likely to be a ticklish person to deal with.

He determined however to begin by forming weekly evening classes of men and boys, for the practice of an improved style of singing; and therefore made preliminary inquiries among the young men of the parish, and received the assent of some, and also of some members of the present choir, to join them. The next step was to secure the co-operation of the organist; and accordingly he stopped her, on the first Sunday after his plans were proposed, as she was sailing out of the church porch in all her finery.

“I wish to speak a few words to you, Miss Simpson.”

“And I was wishing to have a few words with *you*, sir,” said Miss Simpson, in rather an ominous tone of voice.

He beckoned her towards the outer door of the vestry; into which she swept before him, and then began:

“I am given to understand, Mr. Hayward, that you have been making arrangements with some of my singers, to attend week-day classes for the practice of Church music.”

“I have been making inquiries preliminary to forming regular classes,” answered the clergyman.

“Allow me to say that I consider it a most extraordinary proceeding, without first consulting the organist.”

“I have of course gone no further without doing so. I wished to speak to you on the subject to-day, to ascertain whether you would be able and willing to attend the classes when formed, and what day and hour would be most convenient.”

“Then you may save yourself the trouble,” said Miss Simpson, drawing herself up with irate dignity. “With my numerous and important engagements during the week, I should be most unwilling to devote any part of it to the instruction of the lower classes—even had the proposal been made to me in a proper manner. As it is, I consider that I have been insulted—positively insulted, sir!”

“Miss Simpson, pray allow me to explain—I assure you nothing was further from my intentions—”

“I wish for no explanations,” interrupted the enraged musician. “During the ten years I have conducted the music of this church, no clergyman has ever presumed to dictate to me, or to suggest that there was anything deficient in the singing—indeed I have been assured by many that it was above par—but I do not wish to take undue credit to myself. As things are now to be on an entirely different footing, and my opinion is counted for nothing, I beg to inform you that my connection with S. Martin’s ceases from this moment. You will no doubt easily supply my vacant place, if indeed it is not already filled without my knowledge,” and with that Miss Simpson flounced out of the narrow doorway, her *panier* rustling, her silk train sweeping, and her whole air so ridiculously dramatic that Ambrose, who like many grave people had a keen sense of the ludicrous, could hardly restrain a smile; especially at his own position, in being lectured by such a person in his own vestry. His second thought was, how to supply her place? He would

have liked a trained and regularly paid organist, but he was hardly prepared yet for the expense of this, and besides, some time must elapse before one could be secured. His only resource at present seemed to be in some member of the congregation undertaking the organ voluntarily.

On the following day, therefore, he sallied forth on a round of inquiry, combined with cottage visiting; but was met everywhere by disappointment. Some of those on whom he called appeared to have already heard Miss Simpson's side of the question, and to be quite set against the unfortunate clergyman. Others, and among these the two Miss Baylisses, the churchwarden's daughters, seemed to stand aloof from a kind of cautious feeling, rather than the nervousness which might be a natural excuse. And finally the Miss Harts, on whom he called last, were full of expressions of regret and interest &c., but Miss Hart's health never allowed of her taking any active work upon herself, and playing was not among Miss Matilda's accomplishments, otherwise she would only have been "too glad to assist," as she told Mr. Hayward. As to the young men of the parish, he could not hear of any one either able or willing to become a volunteer organist.

Wearied and disheartened he was returning home, wondering whether any amount of persuasion and practice would induce his shy sister to fill the post even temporarily—she had declared before, when he suggested it to her, that she was sure her fingers would not do it if her life depended upon it—when as he drew near the gate of Sunnywood, it struck him to consider whether Mrs. Grey might not be able to help him or at least to suggest some solution of his difficulty. Had not some one told him that Miss Grey was musical? Possibly she might play herself. At any rate he would call and ask her.

Hastening on in the direction of her house, he heard the sharp canter of a horse behind him, and looking

back saw, not the parish doctor, as from the sound he imagined it to be, but a lady, mounted on a spirited little animal, approaching, who proved to be no other than Miss Grey herself. Laura was passionately fond of riding, and as she was very fearless and independent, and the horse was an old friend, her mother allowed her to go about the village, or short distances, in this way by herself; for, as they kept but one horse, she would otherwise have been unable to enjoy the pleasure.

Ambrose, with whom to resolve was usually to act at once, brought her canter to a sudden check by walking in the horse's very path, rather to her surprise.

"Good afternoon, Miss Grey. I was just going to call at Mrs. Grey's. I have a request to make of you."

"Of me? what is it, Mr. Hayward?"

"Do you think you could play the church organ?"

"On Sundays? but I thought Miss Simpson—"

"Miss Simpson has failed us—can't stand being dictated to, and is affronted because I took the names of some prospective choristers without asking her first. I can't get any one else at present, and I thought, perhaps, as I understand you are musical, you might be able to help me."

"I think it would be rather—" fun, Laura was just going to say, but checked herself. "I mean I should rather like if I could do it well enough."

"If you will do it at all, we shall be very thankful. I intend forming class meetings for practice two nights in the week, at the school, but perhaps you wouldn't care to take the trouble of attending them?"

"I shouldn't mind. But I couldn't train the choir!"

"No, oh no," he answered smiling a little at the idea. "I think I can manage that part of it, if I get some one to play. Then I may reckon on you?"

"I must see what mamma says, Mr. Hayward, I don't think she would mind—oh, I beg your pardon!"

as the horse, impatient at being kept waiting so near home, faced suddenly round, causing him to dodge on one side to get out of the way. "Stand, Lassie, stand!"

"I mustn't keep you. If you will speak to Mrs. Grey I will call to-morrow to know your decision. Good afternoon."

"Good-bye," said Laura as, giving the rein to her steed, it went off at a bound. Arrived at home, she ran into the drawing-room in her habit.

"Mamma, Sir Macklin wants me to be his organist. I said I must ask you."

"His organist, Laura! When and where did he ask you?"

"Just now, out in the road. He walked right up under Lassie's nose, and I had to pull up dead in the middle of a canter. I shouldn't wonder if she was lame in both hind legs to-morrow!"

"Come, Laura, talk sense. What has happened to Miss Simpson?"

"Oh! he's quarrelled with her, or she with him, something about the practising. At any rate she's left him in the lurch, and he can't get any one else. Would you let me play?"

"Certainly, dear, if you think you can."

"He is going to have weekly night classes. He thought I shouldn't be able to take those, but I shouldn't mind. It would be great fun to hear Sir Macklin pitching into the boys, as Ninian would say."

"Laura, I won't have that nickname kept up."

"I'm very sorry, mamma, I cannot help always thinking of it, when I see him in that long coat. Those inimitable lines,

‘Sit down,’ said he, ‘and never mind
The pennies for the chairs you sit on,’

so exactly express too, his practical matter-of-fact way of putting things. I'm sure he was the original!"

“He doesn’t know what you are or he wouldn’t ask *you* to play his organ,” said Mrs. Grey, laughing in spite of herself. “One thing he is quite right in, and that is about the classes. You could never undertake that, alone; and I could never promise to go with you.”

“Oh no, mamma. But I didn’t know whether it would be different from going to the Sunday school as I do, alone.”

“My dear, there is a great difference between going to the Sunday school, with a number of other ladies, and going to these evening classes with only him and his men and boys. What would Miss Hart and people say if I allowed it?”

“Good gracious! yes, mamma, I never thought of that. I don’t think I’ll undertake any of it.”

“Nay, Laura, that is going to the other extreme. If you can make yourself useful by playing the church organ, I suppose you are well able to do it—and you ought to be very glad.”

So it was settled; and when Mr. Hayward called next day, at an earlier hour than was quite fashionable, in his anxiety about his organist, they had the answer ready. Laura would be very happy to play in church, but, as she could not promise to attend the classes regularly, it was better not to undertake them at all.

“That will not matter to us,” said Ambrose. “I think my sister can manage to play for the classes. But will you not want to practise, Miss Grey?”

“I suppose I may practise on the church organ?”

“Yes, certainly; only I must make one condition, that such practice is to be *for the Church service alone*, strictly confined to the music you are to play at the services. I know sometimes when young ladies get access to a church organ they look on it as a sort of plaything of their own—I am not saying that you would do this—but you see, I must have one rule for all.”

“ And I think you so perfectly right, Mr. Hayward,” said Laura’s mother.

Laura herself looked a little piqued. “ Of course I shall only play the chants and hymns you tell me.”

“ And voluntaries,” he said.

“ Oh, I don’t suppose I can play voluntaries, at least not like Miss Simpson.”

“ No, I hope not,” he said smiling. “ Hers were the most awful things I ever heard, but you must give us something better.”

It was further settled that Laura, with her mother, should meet Mr. Hayward at the school next day, when he wished to have a trial of the boys’ voices, and to go through some new music; and this arranged, he took leave.

That same afternoon Laura, having finished a piece of work which had occupied her hands and her sewing machine for some time past, set off to convey it to the destined recipient. This was a young girl who had been for a short time in Mrs. Grey’s service, but had left in bad health, and gone home to die of decline, they feared. Poor Lucy Willis’s home was not altogether a happy one. Her father was a drinking, ne’er-do-weel sort of character; her mother, once a lax nominal Churchwoman, had been “ converted” by the Dissenters and was now a canting Methodist—not an unkindly, but a comfortless, slatternly sort of mother. Lucy had been a Sunday scholar, and Mrs. Grey and Laura had wished her to prepare for Confirmation; but her illness had put a stop to this, as there seemed little chance of her ever leaving her sick room again.

Laura found her, as usual, in her bed-chair—her breathing often hindered her from lying down—but she brightened up at the sight of her visitor, and Laura was much gratified by her keenly expressed delight at the beautifully stitched and bound flannel jacket which was displayed to the admiring eyes of both mother and daughter. After it had been tried on and duly

praised and laid by carefully, Mrs. Willis presently remarked :

“ Beautiful minister they’ve got now, miss.”

Laura, thinking some new importation to the chapel was intended, did not make much response till Lucy said: “ It’s the new Church minister, mother means, miss.”

“ Oh ! Mr. Hayward. Has he been to see you, Lucy ?”

“ Ay, ’tis Mr. ’Aywood they calls him,” said Mrs. Willis. “ He’ve been to see her three times, and to be sure, I never see any one so kind, and haffable, and mindful-like, about a sick person—just like a mother, he be.”

“ He seemed to know just when I was tired,” said poor Lucy. “ Some of the other ministers—they’re very kind—but they go on so long, and when I’m very bad I can’t mind all they say, and they seem displeased like ; but Mr. Hayward, he wasn’t like that, but just seemed to understand.”

“ He’ve seen a deal o’ trouble like hers, in his own family,” said Mrs. Willis, “ he couldn’t understand else. The first day he called, Lucy was terrible bad with her breathing ; I couldn’t get her laid easy, try what I might. When he comes in he says, ‘ She ain’t raised enough ; I see what ’tis. Just you lift her shoulders, Mrs. Willis,’ he says, ‘ and I’ll put in this pillow,’ which he did, miss, all in a minute ; and if she wasn’t that easy, to what she had been ; and when I made bold to say I wouldn’t a’ believed a gentleman could be so handy, he says, ‘ I know something about that, Mrs. Willis,’ says he. And he told Lucy he’d a young brother was ill just like her, and that he nursed ’un.”

“ And he’s lying in this churchyard, miss,” added Lucy, eagerly.

“ His brother ! Oh, no, Lucy ; that must be a mistake,” said Laura. “ They are quite strangers here.”

“Please, miss, I’m sure he said it.”

“That’s very strange,” said Laura, thoughtfully. “Has he spoken to you at all about what mamma wished, Lucy?” she asked rather shyly.

“He asked if she’d abeen confirmed,” answered Mrs. Willis, rather officiously, “and I told ’un, you and your mamma had wished her to be, but she’d a’ been too ill to a’ gone, supposin’ she could, and he asks her if she’d like to have the Sacrament. I told ’un I didn’t hold much by Sacraments myself, being that I’d learnt to look to be saved by free grace, but anything that would be a comfort to Lucy I wouldn’t be against. So he said he’d come soon and see about it, and he’ve left her some books, miss,” and Mrs. Willis handed Laura two for inspection.

“My minister tell me,” continued the talkative woman, “after he see him come here, that they parsons as goes about in them long coats and broad hats be no better ’an Roman Catholic priests, and ravening wolves in sheep’s clothing, and that we didn’t oughter encourage them; but I say Mr. ’Aywood’s a good man and a kind man, whatever his coat be, and if he’s any good to Lucy I won’t shut my door against him.”

Laura was rather amused by this expression of Mrs. Willis’s sentiments. She only said, “Well, Lucy, I am glad he is kind to you,” and then took her departure, feeling that Lucy had had enough in the meantime.

As she walked homewards, she could not help wondering about what Lucy had told her of Mr. Hayward’s brother. It was curious, she thought, if he were buried in their own churchyard that she should know nothing about it; and having to pass by the church on her road home, she could not restrain her curiosity from at least walking through the churchyard for the chance of gaining some light on the subject.

Rather singularly, she was not long in discovering her quest. The gate by which she now entered the

churchyard was not the one she usually passed through in going to church, and opened on a somewhat secluded path under some old elm trees, thickly bordered by graves. Along this path she walked, inspecting the headstones on either side as they faced her, and almost started, as, on a small upright stone cross, her eye caught the following inscription :—

In memory of ALFRED HAYWARD,
Beloved and youngest son of John Ambrose Hayward
(of London) and Frances his wife.
Born 5th June, 1848,
Died 7th April, 1863.

“ One day in Thy Courts is better than a thousand.”

“ The LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away ;
Blessed be the Name of the LORD.”

“ Not quite fifteen,” mused Laura to herself, as she calculated the years. “ Just Ninian’s age. Poor little boy ! I wonder how he comes to be here ! It is very odd ; if he died here his friends must have come to him—how curious that seems ! Eight years ago. I wonder mamma didn’t know anything about it. I wonder if Mr. Hayward was very sorry to lose him,” her thoughts went on. “ Were they near in age ? let me see ; if he was fifteen in ’63, he would be twenty-three now, and this man must be——oh ! I’m sure I can’t guess, but a great deal more than that. I must make mamma find it all out from the old lady.”

Laura told her mother, when she went home, all her discoveries that afternoon. The story of the brother was a puzzle to Mrs. Grey too, for she had not been personally acquainted with the relative through whom Ambrose had attained his present position, and whose part in their history was the key to it. The only wonder was that, if there were any story, the Miss Harts had not got it all long since.

Laura mused a good deal over what she had heard and found out so far. Whether from Lucy’s and her

mother's accounts of his kindness, or from the fact of having seen that grave, her feelings towards the new incumbent were somewhat softened; and for that evening, at all events, there was no further reference to "Sir Macklin."

CHAPTER IV.

" 'O, I hae been at the schule,' he says,
' Learning young clerks to sing.' "

Old Ballad.

" **L**AURA," said Mrs. Grey next day, as after an early luncheon she and her daughter had prepared for their walk to the school, " I have told Matthew to bring the carriage for us in an hour's time. I want to call on old Mrs. Wilson afterwards, and while I am there you can drive round by the post-office and pick up the evening letters."

" Very well, mamma," answered Laura, and they started to keep their appointment with Mr. Hayward. Arriving at the school, they were told that he was in the class-room with some of the boys; and there they found him, having been trying voices for some time with the help of a very small harmonium.

" I hope we are not late," Mrs. Grey said.

" No; very punctual," he answered, " but I have been trying to get on with a troublesome part of the business—selecting. It is nearly done; if you will kindly put these two boys through the scale, Miss Grey."

Laura did as she was desired, and was amused by the promptness with which Mr. Hayward classified the two as treble and alto, placing them on opposite sides. Then he put before her a book of chants. " Try that one, please."

She obeyed, but was rather puzzled to catch the rhythm and accent of the Gregorian tone which Mrs. Grey at once recognized with pleasure as an old friend. The boys were slower still, until their instructor sang over several verses by way of example, in a rich sweet tenor voice which took both mother and daughter by surprise, and made the urchins stare at "the pa'son" as if he was a wild beast. Then there were hymns to be rehearsed; and altogether the hour allotted to the business sped quickly, and Laura was quite surprised when Mr. Hayward, taking out his watch, said the time was up, and he had to go into town. He escorted them to the door, where they found Matthew, Mrs. Grey's old servant, with the carriage and Lassie—the little bay mare which served indifferently, to draw it, when required, and as Miss Grey's riding horse. The carriage was a good-sized, though low, pony phaeton, with front and back seats, vis-à-vis, and a small box behind for the servant; Laura usually acting as charioteer.

"Would you like a lift, Mr. Hayward?" Mrs. Grey said, as he handed her in. "We are going to town too—at least Laura is, when she has dropped me, and she will put you down wherever you like."

Ambrose did not often get a chance of saving his many steps during the day; so he yielded to the temptation now, and stowed himself as best he could on the narrow foremost seat of the carriage, opposite the ladies, and in what seemed almost dangerous proximity to Lassie's hind-quarters, which towered high above the small splashboard, as she capered about very unceremoniously in setting off. Laura, who particularly disliked what she called "driving over people's heads," was rather inclined to resent her mother's hospitality.

"Do you not sing in private life, Mr. Hayward?" Mrs. Grey asked, presently.

"I? Oh no—never," he answered.

"You seem such a good musician."

"I have been at *this* sort of thing more or less all my life, but I am no musician otherwise, except in knowing a little of harmony and being fond of all sorts of music."

"It is an immense advantage for a clergyman to know even a little music," Mrs. Grey said; "it is everything for choral service."

"Yes; and it's wonderful how few do. Among a staff of six curates you won't find one that can intone correctly."

"I hate intoning," said Laura, looking however not at him but straight at the horse's ears, "just for that very reason: you never hear it well done."

"You haven't often heard it, Laura," said her mother. "Poor Mr. Wylde is not very musical."

"Wylde of S. Mary's?" said Ambrose. "He's got up a splendid choir, though. I wish I saw my way to anything like it here."

"Yes," said Mrs. Grey; "I should like to see a surpliced choir in our chancel."

"There's the rub, I'm afraid. I don't know, I'm sure, how to get those Baylisses dislodged."

A strong feeling of antipathy, a perverse wish to say something disagreeable, seized Laura at that moment; the more so as she felt that her mother and this presuming upstart new clergyman were entirely of one mind, and that she was somehow against her will being made a party to all his newfangled ways; forgetting that she herself had been delighted at the notion of playing the church organ. "Perhaps," she said, giving the rein a spiteful little tug, "they will be as easily dislodged as Miss Simpson. It would be a good thing, wouldn't it?"

The next minute she could have bitten her tongue off, as she met such a look of rebuke from those grave grey eyes opposite as she hardly expected.

"You quite misunderstand me, Miss Grey. I only meant it in the sense of changing the seat." Laura

was silent, as he went on: "However little I regret Miss Simpson's services, any disagreement with a member of the congregation must be excessively painful. I am going just now to pay Miss Simpson what is due of her salary, in person, to prove to her, I hope, that there is no feeling of hostility on my part."

"I think," said Mrs. Grey, wishing to break the rather awkward silence that followed, "that the easiest way to do anything with Mr. Bayliss is just to speak to him plainly, at once: he is less likely to take offence."

"You do? that is just my view. On all subjects it's best to go straight to the point. At least, if I try any other plan I always make a mull."

Laura's lip curled contemptuously. "He's just like a great lout of a schoolboy," was her thought; but here a check was given to the conversation by arriving at the house where Mrs. Grey wished to call. The old lady was always at home; and having deposited her mother Laura was obliged to drive on with Mr. Hayward beside her, and old Matthew behind.

"Do you care about horses, Mr. Hayward?" Laura began presently, for something to say. She was not wont to sit long silent.

Ambrose, who all his life had looked on a horse merely as the motive power of a cab or omnibus, was rather amused. "I am afraid not much: I am a regular cockney."

"Then you won't appreciate my Lassie, I suppose. Doesn't she go well?"

"Very fast."

"You would appreciate her in a hansom, wouldn't you, if you were in a hurry?"

"It must be rather hard holding on—for a lady."

"Holding her? Yes, she does pull, just a little bit, always, in harness. She never pulls in riding, though, except when the hounds are out."

"The hounds! Do you hunt, then?"

“Are you shocked? No, I don’t hunt, really. Sometimes when Ninian’s at home, mamma lets him hire a horse to go out, and I go with him, just to see them throw off. It’s great fun.”

“I thought it was only fast young ladies who went after the hounds.”

“Is it? I am afraid I am a fast young lady at heart, for I should dearly like it. But you see Lassie’s our only beast; and if she came to grief mamma says we should be reduced to go on foot, as she would never risk getting another. Once, though, she ran away with me and took a hunt on her own account.”

“That must have been very disagreeable.”

“I dare say it ought to have been, but it wasn’t a bit. I could guide Lassie quite well, though I couldn’t have turned her or stopped her to save my life: and she *did* jump so splendidly! We went over five fences in that run. We had to get a stronger bit for you after that, hadn’t we, miss? and I don’t go so near now; but I always long to go with Ninian.”

“Ninian’s your brother?”

“Yes. It will soon be his holidays now, I am glad to think! It is *so* dull when he is away.”

“How old is he?”

“Fifteen.”

“Can he sing? We must have him in the choir.”

“Sing? Yes, he’s a great singer at school. He always has a lot of new songs when he comes home, for mamma’s and my special edification. I won’t promise that he’ll join the choir, though.”

“You must use your influence.”

“My influence is not great during the holidays! And besides, Mr. Hayward, though the choir’s all very well, you mustn’t expect me to join in the hue and cry that’s being got up against everything in this poor old church and place.”

“I didn’t know there was any hue and cry being got

up," said Ambrose, in such an absurdly matter-of-fact tone that Laura nearly burst out laughing.

"I mean, all these improvements and new introductions and changes."

"You don't agree with Mrs. Grey, then?"

"Oh! of course I do, in essentials; but I'm too much of a Conservative for all. I detest change: I can't bear a stick or a stone, or a word or a letter, of anything I am fond of, altered. It's the spirit of the age, now-a-days, to upset everything—(stop cantering, Lassie, do!)—and that is what I can't stand at all."

"I agree with you there. But when the changes are intended to build up and strengthen, not pull down—to restore and improve, not to destroy—what then?"

"Ah, that improvement! it is a dangerous word now. They want to 'improve' the Prayer Book; they've 'improved' the Lectionary already; and they're going to give us a 'revised' Bible. I tell mamma I shall turn Mahometan when that comes into force."

"Then you are not serious in what you've been saying?"

"Serious! of course I am, perfectly. What do you mean?"

"When a person begins talking about turning Mahometan"—

"One begins to doubt their sanity? Well, I didn't mean that literally, perhaps."

"It was rather a wild way of speaking; and it's a pity when people allow themselves to speak in that way on subjects of this kind."

Laura was silent. She felt that she had allowed herself to rattle on too much at random; but she was not used to be lectured by any but her own near relations, and she did not quite relish Mr. Hayward's plain speaking. She said no more for some minutes after that.

"Were you going to the post-office, Miss Grey?"

her companion presently asked, as they were entering the town.

“Yes. Where did you wish to be put down?”

“At this corner, please—opposite the Bank. Thank you,” as she pulled up and he stepped out. “Thank you for my lift, Miss Grey. Good afternoon.” Laura’s hands were both occupied with the reins, so she only bowed in acknowledgment of his salutation, and drove on.

“What an odd, disagreeable man he is, and what a fool I was to go on to him in that way!” she mentally exclaimed, regardless that Lassie, with her lightened load, was racing up High Street in very unorthodox fashion. “I dare say he thinks me demented. I wonder if Matthew heard what we were saying. He will tell the other servants that Miss Grey and the parson were ‘having words.’ Well, it is all mamma’s fault! I wish she hadn’t made me bring him on!” and here Matthew interrupted her cogitations by saying, “Please, miss, did you want the letters? we’re past the post-office.”

“Well, Laura, so you have not upset him,” said Mrs. Grey, as she rejoined her daughter in the carriage on her return. “I have had a long chat with old Mrs. Wilson, and she has been singing his praises. I have been hearing about your mysterious grave, too: not that I began the subject, but she told me all she knew about its history.”

“What is it, mamma?”

“Well, you remember old Mr. Curtis, whom we used to see driving in and out of town. Mr. Hayward was his nephew.”

“Really! Did he get him appointed, then?”

“Mrs. Wilson thinks he had to do with it, but she doesn’t know. However, Mr. Curtis had his younger brother living with him, in his office. This boy was taken ill, and died, rather unexpectedly; so he was buried here.”

"That was it! Do you think you ever saw him?"

"I can't remember, it is so many years ago. He was only here a year. Mrs. Wilson says he was such a bright intelligent boy, and Mr. Curtis was so unhappy at losing him: he never quite got over it. I wondered, at the time, the Harts never spoke of this; but you said the date was '63, and that was just the year they let their house and went away for the health of the sister who died. But there is not much mystery about it after all, now one comes to know how it happened."

"No," said Laura. "Only it is funny to think they must have come here so long ago, because Mr. Hayward nursed his brother: he told Lucy so."

"They must have rather sad associations with the place," said Mrs. Grey. "But there is one thing I want to say, Laura, before I forget," she continued—(they were ascending a hill now, and Matthew was walking behind)—"you really must not let yourself say the kind of thing you did to-day—to Mr. Hayward or any other stranger. I could see you shocked him."

"Yes, mamma, I was sorry; but I could not help it, really. That sort of person makes me so cross."

"You must help it, then. It sounds flippant, however you mean it; and you are old enough now not to let any passing feeling of dislike to a person make you forget what is becoming."

Laura was strictly honest, and always told her mother everything, whatever her faults might be. "I have made bad worse since," she said, in the quiet, almost *nonchalant* tone she always used—most quiet when most in earnest. "I have been talking the most utter rubbish all the way, and he thinks me fit for Bedlam by this time!"

"Have you, Laura? That's a great pity."

"He is so odd; and he says things in a sort of setting down way that makes one want to set him down."

One feels a kind of satisfaction in astonishing a person of that sort."

"Well, Laura, you'll repent it some of these days."

"I know it's very bad of me, mamma; but I can't really change from what I think, or mean anything but what I said. After what Lucy and her mother told me, and that—yesterday, I thought I should like him better; but I find him quite as disagreeable and dislikeable as ever, on further acquaintance."

"He's very musical, at any rate, Laura."

"His singing's quite uncanny, mamma! You expect to find a voice like that coming from, at any rate, a passably pleasant face, and—"

"Upon my word, Laura, I can't see anything so unpleasant in his face: the expression is particularly good. I think you are prejudiced."

"I think him the most disagreeable person, altogether, that I ever met," said Laura; and with that the conversation ended for the present.

Laura lost no time in preparing herself for her Sunday duties by taking a good long practice, alone with her mother, on the church organ. It was a humble one enough, with but two manuals and a few coupling pedals; but to Laura, only accustomed to a small harmonium, it seemed rather formidable. However, she got all her music well at command, and took up her position when Sunday came with a pretty good courage—Mr. Hayward having taken care to provide her with a steady boy for blower, a very necessary adjunct.

She succeeded very well, playing her accompaniments steadily, and only attempting two short pieces from Haydn's slow movements, as voluntaries; and managed above all things to slip away and join her mother unobserved, after both services; avoiding, what she most dreaded, comments and compliments from the Miss Harts.

"How very nicely Miss Grey got on," Mrs. Hay-

ward remarked to her son, as he joined her on the way from church.

“Yes, so different from Miss Simpson,” said Emily. “Really quite refreshing.”

“Such a sweet touch she has, hasn’t she, Ambrose?”

“Ay, she’s got the organ touch, well enough.”

“And she uses such pretty stops.” They were nice critics of organ playing, those three. It was a sacred calling to them.

“It was very fortunate your happening to ask her,” said Mrs. Hayward. “And very kind of her to undertake it at once, and so readily, wasn’t it?”

“Yes,” answered Ambrose in his slow measured way. “She’s a very good little girl, Miss Grey.”

Poor Laura! If she could have heard her enemy call her “a very good little girl!”

CHAPTER V.

“Yet steadfast set to do his part,
And fearing most his own vain heart.”

KEBLE.

“IF you please, sir, Mr. Bayliss would like to see you,” said the maid, entering Mr. Hayward’s study one morning, towards the end of Lent.

“Show him in.” And there entered a pleasant looking portly man, of about fifty-five. Mr. Bayliss was a wealthy builder, and owned some of the best lodging houses in and around Axhill. He had been the clergyman’s churchwarden for many years, without opposition; in fact, none of the parishioners would ever have dreamt of calling in question his right to the office.

“Good morning, Mr. Bayliss. Fine day, this.”

“’Morning, sir.” Mr. Bayliss’s eyes wandered a little uneasily round the room, taking stock evidently of the spare furniture, the few sacred prints on the walls, the plain cross on the writing table, and last not least the tall thin figure in the cassock—which Mr. Hayward had not left off his London habit of wearing constantly when at home.

“Take a chair, Mr. Bayliss.” Mr. Bayliss sat down silently. “Your family all well, I hope?” Ambrose said.

“Thank you sir, yes.” Then Mr. Bayliss cleared his throat and began, “I wished to speak to you, sir, on one or two little things that—ahem—feeling it my duty, placed as I am, to speak plainly—hope to give no offence, sir,” and there he stopped.

“Pray go on, Mr. Bayliss.”

“Well, sir, I’m one as always speaks my mind plainly—and I wished to let you know, sir,—you’re going ahead a little too fast for us, sir, and that’s the long and the short of the matter.”

“Be so good as to explain yourself, sir.”

“Well then, sir, these changes, they don’t find favour with people in general. In regard to the music—I must take the liberty of telling you plainly, sir—you’ve made a bad beginning. You’ve offended a lady, sir, whom we all respected, and who had filled her post with credit to herself and us, for years. The music’s not what it was—not but what little Miss Grey don’t get on very fair, for so young a lady, and may be it’s more pleasing to *you*, sir,” (what a horrible insinuation!) “but it ain’t what we’re used to. If what I’ve heard’s true, we might a’ had Miss Simpson back again if you’d met her half way like, but you was in such a hurry to pay her off and get rid of her, without consulting any one, that she hadn’t a chance. And further, I’m told that these night classes of yours are just a dodge for introducing all kinds of practices into the

service, that—that ain't likely to go down here. So I'm told."

"Then you've been listening to a pack of lies, sir," said Ambrose, and then stopped short, feeling that he had spoken roughly, and angrily, and oh! how unlike what his old incumbent, his dear master and friend, would have done in like circumstances. What trials and opposition had he borne with meekness and patience! "and here am I," Ambrose thought, "flying out at the first symptom of disagreement." "I mean, Mr. Bayliss," he went on aloud, "you've been misinformed."

Mr. Bayliss's comely smooth face looked rather red and angry. "I'm not in the habit of listening to idle gossip, sir. I need not name names, but I was told this in all good faith."

"You must let me undeceive you, then. As far as my intercourse with Miss Simpson went, I showed her no hostility—on the contrary, I gave her time to think of it; but she did not give me the impression that she had the slightest wish to return, or any regret in leaving. Had she returned I don't honestly think we should have got on, for she wished the entire management of everything. One cannot have two captains in a small ship like this—and I intend to be captain myself, while I am here."

"That's easy to see, my boy," thought Mr. Bayliss.

"As to the evening classes you mention, they are entirely for the practice of a simpler style of music, and the formation of a choir."

"A choir, sir? Why we had a very fair choir, before ever you came here."

"A body of singers, but not an organized choir. I intend setting up a surpliced choir."

"A surpliced choir! take my advice, Mr. Hayward, and don't try that here. I know something of what that leads to."

"What does it lead to, Mr. Bayliss?"

“Much. There was Mr. Wylde, in town here, when he first come, he began cramming a lot o’ new-fangled ways down people’s throats that knew nought about ’em. And they had downright jolly rows—shying of brickbats and such like, at the singers. Of course they were a terrible rough lot down about S. Mary’s, and I’m not saying our people would be as bad as that; but—there are other weapons, you know, which I should be just as sorry had need to be used—and more effectual.”

“Is that intended as a threat, Mr. Bayliss?”

“Not at all, sir, not at all. Only I thought it was the part of a friend to give you a bit of a fair warning, knowing what I’d known.”

“Does Mr. Wylde ever have ‘jolly rows’ now?”

“Why no, sir, not as I’ve heard. But of course the folks ain’t so bad now as what they was then.”

“What’s the reason of that?”

“Well, sir, they’ve got kind o’ tired of it, and they go their way and let’s him go his. I don’t say but what the church has done some good to make ’em more decent, and then Mr. Wylde had a lot of schools and such like, and is very good to the poor. But for all that I don’t like what I’ve heard of his goings on. My girls were asked to go there with a friend last Christmas, and they said there was a procession, and a cross, and I don’t know what all—one wouldn’t suppose one was in a Protestant place of worship. I told ’em plainly they shouldn’t go again. And I shouldn’t like to see our church turned inside out that way. That’s been my object, sir, in speaking to you to-day, thinking it only my duty to give you a bit of advice on the subject, and to let you know at any rate what had been said.”

“Thank you, Mr. Bayliss. You mean right, I am sure. As you’ve spoken plainly to me, it will be as well that you should know plainly what my views and intentions are, and then if you hear any more of these

reports, I hope you'll take them for what they are worth. I wish for no vagaries, no extravagances, in what I am working for; only such decency and order as prevails in hundreds of quiet country churches throughout the land. I wish everything as good of its kind, for the Church service, as it can be made. Of course, I know it's impossible to please all, but as far as I can I shall avoid offending the prejudices of any, needlessly—and shall try to explain the grounds of any changes I may see good to make. But what I believe to be my duty to GOD and for the good of those whom He has committed to me, that I shall carry out as far as lies in my power, whether I am assailed with brick-bats, or with those other weapons you alluded to just now. Do you understand me, Mr. Bayliss?"

It was a long speech for a man of few words, but it was spoken in much the same calm, earnest, honest manner as his sermons; and, with a man like Mr. Bayliss, it had its intended effect.

"I do, sir," he answered, "and I honour you for your plain speaking. It's the only thing that goes down with *me*. I am very glad to find your views *are* so reasonable, for I liked you from the first. And I like your sermons; they're plain, and go straight to the heart, sir. No, it would be very painful to me to go against you, sir, even if it were my duty to do so."

"I hope you won't find it your duty, Mr. Bayliss. In the meantime, I've a request to make of you. I am going to ask you to change your sitting in the church."

"Change my sitting! what, for your singers, eh?"

"Yes. The chancel seats, stalls, more properly, belong of right to the clergy and choir. I can offer you in exchange one which I think you will find quite as suitable."

"Well, sir, it's an important matter. Of course I can say nothing without consulting Mrs. Bayliss and my daughters. When are you putting in this choir?"

“ At Easter, I hope.”

“ White gowns and all?”

“ That’s my intention.”

“ Well, I must think about it. Suppose you don’t get the seat, what then?”

“ Then we must have a one-sided choir. I shouldn’t like it, I must say—and I don’t think you would, when it came to that.”

“ What seat would you give me?”

“ The one my mother and sister occupy—the parsonage seat. It is much larger than necessary for them. They only want two sittings, and my mother wishes a less prominent place.”

“ Well, I’m sure it’s very kind of Mrs. Hayward. But, as I said, I must ask my ladies. And if they should agree, you won’t take an undue advantage, eh?”

“ How, Mr. Bayliss?”

“ Well, then, you won’t begin with all Mr. Wylde’s tricks and mummeries?”

“ With no one’s, I hope. All the same, I am not condemning Mr. Wylde, nor do I know that he is guilty of either tricks or mummery.”

“ You won’t have processions, eh?”

“ Not if it is the least likely to cause offence.”

“ ‘If,’ Mr. Hayward? Do you mean you’d like ’em?”

“ What I like, don’t matter. Some of these days you’ll be wanting to join one yourself.”

“ Come now, that ain’t your plain answer. Are you going to turn the place into a Popish chapel, or are you not?”

“ Most decidedly, no.”

“ Well, I’ll take you on trust then, and I’ll speak to Mrs. Bayliss. I’ve often heard her complain that seat’s very cold in winter, and may be she’ll be pleased enough to change. But mind this, Mr. Hayward, the first procession that enters Axhill church, I write to the Bishop.”

“All right, Mr. Bayliss.” And after a very friendly handshake, the churchwarden departed.

“Queer chap that,” he mentally observed, as he walked home. “Precious queer, and precious determined too. That’s the kind of fellow now-a-days they haul through the Court of Arches, and the Privy Council, and he comes out more determined than he went in! Got a temper of his own and no mistake, if you push him. Yet there’s something I do like about him too. Hope he will keep quiet.”

As to Mr. Hayward, he could not keep from wondering a good deal as to whether this warning from Mr. Bayliss portended any further expressions of hostility; but, as nothing immediately followed, he concluded that the reports against him had been circulated by some partisan of Miss Simpson. For otherwise he met with almost no opposition in his parish work. This was due to two causes—the apathy on Church matters which prevailed in the neighbourhood, and the non-aggressive way in which his work was carried on. A great deal of it was necessarily confined to beating up recruits for the Church; as, owing to the laxity and neglect of the last incumbent, numbers of the poorer people had fallen away, either to dissent, or utter irreligion. And the middle and upper classes as a rule, if professing Churchpeople, were most indifferent. Some few, who attended the weekly celebrations and weekday services, were spoken of as belonging to “Mr. Hayward’s set,” and perhaps secretly sneered at for their punctilious observances; but the most done by those who disapproved of the new incumbent’s ways was to give him the cold shoulder—and let him alone.

The choir meetings were, on the whole, a success. The men and boys were musically inclined, and they liked “the parson’s” teaching—“the parson” being particularly in his element at these classes. One of the first to join, and indeed to give great assistance to him at them, was the other churchwarden, Mr. Mortlock.

Though a parishioner of some standing, Mr. Mortlock was not a native of Axhill. He was local agent for a large London mercantile firm, and had an office at the adjacent railway station, where he spent most of his time, residing, however, in the parish of S. Martin's. He was a young man, some eight years, at least, Ambrose Hayward's junior; he had enjoyed greater advantages with regard to Church privileges in his old home, than most of his Axhill neighbours: he had been wont to deplore the want of them here, and hailed the arrival of the new clergyman as the dawn of a better day. He was musical too, and entered very heartily into the choir scheme, bidding fair to become an excellent lay choir-master. He was a first-rate man of business in a worldly point of view, clever, industrious, and steady; and, being also of prepossessing appearance, was considered one of the most eligible *partis* by the middle-class young ladies in and around Axhill. It was even rumoured that Miss Matilda Hart, whose chances of matrimony were yearly becoming slighter, was inclined to look upon him with some favour. The real object of his regard, however, was Miss Bessie Bayliss; between whom and himself there existed a sort of tacit engagement, with the sanction, of course, of her parents, who thus considered that they held a kind of moral check upon his proclivities, ecclesiastical or otherwise.

Mr. Hayward had also set up a night-school three times in the week, for the benefit of the ignorant young men and big boys whose schooling had been neglected before the Compulsory Education Act came into force; and in teaching it he was vigorously assisted by Miss Matilda Hart, who had become a devoted adherent of "Mr. Hayward's set," and threw herself enthusiastically into all his schemes, as far as she knew of them.

Laura went once a week to the day-school to rehearse the music with the schoolboy "contingent" of the choir; at which practice several of the lady Sunday school

teachers assisted, with a view to the improvement of congregational singing. Laura was getting on very well with her own part of the work, and after a few lessons, succeeded in rendering the Gregorian chants to Mr. Hayward's entire satisfaction.

One day, very near Palm Sunday, he called at Sunnywood, entering the sitting-room with such an unusually radiant expression of countenance that both Mrs. Grey and Laura were quite disappointed when he said only, "I am come to tell you Mr. Bayliss has capitulated. We have got the Decani stall."

"I congratulate you," said Mrs. Grey, looking a little amused, while Laura almost laughed outright. "I hope he vacates it amicably?"

"Oh, quite so. I fancy Mrs. Bayliss prefers the seat I offered."

"Then when do you come into occupation?"

"I think I shall keep to my intention of beginning the surplices at Easter, not before; though they are nearly ready, thanks to your help, Mrs. Grey."

"My boy will be home on Saturday. It will be a surprise for him."

"I hope he will join us. Miss Grey said he was musical."

"He is very fond of singing, poor fellow. I shall be very glad if you can get him to take interest in the Church music. It will be a nice resource."

"Has he been confirmed yet?"

"No, I am sorry to say he has not. He was rather young the last time there was a Confirmation, and, I must say, just a little bit heedless too. Is there to be one this year?"

"I hope so—about Whitsuntide. The Bishop hasn't made all his plans yet. I am very anxious about it myself."

"Then I shall certainly wish him to be a candidate."

A little more general talk followed; and then Mr. Hayward departed, leaving Laura to laugh to her heart's content over "the surrender and fall of the Bayliss pew!"

CHAPTER VI.

“He is not the flower of courtesy, but I warrant you as gentle as a lamb.”

Romeo and Juliet.

NOT many days after, Laura, in high spirits, was driving to the railway station to meet her brother, on his return from school for the holidays.

She had not long to wait before the train came in. She did not go inside the station, not caring to face the crowd which was often there; but sat in the carriage, till the one person for whom she was so eagerly watching emerged from the rest—a bright pleasant-faced boy of fifteen, with a good deal of resemblance to herself, though with darker colouring as to hair and eyes.

“Hallo, Laura, here you are! How’s mother?”

“All right, how are you, dear old Nin?” she cried with as hard a squeeze of the hand as she could give. Ninian would have resented anything more demonstrative in public.

“Well, Matthew!” he went on to the old servant, who was grinning with pleasure; “shove in my things here, will you? Now then, give us the reins, Laura, that’s a good girl,” as Laura readily vacated the driving seat. “Cut on, Lassie, get along,” and Lassie, who knew his hand and voice at once, bounded off in double quick time.

“Oh! you dear old darling, how glad I am to have you at home again!” Laura cried. “Mind the corner though, there’s a good boy—that was awfully near.”

“Don’t you be uneasy,” he answered gaily. “Well, what’s up now—any hunting?”

“Oh, yes, I believe so. I haven’t seen anything of them though. I haven’t been riding so much lately, I think.”

“ What have you been doing, then ? ”

“ Oh, different little things. I'm a great person in the parish now, you know. I'm the organist.”

“ You the organist ! Come, that is a good one ! That's the new parson's doing, I suppose.”

“ Yes. He quarrelled with Miss Simpson, the first thing almost, and then couldn't get a soul to play, except poor me ! ”

“ What sort of a fellow is he ? ”

“ Oh ! well, you shall judge for yourself. Mamma's awfully taken with him somehow.”

“ And I suppose he's making you a regular churchy young lady, all decorations and that sort of rubbish. There 'll be no fun to be got out of you now.”

“ Not a bit of it, Nin ! I only do it because mamma likes—and it is rather fun you know,” she added apologetically.

“ What is he like, Laura ? ”

“ Like ! he is like Sir Macklin in ' Bab,' or the Roman Catholic priest in Punch that the little servant girl thinks is a bogey—*plus*, oh, such a beautiful beard, that the Harts rave about.”

“ Not *really*, Laura ! What does he consist of ? ”

“ He consists of a mother and sister. The old lady's rather nice, only awfully *cry-ey*, don't you know ? but they are both very unobtrusive, happily.”

“ No wife ! Oh, I say, Laura, what a splendid chance for you ! Have you worked him any slippers yet ? Take care and get a good pattern, mind—you ' never knitted anything for old Bartholomew,' as far as I know.”

“ Come, come ! no impudence from little boys.”

“ Come, come ! no ' cheek' from little girls,” said Ninian, who usually gave his sister ' as good as she brought.' “ By jingo, she's blushing ! I believe she's over head and ears in love with Bogey already, and trying to throw dust in a fellow's eyes.”

“ Be quiet, Nin, do ; Matthew 'll hear you. There

now, you *will* upset us to a certainty," as Lassie gave a desperate whisk round the last turning, and the subject was dropped.

Not for very long, however, for some little time after his arrival and welcome at home, as he was roaming about the sitting-room, Ninian espied a heap of white work upon Laura's sewing-machine, and exclaimed, "What's all this fine linen? Vestments for Bogey, eh?"

"Keep your meddlesome hands off," answered Laura. "They're the choir surplices, that mamma *would* take in, and of course I'm obliged to do the long seams for her, though I think it's profane to machine them."

"Well, well! Bogey's a lucky dog, say I."

"Bogey! who's Bogey?" asked Mrs. Grey, coming in.

"You may well ask, mamma. It's Nin's horrible word."

"Well done, miss! I like your 'Nin's horrible word.' Just listen to this, mother. As we were coming home, I asked her, from a laudable curiosity, what her respected new spiritual pastor and master was like; and she tells me, with contempt, that he is like 'Sir Macklin,' or the 'bogey' Roman Catholic priest in Punch. I come home and find all her time and talents and energies, and genius, and sewing-machine, devoted to working for this same 'Bogey'—so my natural inference is that Bogey's a lucky dog."

"I shall hand you over to him for correction forthwith," said Mrs. Grey, unable to refrain from laughing at the boy's absurdity.

It may seem matter of surprise that, considering what their mother's training had been, both Mrs. Grey's children should so often speak of matters connected with Church work in a tone of distaste and satire. The fact was that, though both trained in sound Church principles, they had never been brought yet practically in contact with active Churchmanship; and from some stories they had read, and some small amount of

journalism on the subject to which they had had access, they had somehow imbibed the notion that there was a great deal of "humbug" and unreality and extravagance in what was commonly called High Churchism. Alas, that there should be only too much ground for such a notion in many cases.

Mrs. Grey, as her acquaintance with Mr. Hayward improved, was only too thankful that their new incumbent, though a loyal Catholic, was so far removed both in character and conduct from anything like affectation and unreality; for she knew but too well that, whatever she might say, a very little experience of such qualities would repel her hastily-judging young people, and incline them, if not to take the opposite extreme of religious views, to become cold and sarcastic on religious subjects altogether.

As the day after Ninian's return was Sunday, he had not long to wait before his curiosity as to the new clergyman was gratified; but his first impression was more favourable than Laura's had been. "Bogey!" he exclaimed, as they were walking home after church, "I like your 'Bogey!'" "I call him rather a handsome fellow!"

"Handsome! with *that* mouth!" cried his sister.

"What do you see of his mouth, I should like to know?"

"Wait till you see him smile," said Laura.

Next day, Ninian had been out riding alone, and coming into the drawing-room was met by his sister saying mischievously, "You've missed a call, made expressly for you, sir."

"Oh, I say, what a blessing! Who?"

"The Reverend Ambrose Hayward."

"Reverend *What* is his name?" and as Laura handed him a card: "Good gracious! it reads like a bad 'churchy' novel."

"Don't *you* throw stones, Nin."

"Oh, tut—I don't count—I'm half a Scotchman."

“ Well, he was really very sorry to miss you, and all that ; and he wants to speak to you about joining the choir.”

“ Yes,” said Mrs. Grey, looking up from a letter she was writing, “ he wished me to tell you so. I said I could not answer for you, but that you would call and speak to him yourself, to-morrow, before service. He will be out in the afternoon.”

“ Oh, I say, mother, I wish you hadn’t,” said Ninian, blushing in his turn, and looking a good deal put out.

“ I couldn’t help it, Nin. You ought to return his call, at any rate. I haven’t committed you to anything.”

Ninian was more silent than usual for some time after that. The next day, being Wednesday before Easter, he came into his mother’s sitting-room about an hour before the time of morning service.

“ Ready to go, Nin ?” she said. “ That’s a good boy.”

“ I say, mother, do you *want* me to go in for this ?”

“ Of course, dear, I think it would be very nice ; but I don’t wish you to do anything of that sort against your inclination.”

“ Because I don’t believe I can sing a bit, and I don’t want to be a beastly fool.”

“ Go and settle it with good Mr. Hayward. He will soon tell if you can be of any use to him.”

Ninian’s conference, however it ended, lasted till churchtime, as he did not return home before service, but joined his mother and sister at the church. As they returned, Mrs. Grey said :

“ Well, how have you settled it ?”

“ I’ve promised,” he said shortly.

“ You have ! I am very glad, dear.”

“ He was very good-natured. He told me to think of it, to wait and see, if I liked, and all that, but I

thought it would be sneaking to let them have the first brunt of it, if I meant to join, and that I should join at once. He's not half a bad fellow, the parson, whatever Laura may say."

"Did you see the ladies?" asked Laura.

"Yes, both were in the drawing-room. A very nice old person, I thought, the old lady."

"And when are you to practise, Nin?"

"I promised to go to the class on Thursday night, this time, at all events. Laura, I vow I'll never tell you anything if you look at me like that: no fellow chaffs as you do!"

If Ninian had been favourably impressed by his visit to the parsonage, the impression he himself made was no less favourable. Mrs. Hayward, whose motherly heart always yearned towards boys of his age, for the sake of her own lost boy, was taken at once by his pleasant looks and frank manner. "What a dear boy that is of Mrs. Grey's," she remarked to her son afterwards. "I am so glad he is to join your choir, Ambrose. I hope he will come and see us often: it quite does one good to look at his bright face."

"Yes; he's a nice fellow. I'd some difficulty in persuading him to join, though: he was shy: thought his voice would be no use; but I told him his example would, at any rate, and he could think about it. However, when it came to that, he said he would join at once—seeing, I fancy, that it was a question of principle."

The new choir came into possession very quietly on Easter Day; and even Mr. Bayliss, with his well-dressed wife and daughters, in all the glory of possession of the best placed seat in the body of the church, could find nothing to say against them. Miss Bessie naturally glanced with interest towards the Cantor's stall, where Mr. Mortlock now took up his position as choir-master, "looking so nice in his surplice," as she afterwards said to her sister; and certainly it did

not ill become the pleasant open face and earnest reverent manner of the young churchwarden. They numbered six men and nine boys in all—Ninian Grey being an extra. The music went well: Laura was on her mettle, for however she might laugh about it, she did feel a personal interest in the success of the choir now, and played her best conscientiously.

She began, however, for the first time to find her new parish duties a little of a restraint and tax upon her time. As long as she was alone, with her mother often unable even to walk or drive out with her, these duties were rather a welcome resource than otherwise; but it was a different thing now to have to attend the school, or spend an afternoon practising in the church, when Ninian wanted her for a drive or a ramble. For Ninian was a very companionable boy; and when not bent on hunting or fishing, or any exclusively masculine employment, he liked having his sister to go about with him, or to help her in her gardening. And however conscientious Laura might be in other ways, she had not much conscience when her "dear old Nin's" wishes came in the way. Perhaps it was not wonderful.

She had been taking a long walk with him one bright day at the end of April, when in crossing the entrance of the lane leading to Mrs. Willis's, her heart suddenly smote her at the thought of the length of time she had been without visiting poor Lucy; although soups and jellies were constantly sent from Mrs. Grey's to the patient, and of course if Lucy had been worse Laura must have heard.

"I say, Nin, I shall go down here, as I am so near, and see the poor girl—Lucy, you know. I haven't been near her for an age! Don't you wait for me."

"Shall you be long?"

"I don't know. If she's pretty well she may like me to stay for a bit, as I've not seen her lately. I shall go home after, so don't mind."

"All right, then. I shall have a look at the river."

So they parted ; and Laura turned down the lane. Arrived at the cottage she found the door shut, an uncommon thing in warm weather ; and she fancied there was a stir as of more persons than usual inside. Her knock, a little timid, was not immediately answered ; and as she repeated it, doubting whether to lift the latch and go in, the door was opened by Mr. Hayward.

“ Oh, Miss Grey ! wont you come in ? ” he said, quietly. “ I think she would know you. ”

“ Know me ! ” said Laura, aghast. “ Is she worse ? ”

“ I beg your pardon ; I thought you knew. It will very soon be all over, I think. They sent for me about an hour ago. ”

Laura felt as if her heart stopped beating, and the colour went completely out of her face, lips and all. He must have seen it, for he said, “ Do as you like about coming in, but I do think it would please her. There is nothing that can hurt any one to see. ”

That decided Laura. She mustered all her courage and followed him into the cottage. But she was hardly prepared for the sight of her poor friend's state : though to the clergyman, long used to far more awful and harrowing deathbeds, there might be nothing specially shocking beyond the physical suffering, so soon to be at an end. It was easy for even an inexperienced eye to see that, as one of the neighbours who had gathered in the sick room observed to Laura, the poor sufferer was “ going terrible fast—and terrible hard, too, poor thing ! ”

“ Lucy, love, ” said the mother, who was holding up the dying girl in her arms in the bed, “ here's the young lady, Miss Grey, come to bid you good-bye. But she's past minding you now, miss, ” she added, shaking her head.

Not quite. The fast glazing eyes were raised, and something of a faint smile played over the wasted features as they rested on the bright young face that was working so hard now to keep calm—to keep back the

blinding, choking tears. Only for a moment, though ; for the terrible struggle between life and death was all-absorbing. It could not last much longer.

“Let us pray,” said the priest, kneeling down.

Laura would have liked to slip out unperceived, but a woman was behind her, and she could not do so without causing a disturbance ; so she knelt down in her place with the rest, pressing her hands over her face, while in the stillness that followed, broken only by the painful gasping breaths, rose in those calm steady solemn tones the soothing words of the Church’s Commendatory Prayer.

It was unfamiliar to Laura ; but she followed it with the intense earnest attention which a prayer heard for the first time under peculiar circumstances not unfrequently excites. When it was finished there was a few minutes’ pause, and a sort of awful hush : then the voice went on,—

“Almighty GOD, with whom do live the spirits of them *that depart hence in the Lord,*”—what did it mean?

Once more a pause, a silence ; then people rising, moving, a few faint whispered exclamations from the women, and a sound as of some one beginning to sob hysterically. Laura lifted her head, stole one look at the bed, and though she had never seen death before she took it all in at once, and knew that the sufferer had found rest at last. Then she rose to her feet, slipped out behind the rest, and hurried in a sort of nervous terror down the little garden path, just managing to reach the lane outside. The bright sunshine dazzled her ; the bright green of the hedges and banks swam round her ; the sound and sense of the outer air, after that awful death chamber, seemed to mingle in one loud rushing murmur in her ears ; and though she sat down quite quietly, without falling, on the grassy bank, she was for a few moments as really unconscious as if she had fainted away altogether.

The first thing of which she was aware was a black

figure between her and the sun, and Mr. Hayward's voice saying, "Miss Grey, I fear this has been too much for you." Then he turned away, and in a minute was back again with a glass of water from the cottage. "Take some of this. Will you come back and rest a few minutes?"

"Oh, no!" Laura answered, with a sort of shudder. "I am all right;" but her limbs trembled as she stood up.

"Sit down here, then. Are you alone, Miss Grey?"

"My brother was with me, but I told him not to wait. I am going straight home; don't mind about me, please, Mr. Hayward."

"I shall certainly not let you walk home alone," he said, in a quiet decisive sort of way that she could not well answer; so she set off at once up the lane with him walking beside her, feeling shy and awkward, and inwardly wishing that Ninian would appear and relieve Mr. Hayward of his self-imposed charge.

Ninian was far away, however, having thought no more of his sister after what she said to him. Presently Mr. Hayward observed, "This must have been a shock to you, as you were unprepared."

"Yes," she answered; "it has been very sudden."

"Sudden at last. Poor creature! what a blessing for her that it has been so! These cases are so terrible when they linger on."

"I suppose she had not been worse than usual, or I should have heard before?"

"No; she seemed much as she has been for long when I saw her three days ago, and administered the Holy Sacrament to her."

"I am so glad you did," Laura said; "mamma was so anxious about it." Then, as they emerged from the lane, she added, "I hope you won't trouble yourself to come on with me, Mr. Hayward, unless you are going this way. I am all right, really."

"I am glad of that. But I should like to call on Mrs. Grey, as she has not heard about Lucy."

Laura could say nothing to this, so she went on, rather shyly: "It was so stupid of me to be like that, but you know I—I never saw any body dead before, and I could not help it, at first."

"No?" he said; and after a few moments' pause he added: "My youngest sister was very familiar with death before she was seventeen."

"Yes; I suppose in London, where there are such numbers of poor, one must very often see it."

"I didn't mean particularly amongst the poor: I was thinking of our own family." Laura was silent. "You don't remember your father's death?" he asked, rather abruptly.

"Oh, no; I was not quite three years old."

"He is not buried here, is he?"

"No; he died at Perth, in Scotland. His regiment was quartered there some time before Ninian was born, and, just after, papa got the illness of which he died—quite unexpectedly. It was so dreadful for poor mamma, wasn't it? and she was so far away from her own people."

"S. Ninian's, that's the cathedral at Perth, isn't it?"

"Yes; that was how Nin got his name partly. Papa and mamma used always to attend the cathedral (it's the same service as ours, you know), and were so fond of it. Some of papa's relations are Scotch, and I believe there was a Ninian amongst them once; so it is not so very out-of-the-way after all, though I dare say it seems so here."

"It does a little; not that I have any right to say so, having, I suppose, rather an out-of-the-way name myself. But I have it from my father."

"Yes, I know," said Laura, blushing however as he took her up immediately: "You have seen our possession, then, in the churchyard? It has been rather a puzzle to some people."

“Yes,” said Laura; “poor Lucy told me of it. I thought she was mistaken, until I saw it.”

“Ay, I remember I told her about him one day. People who are ill often like to hear about others who have been like them. I think it is right to let those who have gone before be of what use they can to those who are still here: don’t you? It is what they would wish, I am sure.” Laura made no remark; and he asked presently, “Did you ever see my brother when he lived here?”

“No; I don’t think so. It was so long ago I don’t recollect, at any rate.”

“Long ago, was it? Eight years. How old would you have been then?”

It was said in such a matter-of-fact way, with the air of a much older person talking to a child, that Laura forgot to be affronted. “I was not quite ten, I suppose.”

“Quite a lifetime ago to you.” Then Laura ventured on a question in her turn: “Was he your *only* brother, Mr. Hayward?”

“Yes, my only brother, Miss Grey.” They walked on silently for a time, till Mr. Hayward said, “This girl Lucy’s end put me a good deal in mind of his. Knowing what I do, I was quite sure when I saw her recognize you, that, whatever it may have cost you to go in, the pleasure it gave her was worth the sacrifice.”

“Poor Lucy! I am so glad if she was pleased! I only wish now I had been sooner. I feel rather as if I had neglected her lately; but you see I had a number of little things to think of—in fact, I am afraid, I had a little forgotten her.”

“The truth last! You ought to learn to put the truth first always, Miss Grey. Wouldn’t your mother tell you so?”

Laura drew herself up suddenly and coloured, really angry, as she replied, “She is the proper person to do so, at any rate.”

“And I suppose you think I am not. But I think I am—I beg your pardon, Miss Grey—as you are one of my sheep.”

“I wonder,” she said, her voice trembling a little as she spoke, “that you think me worth speaking to at all, as I tell such untruths.”

“No; I didn’t say that, or mean it. But it is a habit every one is too prone to, when he has omitted something he is conscious he ought to have done, instead of giving the real reason, or none at all—to make up some nice little excuse that comes handy, as you did just now. If you were conscious that you had forgotten Lucy, you needn’t have referred to having had so many things to think of. You were self-convicted afterwards, which led to my making the observation I did.”

“Everybody doesn’t judge so hardly as you do, happily,” Laura said.

“But it is not by ‘everybody’s’ judgment that we shall stand or fall,” he answered gravely.

Laura felt rebuked, and walked on in silence for a few minutes. Then she said, “I hope you will not find me making excuses again, Mr. Hayward.”

“I hope you have forgiven me,” he said.

Laura’s offended dignity did not last very long on this occasion; indeed she felt that she had been speaking rather like a naughty child. “Oh, yes, quite,” she answered.

They had reached the lodge gate of Sunnywood, and here Laura had to ring the bell, for as it opened on the thoroughfare to a large town, it was usually shut and fastened within.

“I suppose Mrs. Grey is at home?” Mr. Hayward said.

“Oh, yes; she’ll be in, or in the garden. Come this way,” and Laura led the way by a small side path through the shrubbery which came out in the garden front. Sunnywood was built on a sunk floor, and a raised stone balcony with steps at either end ran along

the house on the drawing-room level, the drawing-room and sitting-room windows opening on to it. Up the first flight of steps Laura ran, looking into each window as she passed, but finding no one within; till at the opposite end of the balcony she confronted her mother, in her garden bonnet and gloves, coming up from the other side.

"Well, Laura," was her greeting, "I thought you were lost. What have you done with that boy? Oh, Mr. Hayward, how do you do?"

"Miss Grey brought me round," he said, as he returned the greeting. "I wished to tell you she has had rather a trying visit, and as I am partially responsible for it I wished to come home with her myself. Her poor friend, Lucy Willis, is just gone."

Laura had vanished into the house, and Mrs. Grey looked rather shocked as she asked in some anxiety, "Was Laura there?"

"Yes. The girl was taken ill suddenly, about two o'clock to-day. Mrs. Willis sent a message for me, and after I had been there some time, Miss Grey came to the door: not knowing anything of how matters stood. I believed it would please the poor creature to see her, and perhaps rather urged her to come in; and a few minutes after it was all over."

"Poor thing! Laura must have been terribly startled. We had heard nothing of the illness having become worse. I did not even know that Laura was going to her."

"I am afraid it was rather a shock to Miss Grey. She came out before me, and when I followed I found her sitting on the bank looking so faint that—that I was afraid to let her walk home alone."

"Poor child, yes. I have managed hitherto to keep her away from any scenes of the kind, in our visits to the poor; but it must come sooner or later, so perhaps it is as well."

"I am very sorry," said Ambrose honestly enough.

I ought not, in your absence, to have allowed her to go in ; but I thought she might regret not doing so. There was nothing unfit for her to see."

" Oh, no ! I believe you were quite right. I am perhaps unwisely fidgety about Laura, but I ought to explain my reasons. When she was a very little child first running alone, she had a very bad fall, and struck her forehead against a stone wall. She entirely recovered—it has not even left a mark—but the doctor told us at the time that the injury might very likely affect her in this way : that she might be more easily upset by seeing or hearing anything painful or shocking—less able to bear such things than she might otherwise have been. Of course this makes one more anxious to spare her. At the same time I do not regret this ; I hope she may be the stronger for it."

Mr. Hayward said nothing, but stood looking before him, apparently too much shocked and conscience-stricken to speak.

" I have been very selfish all this time," Mrs. Grey went on, " not asking after those poor people, and keeping you standing here. Won't you come in, Mr. Hayward ?"

" No, thank you. I only called to tell you about Lucy. I hope Miss Grey will be all right to-morrow."

" I have no doubt she is all right now," said Mrs. Grey, for his anxiety about Laura was beginning to make her rather uneasy.

" I hope so, I am sure. Good-bye," and he turned and went away, abruptly as usual.

Mrs. Grey hastened to her daughter, for she felt certain that Laura would be a good deal upset by what she had seen. She found her in her room, crying about " poor Lucy," a sort of reaction, for while any stranger was present, she always checked any display of emotion. She told her mother the events of the afternoon, generally ; but seemed less disposed to be communicative than usual, and her mother did not press her to talk on

the subject. Ninian soon after coming in also gave a different turn to their thoughts ; and Laura went up to bed, seeming much as usual.

Going into her room the last thing, however, as Mrs. Grey nearly always did, she found Laura sitting up, with her Prayer-Book open before her, looking flushed and excited.

“ Not in bed, you naughty child !” said Mrs. Grey.

“ No, mamma. I have been looking at this part of the Prayer-Book, finding those prayers Mr. Hayward read to-day. I never knew they were here.”

“ No, dear ! You have had no occasion, happily, to know them. Some day you will know the comfort of them,” and Mrs. Grey sighed.

“ They are very beautiful, I think. And he said them so beautifully, mamma, in such a calm *steady* voice. Isn't it wonderful how anybody can read like that, in such a case ? One can't imagine their being able ; I am sure *I* should cry and break down.”

“ Very likely, Laura. But you must remember that clergymen do these kind of things every day of their lives. I should think Mr. Hayward was well accustomed to it.”

“ He seemed quite different somehow, to-day, mamma ; he was so kind and nice at that time ; and to me too, when I was so horribly stupid and upset. I was so angry with myself. I think it was a great shame of me to laugh at him as I did.”

“ I told you so, Laura. I never like to hear good people cut up and laughed at ; even if they are not particularly attractive.”

Laura was silent for a few minutes, then she said : “ Mamma, there is one thing I have always so wondered about, I want to ask you. If we were very ill, you or I, should *we* be visited like the poor people ?”

“ Certainly, Laura, if we desired it, as I hope we should.”

“ I used to think one would be very frightened to

have a clergyman come to one—and not know what to do. But to-day, I think, if one was very ill like that, I should like Mr. Hayward to come and read in that wonderful calm quiet voice. I think it must be very helping—and to hear those words, the last thing, you know,” she added, in a low awestruck tone, with flushed cheeks and dilated eyes.

Mrs. Grey observed her a little anxiously; she was evidently overstrung and excited.

“He would come to us, wouldn’t he?”

“Yes, dear,” she answered quietly. “But you know it does not matter who the person is who visits us, so as one has the consolations of our Church; it is all the same, really. As a rule it is best not to think too much of these things beforehand, but to leave them, knowing and trusting that they will all happen just as is best for us, according to GOD’S appointment. I dare say Mr. Hayward is very pleasant, and quiet, and kind about a sick person; but you must remember that he was only doing what hundreds and hundreds of clergy are doing every day, throughout the land. I don’t say this to disparage him; only as a caution to a certain little girl who is rather apt to run into extremes, not to make a wonderful hero of the first clergyman she has seen doing his work thoroughly; the same person for whom, a few days ago, nothing was bad enough.”

Laura made no answer; perhaps she did not quite relish her mother’s playful words.

“And now, dear, finish your reading—if you have not done so—and go to bed and to sleep, for you have had a tiring upsetting sort of day. Try and put everything out of your head; we have talked enough for to-night. Good night, dearest, and GOD bless you.”

Laura obeyed her mother as far as going to bed was concerned, but she did not find sleep come at her bidding. The events of the day would come back to her mind, do what she might; but in spite of much that was painful in the recollection of what she had that

afternoon witnessed, there was a certain under-current of something new, and soothing, and pleasant connected with it, which prevented her from feeling nervous as she otherwise might have done. What it consisted in she could not herself have told; but her last conscious thoughts were not so much of the suffering and the death-scene, as of the calm steadfast face and voice that went through it all without change or emotion—like a faint human type of that Faith which is the one unchanging support in sorrow and in death.

CHAPTER VII.

“The truest wisdom there, and noblest art
Is his, who skills of comfort best.”

KEBLE.

“I SAY, Laura, shall you want the carriage to-day?”
“The carriage! No, Nin, I don’t think so. Why?”

“Because I want Lassie, sharp. There’s a message from Glover’s to say the horse I ordered got cast last night and can’t stand—the last meet of the season, and not another beast to be got for love or money. So I must just have her, Laura.”

“Would mamma allow it, Nin?”

“Would she! of course she would in a case of this sort. You’re not going to humbug?”

“I think I would rather you didn’t, with mamma away.”

“Well you *are* a precious dog in the manger!”

“But, Nin darling, if any accident were to happen—”

“Accident be hanged! As if you didn’t know the mare was twice as safe as half the screws one gets from Glover’s.”

“ Well, Nin, you must do what you think right yourself. You know I should be so very sorry to disappoint you, darling.”

“ Oh, bother your ‘ darling !’ Do you want Lassie, or do you not ?”

Laura hesitated. She had to act on her own responsibility, for she and Ninian were alone, Mrs. Grey having gone on a few days’ visit to her husband’s father. He was an elderly man, an invalid, and lived alone with one unmarried daughter ; and as Mrs. Grey usually went to see him by herself, she wished to take the opportunity of going while Laura had her brother’s companionship. In the present instance, Laura’s conscience told her what would be the safest course, both for herself and Ninian ; the most proper also, as it was an understood thing by both that Lassie was never hunted. But then this was quite an exceptional case, and Mrs. Grey might have given permission ; and it was so hard to seem unkind to Ninian. “ Well, no, dear, then ; I don’t want her, and if you think mamma wouldn’t mind, you can order her. But *please* be very careful—you know she *does* rush at her jumps.”

“ Don’t teach your grandmother !” said Ninian, scornfully ; “ do you think because she ran away with you, that I can’t hold her ? Well, I’m off then,” and away he ran to the stable.

Very soon he was on the way to the place of meeting, as happy as his careless schoolboy conscience, a “ southerly wind and a cloudy sky,” and Lassie, bounding along as if her joints were springs of steel, could make him. “ By jingo, this is a capital beast !” he exclaimed to himself, as she cleared a low hedge in fine style ; “ and she’s to be kept under a glass case, for Miss Laura’s amusement, forsooth, and to ruin her hocks with that disgusting pony-carriage. She rush at her fences indeed !” Ah, Master Ninian, wait till she has a whole field of horses before and beside her, and then see if you can hold her so easily !

After he was gone Laura set herself to her household duties, not altogether without some little qualms of conscience. Then she sat down and wrote a letter to her mother (which she did daily during her absence) in which she told her what had occurred, thereby relieving her mind somewhat. This occupied her till lunch time, after which, having nothing particular to do she sallied forth with her music, and one of Matthew's boys as a blower, for a practice on the church organ.

She stayed at it about an hour, and was returning to occupy the rest of her solitary day in the garden, wondering as she walked home, how Ninian and Lassie were getting on; when on reaching her own gate she was rather startled to see two splashed, hot-looking horses, evidently hunters, held by one of Matthew's children; and his wife, who kept the lodge gate, looking out apparently in great anxiety. The woman began, immediately on seeing Laura, "Oh, Miss Grey, Miss Grey! Oh dear, oh dear!" and could get no farther.

"What is it? What is the matter?" cried Laura in terror. "Tell me, Mrs. Jones; tell me at once."

"Oh dear, miss—Mr. Grey's been thrown—met with an accident. Mr. Bayliss has just brought him home. Oh dear, oh dear, and your mamma away!"

Laura felt her old enemy, that horrible faintness, coming over her, but as her mother had hoped she was really stronger for her experience of a few days previous, and she rallied her courage at once, and flew rather than ran into the house. On the stairs Mr. Bayliss met her. "Oh! where is he? is he hurt?" she cried.

"Well, he's sort of stunned, just now, my dear young lady, but I don't *think* there's any bones broke. Whitehead's gone off for the doctor straight. What was he doing with that fiery little brute after the hounds?"

But Laura had pressed on into the bedroom, where the two maids had already laid the unconscious boy in his own bed as easily as might be. His eyes were

closed, his face motionless and pale ; a dark bruise on one side of his forehead.

“That was the tree,” said Mr. Bayliss, who had followed her. “It was an ugly fall, but it might have been worse.”

“How was it?”

“Well, it was just this way. I saw it all, for when I noticed how the mare was having it all her own way, I thought I would keep my eye on him. Whitehead and he were going on together, neck and neck, at a low bit of fence with some scrubby trees here and there in it. Whitehead’s horse has a long stride, and he took the fence first, all right ; and then this little tearing vixen rushes in, on the wrong side, between him and a tree. There was plenty of room for her, but the tree caught your brother’s head, and knocked him off. Happily he got clear of the stirrup or he must have been killed.”

“Oh ! Nin, darling, if you would only speak to me,” Laura cried, as she bent over him.

“He’ll come round in a bit, Miss Grey—he’ll come round in a bit,” said good-natured Mr. Bayliss reassuringly. “Don’t you be feared. The doctor’ll be here before long, and he’ll put him all right. I’ll wish you good-day now—is there anything more I can do first?”

“Oh no, thank you,” said poor Laura. She was bewildered and miserable, but almost thankful to be alone with the servants. “Oh ! if mamma was but nere !” she kept repeating.

“Couldn’t we telegraph to Mrs. Grey, miss ?” the maid suggested.

“Oh yes, of course.” Laura seized on the notion, though she had not much idea how to carry it out, having no experience in such matters. Just then a message was brought up to her, that Mr. and Mrs. Hayward were in the drawing-room, “and Mrs. Hayward bid me say,” said the servant, “that if you would

allow her, and she could be of any use, she would come up, and you wasn't to trouble going down to her."

Laura felt as if it would be a relief to see some one who could tell her what to do, so she accepted the offer; and the good lady came up to the door of the bedroom.

"Oh, my dear Miss Grey," she began in a whisper, "I hope you won't consider I am intruding, but when we heard of the accident Ambrose made me come, knowing Mrs. Grey was absent, he thought I might be able to be of some use to you—and the dear boy, is he much hurt?"

"He is stunned—he hasn't moved or spoken—look! Oh! Mrs. Hayward, what shall I do?"

"When do you expect your mamma back?"

"She was coming home to-morrow. I want to telegraph to her: don't you think—?"

"Yes, dear, certainly. She ought to know at once."

"Could you kindly tell me? I don't quite know how I ought to send."

"Mr. Hayward will do all that for you, dear, if you will let him. He is downstairs—will you tell him what you wish? and I will sit here, behind the curtain, you know, and call you if there is the least move."

So Laura went down to the drawing-room, and there she found the clergyman. It was one of Ambrose Hayward's peculiarities, that on occasions when almost any other person would have shown, or at least tried to show, some little impulsiveness of solicitude, he was always peculiarly calm and unmoved. In the present instance he shook hands with Laura as coolly as if it had been the most ordinary visit—yet there was something in that very absence of all flurry, that brought back to her the sense of confidence and support which she had felt on the occasion of Lucy's death. "What can I do for you, Miss Grey?"

"Oh! please—Mrs. Hayward thought—if you

would tell me how to telegraph to mamma. I never sent one before."

"Not know how to write a telegram? I'll show you. Give your name and address, and that of the person to whom you are sending; and then put your message, in as few words as you choose. Twenty words go for a shilling."

One of those absurd connections of idea, which strike every one sometimes at the very worst moment, made Laura suddenly think of Sir Macklin's

"Never mind
The pennies for the chairs you sit on,"

and caused her to give something between a hysterical laugh and a sob, as she found her fingers trembling too much to guide the pen.

"I'll write it for you," said Mr. Hayward. "Miss Grey, Sunnywood, Axhill, to Mrs. Grey—your mother's address, please? thank you—now, what will you say?"

"'Ninian has had a fall, please come home at once,' will that do?"

"Yes, very well."

"I can't tell her more—not to frighten her, you know—as the doctor has not come."

"No, I think it is best just so."

"And where must I send this?"

"I'll take it to the office for you. You had best not send any of your people out."

"What time will she get it?"

"That depends on how far she is from a station."

"Oh, it is quite near—grandpapa's."

"Then she'll get it under half-an-hour. You'll have her home by the six o'clock train."

"What a blessing!" And as Mr. Hayward pocketed the envelope and turned to go, she said, "It is so kind of you—and I had almost forgotten to thank you."

"You mustn't thank me. Keep a good courage."

“Do you think it’s very bad?” she whispered, looking up pleadingly into the calm grave eyes that were fixed on her so compassionately.

“I cannot judge. It may not be much, the merely being stunned. I hope you will soon have the doctor. I shall call again just to hear the report,” and with that he went away.

Laura went back to her anxious watch, and soon after came the doctor. He was an old friend to her, and very kind; but she had never in her life dreaded anything like his visit, and was only too thankful for the companionship of good Mrs. Hayward. She found that the old lady, though given to tearful eyes and headshakings on ordinary occasions, could be very composed and collected in any real emergency.

The doctor’s examination was over at last, and it was a relief untold to hear that no bones were broken, and that there was nothing dreadful to be “done”—but even he could not bring back consciousness, there was nothing but patience for that; and besides the blow on the head, which might or might not be dangerous, there was an awkward contusion of the right knee, always a troublesome sort of business. Having done what he could, the doctor left, promising to call again later.

After a while Mr. Hayward came back. His mother went down to speak to him, and give him the latest report, and then came up to Laura; “Would you speak to him a moment, dear?” she asked.

“Your telegram is gone all right, Miss Grey. You will expect your mother by the evening train?”

“Oh yes, I am going to send the carriage.”

“I was thinking I would go and meet her,” he said. “I can give her the details that much sooner at any rate.”

“How good of you to think of it!”

“Has Ninian come to himself at all?”

“No, not the least. Would you like to see him?”

“Would you like that I should come up?”

She led the way up stairs, and he followed her to the door of Ninian's room, where his mother was. As he entered Laura heard him say in a low voice, “Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it.” It sounded strange and quaint to her ears, but she remembered that it was in the Prayer-Book at the beginning of the Visitation Office. Then he went up and looked at the still motionless form for a few minutes in silence.

“Couldn't you read us something before you go, Ambrose?” said Mrs. Hayward softly.

He looked at Laura for permission, then knelt down, and repeated two or three short collects from the Prayer-Book. After they had risen he turned to go, saying to Laura, “I must go home now; I have something to do before six o'clock.”

“Won't you let the carriage pick you up?” said Laura, with sudden thoughtfulness.

“No, thank you. I don't know where I may be, but I shall not miss that train,” and with a silent shake of the hand he departed.

“It is so good of him to take all this trouble,” Laura said, when once more alone with Mrs. Hayward. “I am afraid he will be quite tired going about so much.”

“Oh, my dear, he is never tired! I am sure in London he used to be walking about all day, and half the night too very often; for when there was a child to baptize, or any one ill, they were sure to call for him. Sick people always like him so much, somehow,” the old lady added.

About half-an-hour longer they sat together, sometimes speaking in whispers, when Laura's quick ear caught a sound from the bed, and with a hasty sign to her companion she went before the curtain.

Ninian was indeed moving slightly; stiffly opening his eyes, and trying to look round.

"I say—what—what is it?" came in a faint puzzled tone. "Why, Laura—"

"Oh, Nin, my own own darling," Laura cried, as the dear eyes met hers at last with returning consciousness. "You *are* better now!"

"Laura, I say, what is it all? Where are we? Why are you standing there? You look so queer."

"Oh, Nin, you've had an accident—don't you know—you were out hunting—"

"O ay. I came some sort of a cropper—but it must have been a long time ago."

"Only this afternoon, dear." Then Laura slipped out and told her kind companion the happy news; Mrs. Hayward promising to remain as long as she liked, but to keep out of sight lest she should disturb Ninian. Laura returned to him.

"I remember something about it now," he said, musing. "It was the fault of that beast Lassie—I don't know where she went."

"It was in jumping, I think."

"I dare say. You were quite right, Laura, the mare's a regular brute of a puller. I shall advise mother to sell her, and I hope it'll be to a butcher or baker, who'll work her off her legs."

"Poor Lassie! she's in harness now, at any rate, going to the station for mamma."

"Mamma? Oh, yes, I remember. Does she come home to-night?"

"I hope so. I've sent for her."

"Sent for her, Laura—what, about this confounded spill? You must be mad!"

"I couldn't help, dear. You were stunned, you know—and we—I mean, I was so frightened, and Mr. and Mrs. Hayward came and they thought I ought to telegraph at once."

"I wish the parson was hanged, and the old woman too!" cried Ninian, loud enough to have been heard outside the door. "Telegraph for mother indeed,

about a wretched thing like this ! What business has he to come spooning here, when mamma's away ?”

A bright scarlet flush shot over Laura's face and neck, to her great confusion. Had the words come by chance, or had this heedless schoolboy of fifteen made the discovery that her three years' maturer wisdom failed to penetrate ?

CHAPTER VIII.

“ And thus a delicate spark
 Of glowing and growing light,
 Through the livelong hours of the dark,
 Kept itself warm in the heart of my dreams.”
 TENNYSON.

MRS. Grey arrived duly by the six o'clock train in a great state of anxiety, naturally ; a little relieved and reassured however, by good Mr. Hayward meeting her with further news, at the station.

Laura was greatly relieved by her arrival ; though, from the time that Ninian had first looked up and spoken consciously, that great weight of anxiety had been lifted off her mind. He was able to comfort his mother by assuring her that he felt all right, only his head ached a little ; and he passed a fairly comfortable night. The doctor's report next morning was favourable, as far as the blow on the head was concerned ; as cold bandages and quiet would probably soon set it all right. The knee however was painful and inflamed ; and he gave it as his opinion that in all probability a month, or even two, might elapse before the boy would be able to use it with safety.

When Ninian heard to what punishment his one heedless transgression had condemned him, he growled and bemoaned himself exceedingly. Of course he

would lose no end of time at school, and he was sufficiently diligent in general, to feel the great disadvantage that this would be to him ; but to be at home, and tied to the sofa, was a thing hardly to be borne. Laura's devotion to her brother was never more thoroughly exercised than at present, for she gave up all but necessary going out, and spent her whole time in attendance upon him—reading, chattering, or playing at games—not always a thankful office either, for Ninian, in his normal condition, abhorred sedentary occupations.

One day, not long after the accident, Mr. Hayward called to say to Mrs. Grey, "I have a letter from the Bishop this morning, telling me he will come here to confirm on the Friday before Whitsun Day. Is there any chance of Ninian being able to go?"

Mrs. Grey counted the days, and said she hoped it might be possible to manage it. She wished him, at any rate, to prepare for it.

So Mr. Hayward fixed an hour for reading with him daily ; and after one of the first lessons Ninian informed his mother : "I say, mamma, the parson said if you liked he could give me an hour extra of Latin and Greek, to prevent my losing time altogether. I said I would tell you."

Mrs. Grey considered for a moment.

"He meant free gratis for nothing, mother ; at least I took it so. He seemed as if he would *like*."

So next day Mrs. Grey met him and thanked him for the proposal. She feared it would be a tax upon his time—hardly fair, &c., &c.

"Not at all. I just mentioned it, as he complained to me he was so utterly idle. Of course it is only for a time : I can easily manage."

Thus it was settled. The sitting-room next the conservatory, with the pretty sunny windows opening on the balcony, was devoted to the use of Ninian and Mr. Hayward entirely for two hours, sometimes more, in the forenoon of every day.

The arrangement was an immense boon to Ninian. The mere food for occupation and interest relieving the tedious monotony of every day was a great advantage ; but the influence of such a man as Mr. Hayward was even of higher importance to him at this period of his life. Ninian was more easily influenced under his present circumstances than if he had been in the midst of his usual pursuits ; and, in their long talks together on religious subjects, he confided to Mr. Hayward things which neither his mother nor sister would ever have drawn from him—confessions of school escapades and scrapes that would have made Mrs. Grey shudder and Laura miserable for life. Not that Ninian's career as a schoolboy was a disgraceful one ; but, like all fatherless boys, he was greatly in need of a man's counsel and authority ; and he had been placed providentially in the way of the very man who was likely to do him good. Ambrose Hayward had a great insight into boy nature, and a great power of winning boys' confidence—partly because with all his gravity there was a good deal of the boy in him still ; and partly because like his mother he always had a yearning towards and sympathy with boys of Ninian's age, for the sake of his own lost brother.

Whether he was likely to influence any one else at the same time was a question which Mrs. Grey often and anxiously asked herself. Laura was very precious to her ; and the comparative seclusion in which they had hitherto lived made the introduction of any new male element into their small society always rather a subject for consideration. In the present case Mrs. Grey felt that she could not have refused Mr. Hayward's services to Ninian without doing the boy a great injustice, besides seeming unreasonable. Laura had little or nothing to do with the arrangement ; indeed, it was a great relief to her, as it allowed her to pursue her own occupations without the hindrance of constant attendance on her brother.

Mrs. Grey watched Laura narrowly, but Laura was very difficult to read just now: for, freely as she chattered on almost all subjects to her mother, since the episode of Ninian's accident she had quite given up talking about the clergyman.

In fact, Mrs. Grey's cogitations on the subject arose not so much from anything Laura had said or done as from her own intuitions with regard to Mr. Hayward. Although a casual observer could have detected nothing in his manner beyond that of the most ordinary friendly acquaintance,—

“Mothers' eyes are quick as light,
Glancing wide and watching near,”

and, in spite of all his outward impassiveness, Mrs. Grey had more than once noticed something in his demeanour towards her daughter that made her suspect him of at least being attracted by her: and she was not mistaken.

For he had been wonderfully attracted by the “good little girl,” as he called her—originally, perhaps, by the accident of likeness which had struck him so forcibly on their first meeting; and as he saw more of her this likeness was constantly rising up and striking him in a variety of ways—either in her merry smile, her random way of talking, or her mischievous buoyant spirits: until, as he came to know her, she assumed an individuality and identity of her own: became, in short, less like the image of his dead brother, and more like her living self; and as such began to occupy a very prominent place in his thoughts.

One so prone to constant and searching self-examination as he was could not long remain in ignorance of the state of his own heart; and he did not attempt to deceive himself, or to shut his eyes to the fact that he did think about Laura Grey more than he had a right to think of any one who was never to be anything to him but a friend and acquaintance. Having faced this fact,

and carefully considered the subject in its different bearings, he came to the conclusion (as he did not hold any 'extreme views' with regard to the celibacy of the clergy) that not only was there nothing wrong in it, but that it was perfectly natural, innocent, lawful, and right that he should so think of her.

Not that he intended or expected any immediate result to follow. Prompt and decided as he always was, he was not precipitate; and he was far too conscious of his personal want of attraction to risk the destruction of his hopes by a too premature disclosure of them. Considering his very short and slight acquaintance with Laura, he could well afford to let matters remain as they were in the meantime.

But it was a wonderful thing for one whose life had hitherto been in many respects lonely and shady—chequered by heavy losses, and wanting in sympathy, to feel even the distant bare possibility of the fulfilment of such a hope: that the warm earnest heart, with such a conscious capacity for deep, unselfish, if undemonstrative affection, *might* some day find another to beat in unison and sympathy with itself: a love to be all its own, of right. What marvel if Ambrose Hayward, in the solitude of his own chamber, should daily kneel and thank GOD for giving him the comfort of this innocent, secret hope, and the opportunities of patiently, though unobtrusively, in the duties of his life, working in some degree towards its fulfilment?

CHAPTER IX.

“ Would I had been, fair Inez,
That gallant cavalier
Who rode so gaily by thy side,
And whispered thee so near.”
HOOD.

NINIAN'S recovery progressed, after the first week or so, more rapidly than had originally been expected. By the day of the Confirmation he was able to walk a little, sufficiently to go to church, and to go up to the Bishop without attracting attention as he had feared. The day was a happy one to Mrs. Grey; and from her boy's thoughtful and reverent behaviour she hoped that the late events, and the good advice he had received from Mr. Hayward, were likely to make this time a sort of turning point in his hitherto rather heedless, aimless life.

On the Sunday following he was also able to attend the morning service, and to receive his first Communion with his mother and sister. Some more weeks still elapsed before he could with safety return to school: but at the end of May the doctor pronounced him convalescent; and with moderate care there was no reason now why he should not go back, as he himself was anxious to do, for the short time which yet remained before the midsummer holidays.

His mother and Laura missed him more than ever; but their thoughts were somewhat occupied just now in preparing for some expected guests. These were Mrs. Grey's sister and her three children, Laura's cousins, who usually spent some part of the year at Sunnywood. Mrs. Mansell, like Mrs. Grey, was a widow; unlike Mrs. Grey, entirely in subjection to her children, two energetic and lively young ladies, and a son of about twenty-three, a lieutenant in the army.

Ella and Mina Mansell were some years older than Laura. With the exception of being accomplished musicians, both vocal and instrumental, they were really very ordinary types of the young ladies of the period. They rode, danced, played at croquet well; drew a little, painted a little, and dressed a good deal. They overran Laura altogether, patronizing her homely little pursuits good-naturedly, and treating her to a good deal of their superior wisdom; but for all that Laura was fond of her cousins, and enjoyed their society.

The duties of entertaining them, however, interfered sadly with her former occupations. She was naturally entirely taken up with them for the first two days of their visit; but on the third, which was Saturday, her mother said, "Don't you require to practise a bit for to-morrow, Laura?"

"I suppose I ought, mamma, if"—she looked towards her cousins.

"I dare say they will excuse you. Perhaps Ella and Mina may like to accompany you and see the church. There are some improvements since they were here, I think."

"What's that?" said Ella. "The church—oh! I should like of all things to hear Laura practise. Do you have the school-children?"

"Oh, no; not now. It is only my private practice, Ella."

"Well, let's come with you, at any rate, and hear what's going to be to-morrow," and off the girls ran for their hats.

"What's up now?" asked Mr. Mansell, as he met them just going out.

"Oh! the organist's going to practise, and we're going to listen," said Ella. "Are you coming too?"

"May I? I should like to hear the 'organ recital.'"

"Of course! Come along, Willie."

So away the four went, a merry party—talking and

laughing up to the church porch. Laura had a key of her own, but she looked about her a little nervously, for she fancied Mr. Hayward would not approve of quite so much noise, and she secretly hoped he was not within hearing.

Into the organ chamber they passed safely, and there Laura hoped at least that her companions would be quiet; but Ella and Mina went on chattering in hardly subdued tones.

“What a cranky old concern! only six stops! What music do you use? Helmore’s Manual—ugh! stupid old thing! You should have Redhead if you wish to go in for that style of music thoroughly—I hate Gregorians! What are you going to play? ‘O Paradise!’ that’s sweetly pretty; but, my dear child, you haven’t got the right tune: that’s an atrocious thing. You want a lot of ‘reform’ here, I see. Look, Mina!”

Laura went through her hymns as best she might with this running accompaniment, then took up a voluntary book.

“Oh, I say, Laura, have you got the march in ‘Eli?’ that’s an awfully jolly one.”

“I can’t play anything so crashy,” Laura said.

“Stuff, nonsense! Let me see if I can remember a bit: I’ll show you.”

And before Laura could say a word Ella had shoved her off her stool, and putting on the full force of the organ burst into such a strain as it had not heard since Miss Simpson’s days. Crash, crash! bang, bang! Ella’s style was of the showy pianoforte kind, and the effect was blurred and painful in the extreme on the poor old organ. At length, coming down full on a wrong chord, she stopped, and burst into a titter.

“I beg your pardon,” said a low solemn voice close beside them, “but this organ is only permitted to be used for the practice of the Church music, and by the organist.”

Ella was really startled for a moment as she turned

and faced the tall black-vested figure of the incumbent ; but she recovered herself immediately, saying, " Oh, I'm very sorry ! I really didn't know I was doing wrong. My cousin came here to practise, but I dare say she is ready to go, aren't you, Laura ?"

Laura, who had been hitherto hidden behind the others in the darkness of the corner, now came forward, looking ready to sink into the earth.

" I am so sorry ! My cousin was only trying over something to let me hear."

" I am sorry to interrupt you ; but you know our rule. Of course I cannot relax it in one case without being expected to do so in all. But you have not finished practising ?"

" Oh, yes !" said poor Laura, who could not have played another note then to save her life. " We are quite ready to go."

" Will you introduce us, Laura ?" said Ella, looking a little amused, for Laura had hitherto been, as her cousin afterwards assured her, too " flabbergasted" to think of doing so.

" Mr. Hayward, Miss Mansell, Mr. Mansell," she said, under her breath.

" Have you been round the church ? Is there anything I can show you ?" Mr. Hayward asked.

" Is there anything wonderful ?" said Ella, flip-pantly.

" Any charming old brasses ?" said Mina.

" Nothing very remarkable, I fear."

" You have a good hot-house apparently," said Mr. Mansell, pointing to two vases of splendid geraniums which had been placed upon the Altar since they came into the church, in readiness for Sunday morning.

" Oh, no ; a very small one, but we are Londoners, we think a great deal of it."

They passed out of the church, much more quietly than they had come in, and took leave of Mr. Hayward at the porch.

"Well, I wouldn't have been you for something, Ella!" Mr. Mansell exclaimed as soon as they were in the road. "I don't think *I* shall have the face to go to church to-morrow, whatever you may do."

"Well, my conscience doesn't smite me very much; but still it *was* awkward," laughed Ella. "It was too bad of Laura though not to warn one."

"Poor organ! I wonder if it will ever recover the touch of your profane fingers," said Mina. "Such absurdity! as if it mattered what one did, so long as it wasn't in service time."

"He ought to put up a notice: 'All persons found trespassing on these keys and stops will be prosecuted.' He certainly made me jump. I thought it was the ghost of some old monk."

"If you only hadn't played that wrong note," said Laura, "and then laughed so loud."

"Don't you talk, Laura; it's all your fault."

"I forgot; and I never thought of his coming in."

"He's a rum fish, certainly," was Willie Mansell's opinion. "Sinister-looking a chap as I ever saw!"

"He's very kind when you know him," said Laura, a little hurt.

"Don't bite those he knows? He doesn't like strangers, evidently. I shouldn't like to feel his teeth."

"Does he preach very long sermons?"

"Does he always go about in a black dressing gown?"

"His cassock! Oh, no; only in church and the school, and that sort of thing."

"He must astonish the rustic mind, after good old Mr. Smedley. I can't say I think him an improvement."

"Nor did I at first," Laura owned. "I loved old Mr. Smedley, and so I do still—as an old friend; and I never could see any faults in him; but Mr.

Hayward *does* go about more amongst the poor, and have more services, and nicer ones."

"I should think he was a staunch upholder of the Confessional, that fellow," said Willie Mansell.

"And frightened the poor people out of their wits," chimed in his sister.

"There you're quite wrong, Ella," said Laura; "I never heard of his making anybody go to confession, and the poor are very fond of him."

"He's got you on his side, at any rate," said Mina; whereat Laura reddened and held her peace.

The cousins gave a glowing and laughing description of their adventure to their mother and aunt on returning home, and there was a great deal of merriment over Ella's start at the sudden apparition. Laura took very little part in the conversation. Inconsistent as she was, she forgot how short a time since she had been equally ready to laugh at poor Mr. Hayward's peculiarities. The events of the last two months seemed to have made him a different person altogether in here yes; and her cousins' free and flippant criticisms made her feel secretly unhappy. She tried to comfort herself by "having it out" with her mother, when they were alone at night, on the subject of the adventure with the organ, which she felt keenly; for she was growing very sensitive as to Mr. Hayward's likes and dislikes in Church matters.

"It was so dreadful, mamma, you have no idea! He had come in with the altar vases, and goodness knows how long he had been in the church listening, while Ella was crashing away at that horrid thing, and then she came down on such a discord, and laughed so loud—you know her way! I thought I should have died of it."

"It was unlucky. I ought to have given them a warning. Ella is much too thoughtless."

"I dare say he thinks it is all my fault, but really I couldn't help it."

“ Oh, no ; you had nothing to do with it.”

“ He doesn't know, though, and he looked so grave and shocked. Do you think he will think badly of me for ever ?”

“ If he does, dear, his opinion is not worth very much,” said Mrs. Grey, as she wished her daughter good night.

What did Mr. Hayward think ?

Of the episode of the organ, as far as regarded Laura's share therein, he thought little or nothing ; but with the sudden irruption of these visitors at Sunnywood, he could not help feeling rather as if a state of things which had been going on very pleasantly, and smoothly, and quietly, for a long time, had all at once been brought to an abrupt termination.

Ninian's return to school of course put an end to his daily visits to Sunnywood ; although he did not lose much by that as far as Laura was concerned, as, except a casual meeting coming in or going out, he had never seen her at these times. He did, however, miss the interest which these visits to Ninian had afforded him ; for he had given a good deal of his heart to the boy, who had so readily responded to his influence.

He saw very little of the Greys just now. One day—a particularly dry hot dusty day, as he was walking between Axhill and the town, he was aware of the clattering of many hoofs behind him, and was overtaken by a merry trio of riders, consisting of Laura, on the long-since-forgiven Lassie, and Willie Mansell and Ella, both on hired animals. And though he had never been on horseback in his life, and probably would not have remained on long if he had been put there, Ambrose Hayward, walking along the dusty road, felt a most unaccountable and unreasonable envy of the riders of those clattering steeds ; especially of the handsome young officer who rode at Laura's right hand, laughing and chatting with all the familiarity of cousinhood. Laura looked brighter and merrier

than he had almost ever seen her—so completely in her element, with Lassie bounding away under her, so completely out of poor Mr. Hayward's! What an absurdity it seemed for a poor plain hard-worked parish priest to think about her!

Next day, however, came a note to the parsonage, from Mrs. Grey, inviting Mr., Mrs. and Miss Hayward to dine at Sunnywood, and meet her guests. Mrs. Hayward never dined out; but Ambrose and Emily accepted, and on the appointed evening presented themselves—he quiet, and grave, and dignified, as usual, his sister very ill at ease in the rustling of her one best black silk dress, with pale pink ribbons, and a very large jet cross suspended round her neck, so much overcome by having to run the gauntlet of three fashionably dressed young ladies, that she could hardly speak a word. The other guests were only Miss Matilda Hart, and a young man, a brother of hers, who was staying with them for a few days; and Mr. Wylde, the priest in charge of a large district church in the town.

The party, though small, was a lively one. Ella and Mina were terrible chatterboxes, and rattled on at their fastest, thereby contrasting unfavourably with their brother, whose talk, light and amusing, was always sensible. Where Matilda Hart was, there was never any lack of animated conversation, and Mr. Wylde also had plenty to say for himself; so the deficiencies of Ambrose and Emily Hayward in that respect were amply covered.

When the ladies had returned to the drawing-room after dinner, the talk of the young ones turned upon a Penny Reading which Mr. Hayward was getting up, as a kind of experiment, the proceeds, if any, to be devoted to the improvement of the organ; chiefly upon the desirability or undesirability of introducing musical performances into the programme.

Ella and Mina were loudly in favour of the music;

indeed they both strongly urged making the affair a concert, with a few readings introduced therein, and had quite talked Laura into their views by the time the gentlemen joined them. Emily, whose shyness had thawed considerably in the universal talk, gave it as her opinion that her brother didn't much approve of that kind of thing—at least not in London.

“ Oh ! I'll soon manage him,” cried Ella. “ Mr. Hayward, come here, will you ? We have all come to the conclusion that the only successful plan for your soirée will be a concert, with occasional readings. We had one last Christmas at home, for coals for the poor, and made twenty pounds clear. Now, if you'll do it at once while we are here, we shall be only too happy to give our poor assistance, and I'm sure you'll find plenty more to join.”

“ It's a matter requiring some consideration,” said the slow grave tones, when Ella had talked herself out of breath. “ I have seen something of these things in London, and I never found them productive of any great good.”

“ Ah, in London, that may be ; it is so different. There any one may hear the great singers comparatively cheaply, at any time ; but at an out-of-the-way place like this, where they never come—”

“ Such a host of talent would be a sure draw,” put in Mr. Mansell.

“ You're laughing at me I know, Willie,” said his sister, “ but it's all very fine ; you'll have to give your services, I can tell you.”

“ At a hundred guineas a night. I hope Mr. Hayward is prepared.”

“ You and Laura must sing that ‘ May Queen ’ duett you were trying over yesterday. It suits both your voices so well. Whom else shall we have ? You would sing, of course, Mr. Hayward.”

“ Oh no, not I. I never sing except in choir.”

“ Now is that true, Miss Hayward ?”

"Quite, I am afraid," said Emily.

"You'll sing then, or play?"

"You won't get anything out of *her*," said her brother, with a touch of dry humour. "Not if she knows it—eh, Emily?"

"Well, you are two very naughty people, and don't deserve to be helped. However, if you will undertake all the prosaic part of the business, the seating, and lighting, and ticket-selling, I'll arrange the musical part, with the organist's assistance. Will you trust me? is it a bargain?"

"Not without further consideration, Miss Mansell."

"Well, but how long am I to give you? We are going away the week after next."

"We couldn't do it without you," said Laura to her cousin. "There would be no one to keep it up at all."

"Are you very anxious about it, Miss Grey?" Mr. Hayward asked.

"Well, I think it would be very nice, but of course you know best. You talked of having the choir, at any rate."

"The choir; oh, of course, for glees and things," said Ella. "Have you any solo singers amongst them?"

"Mr. Mortlock could sing a song, I'm sure," Laura said. "He has such a nice voice."

"The Miss Baylisses sing very nicely," suggested Miss Matilda. "I should think they would like to be asked." Since there had been higher game at Axhill than the handsome churchwarden, Miss Matilda had been wonderfully charitable towards the Miss Baylisses.

"Dear me, we shall have quite an *embarras des richesses*," Ella said. "We only want Mr. Hayward's consent. Come, Laura, let us join our entreaties."

Laura's quick perception saw that Mr. Hayward was growing annoyed under such persistent bullying. Ella and Mina never knew when to stop, when they were

set upon anything. Laura was quite as anxious for the concert, but she had too much good taste to press her wishes, and thus appealed to she only said quietly, "Mr. Hayward must do as he thinks best."

If she had intended to gain her point she could not have taken a surer way, although she did not know it.

"I'll see about it," Mr. Hayward said; and then turned away as if he wished to drop the subject.

CHAPTER X.

"The world went on—my heart stood still."

OWEN MEREDITH.

MR. Hayward's "seeing about" anything usually meant business. In the present instance the first outcome of it was that a few handbills were struck off, announcing that, on such a day, the choir of S. Martin's, Axhill, assisted by some amateurs, would give a musical entertainment in the Schoolroom, in aid of the funds for enlarging the church organ: to commence at seven o'clock precisely; the Rev. Ambrose Hayward, incumbent, in the chair.

In the meantime Mrs. Grey's usually quiet house sounded like a school of music, and was, so to speak, turned upside down. Ella and Mina were in a perfect ferment, writing programmes, altering them a dozen times, trying songs, writing notes to Mr. Hayward till he was almost distracted. Laura was carried away by her cousins' enthusiasm, but hers differed essentially from theirs. To them any kind of excitement was welcome; it was everything to be the chief movers in any scheme which was afloat. They liked putting themselves forward; it was their element. Laura, as far as regarded her share of the business, was certainly acting a part, with great delight in the acting of it.

She was passionately fond of music; but the concerts she had as yet attended were few and far between, rare and wonderful events in her quiet life. She looked, as very young, music-loving people often will innocently look, upon the few professional performers she had as yet heard as the most exalted and happy of mortals, whom amateurs might humbly follow and admire at a distance, but with whom they could never aspire to vie. To sing at a concert appeared to her one of the pinnacles of human happiness.

What then was she to think of singing at a concert herself—before an audience mixed enough to be ‘the real thing,’ yet homely enough not to be too alarming—in a way that was quite ladylike, and harmless, and innocent, and for a useful purpose too—for the benefit of the church? To add the last drop to her cup of happiness, also, Ninian returned home the day before.

She was only to sing twice; a duett with her cousin, Mr. Mansell, and a little ballad alone. Her mother thought this quite enough, and sometimes half regretted having given her sanction when she saw how excited Laura often grew on the subject.

The excitement at Sunnywood extended not slightly to the other persons concerned in the performance. The Misses Bayliss were greatly flattered at being asked, and blushing consented to contribute a duett to the entertainment; and Mr. Mortlock, who never refused Mr. Hayward anything, undertook a solo, besides leading a trio, and taking his usual direction of the choir, under the clergyman.

The wished-for day at length arrived. It was in the middle of June; a bright warm fine summer day. Miss Matilda Hart and Emily Hayward were all day at the schoolroom decorating with flowers; and the effect was very pretty, by the time everything was arranged for the grand event.

The Sunnywood party, at least the younger portion, under the escort of Willie Mansell and Ninian, were

early on the scene of action. Ella had a great many suggestions to make on the seating of the performers, and placing of Mrs. Grey's piano, which was sent down; and made herself so needlessly officious that her brother was at last forced to call her to order by saying, "Keep quiet, Ella, do, and leave these things to Mr. Hayward."

The choir—the "chorus" as Ella profanely styled them, came tramping in, preceded and marshalled by the indefatigable Mortlock, faultlessly dressed, as became the bearer of so much dignity—churchwarden and choirmaster, and the aspirant to fresh honours as a public singer in the presence of his lady-love. The men and boys were soon all seated, Ninian amongst the latter; and the young ladies then retired to the classroom, which had been converted at Ella's suggestion into a cloak-room, where they divested themselves of hats and shawls, to issue forth at the eventful moment in all their glory.

A well-filled room received them, as punctual to a moment "the Misses Mansell" appeared at the piano and opened the concert with an operatic overture, "magnificently" played; a great deal of noise, but really effective in the large room, and people were much impressed. Then came "All among the barley," by the choir; after which was a reading by the incumbent, a selection from the "Deserted Village," which no one cared very much about. Indeed the incumbent did not appear to partake of the general animation, and went about rather as if he was ashamed of the whole affair. He had not expected such a concourse, so much dress and excitement and "nonsense," in the getting up of his entertainment; and he felt, now that he was in for it, that he had allowed himself to be cajoled into a proceeding that was against his better judgment, by the persuasion of two or three silly young ladies; a thing that he was quite sure had never happened to him before.

After his reading, came the duett from the "May Queen," set down for Miss Grey and Mr. Mansell. Laura had been hitherto sitting in the front row, beside her mother, aunt, and cousin; and now, handed by him, she came up to the platform, looking very pretty and bright and merry, and, if she felt at all shy, certainly not showing it in the least. Mr. Hayward, who had been rather provoked by the ostentatious way in which the Miss Mansells had come forward to play, watched her with growing displeasure. He could not quite make her out. He had thought at least that she would show some reticence—some difference from her cousins' behaviour. He had not suspected her of caring for anything like display; but now here she was, perfectly happy apparently to dress herself up to any amount (she was only in plain white muslin and blue ribbons, but in Ambrose's severe eyes she looked very dressy indeed) and to stand up and sing like a professional, to a roomful of people, with that cousin of hers. How frivolous, how utterly inexplicable and artificial all young ladies of the period were! Really his poor little shy plain sister, sitting in a corner under her mother's wing, and enjoying herself so thoroughly just because she had no part in the matter, was worth a hundred of them!

But Laura did feel a little abashed, to do her justice, when she stood up there; although she tried to put the feeling away, and to think only of Titiens, whom she had once heard at a provincial festival. And her cousin Willie—Sims Reeves was nothing to him! only Mr. Mansell looked really a great deal too quiet, and well-bred, and unconscious, for any public singer.

Mina is at the piano to accompany, and they begin their recitative; Laura happy again as soon as she has felt her voice in the big room, and, for the moment, quite unconscious that a pair of grave grey eyes, with their heavy black brows a trifle closer than usual, are watching her doubtfully, drinking in every note, as the

pure fresh young voice, more suggestive to his ear of a certain little chorister-boy than of Titiens, broke into perhaps one of the most graceful strains of modern melody :—

“ Can I not find thee a warrant for changing
Up in the firmament, down in the flower,
Round in the breezes for evermore ranging
City and wilderness, ocean and bower ?
Till the wild wind with its messages laden
Thou canst set free or control with a span,
O for inconstancy blame not a maiden,
Force not her heart to do more than it can.”

Had the words been written expressly for her ? Had she chosen the song on purpose as her own apology ?

But what is “ the fellow ” going to sing ? He has a good “ light tenor ” and a very unaffected style, though his words do not ring out so clearly as Laura’s. This is his answer :

“ Why do you cruelly frown on and fly me,
Wither my heart, and bewilder my brain ?
Why are you beautiful but to destroy me ”—

Faugh ! stuff ! think of listening to rubbish like that ! And the incumbent suddenly dives into his waistcoat pocket, pulls out a paper of memoranda, and becomes deeply absorbed therein.

The pretty song is over—the last strain, where the two sweet voices mingle so tunefully. Some of the audience have an idea of how to applaud, and applaud they do, like at “ a real concert.” Laura was rather shy, but still greatly delighted at the flattering testimony. She cast a laughing, half mischievous, half triumphant glance at her cousin, as they turned to go back to their seats ; and incidentally she thereby caught the eye of Mr. Hayward, who was now standing behind.

Such a grave, almost lowering, look it was, that it struck her with a sudden sense of having done some-

thing wrong, though what she could not for the life of her have told. She had been flushed before with excitement, shyness, and pleasure combined; but when she hurried back to her chair and sat down by her mother's side she was crimson with that sudden strange revulsion of feeling, fancying that the grave reproachful eyes were pursuing her still.

She hardly heard the next piece, a reading by Mr. Wylde. Then more glee singing, and singing by her cousins, and reading again, and the Miss Baylisses' duett; but through it all poor Laura could hardly lift her eyes to the platform, and gladly took refuge in a whispered conversation with whichever cousin happened to be next her.

A great deal of very genuine laughter was caused by Ninian singing the "Little Wee Dog," which was just then popular. The next thing in the programme was the "Canadian Boat Song;" but there was some hitch here, and Mr. Mortlock, who was to sing it with two other choirmen, appeared in earnest conversation with Mr. Hayward. The man who was to have sung second tenor had a cold, and couldn't venture on a single part. Would Mr. Hayward kindly take it himself, to prevent disappointment?

The audience were rather surprised, and certainly gratified, when, after a few minutes, they saw Mr. Hayward's tall figure in the centre of the trio: in its angular blackness rather a strange contrast to broad-shouldered and decidedly stout young Mortlock, with his handsome face, his bright tie, and the rose-bud in his button-hole.

Everybody knows the "Canadian Boat Song," but not everybody there had heard it so sung as it was then. Mr. Mortlock and the other chorister had good voices, but the second tenor, though a little worn with years of intoning, beggared them both, in its richness and pathos. The melodious trio was only too short for the listeners.

“Willie, the umbrella—the walking-stick—anything—for goodness’ sake get up an ‘encore’ to that!” cried Ella, making as much noise with her fan and programme as she could. Willie stumped away energetically, and so did plenty more, but the “second” had disappeared into the background.

“I say, Laura, Ella, look at the big fellow, the *primo tenore*,—he thinks it’s all intended for him,” whispered Willie Mansell, shaking with suppressed laughter. “O, I say, how capital! Bravo, bra-vo, my boy—encore, encore!”

Poor honest Mortlock, thinking it was the correct thing to bow repeatedly to the applauding multitude, blushing under his honours, and the approving smiles of Miss Bessie! He turns deferentially back to Mr. Hayward.

“If you please, sir—if you thought proper—they *do* seem to wish it over again.”

“Certainly not, Mortlock. Go on with the ‘Rosy Morn,’ please.”

And to the “Rosy Morn,” Mr. Mortlock obediently went—slightly wounded in his feelings, but good-humoured still.

The concert was near its close now. Laura’s ballad came next—“Far away,”—a great favourite of hers; but she contemplated her second performance with very different feelings from her first, and felt nervously miserable as she stood up.

What was come to her voice to shake and quiver as it did? Public singers used that sort of “vibrato,” and Laura sometimes had tried to imitate it; but she did not want to do it now, and now it would come; and she was quite sure her high notes were getting flat—and yet, though she did not know it, with all these disadvantageous circumstances there was a thrilling sadness in the tones of her pathetic song that struck deep into one heart at least of those who heard her. Her mother, listening from below, wondered

what had come over Laura, and dreaded the reaction of that exciting evening.

The National Anthem, as a matter of course, closed the proceedings; the solos sung by the ladies, the chorus doing their part with a will. The thrilling well-known music, and the pleasure of joining in it, somewhat restored Laura's spirits; and she was looking more herself as she passed out of the room with the rest of her party, talking to one or another village acquaintance or friend as she went along. Then they came to Mr. Hayward, who was seeing to the orderly departure of men and boys, and the general disposal of the "properties" of the evening. He responded rather shortly to the greeting of the two elder ladies, and merely bestowed a passing "good-night" upon the younger ones collectively—turning back immediately to some arrangement he was making with the schoolmaster. It was some time before he had wound up his affairs, but the crowd was long in dispersing; and though his mother and sister had walked on home before him, the road was still lively with returning visitors, some on foot, some in conveyances, when he left the school. Most of Mrs. Grey's party had gone home in the pony-phaeton, but Ella, Mr. Mansell, and Ninian walked leisurely after.

Ambrose, beginning his homeward walk, and not in the most amiable frame of mind with the world at large, was, to say the least, rather taken aback when an active little female figure darted out of the shadow of the schoolhouse and coolly joined company with him.

"Oh! Mr. Hayward," cried the lively but somewhat harsh tones of Miss Matilda Hart, "what a lovely evening! Annette has gone home in Mr. Bayliss's phaeton, but I wouldn't have missed the walk for anything! I was quite afraid I should be late, for dear old Mrs. Wilson's fly was so late in coming, and I was having a long chat with her. Very charming her

making the exertion to come out, wasn't it? Well, it has been a most successful concert, hasn't it? I am sure you must be delighted! Do you know what you have made?"

"Nineteen pounds and some odd silver."

"Nineteen! that really is famous, for a first attempt! I am sure it has been a delightful performance at any rate. And how beautifully you made that trio go, Mr. Hayward. It was lucky for *us* I am sure, that James Walker had got a sore throat. It is really too great a shame that you should let your voice remain idle!"

"My voice gets plenty of work, thank you, Miss Matilda."

"Ah, yes; work of one kind, certainly. But it is such a pity not to sing when one can. What a pretty duett that was of Miss Grey's and Mr. Mansell's too, and how nicely they sang it." Mr. Hayward made no reply this time, and Miss Matilda went on, "What a handsome couple they are; they seem so exactly suited to one another, don't they?"

"Who?"

"Why, dear Laura and her cousin. It is such a happy prospect for her."

"Happy prospect?"

"Ah! I was forgetting you are still such a stranger amongst us! You mustn't go and talk about it, you know, because the engagement has never been *formally* announced, and I fancy dear Mrs. Grey wouldn't like it to be just yet; dear Laura is so very young, and he always going about with his regiment. But every one has known for a long time, indeed you could hardly help seeing—that there *was* an engagement." Miss Hart paused for breath—Mr. Hayward's legs were so much longer than hers, and he was walking fast. "I fancy," she continued, "that he is only waiting for his promotion to sell out—he can well afford it—and that then it will be all settled at once."

After that Miss Matilda might and did talk, but it was to the stars as far as her companion was concerned. She got nothing more from him till they reached her own gate, when he shook her off with an abrupt "good-night."

"That was well managed," she thought to herself as she walked up the strip of garden. "Quite as well to give him a warning—and not a bit too soon either, for he is evidently rather smitten in that quarter. I suspect Miss Laura is a little bit of a flirt, playing his organ and teaching his school one day, as if she thought of nothing else, and galloping about the country and singing duetts with Cousin Willie the next. Well, I hope it will save the chance of a *second* disappointment, for there has been one already I'm sure, or he wouldn't look so *triste*" (it was "*triste*" now, not "lugubrious.") "Poor fellow! who knows though but number three may bring good luck?"

What she meant perhaps she could not have exactly told, but certain it is that before Miss Matilda fell asleep that night number three had merged itself in her ideas into something very closely resembling Number one.

In the meantime Laura was one of a very merry party, as they congregated round the table spread with a cold supper, laughing and talking, not at all tired as it would seem with their exertions.

"I say," said Willie Mansell, when almost every separate performance and performer had been commented upon, extolled or quizzed, "it's a regular case of a match between Miss Matilda What-d'ye-call-her and the parson. They overtook us walking home together in the closest conversation."

"Oh, Willie, I know he hates her!" cried Laura, and immediately repented. What did she really *know* about Mr. Hayward?

"Matilda does make love to him awfully," Ninian said, "because I've seen her myself—but I believe it's all on one side."

“I’m not so sure of that. He was looking more amiable than I’ve seen him to-night.” We will not say in how far Willie was romancing.

“My own private opinion is though,” he went on, “that Mr. Ambrose is half-way to Rome already, and won’t be very long finishing his journey—and if so, of course, Matilda’s sold a bargain—and no great loss either.”

“You don’t know anything about him,” Laura could not help saying. “You only think so because you saw him in a cassock.”

“Come now, Laura,” said Ninian, “you know you told me yourself he was like—”

“Have you young people satisfied your hunger yet?” asked Mrs. Grey, putting a hand on either of the boy’s shoulders, “because I mean to order my two off to bed at once.” And, after a little more laughing and dawdling, the party separated for the night. “Promise me you’ll soon be asleep, darling,” was Mrs. Grey’s last whisper to Laura, with rather an anxious look at her flushed cheeks.

Laura did not care about Willie’s nonsense, which she knew meant nothing. But before she fell asleep that night her cheeks and her pillow were wet with tears because some one—the most “dislikeable and disagreeable person she ever met,” but still the person for whose opinion she was growing insensibly to care above all others—had looked as if he was displeased with her.

CHAPTER XI.

“What if with her sunny hair,
And smile as sunny as cold,
She meant to weave me a snare
Of some coquettish deceit?”

TENNYSON.

THE Mansells left Sunnywood within three days after the great “Soirée Musicale,” and Mrs. Grey and her children fell into their ordinary routine of quiet home-life.

For several days they did not see Mr. Hayward at all. Laura thought it rather strange that he should not have spoken to them once since the concert; but she kept her thoughts to herself. On the next Sunday he gave notice that the Dedication Festival of their church would be held on the fourth of July, the Translation of S. Martin; he having discovered by some reference to the parish archives that it had been originally consecrated on that day. He also referred to the subject in his sermons, with a view to explaining the meaning of his intended festival; it being a thing quite unheard of within the memory of man at Axhill.

Laura expected to hear something further after church, but no Mr. Hayward made his appearance. The next day however she received the following note—written in the round clerk’s hand, which Ambrose had never been able to shake off.

“Dear Miss Grey,—I wish to have a full Choral Service on the fourth, with organ accompaniment throughout. I hope this will not put you to any inconvenience, but should it do so, I believe I can get Mr. Wylde’s organist to come over for the day. I enclose list of music in case you wish to play. Be

kind enough to let me know your intentions as soon as you can.

“ Faithfully yours,
“ AMBROSE HAYWARD.”

“ What a funny note, mamma !” said Laura, handing it to her mother. “ What does it mean ?”

“ I don’t see anything particularly funny, Laura. He thinks you may perhaps not be up to this, and wishes to make it easy for you to get off.”

“ But he always used to tell me about anything new—to come and talk it over. This looks as if he didn’t want me to play.”

“ I don’t think so. It’s business-like—that’s all.”

“ Must I write and answer it ?”

“ No ; I think you needn’t write. You can send word by Ninian—it’s his choir-night. What shall you say ? Can you do it ?”

“ I should have liked,” said Laura, with a little quiver of the lip ; “ but if he would rather have this organist, of course I don’t want.”

“ You’d better say you will do it or not as he likes.”

So when he met Mr. Hayward that night at the school Ninian said : “ My sister is quite ready to do her best on the fourth, Mr. Hayward, but if you think it better to have the organist she doesn’t mind.”

“ Not at all. I only thought it might give her too much trouble. Tell her, will you, that I shall have a full rehearsal on Monday evening at half-past six, if she can make it convenient to come.”

Which message Ninian delivered faithfully, and with a sufficiently faithful reproduction of the short surly tone in which it was delivered.

“ He’s awfully savage to-night, old Ambrose is,” said Ninian, rubbing his hands and chuckling apparently with great amusement at the recollection. “ Snubbed me, and pitched into Mortlock, and turned

one poor little beggar out altogether—for nothing particular that I could see!”

“Oh! Nin,” said his mother.

“True, I assure you, mother. Poor Mortlock didn’t know how to please him. Laura had best look out for herself, if she is going to play.”

Allowing for a good deal of schoolboy exaggeration, there must surely have been something unusual in Mr. Hayward’s manner that night.

Laura anticipated the rehearsal with rather mixed feelings. She was obliged to go with only Ninian’s escort, for her mother was suffering a good deal from her old enemy, rheumatism, and was obliged to save herself for the next day. There was a large class in the school. Mr. Hayward shook hands with her almost silently, opened her harmonium and music, and then withdrew to the upper end of the room, and devoted himself entirely to the direction of the men and boys, leaving Mr. Mortlock to give Laura her instructions, which he did with most good-natured, deferential minuteness, puzzling her rather sometimes. Poor Laura was particularly anxious to give satisfaction, and consequently got nervous, and made several mistakes in the Tallis’s responses, which were new to her.

“Would you kindly repeat the versicles?” Mr. Mortlock said. “I think there were some discords amongst them.”

Laura was painfully aware of the fact and turned back the page of her book, saying humbly, “Ought I to play the priest’s part, please?”

“No, I think not; Mr. Hayward doesn’t require it, you see, as some do—he has such a correct ear.”

And Ninian informed her afterwards, for her comfort, that Mr. Hayward had “made the most awful face” when she had unhappily given him F instead of G as his reciting note.

When the practice was over he accompanied Laura and her brother to the door and shook hands with

them, still in the same grave silent way. Laura mustered courage to look up at him and say—she was determined to say something—“I am afraid I did very badly to-night, Mr. Hayward. I hope all will go off well to-morrow.”

“I hope so too,” he answered coldly, “as it is too late now to change our plans.”

“I wish to-morrow was come and gone!” Laura exclaimed as she linked her arm in Ninian’s to walk home.

“Well, how did it all go?” asked Mrs. Grey, when they returned.

“So so, mamma,” answered Laura, sighing rather wearily.

“I’m sure it wasn’t for want of trying,” Ninian said. “She and Mortlock were in a regular funk.”

Laura pondered not a little over Mr. Hayward’s short distant ways that night, and wondered whether she should tell her mother about them; but after a good deal of reflection she came to the conclusion that there was nothing to tell. Only as she went to bed she sighed to herself again, “I wish to-morrow was come and gone, or that the S. Mary’s organist were coming!”

CHAPTER XII.

“So shalt thou dare forego, at His dear call,
Thy best, thine all.”

KEBLE.

THE great day came and went, however, without any failure on the part either of Laura or the choir. She certainly strove her very utmost to accompany well, and her mother and Ninian both said that the choral ser-

vice was a great success ; which was satisfactory to her, as from Mr. Hayward she heard nothing, either in praise or blame.

She had not much leisure or opportunity for noticing Mr. Hayward's behaviour further at present, however, as she and her mother were now preparing to leave home for a time on some visits to relations, before Ninian's holidays came to an end. Her place as organist would be vacant ; but Mr. Hayward made arrangements with a young man in the town, a pupil of Mr. Wylde's organist, to take the duty for a short time.

A few weeks before, the Greys' absence would have made a considerable difference to Mr. Hayward : now, however, it was rather a relief to him than otherwise. It saved him the trouble of keeping out of Laura's way, a task which he had resolutely set himself, with what present effect has been seen. It was a sacrifice in other ways beside the great one, as Mrs. Grey was almost the only lady in his parish who gave him real sympathy and help in his work ; and he missed her kind ready interest in his schemes, by his steady avoidance of her. He could not quite get over the notion that Laura—with her innocent childlike ways, her mischievous merriment, and her willingness to undertake what he proposed—had been in some degree flirting with him ; with that kind of flirtation which he held in the greatest abhorrence, flirting with a clergyman. This idea made him feel somewhat angry with her, besides his other great disappointment ; angry with himself also, for having been so far misled.

He was not without some few friends, though none so taking as the Greys had been. Old Mrs. Wilson, the widow lady who had been a friend of his uncle, and remembered his brother, always had a welcome for him, and was delighted to talk away for as long as she could get him to listen. The Miss Harts, too, considered themselves his greatest allies. The elder

sister made up for her physical inability to take active duties, by talking, and professing the warmest sympathy with all his plans: Miss Matilda both talked and worked, but a great deal more than he liked. Since the memorable night when she had given him such valuable information, she had followed up her supposed advantage by running after him so unwarrantably, that he dreaded the very sight of her, and made his sister walk about with him whenever it was at all possible for her to do so, as a protection. Miss Matilda was a dangerous enemy, but a no less dangerous friend, as her love of gossip, and her unsparing tongue, had proved to the cost of many of her acquaintance.

In his neighbour and brother priest, Mr. Wylde, Ambrose also found a friend, though not altogether likeminded. Though agreeing on all important matters, Mr. Wylde differed from him on many minor points, insomuch that he was thereby prevented from asking his assistance on different occasions when it would have been most useful to him.

The person from whose society and co-operation he had on the whole most satisfaction, was his staunch friend and supporter Mr. Mortlock. His was one of those sincere, earnest, open characters which make themselves universally liked, and it was in great measure from this that he had, though so young and a comparative stranger, been nominated to the office of churchwarden, on the death of one who had held it for years. Of late, the decided line he had taken in Church matters, and in promoting all the changes made by the new incumbent, had caused some people to look a little doubtfully upon him; especially his fellow-churchwarden, Mr. Bayliss. Hitherto, however, no disagreement had arisen.

One Sunday evening, however, the second Sunday after the festival of the dedication, Mr. Mortlock lingered behind the rest of the choir in the vestry, after service; and when all the others had gone, he said

to Mr. Hayward: "I wish to speak a few words to you, sir, if you please."

"I am quite at your service, Mortlock."

"It is a little personal matter of my own," said the young man, colouring; "if it is not troubling you too much. I am very unhappy, and I wish for your advice."

"Pray let me hear."

"Perhaps you may have understood, sir, that—a—Miss Bessie Bayliss and I have been attached to each other for a considerable time, though not actually engaged?"

"I believed it to be the case."

"Her father—my fellow-churchwarden, has taken great offence, it appears, at what he is pleased to call my 'goings on,' and on my expressing to him my wish the other day of coming to a—ahem—understanding with him, as there is nothing to prevent our marriage taking place at once, he told me very unceremoniously that unless I make certain changes in my behaviour and practice, I am to have nothing more to say to Bessie, or she to me."

"Indeed! And what is it that he wishes you to do?"

"Well, sir, I have seen for some time past that he has looked unfavourably upon the choir and the conduct of the services, but especially since the Dedication Festival. Your having Mr. Wylde here to preach and assist at the celebration, for one thing, gave great offence—you know, sir, Mr. Wylde *is* very different from you in many little things, and he goes against people's prejudices—no offence, I hope, sir."

"Well, well, but what has Wylde's coming here to preach got to do with you and Miss Bayliss?"

"I was merely leading up, sir, to what I had to say. My being such a prominent mover in all things connected with the church has displeased Mr. Bayliss for some time back, but when I spoke to him, two

days ago, he regularly flew out at me, and told me not very civilly, that I ought to be ashamed of myself, in my position of churchwarden, acting as promoter of all your Romish ways, sir, as he presumes to call them, instead of being some restraint upon you. He considers that I ought to give up the choir altogether; and he even goes so far as to object to my attending the weekly celebration, which, he says, is all hypocrisy on my part, and he specially objects to my remaining through that part of the service—which you know I do with the rest of the choir, sir—when I have been at the early celebration. He said a great deal to myself and also of you, sir, which was very unbecoming, and which I do not wish to repeat; and when I said I could not go against my principles to please him or any one else, he bade me go about my business, and not presume to pay my addresses to any child of his. Mrs. Bayliss took me aside afterwards, and entreated me, for Bessie's sake and my own, to make some compromise, for she assured me Bayliss was so set against these things, now, that he wouldn't hear of a settlement of matters. And this is where I want your advice, sir."

"Are these matters, in which he wishes you to change your line of conduct, matters of conscience or merely of choice? That is the question."

"Well, sir, as regards the choir. Perhaps I might relinquish that, for a time, although I should very much regret doing so, when you are kind enough to consider my poor services of use."

"Yes, I should be sorry if you were obliged to do so. The loss of your example would be even a greater one than that of your voice, though I should not like to lose either, Edward."

"Thank you, sir," said Mortlock, with a faint smile. "However, supposing, we will say, that I did give it up in the meantime, it would certainly be with the intention of resuming it again; and I should feel I was

acting rather a dishonourable part in throwing it aside, just to attain my object, with this view."

"I think there is no doubt of that. And supposing, as you say, that you could, without going against your conscience, give up the choir duties, do you intend to give up the Holy Communion also, or to bring yourself down to the Bayliss standard of once in three months?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"Then the only counsel I can give you in the matter is patience."

"Patience! yes, but for how long? Are our best years to be wasted waiting for the whims of a pig-headed old fellow like that, who won't listen to reason? I must say it, though he is her father. He's getting worse rather than better; more senselessly prejudiced, the more he sees."

"You don't intend to marry the girl against his consent, I presume?"

"No, sir; I wouldn't act so wrongly by her."

"And you don't intend to sacrifice your principles? Then I see no other course."

No other course but patience! Edward Mortlock, looking at the grave ascetic face before him, wondered whether that man knew what he was talking about. It was easy, so easy, to preach patience; but quite another thing to practise it. The course of his true love, like that of his worldly prosperity, had hitherto run so smoothly that any interruption of it was quite unlooked-for.

"Isn't it preposterous, sir?" he began again, after a few minutes' silence. "If I was a drinker, or a swearer, or a gambler, and managed to keep my vices in the background and put in a decent appearance before him, attended church once on a Sunday perhaps—I don't believe the fellow would have a word to say against me. It's too hard—it would drive plenty of fellows I know of to run reckless, and go to the bad altogether."

“Not those who have had your advantages,” Mr. Hayward said. “It is hard, no doubt, but you are not without the comfort even of earthly hope. If you are both truly attached to each other—if your union is for your real eternal welfare, it will be brought about in God’s own time and way. The dearest earthly blessing purchased at even a slight sacrifice of principle could not prove a blessing in the end; but even should your earthly hopes never be realized you have the peace which arises from a will subjected entirely to the Divine Will—and the hope, which nothing earthly can take from you, of reunion ‘where loyal hearts and true,’—as you sing so often—”

“That was our favourite hymn,” broke out poor Mortlock, with tears standing in his eyes. “Hers and mine: she told me so last Sunday when we walked home together—our last walk! Little did either of us think so, I’m sure.

“The worst of it is,” he went on after a few moments’ silence, “that I am not the only sufferer here. She will feel it as much as I do.”

“Yes; but you may be sure the discipline is needful for her also, or it would not be sent. And surely there is comfort, too, in feeling that you are thus able to prove the sincerity of your mutual affection.”

“I wish you could speak a few words to her, sir; I am sure it would be a help.”

“I fear she is not likely to give me the opportunity. If she does, I shall not neglect it.”

“Thank you, sir. We shall have your prayers, I know.”

“Always, Edward. And pray do not scruple to apply to me at any time if I can be of the least service to you.”

“Thank you,” said Mortlock again. “Old Bayliss will say, no doubt, that I go to confession—though for the matter of that he may say what he pleases

now, it will make no difference to me. Well, I must wish you good night, sir."

"Good night," said the incumbent, holding out his hand. "Don't neglect to pray for yourself. Above all, beware of hard, uncharitable thoughts just now."

The young man returned the pressure of his hand in silence, took up his music books, and departed; his pleasant honest face wearing an expression of down-cast sorrow quite foreign to it. And Ambrose Hayward went back into the silent empty church, and, kneeling down alone in his place in the stall, prayed long and earnestly for the two young people in their trial—and for another whom he deemed a less worthy fellow-sufferer.

It seemed a light trial by comparison: two loving hearts, believing and trusting in each other, resolved to be true through sorrow as well as joy, separated for a time by the will of another: very unlike an unacknowledged, hopeless, one-sided attachment. But, then, why did people ever fall into hopeless, one-sided attachments?

CHAPTER XIII.

"Oh! would that those who cast such scorn upon our holy things
 Could only know the life and peace CHRIST'S true Spouse
 ever brings."

A. ST. JOHN.

"IS your master within, young woman?"
 Mr. Bayliss spoke rather sharply, as he confronted the maid who opened the door of the parsonage. The day was warm, and he had been walking fast, apparently.

"No, he's not in just now."

"When do you expect him?"

"I couldn't say. He's been out since nine this morning; perhaps he mayn't be any time now. Will you step in and wait, Mr. Bayliss?"

Mr. Bayliss assented. The maid ushered him into Mr. Hayward's study. Mr. Bayliss seated himself, removed his hat, wiped his heated brow, and then sat tapping the side of his dusty boot with his walking stick, and scowling at the cross on the table—in no pleasant frame of mind, to judge by appearances.

At length his impatience was relieved, and Mr. Hayward entered. He had been walking further and faster than Mr. Bayliss that hot forenoon, and he looked rather worn and fagged when he came in, but held out his hand courteously to Mr. Bayliss. The latter, however, only replied by a short crusty bow, keeping his hands to himself.

"Hope you've not been waiting long, Mr. Bayliss."

"About a quarter of an hour. However, that doesn't matter: my business is soon told now that you are come. I want to know what you have been saying to my daughter."

"To your daughter, Mr. Bayliss?"

"To my daughter—Bessie. Perhaps, if you think now, you'll be able to recollect."

"I don't understand to what you refer, Mr. Bayliss. I am not aware of having said anything to her."

"You're not? Do you mean to tell me you haven't been filling her head with all kinds of superstition, worse than nonsense—downright error, till she's nearly out of her mind with it? It ain't you, is it?" and Mr. Bayliss looked extremely threatening.

"You appear to be under some extraordinary delusion," Ambrose said. "Miss Bayliss has never applied to me for advice, and I should certainly not think of obtruding it upon her unasked."

"You wouldn't, wouldn't you? But you've got your ways and means—like all the lot of you. My daughter's in a very unsatisfactory state of mind

—most unsatisfactory; and we've you to thank for it all!"

"I am very sorry to hear it, Mr. Bayliss; but I can hardly think I deserve the blame."

"Dare say you can't," said the angry Mr. Bayliss. "If not, will you tell me why she can't or won't do a single thing like other people? She can't go to church at a reasonable hour with her parents and decent folk—not she: she must be up and away at eight o'clock in the morning, or there ain't no use going at all. 'Oh, Mr. Hayward said it was right.' Cries her eyes out, because she ain't given in to about going to the Sacrament twice in the week: saints' days, indeed, as if she was so much holier than her old father and mother, and their parents before them. 'Mr. Hayward said we ought.' Won't go out, nor take a bit of pleasure along with her sister; and all she's got a fancy for now is sitting up in a room by herself, crying and saying prayers and reading hymns—and precious popish hymns some of 'em, but I took the book away. Can't speak to her but she cries and runs away—and won't eat, and won't work! I believe the girl's going clean out of her wits; and it isn't to *me* that she says it, but when her mother speaks to her it's 'Mr. Hayward everything'—this, that, and t'other."

"If Miss Bayliss is in distress of mind—if she has misunderstood anything she has heard me say in public (for I never, I am certain, spoke to her in private), I could perhaps set her right if you would allow me a few minutes' conversation with her some time."

"I'll see you——" Mr. Bayliss was beginning furiously, but he checked himself, and stammered, under the stern steady gaze of the calm eyes "I'll see you far enough away before you come near my house for such a purpose! How dare you ask it? That befooled young idiot Mortlock goes to you for 'spiritual advice,' I know—ha, ha! we're to have the Confes-

sional here, are we? But he can please himself, as I told him, when I bid him choose between his tomfooleries and my daughter, and he had the good sense to prefer them—a pretty fellow to cry about! You can do a good deal with impunity, as no one knows better than yourself—bringing your friend the Jesuit over here posturing and grimacing in our church, and honouring of saints that never existed, for aught I know; but just you tamper with my girls, sir, and I'll report you to the Bishop, as sure as we stand on this floor!" and Mr. Bayliss brought his hand down with a rattling thump on the table. "We'll find out the length of your tether, my fine fellow! and how much we're to be expected to stand. The women—ay, the women!—it's just them that your sort get hold of: just what you want, eh? a pack of silly young women to run after you, and tell you all their secrets, and worship the very ground you tread on; and there's one or two already in this miserable parish fit enough to do it. But, thank Heaven, there are a few men left with brains in their heads, and Protestant principles in their hearts, and we'll see which has the law on his side yet, sir, and which 'll carry the day!"

"And the servant of the LORD must not strive." Over and over again, as the man's vile taunts sounded in his ears, did these words rise up in Ambrose Hayward's mind, checking the angry thoughts, forcing him to speak, when he did speak, coolly and calmly.

"I do not know what has turned you against me," he said, when the angry man had run himself down. "I only know that I am utterly innocent of the motives you impute to me, as I hope time will prove."

"Turned me against you! It's enough to turn any man against another when his home is made miserable by him, and he sees his children led astray. Why, to begin with, there's that wretched soft fool Mortlock: if you'd only let him alone he might have been a man,

and he and my girl might have been happy together. That's your doing, too."

"I don't suppose what I say is likely to have any weight with you, Mr. Bayliss; but as you have introduced the subject yourself, I must take the opportunity of saying that I think you are acting very unjustly and unwisely by Mortlock, and your daughter, too, in separating them. You may repent it another day, perhaps; and her trouble may have more to do with him than with me."

"Thank you kindly, sir. When I want your ghostly counsel and advice I'll ask you for it. In the meantime you may be content with what you have done, and keep it to yourself. With regard to this confounded business that I came here about—look here: if you can give me your word, as a man and a Christian, that you never spoke to my daughter privately: that the mischief you've done has been without your intending it, as far as she's concerned—well, I'll say no more about it in the meantime. Only you won't expect to see them at your Sunday-school or the singing class again; and I shall forbid either of them to have anything to say to you beyond a passing bow—do you understand me?—and you may as well take a hint to make yourself scarce, as far as my people are concerned. If you want to see *me* on business, that's another thing. You know how to get at me, I take it, without being told." And Mr. Bayliss lifted his hat and turned towards the door.

"Very well, Mr. Bayliss. I hope I shall not intrude myself upon you or your family against your wishes. At the same time, if you should alter your mind, and should wish for my presence, I must tell you that I shall not refuse to come at any time you may send for me. And I hope it may please Him Who knows all hearts to remove your ill-will against me, when He sees fit." And as Bayliss was turning away, he held out his hand, adding, "We do not part enemies, I hope."

The churchwarden could hardly refuse this, so he gave his hand rather sheepishly, and went away.

“Hang it, but he’s got a way of coming it soft over one, the ill-favoured chap!” he said to himself. “Half wish I hadn’t said all I did to him; but I believe he’s no better than most of his sort. Pity he ever came here!”

Perhaps Mr. Bayliss might have had even more compunction if he had seen “the ill-favoured chap” after he was left alone in his study—on his knees, praying, how earnestly and with what a wounded spirit no human eye could see, that his sins of ignorance might be forgiven: that nothing he should henceforth say or do might put a stumbling-block or occasion to fall in his brother’s way!

He felt very unhappy too about the poor girl Bessie, being unable in any way to reach her difficulties, whatever they might be. After this, she of course was never at the school, and was now less often seen in church, and when there had a strange frightened kind of expression, which made him fear that her mind was affected. Once, and once only, he met her walking alone near the village; but when she saw him she coloured, kept her eyes rigidly fixed on the ground, and hurried along under the hedge like a timid animal—though he was of course much too considerate to take any notice of her.

As to poor Mortlock, he showed what stuff he was made of by going on bravely with all his duties, though with a very sore heart. He worked energetically at the Bible classes and the choir meetings; was never absent from any of the three services on Sundays, or from the early celebration on festivals, and was always ready to undertake anything Mr. Hayward asked of him; though he never seemed inclined to give him more of his confidence, or to resume the discussion of his troubles. On week days he moped about his office disconsolately: he grew thin and pale, avoided society, and became altogether a changed man.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Hers was the subtlest spell by far
Of all that set young hearts romancing.”
W. M. PRAED.

“L AURA, I have been talking to Aunt Helen, and she is quite come round to staying for the ball!”

The time was a bright day in the latter part of August: the place, the drawing-room of Mrs. Mansell's house, in a pretty part of the south of England. By the open drawing-room window, on a low chair, Laura was sitting: a pleasant picture, in her light muslin dress and garden hat, when Ella, her eldest cousin, ran into the room with the above intelligence.

“Has she *settled* to stay?” asked Laura, not looking quite so much pleased as her cousin expected. “Without asking me?”

“Yes, I believe she has, quite, you ridiculous child! Be properly grateful to me for insisting on it.”

“Oh, well, I dare say I shall like well enough to *see* it. I don't expect to dance at all, as I don't know anybody.”

“What an idea! You know Willie, don't you? and can't he introduce you to as many partners as you like?”

“I think I shall be much too shy to dance with strangers.”

“A very innocent idea, my child; but you'll find it doesn't hold good. I know somebody who'll be awfully disappointed if you don't go.”

“I don't know why anybody should be the least disappointed,” said Laura, coolly, as she got up. “I must go, though, and see what mamma means really to do;” and with that she went out of the room, meeting Mina, who was just coming in.

“Well, is it arranged?” asked the latter of her sister.

“Yes, it’s all right. Isn’t it capital?”

“Is she glad?”

“Don’t ask me! She nearly kills me, that child! It’ll be all settled at the ball, that’s one thing, which will be great fun.”

“What?”

“What! Why, don’t pretend to be obtuse: Arthur Wyeman, of course.”

“Do you think she likes him?”

“Oh, no fear of her liking him, when it comes to the point. She won’t show it, though, till it does.”

“There’s no doubt about him, anyhow. He’s perfectly crazy about her.”

“Yes. What a funny thing it is, to be sure, Mina, that a little chit like that, hardly out of the school-room, so to speak, and who has never been out or seen anybody (except that black Jesuit at Axhill), should be carried off almost before her first ball!”

“She’s very pretty, certainly.”

“Charmingly pretty,” said Ella, with ungrudging heartiness. “I think she’s prettier than she was last year. She will look lovely in white, with bright pink,—no, rose-coloured ribbon, and those rose-coloured pe-largoniums in her hair. I shall settle all that for her,” she added, as coolly as if she was talking of dressing a doll. “It is delightful to hear her talk of not dancing at all! I wonder how long she will remain standing. Ah!” as a figure went lightly past the window, “there are she and Ninian off to their never-ending croquet: I must go!” and out of the window she ran.

It happened that at this time the regiment to which young Mansell belonged was stationed at a large town, not many miles from where his mother lived. Of course he was often over at his home, and with him very frequently his great friend and companion, Arthur Wyeman. The latter was a very young man, two

years younger than Willie Mansell himself: he had but lately joined, and having few friends or acquaintances in that part of the world, was glad to spend much of his spare time in such a cheerful household as the Mansells'. Of late there had been a special attraction, as during the fortnight that Mrs. Grey and her daughter had spent there he had very unmistakably fallen violently in love with Laura.

Of course Mrs. Grey could not but see this; but as yet nothing had passed between her and Laura on the subject. She did not feel quite certain as to Laura's own ideas on it, or whether she took the young man's attentions as they were intended. She was bright and merry, and laughed and talked with him as with every one else, though she certainly could not be accused of unduly encouraging him; and if, as on the present occasion, her cousin jestingly hinted at a preference on his part, she put down the idea with supreme contempt.

The ball in prospect was to be given by the officers of the regiment; and Mrs. Mansell and Ella had persuaded Mrs. Grey into remaining and going to it, although it was later than the time she had fixed for going home. Laura almost tried her cousins' patience by not being in what they considered the necessary state of rapture in the anticipation. She had never been at a regular ball yet, and was fond of dancing: but it was not the matter of life and death to her which her cousins would have expected. In fact, she had been far more excited in the preparation for the Axhill concert, than for her "first appearance" in a ballroom.

She let her mother and cousins arrange all about her dress with the utmost coolness; though when the actual evening came, she did feel a little secret thrill of excitement and pleasure—a sense of novelty in what was going to happen: at times an undefined feeling of dread—of what she did not exactly know.

She did look very pretty in her ball dress, a far

smarter dress than she had ever worn, but which, in its elegance and simplicity, was exceedingly becoming. She hardly knew herself, standing before the long glass in her wardrobe panel; and found herself suddenly unconsciously wondering—not what Arthur Wyeman would think of her, but whether a certain pair of eyes that had looked disapprovingly on her at the school-room at Axhill would frown upon her now.

She was recalled to herself by the entrance of Ella, very handsomely attired, bringing the flowers she had promised her.

“How lovely they are!” Laura said, as she turned over the delicate blossoms. “They look too good—to perfect to *wear*.”

“Why, what would you do with them?”

“We haven’t any *quite* like this in our hot-house,” she said, thinking in her own mind where they would inevitably have gone. What a shame—almost a profanation, it seemed, to carry those pure sweet natural flowers into the glare and heat and artificial life of a ballroom! But she said nothing, for she knew Ella would not have understood her thoughts. She passively allowed her to arrange the flowers as she liked in her coils of soft shining hair; then told her she would follow her down stairs immediately.

Left alone, she knelt down for two or three minutes, hiding her face. She knew her special temptation, better than she had done a few months since: she had been watching against it more carefully of late. Knowing what was before her, she asked for watchfulness and recollection: that she might not be carried away by the excitement and the novelty to say anything foolish, or flippant, or unworthy—anything to mislead another.

She was unusually silent, for her, during the drive, while her cousins rattled on in their usual way. But when they arrived at the ballroom, in the brilliant scene, so new to her, her spirits rose, and she felt quite able to enjoy herself.

Willie had promised her the first dance; and not being shy with him she enjoyed it thoroughly. Arthur Wyeman had caught sight of her the moment she came in, and claimed her at once for the second; then her cousin introduced her to another officer; and once set going she had little time to stand and look about.

Arthur Wyeman was not content with one dance or with two. He was in high spirits to-night, and looking his best: although he was handsome rather in promise than in actual appearance at present. He was very young-looking even of his age, slight and fair, with small feminine features, expressive eyes, and a soft light-brown moustache: very animated and merry and pleasant in conversation, well-bred, and intelligent.

After their third dance, Mrs. Grey gave Laura a hint that it did not do to dance too often with the same person; so Laura sat through two dances, though her feet were tingling to be on the move, because she could not tell him she was engaged when he asked her. As the time wore on, however, he begged for one more, and she did not know how to refuse, though she was engaged two or three deep at that time.

"This is our 'Lancers,' I think," he said, at length, making his way to her.

It was a merry laughing set this time. Ella and Mina were both in it, and some other girls of their acquaintance, and they were all chattering across to each other in snatches during the absurd figures. When it was over Arthur insisted on marching his partner off to supper.

Laura was as hungry as young ladies generally find themselves after the amount of exercise she had taken, though if she had known what was to follow she would never have accepted the offer. It did strike her, while she was at the supper table, that Arthur had suddenly relapsed from his previous flow of merry talk into an ominous silence; and, after he had helped her to what

she wanted, remained standing absently beside her chair.

She was not long in finishing, and got up to go back to the ballroom.

"This has been a most delightful ball," he said, as they ascended the stairs. Why did he walk so slowly?

"Yes. It is a pleasant wind-up to my visit here, which I didn't expect."

"Do you *really* go to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes! to-morrow morning."

"Miss Grey—I can't let you go away without speaking to you."

It was coming, then! and there were at least ten of those horrible steps to go up still! and he held back her arm with a kind of determined pressure, though she tried to walk faster.

She hardly knew or heard what followed, though she knew very well what the few almost incoherent words meant. All that she could get out when she reached the top of the stairs was a breathless request to "go back to mamma." She knew it was utterly senseless and childish: but what was she to say to him? He gave her one pleading, half-reproachful look, but led her to Mrs. Grey's side, and withdrew.

Just then Willie brought up some one to introduce to her—whom, she had not the least idea; but the next minute she was whirling round again with a wild sense of momentary relief and safety, her eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing with a sort of indignation—there is no other word to describe it—at what had passed. When the valse was over, and she again rejoined her mother, it was to say, "Please—*please*, mamma, are you ready to go?"

"To go, Laura! What's the matter?"

"I can't tell you now. Only *please* go home as soon as you can."

However, it was a considerable time before Ella and Mina allowed their mother to drag them away. The

time came at last, however; and happily for Laura's impatience she found herself in her mother's room able to pour out her trouble. "You *don't* think he will do anything *more*, mamma?"

"Of course he will, Laura. You made a great mistake in not giving him a hearing."

"I'll never go to a ball again!" and poor Laura, quite overstrung, burst into a flood of tears.

Her mother would not let her talk more then, but made her go to bed at once. They had to be up in good time for their journey. Just before they went down to breakfast, Mrs. Grey came into Laura's room. "There's a note for you, darling. It came enclosed to me."

Laura's heart sank as she opened it and read:—

"My dear Miss Grey,—I had no opportunity last night of finishing what I wished to say to you, and am therefore obliged to take this means of assuring you of the warm and deep affection which I feel for you. Nothing that I can say will adequately express my feelings towards you, which every day that I have had the happiness of meeting you, and every day that I have been away from you, have alike strengthened. Is it too presumptuous, on so short a friendship, to hope that you may be able in some degree to reciprocate my affection, or at any rate to grant me permission to hope that you will some day fulfil the dearest wishes of my heart, in consenting to become my wife? Anxiously expecting a favourable answer, I am ever, my dear Miss Grey,

"Yours, with sincerest affection,

"ARTHUR WYEMAN."

"O, mamma, mamma! what on earth am I to do?"

"Poor child! are you very much taken by surprise?" said Mrs. Grey. "You have had the preparation of last night."

"Last night! but I am sure I tried all I could to

stop him, and this—this is so dreadfully serious! What must I say?"

"You must think over it calmly, dear, and make up your mind."

"My mind! I haven't got any to make up—I mean there is but one answer."

"Are you so sure then that you don't like him?"

"Like him? Yes; that's precisely it, mamma! I *like* him. I like him to talk to, and play at croquet, and dance with. But *this*," and she made a pause more expressive than words.

"You have certainly only had a short acquaintance with him. But you might feel differently after a time."

"I am quite sure that if I lived to a hundred I should never care for him in that way."

"You have been very sure of things before, Laura, and yet a very short time has changed your opinion."

A conscious flush mounted to Laura's forehead; but she replied, "One must speak as one thinks at the time, must not one?"

"Yes. But there is a difference between such an answer as to extinguish a man's hopes point-blank, and one that, though not all he desires, leaves an opening for hope. He shows you that himself."

"Mamma, I know you are always quite right, and I don't want to say anything impertinent. But it does seem to me as if none but the most empty-headed, heartless creature that ever was, would keep a man hanging on for the *chance* of some day being able to like him."

"That is not quite what I mean, Laura. People's feelings change very much in a few years' time, and they may come to regret throwing away a chance of happiness, besides destroying the happiness of another. Mr. Wyeman's affection for you is evidently very genuine; and if you are able honestly to give him any hope, you ought to consider before you cast him off

finally. I don't want to bias your decision, but if you were to return his affection I should certainly feel very well pleased. He is a very promising young man, dear, really; well born and well brought up; and, from what I have seen and heard, trained to the same ideas in serious matters as you have been. So there are the foundations at any rate for a happy marriage."

Laura listened to all her mother said; then she stood up before her, with a blushing face, and a little quiver sometimes in her voice, as she said very quietly and decidedly, "Mamma, I know I am very silly and changeable and absurd sometimes—at least, I have been—and you have quite a right to say so. But I am quite, *quite* sure of one thing; and that is, that there would be no use in letting Mr. Wyeman think I could ever care for him. It would only be very false and wrong. Please don't think me obstinate and self-willed."

"Certainly not, darling. You must take the responsibility of the decision."

"It is very dreadful, mamma! You don't *think*, do you, that I ever encouraged him?"

"No, Laura, I hope not. I am sure you are too truthful to do so knowingly. It is a painful thing having to disappoint any one so cruelly."

"Yes. If one had flirted," she said, shyly, "I think one would never forgive oneself when it came to that. What a pity, mamma, that people ever take fancies to people who don't care for them!"

"Yes, Laura. It shows how careful one ought to be. Men are not the only ones who make these mistakes. But now, darling, write your note: you can show it me or not, as you like; and make haste, for we shall be late for the train, I am afraid, otherwise."

So Laura went to her painful task—painful because though she had not the shadow of a thought of love for Arthur Wyeman, she had a very tender heart; and there was *that* somewhere hidden in its inmost depths

which told her by force of sympathy what a bitter disappointment she was inflicting.

She was very thoughtful all through the journey home. She was very fond of her home, and after the pleasantest visit or tour she always rejoiced in coming back to it—to her horse, her garden, her poultry, the village people and children who missed her; but on this occasion she felt, besides the other sobering influences she had just experienced, a sort of vague undefined dread of going home: a recollection of something not altogether pleasant connected with the time just before they had left it, which had haunted her more or less ever since she had been away.

She could hardly have told wherein this consisted; but certainly she lay down to rest on her own pillow, in her own dear old room, on the night of that eventful day, with feelings very unlike her usual unalloyed satisfaction in returning.

“Men are not the only ones who make these mistakes!” Had poor Arthur Wyeman’s misplaced affection only served to show her that her heart was gone—hopelessly, irrevocably, out of her own keeping?

CHAPTER XV.

“Give me one look, before my life be gone,
Oh! give me that, and let me not despair.”

CRABBE.

THE Greys’ first day at home was Sunday; but of course Laura did not play the organ. They met the Harts and several other friends and acquaintance after service; but neither Mr. Hayward nor any of his family.

The next day he called: not, however, before the

two Miss Harts had forestalled him, coming as early as it was admissible to do so, and regaling Mrs. Grey and "dear Laura" with a long and voluble account of all that had been going on their absence, and especially how abominably that horrid Mr. Bayliss had treated "dear Mr. Hayward"—Miss Hart was in the habit of applying the epithet "dear" to any clergyman whose ministrations she happened to like. Miss Matilda was furious on the subject: the treatment which "that good young man Mr. Mortlock" had received, coming in for a large share of her indignation. And poor Bessie Bayliss, too! wasn't it so sad about her? she was really in a very distressing state, and regularly persecuted at home, &c., &c., &c. And how wrong to tell such falsehoods of Mr. Hayward, who was working himself to death, and looking so ill, Miss Hart averred, with considerable satisfaction apparently in the statement; she was quite certain he was going into a consumption, poor young man! but he was *so* good, and *so* charitable, and *so* devoted to the poor!

Just as having talked themselves tired, and their friends bewildered, they had risen to say good-bye, the object of their admiration and pity walked in—fortunately too late for them to sit down again, as they would gladly have done. He looked much as usual, Mrs. Grey thought, only perhaps rather graver; but he had been grave and solemn and pale and thin all his life, and would be so to the end of his days. He might have plenty of other people's troubles on his shoulders, but nobody gave him credit for any of his own.

He sat down in his usual rather awkward way, and began, with very much the manner of a shy schoolboy who has been sent with a message: "My mother wished me to tell you, Mrs. Grey—she is not very well, or she would have come herself to announce it to you—my sister is engaged to be married to Mr. Wylde."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Grey, smiling—she was cer-

tainly rather taken by surprise—"I must congratulate you. I hope Mrs. Hayward is pleased."

"Yes; I think she is. He's a very good fellow, Wylde—quite sound, you know—though I don't go along with him in everything."

"He must be a good deal older than your sister, is he not?"

"He's forty-eight and she's twenty-eight. But that's a fault on the right side, isn't it?"

"Yes, I think so, certainly," said Mrs. Grey; while Laura stooped to pick up a ball of worsted which she had just dropped, and was some time about it.

"And when is it to be?" Mrs. Grey asked.

"About the end of next month, I believe. He generally takes his holiday about that time."

Then there was a dead silence for at least three minutes, poor Mrs. Grey beating her brains for something to say, and she at last began:

"You have got a very good player for the organ just now, Mr. Hayward."

"I'm glad you thought so," he answered. "That was one thing I wished to mention: I am in a position now to relieve Miss Grey of her arduous duties in this matter, as young Mr. Hopkins is quite willing to engage to come over regularly on Sundays and festivals, and to practise the choir twice a week. Of course I have not entered into an engagement with him until I knew what Miss Grey's wishes might be."

Laura felt as if she had been given a sudden stab. Lightly as she had at first undertaken it, she had come to give a great deal of her heart to the organ playing: she appreciated the honour, though she did not make much talk about it, and always tried to do her best; and now Mr. Hayward wanted to shake her off altogether!

She controlled herself, however, as she felt him looking at her with that hard set face, waiting for her to speak; and said quietly, though with a little constraint

in her voice : " Oh, of course, I have no wishes in the matter : I am quite ready to resign my task into better hands."

" Very well. Then I shall engage Hopkins as organist. The choir are very much indebted to you, Miss Grey, for doing it so well and so long."

" The choir are very welcome," said Laura.

And Mrs. Grey, sitting by, listened in surprise.

Mr. Hayward had, indeed, a double motive in thus dispensing with Laura's services. He had always wished for a male organist, one who was able to work the choir, and to whom, being salaried, he should be under no obligation ; but he had a stronger reason for feeling it expedient that Laura should be no longer associated with him in any way. Mr. Bayliss's insinuations, though utterly unfounded as far as he was concerned, had left a sting behind. Always shy and sensitive, he was now more so than ever ; more utterly determined that he would never, as far as he could without actually neglecting his duties, do what might give any one an excuse for saying that he encouraged young ladies to run after him, or cause any one to be talked about on his account ; least of all one for whom he had such tender consideration as for Laura Grey—an engaged young lady, too.

Having thus got over what he had looked forward to as rather a disagreeable duty, he took his leave, and walked away, feeling a certain amount of satisfaction in what he had done. The young man whom he had now decided to engage as organist had pleased him much during his time of trial. There was moreover another bond of sympathy between them, which deserves to be mentioned.

Ambrose's first acquaintance with him, after his coming to Axhill as incumbent, was on this wise. He was in town walking up High Street, one day, when a pleasant-looking young man crossed the road and accosted him. " Mr. Hayward, I believe ? You will not

recollect me, sir ; I saw you here some eight years ago. I knew your brother Alfred very well. My name is Hopkins."

Then it all came back to him, and he remembered how the former chorister of S. Mary's had, from a casual acquaintance, become, by reason of similarity of tastes and pursuits, an intimate friend of the London choir-boy, in his somewhat lonely life at Axhill.

Hopkins had been away from his native place for some years, so he said, in business ; but he didn't like the business, and, being musically inclined, had given it up and come back to study for an organist under his old master, Mr. Freer ; he was therefore very glad of the opening Mr. Hayward's temporary employment afforded him. He had been rather an idle, thoughtlessly inclined youth ; and it was chiefly the sudden early death of his friend and playmate that had had a sobering and salutary influence upon his after life. " I shall never forget," he said to Mr. Hayward, " the day I went to wish poor Alfred good-bye ! To see a boy no older than myself, one whom I had been so familiar with, suddenly called away from this world, and seeming so ready, too, to go ; it set me a-thinking, I assure you, sir ! By the blessing of GOD, his example and his remembrance made another boy of me. He gave me a little book—perhaps you may recollect, Mr. Hayward—the ' Devotional Helps'—I shall keep and value it all my life."

Of course, after this, Ambrose naturally felt an interest in the young man. Another reason, too, for which he was glad to engage him was this—Mortlock liked him : he and Mortlock would pull so well together.

Thus congratulating himself, he was proceeding through the village, when his steps were suddenly arrested by a shrill shout of " Hi ! hi ! pa'son ! " and turning round he found himself pursued by a little breathless boy, whom he at once saw was not one of his own flock.

“ Oh, please, pa’son, come up to station and see the man ’as been runned over !”

“ Run over ! Who sent you ? Whose boy are you ?”

“ Station-master’s,” replied the urchin, promptly. “ Father bid me run all I knowed, ’cos he can’t come hisself, and you’re to come right away, sharp, ’cos he’s agoin’ to be killed, and it’s one of your men.”

“ One of my men ?” repeated Ambrose, with a sickening sense of horror, as a perception of the child’s meaning flashed upon him.

“ Father said so. It’s Mr.—Mr.—him as the coal trucks belongs to.”

“ Mortlock ?”

“ Ay—that’s it.”

Mr. Hayward waited no longer, but strode off at his fastest, leaving the panting little messenger far behind. It was usually considered a long walk from Axhill to the station, but it did not take him long now.

On the platform a little crowd had gathered of porters, clerks, and a few strangers, and they were still standing about in groups, some with perturbed faces, near the door of the station-master’s own quarters. The latter person was evidently on the look-out for the clergyman, and met him at once.

“ Seen my boy ?” was his greeting. “ Well, you ain’t been long, either of you. Awful job, this—you’ve heard, eh ?”

“ No details. How was it ?”

“ A child got straying on the line, just after the 2.20 had come up and was shunting a lot of coal and lime trucks for the depôt. Mortlock was out here, seeing after them, and he sighted this little wretch coolly walking along the siding, and three waggons coming full kick towards him. He was off the platform in a moment, swung the child out of the way just in time, slipped his foot somehow on the metals and fell, and the three loaded trucks went over his legs.”

“ Where is he ?”

“ In my place—it was the handiest. My wife’s with him and two doctors. They’re going to get him taken to the hospital—seem to think it’s a poorish chance for him.”

“ Where are his friends? Have they been sent for?”

“ His mother’s out in the country, somewhere; he’s got a brother at Leeds. I’ve telegraphed to him and to the head of the firm. He’s got none belonging to him about here, except it was the girl he was courting, but they’d parted company, folks tell me. Anyway ’tis a miserable business. Go you in to him; he was calling out for you just now. I can’t come—I’ve the signals;” and, brushing his sleeve across his eyes, the man ran away.

Ambrose Hayward was well accustomed to sudden calls to painful scenes, and the outward composure which was one of his most valuable qualities as a clergyman never forsook him. But in all his life, not excepting the occasion when he was suddenly summoned to the dying bed of his only brother, had he felt more shocked and unnerved than now, when he went into that little room within the station and saw the fine young man, his one true friend and faithful helper in all his work, suddenly stricken down in the prime of his strength, writhing in the fearful agony of his crushed and mangled limbs. Poor Mortlock, like many a strong man who has never known a day’s illness, was little tolerant of pain; and his cries and moans made the scene more distressing.

“ Can nothing be done?” asked Ambrose of the Axhill doctor, who was standing by.

“ Nothing more, here. We have stopped the bleeding now, and made arrangements for getting him up to the hospital at once. Amputation is his only chance—a poor one enough. Speak to him while you can—he appeared to have something on his mind. I will get these people away from the door,” and he retreated,

leaving Mr. Hayward and the station-master's wife alone with the sufferer. The kindly woman bent over him, saying gently, "Here's your own minister come now."

The poor fellow lifted his eyes earnestly to the calm grave face of his friend as he knelt down beside him, and tried to speak; but the parched lips seemed unable to utter a word. The woman moistened his mouth with brandy and water, and after some minutes Ambrose caught the words: "See *her*—tell her yourself—promise."

"Yes, I promise," he said, for he understood immediately. "Are you at peace, Edward, with GOD and man?"

A spasm of pain passed over the young man's face; not bodily pain only, the clergyman rightly judged. "Have you anything against any one—anything that keeps you back from Him? tell me now, while He gives you time."

"I have tried—I have tried—but it is so hard—to forgive."

"You must forgive him, Edward. You must keep no hard thoughts against any fellow-creature, as you desire to stand acquitted at the bar of your GOD and Judge."

"I do now—I know—my own great need—mercy—mercy!" gasped the poor fellow. "I did not always—I had hard thoughts of him—even at the altar—I deceived you—myself—but I cannot deceive GOD. Will He—accept me—now?"

"He gives you time and consciousness to repent. He will surely not cast you off. You have tried to serve Him faithfully."

"So weakly—so unworthily—you can't judge—I see it all now."

Ambrose Hayward, as he listened to his poor friend's broken expressions of penitence, felt deeply humbled; felt too, as he had often felt before in his ministerial experience, what an awful significance even the smallest

and, as men judge, most excusable faults assume, in the light of coming death and judgment.

When at length he had pronounced the Church's absolution over his suffering parishioner, he could not but feel that he had never been called to speak it over one whose life, as far as he knew, had been more single-hearted, faithful, and pure.

The necessary arrangements for his removal to the hospital had now been made. Poor Mortlock entreated not to be moved—to remain where he was; but while there was any chance of saving life his request could not be granted, so he was carried away; Mr. Hayward going with him to the door of the hospital, and promising to return to him as soon as he was permitted.

In the street he met Mr. Bayliss, who inquired with some concern after his colleague; but when Ambrose offered to call, curtly informed him that Mrs. Bayliss was from home. Returning to town, he had a long time to wait before he was admitted at length to the accident ward.

Mortlock was its only occupant at present. All that skill and science and kind consideration could do for his terrible case had been done so far; but, even if it should prove successful, it was pitiful to see the sadly maimed figure under the light coverings of the hospital bed, and to think of the state of hopeless crippled helplessness to which the stalwart young man had in a few hours been brought. Ambrose Hayward had watched many death-beds, and the expression of the sufferer's face led him to believe that his hours were numbered; but he tried to speak with some degree of hopefulness as, after the first low pastoral greeting, he said, "You will feel easier now."

Poor Mortlock looked up at his friend with a sad wistful face of suffering—a face so changed from its once serene cheerful expression as hardly to be recognizable. "They have done for me, Mr. Hayward,"

he said; "they have taken both my legs. Much use living would be."

"Men have borne as much before, and yet led useful lives. There may be work for you to do still; take courage."

"No, no," he answered, shaking his head. "My work is done. I wish I had never waked after that chloroform!"

"Have you much pain, now?"

"Pain! oh, yes—lots of pain. I never knew pain before. Why did I ever see that miserable child?" He shut his eyes and groaned.

"Because Our LORD willed to give you an opportunity of sacrificing yourself for one of His little ones," said Ambrose gently. "'Inasmuch as you have done it for one of the least of these.'"

"But I never thought of that, or of danger. Well, poor little chap, I'm glad he's not suffering this! Only you see, the odds are, he'd have been killed outright, or else gone clear of altogether, may be!"

"We don't know. All we do know is that it was all ordered by GOD and for the best. You did what was your duty—any man's duty, at the moment; and you may be sure, though you had no time to think of what you were doing, that your sacrifice will be accepted, if you resign your will to His now, and make it your own."

"I don't know," he said faintly. "My head is weak and dizzy. I can't seem to think. Will He forgive?"

"He has forgiven. Remember, you have received His pardon for the past. All that He asks of you now is patience and submission; to lie still and wait for Him."

"It is weary waiting here," he said, half unconsciously quoting his favourite hymn, and another moan escaped him. "But I don't mean to murmur—He knows."

"Yes, He does know. He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities."

He lay quiet for a few minutes; then he asked, "Does *she* know about me?"

"Her father does. I met him after I left you, and he was asking about you. I shall go there to-morrow." And as he made no answer, Ambrose said: "Your brother will be here before morning. He has telegraphed to say he will come by the night mail."

"My poor mother!" he said; and then, as if roused to a sudden recollection, he proceeded to give Mr. Hayward a few directions respecting his personal property; adding that he knew his commercial accounts would be found all right by whoever was sent to succeed him. His thoughts evidently turned chiefly to the poor girl whom he had once hoped to make his wife; the more so that he had been cut off from her lately.

"*She* is so near," he said, after a while; "if I could only see her just once, I could die easier."

"It would pain her so to see you now: it might do her harm."

"Ah, yes; poor Bessie! But yet I do think it would be a comfort to her afterwards, and I do so wish to say a few words to her." He was silent for a few minutes; then he said, "There is one thing more I wished to ask you, Mr. Hayward, before you go. I know it is too late, to-night, to ask for anything here except a prayer: but if I am alive to-morrow morning, when my brother is come, I should like to receive the Blessed Sacrament from you once more, with him, and any others you would think proper to ask to come."

"Yes; I will bring my mother—and Hopkins. You shall have that request granted, Edward, if it please God. And for the other, I would do anything I could to further it; but you must be content to leave it in His Hands. Now I will read you something, and then I must go, as they will be closing for the night."

And after a few brief soothing prayers, Ambrose took a kind farewell of his poor friend for the present, and walked sorrowfully homewards.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ We’ll meet and aye be fain
In the Land o’ the leal.”

IT may be supposed that Mr. Hayward was not slow in presenting himself at the hospital next morning.

He found Mortlock much the same in most respects as he had left him : suffering and weakened, but not materially worse. His brother had duly arrived. He was quite a youth, and had been terribly shocked and upset by the sad telegram : he was shy and silent, but quickly gained confidence from the kind sympathetic manner of the clergyman who was his brother’s great friend. And so Ambrose returned to summon his mother, who never refused her presence on occasions of the kind, and the young organist, who was one of Mortlock’s chief friends ; and with those three to participate, the Holy Communion was administered to him.

After the service was over, and Mr. Hayward was once more alone with the sufferer—Richard Mortlock, the young brother, having gone at his desire to fetch some books from his house—Edward could no longer conceal his extreme anxiety for an interview with Bessie Bayliss. It appeared to weigh so much on his mind, that Mr. Hayward became almost equally anxious to gratify him ; and at length consented to walk over to Mr. Bayliss’s, and ask if the request might be granted.

He went to the door which had been so long closed against him, and was shown into a little business room of Mr. Bayliss’s ; where after a few minutes the churchwarden came to him.

“ Well, Mr. Hayward, what do you want with me ?”

“ I am just come from the infirmary, where your

fellow-churchwarden lies in a very precarious state. I—”

“ Ah! h'm—ha—poor fellow,” interrupted Mr. Bayliss, rather hesitatingly. “ A very sad case, I fear. Any hopes of ultimate recovery ?”

“ I cannot pronounce, but I fear not. He does not think so himself. But he is now most deeply anxious, Mr. Bayliss, for one short interview with your daughter—to say a few farewell words. At his earnest desire I have come to make the request of you and Mrs. Bayliss, should you think proper to allow it.”

“ Do you mean to say, sir, that the fellow—poor fellow, one mustn't speak hardly of him, if he's on his death-bed ; but do you mean to tell me that he pretends to keep up any feeling for my daughter after the way in which he threw her over ?”

“ I mean to say, sir,” said Ambrose, speaking as sternly as he could speak when thoroughly roused to indignation, “ that, in the midst of great suffering, and in the prospect of approaching death, Edward Mortlock's one earthly thought and care is for your daughter, whom he has never ceased faithfully to love ; and he can hardly die easily without seeing her. Should you be unable to permit him to do so from motives of consideration for her, he will be the last to blame you ; but I would ask you to consider, before you deliberately refuse a dying man's urgent request, whether you have sufficient grounds for doing so.”

Bayliss looked rather conscience-stricken then. He was not really a bad-hearted man ; but prejudice and obstinacy had been so long suffered to overcome his better feelings that he was a good deal blinded by them on many occasions. “ Well, well,” he said, at length, “ it is a wretched business! though, goodness knows, I tried to act for the best ; and if it was to end this way it may be as well they were no more to each other. I must ask Mrs. Bayliss, however, before I give an answer, one way or the other.” He left the room,

and after some time had elapsed, during which Ambrose thought anxiously of his poor friend's suspense, he returned with his wife. Mrs. Bayliss was a different sort of person from her husband; very kindhearted, and not so prejudiced in any way as he. A minister was a minister in her eyes, irrespective of the cut of his coat; and that the minister should call and see them in their trouble—for that poor Bessie, at any rate, was in sore trouble, no mother could have been ignorant—seemed rather a natural and comforting thing than otherwise. She had grieved deeply too over the separation between her daughter and Mortlock, whom she truly believed to be calculated to promote Bessie's happiness in every way. With regard to the question under discussion, her tender feeling for the two young people disposed her to favour the request; especially as she found, on submitting it to Bessie, that she was excessively anxious to be allowed to go.

So, with her husband's tacit consent, she acquiesced in Mr. Hayward's proposal; "if," she added, hesitatingly, "Mr. Hayward were quite certain—could assure her positively, that there was nothing too painful or overcoming for Bessie to see."

"I think not," he answered, quietly. "He has lost both legs from the knee, but there is no further injury. He is quiet and calm, and will be careful not to let her see that he is suffering. My mother was there this morning."

So, greatly relieved, he returned to tell his friend of the success of his mission. Poor Mortlock was wonderfully pleased, and his gratitude to Mr. Hayward knew no bounds. He requested particularly that Mr. Hayward would remain during the interview; saying, as Ambrose seemed scrupulous, "I had much rather you did, sir; we have nothing to say to each other that we should wish to hide from *you*."

Then he asked Mr. Hayward to arrange the coverings of his bed so that the sad deficiency might not be

apparent, and begged a comb and brush from the hospital nurse, evidently wishing, poor fellow, to look his best still for the girl of his affections. And when the preparations were made, with the dark hair and short young beard and moustache trim and smooth, a flush of expectation on the cheeks so much paler than their wont, it was a face not so very unlike the brave bright-looking Edward Mortlock of former days that awaited the coming of Bessie.

She came, escorted by her mother; but Mrs. Bayliss would not go beyond the door of the ward, as she wished to leave the two young people unfettered by her presence. Bessie came in very calm, but Mr. Hayward, who had not seen her for some time, was much shocked by the glimpse of her face, with its strange hard-set expression; though he considerably withdrew to the further end of the long room, and would not appear to notice her.

At the sight of that face watching for her, the hands held out to her, her unnatural composure quite gave way. Only two words were spoken—"Bessie!" "Edward!" and the poor girl dropped on her knees beside him, and burst into silent tears. He took both her hands in his, and remained holding them tightly pressed to his heart.

"This is indeed kind of you, to come here, Bessie," Mortlock said at length. "The pleasure of seeing you is so great that it almost makes me forget what I had to say to you, and that it is good-bye."

"But you are getting better?" Bessie faltered out. "You look so well."

"Do I? No, dear; honestly, I don't much think I'm getting better. And I don't know that I wish it, now. I could never be anything but a cripple, and a burden to myself and others, if I did pull through and I could never ask you to marry me now, Bessie!"

Through her sobs poor Bessie got out the words, "I would make no difference."

“No difference! GOD bless you for saying so, Bessie, and for your true unselfish love. I don’t doubt it. But I should never agree to it—never. However, there’s no use talking of that; but what I do want to say to you, Bessie, as my last entreaty, is this: hold fast to your principles—to all the good things we’ve learnt together—never let them go. Above all things, Bessie, never give up coming to the Altar—when you can, as often as you can. There is no help like that—only hold on, and all your little doubts and troubles will pass away in time.” He paused, and Bessie murmured some words only audible to him, as he answered immediately. “Unworthy! who *can* be worthy? By staying away one will never become worthy. And, Bessie, don’t fret, don’t make yourself unhappy because you have not power or opportunity to follow out all the little things you would wish to do. *He* does not expect more of us than He gives us opportunity for. Only hold fast to your *principles*—give up nothing essential—and you may find your opportunities will come another day. And oh, Bessie, never, never doubt His mercy and His love! You never doubted *my* love, when we were parted—a weak sinful man’s; would you doubt the SAVIOUR Who died for you?”

To all this poor Bessie’s only answer was to weep. Ambrose Hayward, as he could not help hearing most of the conversation, felt deeply and bitterly for the grief, and want of guidance of this sheep of his flock; and his own inability to reach it and to deal with it.

“I am rather faint, Bessie,” poor Mortlock said, after a short silence. “Give me a mouthful of that stuff in the tumbler,” and as Bessie handed him the glass of brandy and water that stood on the table, he smiled his thanks. “Fancy your waiting upon me! I’ve gone in for an awful lot of brandy these two days, Bessie—enough for any man’s lifetime—not with my will, I promise you! But it never went to my head,

for all I'm so unused to it." And Bessie appreciated the allusion, well knowing that in his days of health Edward Mortlock, though constantly obliged to attend sales and markets, never tasted spirits of any kind.

"Now there is one thing more, Bessie, I must say, before you go. If, another day, as is very likely, you meet with some one whom you can thoroughly trust and respect and lean on; who loves you with all his heart, as I do, and who can make you happy, never think you are doing me wrong by accepting his love. I don't say, if I were alive to see it—human nature is so weak—that it wouldn't give me a pang; but it can never do so now. I can honestly say I wish it. I wish you to be as happy as a woman ought to be—to have a nice home, and a—a husband to love you, and children to rise up and call you blessed. It will make no difference when we meet in Paradise." And as the poor girl could only stammer out "never, never," he added, "Well, well, never mind, then. I've said what was in my heart to say. And now, Bessie, here's my old choir hymnal for you. It's very worn, and rather smoky, I must confess, but I don't think you'll mind that. Look at the marks in it—'Paradise'—there's a date there that you'll remember—and the 'few more years'—and the 'songs of peaceful Sion'—all our old favourites. How much we have to thank Mr. Hayward for bringing in all that beautiful music! I've written your name in it, Bessie, very badly, above my own." And he showed her where, above the firmly-traced "Edward Mortlock," was a shakily-written, pencilled "Elizabeth Bayliss," and the date of that day. "Now good-bye, my own dearest love. Give me one kiss—remember—meet me 'where loyal hearts and true stand ever in the light.' GOD bless you, Bessie."

And with trembling knees and streaming eyes, poor Bessie walked to the door. Mr. Hayward came forward, took her hand kindly, and led her to where her mother was waiting for her; but beyond a quietly

spoken pastoral blessing, he said nothing. He felt that words would have been superfluous, and that Mortlock's one note of comfort was the best for her to carry away.

Poor Mortlock himself was a good deal overcome when the interview was over. The effort of self-command, both mental and bodily, while it lasted, had been great; and Ambrose was not surprised to see him relieve himself by a violent fit of weeping—the impulsiveness of a boy mingled with the deep passionate grief of a strong man.

When his friend had soothed and calmed him somewhat, as much by his kind sympathetic manner as by his words, and had said a few helpful prayers, he was obliged to leave him for a time; as there were other scenes that required his presence, and other duties for him to perform. He promised, however, to return in the evening, if not before.

He was feeling very depressed as he retraced his steps to the hospital, at the close of that sad anxious day. It might have been partly from bodily weariness, for his numerous walks to and fro, between town and village, had been more than enough even for his untiring legs: partly, also, from the desponding view which it was becoming more and more natural to him to take of things in general. But from the first moment when he was summoned to Mortlock's side after the accident, he had felt somehow as if there was no doubt that the decree had gone forth—that he was fated to lose this friend also—his one sympathizer and helper—the redeeming character, as he had grown to think him, among the heartless or hostile parishioners of Axhill. He might, from a sense of duty of course he would, work and strive on, as conscientiously as before; but, oh, what would it be to him to miss for ever the one kind bright face that was always the same to him, the cheery voice and manner that had many a time lifted up his fainting spirit, the hearty warm response to his wishes and co-operation in his schemes,

the brave manly influence that was always ready to exert itself for good!

All this was in his mind as he once more sought readmittance at the hospital door. He did not feel surprised, though he was inexpressibly grieved, to see the great change for the worse which had come over his poor friend, even before Mortlock said, looking up at him with piteous eyes: "Oh, Mr. Hayward, I'm very ill! I shan't be long now." And as Ambrose knelt down beside him and pressed his hand, he went on: "The doctor was in—about five minutes back. I asked him to tell me the truth, and he says I'm going on for lock-jaw—I've all the symptoms—so I know it won't be long, but I've got to die hard! And, Mr. Hayward, dear sir, I want you to stay with me!" he ended, looking pleadingly up into the priest's calm eyes.

Of course Ambrose had to ask the doctor's permission before he could promise. He was asked, in return, whether he had ever seen a case of tetanus, and on his saying no, whether he had pretty good nerves. Finally, he came back to his friend, saying that his request was granted, and that he might remain with him through the night.

There was no thought of his own weariness, his natural shrinking from what was painful—for Ambrose *had* nerves, delicately-strung, sensitive nerves, under all that calm exterior, and he not unfrequently suffered afterwards for painful scenes, though few guessed it. If he had sought a reward, the gratified look of his poor friend's face was more than sufficient.

"God bless you—God reward you," said poor Mortlock earnestly. "You have always been a kind friend to me, Mr. Hayward."

"So have you to me, Edward: my right-hand man."

"It was little I could do, sir. But your work will tell."

"You've always upheld me—'loyal and true,' eh?"

"Thank you, sir," he said, as a faint smile of pleasure

lighted up the pain-stricken young face. "My happiest hours—the only happy ones lately—have been spent in the work you found for me to do, and the privileges you afforded me."

"You don't regret now, that it cost you something to hold by them?"

"Regret! Oh, no. I see it was all for the best. It has spared her something, and me too. It would have been harder for *her*, anyhow, if we had been man and wife," but he could not dwell on the thought of what might have been, and broke off, with his eyes full of tears.

"Life used to seem very bright and pleasant once," he continued presently, "but that is all over long ago. I don't desire to live a burden to myself and others, and I'm a very poor hand at bearing pain—oh, dear, dear!"

"And the thought of the Rest at hand," said the clergyman. "Not only the relief from pain, but the actual blessedness, of which our happiest 'sacrifice of praise' here is but the faint foretaste!"

"Ay, I know, I know. But oh! how blessed to have been allowed such foretastes!"

He spoke feelingly, turning his eyes with such a look of gratitude on his friend as filled the humble worker's heart with deep thankfulness to Him Who had so blessed his work at least to this one soul. With a strong passionate yearning in his breast for the honest love that was passing away from him, he said: "You won't forget me, Edward, where you are going?"

"Forget you, Mr. Hayward! That would be quite impossible! Please GOD, I shall pray for you better there, where there is no more pain. Now you must pray for me—I'm getting so bad I shan't be able to follow it soon—pray that it may be shortened."

So, through the long weary hours of that sad night, Ambrose watched beside the sufferer: repeating constantly such short prayers and psalms as he seemed

able to follow,—or a few verses, it might be, of one of his favourite hymns, which always seemed to please him. There could be no doubt that his ministrations were acceptable. Over and over again, after an interval of apparent unconsciousness or slight wandering, poor Mortlock would turn his head feebly, saying, “Mr. Hayward, are you there still?” and meeting the kind eyes so full of unspoken sympathy, would give utterance to some passing expression of his suffering,—not in a murmuring spirit, but because it was natural to him, and a relief to tell his trouble to his friend, and to receive in return the few words of holy comfort—words generally not his own—with which every complaint was answered. Or it might be a request for something to drink, or some little change in the arrangement of his pillow or coverings—always most respectfully worded, “Would you be so kind, dear sir, as to do” this or that; but showing that, like every other sick person with whom Ambrose came much in contact, he seemed to think that no one could do anything for him like Mr. Hayward. It was more than was needed to strengthen the tie already existing between the lonely man and his one likeminded parishioner—the tie so soon to be rudely snapped asunder. Indeed within the last sad two days Ambrose seemed to have gained quite a brotherly affection for this young man, whose age was so nearly what his own younger brother’s would have been then had he lived.

About midnight Mortlock started up rather uneasily, saying, “Mr. Hayward! you promised to stay with me—you always keep your word. Promise me that you will not lose sight of Bessie.”

“I will do what I can. But you must remember that I cannot force them to admit me, or to listen to me.”

“But if her soul is in peril!” he said with a strange earnestness, looking at Ambrose with dilated eyes. “Look here, Mr. Hayward—nobody knows so well as

I do what her troubles are. She used to ask me so many things—in our walks—she was so earnest—so anxious! Hasn't one read of 'counsels of perfection?' Well, Bessie is just one of those, who if she thinks she finds out a 'more excellent way' in anything—will never rest unless she can carry it out. And she misunderstands things. It was so with her, I know, about the early Celebration—she hasn't been at all since they kept her from that—and so many other little matters besides. And placed as she is, she can't possibly carry out half her ideas of what's right—and then she frets—I know she does—and is tempted to doubt GOD's acceptance of her. It was so—even while we could speak of these things together—and I could see—to-day—she has been worse since that—my poor Bessie!"

It cost him a good deal to get through this, and he spoke painfully, and in broken sentences.

"I will try to help her, as GOD gives me opportunity," said Ambrose, humbly. "It may be only with my unworthy prayers. But you mustn't trust to me alone. The LORD can lead His children in His own way. He does not save only by His weak instruments: He will surely bring those who trust in Him out of all their troubles in His own good time. And these trials sometimes depend on a person's physical temperament partly. They often disappear before the sterner realities of life. Even this present grief—your loss, may be the means, under GOD's blessing, of strengthening and raising her mind above the lesser matters that trouble her."

"If I only *knew* she was in good hands!"

"She is in the best Hands of all—the most tender—the most loving. 'No man is able to pluck her out of our FATHER's Hand.' You must not let doubts and fears for her disturb your confidence now. Trust Him for her, as absolutely as you do for yourself—and you will not find Him fail you—I dare to affirm that."

“Yes—I do trust Him,” he said faintly. “He knows best—and He loves her best.”

He seemed unable to speak more then. And when his faithful watcher endeavoured to moisten the hot dry lips with some drink which he had signed for, he found to his distress that the poor fellow was unable to swallow it; the attempt only increasing his painful symptoms.

He submitted meekly, only whispering as he laid back his head again, “Pray.” And Ambrose knelt down once more; this time with the two strong hands clasped round his own with a sort of clinging child-like grasp, as if there were help and comfort in the outward calmness and stillness. He went on repeating prayers, and for a while Mortlock controlled himself sufficiently to follow in some degree; but at length broke out:

“Oh, I am so bad, so bad! Do you know what pain is, Mr. Hayward?”

“If I do not, my poor fellow, the All-Merciful does.”

“Why does He let me live like this? You put a dumb animal out of pain. What have I done to deserve it?”

“What have you done to deserve Paradise?”

“It’s long coming. Oh!” as three sharp successive whistles sounded cruelly shrill under the roof of the adjacent station, making him start and quiver in every nerve, and wringing from him one impatient cry, “those confounded engines! can’t they keep quiet?”

“Hush,” said Ambrose, gravely. “You have made your peace with God. Do not let His enemy rob you of it because his time is short. Our loving LORD will not let you suffer a moment longer than is good for you; and then—peace and joy and rest for ever!”

“Say it—say it through.”

“What do you wish?”

“Paradise!” came faintly through the closed teeth.

Mr. Hayward began to repeat the familiar hymn, which had a deep terrible significance uttered as a prayer beside that couch of pain ;

“ O Paradise, O Paradise,
Who doth not crave for rest ?”

but he could not finish it. Before many verses were said, a terrible convulsive struggle had set in. It was indeed the most painful vigil Ambrose had ever known, watching the suffering which human aid seemed powerless to alleviate ; for though the two doctors were there to do what was within the range of their skill, the frightful disorder ran its course. But not once did he regret his promise so readily given of remaining. The poor sufferer never seemed quite to lose consciousness of his presence ; and ever, in intervals of partial relief, the strained eyes sought the set steadfast face of the watcher—the face that never flinched or showed agitation, but when the conflict was severest and the sight most distressing, only closed the eyes in silent intercession that for no pains of death the soul's confidence might be lost.

Many hours the strife lasted—the strife, so terrible in its protraction, between manhood's strength and mortal agony. Still Ambrose knelt on, his whole soul concentrated in one earnest intensity of supplication, as the fearful rending spasms returned again and again with greater violence, that each might bring release to the suffering spirit : conscious of only unutterable thankfulness when, about nine o'clock in the morning, he saw the racked frame sink at last into that repose which no sound or sense of earth should again disturb.

He could hardly realize yet his own personal loss ; not even when he turned to speak a few words of comfort and hope to the lonely boy who was sobbing his heart out downstairs about “ poor Ned,” and would hardly look up or listen to him. He was too young, and too utterly overcome to take anything upon him-

self; and on Mr. Hayward devolved the duty of caring for the decent bestowal of the body of his poor churchwarden, until the formal inquest should be over.

He went with Richard Mortlock to poor Edward's house,—the neat little cottage which he had taken shortly after settling at Axhill, and whither he had hoped at no distant time to bring Bessie as his bride. He assisted him in taking charge of his few possessions, and in taking measures for carrying out his wishes with regard to them. After which, Ambrose asked the friendless youth to come and stay at the parsonage until his brother's funeral should be over.

He accepted the offer gratefully. Ambrose learnt from him more of the family history than he had ever done from Edward himself, who seemed to have been the pride and mainstay of them all—a family of seven, of whom he was the eldest; the father having been dead many years, the mother being in delicate health. Richard himself was in the postal department at Leeds, whither he would have to return as early as possible.

Ambrose could not rest without calling that very day at Mr. Bayliss's; and being received, as before, by the churchwarden alone, said that he had ventured to do so, in case it might be any satisfaction to Mrs. and Miss Bayliss to see him. But Mr. Bayliss's softer mood had departed, and the very idea was to him as a red rag to a bull.

“No, I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Hayward. I don't think either of them would be particularly anxious to see you. Miss Bayliss is well—and now that this unfortunate affair is over, and the poor young man gone to a better world, we trust, I have every confidence in her sense of duty, and the Christian principles in which she has been brought up—though I dare say you don't give us any credit for it—to overcome her feelings of natural grief. And I must take the opportunity of reminding you that we're on the same footing as before, as far as my girls are concerned. Much obliged to you for your attention in

calling to inquire," Mr. Bayliss went on. "Of course it is natural you should wish to improve the occasion,—and if you'll do so in the pulpit, sir, we shall all be delighted, I'm sure—and all benefit, I hope. Good day to you," as Ambrose turned to go away with a silent offer of his hand. "Inquest's to-morrow—I suppose you've heard?" he added, with a little assumption of importance; for he was to be on the jury.

"Yes; I imagined it would be."

"Mere form, of course," continued Bayliss. "Well, well! it's a sad affair—casts a gloom over our quiet little place. And a terrible loss to that company up in London—clever, steady, rising young fellow!"

But Mr. Hayward could not stand any more of Mr. Bayliss's late-bestowed commendations, and walked sorrowfully away.

He attended the inquest next day, having been asked to do so as a witness of the death; and was not sorry, because it enabled him to be some comfort to Richard. The poor boy's nervous dread of having to appear and identify his brother made him greatly in need of the support and sympathy of a friend.

And later on the same day in the bright calm summer evening, Edward Mortlock was laid to rest in a quiet corner of S. Martin's churchyard; his brethren of the choir—the choir that owed so much to his influence and example—standing round in their white surplices, hardly a dry eye amongst them, to sing with what heart they might the musical portion of the service. Their last farewell over his open grave was his favourite hymn, "O Paradise;" and as the harmonious voices blended, floating tunefully on the still evening air, Ambrose Hayward, as he missed the one which was wont to give so much support, felt that he should never dissociate that hymn from the recollection of his faithful churchwarden and choir-master—the "loyal heart and true" which had willingly given up the dearest joys of earth for the things of heaven.

CHAPTER XVII.

“It is not what the leech can cure—
An erring chord, a jarring madness ;
A calm so deep, it must endure—
So deep, thou scarce can call it sadness.”

LOLD LYTTON.

THE sudden and painful death of the young churchwarden of S. Martin's seemed indeed to have cast a gloom over the village of Axhill. Even the most determined gossipers for some time after that sad event had scarcely spirit to canvass what would otherwise have been the most interesting subject of discussion, namely, the approaching marriage of the incumbent's sister to the Ritualist clergyman of S. Mary's.

Mrs. Grey and Laura paid, as in duty bound, a visit of congratulation at the parsonage ; which was followed by Miss Hayward's walking up to Sunnywood one morning—escorted by her brother as far as the gate and no further—to ask, with a good deal of nervousness and apology, whether Miss Grey would be so very kind, if she did not think it too great a liberty to ask it, as to be one of her bridesmaids.

Of course Laura could not well refuse ; and having consented, she was further warmly pressed to come over some morning soon to have a private inspection of the presents, and to give her advice and assistance in the arrangement of several important matters regarding the bridesmaids' dresses.

Mrs. Grey told her to go : it was only neighbourly by poor Emily, who had few friends near her of her own age to sympathize with her ; so on an appointed day Laura mounted her horse and rode over—she generally rode rather than walked when she had to go about alone.

She felt shy, and greatly relieved to find only Mrs.

Hayward and Emily at home. The latter carried her off upstairs at once to the "private view" of her treasures, and to have a confidential chat; and when Emily got by herself with a young companion she was as communicative and confidential as she was silent at other times.

"It is so kind of you to have come, Miss Grey," she began, "and I want you to take the whole arrangement and disposal of your dresses, for I'm sure I can never find what will suit everybody. I am such a bad hand! I asked Charlie what was his favourite colour, and he said, 'a judicious combination of all the colours of the rainbow,' and when I told him that was white, he said he had no idea I was so scientific!" and Emily laughed and showed all her teeth.

"Who are the other bridesmaids?" Laura asked.

"Two sisters of Charlie's—they've got red hair, so they'll be difficult to suit; my little niece, she's dark, but she's only four years old, so she'll do in anything; and yourself and Matilda Hart. So you must manage to please all."

"What a beautiful photograph!" said Laura, taking up one which lay on the table in an Oxford frame, and represented the interior of a handsome church.

"Yes, isn't it lovely? That's from our dear clergyman in London—Ambrose's old incumbent, you know. It's his church and ours, all our lives. I make Charlie jealous by telling him S. Mary's isn't to be named in the same day with it. He's sent me such a beautiful prayer-book too, Mr. Singleton, I mean. That writing case is Ambrose's present. It's like him, isn't it? so practical. Look and see how it's all fitted up inside. That photo," as a small worn-looking carte-de-visite fell out as Laura was examining the fittings, "ah, yes, it lives in there just now, but it's a very very old one; did you never see it? It's my youngest brother—the one who died here."

Laura turned the little brown faded likeness reverently in her fingers. A thin delicate slip of a fifteen-years-old boy, with light hair and eyes, and a merry mischievous fair face. "What a pretty little boy," she said, "but he is not a bit like any of you!"

"No; isn't he a darling? We have no good likeness of him—nothing but that, but he was much nicer looking. Mother thinks your brother rather like him, in some things. I've a number more photos here. Do you know this one of Ambrose?" and she handed Laura another carte. "It was taken before we left home—London I mean—for the people there. We like it so much."

It was a half-length of him in his cassock, and flattered as photographs will sometimes flatter plain people; or rather, perhaps, taken at the best instead of the worst. The dark hair and eyebrows, the meek grave expression of the dark grey eyes, told well; the beard and moustache concealing the mouth which was the worst feature of the face.

"It is a capital likeness," Laura said.

"You think so? You are more complimentary than a friend of ours who was calling the other day. She was looking over mother's photographs and she came to this and said, 'Who *is* this very handsome, melancholy-looking man?' and when we told her, she was so dreadfully shocked, and taken aback, and she said, 'I am sure I should never have known it. You don't think it like?'"

Laura laughed a little shyly, and was glad of the diversion when Emily placed before her a striking likeness of "Charlie" in surplice and stole, which was much more engrossing to Miss Hayward than any of the others; and when this and some more had been discussed, Laura said, "Mr. Wylde has a nice house and garden, hasn't he?"

"Oh, yes; very fair. It is too near the low part of the town to be quite a nice situation, but the house

is good. I hope you will come and see me often, Miss Grey."

"Thank you. It will be so nice for you to settle down so near your mother, won't it? for I suppose Mr. Wylde will always stay where he is now."

"Oh! yes; Charlie will never leave S. Mary's, I'm sure; he is so devoted to it. It would be a great disappointment if Ambrose goes away now, because of course when he does he takes mother with him."

"But Mr. Hayward doesn't think of going, does he?"

"Well, you mustn't say anything about it, you know, but sometimes he talks of it, if he could get something with more work. He would like something of mission work—home missions, I mean. I know he doesn't care about Axhill."

Laura felt as if suddenly transfixed. She turned very pale at first, and then, suddenly conscious that Miss Emily's sharpened eyes were regarding her with some curiosity, flushed crimson; and turned away hastily to look at something on the table.

It was not very restoring to her composure to find Mr. Hayward in the drawing-room when they went downstairs, in earnest conversation, apparently, with his mother, but which stopped as soon as the two girls entered. Then they went in to luncheon, or, more correctly speaking, the Haywards' early dinner. A quiet unceremonious sociable little meal enough; but Laura, though not a shy girl, never suffered more from shyness in her life than on this occasion. How could Emily go chattering on, about all sorts of "nonsense" (as Laura considered it), connected with the all-important event, with him sitting there silent at the head of the table, looking as Laura afterwards told her mother, "like a mild thunder-cloud!" It was quite a relief when the maid-servant brought in a note which she handed to Mr. Hayward.

He read it, then rose, passing it to his mother, and

saying merely, "I must go at once—Miss Grey will excuse me I'm sure—a sick person," left the room. Mrs. Hayward looked up from the note, saying, "How sad! is it not? Poor Miss Bayliss!"

"Is she worse, mother?" said Emily. "Have they actually sent for him?"

"Dying, he says. Very melancholy, is it not, Miss Grey? See, that is what Mr. Bayliss says; rather a singular note to write to the clergyman, is it not?" and she handed it to Laura, who took it, feeling as if she had no business, and read:

"Sir,—My poor girl is dying. Her mother wishes you would come and pray with her.

"Yours obediently,

"BENJAMIN BAYLISS."

"Poor Bessie! I had no idea she was so ill! She has been in' a sort of odd way for some time, hasn't she?"

"Yes. I think it was a kind of religious melancholy at first. She was engaged to poor Mr. Mortlock, and her father broke it off. Then after his death she got worse. Mr. Bayliss is so prejudiced, he never would let my son speak to her or do anything to help her. It must be very bad indeed for him to have sent."

"Yes," said Emily. "I can't think why people are so afraid of Ambrose. I am sure he is the last person one would call Romanizing. If it was Charlie, now"—and a long discussion of "Charlie's" views and doings was impending, but was happily interrupted by the arrival of Charlie himself, to make his almost daily visit to his betrothed; and so Laura, feeling that she was no longer wanted, gladly ordered Lassie, and cantered home.

She amused her mother by a long account of all Emily's treasures, and her visit generally; and proceeded to discuss the important matter of the bridesmaids' dress. One thing she did not mention at first,

and this was the rumour about Mr. Hayward's leaving Axhill. After an hour or two, however, the burden of concealment was too much for her: she felt quite treasonable in knowing anything about Mr. Hayward that her mother did not know. She was standing looking out of the sitting-room window just before tea, and began, rather as if feeling her way, "Mamma."

"What, dear?"

"Emily told me to-day, mamma, that she thought—that Mr. Hayward would like to go away—that he wanted more work—home missions, I think she said—and didn't like Axhill."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Grey, drily.

"She said I wasn't to talk about it, or tell any one, you know, mamma," said Laura, still intently regarding the little stone fountain which was in the middle of the grass.

"You may be sure I shall not talk about it, Laura; and, as a matter of course, you will not." Or think about it either, she would have liked to have added, but she had a miserable presentiment that it would be of no use.

"What a dear girl Miss Grey is," Emily said to her mother, when they were alone together. "So kind, is she not?" Then after a little pause, "The Harts said she was *certainly* engaged to her cousin, didn't they, mother?"

"Yes, dear. It was quite well known, they said."

"Well, it is very funny," said Emily, simpering a little, "because, you know, if it wasn't the case, I should say she had taken a fancy to Ambrose."

"My dear, what makes you think so?"

"Well, I never thought so before to-day; but one or two little things I saw this morning made me think so," Emily said, confidentially. "She thought his photograph so good; and when I said something about there being a chance of his leaving, you know—quite in confidence, of course—something she said led to it,

she got so red, poor girl. And you could see how awfully shy she was of him all dinner-time."

"Well, you have got sharper eyes than I, my dear. You don't think it's mutual?"

"Oh, *dear* no! He knows she's engaged. Besides, I don't believe he ever thought of her as anything but a tolerable temporary organist."

"Well, I am not thinking of Miss Grey, because though she is a dear girl, she's much more fitted for the wife of a man like young Mr. Mansell, than a poor parson. But I do often wish that Ambrose would make a good choice, and marry. I feel myself getting such an old woman now; and with both his sisters married and settled it will be very lonely for him, poor fellow, when I am gone! If he could only find some nice girl to take a liking to him."

"There's the rub, I'm afraid, as he would say himself," said Emily. "He would never show what he really is to a stranger; and the chances are the better he liked any one, the more the dear old bear would snub her."

It was late in the evening when Mr. Hayward came in. He found only his mother in the drawing-room, and she immediately asked after Bessie.

"At rest," he said, gravely.

"Poor girl!"

"Poor girl!—happy girl, you mean! Would you have had her live?" And as Mrs. Hayward looked up a little wonderingly, he added, "She has been insane for weeks; no question about it. Her mother has been telling me all about her."

"Indeed! what a sad case!"

"Ay, sad enough; and humanly speaking, one can't but think, that but for prejudice, she might never have come to this. She was just a religious earnest-minded girl, who had had very little Church teaching, and some things she heard me say, when I first came here, set her a-thinking. She hadn't any opportunities of hear-

ing me except at church, as old Bayliss would have thought her lost altogether if she had asked for advice or explanation in private ; but she used to get it all out of Mortlock at second hand, in their Sunday walks. Then, when that was put a stop to she had no one to ask, and just sat by herself and read and brooded. His death put the finishing stroke to it. Her mother says that ever since, she would scarcely do anything but sit alone in a room at the top of the house and sing out of his hymn-book. She was very quiet and harmless, so they didn't like to interfere with her ; but her mother or sister were almost always in the next room watching unknown to her. Last evening Mrs. Bayliss was there and heard her open the window—went in, just in time to stop her from jumping out. She said Edward had told her to meet him—she *must* go !”

“How very distressing ! But what did she die of ?”

“Brain fever. She got delirious last night—quite raving. It couldn't last long, for she was worn out before—worn to a shadow.”

“Did she return to consciousness at all ?”

“Oh, no. As Bayliss kindly told me when I got there, I couldn't do much good or harm either, now. She was quieter then ; all the afternoon she went on singing the hymn, ‘O Paradise’—over and over and over. Strange, it was *his* favourite, too ; the last thing he asked for ! She went off very quietly at last, about four o'clock. I didn't stay after that. Bayliss feels it very much, I believe, though he wouldn't look at me, scarcely ; *she* thanked me, poor woman.”

“Then you have been doing a good deal since ?”

“No ; little enough, I assure you. Went round by Whatman's, to look up those two lads who have been shirking choir practice for the last ten days. Might have saved myself the tramp, for the cottage was locked, not a soul at home. Read for half-an-hour to old Mimms. Then called on that canting Mrs. Willis, who gave me a long history of how her husband had been

converted the other day by a new preacher at the chapel and had kept sober for a week. Finished with the riverside cottages, where there are two lots of children down with the measles—I don't suppose you'll have any one coming in now who's afraid of measles, but I'll go and take off this coat all the same, and put on my cassock. I suppose Wylde's been here?"

"Oh, yes. And he wants to see you there, because he can't come to-morrow—something about his school accounts, and a new psalter he wants your advice about. He charged me particularly to tell you."

Ambrose stood up and stretched himself as a man does after a hard day's work, but with such a sad weary look that his mother said, "Are you tired, my dear?"

"Yes, mother. Tired of doing nothing."

"Doing nothing, Ambrose?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing," he replied, despondingly. "I'm not the man for this place; and I was a born fool for ever accepting it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Cold Altar, Heaven and earth shall meet
Before you hear my marriage vow."

TENNYSON.

A DAY in the end of September was fixed for Emily's marriage, and therefore there was no time to lose in making preparations.

It was to be rather a grand affair, as far as the ecclesiastical part of the ceremony went. The service was to be choral, with celebration of Holy Communion. Several members of Mr. Wylde's choir were to

strengthen the Axhill one; and Mr. Freer, the old organist of S. Mary's, was to displace his pupil for the auspicious occasion. The Miss Harts worked with a will at the decorations of the church; and Mrs. Grey sent two splendid bouquets from her conservatory for the Altar vases.

The appointed day was a fine one, and S. Martin's was full at an early hour. A number went, especially of the poor people, from interest in Miss Hayward, who in an unobtrusive way had been very kind in going amongst them: a number of townspeople also came to see their parish priest, whose earnest work for many years past had won their respect, married at last; and when these were taken into account, there were still a good many, both country and townsfolk, who came to gaze and wonder at and criticize a Ritualistic wedding.

After all, they did not find anything so very outrageous. They only heard the marriage service most solemnly, quietly, and reverently gone through by the incumbent of S. Martin's, the mixed choir singing the musical portions and two hymns. Some few, but these chiefly of the wedding guests, remained for the Holy Communion, with the bride and bridegroom; and when all was over, Mr. Freer had out all the stops of Laura's old organ, and played them away to a splendid version of the Wedding March.

It was generally allowed that the bridesmaid-in-chief—as Laura much to her distress was reckoned—had done very well in the matter of dresses. Blue silk and white muslin suit everybody—at least, disagree with none: though Laura's own fresh face and young figure were the only ones that set off the delicate dress to real advantage; not that she had considered her own particular likings at all. The two Miss Wylde were tall gaunt maidens on the shady side of forty; and Matilda Hart, though always "tight and tidy," had no further pretensions to prettiness of any kind.

And the poor little bride? At no time a beauty, of course she did not look to advantage in the most trying dress of all, the bridal white; only like a curious small fair feminine reflection of her brother, when she confronted him "in the body of the church." But she looked very calm and happy and trustful as she went through the service, and when she walked away with her husband.

The whole party returned to the parsonage, where a pretty little wedding breakfast was spread, to which the wedding guests and most of Mrs. Hayward's near neighbours and friends were invited. Laura found herself seated nearly opposite the bride and bridegroom, and between old Mrs. Wilson and a young man, a friend of Mr. Wylde's, to whose charge she had been confided, but who was too shy to make many attempts at talking. Mr. Hayward, of course, sat at the head of the long table. He took in Mrs. Grey; and beside him, wedged in between that lady's chair and his own, sat his little niece Fanny Miller, the four-years-old bridesmaid, of whom he managed to take a good deal of charge without neglecting the duties of his position. Poor Mrs. Hayward, rather nervous and inclined to be tearful, sat at the other end of the table, supported by a brother-in-law, who had come expressly to give away the bride—an elderly and rather delicate-looking man, with a quiet grave manner, somewhat recalling his nephew.

Clergymen are proverbially fond of speechifying, and as the clerical element on this occasion was strong it might be expected that it would prove no exception to the rule. Laura had not been at many weddings, but still she knew something about what was customary, and the kind of speeches that were generally made; and being in a shy humour—she was always shy now somehow—she grew rather uncomfortable in the anticipation. Of course the health of the newly-married couple was drunk with great enthusiasm; and Mr.

Wylde, in returning thanks, made an elaborate and rather funny speech, dragging in sundry allusions to Church matters which might have very well been let alone. Several others followed—good, bad, and indifferent; and then the “best man,” a friend and brother clergyman of the bridegroom, stood up to return thanks for the bridesmaids’ toast which Mr. James Hayward, the elderly uncle, had proposed, in the quietest manner possible, greatly to Laura’s relief.

“I have now to propose,” the speaker went on to say, “a health which I am sure all here present will respond to with the greatest readiness—that of a person who has played a most important part in the day’s proceedings: without whom indeed, I may say, we should never have come to this stage of the proceedings at all—I mean, the incumbent of S. Martin’s. It may seem presumptuous in me, a stranger, to speak to you, my friends, in praise of one whom you know—whose merits you know—you have so many more opportunities of knowing than I; but I think I may say this without being considered profane, that by his labours among you he ‘has in a short time fulfilled a long time.’ I have not very often had occasion to be at your church, but I have been there before; and I am sure that if I had been called to a wedding at it, say this time last year, I should not have seen our noble Marriage Service set forth with such beauty and correctness of ritual as I have seen to-day. Now we all know—none better than my friend Wylde here—that men who set themselves in earnest to carry out the Church’s work, meet with very rough usage—sometimes at the hands of those who ought to know better: get a good many hard knocks—get called names: I have heard my friend Wylde called a Ritualist and a Papist” (a titter ran round the table, and the bride laughed merrily up into her husband’s face). “Now, I hope nobody here is going to ask me to define a Ritualist, because, if you’ll take my word for it, I don’t believe any two people are

agreed as to what a Ritualist means" (more laughing); "but everybody knows what a Papist is; and I think you will all agree that our friend Wylde has given us the best possible proof to-day that he is not a Papist" ("hear, hear," from several of his friends). "And I think you will all agree with me that our friend, and your incumbent, Mr. Hayward, can't do better than follow the good example set him to-day. I think in wishing him well, we can't wish him better, than that he may soon call upon his brother-in-law to return his good offices of to-day." ("Hear, hear," again from the speaker's friends.) "I beg to propose the health of the Reverend Ambrose Hayward."

A murmur of applause followed this splendid piece of oratory. Old Mrs. Wilson, Laura's next neighbour, was greatly interested by the speaker; but when he had finished she turned to Laura, and said in a low voice, "Ah, he may say what he likes, but our Mr. Hayward isn't a marrying man! Very warm, is it not, this room? You look so flushed, my dear!"

Unhappy Laura! She was only too conscious of the fact, and that her light bonnet was making her cheeks purple by contrast. And that horrid little Mrs. Wylde opposite was grinning away: Laura was quite *sure* she observed her discomfiture. She sat nervously pulling to pieces the last remnant of an unfortunate rose she had brought with her, gazing down at the table, but burning with that painful sensation of shyness for another which almost every one sometimes experiences, as she saw, without looking, the tall black figure rising to reply.

She need not have felt uncomfortable on his account. Of course Mr. Hayward never blushed, never showed nervousness, as in the grave quiet measured tone in which he spoke to his people week by week from his pulpit, he thanked them all—"my friend," he said, "for the kind manner in which he proposed my health, and you for responding so cordially to it. I am very

far from taking credit to myself for the satisfactory performance of to-day's ceremony, or for being entitled to the praise which has been bestowed upon me. In regard to the good wishes that have been expressed for me, I have no doubt they are quite sincere. But I hope those who know me will require no more convincing proof than my daily life among them that I am a loyal member of the Anglican Communion. I have a great objection myself to party names and party cries—I shouldn't like to be called on to define a Ritualist any more than my friend here; but I am quite indifferent to what people may call me. If any one were to say that I was a Papist, I should feel undeserving of the name in more ways than one. I am quite sure that if I were placed side by side with many who are rightly so named, I should suffer very much by comparison." ("Tut, tut," from the last speaker, and "No, no," from several.) "I beg to thank you all once more most sincerely for the kind interest you have all shown in me and mine to-day, the kind sympathy with my sister's happy prospects, and last, not least, the kind feeling shown toward myself—which I value more than I am able to express."

Then he sat down. By the time he had got to the close of his speech Laura had recovered herself sufficiently to look up at him; and what most struck her was the sad wistful expression of his face as he ended.

The proceedings were drawing to a close; the bride had retired to prepare for her departure, and in a sort of lull in the conversation a child's voice was heard distinctly saying, "O dear! I so tired of being married? Aren't you, uncle Am?"

A general laugh followed at the expense of the poor little bridesmaid, who was leaning back in her chair, looking indeed very weary. "What an ominous speech for the conclusion of a wedding breakfast: 'So tired of being married!'" was whispered round by several;

and the "best man," turning towards the little girl, said, "I hope your husband's not within hearing, young lady."

"Uncle Am's *my* husband," answered the child, coolly; "and I want him to come and give me a ride on his shoulder. Put Fanny's chair away, please," laying her hand imperiously upon his arm.

So, amidst the diversion caused by the little guest's speech, the party broke up. There were the usual farewells, the usual crowding to the door to see the departure of the newly-married pair, the usual throwing of slippers after the carriage. Mr. and Mrs. Wyldé drove off to the station, to start on a three weeks' cathedral tour in the south of England. Some of the guests afterwards proceeded to the school, where Mr. and Mrs. Hayward had provided a feast for choir and school-children. Laura was of this party. She did not feel particularly inclined for it, but her mother gave her a hint to go with some of the other bridesmaids: it was a kindness by poor Mrs. Hayward to look a little after the treat, as she was quite unequal to doing so herself just then.

The incumbent was there, going round amongst men and children, with little Fanny, now supremely happy, perched upon his shoulder; performing the duties of hospitality to the good old organist of S. Mary's and the choir guests. Miss Matilda transformed herself at once into a waitress; and was in the highest spirits and activity, handing cake and tea, and talking to every one.

There was some health-drinking to be undergone at this entertainment also, Mr. Freer and Mr. Hopkins vying with each other in proposing toasts. Mr. Freer gave that of the incumbent with great enthusiasm, saying that he hoped the next occasion when they would all meet together would be his wedding, and that the day was not very far distant. "And when that day comes we shall be delighted to give you our best services, sir,

every man and boy among us, if you'll allow us," said good Mr. Freer, turning round and addressing Mr. Hayward. It did strike Ambrose rather painfully that Mr. Freer and his contingent were more cordial than his own choir.

"Thank you, thank you, Freer—thank you all," he said; "I'm afraid you'll have to wait for 'a very long day,'" he added. The last words were almost an aside, and intended only for Mr. Freer's ears; they chanced however to reach other ears that were painfully sharpened.

Little Fanny took up the idea of waiting. "Yes, you'll wait till Fanny's a big lady and goes to *long* church every Sunday!"

Of course the men and boys were not satisfied without cheers as well as toasts. They got up cheers for bride and bridegroom, for Mr. Hayward, Mrs. Hayward, bridesmaids, guests, every one they could think of. Then Mr. Hayward felt obliged to get up cheers for Mr. Freer and S. Mary's choir; then Mr. Freer responded with "Mr. Hopkins and S. Martin's choir," and "the schoolmaster of Axhill," and the walls rang again with their shouts. It was over at last and the guests moved away.

"Fanny likes that noise," the little bridesmaid remarked. "Fanny wants it over again." Then as they stopped for a moment in the crowded doorway, and some of the lady visitors passed out, "Uncle Am, you will *really* wait till Fanny's a big lady, to be your lady? You won't *really* marry any other lady? You told that man to wait."

Fanny's answer was a sudden descent from her elevation to her own feet, and she was obliged to content herself with trotting home, holding on by her uncle's hand.

"What horrid tiresome things weddings are!" exclaimed Laura to her mother, when they were once more alone and quiet.

"Tiresome to *you*, Laura? You have not had experience of so very many."

"No, thank goodness! One's enough to sicken anybody."

"The breakfast part is always rather stupid; but at your age I should have been amused. I thought the service beautifully done. I never saw a nicer wedding."

"What a horrible little creature that granddaughter is!"

"Laura, you are terribly abusive! I thought she was wonderfully good, poor little thing."

"You didn't hear how she was going on at the school—a vulgar little wretch."

"How nice and kind Mr. Hayward was to her. I shouldn't have given him credit for being fond of children."

"I should have given him more credit if he had given her a whipping," said Laura, biting her lips and reddening.

She said no more then, and her mother seeing that she was nervous and tired left her alone. Mrs. Grey herself did not feel particularly happy for some reason or another that night; she had observed more than once Laura's uncomfortable consciousness, and she could not help observing also that, unless she was very much mistaken, Mr. Hayward had changed his tactics altogether.

Laura went to bed that night with a heavy heart. And when, tired out at last, she fell asleep, the events of the day came crowding back, and she seemed to be again in all the confusion and bustle of the wedding party. She saw them all again with painful distinctness, the light dresses of the ladies, the long black coats of the clergymen—only this time she seemed to be herself transformed into the bride—not happy peaceful-looking little Emily—but herself, anxious, and shy, and confused, in the white dress and deep veil. She

felt it all—they were standing now in the middle of the church, gathered together, waiting—waiting for somebody—waiting for whom?

Then a face, which was never very far somehow from her mind—a face grave, set, stern, with heavy black brows and sad eyes, came before her, looked at her with a sort of pitying wistful look, and said, “you’ll have to wait for a ‘very long day.’” Then she seemed all in a moment to be at the long table again, and old Mrs. Wilson’s fidgeting voice said distinctly in her ear, “Such a pity, isn’t it, my dear—he’s a ‘*Papist!*’”

She woke with a great start, trembling all over and her heart beating violently. It took her some time to gather her thoughts and remember where she really was. And then, in the darkness and solitude of her chamber, poor Laura got up to her knees and, pressing her face into her pillow, thanked GOD with all her heart that that part of it was only a dream!

CHAPTER XIX.

“Woe’s me for mine own heart that dwells alone,
My heart that breaketh for a little love.”

C. M. ROSSETTI.

THE wedding guests at the parsonage, down to little Fanny whose visit was extended to a week at her grandmother’s urgent request, had all departed; and the incumbent of Axhill and his mother settled down to what would be henceforward their normal tête-à-tête life.

Mrs. Hayward missed her youngest daughter very much, as might be expected; for Emily, except during the few years that she had spent at school, had been her mother’s inseparable companion. She could not

expect much companionship from her son, as during great part of the day he was, of course, out, and when at home he was chiefly shut up in his study. And at this particular time poor Ambrose was less fitted to be a sociable companion, in mood and temper, than he had ever been in his life.

His mother was slow to observe anything special about him, since there was generally so very little to observe; but she must have been a more than ordinarily obtuse mother if she had not noticed that he was more silent, gloomy and abstracted than ever before. He seldom spoke of his parish work but in a tone of despondency, and seemed to go about it heavily and heartlessly. Another more remarkable symptom was a kind of nervous irritability, which would show itself occasionally in spite of him: an old long-forgotten fault of his very early youth, which some mysterious influence seemed to have awakened from the grave where it had lain so many years.

All this was not enlivening to poor Mrs. Hayward. She had always said that from a child she could never understand Ambrose: she understood him less than ever now, and it made her feel annoyed and provoked with him, as long ago in the days of his surly inexplicable boyhood.

Then she was seized with a notion that he was ill. She could not overcome a haunting dread that he would go into a decline, like his father and younger brother; and she took to watching his health with a fidgety solicitude that to him was of all things most trying. It only made him shut himself up more completely when at home, to get out of the way of observation and questioning.

One evening, about a month after the wedding, they were sitting together: he reading a Church paper that he took in, when he suddenly handed it over to his mother, with his finger on a paragraph, saying curtly, "Think I shall answer that."

Mrs. Hayward looked where he pointed, and read: "Wanted, a Priest, of sound Catholic views, and independent means, to undertake the charge of a new mission in the mining districts. One who has some experience, and is able to organize a choral service, would be preferred. Daily services and weekly celebration. A parsonage house is in course of erection. Address, &c., &c."

Then Mrs. Hayward looked up at her son. "Are you joking, dear?"

"Joking! I'm so given to joking, ain't I? No, I was never more in earnest in my life."

"You really think of throwing up this living, and going away from Axhill?"

"Most unquestionably I do—sooner or later—the sooner the better."

"Well, you do take one's breath away, certainly, Ambrose!"

"Breath away! I'm sure I've told you often enough I was out of place here."

"You've given it but a very short trial, anyhow, dear."

"Long enough to show me my mistake—the worse than folly of trying to do impossibilities."

"But what then, are you not getting on as you would wish? I'm sure it seems to me that considering the short time, things are very much improved—"

"Are they? It's all on the outside then—the spirit of the place isn't improved."

"But surely your work must tell in time."

"Work, work! what work can one do here if one wished ever so? I haven't work enough to give me occupation—not half. And if one had, a man doesn't go about his work with much heart when all those he's working for are dead set against him—all who care for these things at all."

"I think you take too bad a view of the case."

"No, mother, I know what I'm saying. They hate and detest me, every one of them."

"I think that is what your dear father would have called morbid."

"Morbid or not, it's the truth. I tell you, since that good fellow Mortlock died—that 'loyal heart and true,' which he was, if ever was one—since he died, not a soul in this parish has said a kind word to me about my work, or given me the slightest encouragement. They're all dead set against me."

"They can't be more set against you than they were against Charlie when he first set up, by what we've heard."

"Charlie! don't talk of Charlie!" he answered impatiently. "Charlie's position was never like mine. He came amongst a set of heathens, Christianized them by regular hard work, and now they'll do whatever he likes. Very different from a place like this, with a set of hopelessly respectable folk—one half Dissenters, the other false Churchmen, which are worse."

"There are some true Church-people, surely. The Greys, for instance."

"What use are the Greys? If Ninian was thirty instead of fifteen, and churchwarden, he might be of some good."

"And the Harts—Miss Matilda helps you so."

"Matilda Hart!" he said with a little petulant shrug. "That woman alone is enough to drive one away from the place."

For in truth Matilda Hart was one of the sorest thorns in Mr. Hayward's side just now. He had snubbed her over and over again to the verge of rudeness; but though half the amount of snubbing from any other person would have converted her into that person's deadliest enemy, from Mr. Hayward it appeared to have the very contrary effect.

"I know what you'll say," he went on after a few minutes' silence; "I know one oughtn't to look for

visible fruit of one's labours, or work for popularity, and all that. But still I do think that if a man finds himself quite out of his proper element in one place, and he sees what may be an opening for increased usefulness in another, he is not wrong in taking advantage of that opening. Of course I'm not going to rush into the thing blindfold, without knowing what I am undertaking."

"Well, dear, you must do as you wish and think right, of course. I don't want to be a drag upon you. I must say I did think, when I broke up my home of so many years, and came to settle here, that it *would* be a settling for life—for me at all events. But you must make up your mind decidedly about the next move, for I am too old for many more."

"You're not obliged to come with me if you don't like. I'll take a house for you here, or in the town. You'll be close to Wylde and Emily—and much better to be rid of me."

"No, dear, you know I should not like that, at least while you were alone. But I tell you what, Ambrose, you ought to marry, and make a home for yourself, and be independent of the old woman."

"What, you too, mother! you want to shake me off—am I so bad as that?"

"My dear boy, why will you misunderstand me? It is for your own sake that I wish you to form new ties. You would be so much happier in every way with a wife and home of your own. I should like, before I die, to see you married to some nice girl; one who would have the same interests as yourself, and sympathize with you, and be a real assistance to you in your work—instead of an old woman like me."

Then, out of the bitterness of his heart, poor Ambrose spoke and answered her. "Thank you, mother. I have so much time and opportunity, haven't I, for looking after these nice girls that are so plentiful? And when I have found them, I'm so attractive—such a hand-

some, agreeable fellow, eh? that they're safe to fall in love with me without waiting to be asked—that's what you mean, isn't it? Well, I don't think I'm likely to give them the refusal. No; as far as my marrying goes, there's not the slightest probability that your wish will be gratified. Make up your mind to that; and oblige me, please, by never alluding to the subject again."

He spoke so sternly, with such displeasure, that his mother, already rather nervous and disturbed in her feelings, burst into tears.

"Good gracious, mother, what now?"

"I have vexed you, dear; and I am sure nothing—nothing was ever further from my thoughts. Forgive me, and bear with the old woman—it will not be for much longer."

"Bear with *you*," he repeated in a tone of deep self-reproach; "poor mother! the pity is that you've got to bear with *me*. I think I grow worse instead of better—more and more unworthy. I've no right to wonder, certainly, if my work doesn't prosper," he added, as if to himself. "Forgive me, if you can, mother, and don't cry."

Then he knelt down beside her, and took her hand, and remained so, passive and silent, while she had out her cry on his shoulder, and ended by telling him he was her own good boy—her only comfort—and she would do anything he wished, and go wherever he liked, while she could.

Poor fellow, she thought, with his long solemn lantern-jawed face, and the angular figure in the rusty cassock, was it likely that any girl should take a fancy to him, even supposing he were to fall in love? No doubt he was quite sensible of this himself; he might have had his fancies already, for anything she knew. At any rate, whatever he might seem to others, he was all in all to her; and she must try never to worry him or hurt his feelings again—never to lose patience

with him, if he were sometimes strange, and hasty, and inexplicable.

She might well make such resolutions, although she little knew or guessed how the poor fellow's sensitive warm heart was well-nigh breaking for want of a little sympathy—sympathy with his work, and sympathy in his home life: how the coldness, and indifference, and in some cases dislike, of those for whom he laboured, after the warm attachment and gratitude of his London poor, disheartened and chilled him: how the sudden painful loss of his one true friend and lay helper had depressed and unnerved him; and, above all, how the unspoken failure of the hope he had begun secretly to cherish was rankling, in spite of all his efforts at resignation; till the burden of his life seemed almost more than he could bear, and at times he would fain have wished to lie down and rest beside the bright young brother who had never grown up to know the cruel disappointments of life.

But so it came to pass, that the answer to the advertisement was written, sealed, and sent.

CHAPTER XX.

“*Don Pedro.* Conclude, conclude, he is in love.

“*Claud.* Nay, but I know who loves him.

“*Don Pedro.* That would I know, too; I warrant, one that knows him not.

“*Claud.* Yes, and his ill conditions; and, in despite of all, dies for him.”

Much Ado about Nothing.

GREAT was the surprise of the good people of Axhill when they heard that their incumbent, who had only been so short a time amongst them, was going to leave.

He had managed all the arrangements so quietly that there had been, wonderful to relate, no flying rumours before his own announcement of the fact to those whom it might concern : so that it came upon them like a thunderclap.

Long and loud were the lamentations of the Miss Harts. The elder sister could hardly allude to the subject without tears : the younger talked less despondingly, however, for she managed to buoy herself up by a secret and most 'unfounded' hope that when the time for Mr. Hayward's departure came he would ask her, Miss Matilda Hart, to change her name and go with him.

The Greys were in a measure prepared for the announcement, owing to Emily's conversation with Laura. Mr. Hayward made a sort of formal call, to tell them : it struck him that Mrs. Grey said very little, and was rather distant in her manner. Laura said nothing at all.

He could not leave his present charge under six months, which would bring his departure to some time about Easter in the following year. In the meantime he went on with all his work as usual, meeting with no opposition : only with the same—or, perhaps, since he was looked upon now as merely a temporary infliction, even greater, coldness and indifference.

He scarcely ever called on his parishioners of the upper class now. He visited the poor and the sick with unremitting attention, and worked at the night school and choir harder than ever. It was no wonder that the latter reached such a height of perfection that the church was crowded on the evenings of Sundays and festivals ; not only by the people of Axhill, but by strangers from the town and other parishes, who came to hear the beautiful choral service at S. Martin's, which had the advantage over S. Mary's in that Mr. Hayward could sing well, and Mr. Wylde could not.

The Greys never saw him now except in church or at the Sunday-school. Laura went altogether less amongst the poor than of old—scarcely ever except under her mother's wing. She was shy of meeting Mr. Hayward in his parish visitings, as he was constantly among the cottages.

Her mother observed also that she seemed to have less interest in her old home occupations than formerly, and to go about them in a sort of languid, listless way quite foreign to her nature. She even required stirring up to take her favourite exercise of riding; and after a short gallop she would come in and complain of being tired or headachey, and sit down in an easy chair with a book or work in her hand, but really gazing straight before her as if her thoughts were far away.

Her mother forbore to question her or notice her changed deportment. She hoped that any passing fancy the girl might have taken to Mr. Hayward would wear off of itself when she saw how futile it was. It sometimes crossed her mind to wonder whether, at an early stage of her acquaintance with the clergyman, Laura had said or done anything to repel him, which she now repented of. She could hardly imagine that such could have been the case without coming to her knowledge. Laura was openness itself, and in any real trouble or difficulty would naturally turn at once to her mother for comfort or advice.

So things went on till the Christmas holidays brought home Ninian. He had heard by letter of the impending departure of Mr. Hayward; but not being great at letter-writing he had not made much remark on it in his answer. When he came home, however, he spoke of it in no measured terms of displeasure, and expressed his intention of "giving the old fellow a bit of his mind" on the first opportunity.

Which he did by waiting for and waylaying Mr. Hayward after the first service he attended on his return home.

“But look here, I say, Mr. Hayward, this is preposterous! It can't be true?”

“What's that, Ninian?”

“Your going away. You can't mean it?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I call it a regular shame! You come and set us all a-going, and make no end of improvements, till people are beginning to know what's what; and then, just when things are a little bit in working order, you're going to hook it, and leave us all in the lurch! Hanged if I don't think we ought to go to law with you somehow.”

“It is very kind of you, Ninian, to express any regret. You won't find many to join you.”

“Oh, shan't I though! I bet half the parish are as jolly disgusted as I am.”

“I'm afraid you'll find that a mistake.”

“And where are you going to? Some beastly hole in the Black Country!”

“Yes; I'm looking forward to it so much. Good hard work, instead of living in idleness.”

“And what's to become of us! Are we to be at the mercy of every chance fellow that comes?”

“Oh, no. I can't leave till my place is filled.”

“The church and choir and all 'll go to the dogs, I bet a guinea! See if we don't get some wretched stick who can't sing!”

“You mustn't forebode ill. You'll be much better off: you can't be worse, at any rate. Now, I'm going into these cottages; so good-bye, and thank you, my boy.”

He shook hands warmly, for him; but Ninian, who had, as has been seen before, observant eyes for his years, was struck by the sad look of the grave face and the desponding tone in which the words were spoken.

“I've been having it out with old Ambrose,” he remarked coolly, rather to his mother's and sister's consternation, when he joined them at home. “The poor

old chap's awfully down in the mouth, though he tried to humbug me into thinking he was no end glad to go. What have you all been doing to drive him away?"

"Good gracious, Ninian, what have we got to do with it?" said his mother; and Laura gave a little laugh, saying, "So likely that *we* should influence Mr. Hayward's movements in any way."

"Well, he thinks every one wishes him at Jericho, that's evident. I pitched into him as far as *I* could, but it was no go."

"I should think not; and pray let me beg you to leave Mr. Hayward alone in future. His movements are no business of yours, at any rate," said Mrs. Grey.

"His going is the worst thing possible for this place," remarked Ninian so oracularly that both his mother and sister laughed.

Later, as he and his mother were going up to bed— Laura had retired earlier on the plea of a headache— he threw both arms round his mother's waist, looking up into her face with a comically wistful expression: "Mother, there's one thing I *do* want to know, so tell your own little Nin. Is this fellow of a parson going away because Laura's snubbed him?"

"*What* an idea, Nin!"

"No, but now *is* it, then, mammy?"

"You are the most inquisitive, impertinent boy I ever met; but perhaps I had better set your idle thoughts at rest by telling you at once that it is nothing of the kind. He and Laura have nothing whatever to do with each other."

"It's precious odd, then. They used to be as thick as thieves when he first came."

"Not a bit of it, Nin."

"I can't make the old chap out. He looks to me no end like a fellow in love."

"What *do* you know of people in love?"

"Oh, don't I just know something, rather! One of our tutors got jilted the other day, and, my eyes!

didn't he take it out of the boys in his division?—which I'm happy to add your affectionate son wasn't one of them."

"Pity he wasn't," said Mrs. Grey. "Well, if Mr. Hayward's in love, it's with nobody here, so you've a wide field for guessing. Though I do think little boys might find more useful holiday tasks than speculations about the love affairs of their betters."

Ninian said no more, though he remained rather in the condition of a "man convinced against his will." He, even more than his mother, perceived the change in Laura, and her want of interest in her former amusements and occupations; her reluctance to accompany him in walks or rides, and her preoccupied air on many occasions.

One day he persuaded her, with great difficulty, to ride out with him just to see the hounds throw off; it was his last chance before returning to school, and a beautiful spring-like winter day. They set off accordingly; but when they came within sight and hearing of the hounds Lassie began dancing, and Laura begged her brother to stop and let her go back.

"Go back now! stuff and nonsense. You must see the start."

"I can't—I can't, indeed, Nin."

"What's the row with you? You're as white as a sheet." Which indeed was the case; and Laura's hands, usually so strong and deft with the reins, seemed to have lost both their strength and skill, as Lassie fretted and plunged and sidled about.

"I can't hold her," Laura said, helplessly. "Turn round with me, there's a dear, or I shall jump off, I know I shall."

"I believe you're stark mad, Laura," said the boy, impatiently; but he turned his own horse, seized Lassie by the curb rein, and led her and her rider passively home at a rattling trot. "I'm hanged if I take you to a meet again," he said, as they reached the door.

“Ten to one I don’t see them again to-day,” and he turned and galloped off.

Poor Laura was trembling and crying when her mother met her and wonderingly asked what had happened.

“I—I don’t know—I can’t hold Lassie a bit. I was so sorry to bring Nin back, but I really can’t help it. I won’t ride any more.”

And she kept her word. Hitherto she had never known fear, and delighted in Lassie in her wildest moods; but, from whatever reason, she seemed now quite to have lost her nerve, and would not be persuaded to mount her favourite again, either alone or in company.

Ninian’s Christmas holidays were short. And soon Lent came on, bringing an increased number of services, early and late, in the church; of which Mrs. Grey and her daughter of course availed themselves. Mr. Hayward worked incessantly in his parish, as if he were determined to avoid all chance of being accused of want of interest in it because he was so soon to leave it.

The time was very near now. He was just to remain over the octave of Easter, and leave in the week following. He was going alone in the first place; having taken lodgings in the town, for some months, for his mother—the parsonage at his new cure being unfinished and unfurnished; but at the end of the year Mrs. Hayward expected to join him for good.

Easter came. About that time Laura managed to catch a very bad cold—her mother attributed it to some of the late services; but, however that might have been, it came to pass that when Mr. Hayward went to pay his formal farewell visit to Mrs. Grey, Laura was in her bed and unable to see him.

Perhaps it was better so, he thought, as he turned for the last time from the familiar door of Sunnywood. If ever he saw her again it would probably be as Mrs. Mansell.

His winding-up of affairs at Axhill was to be at the night-school. He wished to give his young men and lads one last lesson and address, and to work up to the very last, even though it entailed one more *tête-à-tête* walk with his indefatigable assistant Miss Matilda Hart.

For Miss Matilda, of course, was at the school as usual; and on this particular night in what might be called a desperate frame of mind. It was come to the absolute eve of Mr. Hayward's departure, and not a word had he said of what she wished, and told herself she might expect, to hear. She had turned the matter over in her mind, and said to herself that he was diffident, as after previous disappointment he must naturally be: no doubt he wanted encouragement. It would surely not be unbecoming in her, as she was—well, a little bit—the elder, to meet him, perhaps, more than half-way.

The lesson seemed long to her impatience; but it was over at last, and in an unusual state of trepidation, for her, she prepared to leave the school with him. It was a dark night: rain had fallen recently and the roads were muddy and full of pools of water; so in common courtesy he felt bound to offer the lady his arm. She took it impulsively and opened fire at once.

“Good-bye is a hard word, Mr. Hayward!”

“Sometimes,” he answered coolly. “I found it so when I left London.”

“Ah! you had been so many years there. But I am sure in a short time no one could possibly have done more to win the regard and respect of a parish than you have.”

“I don't flatter myself I have done anything of the kind. I believe they're all very glad to have seen the last of me.”

“Oh, Mr. Hayward!” in a tenderly reproachful tone, but as he said nothing, Miss Matilda went on: “Of

course you cannot expect all to feel alike. Those who have had the great privilege—as I have—of being so much—so humbly—associated with you in your labours—those must feel their loss most keenly. For myself, I really do not think I shall have courage to enter the school after you are gone. I really don't think so."

"Oh! don't talk sentiment, Miss Hart."

"People don't talk sentiment, Mr. Hayward, when their hearts are full."

"No; I know that."

"I am not a very sentimental person, either," said Miss Matilda. "I always think between those who understand one another—true friends—there is no need of sentiment—and I'm only speaking the truth when I say it will be very hard to see a stranger in your place."

"As hard as it was to see me in my predecessor's some months ago."

"Well, that was rather a different case."

"I say, look out! or you'll be splashed all over," said Mr. Hayward abruptly, pulling his companion up dead on the brink of a puddle a foot broad.

"Oh! thank you—so kind—I did not observe—I was trusting entirely to you!"

Ambrose inwardly wished that a succession of small ponds would occupy Miss Matilda's attention for the remainder of the walk, but she immediately began again on a new tack. She felt that she was not, so far, much nearer bringing him to the point: her time was very limited, and to the point he must be brought somehow, in the course of a few hundred yards.

"Your new parish is a very secluded one, is it not, Mr. Hayward?"

"I don't know that you could call it secluded, exactly. It is a wild, poor place; not a gentleman's house in it."

"You will feel very lonely there."

"I expect I shall have too much work to feel lonely ; and my mother is coming by-and-by."

"Ah, yes. Dear Mrs. Hayward ! I think she feels the moving very much, do you know ? Indeed it is very enterprising of her to undertake it."

"It will be once for all, I hope. Of course she is sorry to leave a place where she has some kind friends, and some old associations."

"And you, Mr. Hayward ? Do you feel no regrets at leaving Axhill ?"

Mr. Hayward was getting very tired, simply tired, annoyed, out of patience, with all this. He had, to say the truth, been a little disappointed too by the stolid indifference of the Axhill youth in parting from him that night, and, being in a not too happy frame of mind, it was no wonder that his reply was rather bitter : "Well, when a man feels that those he's been working for for a year and a half don't care a straw about him ; when he feels that he is leaving no one to regret him—I think he may be excused for not expressing any very great regret in going." He hoped to silence her for this time, but in his blundering awkwardness he had given her just the very handle she wanted, and was not slow to seize.

"No one to regret you ? Oh ! Mr. Hayward, is it possible that you can be ignorant—that you can so misjudge—so misunderstand ?" and Miss Matilda made a pause intended to be more eloquent than words.

"I misunderstand no one," he said coldly, "and I shall take it as a favour if you will drop this most unprofitable subject."

Miss Matilda was desperate now. She had one resource left, and she used it. She stood still and burst into tears.

"For goodness' sake, Miss Hart—" began Mr. Hayward, turning round in utter dismay.

"Oh dear ! oh dear !" she sobbed. "I can't help it ! I can't help it ! I knew—I knew I couldn't—part

from you—without—telling you the truth ! Can it be so very wrong ?”

He stood silent, really too much horrified to speak. He knew Matilda Hart to be a flirt and a humbug—he had always been in the habit of looking upon her talk *as* so much talk, mere sound, and paying very little heed to it. To-night, with his mind preoccupied by many things, he had simply borne with the infliction of her company, given her words a sort of half-attention and such answers as he hoped were most likely to check them ; but he had never expected that she would go so far as this.

“ Can it be so very wrong, to speak the truth ?” she sobbed. “ Associated with you, as I have been from the first, in your labours amongst the poor, with the same interests, the same ends in view, if I may humbly say so ; with daily opportunities of seeing your devoted life—your goodness and kindness of heart—of knowing you as I do—is it so very strange that you should have taught me *to love you* ?”

“ Pray—pray—say no more,” he entreated in a low stern voice.

“ Oh ! dear, what have I said ? I couldn't help it. What must you think of me ?”

“ That you are most grievously mistaken.”

Then they both stood silent, confronting each other in the darkness. She was beginning to see her mistake, now—her fatal mistake ; and, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she was covered with a miserable sense of that shame which must overtake every woman who steps out of the shelter of her rightful position and places herself at a disadvantage.

She had had many a flirtation before now ; but never had her feelings been perhaps so really involved as they were in the present instance. All her works in the parish, her frequent church-goings, her assiduous school-teaching, her enthusiastic sympathy with Mr. Hayward's undertakings, however they had been begun,

had for a long time past been carried on solely and wholly with one purpose and one object; and now she was reaping her reward!

And he? He ought perhaps to have felt grateful; but, if this was beyond him, he could and did at least feel a sentiment of pity for the unhappy woman who had been so mistaken as to fall in love with him—with him, plain, blunt, disagreeable Ambrose Hayward, whom no other woman probably would ever look at. Besides, had they not made one mistake in common?

Involuntarily his mother's words came to his recollection. In a few years, comparatively, he would in all probability be a lonely man, with no companion, no home ties. Here was, if not exactly a "nice girl," at least an energetic, warm-hearted, middle-aged woman, who would make a sufficiently bright home companion, and assist him (to any amount) in his work, and love him—yes, love him faithfully to his life's end. All this flashed through his mind in a few moments; and then he shuddered at his own thoughts. Any solitude—any loneliness—any isolation of heart and life rather than Matilda Hart's face always before him, her voice always in his ears!

Her voice was very humble and pleading now, as she said: "I have been very wrong—I am most unhappy. Forgive me."

"There is no need to ask forgiveness. I suppose you think I don't feel for you—I do, upon my word. I hope you acquit me at any rate of having misled you, voluntarily?"

"Oh yes; oh yes, certainly. I am the only one in fault. I allowed my own feelings to blind me altogether." Then she hid her face in her handkerchief for a few moments, looking up at length to say, "You are accustomed, as a clergyman, to deal with the weakness of human nature. Be kind enough to promise that you—that you will forget—all this—all that has passed."

"Actual forgetting is not always in our power,"

he said, in his matter-of-fact way; "but I promise that it shall be virtually forgotten. I hope indeed that you will forget also—that you will meet with some far worthier object for your affections." It might have comforted her to know how unlikely ever to marry at any time Mr. Hayward knew himself to be; but he did not feel called upon to take her into his confidence so far. "You have no cause to distress yourself as regards what you have said—you are quite safe with me—hark—what is that? stand back!"

For the sharp rapid beat of a horse's hoofs sounded suddenly approaching, splashing along the muddy road. Why did that sound all at once recall Laura to his mind so vividly? The next instant a horse and rider dashed round the corner, striking against him and covering him with mud; and if he had not been very active would have knocked him down. The rider immediately pulled up.

"Hallo—any harm done? Oh! Mr. Hayward, is it you? I beg your pardon," said Ninian Grey's voice in a tone of deep concern; "I didn't see, and she's such a confounded puller—are you hurt?"

"No, thank you."

"I'm so glad of that. I'm off for the doctor—my sister—"

"Your sister!"

"Yes, she's awfully bad—bronchitis or something—she never *will* be reasonably careful—I must go on—get along, Lassie!"

And he galloped off into the darkness.

If Miss Hart had required any proof of how little consequence she was in Mr. Hayward's eyes, she certainly had it now. He stood rooted to the spot: her presence—the little tragi-comedy in which he had just played a part, as completely forgotten as though she had never existed; conscious only of one thing. That Laura was very ill—dying perhaps—and that he could do nothing for her.

“Should *we* be visited like the poor people?” Laura had once asked. Ah, if she had been a poor person, Mr. Hayward would have gone to her even now—on the very point of his departure. Or if it had happened a few days earlier he might at least have called to see if he could be any comfort; but he was incumbent of Axhill no longer, and neither as friend nor as parish priest had he any right to intrude upon Mrs. Grey.

He was recalled to his senses by Miss Hart saying humbly, “Good-night, Mr. Hayward—good-bye.” Mechanically he answered, “Good-bye,” and put out his hand; and she went on her way, and he went his.

Home—to the empty deserted parsonage, to the room which was only his for a few hours longer. His mother had been for some days settled in her new lodging: he only slept at the parsonage to the last, for the convenience of any who might require to send for him. To say he slept there to-night however would be but a figure of speech, as he never went to bed. The hours were passed in earnest broken intercession for those he was leaving behind: most of all for the one who was being cut off, it might be, in the very spring-time of youth and hope and love.

Very early next morning he was at the door of Sunnywood, having left his cab at the gate, to inquire. There could be no harm in that. The door was open and the maid washing the step—a good sign, he thought. Just as he stopped to speak to her he caught sight of Ninian’s face in the hall.

“Oh, Mr. Hayward, are you just off?”

“Yes. I called to inquire after Miss Grey.”

“Oh, she’s much better—really. The doctor says the danger’s over for this time. But we were in an awful funk about her last night, when I nearly rode you down. I say, I was so sorry for that.”

“I am very thankful for your report; I thought I might just ask—in passing.”

“It’s very jolly of you,” Ninian said, “I shall tell mother and Laura. I am so sorry you are going, Mr. Hayward.”

“Thank you. If ever you are in the Black Country, which I suppose isn’t likely, you must come and look me up.”

“Won’t I just?” said Ninian, with a warm squeeze of his friend’s hand.

“Good-bye, then—GOD bless you and yours, Ninian.”

And Ambrose Hayward turned away, feeling that the warmhearted schoolboy was the best friend he was leaving behind at Axhill.

“There he goes, poor old chap, and I wish he didn’t,” was Ninian’s thought as he watched the familiar black figure recede through the gate. “I wonder if he ever *was* sweet upon Laura. He’s very anxious about her at any rate. Well, there’s no accounting for girls, but I would rather myself Laura married him than any other man I know!”

CHAPTER XXI.

“‘*Suffer love,*’ a good epithet! I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will.”

Much Ado about Nothing.

WITH Ambrose Hayward’s successor at Axhill this history has very little to do. He was a young man with a young wife, recently married—of a bland easy colourless character. A very promising young man in the opinion of Mr. Churchwarden Bayliss, who imparted to one of his cronies that he thought it likely Mr. Blake and he would pull well together; which implied that all the pulling would be virtually on Mr. Bayliss’s side.

Mr. Blake took things very much as he found them at first, and made no changes. But by degrees things began here and there to droop and dwindle—the choir became irregular and unsteady, the services were less well attended, and it became evident that the parish felt the want of the vigorous hand and eye and spirit, the plodding determined uncompromising will of the man who had worked it for eighteen months. Some who had cared least for him during his incumbency complained most of his loss now.

Mrs. Grey naturally felt the disadvantages of the change, having heartily approved of all Mr. Hayward's work. She was a good deal preoccupied however just now in watching her daughter. Laura was recovering but slowly and unsatisfactorily from her dangerous attack of cold and inflammation of the chest. The doctor said there was nothing radically the matter with her now: she only required to get back her strength and appetite to be quite well; but those were precisely the things that would not come back. She looked pale and thin, and altogether unlike what she was; moved about languidly, could not be persuaded to eat, and seemed to make absolutely no progress.

They did not hear anything of the late incumbent for some time. Mrs. Hayward lived so much further from them now, and was not much of a visitor; but one day in the middle of summer she drove over to Sunnywood with her daughter, Mrs. Wylde, in a little basket carriage, drawn by a very humble hardworking small pony—the possession of which turn-out was a source of unbounded pride and delight to Emily.

The old lady seemed in very good spirits, unusually so for her. Oh, yes, she liked her new lodging very much, and it was such a comfort being near S. Mary's. "And I have excellent accounts from Ambrose," she continued. "He seems to have got work quite after his own heart now, and to be in such good spirits. I heard from him yesterday—I have his letter here,"

and she began feeling in her pocket; "I thought perhaps, as you have always been so kind to us, Mrs. Grey, that you might like to hear what he says himself." Mrs. Wylde had in the mean time been making some commonplace remarks to Laura, but finding that the attention of the latter was quite taken up by what her mother was saying, she relapsed into silence. Miss Grey had evidently not lost her interest in Ambrose yet! In the mean time Mrs. Hayward had adjusted her spectacles, and began, for Mrs. Grey's edification. "This is what he says: 'I am getting along famously, for the time . . . I have got a surpliced choir already—seven men and ten boys. The churches in this quarter have nearly all surpliced choirs—whatever the priest's views may be otherwise; so I had far less difficulty in introducing it here than we found at Axhill. The night school also seems to answer . . . you would wonder how open to influence some of these fellows are, for all they look such savages. I have taken to extempore preaching—two sermons every Sunday—what do you think of that for a man of a slow tongue? But these people think twice as much of you if you give it them without book, and it does save a good deal of time. I've plenty of work for you when you come, in the way of mothers' meetings and sewing classes, for I can't do *everything*.' (I think," Mrs. Hayward put in by way of comment, "I think it's time he got a younger and more active lady to do these things for him, don't you, Mrs. Grey? Well, I've promised Emily to remain over October, so the mothers' meetings must wait a little while.) 'What I should like above all things to see here is a Sisterhood, but I fear we are hardly ripe for that yet.' It is hardly fair to read the postscript perhaps—shall I tell you what he finishes with? 'Tell Wylde that I shall be down upon him soon for a handsome Offertory. I know it's no use asking Axhill for anything!'" And Mrs. Hayward looked up rather deprecatingly over her spectacles.

“He is very unkind to Axhill,” Mrs. Grey said, somewhat drily; “but I don’t think he liked the place ever.”

“He is such a terrible one for work,” Mrs. Hayward said. “Never happy unless he is going from morning till night grinding on at something or other. And the people here didn’t understand him. They thought, I suppose, that because he was energetic he must be after no good! I only hope his health will stand, poor fellow. His dear father,” and the old lady shook her head, “was just such another—work, work, work, till he dropped—though to be sure his wasn’t such hard work.”

“Mr. Hayward seems very strong, though,” said Mrs. Grey.

“Yes, he never lays up. But it makes one feel anxious always, having lost two in consumption; and he’s such a patient creature, he would never complain unless he was absolutely obliged.”

Laura made no remarks after the visitors had departed. Her mother seldom questioned her now, for she seemed to like to be left to her own thoughts. The same evening—it was a soft warm July evening—she was standing outside the sitting-room window, leaning on the balcony and gazing dreamily out across the little paddock which bordered the garden lawn, silent for so long that her mother at length said, “What are you thinking about, child?”

“Are Sisterhoods good things, mamma?”

“Sisterhoods? Yes, Laura, if they are rightly organized, they are undoubtedly one of the most useful influences for good which our Church possesses.”

“They are not Romanizing, then?”

“Not as I have been taught to think, or, as I believe any unprejudiced person would say. Mr. Bayliss would tell you they were, no doubt. But what made you think about Sisterhoods?” For, to say the truth, Mrs. Grey had forgotten the passing allusion in the letter.

“Mr. Hayward wants one at Calton.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Grey, in a tone which showed she understood now.

“How old are people when they go into Sisterhoods?”

“Really, Laura, I cannot tell you exactly. I believe different Homes have different rules. Why do you want to know?”

“Oh! I don’t know,” she answered rather hesitatingly, and was silent for a time. Perhaps she was thinking of one day when she had been rebuked for putting the truth last, for after a rather awkward pause she began: “I didn’t give you a very truthful answer just now, mamma, I am afraid. I wanted to know about Sisterhoods because I think, if one was a middle-aged woman, it would be rather nice to belong to one.”

“Well, Laura, if I live till you are a middle-aged woman, and if it is your vocation then, I won’t grudge you to it. All the same, I don’t think it *is* your vocation.”

“I don’t know,” said Laura. “Middle-aged women without anything to do, get so gossipy and old-maidy—sort of Matilda Harts.”

“But have you made up your mind, at eighteen, that you are to be an old maid, and a sort of Matilda Hart? Because I don’t see the necessity.”

Laura made no answer, or any further allusion to the subject. She continued much the same—abstracted, silent, listless—through the summer. Even a visit from some of her cousins, the Mansells, failed to stir her up to her usual spirits and activity; though this visit was fraught with some rather important consequences, as will hereafter be shown. By the end of August her mother was getting really alarmed about her, and beginning to think of consulting some clever physician—she did not think the old Axhill doctor understood her.

It was at this time that, one fine day, before Mrs. Grey and her daughter had sat down to their quiet early dinner, they were surprised by the arrival of the two Miss Harts, in a great state of trepidation, evidently brimming over with some kind of news, but whether good or bad, from their eagerness it was difficult to discover.

“Oh! dear Mrs. Grey, we called—we thought you would excuse an early call—we thought perhaps you might not have heard the news. So sad—so shocking—is it not?”

“I have heard nothing,” said Mrs. Grey, anxious on Laura’s account, for Laura’s eyes were twice their usual size, and every bit of colour was gone out of her face. “What do you allude to?”

“So sad—so sad,” said Miss Hart. “Our late incumbent, dear Mr. Hayward; there has been a telegram to say that he is very seriously ill—not expected to live. His mother went off to him this morning.”

“Indeed! But perhaps the report may be exaggerated; we will hope so,” said Mrs. Grey, eager to say something that would soften the shock to Laura’s susceptibility. “These things always gather as they go.”

“Oh, no; we know it must be true. Our gardener was in town and he saw Mr. Wylde’s man who drives his pony-chaise, and he had just taken the poor old lady to the station.”

“I wonder what it is?” said Mrs. Grey.

“Oh! consumption, you may be sure; it’s in the family. Very likely burst a bloodvessel. That’s the way the little boy went, you know, in a few days. Mrs. Wilson recollects all about it. No one knew that he was ill, I believe, till the servant went in, and—”

Mrs. Grey, in despair, made a sign to the thoughtless gossip to stop, but Laura had risen up pale and calm, and now walked out of the room. It was her

way, as her mother well knew—often and often in past times, on any casual mention of a painful event, though in no way affecting her sympathies, had she gone away out of hearing in self-defence; and she did not like to be followed.

“Ah, I know; dear Laura is easily upset,” Miss Hart said. “And it is painful—I do feel so sorry for the poor old lady, going off all alone.”

“Well, I really think she deserves it,” said Miss Matilda, in righteous indignation. “How she could, knowing him to be delicate, and that he would never spare himself—how she *could* let him go away there by himself, and live in a new, unfinished, damp house, and no one to look after him, and work himself to death, is beyond *my* comprehension!”

“She was staying here on account of Mrs. Wyld, you know, Matilda. Poor thing, it must be very sad for her, too, so near her confinement.”

“I don’t believe it was all on account of Mrs. Wyld. The old lady didn’t like moving; she told me so. Oh, no; he was to go and get it all in order for her to join him.”

A little more time passed in this sort of discussion, to which Mrs. Grey had hardly patience to listen. She was thankful when at last they had had enough of it, and rose to go. Then she went up to Laura; but Laura met her at the top of the stairs, quite composed. “Been lying down, child?” said the mother, looking at her anxiously.

“Yes, mamma; just a little bit. I couldn’t quite stand their clack.”

And she came down to dinner, as coolly as if she had heard nothing. Only her mother thought her manner a little bit forced; she would rather Laura had shown more of what she really felt. But she obstinately avoided all reference to the visit further, and her mother left her alone for the rest of the day.

She wished Mrs. Grey good night and went to bed

as usual, without betraying any emotion. But some time after they had parted for the night, Mrs. Grey, whose bedroom was close to Laura's, heard sounds issuing therefrom which she considered quite justified her in going back to her, and entering without knocking. Laura's light was out, but she was kneeling beside her bed, her face hidden, sobbing bitterly, in most unmistakeable distress and agitation.

"Laura, my child, what is this?"

If Mrs. Grey had been in any doubt as to Laura's feelings she could be so no longer. The poor girl lifted up a face of such genuine misery as her mother had never seen it wear before, and sobbed out at last: "Oh, mamma—aren't you—so sorry—for poor Mr. Hayward?"

"Yes, Laura, of course—of course one must be sorry; but to put yourself into such a state, dear child, seems hardly fitting—hardly right."

"I have been keeping it in all day," she gasped. "I didn't know it was wrong. I never thought you would come in."

"My coming in doesn't make it wrong. If you were unhappy, dear, I should not wish you to hide it from me. Of course, I know you must be shocked, as I was; but consider, darling, if he was your nearest relation you couldn't be more miserable, and he is nothing to us now—we have no right—"

"Unless one can't help," Laura half whispered. As she had risen and stood up beside her bed, a small folded paper, like a note, dropped on the floor. "What's—that, dear?" said her mother, wondering.

"That! Oh," and Laura picked it up and handed it to her with quiet dignity. "It's mine—at least, his—the only letter I ever had from him."

Mrs. Grey turned it over. It was his short business-like note about the Dedication Festival, written a year ago. She glanced through it with a sad, pitying feeling—the brief sentences—the "faithfully yours, Am-

brose Hayward," in the common-place, lawyer's clerk hand—such a very unloverlike epistle! There was something pathetically comic in the thought of poor Laura treasuring it all this time, and crying over it as she had evidently been doing. "Laura," she said at length, looking up with a faint deprecating smile, "if this is hero worship, it has been carried a great deal too far; if it is anything else, my poor child, surely you must have found out your mistake by this time?"

"I didn't know there was any harm in keeping it," said Laura.

"Harm! No, perhaps not exactly. But is it quite right, do you think—quite fitting—to go on keeping up a feeling of this sort for a man who has shown pretty plainly how much he cares for this place and all connected with it? The very letter itself shows on what sort of footing he considered himself with us."

"Nin said he was very unhappy at going."

"Nin fancies a great many absurd things, dear. Perhaps he was unhappy, but it evidently had nothing to do with—I mean there has never been anything to justify your taking such an especial interest in him."

Laura was silent for a few moments, then she said: "Mamma, one thing—shall you do anything to hear more—to inquire? It is so dreadful hearing only through those horrid Harts."

"I think I might go over, or send, to Mrs. Wylde. I think it would be right, after hearing this. But you must promise not to excite yourself."

"And oh," Laura's voice sank to an awed whisper, "you don't think—oh, say it's not *that*—what Annette said."

"What? consumption—"

"Breaking a bloodvessel. She said the little boy did. And once I heard old Betsey Jones telling you about her son—long ago—and I can't help fancying, and *seeing*, such dreadful things!"

"Poor child! you must try and not let yourself

dwell on them, or you will be quite ill. It doesn't follow because Annette said it that it must be. Of course I can't tell you—but I don't think Mr. Hayward was in consumption when he left this, although Annette was always croaking."

"It must be so bad to be ill all alone, and in that wild place," Laura said, in a tone which showed how she realized all the circumstances of the case to herself.

"He has his mother by this time, Laura; and she will take very good care of him."

"And when will you send over?"

"To-morrow morning perhaps. But recollect, dear, whether poor Mr. Hayward recovers—as I hope for his friends' sake he may—or not, we shall probably never see him again; so it can *really* make no difference."

"Must you take that away?" asked Laura, looking wistfully at her letter.

"No, Laura, I won't take it away. I will leave it to your judgment and discretion what to do with it. But I trust, darling, your own right feeling and sense of duty—of what is owing to your self-respect as a young woman, will help you to overcome—what is making you so unhappy."

"I *may* pray for him?" she said, without answering her mother's words; "there is no harm in that."

"There is no harm in praying for anybody, Laura. One person I think we should very much remember in our prayers just now—poor Mrs. Hayward."

CHAPTER XXII.

“By the sad couch whence hope hath flown,
Watching the eye where reason sleeps.”

KEBLE.

POOR Mrs. Hayward!

In all her troubles hitherto she had had her good Ambrose beside her; his manly arm to lean on, his clear-headed practical sense to guide her, his dutiful affection to comfort her. Now, as she took her seat in the train in answer to the summons of that awful telegram, she felt that she was indeed alone.

It was true that she had two good sons-in-law; but her elder daughter's husband was far away in London and in business, and could not well have come to her, and Mr. Wylde's first duty was to his wife, about whom her mother was also feeling some anxiety.

A long tedious day's journey, with several changes, brought her at length to the dreary little station on a branch line which landed her in the midst of Calton Collieries. Fortunately she was then near her destination, for not a conveyance was to be had. A five minutes' walk, under the guidance of a porter, took her to the parsonage—a good house, but in its staring unfinished state, in the midst of waste ground, it struck her with an inexpressible sense of dreariness. Here her son had been living and working alone for the last five months—here he was now perhaps dying—alone. Was she indeed in time?

The door was opened by a rough-looking, slip-shod woman-servant, who stared at her from head to foot. “Yes, Mr. Hayward's about the same. Are you the lady was telegraphed for?”

“Yes; I'm Mr. Hayward's mother. Where is he?”

“Step upstairs, please—that room to the right.

I ain't seen him to-day, but the nurse is there—and there's two men."

"Two men!"

"She got them to hold him—'cause he's out of his senses like."

With a trembling hand, and limbs that almost refused to support her, the poor old lady opened the door of the bedroom. What a sight for a mother! The room was a good-sized one, light and airy, but with only the necessary furniture, and uncarpeted. On the small iron bed lay her son—his head, close shaven, wrapped in wet cloths; his face wasted away as she had once seen it years ago, when he had been at death's door with fever; his eyes roaming about with the restless wandering gaze of delirium; two rough-looking men, mechanics apparently from their dress, holding him down in bed.

"Loyal hearts and true," in their way—they were two of his choir, a father and son, and had been up with him two nights already; but such rough nurses they looked, with their hard strong hands on his shoulders, that the mother's first impulse was to cry, "Oh, don't—don't hurt him!"

"Eh naw, missus," said the elder man, with a strong provincial accent, "he'd be oot o' bed, and oot o' winder too, if it warn't for weä. Naw, naw, there's none of us would lay a hond on the parson to hurt un. He's oot o's reäson noo, poor chap."

Mrs. Hayward turned in mute inquiry to the nurse, a hard-featured stout elderly woman, who went to the miners' wives when they were ill; not a comforting looking person in such a case as the present.

"It's upon the brain, mum, the doctor says; violent cold, turned to inflammation."

"How long has he been like this?"

"Let me see, this is Thursday—'twas Tuesday I come here. Doctor, he coom'd down to my place, and he says, 'Mrs. Biggs, are you disengaged, and ready

for a good tough job?' 'At your service, doctor,' says I; 'who is it?' 'A gentleman this time,' he says. 'A gentleman!' I says; 'and where's he from?' for there ain't many gentlemen cooms here. 'It's the Puseyite minister,' he says—'cause he knows my people b'longs to the Wesley chapel—'and just you come away at once, for he's as ill as a man can be.' And so I just puts up a few things, and I cooms up; and I ain't had my things off, let alone closed an eye since I been here. Couldn't have managed a bit if I 'adn't a' got them two in of nights. If I'd been the mother he's always a-callin' out for, I couldn't a' done more nor I have for him, poor fellow. I'm feared he's past knowing you now."

"Two days, and I not sent for!" said poor Mrs. Hayward, as she bent over him. "My own poor dear boy! don't you know me?"

"Yes, I know your voice," said the strange hollow tones. "You come from Sun—Sunny—that's where she is—but I'm not going back there again."

"I'm your mother, dearest."

"Her mother, are you? Then I take leave to tell you you needn't have thrown her quite so much in my way."

"Sure he's taken a turn along of hearing a voice he knows," said the nurse. "That's the first time I've heard him speak so wild like. Says his prayers beautiful, he do, that you would think he was reasonable, and portions of Scripture, and all that—some men goes on awful when their heads is gone, but nothing comes from his lips but what a child might hear, and be the better for. I think he's a good bit quieter than he were last night, don't you, Mr. Caldwell?"

The individual thus appealed to shook his head, saying grimly, "Gittin' so much weaker, ye see."

"Does he take any nourishment?" asked his mother.

"A little milk, or a little beef tea, the doctor said to give un, to keep up his strength, but it's an awful

trouble gittin' him to take it; and then he ain't kept nothin' down, unless a sup of wine I've given him now and then—so it ain't much use trying. Ah, mum, it'll be a blessed release for him and you too, when he's taken; it's bad for a mother to see her child like that."

Mrs. Hayward said nothing, and the woman went on: "I'm sure I've tried all *I* could, and if you'd been here yourself I couldn't a' done more. It's about time for changing them things about his head, which I does reg'lar, as the doctor ordered. May be you'll like to do it yourself, and see if he'll know a difference. Stand back a bit, Timothy, and let the lady try."

Mrs. Hayward went up to her son's side, but as soon as he had one arm at liberty he raised it to his head, and pushed his mother's hands away.

"You keep off—I don't want your hands about me—they burn my head. I want mother, mother, mother!"

"It's me he've called mother all through," said Mrs. Biggs.

"Oh! mother, mother!" said the poor sufferer, "are you gone too, mother? They're all set against me—all against me," he wandered on. "It's hard—hard—when one tries—but I must just go on—work and pray—'always to pray and not to faint.' It's hard, hard."

Then he broke into a strain of intercession, so earnest, so touchingly worded, that it was difficult to believe it the utterance of a wandering intellect. He mentioned many names, all of Axhill people, sometimes confusedly and incoherently, but still with a meaning running through it all—showing how strong was the habit of earnest prayer for his flock. Then the drift of it changed. "Have mercy upon the lonely—all who suffer like me. It is very hard to bear—help me to bear it—not to wish otherwise—help me through all—make them happy."

“They were here just now,” he went on in a strangely quiet dreamy sort of tone. “They were here, father, and Alf, and the loyal heart. I can’t remember names now. I saw them all. I know they couldn’t really come back—they come when I am sleeping very often—and then it’s not so bad, but they will never really come back! I shall go to them, but they will not return to me.

“And that is what we—we who stay behind in this valley of tears, while those we love better than our own lives are taken before us—that is what we have to look to. Oh! brethren, there will be no loneliness there—none lonely in Paradise!”

“Sure, that’s what he said to us last Sunday noight,” said the younger of the two men, in a low awestruck voice, looking across at his father.

There was a sudden change in his tone now, as he said, trying to raise himself: “It’s not *necessary* for me to be there. Get Wylde—get Wylde over for the day!

“Why do you hold me so? I’m not mad—not yet! *She* was, I know, but I couldn’t help her, ‘enter not into judgment with Thy servant.’

“Mortlock! Mortlock! is that you? I can’t hear what he says with his teeth set that way—but I know he’s asking me for her soul! Take him away!

“She is not lost—no, no, no,—not while there is mercy in heaven. O don’t look at me so, Mortlock; don’t hold me—I did all I could!”

He began to struggle violently against the two men. The poor mother turned away, covering her face with her hands—she could not bear to watch the scene. Then succeeded an interval of exhaustion. There were tears rolling down the worn furrowed cheeks of the elder Caldwell as he relaxed his hold of the sufferer, saying, “Poor lad, poor lad, he’s near through now! He’ll never speak to us sensible no more.”

A short time after the doctor called. It was a relief

to poor Mrs. Hayward, as she was at last able to learn some details of her son's mysterious illness from him.

Mr. Hayward had been under his advice for some time, he said, for violent neuralgia in the head, which yielded to no remedies and seemed to be almost wearing him out, though he was never off his work. About four days since he had had to conduct a funeral; it was a very wet chilly day, and standing out in the rain bareheaded had given him a severe cold. It had flown to the weak point and taken an acute inflammatory turn, and was now affecting the brain.

"Was there any hope?" the poor mother asked.

"I should be afraid to say," was the answer; "these cases are generally fatal; and he doesn't seem to have much stamina, and he can't take nourishment. Has he ever been ill before? seriously ill?"

"Yes, once, with fever. He was very nearly gone, and he recovered. Oh, say it is not impossible!"

"Not impossible," answered the doctor, kindly. "We will do all we can; but there's little now but nursing and watching. Your presence is in his favour."

"But why was I not called before?"

"No one knew where to send, ma'am. His servant didn't, and of course the people here were unable to tell me, and he's been delirious ever since I was called in. When I saw how things were going I rummaged in his coat pockets and found your name and address from a letter, and telegraphed at once. But you could have done nothing more even had you been here, and he does not know any one."

It was poor comfort for Mrs. Hayward. Bitterly and often she lamented, and reproached herself, through the watches of that sad night, that she had ever allowed Ambrose to go away and live alone. Here he had been, for weeks at least, ill and suffering—all the time that he was writing those cheerful letters, and working on uncomplainingly; and when stricken down and helpless, he had been left to the mercy of a strange

country doctor, a rough servant, and that coarse hard Mrs. Biggs! worse tended than some of his own parishioners would have been—without a kindred face near him, or a familiar voice to soothe him. And was this—this to be the end now? the end of all his hard self-denying work, and his loving care of her! Was she to see her last remaining protector thus rudely snatched away, to be the lonely survivor after all?

Her last! She felt as if it must not be—she could not spare him. Yet, as she thought of his holy patient life, and listened to his unconscious words of sorrowful prayer which revealed to her a little, though so little, of the inner workings of his mind, and saw the state of helpless suffering to which he was reduced, her heart owned that her loss would be his gain.

The night wore on. By morning he was quiet and seemed completely exhausted; the two faithful watchers left, saying that they must go to their work, poor souls! after their night of nursing, “but we’ll call in about noon, missus,” the elder said, “and see if there’s owt we can do for the parson.”

But there seemed little chance that any one would “do owt” for him again in this world. By midday he was in what the doctor called “a state of coma,” and he told Mrs. Hayward that he would in all probability never rally from it, but just pass away quietly and insensibly, at any moment. There was nothing more to be done, and no use in the doctor remaining.

The poor stricken widow bowed in meek despairing silence to the terrible verdict. She was alone now: there was no need of the men’s assistance, and she sent Mrs. Biggs, who seemed inclined to make the most of her own fatigues, to lie down and rest. She alone sat for hour after hour by the bed-side sleepless, but motionless and tearless; watching the still death-like face, holding in her own the worn nerveless hand, watching and waiting for the coming of the fatal hour which should “quench her coal that was left.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

“Not die : but live a life of truest breath,
And teach true life to fight with mortal wrongs.”
TENNYSON.

IT did not come. Once again, as years ago, Ambrose Hayward was spared contrary to all expectation to crawl back to life, by slow and painful stages, from the very gates of the grave—to look up and recognize and speak to his mother—but such a ghastly wreck of a man, the mother thought she had never beheld.

But there were days and days of anxious wearing watching, before he came even to the stage of recognizing her. Days and nights when he did absolutely nothing but sleep the sleep of utter exhaustion, from hour to hour. The doctor said that sleeping was his best chance : the only chance, in fact, for restoring his brain ; the utmost care would be necessary, when consciousness returned, to keep him from any kind of disturbing influence. And even with every care that could be taken there was a lurking dread, more terrible to the mother than anything else, that his intellect might, nay, very probably would, never be quite so strong as before this attack.

By degrees, however, the intervals of consciousness and reason became longer and more to be depended on. Mrs. Hayward soon discovered that the time immediately before his illness was a complete blank to him ; that he fancied himself still at Axhill. He would ask her over and over again why she had changed his room—he did not remember this room ; and beg to be moved back to his own. Then came a stage of progress even more difficult to deal with. He became fidgety about his work, wishing to get up and go about, though

really unable to walk ; and but for his habitual gentleness and deference to his mother's wishes she would have been quite unable to control him.

He would ask her questions too which she could neither understand nor answer—to which she had not the slightest clue.

“Has he got his—his degree yet?” he said to her one day quite suddenly, without the slightest reference.

“Who, dear?”

“Who? ah! that's just what I can't tell you. I can't tell names now. But you know perfectly well whom I mean.”

Mrs. Hayward puzzled her brains, and at last mentioned the name of a young London friend who was reading for Ordination.

“No, no, no, of course not. You know perfectly well. I wish you'd get me a paper that has the—the—the—what do you call it? It will show.”

But Mrs. Hayward was quite unable to satisfy him ; and then he went on to, “Do you think there's likely to be any difficulty in getting Wylde to come over for the day? just for that, you know. I must get away before it takes place. And I don't see that this looks very like getting away.”

He would go on in this strain constantly, about getting away from Axhill—always getting away, and his mother tried in vain to divert his thoughts. At last one day, after he was able to sit up a little, she ventured to place his chair by the window ; hoping that the sight of the colliery chimneys and spoil-banks would bring him to a realization of his change of home. He looked out and said immediately, “Hallo! that's something new since I was going about! What is it? I don't remember that. What are those chimneys?”

“Calton collieries.”

“Calton collieries? Where's that? Calton—Calton ; where have I heard the name?”

“Your own parish, dear—your new parish.”

“My new parish!” he repeated musingly. “No; I’m at Axhill, am I not?”

“No, dear. You will remember all about it soon. You left Axhill before you were ill.”

“Before I was ill? I don’t remember it. I don’t remember being ill before. I am very ill now, I think, and my head is all gone. What did you say was the name?”

It was very painful to see the efforts of the weak sorely-tried brain, at remembering; and Mrs. Hayward almost regretted having tried to rouse him to recollection. Little by little, however, as he sat gazing out at the dreary view, it seemed to come back to him. He did not speak of it much; but she found that he gradually appeared to accept his position, and left off referring to Axhill.

Numerous were the inquiries made at the parsonage by the poor miners and mechanics of Calton, showing how much beloved their new parson had in a short time made himself. A neighbour priest came over to take the Sunday duty, and offered to visit the sick man; but rather to his mother’s surprise Ambrose declined the offer, saying he did not wish to see any one.

They were sitting together one day, the mother and son, after he had progressed somewhat more towards convalescence: she occupied with her needle, he in his enforced idleness, gazing dreamily out before him, when the servant brought Mrs. Hayward a letter. She saw her daughter’s handwriting—she was feeling rather anxious for tidings of her now, and took it with the remark, “Emily herself.”

“Why not Emily herself?” he said.

“She is expecting every day now—.”

“Emily is! and what on earth are you doing here, mother? why don’t you go to her?”

“She doesn’t expect me now, dear. She knows I am better to be with you.”

“With me? what on earth do I want with you—to

keep you here? I can sit here and vegetate, can't I, with the help of Mrs. Biggs? Now—you'll pack your box to-night—and be off by the first train to-morrow."

"My dear, you are so precipitate. I had really quite given up all idea, and so has she—it may put her about."

"Nonsense. You'll put me about, I can tell you, if you persist in staying away from her—you'll fidget me to death."

"Well, don't excite yourself, dear—one can think about it. It is very kind of you, I am sure, and if you wish so much, I must try and do so," said poor Mrs. Hayward, trembling lest he should do himself harm by the agitation. "Let us see what Emily says."

She opened the letter, and began to read extracts. "So glad to hear the dear old boy is getting on so nicely, and you pretty well yourself. . . . Charlie is very busy getting ready for the Harvest Thanksgiving. . . . going to have a week of it. . . . such difficulty in getting decorations enough. . . . expect Mr. Warlingham down to preach. . . . Mrs. Grey made me a kind visit yesterday, and sat with me for some time. She told me she had made up her mind to let her house from November, as she is ordered abroad with Miss Grey. I fear she is really very delicate.'"

"Who? Miss Grey? delicate?" he said quickly. "That's something quite new."

"I don't think so, dear; she has been very much out of health all the summer."

"You've kept it wonderfully close then; I knew nothing about it."

"Did I never mention it in my letters? Well, I don't know that there was ever very much to mention. I fancied you knew she was delicate—I think it was before you left."

"What is the matter with her?" he asked shortly and sharply.

“Well, Ambrose, I don’t like to say what I think is the matter with her, for fear of its coming to Mrs. Grey’s knowledge, for I can see she doesn’t wish to think it. But, from my own observation, I should be afraid it was the old enemy,” she put her hand to her chest, “that *we* know only too well.”

He said nothing, but closed his eyes and shook his head with a gesture of extreme sadness. Mrs. Hayward took up her work and went on: “Mrs. Grey has had a good deal of annoyance this summer with people’s talk. Those cousins, the Mansells, whom I dare say you recollect, came down to Sunnywood, and after a very few days the young man went away suddenly by himself. A report was immediately got up that Miss Grey had jilted him; the Harts got hold of it, and—you know what Axhill gossip is—it was all over the place at once. It came round to poor Mrs. Grey, and she was terribly annoyed. She kindly came to tell me herself, as she did several of her other acquaintances, because she knew they would hear reports, that there was not a bit of truth in it from beginning to end—he had had a sudden order to join his regiment, that was all. And further, she said, there had never been—as indeed I had been quite given to understand—any attachment between Laura and her cousin. They had been friends and playmates from childhood, but nothing more, or were ever likely to be. So much for gossiping tongues! Ambrose, my dear, my dear, what—O, mercy, mercy!”

He was lying back senseless in his chair, so utterly deathlike that she was terribly alarmed. It was only a faint, however. She hastily summoned Mrs. Biggs, and together they got him laid in his bed as best they might.

Even then Mrs. Hayward failed to perceive any connection between his agitation and the subject of their talk. “He has been up too long—he is overtired,” she kept saying, as she tried every means she knew of to restore him to consciousness.

It was a long, frightful swoon. And when he recovered, his mother found to her horror that his mind was wandering again.

In dreadful fear she sent for the doctor, who understood matters better. "He has had some shock, I am certain."

"I don't know of any, indeed," said the poor trembling mother; "I read him a letter from his sister—but nothing at all unusual—he was quite composed."

"Letters, indeed! what has he got to do with letters?" said the doctor angrily. "I tell you, ma'am, if he gets a relapse now, he'll just go out like a candle. You ought to have known better."

Poor thing! she wept and reproached herself, and sat up watching him again all night; for he was very restless, and talked a great deal, but so incoherently that she did not receive any enlightenment.

She was a little consoled to find him much as before, after a short sleep in the morning. But as the day wore on she observed that he was disposed to be very nervous and irritable—impatient at his own weakness and incapacity for thought or occupation, and chafed by the least contradiction.

Of course she made up her mind not on any account to leave him; though he did his best to drive her away, and said things that cut her to the heart to hear. She bore it all meekly and patiently, knowing that his mind had lost its balance, and that his irritability was as much physical infirmity as his bodily weakness.

Two days after she had received Emily's letter came one from Mr. Wylde, announcing the birth of her grandson. She could not keep it from Ambrose; and she thought perhaps the news might cheer him up and divert his thoughts. But she could not bring even the ghost of a smile to the sad haggard face when she read the letter.

"Tell Hayward," it concluded, "that he must make haste and get up his strength in time for the young

fellow's baptism, as Emily has quite set her heart on his officiating on the auspicious occasion."

"No, no," he said to that, "strength or no strength, I don't go back there again. That place has been the curse of my life."

"My dear!"

"It's quite the case. I believe there is a curse hanging over the place—it seems to me a place where people are sent for trial."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I mean just that. I am sure we have seen it in our own case. There was Alfred, he went there for his trial. He was never happy there; and how he longed to get away, poor fellow, to the very last! There was Mortlock again—he didn't belong to the place—he went there for his trial too. Merciful Heaven, what a trial it was! I hope I shall never see a case of tetanus again as long as I live! Then there is Mrs. Grey; she didn't belong to the place, and I expect she is gone there for *her* trial."

He spoke so strangely that his mother was afraid that he was beginning to wander again. "You shouldn't take such ideas," she said.

"It is no taking ideas, when one sees things quite plainly. For myself, if I had never gone there—if I had stuck to London, I might have been a useful man, and a happy man: as it is, there is not much prospect of my ever being either. If ever I get good for anything again, I have a great mind to go back to Singleton, and ask him to take me as supernumerary, choir-master, any sort of drudge that he likes—and just try and make myself of some use again. I've been of none since I left."

"But, dear, I think you forget. You are weak and ill just now, and you fancy all sorts of things. I am sure you have done an immense deal of good here already—and at Axhill, though you did meet with some failures and disappointments—"

“Failures and disappointments, eh? What do you know about them, I wonder?”

“Only what you have told me, dear.”

“I told you so much, didn’t I?”

He was getting into one of those strange unaccountable half-ironical moods which were so painful as well as inexplicable to her.

“No, dear,” she answered, “you never told me very much. But I am sure you have often told us that trials and disappointments work together for our good—and I think from our own experience we have seen that to be true.”

“Perhaps—in some cases. But I am the most unfit man living to tell you so. I can’t speak from my own experience—unhappy man that I am.”

What could he mean? He looked at her with those great grey eyes, out of their shadowy hollows, with such a wistful dejected expression, she could not understand it. He had been low-spirited and silent before leaving Axhill she knew, but he had appeared to cheer up so completely in his new work that she could not imagine why he should now show so much depression. She scarcely knew how to answer him.

And then he sat, lying back in his chair, for more than an hour, quite silent; and she once looking up at him saw what no one had ever seen in the course of his life since his very early childhood, saw large tears coursing down his wasted cheeks. She would not appear to notice it: she did not even know if he was conscious of it himself.

“I cannot,” he said at last. “I want to say one prayer for her—but I cannot remember anything connected. I think He is taking from me the power of praying because He will not hear me. I am so unworthy.”

“My poor dear!” said his mother, “you were always hard on yourself. You do not serve so hard a Master. He does not so requite those who serve Him faithfully

while they can. You would not say or think such things if you were stronger. Might I read anything for you? Was it for Emily, you meant?"

"Oh yes, if you would. Something short enough for my miserable brains to follow. There is a collect at the end of the Churching Service—that will do."

She did as he desired, and he thanked her, and said no more at the time. But she was getting thoroughly alarmed about him: his state of mind was unlike anything she had ever known; least of all was it like him, who had always been so patient, so resigned, so trustful, under his sorrows. She felt greatly in need of some other counsel; and that night after he was asleep she sat down and wrote an account of her anxieties to her old friend and adviser of so many years, her and her children's true friend in joy and sorrow—Mr. Singleton.

She did not get an answer on the day she expected; but on the afternoon of that day, Mrs. Biggs came in to tell her that a gentleman downstairs wanted to see her. He wouldn't give his name. Then she knew that he had come himself, and she went down to him.

She had borne up bravely hitherto under her trials; but when she found herself alone in the kind calm presence which had soothed her in so many a heavy hour, she completely broke down, and wept unrestrainedly.

Mr. Singleton let her "have it out," and did not scold her as her son would have done. When she was able to speak he talked to her very kindly and gently, and then proposed to go at once and see Ambrose. She felt a little afraid of the surprise for him, but went back to his room, saying quietly, "It's Mr. Singleton, dear. You will see him, will you not?"

"Singleton come here!" he said, and seemed a good deal agitated.

"Yes; he has kindly run down to see us. He will

not be going away to-night, so if you are tired now I can tell him you will see him to-morrow."

"No. I'll see him at once—alone."

So Mrs. Hayward brought him up, and then left them together. She knew she might trust Mr. Singleton implicitly not to tire or excite him; so she did not feel uneasy at the length of time they remained together.

At last Mr. Singleton came down to her.

"Well, we have been having a long talk together, your boy and I," he said, "but I don't think I have done him any harm."

"Oh, no; I don't think you could. Does he want me—shall I go up?"

"No. I don't think you need just now. He is lying down and says he is going to take a sleep. I have tired him out, you see."

"What do you think of him?"

"Poor fellow! he has been sorely tried. It seems he hasn't taken you into his confidence, and I have no authority to forestall him; but I have no doubt you will know all about it by-and-by."

"How do you think his mind?"

"Oh! I think he is perfectly right; as clear-headed and sensible as possible, only weak and nervous. This parish has been a great deal too much for him."

"I was afraid, when he would take it, but he was always bent on mission work."

"No, no; I don't mean the mission work—that's just the thing for him; but Axhill. He was never suited for it: he is much too scrupulous for a place of that sort. He blames himself for everything that went wrong. To take one instance, that of the poor girl who became insane; and then his churchwarden's death. That has been a terrible shock to his nerves. He told me the poor young man's dying face used to haunt him till he thought he should lose his senses. He has felt that business terribly."

“What! has he been telling you all that?”

“Yes, he has told me everything—made a clean breast, as he calls it. Poor boy, I wish some of us had as few shortcomings to reproach ourselves with!”

“He is so inclined to be morbid. And that dreadful depression and irritability—so unlike himself.”

“You must just bear with him, Mrs. Hayward—no doubt you do, have done so. He is dreadfully penitent for that part of it—says he has treated you so shamefully, and makes himself quite wretched afterwards. But I think it will all disappear as he gets stronger. You must get him back to Wylde’s by-and-by, and give him a little change.”

“He says he never will go back there: he has a perfect horror of the place.”

“Perhaps you will find he has changed his mind.”

“You have worked wonders, then.”

“Not I. But I hope there is some brightness in store for him, poor fellow. He is greatly in need of it.”

They were silent for a few minutes, and then Mr. Singleton said: “I have promised to give him a celebration to-morrow before I leave. And there are two men he wishes asked to join, railway mechanics, I think he said; he could not recollect the name, but he said you would; they attended him when he was ill—he says they are both communicants.”

“Oh, yes! It will be poor Caldwell and his son. I don’t know where they live, but I will send the nurse for them.”

So it was done. The service next morning was a touching and a happy one—only those three, with the sick man, receiving the Holy Sacrament from the hands of his dearest earthly friend and second father; the mother, and the two faithful-hearted rough working men who had given such valuable assistance in the hour of need. Mrs. Hayward was thankful to observe already a change in her son’s condition—a peace and calmness of spirit which had been absent from him for

many a day. How could it be otherwise, when the much-tried weary young labourer in the Master's Vineyard had laid bare the secrets of his burdened soul, his failures and disappointments, his doubts and fears and sorrows, before his kind, wise, fatherly friend and brother priest, and had received the ministry of consolation, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness ?

CHAPTER XXIV.

“Let the sweet heavens endure,
Not close and darken above me
Before I am quite quite sure
That there is one to love me ;
Then let come what come may
To a life that has been so sad,
I shall have had my day.”

TENNYSON.

AMBROSE Hayward appeared to have taken a turn for the better from the day of Mr. Singleton's visit. He never made any allusion to their conversation, or any further confidences to his mother ; but the nervousness and impatience seemed to have altogether disappeared, and with the mental improvement his bodily strength appeared also to progress.

It seemed, however, as if Mrs. Hayward was no sooner to have one child a little off her hands than she was to have cause for anxiety about another. Letters came from Mr. Wylde, giving anything but a satisfactory report of his wife's progress. Poor Emily had a good deal of the Hayward delicacy of constitution, and made but a tardy recovery, with many ups and downs. Then she caught a cold which threw her back considerably. But there was really no reason

now to prevent Mrs. Hayward from doing as her son before wished her, and going to nurse her daughter. Ambrose was tolerably independent at last; the doctor said he might even go out a little, on fine days; and when he heard the latest report of his sister, he, without any undue excitement or agitation, quietly and decidedly told his mother that he insisted on her going.

It was a relief to poor Mrs. Hayward to find herself once more obeying a stronger will than her own; and she meekly packed up her things and started, having begged him over and over again to take care of himself: feeling, poor mother, very much divided as she saw the last of his pale thin face at the window. She arrived at the end of her journey to find a reproduction, not quite so ghastly certainly, and more apt to break out into smiles, but still a reproduction, in its look of delicacy, of the face she had left at the other end.

Master Wylde, however, was a very flourishing little specimen of babyhood; and this being the case, there was no objection to putting off his christening a little longer than had first been intended, to allow of his mother's presence, as she would have been greatly disappointed to miss it. So it happened that by the time Emily was strong enough to fix a day, Ambrose wrote to his mother that the doctor said he ought to go away for change of air: there was, moreover, some painting to be finished at the parsonage, which would necessitate his going away somewhere; so he would like to join his mother and remain with her a short time, before taking her to her new home for good. And if he was in time and they still wished for his services at the christening, he thought he might be able to manage it.

Not many days after, Mrs. Hayward, accompanied by her son-in-law, was waiting for his arrival at the station, in some anxiety as to how he would get through the journey which she had found so long and weary.

"There he is," said Mr. Wylde, as the train glided in. "Good gracious, Mrs. Hayward, how ill he looks! He can't be fit to travel alone!"

Yes, he did certainly look very ill—all that could be seen of him between the broad brim of his hat and the comforter round his neck—when he got out and stood on the platform: very thin and haggard, and as if he could hardly stand up in his heavy Inverness cape; but to have him there at all, able to walk about and take care of himself, was so much more than his mother had dared but a short while back to look for, that she had no room for anything but thankfulness, as she hastened up to meet him. How familiar the old place was to him! the high glass roof, and poor Mortlock's coal depôt, and the little red-brick office where he had gone so often to speak to him, always to meet with the same ready sympathy—and ah! that little door leading to the station-master's rooms, which he could not see yet without a shudder. How full of associations, from the day so many years ago when he had parted from his own Alfred there, to see him no more in health, to that other when he was called to watch the terrible death agony of the faithful friend and fellow-labourer, who had become to him almost a brother.

He had not long to look about him, for his mother and brother-in-law hurried him off to the pony-carriage which was in waiting. They went straight to Mr. Wylde's house first, as Ambrose wished to see his sister, and she was no less anxious for a visit from him: not having yet been down stairs.

"Oh! goodness, Ambrose, what a scarecrow you are!" was her not very flattering reception. "Poor old boy, you *have* been bad!"

"And are you better, Emily?" he said, as he bent down to kiss her.

"Oh, yes. I am getting on a bit now, I hope. And there's your nephew," pointing to the berceauette

which stood beside her sofa. "Look at him, pray; isn't he a remarkably handsome young man? Do you think you're to be trusted not to let him fall to-morrow?"

"I'll see when to-morrow comes. What's his name going to be?"

"Well, I'll tell you, in confidence, beforehand, and you must promise not to make any mistake: Alfred Charles John Hayward."

"Well done, Emily; one, two, three, four, five, initials!"

"Do you approve? We thought you would."

"Oh! yes; of course I approve. I only hope he won't have the misfortune to lose his memory when he grows up, or I'm afraid he'll not be able to endorse a cheque correctly."

"No, now, but tell me about yourself, poor old fellow. You've not really lost yours so badly as all that comes to?"

"Enough to be very glad I've only one name to think of. But I didn't come here to talk about myself. Tell me your news."

"I really have very little."

"How are they getting along at Axhill?"

"Oh! well, you know it is so long since I was there. Charlie went over to their Thanksgiving last week, and took Freer and some boys to help."

"How's good old Freer?"

"Oh! in great force. He made a formal call on Master Wylde the other day. I believe he already looks forward to having him in the choir. Their singing's at a very low ebb at S. Martin's. Hopkins is gone—you've heard that?"

"Not that I recollect."

"Oh! yes. He gave up because Mrs. Blake bothered him so he couldn't stand it. So she plays herself now, and very badly."

"What a pity, to be sure! Where's Hopkins gone?"

“To some place near Manchester. A good appointment. And he’s engaged to Janet Bayliss. Their harvest festival was a very poor thing, Charlie said. Ours was splendid, Ambrose! I would have given anything if you could have been with us—it put one in mind of S. John’s in the good old days! We had eight priests counting *him*, and Mr. Warlingham for the day itself. I like him best of all, though Charlie considers Canon Willett the ‘great gun.’”

“Willett? who’s he?”

“Canon of F——, and a splendid hand at a ‘special.’ He’s a sort of friend of Mrs. Grey’s. She came to hear him. You know about the Greys?”

“They’re going abroad, aren’t they?”

“Yes. Isn’t it a pity? We shall so miss them. Mrs. Grey has been so kind. She sent very often to inquire when you were ill. And she has sent us numbers of things—fruit and vegetables, and beautiful hot-house flowers for the church.”

“When do they go?”

“Next week. I don’t like to think of it—it is so sad, isn’t it? dear Miss Grey being so poorly. I fear she is really in a very precarious state. I haven’t seen her for long—she can’t come as far as this, but when I was last there she was looking so thin and changed, and delicate.

“Wasn’t it an absurd thing”—she was going on, but looking up she saw her brother gazing straight before him, with such a sad, fixed, abstracted expression that she checked herself and coloured.

Neither spoke again for some minutes. At last he said, drawing himself up abruptly,

“Well! I must go. Hope I haven’t tired you, eh?”

“*You* tire any one!” she said. “But you look frightfully tired yourself, and you must go and take a good rest before to-morrow. Good-bye, dear old fellow. You must stay till you get a little colour and flesh on to those miserable cheeks of yours.”

He said nothing, but only gave her a silent kiss. But as their eyes met, brother and sister felt intuitively that each understood the other.

The next day was a fine one happily for the christening. The service was a Wednesday Litany only; S. Luke's day, when they had hoped to have it, was gone and past, and they did not wish to wait for another festival. The congregation was quite a small one; and, of the few present, hardly any recognized the former young incumbent of Axhill in the haggard worn-looking priest with the black skull-cap, who only performed the actually ceremony of the baptism, besides answering as one of the sponsors. He got through his part very well, though his mother noticed that his voice was very weak, and that he made great use of his book—whereas formerly he was wont to go through the whole of the Baptismal Office by heart.

The christening party returned to Mr. Wylde's to luncheon, and when it was over Ambrose took his mother aside to say, "Emily says the Greys are going away in a week. Will you come with me to call there this afternoon? Emily says we can have the pony-chaise."

"Will it not be too tiring for you?"

"Oh, no! You'll come, then?"

Of course Mrs. Hayward could not refuse, though she wondered a little at his being in such a hurry to call; so the pony-carriage was ordered for them.

"And pray take care of Tommy," was Emily's parting injunction to her brother, as she smiled up at him with a good deal of sympathy in her eyes. "I know you can't drive a bit—but he'll go perfectly well, and he knows the right side as well as possible if you only let him alone. And never mind if he goes zig-zag up the hill, because it is easier for him."

"All right. I've only got to pitch into him, I suppose?"

"If you do, you shall never have him again."

They arrived at Sunnywood, thanks to Tommy, without any accidents. Mrs. Grey was at home, and they were shown into the drawing-room, where, after they had waited a few minutes, that lady came in to them, alone.

"Oh! how do you do, Mrs. Hayward? I did not know you had returned;" then she turned to shake hands with the other visitor, looking at him almost doubtfully for a moment, he was so changed; "Mr. Hayward, I hope you are much better."

"Yes, we are just on the move," she continued, in answer to some remark from Mrs. Hayward. "It is a great undertaking, letting one's house, and going away for so long, but when it was to be," and she sighed a little, "it was the best thing to make up one's mind to it at once. Laura could never have spent the winter here, that is certain."

"How is dear Miss Grey?" asked the old lady.

"Thank you, she varies a good deal from day to day; sometimes she seems much better, and at others she can scarcely do anything. I have great faith in the entire change of scene and association which going abroad will be for her—more even than in the change of climate, though the doctor considers that essential."

"Is she quite confined to her room now?"

"Well, no—not quite. She goes out a little on bright days, and comes down sometimes. But she asked me to make her excuses to you for not coming down to see you. She does not like 'good-byes,' and I am anxious to spare her as many of them as I can." It did not escape Mrs. Grey that Mr. Hayward's countenance on this became several degrees more melancholy than it was before, and he fixed his eyes on the ground.

"Shall you make a long stay now, Mrs. Hayward?"

"Just a few weeks, I think—until my son is strong enough to begin his work again, and the house is ready for us."

“You must have had a most anxious time,” Mrs. Grey observed. She did not like to say very much about the illness, with him sitting by a silent listener.

“Yes, indeed we had! But I have great cause for thankfulness that he is as he is now. I did not expect it at the time,” and she wiped her eyes. “My daughter tells me you have been most kind and attentive in your thought of us.”

“Is your son going abroad with you, Mrs. Grey?” said Mr. Hayward, the first connected sentence he had spoken during the visit.

“No, poor fellow. We cannot manage it. His winter holidays are too short to make it worth his coming out, and I feel I ought not to take him away for longer. But he is to spend Christmas with some friends, so I hope he will not be very dull.”

“I suppose he is engaged. But if you would allow him to spend any part of the time with me, I should be very glad.”

“Thank you, you are very kind.”

A few more common-places filled up the visit, and the mother and son rose to leave: Mrs. Grey bidding them farewell cordially and kindly, but with a little distance in her manner to her former clergyman. She could not help, unreasonable as it might be, feeling a little angry with him for the impression he had innocently made on her child's fancy.

Laura was not looking out at her window, or she might have been, as formerly she certainly would have been, amused at seeing Mr. Hayward run the axle of Emily's pet pony-carriage within a quarter of an inch of the gate-post.

She did not say anything when Mrs. Grey rejoined her in her up-stairs sitting-room. Since that night when she had so completely betrayed herself to her mother, she had been very shy and sensitive on the subject of the Haywards. She knew indeed that her mother understood her, and was at rest in the know-

ledge; but she never returned in any way to the subject, and seemed afraid of even appearing to show any particular interest in the family.

"Well, Laura, they did not stay very long," her mother said; "Mrs. Hayward expressed many regrets at not seeing you, and I was to bid you good-bye for them, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh," said Laura, and said no more.

"Poor Mr. Hayward looks dreadfully ill still—quite changed. I should hardly have known him; his hair has been all cut off, and he wears a little black velvet cap."

"What are they going to do now?"

"Oh, to stay a little while here, and then go back to his parish for good. He does not look as if he would ever be equal to much hard work, poor man."

Ambrose confided to his sister that they had only seen Mrs. Grey that afternoon. Next morning, hearing that Mr. Wylde was going to drive some way in the direction of Axhill, he asked for a lift, as he wished to make some other calls in that part.

"The ghost revisiting his old haunts, eh?" said Mr. Wylde: which witticism elicited a very ghostlike smile indeed from the subject of it.

Mrs. Grey and Laura were upstairs together that forenoon, the mother winding up her various household accounts, the daughter occupied with a little bit of crochet-work—she was not strong enough to drive her once busy machine now—when the servant came in to tell Mrs. Grey that Mr. Hayward had called to ask if he could see her.

"Where is he, Margaret?"

"In the drawing-room, ma'am; I asked him to step in and wait."

Mother and daughter exchanged a glance of wonderment, and Mrs. Grey closed her book and went down-stairs.

There she found him, looking just the same as

yesterday—only it struck her even more how thin and ghastly he was, ten years at least older in appearance than when he went away. What had he come back for?

“I ought to apologize for troubling you at such an early hour. I called to ask the favour of—of—an interview with your daughter.”

To say that Mrs. Grey was surprised would be to say nothing. She was amazed, startled, shocked. The solution of the riddle, the explanation of all that had appeared strange and inexplicable to her in the relations of Mr. Hayward and her daughter, seemed to burst upon her in one sudden painful rush. And there he sat waiting for her to speak.

“My daughter is in very delicate health, Mr. Hayward,” she said at length, “as no doubt you know. She very seldom sees any visitors; and I am bound to keep her from anything that may be at all exciting or painful. If I am obliged to consider before immediately granting your request, it is on that account.”

“You will be the best judge whether—whether my seeing her would be likely to do her any harm.”

“I suppose I may be allowed to ask, Mr. Hayward, what is your object in wishing to see her?”

“I have an explanation to make to her in the first place. And after that I have only one object—I mean there is only one thing I have to say to her—with your sanction.”

Mrs. Grey put her hand up to her head and tried to collect her thoughts. She had always liked and respected Mr. Hayward as an earnest, kind-hearted, hard-working and devout man; but he was not, most decidedly not, the man she would have picked out as a husband for Laura. And then he did look so frightfully ill!

As she did not speak immediately, he went on:

“Of course if you disapprove of me as—as a suitor

for your daughter, there is no occasion for my troubling her. I am quite aware that I have no right to feel surprise should you do so." Then he cleared his throat, and went on as if trying to exculpate himself from some fault: "Of course I know, my health has been rather severely tried lately, but I have every reason to believe that, with God's blessing, I shall regain my former strength and ability for work. And then you know, in a worldly point of view, I am very well off, for one in my position. Of course I know you are obliged to consider these things, that's why I mention them."

Mrs. Grey felt that she must speak, but conflicting feelings made it very hard for her to do so. With a good deal of effort she controlled her voice to say, "There is one thing, Mr. Hayward, in which I must not deceive you, as I have been I fear too long trying to deceive myself, though I cannot do so any longer. You mentioned the subject of health just now—it is my duty to tell you plainly that my child's health is causing me very grave anxiety. I should not be right in allowing you, or any one taking an interest in her as you do, to go any further without knowing the truth, as far as I know it myself. In fact it is only right, for the sake of both, that you should know what the doctors say of her."

"What do they say of her?"

"They try to speak hopefully to me, I know—but they tell me distinctly that there is something a little amiss with one of her lungs."

Mr. Hayward bent his head silently, as if he was quite prepared for this. Sadder and graver he could not look. After two or three seconds he raised his head to say, "Will you allow me just to speak to her once, Mrs. Grey?"

"You will think me very hard, very unkind, if I hesitate once more. But may it not be truest kindness, when one weighs everything? Your life must

always be a hard one, Mr. Hayward, if you are to do your duty—and you do not seem very strong yourself. Even if, as I trust and pray, my dear child may be restored to health, she shows that she can never be a very strong person, such an one as would be the help and comfort, in one sense, whatever she might be in others, that you should look for in a wife. Would it be wise to hamper yourself—to impair your usefulness, by taking a delicate wife to be an anxiety and a drag upon you? Wouldn't it be kinder and wiser in me, her mother, to say no at once, before this has gone any further—before you have disturbed her peace of mind by speaking to her?"

It cost Mrs. Grey a good deal to say all this.

"If you tell me so on her account—well."

"But on your own too—is it not right?"

"I do not know. God only knows how I love her. I hope I should not let my love and care for her detract from my service to Him."

Again Mrs. Grey pondered. If it had been on Mr. Hayward's side only, it would have been very hard to refuse him: there could be no doubt of his sincerity. But she thought of Laura's pale little face upstairs, of her unfeigned misery on that night when she had heard of his illness, of the letter, of a thousand little things that showed what her feeling towards him would be. And she could not—she felt she had no right to, say no. Whatever might come of it, she would not deny her child the opportunity of hearing from his own lips the declaration of a good man's love, and accepting it or not as she thought best.

"Well, Mr. Hayward, I will place it in my daughter's own hands. But it cannot be just now—at the present moment. She never comes down till the afternoon—and besides, she must not be startled."

"When may I come back then? Three o'clock?"

"To-day?"

"Is there any use in delay?"

“Well, then, to-day at three, if you please. I am sorry you have to wait at all. But you should not go and return—remain to luncheon, will you not? She will not be down.”

“No, thank you—no—I would rather go now. Thank you, Mrs. Grey.”

He was gone without another word.

It was only twelve o'clock when he left the gate. In spite of what was before him, he managed to pass part of the time in making a few calls, as he had intended, on the good folks of Axhill—some of the cottagers, old Mrs. Wilson and the Harts. The old lady was delighted to see him again, and gave him a great deal of advice regarding the care of his health; while the two latter made such an outcry at his changed appearance that he did not know which way to look.

He was walking homewards when he was hailed by his brother-in-law, who had driven him so far, also returning. “Hallo, Hayward, done your visiting? jump in.”

He was not sorry for the offer, and availed himself of it at once. How Mr. Wylde did talk all the way home, about a new guild that he was just going to set on foot for the benefit of some of his factory lads! But when they pulled up at Mrs. Hayward's lodging, his companion could not, for the life of him, have told what it was all about.

He was in time to preside at, for he could not eat, his mother's early dinner; and had a good deal to go through thereby, as she was terribly anxious about his not over-fatiguing himself. “My dear, this early walking and visiting does not do for you: you are not fit for it yet.” “My dear, do pray, now, to oblige your mother, take some more,” she went on during the meal, till he was half distracted. When it was over, he stood up and faced her astonishment boldly, at once, by saying—

“I’m going out again, mother, in a quarter of an hour.”

“Ambrose!” was all she could get out, aghast.

“Mother,” and he came nearer and spoke lower, “I’m going up to—to Sunnywood—by appointment, to see her. Wish me success.”

The scales suddenly fell from Mrs. Hayward’s eyes, but she was too much surprised to say more than, “Success, my dearest boy! GOD bless you now—and always,” and then he kissed her and went away to his room.

He wished for a little time to himself, to collect his thoughts: to consider what he was going to do, and to ask, as he had daily asked for weeks past, a blessing on it; above all, to seek for the only Strength by which he could school himself to submit, with entire resignation, to whatever of disappointment, trial, or sorrow might be in store for him through the medium of his great earthly love.

Then he spent five whole minutes—poor, plain, unpretending Ambrose! in trying to get up his personal appearance to the best advantage. He could not make very much of himself, let him brush and polish away as fiercely as he liked. His glass told him that. His hair, which had been cut off close to his head, was beginning to grow again, short and stubby, and freely sown with grey—that curious iron-grey shade which is the first change with very black-haired people. There were grey hairs in his beard; and the heavy black eyebrows and moustache only served to throw into stronger contrast the more than ordinary paleness of his complexion. While for hollow eyes and lantern jaws he might certainly have challenged Laura’s favourite hero Sir Macklin now, had he known of the existence of such a personage. And the black cap which he was obliged to wear to protect his head gave him altogether a strange old look—like some weird mediæval picture. “Enough to frighten her,” he said to himself, as he turned

away in disgust from his own image. "A pretty scarecrow, indeed!"

But scarecrow or ghost or what not, the facts of the case were these. He loved Laura Grey with all his heart: Laura was free to accept or reject him; and he had as good a right as any man living to go in and win her.

CHAPTER XXV.

"So these lives, that had run thus far in separate channels,
Coming in sight of each other, then swerving and flowing
asunder,

Parted by barriers strong, but drawing nearer and nearer,
Rushed together at last, and one was lost in the other."

LONGFELLOW.

HE had not walked so much since his illness, and he felt as if he had had quite enough of it, when he rang the bell at Sunnywood for the second time that day.

He was shown into the sitting-room—the pleasant little sanctum where he had spent so many happy hours with his pupil, Ninian. No one was there when he went in, and he was not sorry for the few minutes to sit down and collect himself. The room had a packed up desolate sort of air now. He looked out of the window, at the old familiar view: the smooth grass plot with the evergreens and flower-beds, the pretty fountain where the birds always congregated, the trim shrubberies which bounded the paddock beyond the garden, where Lassie, unshod for the winter, was peacefully feeding. There was an autumnal melancholy waning look about it all—the few flowers still lingering on the climbing roses of the balcony, the dahlias and

chrysanthemums in the borders, the yellow leaves gathering in the walks—a look that involuntarily recalled to his mind the words he had so often turned into a prayer :—

“Change and decay in all around I see ;
O Thou Who changest not, abide with me !”

The door gently opened, and with the slow measured step of an invalid, Laura came in. He did not note particularly how or wherein she was changed since their last meeting ; but it seemed to him as though the autumnal decay which lay upon the outer world had passed upon her also, blighting and withering her bright young life. She wore a dress of some soft warm material, which fell to her feet in clinging folds and swept a little on the ground as she seemed to glide into the room with a sad quiet sort of stateliness, very unlike her old brisk way of moving.

She was very calm and self-possessed as she held out her hand to him ; but when she saw the change in him she was a little startled and forgot everything else for the moment, saying quickly, “ Oh, Mr. Hayward, how ill you have been !”

“ Yes, I have had rather a hard fight for life, and it has left its mark upon me. I am quite well now, though. I fear you cannot say the same.”

It struck him then how small and colourless and transparent her face was, and how terribly like his brother's now her great luminous eyes were, as they looked up to him, half shyly, half wistfully.

“ Yes ; I am not quite so flourishing as I used to be once on a time,” she said.

“ But you are going away—going abroad to get set up—put all right again—eh ?”

“ Yes—at least that is the popular belief ; so I have made up my mind to accept it.”

A few minutes' silence followed : then Mr. Hayward said, “ Your kindness in granting me this interview,

Miss Grey, makes me hope that—that you will listen with patience to what I am going to say to you.”

Then he stopped again, and sat looking before him and twirling his hat round and round, and bending it into all sorts of shapes, while she was demurely waiting for what was coming. At last he began :

“ When I first came to—to—to,” he stammered hopelessly at the name, “ to this parish—and first had the pleasure of knowing you, Miss Grey, you made an impression upon me which—which—it is quite impossible for me to describe. And as I saw more of you—I received so much kindness from both you and your mother—and I began to be presumptuous enough to hope that—that—some day perhaps—I might be able to—to—to—I mean, that you might come to care even for such a very unattractive person as I am. And then,” he drew a long breath, “ I was told, on good authority as I supposed, that you were already the choice of another, whose affection you returned.”

“ Oh, who, please ?” said Laura, looking up, quickly.

“ Your cousin—Mr.—Mr.—you must excuse me, Miss Grey—I shall forget my own name next.”

“ Willie Mansell ! how very funny !”

“ I did not think it at all funny, I assure you. I believed it implicitly, and, of course, I acted on it. Perhaps this may explain—I believe I am very awkward—and I adopted a line of conduct which may—which must have seemed very strange after your great kindness to me in many ways.”

Laura did not know what answer to make to this, so she said nothing and he went on.

“ I understand now that I was misinformed. Of course it would be a great satisfaction to me to hear from your own lips that it was so.”

“ About Willie ? Oh, yes. We should never have thought of such a thing, I am sure, either of us. I wonder who can have invented it.” For Mrs. Grey had

carefully kept from her daughter the report which had been got up.

“You seemed such great friends, you know,” he said, apologetically.

“Friends! oh, yes, of course. The best of friends. Willie and I have been friends ever since we were little bits of children. But that is no reason why we should be anything else but cousins, if we lived to be a hundred. Besides,” she added, with a little bit of her old mischievous look, “Willie has got a *young lady*, down in Kent, that they all teaze him about—so you see there would be no use even if I were to think of it.”

“Well, Miss Grey, you have heard my explanation so far. Will you let me finish—what—what—has been in my heart to say to you so long—ever since I knew you were free—will you believe that my feeling towards you is only changed in that it is so much stronger—than I could ever express—and if you think you could ever bring yourself to—to—to like—I mean to overlook anything so—so outwardly unpromising—and to share such a life as mine—I think—I do believe—with GOD’S Blessing—I could make you happy—that is if my heart’s truest affection could do so.”

There he stopped, and sat, hardly daring to look into her face, his very lips white, his heart beating, his hands trembling with such visible nervousness—the effect partly of physical weakness—as was painful to see in one usually so cool and composed.

And Laura, who had the advantage of him, in that she knew her own heart as well as his—Laura was weak too; and instead of making any answer she burst into tears and cried, as usual with her when she cried at all, very impulsively and really.

He was greatly distressed: he could not bear to see any one in tears, and his heart, never sanguine, read her agitation as unfavourable to him. “Pray, pray don’t, Miss Grey,” he entreated. “Don’t cry so—

don't distress yourself, if it cannot be as—as I hoped. Don't mind telling me so; I am quite prepared for anything."

But she could not let him so misunderstand her, and with an effort she lifted up her head and said, "Oh! no—it is—I believe it is—the wonderful joy!"

"My darling, my darling! Is it possible?"

Then he stood up and came nearer to her and took both her hands—poor little thin trembling hands—in his, and so remained standing for some minutes, with bowed head and closed eyes, silently giving thanks for his great new-found happiness.

"It is so good of you," he said at length, "to take me on trust, because I could never express the half of what I feel for you—what you are to me. It may seem like exaggeration, but I believe I may truly say that since I left this, there has not been an hour of conscious thought that you have not been present to my mind. I used to pray so often that you might be blessed in your choice—more need for that than ever now!" he added, half to himself.

"I think—I think it is a case of 'my prayer shall turn—'" said Laura, looking up shyly.

"I hope so," was the grave reply.

"Will you tell me one thing, Mr. Hayward?" she asked presently.

"Anything you like."

"When was it that you heard that story about—me and Willie?"

"I can tell you exactly. It was just after that miserable concert, a year ago."

"I thought after that you were angry with me for something. I never knew what."

"Did I seem so? I am very sorry. You must forgive me, now that you understand. I was very unhappy then."

"So was I," said Laura, under her breath.

"But that is all over and gone. We understand

each other now for ever, come what may." And, as he met again the bright shy upward look of those truthful eyes, his heart could hardly realize its own happiness, in having found one to understand and sympathize with him at last.

They did not say much more to each other. He was always most silent when he felt most; and she was awed and subdued by that quiet devotional manner of his, so much so, that she felt unable to speak—as if it were out of place to do so. At length he said,

"I must go home to my mother now, I think, and leave you to yours."

"Will you not see mamma first?"

"Not now, I think. I'll just go straight home. I'll come again to-morrow and see her and you; at the same time, may I?"

"Oh, yes. Any time you like, Mr. Hayward."

"Call me by my name, Laura, once, before I go."

"Ambrose!" she said, looking up at him.

How he smiled! showing all those long prominent front teeth of his. But it was a very pleasant smile notwithstanding—like a gleam of bright sunshine over a cold grey landscape.

"I always thought it such a pretty name," she added.

"Too pretty for me, and a great deal too saintly!" And as she stood up to say good-bye he drew her close to him, in his strong tender arms, and kissed her gravely, reverently, and tenderly—in a way that to the fatherless girl brought a wonderful sense of protection—a sort of realization of what the father's kiss and blessing might be. The next minute he was gone. And Laura, standing up in the middle of the room, just where he had left her, lost in wondering thought, found herself clasped in her mother's arms and gently drawn down beside her on the sofa. Then she hid her face on her mother's shoulder for some minutes, but neither wept nor spoke.

“Oh, Laura, Laura!”

“Oh, mamma, mamma! isn't it wonderful?”

“Yes; it is a wonderful thing to me somehow.”

“Do you think there was ever any one like him?”

“Not in your eyes, I suppose, my child. But tell me how it is—what did you say?”

“I hardly know, mamma. I don't think I said anything much—only he seemed to understand.”

“What was he to explain to you?”

“Oh! about—about—it is so absurd, mamma. He said that after—when he had begun to think—about me, he was told that Willie Mansell and I were engaged. Did you ever hear such nonsense?”

“Well, to say the truth, I have, dear, but I never told you, for I thought you would only be annoyed. Of course I contradicted it when I had the opportunity. You and Willie had always been playmates, and you were very familiar; the world does not always understand these things, and is quick to interpret them in its own way. I suppose our kind friends, seeing you so much together at times, and so nearly of an age—”

“That's half the absurdity! I should detest to marry a person only a few years older than myself. Now Mr. Hayward's so nice and old.”

“He would be much flattered, no doubt. Do you know his age?”

“No. But I am sure he is forty, at least!”

“He's not thirty-five, Laura. I know that for a fact. His mother told me long ago that he was ordained at twenty-seven; and he had only been in Holy Orders six years when he came.”

“Only thirty-four!” said Laura. “But he *looks* old at any rate.”

“I agree with you there. He looks very old for his age. Don't you think him very much altered?”

“Well—yes. Altered, and yet the same. Of course he looks as if he had been very ill, if you mean that.”

“And not over strong, I am afraid.” Mrs. Grey sighed. She thought of the father and brother, and then of what had been said of her own child—though she had no hereditary right to chest complaint. Altogether, though she did not want to damp Laura’s happiness, she could not feel that the prospect was a very bright one.

“Why do you sigh, mamma? You like him very much, don’t you?”

“Yes, Laura. I always liked him, before you did. I think he is a thoroughly good man, and I am glad my little girl has the discernment to see it. At the same time, Laura, it is the last match I should have foreseen for you; and though I suppose a poor officer’s widow has no right to hold her head too high, still I must say some mothers would look higher for an only daughter.”

“But not *my* mother.”

“No, Laura. I think I should be wrong in doing so under these circumstances. I believe Mr. Hayward to be a most thorough gentleman, both in feeling and education: as a clergyman of course there can be nothing to say against his social rank; even though, as you know, he is a good deal below you by birth. As to his being—shall I say?—not very *taking* to people in general, it is enough I suppose that you find him so; and he has been such a good son and brother in his own family that I feel no fear of his not making a good husband.

“When I was very little older than you, Laura,” she continued, “and papa and I were attached to each other, your dear grandmamma laid before me all the disadvantages, such as, not being well off, marrying into a marching regiment, &c., &c., because, as she said, it was right that I should know all these things beforehand, as I was not likely to think of them for myself, and it was the duty of old people to see that young ones did not undertake the most solemn obligations of

life blindfold. At the same time she told me that she did not expect that these things would have the least effect in altering my mind, 'and if both your hearts are in the right place,' she said, 'I don't wish that they should; and you may marry as soon as it is reasonably prudent to do so.' I never had cause to repent of my decision, Laura. I pray and trust it may be the same with you and Mr. Hayward. I suppose there is no doubt *your* hearts are in the right place."

"The only thing is—whether one is worthy," Laura said. "He told me that since he had been away there had never been an hour that he had not thought of me. It seems so wonderful that one should have the making or marring of any one's happiness, doesn't it? One is almost frightened; and when one thinks how good he is, and a priest, and all that, it seems as if one never could be fit."

"I suppose I needn't warn you against hero-worship now, Laura—as of course when he is your husband you may worship him as much as you like. But priests are but men after all; and you know absolute perfection is not to be met with, even in the best of men. So you must not expect it, even in Mr. Hayward."

"And I hope he will not expect it in me."

"No, I should think he was far too sensible. Another thing you must recollect is, that although you will not have, as many clergymen's wives have, to contend with poverty—as I know Mr. Hayward is well off as far as worldly means go—I am sure he leads a very self-denying life, and I imagine he will expect his wife to do the same, in the long run. And as to his home, are you quite prepared to go and live among the miners, dear?"

"Oh, of course. I should be *very* sorry if he were to give up his mission work."

"Well, you have considered everything I suppose, darling—and I shall try to think of it as your vocation

now. But about our present movements—he knows of course we are going abroad?”

“Oh, yes; but it is so horrid, this going. *Must* we go, now?”

“Of course we must, if it is considered necessary for you. I must have you well and strong before anything else is thought of, Laura. And besides, recollect, we shall not have a house over our heads this day week, if we stay here—so we must go somewhere.”

“Oh, dear, how tiresome it is, and for five months too! I’m sure it’s all humbug this going abroad. I don’t believe I’ve got anything the matter with me!”

It was very evident who had the making or marring of poor little Laura’s happiness!

In the meantime, Ambrose Hayward walked the two miles home, conscious of neither fatigue nor weakness, feeling only that the sun which had shone so faintly and fitfully in his heaven till now was at its meridian height: feeling neither care nor foreboding then, but that come what might, and happen what would, he loved, and was beloved again by, the sweetest, gentlest, most innocent, and most loveable little maiden in the kingdom.

He walked straight into the little sitting-room where his mother was, and before she had time to ask a question, he went up to her, saying quietly, “Well, mother, it’s all right, and I suppose you’ll have your wish after all. You always liked Miss Grey, didn’t you?”

“Oh! Ambrose, my dearest boy—is it really so!”

“It is indeed, mother. Ask that I may be worthy of so much happiness.”

Tears were Mrs. Hayward’s natural resource under joy or sorrow—this time they were tears of very heartfelt joy. “I am sure, if any one ever deserved happiness, you do, and I pray from my heart it may ever

attend you, and the object of your choice. This is not a new idea of yours then, Ambrose?"

"Not newer than a year and a half back. Ever since I knew her really."

"But I thought—we all thought she was engaged to her cousin, at that time."

"I was—well—I had made up my own ideas before I knew that at all."

"And now, dear, do tell me, was that your reason for leaving Axhill?"

"Well—if you must have it—partly; I'd many other reasons besides. I never thought after I had begun to really work the parish that I should get on here; and I never contemplated staying long. Of course, when my hopes were knocked on the head I did not relish the place very greatly, or feel that I was the better for staying. Then came that affair of poor—you know whom I mean, that dear fellow the churchwarden—and the girl. I can't tell you what a trouble that was to me. I always felt as if I had somehow neglected my duty by her. I don't think now I could have done more, or differently—Singleton says not—but it haunted me then. And I got into a sort of horrible nervous dread of that other business—*her* marriage—coming on, and that I should have to officiate. I used to study the *Gazette*, in perfect fear of seeing the fellow's name promoted. That, and reproaching myself about poor Bessie, so took hold of me that I believe I was precious near going out of my mind. I used to think sometimes that the same dreadful visitation would come upon me—as a punishment for my neglect of duty, through fear of facing that man's—her father's—taunts and the vile things he used to say of me.

"Then, when that advertisement appeared, it seemed like a call from heaven. If I was fit for anything at all, it was for work of that sort, and it seemed a sign that I was not cast off altogether—that there was still some work I might try to do."

“And then,” said his mother, who was listening with great emotion to his recital, “when you got to your new parish you were happy, were you not?”

“I recollect very little about that time.”

“You used to send me such nice letters.”

“Very nice letters I expect they were. I must have been half stupified, between neuralgia and chlorodyne!”

“You never said you were suffering!”

“No—where would have been the use? But that is all over now, and I shouldn’t have spoken of it at all, only you asked me. Of course, when I found the obstacle was removed, I thought—I thought I might as well try my chance once more; and the result has been more than I dared to hope at first.”

“Well, dear, I am most thankful. I can hardly realize it yet; it seems so wonderful—dear little Miss Grey!”

“Wonderful! what, that she should have anything to say to such an ugly mug?”

“No, no, no,” said Mrs. Hayward, laughing in spite of herself.

“Well, it *is* wonderful certainly, when you think of it—and she such a pretty creature—I say, mother, did you ever see a likeness in her?”

“No, dear; not that I recollect.”

“It’s not the face altogether, but her eyes; if you observe, they’re just as like Alf’s eyes, as one pair of eyes can be like another.”

Mrs. Hayward shook her head. “I should not wish them to be too like,” she said. “How is she—how do you think her looking?”

“I think she is much altered,” he said quietly, not at all as if he wished to shut his eyes to the fact. “Her mother told me plainly that they think one of her lungs affected; and she looks thin and weak. But we’ll get her strong and well again, please God, if love and care can do it. She is very young, and she hasn’t *that* ingrain, as we have.”

“ Well, dear, I trust indeed from my heart that she will recover her health—and you, too, you want a little setting up most terribly—only you never will think of yourself. I hope she will find out for herself what a treasure she has in you, and prize it accordingly.”

“ A rough diamond, eh? Well, she’ll have to do the cutting.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ There is none like her, none.
 And never yet so warmly ran my blood
 And sweetly, on and on
 Calming itself to the long wish’d for end,
 Full to the banks, close on the promised good.”
 TENNYSON.

“ MY dearest Laura,—This is the jolliest, stunningest tip-toppest news I’ve heard this many a day, and I don’t know really what I ought to say to you, besides which I have only about three-and-a-quarter minutes to say it all in, but I couldn’t wait, so you mustn’t mind if I say it very badly. I am sure you know that I wish you every sort of happiness and all that, and you may tell a certain old party who shall be unnamed of me, that he’s a brick and you’re another, or *vice versa* if that is more correct. I suppose I must mind my ps and qs now, and not remind you of the old nonsense, but I should *really* like you to say to him somehow how jolly glad I am to think I shall have him for a brother. Write soon and tell me everything—there’s the bell.

“ Your affectionate brother,
 “ N. G.”

This was the first letter of congratulation which Laura received, and one which she read and re-read with much satisfaction.

Poor Ninian was evidently in great delight and excitement over the announcement. Mrs. Grey, having quite decided that the engagement might and ought to stand, had made it known at once to her nearest relations. She being Laura's sole guardian, there was no one else's consent to be asked.

She also, with the concurrence of both parties, announced it to her friends and acquaintances at Axhill. For what, she argued, was the use of trying to keep it a secret when Mr. Hayward was morn, noon, and night at Sunnywood? It was much better to publish the truth at once, and people would sooner get tired of talking about it.

Of course people did talk. And of course also the greatest talkers were the Harts. Very severe were their questionings and criticisms on the prudence and propriety of the match. "So foolish of Mrs. Grey to allow it to go on," Annette grumbled, "when she might know that her daughter was never likely to be strong, and dear Mr. Hayward could not possibly have more than half a lung, &c., &c., &c." Matilda took her standpoint from another side, saying it was very wrong of Mr. Hayward to think of burdening himself with a sickly wife, to nurse and drag about, instead of being a comfort and help to him. She would have thought him wiser!

And in the meantime, the two lovers enjoyed themselves in happy unconsciousness of all these doleful prophecies. Mrs. Grey, after the affair was all arranged, felt at first a little disposed to be anxious whether, after all, this grave, reserved, silent priest, old even for his years, which were nearly twice her daughter's, and wrapped up in the work of his calling, was the man of all others likely to promote the happiness for life of her little imperious, impulsive, warm-hearted Laura. But

as she saw them together, and saw how completely one supplied what was wanting to the other—the equal balance of grave and gay, she doubted no longer. And Laura found that, in spite of his mature years and taciturn disposition, Mr. Hayward was as devoted and constant in his attendance upon her as the most infatuated young lover could have been.

She brightened up wonderfully, and seemed suddenly to have regained her old spirits and life. And though health and strength could not actually return at once in exact proportion to her spirits, there could be no doubt that she did improve marvellously in the few days.

She brightened up Mr. Hayward, too, in a way that surprised even herself. Of course, he could not change his nature, and never had very much to say for himself in the presence of a third person ; but alone with her he became quite communicative and confidential, and told her by degrees the whole history of his life, its failures and successes, joys and sorrows, till she felt as if she had somehow gained a lifetime of experience. It was as if he had just discovered the happiness of giving instead of only receiving confidence, and was determined to enjoy it to the utmost.

He had terrible fits of reaction and depression, poor fellow, when he got away by himself. He could not help feeling a kind of haunting fear lest what had been his fate through life should follow him still—namely, to lose what he most treasured just when he had discovered its full worth.

There was his father—the one member of his family who had loved him from first to last with a steady equal impartial affection ; who had never snubbed him for his ugliness and awkwardness, and could make allowance for as well as correct his faults. Just at his opening manhood, when his father had come to lean on him and trust in him and confide in him, he was taken away. Then his only brother : for how many

years of their lives had there been little sympathy between them, the younger looking on the elder as one set in unwelcome authority over him, to chastise his faults and curtail his pleasures! And when all that was past, and they had become brothers in heart and sympathy as in name—companions and friends—the brother also was taken. Then, too, his one, special Axhill friend had been removed, when he seemed to value him most. And now, in the case of the one woman whom he had ever loved, would ever love, for with him to love once was to love irrevocably—might it not be that the same dread destroyer had laid his mark on her also, and that he had only found his love returned to face the full bitterness of losing her? Many an hour of night did he spend in earnest heart-felt prayers for resignation, and in agonized supplication that, if it might be, this bitterest trial might be spared him.

Of course Laura knew nothing of all this. She always saw him with the same quiet, calm demeanour, the same gently grave expression; except when she contrived to make him laugh at some nonsense peculiarly her own.

They spent a few blissful days together, in long talks in the sitting-room, and, when it was fine, wandering in the warmest parts of the garden and shrubberies—only tempered by the thought that they must of necessity be but so few, and that a long parting was to follow. For the doctors told Mrs. Grey that though there might be slight sudden improvements, they could not be relied on as lasting; and that a complete change to a foreign climate, taken at once and in time, was far more likely to effect a permanent cure than any half measures. So, with the full concurrence of Mr. Hayward, Mrs. Grey decided on carrying out her original intention of starting at once for Cannes.

He was to go with them as far as Folkestone, to see them off. Being idle just now, it was as good a way of spending his time as any other; and he was able to

make himself very useful to Mrs. Grey, whose heart rather sank at the prospect of travelling alone with her child. She began to experience a little of that feeling of quiet, reliable *stay*, in his presence, which his own mother knew so well.

He was to return to Calton after their departure, and to take her with him. The parsonage was finished now: only some furnishing remained to be done, in which he wanted his mother's help, and she was delighted at the idea of helping him to prepare the house for his bride. She was resolved never to allow him to go away alone again; but she also expressed her firm determination, which nothing he could say would induce her to alter, that when he was once married she would settle down close to Mr. Wylde and her daughter, and not move again. She had formed a great attachment to S. Mary's; and then there was always the tie of that little grave at Axhill; and she had not certainly fallen in love with what she had seen of the Black Country. So he let her alone at last, feeling that her own decision was best.

The day of parting for the lovers came only too soon. Poor little Laura kept up very bravely, considering all things. But she had a good deal of quiet fortitude; and it helped her besides to know that Ambrose did not like people to cry and make a fuss. They had had two or three pleasant days in London, during which he had taken them to his old church, and they had made acquaintance with Mr. Singleton. So at length they bid farewell for the five months' separation: the travellers to start on their health-seeking journey; and Ambrose Hayward to go back and work amongst his miners, with new heart, new hopes, and new life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“Nor deem me all to blame, if I
Conjecture of a stiller guest
Perchance, perchance among the rest,
And, though in silence, wishing joy.”

TENNYSON.

SPRING has come again, bringing back its birds and green leaves and flowers ; bringing back its sunny days and warm winds ; bringing back Easter joys and hopes and memories, “having the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

Sunnywood garden was in its springtide beauty on the calm April afternoon when Laura Grey walked alone down one of its sunniest, most sheltered paths, thinking that it was the last time that she would call her old home, “home” in the old sense ; and, in spite of her happiness, with something of that sad mixed feeling with which we do anything for the last time. A springtide look rested on her fair face and light figure, for the old life had come back to her since she had last parted from her home. Certainly the “winter abroad” had been a success as far as her perfect recovery was concerned ; though her mother and she herself both felt that other circumstances had conduced to it, wanting which neither the avoidance of an English winter nor the salubrious air of Cannes would have brought back the colour to her cheeks or the light to her eyes. She had come out to her old haunts for a few moments’ quiet, for the house was full of wedding guests. The most important of these was her grandfather on the father’s side—both Mrs. Grey’s parents were dead. Old Mr. Grey was, as we have said, rather an invalid, and seldom left his home. On this occasion however he had so far consented to break through

his usual habits as to come to Axhill to "give away" his only son's only daughter. He was a kind old man, and a staunch Churchman, and therefore not disposed to quarrel with Laura's choice.

The Mansells were also there in great force, Ella and Mina of course as bridesmaids: also a brother of Mrs. Grey's with one daughter; and last, not least, Mr. Singleton, who had managed to leave his work for one day at the urgent request of both parties, to tie the knot for them. He was accompanied by his daughter, a nice girl of fifteen, who was also a bridesmaid; so the party at Sunnywood was unusually large.

Laura stopped at a little bed of early flowers, to gather a few blossoms of white double primroses that she wanted, when a step on the gravel made her look round; and she confronted the familiar black figure with black beard and eyebrows under the broad-brimmed hat, that was the central figure of her thoughts now and always.

He had improved as well as Laura in the past five months. Happiness in anticipation had agreed with him also, and he was very different from the scarecrow she had parted with on going abroad. He had been working hard and faring hard all the winter; working especially hard during the past weeks of Lent and Eastertide, but had stood it well, and had regained his strength wonderfully. His hair had come back, not so very grey after all, and Laura was quite of the opinion expressed long ago by Ninian, that her bridegroom was "rather a handsome fellow."

"I was told I should find you here," he said, as he joined her.

"Am I not to have a moment's peace?" she answered, laughing mischievously up into the grave face. "I come out here to get away from the turmoil in the house for half an hour, to find myself pursued by fate in the shape of—"

"An old bear. What are those flowers for?"

"I'll show you presently," said Laura, with a sudden sobering of voice and manner; "I only want two or three more—and I am glad you came out here, because I was just wishing for you. Come this way."

She put her hand through his arm and led him into a little house used for keeping tools and seeds, where she showed him a small shallow flat tin cross, made for holding water, and filled entirely with white double primroses and narcissus, one pure white camellia forming the centre.

"What is that, Laura?"

"I got it for your little grave, if you like. I thought I should like it put there to-night, if you don't mind."

"How kind of you, my child!"

"I am very glad you like it. It is finished now," as she put in one or two additional flowers. "Would you take it over some time?"

"Of course. I say, would you mind coming too?"

"I should like very much. I'll just run in and tell mamma, in case she should miss me, and get a basket." And she was off in a moment.

Mrs. Grey and her sister were in the sitting-room when she went up to her mother and said quietly, "Ambrose wants me to go with him as far as the church. May I?"

"*May you*, child? You won't have to ask my leave much longer. Don't tire yourself, that's all."

And away she went to join him, and they set off; he carrying the precious cross at the bottom of a garden basket.

"It is so kind of you to think about him," he said as they went along.

"He will be *my* brother to-morrow," she said shyly.

"I am so glad to hear you speak in that way. I think there is no greater mistake we make than to speak of our dead as if they were past, perished altc

gether, instead of only 'gone into another room,' as Keble says."

"I should think so—but you know, I am afraid I can't enter into these things as I ought, because I never knew what it was to lose any one *very* near to me—whose life was bound up in mine, as it were. I don't remember my father, of course."

"May you long be spared the knowledge, darling. And when it comes, as it must sooner or later to all—all but those who die very young—may it only bring with it the fuller knowledge of that Love which (in the words of a very favourite prayer of mine) 'is effectual to supply the place of every gift which His Wisdom removes.'"

"It must be very difficult to feel it. You see I have so few *very* near ones—only mamma, and dear old Nin, and you. And I think sometimes it would be quite impossible to live, if—"

"If what, Laura?"

"If any of one's *very* dearest were taken."

"You mustn't think that—it is not right."

"It is a sort of feeling I have had ever since I was very little. It used to make me so miserable to think of the possibility of mamma's dying. And, do you know, I am quite sure that if you hadn't got well that time last year, I should have died too—I should have gone into a real consumption, I know."

He did not speak immediately: when he did it was to say, "I say, Laura, I can't help wondering sometimes—of course I know really these things are all ordered for us—but I do wonder sometimes how you came to love me. Most people I have met, who have not known me very well, and some who do besides, don't give me credit for having any heart at all."

Laura's only answer to this was a little silent pressure of her hand upon his arm, as they stopped at the churchyard gate.

They were not long in reaching the spot, and Am-

brose laid down the basket on the grass, saying, "Now, Laura, this is your work."

She knelt down and placed the cross tenderly in its appointed place, he standing by silently watching her. He had taken off his hat for a few moments—it might have been a chance action, but Laura guessed otherwise, and remained silent until he spoke.

"Just such a bright April day as this it was that we laid him down," he said, "ten years ago."

"It must be very sad for you," she answered, as she stood up again. "I should like—I hope you won't mind my saying it—I know it can't be the same at all—but I want to ask you to let Ninian be to you, a little—just a little what *he* would have been."

"He has been that already. I assure you his kindness has been a great comfort to me—and at a time when I needed it. And I can't tell you how I enjoyed the few days he spent with me last Christmas; he made me feel really that I had a brother."

"He is a very dear old fellow, though I say it," said Laura. "Now, I think the flowers are all right. I hope it won't rain before to-morrow."

"Would you mind coming round this way? There is one other I should like to have a look at—one whose prayers I like to hope may be with us to-morrow, as his heart would assuredly have been, if he had been here."

He stopped opposite another neat white cross—Alfred Hayward's was no longer the solitary instance of a cross in Axhill churchyard—a new-looking stone with freshly cut letters, bearing the record of Edward Mortlock's early death.

"Poor Mr. Mortlock," said Laura; "you rather liked him, didn't you?"

"Liked him! he was something like a friend—when I had few enough friends. That fellow would have gone through fire and water for me, I believe. I can't say how much I felt his loss personally."

“It was very sad. I didn’t know though that he was such a great friend of yours.”

“Yes, poor fellow; I wish there were more of his sort. It is a rare thing, except in towns, and about a church like my old S. John’s, to find a young man in business really interesting himself in Church matters. We should have a good many more lay workers if such men would but consider the immense influence they possess for good if they only choose to exert it. And that without overstepping their rightful province, or interfering with their success in their line of business, be it what it may. Mortlock was a most prosperous man: if he had been spared he would no doubt have been a very useful member of society. But we can’t judge of what is best; it is enough for us to know that the Master saw that his work was done.”

“Who chose that verse?” asked Laura, pointing to the inscription at the foot of the cross.

“LORD JESUS, King of Paradise,
O keep us in Thy love,
And guide us to that happy land
Of perfect rest above.”

“Well, it was partly his friends’ doing, partly mine. They wished a verse of some kind, and when they heard about his asking for that hymn, they chose these lines. It was his favourite hymn; the one he asked for last, when he was in such terrible agony that it seemed he could scarcely listen to anything.”

“Poor fellow. How very touching.”

“Yes. It was the most awful death, as far as mere bodily suffering was concerned, that I ever saw—but I did not mean to speak to you of that,” he said quickly, for he saw her change colour. “I thought then, as I have often thought since—and I hope it is quite permissible, as it is most comforting, to think so—that these terrible cases which are so utterly beyond human skill to alleviate, may be allowed as a special

mark of love; a special nearness to and share in the Cross."

Laura's voice trembled a little as she said: "Yes indeed, that is a wonderfully comforting way of looking at it!"

"There was another thing that struck me very much at the time—I don't sadden you too much, do I?" he asked, and meeting her sweet calm smile he went on: "The poor girl, Bessie Bayliss, the afternoon she died, when she was quite unconscious, as far as we knew, of her earthly surroundings—said that she saw him, Edward, with his white surplice on, looking, she said, just as he used to do in church, but so beautiful—so happy! Of course we knew she was delirious—she had been going on talking and singing all day; but I never can bring myself to think that was *all* delirium. He was so attached to her—so anxious about her, to the last; I *do* believe he was in some way allowed to help her in her last trial. At any rate, the remembrance of her words is very comforting to me, sometimes—after what I had seen."

"Where is she buried? I never knew," asked Laura, with her eyes full of tears.

"Over there. That flat slab with the railing. I would have put them nearer together, but it does not matter. They are together now, I humbly believe, where nothing can come between them again."

"How terrible it must have been for her after he died!"

"Yes; she felt it very greatly, but that was not altogether the worst. She was in distress of mind—religious perplexity—and had no help or guidance, thanks to her father's blind prejudice."

"I remember hearing he wouldn't let you see her."

"No. I never was more unhappy about anything in all my experience hitherto, since I was ordained. I believe I was wrong in attaching so much importance to any influence I might have had upon her. The

Almighty works in His Own way. He does not need His weak instruments—and I have no doubt whatever that she has been led, though by a sorrowful road, to His full light. But from what I heard from her dying lips, and what her mother told me, she must have suffered terrible mental distress.”

“Poor thing. It seems very cruel.”

“Yes; mental distress is very bad to bear—the worst suffering of all. None but those who have felt it themselves can have any conception of what it is.”

He spoke low and earnestly, and Laura looked up at him in wondering awe, too deep for words.

“I am not, I do not think I ever should be,” he continued, “an advocate for confession, under all circumstances—systematic, enforced confession, as some would wish to introduce it. But this I do affirm as my most earnest conviction, from my own experience; that whoever, through prejudice or obstinacy, would deny to another who is in doubt or fear or distress of mind, the opportunity of unburdening his heart to one authorized to hear him; of seeking counsel, and, if he desires it, absolution, in the way which our Prayer Book directs—incur as grave a responsibility of imperilling a fellow-creature’s soul, as any one can.”

He paused, and neither spoke for a few minutes: then Laura said, “Old Mr. Bayliss is very much altered I believe, in the last year.”

“Yes; I thought him so when I called there. He is much quieter than he used to be, and seems failing. I fancy he and Blake don’t quarrel now.”

“I don’t know. I believe Mr. Blake has found him rather troublesome. He gave in to him in one or two things directly he came, very foolishly—things that no one else objected to; and since that he finds it difficult to do anything without his consent. Ah! there is dear old Mr. Smedley,” she added, as they passed another raised slab railed in.

“Yes. Were you very fond of Smedley?”

"Oh, yes, very," Laura answered unhesitatingly. "He used to be *so* kind to me when I was little."

"He was a very kind-hearted man, but incorrigibly lazy—terribly so!"

"Did you know much of him?"

"Not very much. He visited my brother at last, and gave us our last Communion together: so I feel gratefully towards him."

"Why didn't you"—Laura was beginning, and corrected herself. "Of course, I forgot you weren't ordained then! I am glad you like dear Mr. Smedley for something. I don't like to hear him found fault with even now. Do you know, Ambrose, when you first came I couldn't bear you—just because you came in his place—and wanted to change things!"

"Couldn't bear me, eh? You took a wonderfully pleasant way of showing it, then!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the way in which you helped me. If what you say was the case, it was very good of you to go along with me as you did, in all the changes I had to make, just for the sake of principle."

"Ah, well, you see, I couldn't prevent it. It was mamma who really helped you."

"Was it? I remember your telling me once you detested change. But seriously, you can't have liked the church as it was before even Smedley improved it?"

"Seriously, I can," said Laura smiling. "There were things that I remembered all my life, since I first went to church, that I felt really quite sorry to part with, although I know they were not ornamental. There was a tablet on the wall—I dare say you know it, it is stowed away somewhere in the tower now—to some man who had been all through the old Indian wars, and it gave quite a long story of how he was thrown 'into the terrible dungeons of Hyder Ali.' I used to read that through regularly every Sunday morning, while

the bells were ringing before service. And there was, oh, such a splendid hatchment just above our pew, with all sorts of things on it, that I don't know the meaning of to this day."

"'Resurgam,' of course," he put in.

"Yes, that was on it; but what made most impression on me was, in the lowest corner, just where I could see it best, a flying skull—a death's head with wings. That used regularly to fascinate me. Ninian used to laugh about it, but I never could—it was much too awful to me. I never told him I was frightened, though, because I knew it would make him worse. Now, you may laugh if you like; I assure you it was like losing two personal friends, when those things disappeared."

He looked a good deal amused at that.

"You must remember, they were my earliest associations with going to church."

"Yes, I know. But really it is matter of thankfulness, among the minor results of the revival of the last twenty years, that not many children now-a-days will associate their first recollections of going to church with flying skulls!"

Laura laughed. "But surely you remember things as bad?"

"Oh! yes. I ought certainly, as I am so much older than you. But I was not a very big boy when my father went to Mr. Singleton, so perhaps I was exceptionally fortunate."

"Which is not to say you have any business to laugh at my poor little recollections!"

He made no answer immediately. After a minute or two he said, bluntly: "You told me just now you couldn't bear me when I first came. May I know what led you to change your opinion?"

She looked up at him with her bright open expression, and answered at once. "I think I began first to like you better when you were so kind to poor Lucy.

And then, when I knew about your brother, I was so sorry for you!"

"Was that it?" he said, and added, partly to himself, "Then I have to thank him, in some sort, for *this* also!"

She hardly understood the allusion.

"You were sorry for me, were you?" he went on, drawing her hand suddenly through his arm with an action that was at once abrupt and tender. "You who had no sorrows of your own."

"Yes, I was," she answered. "You see I could understand that a little, because I knew so well what an only brother is. I could fancy what it must be to lose one. There are some lines I have read that I think so beautiful—they so exactly express the kind of irreparable feeling of such a loss:—

"For all things else and all men may renew,
Yea, son for son the gods may give and take,
But never a brother or sister any more."

"Yes, that's very true."

"And I used to fancy somehow—having been just Nin's age—that your brother must have been something like him. And there is something so sad, so unnatural, if one may say so," her eyes were full of tears now, "in the thought of a boy of that age dying. They are such bright happy careless creatures! I haven't said anything wrong, have I?" she added, as he did not immediately answer.

"Wrong! no. You might have said so indeed, if you had known him."

"He *must* have been just like Nin!"

"Just like Nin, eh? I think Nin's sister is very like him."

"I!" said Laura, in innocent wonder. "How can that possibly be?"

"I can't tell you how it can possibly be, but I know

I thought so, the first time I saw you. Some sort of a look about your eyes."

"Oh! now I perceive why—what made you like me!"

"Very absurd, isn't it? But I believe the most important events of our life do sometimes turn on quite as trifling circumstances."

Laura walked on for a few minutes, then broke into a merry little laugh. "I beg your pardon for being so rude, but it does seem to me the very funniest idea I ever heard of—that one should fall in love with a girl for being like a boy."

"Oh, yes, if you put it so. But you must remember the chance likeness in itself would have been nothing—nothing to me, at least—unless I had seen—"

"Unless you had seen what?"

"Ah, you want to get a little flattery, don't you? But I am a bad hand at flattery—don't you know that?"

"In words but not in deeds," said Laura. "Let us go," she added quickly. "There are Mrs. Blake and Matilda Hart coming in at the parsonage gate with flowers."

"By the bye," she continued as they turned homewards, "do you know Matilda is engaged to be married?"

"No; is she? who's the happy man?"

"A farmer—a stranger, who has just taken Upleigh. They make him out to be quite a *gentleman* farmer, but I don't think Annette likes it, though she is to live with them. I asked Matilda to be my bridesmaid, for old acquaintance' sake, and she looked very mysterious, and said she really couldn't, she was never going to be bridesmaid again—and then it all came out, so I fancy it's only just made up."

It was true. That extraordinary woman had in an incredibly short time wooed and won—ill-natured people said, whether he would or no—the affections

of a prosperous young farmer lately come to the parish, with a good deal of capital and very little brains, who was soft enough to fancy he was contracting a grand alliance in marrying a "born lady" some fifteen years his senior. She was consequently in a state of triumphant spirits and universal charity, which enabled her indignantly to oppose Annette's cheerful predictions as to the likelihood of Mr. Hayward and his bride being each in a galloping consumption—a sort of neck and neck race, in short—before the year was out.

"I shall wish you good night here," said Ambrose, as they stopped at a gate opening into the shrubbery—a private entrance to the grounds of Sunnywood.

"Aren't you going to dine with us?"

"No," he answered with rather a deprecating smile. "You've got such a lot of people, you see; and I mustn't leave my mother alone to-night."

"Poor Mrs. Hayward! how will she get on without you?"

"I expect she'll get on remarkably well without me," he answered quaintly. "She's got regularly domesticated now at S. Mary's—got her own little corner there where she can always go, which just suits her; and there are a good many people that she likes. Besides, she's wrapped up heart and soul in that boy of Emily's: he's quite put his old uncle's nose out of joint. So I feel very comfortable about her. I know she'll never be lonely, and she knows she can come to us whenever she chooses."

So they parted, for the last time as two.

Laura walked home lightly through the shrubbery path, feeling as if his low-spoken "God bless you and keep you" went with her, bringing an abiding sense of wonderful peace and joy. And he made his way back to the little cottage, at the very outskirts of the town, yet within the shadow of S. Mary's white spire, where his mother was settled down; where she hoped to end her days in tranquil contentment.

She was alone when he returned. Those of his own family who had come down for his wedding—his eldest sister, her husband, and little Fanny—were staying with the Wylde; so the mother and son were to spend their last evening together by themselves.

He told her about Laura's cross, which made her weep with gratification. "So kind, so thoughtful," she repeated. "But I shall thank her to-morrow. I have indeed very much to be thankful for," she continued, wiping her eyes, "though I shall feel the want of you, dear, as I never can express; and I can scarcely realize even now that this is our last evening."

"Well, mother, you know it's you leaving me, not I leaving you. I've told you over and over you might stay with us."

"Yes, dear, I know I might and I don't think I should quarrel with your wife. But I had quite made up my mind from the first, that I wouldn't stay with you once you were married. I think young married people are best left to themselves, in their own home. But I will come and see you whenever you ask me; and for the rest, I couldn't be better than here, next to London—and now that I have once left dear old London, I don't think I shall ever go back to it again. It is such a blessing dear Charlie not being a 'rolling stone'—he is so attached to S. Mary's."

"As much as I mean to be to my S. Michael's—though I appreciate the force of the allusion to 'rolling stones.' I've rolled into my place at last, I trust."

"I hope it will suit your dear Laura."

"Suit her? of course it will! She's longing to get down amongst the coals."

"Well, I do feel most happy to think you have found one so likeminded with yourself. It is such a comfort to think you won't be lonely now—after I am gone. I assure you that used often to give me many an anxious thought."

"Did it, mother? Well, though at one time I

never expected anything else, I can't say I am in love with loneliness."

"And yet—how mistaken people are! One day I made some remark on the subject to Charlie, when you first went to Calton, and he said, 'Oh, but Mrs. Hayward, he's just as happy or happier alone.'"

"Charlie said so, did he? It's precious odd certainly, when you come to think of it. Why, because a man may be ugly, and hasn't the 'gift of the gab,' like Wylde himself, he should be supposed to enjoy banishment, I don't see at all."

"Well, you see, opinions differ. As far as ugliness goes, my dear, now that your hair has come on so nicely, and you've got a little flesh on your bones, (though not too much by any means,) and your nice beard, I don't see that you've anything to complain of. I'm sure there are plenty uglier than you that pass themselves off for handsome. You've got a good deal of your dear father's look about you now, Ambrose; and you know what a good-looking man he was."

"What, the ugly duckling has turned into a swan, has he?" said Ambrose, looking down at her with a queer droll expression in the corner of his eye; "and the best part of it all is, that the old mother thinks I'm so jolly soft as to believe it."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"They leave the porch, they pass the grave
That has to-day its sunny side."

TENNYSON.

A BRIGHT breezy April morning, with a few flying clouds, a few occasional falling April tears, ushered in Laura's wedding-day. Very early Laura stood at her window, looking out at the scene which

had been familiar to her from childhood—the garden, the fountain, the field, the shrubberies, with the fleeting lights and shades touching the tender green of the spring foliage—looking at the home she loved so much, and was going to leave.

It was all so dear to her, so full of associations; dear especially in springtime, when her favourite wild flowers were coming out in all the old places, while she knew so well just where to find them. And her little room too, not splendid or luxurious, but homely, and cosy, and comfortable, full of the tokens of her mother's love and thoughtfulness for her only daughter. She had been so happy here, at Sunnywood, in the old days; she, and her mother, and her "dear old Nin," so innocently, carelessly, brightly happy, until—ah, yes, until! And Laura knew very well in her inmost heart that, if she could by a word alter what had taken place, and go back to the old life, the old life would not be happy in the old way again.

With regard to the life in store for her, Laura had no misgivings. She knew perfectly well that she had cast in her lot with a man whose life was not one of ease and self-pleasing, but of earnest self-denying hard work in the most exacting and engrossing, if rightly pursued, of all earthly callings. His time and means would be spent, not for her amusement or gratification, but for the welfare, bodily and spiritual, of the poor and ignorant and, in many cases, half-heathen people for whom he laboured. He would have few recreations, and fewer holidays: their life would be an unvaried round of Church work and parish work, preaching, teaching, and visiting from year's end to year's end. And she was quite content that it should be so. A petted, though not a spoilt child, tenderly watched and guarded hitherto from all that was painful or shocking, she must now be ready to face what her husband faced, to visit painful scenes, to listen to tales of want, and woe, and sin. She knew it all, and her

heart went forward to meet it in childlike faith that her strength would be as her day; and that nothing could be very hard for her to give up, to bear, or to do, while she had such a help and such an example beside her as the man whom with all the pure affection of her fresh happy young heart she loved.

And he for whom she felt all this—whom she had known only for two short years—he was not attractive she knew, save with the attractiveness of goodness, pure and simple: he was not brilliant, or clever, or learned beyond what was absolutely necessary for the office he held: he was not even a lively companion. Of humbler birth than her own—a poor organist's son, a poor city clerk, who but for the accident of his ordination would never have crossed her path: with no polish, no graciousness about him even now, only the true refinement of heart and soul that religion gives, and the true dignity which attaches to the humblest who, realizing it fully and exercising it conscientiously, bears the priestly authority.

Such was the man to whom Laura's young affection was given. And she turned away from the window, to kneel down beside the little table where for many years past she had knelt to say her prayers: and prayed long and earnestly that she might be enabled faithfully to fulfil the duties of the new state of life on which she was about to enter; in her loving humility that she might be worthy of the love of so good a man.

The wedding was to take place at a somewhat early hour, as the bride and bridegroom had a long day's journey before them. They were going to London however, and no further. A week was all that Ambrose could allow himself away from his parish now, as he wished to be back before Rogation Sunday. It was too early in the season for touring in England, and Laura said that she had had travelling enough to last her for a long time to come. So they settled to spend their short honeymoon in a little lodging not far from

S. John's, and enjoy themselves quietly by going to see such exhibitions as were open, and hearing a few good concerts, with perhaps a run down to the Crystal Palace to end off with.

The important matter of the wedding toilette—important even to those who think least of their personal appearance—was completed at length, and Mrs. Grey was putting the last finishing touches when a light but manly tread sounded outside the door, followed by two or three raps. "It's the boy," said Laura, "let him come in."

The door opened, and Ninian stood before her. He had grown very much in the last half-year, and looked a brother to be proud of, with his bright fresh handsome face and strong active figure, in the entirely new suit of clothes, a step in advance towards manliness, which was put on for the first time that day.

"Well, Laura, I came to get a proper good-bye of you all to myself, but you look only fit to be put under a glass case in a hair-dresser's window, and I am afraid to come near you. Upon my word you look uncommonly well, don't she, mother?" he added, surveying her critically.

"I think I may return the compliment," she said. "You look twice as big in that jacket."

Ninian made an absurd bow, and began to spout from his favourite ballads:

" 'Here's love of Bran New Clothes—
Embezzling—Arson—Deism,
A taste for—' "

"Don't, Nin," said Laura, imploringly; "I won't answer for the consequences if you quote 'Bab.'"

"I say, Laura, do you remember Bogey? I think it's a case of 'Bogey's a lucky dog,' eh? a precious lucky dog!"

"I suppose you must be allowed to be as impudent as you choose, for once," said Laura; and then she

suddenly flung her arms round his neck, to the utter disregard of her lace cuffs and his collar. "Oh, Nin, darling, what ever will you do without me?"

She was fairly upset now, and gave way to two or three hearty, though almost tearless sobs. It was in some sense the hardest parting of all. For nothing, she felt, could come between her and her mother's love: they would be the same to each other, even though often apart. But the old childish companionship of brother and sister—that delightful feeling of half dependence on, half protection of, each other—all that Ninian graphically called "the old nonsense," that must be at an end for ever. Yet even now her sorrow was more for him than for herself, as she thought of him wandering about their old haunts solitary and sisterless. And when she let him go half choked, the tears in his bright eyes showed that he too realized and felt the parting.

"It won't do to think of home without you," he said, after he had bravely forced back the tears. "But I shall come and stay with you very often, I promise you. And you don't know what a jolly place your new home is, though *I* do, and I've always wanted to tell you, Laura, and never got an opportunity, that I never was happier in my life than that little bit of time I spent there—he was so *awfully* nice and good to me! and not all as if it was for *your* sake, don't you know? but just as if he really cared for a fellow! He told me once that it made him feel young again, having me to go about with—and reminded him of that poor little chap of a brother that died."

"Thank you for telling me, darling," Laura whispered, and then they went down stairs.

The bridesmaids were five in number: Laura's three cousins, Mary Singleton, and little Fanny Miller, of course, to whom the delight of acting for a second time as a bridesmaid quite made up for the fact that "Uncle Am's" views regarding matrimony had undergone a

complete change. Being a year and a half older than on the former occasion, it was to be supposed that she would conduct herself with greater discretion.

They were a nice, pretty-looking group of bridesmaids, as they made up the procession, but of course all eyes were turned towards the bride herself, as she entered, led by her grandfather. Ninian was not wrong in saying that she looked uncommonly well, for the dress, usually a trying one, suited her to perfection; and her face, always pleasant in its subdued brightness of colouring and expression, looked doubly sweet softened under the bridal veil. As she walked up the church a sudden sense of having been in the same circumstances before—one of those curious unaccountable sensations of the mind which almost every one knows—came over her, accounted for now, however, by a momentary vivid recollection of that strange dream she had dreamt after Emily Hayward's wedding.

She had not to wait for her bridegroom now. He was kneeling already in his place, so absorbed that he never moved or looked round when she knelt down close beside him, in the sheltering presence that was to be the stay and comfort of her life henceforward.

The chancel seemed filled to overflowing with surplices when they stood up together. The choir of S. Mary's had indeed turned out with a will, "every man and boy of them," and such of the Axhill choir as still held together were not behindhand. It was worth something to hear the united chorus sing, "The voice that breathed o'er Eden"—Mr. Freer accompanying beautifully on the old organ.

Mr. Blake and Mr. Wylde were both in the stalls, but Mr. Singleton was to perform the whole of the marriage rite. And now he stands before the couple: the kind gentle face, with its almost angelic expression of serenity, which one of them has known and loved from childhood, which the other has already learned to look on as the face of a friend. Not an incongruous

couple, he thought, as he looked from the pure sweet countenance of the young bride, on whom so large a share of earthly beauty had been bestowed, to that other face, still young, though bearing the impress of past suffering both mental and bodily—but on which the meek devout expression would have atoned for far greater disadvantages of feature and colouring. Quietly and solemnly the short service went on; till Ambrose and Laura had taken each other for better for worse, for richer for poorer—and she had heard the earnest steady tones already so familiar to her in the services of the church vowing to love and cherish her till death; and they stood together as man and wife before the Altar. Then followed the Feast, without which all earthly solemnities, whether joyful or mournful, are cold and lifeless.

A number of the villagers were waiting outside the church to see the bridal procession return, and to have a farewell look at their former pastor, and “little Miss Grey,” for whom most of them had a sincere affection. Certainly a couple more calmly happy-looking could not have been seen anywhere, as they passed together down the church path; both stopping at the gate for one parting glance back to the spot under the elm trees where the cross of white flowers lay glistening in the morning sun. There was an unspoken thought in the mind of each, too, for that other young couple who rested so near—who in their death were not divided.

There is little need to describe the wedding breakfast at Sunnywood. It was necessarily somewhat curtailed, as the bride had but a short time to prepare for her journey. Suffice it to say that, although various speeches of the usual kind were made, Laura had no more cause for shyness or shamefacedness; and when her husband stood up and in a few short and, for him, hesitating sentences, returned thanks for all the good wishes expressed by the company, she felt every bit as

proud of him as if he had been the finest orator in the world.

The final moment has come at length ; and in her pretty brown velvet travelling dress, Laura Hayward, with one hand in her mother's, the other slipped through Ninian's arm, stands up between them, ready to go. There is a leave-taking for the bridegroom too. Poor Mrs. Hayward tries to keep up bravely ; but there is no doubt that she feels giving up her good Ambrose, as she must in a measure give him up, while she holds one of his hands in both hers, to the last moment, in a nervous, tremulous clasp—he standing passive, silent, undemonstrative as ever. She has him all to herself for that moment, in the crowd ; while some of the nearest of Laura's relations press round her for a last kiss and good-bye.

“What, no crying, Laura?” said her aunt Mrs. Mansell, looking into her calm happy face. “What a hard-hearted girl !”

“No,” said Laura, as, turning to Mrs. Grey, their eyes met with a smile of perfect mutual understanding and sympathy. “Even my mother cannot win a tear from me.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

“A shadow and a trembling still
Were mingled with our bliss !”

MRS. HEMANS.

“THIS is Calton,” said Laura to her husband, as the odd little mixed train, with its one “composite” carriage, a number of empty loosely coupled trucks, and a breakvan, came to a jolting standstill at the small dreary station.

“Yes. Not a very grand place, is it ? but there are

many worse, I believe," Ambrose answered as he handed her down on to the platform. "Hallo, Caldwell," as an elderly, rough, but respectable-looking mechanic greeted him with a very respectful salute, and a pleased smile. "Yes, this is Mrs. Hayward. My senior chorister, Laura," he added, in a sort of aside, as the man passed on. Several other men about the station had a bow for the "parson," and a look of some curiosity at the very pretty and "stylish" lady he was bringing home as his bride. For indeed, Laura, though very simply and quietly and becomingly attired, in her travelling wraps, was something quite "out of the common" in these parts.

"I hope you won't mind walking up to the house," Ambrose said. "As Calton doesn't boast any vehicles for hire, my only alternative would be to take my wife home in a wheelbarrow, like the hero of the old rhyme."

"Thank you, but she greatly prefers her own feet to such a catastrophe as that ended in. Is *this* our house, Ambrose? you didn't prepare me for anything so imposing. What a splendid entrance drive!"

"In the rough, at present. But we must get some gravel laid down before we set up our carriage."

"Our carriage!"

"Yes. We must have some sort of a trap—like Wylde's—to take you to the extreme parts of the parish. I have told Caldwell to look out for a pony, subject to your approval—something rather more sober than Lassie, eh?"

"Ah, my poor old Lassie! She used to frighten you out of your wits. There are grand capabilities for a garden here," she continued, "only the soil looks awfully coaly!"

Then they went into the house. It looked different now from what it appeared to the elder Mrs. Hayward on her first arrival there last year. She had made good use of her time and judgment in furnishing, and

the drawing-room was as cheerful and comfortable-looking as any could be on a somewhat cloudy spring evening. A small fire had been lighted, which gave a genial appearance to the bright and prettily furnished room.

"I hope you will like it, Laura," her husband said rather anxiously, as she stood looking round at the prints on the walls, the bookcase, the piano and harmonium, and finally went to the large south window to inspect the view. "Ah! there's nothing pretty to look at there—nothing like Sunnywood; but you must get up some flowers and things; we've a pair of splendid Altar pots, and not a scrap of anything to put into them," he ended, in the gravely droll tone he sometimes used and which always made Laura laugh.

"I suppose I'm to have nothing for *my* pots," she answered. "How do I like it? I like it all, as far as I see of it, very, very much, dear! Nin prepared me for a very jolly place, and I think it looks so."

"That's according to one's notions of what is jolly. I confess it looks to me, shall I say 'jollier?' than I ever thought to see it." He paused, looking at her, as she stood by the fire; the flickering bright light, which was becoming the prevailing light in the room now, bringing out the lines of her sweet happy face and graceful figure—the face and figure that had haunted him, whether he would or no, in so many a sad lonely hour in the self-same room. Could it be true that she was his very own now—could such a happy lot be his?

He drew her close to him and kissed her, with a tender thankfulness that was too deep for many words. "Laura, we must have one prayer together, before anything else, in our new home." Only the LORD'S Prayer, a few short collects, and the general thanksgiving; but there was something especially soothing and restful in the familiar words. When they rose, he said, "I must go out now, for I have a number of things to see after. One falls into arrears, if

one is only away ten days. I'll come back and take you down to church—eight o'clock—if you're not too much done up with the journey."

"Oh, dear, no! I would not miss church on any account."

"You'll have to miss it pretty often on account of the evening fogs. And you're not going to begin by playing any tricks, I assure you!" And then he went away, to the village, leaving her to "turn round" as he expressed it, and get a little settled down in her new home.

Should she like it? The dreary, level, *coaly* country, the tall ugly chimneys, the straight bit of branch railway, the stunted bushes—it was not a pretty view or a cheerful one, but it was her home—her husband's home, his parish and the centre of the work nearest to his heart: and the same instinct which made her love the grave, plain, hard-working man of her choice taught her to fall in love at once with the dull view and the dreary country, for his sake. And was not the newly-built white spire of S. Michael's peeping out behind that nearest colliery? so near, only five minutes' walk. How she longed to see the interior! It wanted three quarters of an hour to service time, and she had not half finished her preliminary inspection of her own particular household sphere, when Ambrose came in, rather out of breath.

"No; it is not time yet, but there has been an explosion. Quite a small one—one of those things that are always happening—nothing very serious, but two poor lads a good deal hurt."

"What can I do?"

"Would you *mind* coming to the cottage? the poor mother is in a terrible state. I came to get some things they want."

"I will come directly."

With a true woman's instinct, Laura quickly put together such few things as the emergency of the case

was likely to call for, and in her hat and cloak was ready in less than five minutes. She was fortunate in having little time to think, for at the first mention of an accident, her heart began to sink and her limbs to tremble; but with a strong effort, and a mental prayer for help, she conquered her infirmity, and with a brave heart she put her arm through her husband's and they sallied forth.

Strength seemed to come with the mechanical support, as she walked on, keeping step with his firm quick strides. It was not many minutes' walk, but they had to pass by and through a crowd of rough loud-voiced men and women too, who had gathered of course near the scene of the accident. She only tightened her grasp of the steady arm, and looked straight before her.

"Are you nervous, my child?"

"Oh, no—not really."

"This is beginning your work at once. Now then—here's the place."

A low dark doorway—a small bare hovel of a place, but lighted with a good coal fire and a strong-smelling paraffin lamp. A rough, tattered, worn-looking woman, bewailing herself lamentably as, with the help of one or two neighbours, she endeavoured to alleviate the sufferings of her two sons—lads of some sixteen and eighteen years, who had been badly burnt by the explosion.

"Peace be to this house!" the words fell strangely on that scene of confusion and distress; but they brought to Laura at least that feeling of wonderful support and strength and calmness, that had come to her on the occasion of her first sight of a death-bed. She thought of the first time she had heard them said, too, in her brother's room—how long ago it seemed! And then, with wonderful quickness and efficiency, considering how little experience she had in such cases as the present, she set to work to apply the simple remedies she had brought with her.

Shortly after the doctor came. It was a satisfaction

to be told that all had been rightly done so far, and that the boys, though suffering much, were both likely to recover. And when husband and wife, in their several ways, had done all that they could in the mean time for the poor people, they left, promising to call early next day, and walked back together to the church, it being now nearly eight o'clock.

They scarcely spoke till they reached the porch, when Ambrose said in a low voice, "This is really like bringing you home, now."

He took her into her seat and then disappeared into the vestry. She stole one glance round the calm-looking handsome church, with the few gas jets which were lighted here and there bringing out the fair proportions of pillar and arch; the general dimness of the nave favouring the bright effect of the chancel which was more fully lighted. It was a good-sized building, simple in design, with much of the ornamental work as yet uncompleted; but everything necessary was there, solid, substantial, and good, as far as it went, and bearing in every minute particular the impress of reverent care. So like *him*, Laura thought, as she knelt down and covered her face, and tried to shut out all distracting thoughts while she asked only to be more worthy of her lot—in some sort a helpmeet, in the great work which he was carrying on.

The congregation was a very small one; but she was surprised to see as many as three men and five boys with the priest in the stall, and to hear the Psalms and her favourite evening hymn, "Abide with me," well and heartily sung, accompanied by the schoolmaster on a good harmonium. The rest of the service was in simple monotone. How soothing it was to hear the dear familiar prayers in the familiar voice, so tuneful in its intonation, but so essentially natural and devout, carrying her back to days long past at Axhill, days both happy and unhappy, but all happy now in the recollection, blending itself with her present happiness!

Laura's mother had cautioned her in former days against hero-worship, but surely never was worship more complete than this young bride was ready to pay to her husband, however plain and prosaic and plodding a hero he might be.

And then the short walk home under the stars, while she poured out her enthusiastic admiration of "our church," which even recent services at S. John's could not cast into the shade.

"Well, yes; I thought you would like it. It is all genuine so far; and when the reredos is done, and the windows, which you couldn't judge of to-night, filled in, and some little bits of painting here and there—I think we shall do pretty well."

They had come home now, and were sitting by the fireside, over their tea—for there had been no time to take it earlier to-night.

"I am so glad they think the poor boys likely to do well," Laura said. "I felt so sorry for them and their mother." After a little pause: "Did you say these explosions were *always* happening, Ambrose?"

"Well, I'm afraid it is the case. The men are awfully careless—and no amount of warning will alter them. Do you think you've come to live over a volcano, eh?"

"I *hope* there won't be many. I suppose use hardens people to the sense of danger, but it seems very awful."

"Yes, not only seems, but is. I say, Laura, it's not a very nice sort of a welcome home for a bride—to be marched off at once to the scene of an explosion and turned into an impromptu nurse!"

"Of course I am sorry the accident happened—but as far as my employment went I think it the best welcome I could have—to be made useful at once—that you should trust me to help you."

"Trust you! I only hope I shall not over-tax your readiness to help me! It is a very hard life—a very

trying one—that I have brought you to, my darling. I pray I may not have done wrong!”

“I have come to it with my eyes open,” she answered, looking into his face with her bright trustful expression. “My only fear is, that I am too unworthy—if I should ever be a hindrance, a drag upon you, in your glorious work; Ambrose, I could bear to die sooner! But you mustn’t think I mean to *mind* things. I have done with all that nonsense, I hope, please GOD! At any rate I felt to-day—to-night—when you went into the cottage so quietly, and seemed to carry hope and comfort with you into all that trouble and hurry—that I should never again fear going to see anything, however bad, with you!”

“You mustn’t lean only on me, Laura, or you will find you trust to a broken reed. Only one Strength will carry us through what is trying, but that Strength is sufficient for every one.”

“But you have so much more power of helping.”

“I have the power that He gives me,” he answered, simply, “but if you were in my place you would know what it is to feel wretchedly weak and unworthy—more unworthy in proportion to the trust committed to one.”

“But not being in your place,” she was quite in sober earnest, though the turn of the sentence was in her old playful style, “I only feel, that being allowed—in my poor little woman’s way—to help you, ever so little, in such work as yours, is too much happiness almost”—she broke off with a tearful quiver in her voice, and tears were standing in her bright eyes.

“Too much happiness!” the words gave him a sort of shudder, for they called up a responsive echo in his own heart. Of late, but especially through that day, he had felt a sort of awe in his happiness; “a deep mysterious fear,” partly natural to his temperament, from having so often experienced the fleeting nature of earthly happiness—partly because the realization, beyond what he had ever dreamt of as possible, of his in-

most hopes, seemed really too perfect to last, in this world.

If Laura's danger was in hero-worship, perhaps the tendency of the reserved, but intensely loving tender heart of her hero was to idolatry!

CHAPTER XXX.

“ I bless thee for the noble heart,
 The tender, and the true,
 Where mine hath found the happiest rest
 That e'er fond woman's knew ;
 I bless thee, faithful friend and guide,
 For my own, my treasured share
 In the mournful secrets of thy soul,
 In thy sorrow, in thy prayer.”

MRS. HEMANS.

“ *S. Michael's Parsonage, Calton,*
 “ *May 13, 1873.*

“ My dearest Mamma,—I have been longer than I intended without writing, but really we have been so busy the last week, that I have had no time to sit down to a long letter, and when I once begin I cannot make it a short one. Ambrose says his work has fallen frightfully into arrears during the time he has neglected it, and now the preparations for Whitsuntide, when we hope to see a great increase in the number of communicants, makes him extra busy, having classes four times a week for instruction on that alone. My last letter was written before we had regularly settled down to work, so I think you will like to hear something about my days now. First, there is the eight o'clock matins, which I manage to get to every morning, unless it is very wet and foggy, when I am not allowed. At ten I usually go to the school for an hour, unless

anything more special comes in the way. After that I am always, nearly, at home till half-past one, when we dine, that is to say, we are supposed to do so, dinner being on the table; but A. exempts himself from all obligations to punctuality, and considers it quite allowable to rush in at any time between twelve and three, make a sort of apology for a luncheon on the first thing that comes to hand, and rush off again; so that I not unfrequently dine in solitary state, as I should only lose valuable time in waiting for him. In the afternoon I do any of my cottage visiting, and twice a week I have undertaken to inspect the sewing classes at the girls' school, for sewing is decidedly at a low ebb here! and I consider myself bound to improve that department for the credit of myself and the young women of Calton. The people *are* rough, but much more approachable than you would think; and the way most of them love and look up to A. is enough to make one love *them*! I believe they are very much softened since he came, and there are much fewer Sunday dog-fights, and little pastimes of that kind, than prevailed formerly. I don't really feel *afraid* of going amongst them, though he never lets me walk about alone late, and when I am with him it is quite impossible to be frightened.

"We have not set up 'our carriage' yet, but that good old Caldwell, whom A. calls his 'right-hand man' now, has found us the dearest little pony! It was a starved little thing when it came, but is quite young and sound, and already much improved, and I rode him to the furthest end of the parish one day! It did feel funny and like one's childish days, to get on anything so small; and I nearly died of laughing when A. implored me not to let it run away—the poor little innocent beast! I shall be glad when we get something on wheels, for if he *could* ride he would look rather ridiculous on a creature under twelve hands, and he does get such a tremendous lot of walking in a day in this straggling parish.

“The choir practise three times a week, just as we did at home formerly; and the people are very musical, so you may suppose, with the teaching they get, the singing is not to be despised. A. does all that work, but the schoolmaster plays and sings well enough to be a great help.

“16th May. Since I began this letter I have had such an alarm! but thank GOD, it is all past now, and my darling is really as well and safe, I trust, as he ever was—but I shall never forget the fear all my life! I can hardly believe it is only three days since. I really could not write the first day, and then he would not let me make anything of it after, for fear of frightening you and his mother needlessly; but I must tell you the whole story now. What concerns our poor people you will see something about in the paper, but my dreadful anxiety seems to have swallowed up every other thought for the time.

“On the afternoon of the day I began this, there was an explosion in our nearest colliery. Ambrose was off, of course, as soon as he heard of it, but he wouldn't let me go at first, as I could be of no use, and told me to stay in the house until he came back. You may suppose the shock it was to me when, a good deal later, Dr. Fisher came in, in a great hurry, to tell me I was on no account to alarm myself, but Mr. Hayward had been exerting himself rather too much at the scene of the accident, and had broken a small blood-vessel, he was afraid. It was only very slight, but they were carrying him home, and he was afraid I might be frightened. The doctor tried to make me think little of it, but, with what one knew, the very thought was agony. Fancy what it was to see him brought home by a number of men on a sort of stretcher, looking as white as death, and covered with blood! He had been, as he told me after, down the shaft, to the place where the accident happened, and they were digging out some of the poor fellows; and

must have strained himself in trying to lift a block of the stuff that had fallen in, though he does not know exactly when or how. They say he lost very little blood; and he knew exactly what to do, poor dear, and remained quite still and quiet, and luckily the doctor was on his way to the place, so he had proper help at once. The doctor has examined him very carefully, and assures us that it has nothing on earth to do with his lungs, and that they are quite sound; that it was a thing which might happen to any one; but it shows, as dear old Caldwell, who was in the greatest anxiety about him, says, that 'he beän't a terrible strong un,' and that he ought never to make any very great muscular exertion; and he promises me to be very careful in future.

"He is going about again, and doesn't look *much* paler than usual; so you may see that it has been more a great alarm than anything else. The explosion was what they call here a *slight* one—only two poor men killed: seven dug out alive with a chance of recovery. But it brings terrible sorrow on the poor families, and great want also—even when not actual bereavement. One feels how *very* little one can do for them after all! and that the very utmost would be far too little to express one's unutterable thankfulness for the great mercy vouchsafed to us. When I think of what might have been, and that I have him still, it makes one feel quite humbled and frightened to see our poor widows—but one can at any rate sympathize with them more fully.

"And now, dearest mother, I must end this very long letter. You will not be pleased if I don't tell you how I am, so I will just say I am quite well, only I feel a little bit shaken still, and as if I was ten years at least older. Here *he* is asking what on earth I am scribbling about, so I will only add his and my own best love, and remain ever,

"Your truly loving daughter,
"LAURA HAYWARD."

THE INCUMBENT OF AXHILL.

“ *Calton Parsonage,*
“ *Eve of Ascension,* ’73.

“ My dear Mother,—Yours of the 15th duly received, and ought to have been answered before; but now that Laura takes so much of my correspondence off my hands, I am become a worse letter writer than ever. Thanks for your kind words. She has thought much more of my little accident than it was worth, and I suppose has made you do the same. It was rather a relief to be assured that it is not a case of ‘bellows to mend,’ which I must say I thought myself at the time—very unreasonably, as I had nothing whatever the matter with me before. I think I shall abstain from coal-heaving in future; though it is difficult to stand by in a case of that sort and not lend a hand. I wish some man of science would find out how to make these explosions impossible. The slight ones happen so often that it is no wonder the men get callous, and then comes a wholesale affair. This might have been much worse, however; and I have good hopes of the rescued men recovering.

“ As to my darling, I suppose it is not wrong to say to you that every day makes me more and more sensible of my happiness in having such a treasure. I cannot speak of what she is to me. I only pray (and I hope my friends pray for me) that I may be more worthy, and make a better return to the Giver of all good, for the invaluable help-meet He has given me.

“ She takes to this work in the most wonderful way: never shrinks from doing anything, or going anywhere. I only fear whether I am letting her do too much, for she always has a delicate look; but, thank GOD, she is at present quite strong, and her spirits are like no one’s but my father’s and Alf’s, that I ever saw. One ought to be very much better for living with her!

“ Getting on for service-time, so good night. All

blessings for this Ascension-tide be with you. Love from Laura and myself.

“Your affectionate son,
“AMBROSE HAYWARD.”

“*Calton Parsonage,*
“*Feb. 3rd, 1874.*”

“My dearest Mamma,—Thank you many times for your kind letter and sympathy. It is rather a trial to be such a prisoner, but when one thinks of the possibility of being oneself again not so very long hence, and all the rest of it, one cannot be very miserable. I miss church sadly, after the daily help; although my dearest never omits to read me the service at home, however hard-worked he is—and I feel a great addition to his hard work. I am allowed to have my especial pet class—ten very nice unsophisticated little girls, with very rough heads, and no idea, happily, as yet, of the Paris fashions—twice a week, which is a little amusement for me; and the poor women always come to me for what they want, and greatly prefer my advice to the doctor’s, which makes me feel mixed pride and responsibility.

“I often think of poor Lucy Willis and her mother, and what they used to say about A.’s nursing. I believe it is his special vocation; all the same, I shall be very glad when he has not occasion to exercise his talent upon me.

“He has been having a little of that tiresome neuralgia, with these fogs; but otherwise is very well, and never rests. I rather fear Lent for him, if it is to bring extra work as it is sure to do—he always seems to me to be doing the very utmost!

“Good-bye, dearest Mamma, and don’t be anxious about me. I am only too happy.

“Your loving daughter,
“LAURA HAYWARD.”

“ *Calton, Feb. 4, 1874.*

“ My dear Mother,—Thanks for yours with account of Wylde’s second Christening, and glad to hear good accounts of them all. Tell Emily I should have been glad to have baptized my name-child, but it would have been quite impossible for me to have left my work just now.

“ You will have heard from Mrs. Grey that Laura has been condemned to spend the greater part of her time on the sofa. Fisher gives us good hopes that she will be all right by-and-by : and these nasty fogs—which don’t do my head any good—are so likely to give her cold, that it is perhaps a matter of thankfulness that she is obliged to stay indoors. Of course she feels the monotony, and pines for the air and exercise she is used to : though I ought not to say she pines, for there is always the same bright smile and cheerful word, come when I may. She is full of occupation, and has constant visits from the people, who regularly worship her ; and it’s all I can do to keep her from turning the drawing-room into something between a school and a doctor’s consulting room. I believe, however, she is better for the interest it gives her ; and her spirits never flag.

“ Of course I do feel great anxiety : it haunts me night and day, do what I will. Ask for me entire resignation to whatever may be ordained. I scarcely dare to ask for anything else—or to look forward. Whatever happens must be best for *her*—and what is best for her ought to be my only wish. Her sweet calm brightness ought not to frighten me, but it does—selfishly.

“ I don’t want to make you uneasy. It is part of my nature and temperament to be anxious—but I try to keep it from her. GOD bless you, mother. Always asking your prayers,

“ I remain, your affectionate son,
“ **AMBROSE HAYWARD.**”

“ *Calton, 4th Wednesday in Lent, 1874.* ”

“ My dear Friend,—I write, as you wished to hear of us ; and to ask your very special remembrance of us just now. I cannot deny that my dear wife’s health is causing us very great anxiety, far more than one would naturally feel. We were very much alarmed about her, and she remains very weak and poorly. We wish you to place her name on your list for special remembrance in the Church’s prayers : it is comforting to think we always have yours. You know what to ask for *me*. Her state of mind is beautiful—all that any one could desire ; and of course her sweet calmness and faith are in her favour, both physically and morally. She talks of my being able to help her so much, dear child ! As if she were not far fitter for the guide and teacher than I. One must be past learning, indeed, if one does not learn much from her. Her mother is with us now, which is a comfort, as I am obliged to be much away from her. GOD knows, it is often a hard struggle ; and I so fear the temptation of putting her before the Master’s work, that I believe I fall into the opposite extreme, and give her such scanty attention as I should be ashamed to pay to a poor person. But she never complains, even when I am out all day.

“ I will write again when I have anything to tell you. I dare not allow myself to dwell on the future ; the bright side seems too bright to hope for, and it is wrong to forecast the dark—with such an example beside one. A few words from you, when you have a spare moment, are always a great comfort to both of us ; but we know how your work thickens.

“ I remain, my dear friend,

“ Your loving son and brother in the LORD,

“ A. HAYWARD.

“ The Rev. C. Singleton,
S. John’s Parsonage.”

“ Calton, Wednesday before Easter, 1874.

“ My dear Friend,—I write to tell you that Laura was confined late on Monday night, of a son, who only survived a few hours. They told me from the first that he was too weakly to live, and I baptized him privately. To-morrow after midday Celebration (when you must particularly remember us) I shall lay him in his little grave. It is a sad termination to our once happy anticipations.

“ Unfortunately I can give you no favourable account of my dear wife. She has been very ill, and is now as weak as can be, with much fever, which is the worst symptom. When I look at her I can only pray that she may not have long to suffer, before entering into her Rest ; though what the thought of life without her is to me no words can express. Some day, by GOD’S grace, I may hope to attain to something like a fitting frame of resignation : at present my thoughts seem all in confusion, and I feel stunned—unable to realize what is happening.

“ To you alone would it be possible for me to write so much about myself : but it is some relief. My great earthly comfort is in the thought of your constant intercession for us, before the daily Sacrifice. As to her patience and saintliness, it is impossible adequately to describe it. She wanders a little at times, but even then always follows my voice ; but generally she is quite conscious and clear, full of thought for others ; and neither I, nor any of those in attendance on her, through the long weary time of trial she has had, have heard her utter one murmur of impatience.

“ It is a great thing for such an one as I to be allowed to help her at all in her preparation. I do sometimes wish for you to visit her, for I feel that you would speak far more fitly and hopefully than I can do ; but she herself seems quite content to have no one but her most unworthy husband, and I believe her great love for me covers all deficiencies. And indeed she seems,

and has all along seemed so near Heaven as to have little need of any one to speak for her.

“I have come to be thankful at last that I cannot express my feelings outwardly, even if I would. That external stony-heartedness, which you know I used to deplore so much in former days, enables me to do much that would be impossible, I suppose, to one who knew the relief of an occasional break-down.

“The kindness and sympathy of our people, one and all, is very striking. You wouldn't suppose it was in them to show so much real feeling and consideration as they do; but I think her influence has done very much to soften and raise them, as indeed it ought.

“I must close, for I have had several interruptions, and it is late. Excuse this pencilling, as I write from her bedside. I will write again when I can.

“Believe me, dear friend,

“Yours, in much affliction,

“A. HAYWARD.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

“Strengthen, my dearest, thy fainting heart,

Wait till the stormy clouds depart,

Wait till thou hearest the Master's cry,

Then gladly, beloved, lie down to die.

Meet me never again to part!

Where the songs of Heaven sound clear and sweet,

Our voices for ever and ever shall meet.”

EASTER has come round at length. Spring-time at Calton Collieries is very different from spring-time at Sunnywood. There are very few trees; and what there are, with the hedgerows and bushes, look stunted and blackened, and the young buds are withered by the fumes from the tall chimneys before they are well out.

The parsonage has a more finished, inhabited look than formerly. The garden is in something like order now; and in the little beds under the front windows some spring flowers, polyanthus, auricula, and the like, are trying to bloom, in spite of the cold east winds and smoke-impregnated air.

The ordering of that garden has been a great resource and pleasure to its mistress, but no one takes much heed of the struggling little flowers just now. For the shadow of a great sorrow hangs over the house. Rough working men look towards it with a passing glance or word to each other of sympathy for "parson's" trouble, and poor women now and then go to the door not on their own affairs, but with messages of inquiry.

For weeks past, before the daily Lenten Litany in the miners' church, the calm unfaltering voice has asked their prayers for Laura Hayward—feeling that the simple daily repetition of the request, though unnecessary, brought home more truly to the small humble congregation the needs of the "one member" that suffered. And many a lowly but honest and sincere heart responded to the petition.

For nearly a year she had gone in and out amongst them, following in her husband's steps—never overstepping her rightful province, or assuming to herself authority which belonged to him, but doing woman's work among the women and children in her own bright, gentle, loveable way. And when she could not go amongst them, she sent, showing her thoughtfulness and recollection of their individual and different needs. And then the poor rough hard-working mothers would come to see her, and tell her their troubles, and express, in their own homely way, their sympathy with her hopes and her fears.

On Monday before Easter, a new little life dawned at Calton parsonage, but a life so feeble that hope was immediately changed to anxiety. Just long enough to receive the new birth the faint flame flickered, then

passed on to a higher life. On Maundy Thursday a tiny coffin, completely covered by the sweeping white cross of the violet pall, lay at the chancel step of S. Michael's Church, and kneeling before the Altar in the celebration of the one great Sacrifice, a sorely-stricken heart made also the silent sacrifice of its first-born hope. And now a harder sacrifice, a fuller act of resignation is required of him. For in the hushed darkened chamber, watched by the two whose lives are indeed bound up in hers, the young mother is lying sick unto death.

Their year of married life had been one of almost unalloyed happiness, as the few specimens of letters to their nearest friends, given in a preceding chapter, fully prove. It had been a year of perfect union of heart and life, of aims and sympathies, of prayer and work. And even when Laura's health began to fail, and to cause anxiety above what was ordinary in her case, it only seemed to bring out more than ever her husband's tender love and devotion; and she began really to experience, as his father and brother had long ago done, his wonderful talent for nursing.

She was happy too, when quite laid up, in having another equally devoted watcher in her mother, and always at hand; for the calls upon Ambrose's time were many and pressing, and he never suffered his care for her to make him forget Whose servant he was, nor even when in greatest anxiety about her, did he ever fail to answer a summons, however distant, to attend to the needs of a parishioner.

It is Tuesday in Easter-week. With the cessation of the extra Lent services and classes, there is some slight relaxation now in the priest's heavy work. Very worn and haggard and hollow-eyed he looks, after the last month of strain and anxiety, as in the lengthening twilight of the calm spring evening he comes into the room where his heart has been so often through the day, and sits down by the bedside of his dying wife.

The mother has slipped out, leaving them alone together.

"Ambrose, darling," says the low sweet voice.

"Yes. How are you now?" his unfailing question after every absence, long or short.

"This is the day he died—the 7th," she said, without answering his words.

"Yes—I know." It was his brother's death that she alluded to.

"And it is—I mean it comes on Easter Tuesday—the same."

"Yes; the dates are all the same this year—'74 as '63."

"How curious, isn't it, darling?"

"It must happen sometimes."

"I was dreaming about him this afternoon," she went on, in a kind of half-whisper. "I never saw him, but I knew him quite well. Oh, my dearest, I shall see him before you!"

"Do you feel less well to-night?" he said, in the abruptly matter-of-fact tone which often proceeded from depth of feeling.

"Oh, no; not less *well*," she answered, "only so happy! Ambrose, do you know I have been thinking I have been a spoilt child from first to last—all my life."

"A spoilt child, dearest!"

"Yes: in this way. I have been always so happy, ever since I could remember, when I was very little; I never had any real trouble or sorrow, or lost any one very dear. There was *that* time, you know—two years—is it two years ago? I think that was my first taste of anything like real trouble. And then it was so short—it only seemed sent to prove the *reality* of our great happiness when it came. And it has been the same throughout—everything that I feared or dreaded has been kept from me, or else made easy, and the fear taken quite away."

She stopped to rest, and he said quietly,

“ ‘Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.’ That has been the key-note of your life, my most precious one !”

“ No ; I am not worthy to say that,” she answered humbly. “ But I have been so cared for—so helped ! I used to be very weak and foolish—very much afraid of things—once. You know my weakness—I couldn’t stand seeing or hearing painful things ; and they have always been kept from me. And I couldn’t bear to think of losing my dear ones—now I shall never know that sorrow. And I used to be so afraid of dying—all that is gone. Isn’t it so good of Him—to let me have those three to think of meeting—my own father—and your brother—and our own little one—so that it will not be like going to a strange country ?”

“ It can never be that, with the Good Shepherd.”

“ No : but the thought of them is a help ; and yet I have not really had the pain of losing them.”

“ No ; the pain is for those who are left. GOD help them !”

“ Was I selfish ? Do you know, darling,” there was a little agitation in her voice now, “ after that time, when I had the fright about you, I began to pray—I couldn’t help it—that I might die before you. Was it wicked ? I didn’t think somehow of telling you before ; I think I ought. But you are so good—I am sure you will always be comforted—you and mother too—and darling old Nin. I am so glad to think mamma has you to lean on. And Nin will always be a brother to you—besides your watching over him. Poor darling, he promised me he would try and comfort you—when I wished him good-bye, yesterday !”

“ My comfort will be in my work—and in thinking that every day is a step nearer Home. Yes ; you mustn’t let my selfish sorrow disturb your sweet peace. It is far more than I deserved—than I ever hoped for once—to have had you for my own for even this short time on earth. I try to be thankful.”

And then they remained silent ; she lying still, with closed eyes, and that sweet peaceful look upon her little white, childlike face ; till he knelt down and began to say some prayers that he often repeated to her, in the " calm *steady* voice " that had once struck her so forcibly with its supporting influence—that was now the most familiar, the dearest sound to her ears. Then came a low knock at the door.

He rose, went to it, received a whispered message, and returned to the bedside.

" I'm wanted, Laura. A child to baptize."

" Go, directly, dearest. Whose is it ?"

" Mrs. Caldwell's. They think it is dying."

The call of duty is sometimes very hard and un-sparing. He sighed heavily as he bent down and kissed the pale lips, and murmured a parting blessing. Would she be *there* still, when he came back ?

He had a long way to walk to his destination. And when he found himself in the cottage, with the rough children of all ages crowding round, as he stood up to baptize the tenth child of his old friend Caldwell, a sudden passionate yearning rose up in his heart for his own son—his little Alfred Ninian—whom he had just baptized and buried. Why were some to have all and others none ? These poor people had had a hard enough struggle often to fill the nine mouths that had come before, and now there was a chance of the tenth child living ; and he—what an inestimable treasure and comfort would *one* child have been, to look to, in the dreary future before him !

The short office over, he hastened back ; but nearly an hour had elapsed before he returned home. The nurse met him at the foot of the stairs : " Please, sir, Mrs. Grey thinks there is a change."

He just heard the words, and strode past her, up-stairs, and into the room. The change he knew so well was indeed on the dear face, and she was lying motionless, as if unconscious ; but when he bent over

her, saying, "Laura, Laura, I'm come back to you," the two star-like eyes unclosed, and looked up to him once more with the answering look of love. Even then it showed that her thoughts had been with him and his poor people, that the first faint word that he caught from her lips was a whisper, "How?"

"Better, rather—some chance."

She smiled a happy thankful smile.

"Sing, Ambrose," she said, after a few minutes.

"Sing me 'Abide.' It is dark now."

Sing! He felt as if an iron grasp were laid upon his throat—as if even speaking were beyond him. But he never thought of disobeying—of refusing anything she asked. With one elbow resting on his knee, with one hand shading his eyes, the other clasped in hers, he began the hymn, and went through it without one faltering note—though the sweet voice sounded muffled and far away.

And then there was silence. When he looked up "Heaven's morning" had indeed "broken" on the eyes which were closed to the waning light of earthly eventide.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn those Angel-faces smile
Which I have lov'd long since, and lost awhile."

Lyra Apostolica.

AT the quiet early Celebration on Low Sunday there was another coffin in the nave of S. Michael's.

Ambrose did everything himself: the three Sunday services and the funeral. Offers of help had come both

from his neighbours, his brother-in-law, and Mr. Singleton; but he refused them all. And when Mrs. Grey, who in the midst of her own deep sorrow, felt the utmost anxiety about him, ventured once to begin a remonstrance, he stopped her immediately, saying, "My only chance is in holding on."

So—preceded by the choir—the chief mourner, in his cassock and surplice and black stole, walked before, instead of after, the coffin, which was borne by six miners. Mrs. Grey, Ninian, and Willie Mansell followed; then the two churchwardens, and a body of men connected with the mines who had asked leave to attend as a mark of respect for their pastor. So, at the most trying moments,

"His voice went soothingly before,
As if a shepherd led:"

ringing out at last clear and steady, as if the beauty and hopefulness of the service, and the pleasure of being able to do it all himself, for her, was lifting him up altogether beyond the region of earthly trouble, beyond the thought of his blank lonely future here, to the "sure and certain hope" of re-union hereafter. And Mrs. Grey, who had felt beforehand as if she could least of all bear to see him perform that service, said to Ninian afterwards that it was the most helpful and comforting part of the whole to her.

She dreaded a re-action for him, overstrung as she knew he must be. She was not the only one who wondered at the calmness with which he went through the work he had taken upon himself; but he knew his own strength better than she. The Sunday service that day was hardly so trying to conduct as the two preceding ones had been under the burden of such painful anxiety; and, except that he read a printed sermon, as he had once or twice done lately, in the morning, he allowed himself no relaxation.

The immense strain, both mental and bodily, told a

little at the end of the third service—the late one—as when they were singing a hymn before the sermon, No. 14, of Hymns Ancient and Modern, he kneeling through it at the end of the stall, those nearest to him suddenly discovered that Mr. Hayward was breathing heavily, and that his head was resting on the desk, his arm across it, in a position that he would never have assumed voluntarily. Old Caldwell and Ninian, who were standing near him in the choir, helped him, without creating any disturbance, into the vestry, where a rush of cool night air after the crowded heated church, and a glass of cold water, brought him to himself by the time Ninian's quick fingers had unbuttoned surplice and cassock. He looked so dreadfully ill and exhausted that his brother-in-law begged him to go home at once; but he insisted on going back, and preaching, as he had intended, this time in his own unwritten words. The seats were full of the rough poorly-clad men and women amongst whom he loved to work; and there was not a wandering eye or the faintest sound as the tall figure stood up, calm and still as ever, the gas-light bringing out more distinctly the sharp lines and shadows of the white worn features, the expression of more than ordinary sadness and weariness which rested upon them. "A man of a slow tongue," he called himself, but surely never the utterance of the most eloquent orator fell with more force and pathos on the ears of a rapt multitude than those few quietly-spoken words, which stirred the very hearts of the simple folk who listened to them.

"For if we believe that JESUS died and rose again, even them also which sleep in JESUS shall GOD bring with Him."

"This is the season of joy, both in nature and in the Church. It is the resurrection-time of nature; when she awakens after the long death-like sleep of winter, and clothes herself in a new and risen life, and bids us rejoice with her.

“And at times we can do so. As long as all is well with us—while we walk in the light of earthly prosperity—we feel ourselves in tune as it were with the voice of nature. But when trouble comes—when our path seems dark and sad—when we are in poverty, or sickness, or bereavement, we can rejoice with her no longer : then the bright sunshine seems to mock us, and we turn away and hide our eyes from it.

“It is not so with that other joy—the joy of which the Church speaks to us in her spring-time. For it is a joy which has its source in Heaven, its root in the Eternal Truth of GOD. It speaks to us of a life of joy and peace and never-ending spring, when all our earthly troubles shall seem to us ‘like a dream when one awaketh.’ For ‘if we believe that JESUS died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in JESUS shall GOD bring with Him.’ And we may, each one and all of us, be of this number if we will—if we *will*—by keeping close to Him now, in our daily and hourly life, by serving Him and obeying Him in the way He has set us to go. So, whether you are in poverty, in sore pain and sickness, or weariness, or are mourning for those dear as your own lives, you need never turn your faces away from the thought of this joy ; for it is the cure for all your sorrows. What matter to any one of us if his burden have been light or heavy, his trial long or short, if at the last he find himself among the number of those whom the LORD will bring with Him at His Coming ?

“O brethren, let us all, each one of us, be very careful—very watchful—in our dealings both with ourselves and others, that through no fault of ours shall one be missing who ought to be of that number. It depends, not upon any passing feeling of religious fervour, not upon any sudden emotion, but upon the little trifling events of our daily lives, the words we say, the deeds we do, the thoughts we think. Sin only can take away our Easter joy, and darken the face of

that spring-time to us ; and from such a loss, and such a darkness, let us beseech our risen LORD to deliver us !”

And then there was a long pause. Many of the poor women were crying silently ; not that any particular allusion had been made, but the quiet sad face and earnest unfaltering voice were infinitely more affecting than anything more demonstrative would have been. They sat watching and waiting, for he had not turned away from them ; till he seemed to collect himself again with effort, and went on.

“ I don't think any of you who listen to me will be hard upon me to-night, if I say what I have to say to you in very few and very imperfect words. The Hand of GOD has been laid very heavily upon me, and I am not able to express myself as I should wish to do ; but still I would not give to another my right of speaking to you to-night particularly, because I am quite sure that you have all sorrowed with me in my sorrow ; and I think and hope you will more readily believe my message spoken on this night, so near that newly-covered grave—that this Easter joy is one which will stand the test of every sorrow and bereavement and trial that the Hand of Love inflicts, and is never so truly felt, as when the joy of earth seems well nigh quenched for ever !”

The deep voice was very low and muffled then, but almost immediately rose to its true intonation in the concluding ascription, when the voices of the choir floated in with their long-drawn “ Amen.” Then they sang the 117th Hymn ; and with that closed a service and a Sunday that was long remembered by the congregation of S. Michael's.

Quietly, with a sort of awed hush upon them all, the large congregation dispersed, some speaking low to each other in groups, a few standing about, and gathering to take a look at the newly-filled grave, after the manner of country folk almost everywhere. It

jarred somewhat upon poor Ninian, as he walked home under his brother-in-law's wing, to see the rough men and lads loitering about in the bare, treeless, newly partitioned piece of ground, so unlike their quiet, pretty, sheltered churchyard at Axhill. He had been struggling to keep his composure all through the service, not of course making an approach to singing, though, agreeably to his usual custom when at S. Michael's, sitting in the choir seat. That evensong had upset him altogether; and when he went back to his mother (who had been quite unequal to attending the third service) his last remnant of fortitude gave way, and he cried and sobbed pitifully.

It comforted her in some degree that he was able to find that relief; and she felt greater anxiety about the widower, as Ninian at last managed to say, "I'm very sorry, mother—to—to—be such a beastly idiot—but it is worse than anything to see *him!* I thought really he was going to die to-night when we got him out; and then he *would* go back—and his sermon was the most awfully upsetting thing to listen to! And then the crowd afterwards—and as we came away there were two or three horrible fellows loafing about at the gate talking, and one said—I don't know whether *he* heard, but I almost think he must have—'he'll not be long after her!'" and the poor boy went off sobbing again.

"Is he come in?" Mrs. Grey asked.

"Yes, and gone slick up to her—I—I mean, to his room. He told me to tell you to send me for him, if you wanted him."

"I wish I could do anything for him!"

"Yes; and that's just what one can't. He seemed as if he didn't want to be bothered."

He did not appear again, and Mrs. Grey thought it was the truest kindness to let him alone. But later when Ninian, on the strength of the permission given him, ventured to go and wish him good night, he re-

turned to his mother looking very white. "I say, mother, I do wish you would just go to him. I think he's awfully ill."

Then she hesitated no longer. She found him suffering from his old enemy, neuralgia, to such an extent that the physical pain overpowered every other feeling. She took him in hand at once; and early next morning called in the doctor, without asking his leave.

For several days he was obliged to succumb. The reaction of the past month's labour and anxiety, and especially the strain of the last few days, had produced a state of almost complete prostration, with a good deal of low fever; and having once given in, he appeared to have no energy left to withstand its effects. He submitted patiently and silently, without attempting to take anything upon himself.

Mrs. Grey nursed him like a true mother. It was in reality a great help to her to have some one to be obliged to think of and care for, with the great blank that had fallen upon her life. He was not, as before, dangerously ill, so as to make it necessary to send for his own mother; and he did not wish her to come. She had aged a good deal of late, and was less equal to long journeys alone than formerly; and besides was greatly taken up with Mrs. Wylde's increasing family cares.

After a short time, he got up and went about his work again, looking very old, and grey-haired, and worn. The poor people shook their heads, and were more than ever of opinion when they saw his altered appearance that "parson" would not be long after his wife. But by-and-by they began to think otherwise, as he went on with all his undertakings, and went about amongst them as indefatigably as before.

One of his first acts was the ordering and erection of a stained window for the church, as his wife's memorial. He found a good deal of interest and pleasure of a certain kind in the planning of it, though it

was quite a small and humble side light in the chancel wall, where few but he and the choir could see it, and fewer would understand the selection of the subject—S. Perpetua and her child.

He explained it all to his loyal senior chorister one day. And although no one would give poor old Caldwell credit for having a grain of poetry in his composition, he always notices how, when the sun is at a certain height, and the priest is kneeling before the Altar, the red light from the martyr's robe falls upon the white surplice.

One last sketch of him, at the beginning of his henceforth solitary life, shall be given in his own words, a letter to Mr. Singleton, the one friend to whom he could always open his heart.

“Calton, 28th May, 1874.

“My dear Friend,—Thanks for your kind words which should have been answered before; but when I first got up, any attempt at writing brought back the neuralgic headache, so I was obliged to avoid all but necessary correspondence.

“You ask me to tell you about myself. I am well in health, thank GOD, now; and have begun to settle down, outwardly at least, into the routine of my life to be. My days are as full of occupation as they can hold—fuller very often; and my spare time at night is not a bit too much for necessary reading and writing, without entrenching upon one's private devotions: so I should have very little time for repining. I dare not say very much about the inward state yet. Our loving LORD is very pitiful, and as long as I do not wilfully rebel against His chastening, I trust that He will have patience with my infirmities, and give me grace in time to realize more and more of the one only satisfying Love, and to find in the work He gives me to do, and the hope He gives me to look forward to, sufficient to fill all earthly cravings. But at times,

when I think that I have attained to something like real submission, some little unexpected circumstance will set my heart crying out again with the same insensate craving for what has been taken away, and I see how little I have gained after all. I believe the thought of her is never absent from my mind, working or praying, sleeping or waking. But I see and feel most fully the justice and the wisdom which has ordered this as well as all my other trials. I know that when I love any earthly object at all, it is with a blind passionate idolatry which makes it far better that I should be for the most part without any close earthly ties.

“There are other minor reasons too why it is good for me—whatever it may be for others—to be alone: We had some bad cases of typhus here last week: two girls died, the mother barely recovering. When I went home one night, after being for hours in the cottage, I asked myself, could I have done this as freely and gladly if I had had my wife and child to come home to? I know hundreds are doing it, throughout the land: I know you do it, have often done it yourself, under such circumstances; but I know also that to me it would be a temptation and a trial of faith, and I can but be thankful for every such temptation removed.

“There is, I think, no chance of my mother returning to live here. Of course she would come if I asked her; but she is so comfortable and happy where she is, and such a comfort to Emily, that I should not feel justified in asking her, at her age, to move her home again. She has promised to come and visit me by-and-by; but at present I set my face against receiving any one, until I am quite broken in to my loneliness.

“There is an idea of young Ninian Grey coming to read with me for a time. He leaves his present school at Midsummer, and his mother and he have a

wish for this arrangement. I am not sure whether it would not be better for him to go at once rather to a University man ; but I believe I should keep him as conscientiously at work as any one, and it would be a great boon to me to have him even for a short time. I fancy his mother would be glad if he took a liking to my work, though I don't think the lad has much turn that way ; but he is a fine fellow.

“ I confess the future, when I look forward at all, does seem very blank and dreary. When one thinks of how my father was taken at forty-five (ten years older than I am now) from so many home ties, leaving a widow and young children to struggle on as best they could without him, and that the odds are in favour of my living some twenty or thirty years longer, in complete solitude, one can only say that GOD'S ways are not as our ways, and that there must be a hidden purpose in these things, which we shall understand, perhaps, hereafter, if never here. It may be, as far as I am concerned, that what looks so dark in prospect may have a bright side as it comes nearer ; at any rate it will be all brightness at last, if I may only be found faithful.

“ This is a sufficiently long letter, and a most selfish one ; but I do not think you require an apology for it. I hope I am thankful for the outlet your correspondence affords me : it is something, for one who could not shed a tear to save his life, to be able to relieve himself in some degree on paper, and to a friend who is able to understand him. Any word of counsel you may think good to send will be received with gratitude by one who is most unworthy to sign himself,

“ Your loving son and brother in our LORD,
“ AMBROSE HAYWARD.

“ P.S.—I omitted to notice what you say about my going away for change. When the time comes, my holiday will be divided between you and Axhill ; but it

will cost me a great effort to go *there* again at any time. At present I feel that this and this alone is the place for me; that without the constant work I should break down altogether; and that what I have said against receiving visitors here, holds good equally against my going anywhere, until I am thoroughly broken in to the life which is to be my unchanging life henceforward, as long as GOD gives me strength to work for Him."

And so we leave Ambrose Hayward, as we found him, a lonely man. Not so lonely, though, as if he had never known the love of wife or child. To his dying hour he will feel and retain the influence of the gentle girl who was his own for one happy year; besides having the blessed thought of two more loving souls—all his own now—awaiting him in the Home above.

He may yet have many years of useful hallowed work in the Master's Vineyard before him, and be able to devote himself to it more closely and thoroughly than any man with family ties can do: for his quiet power of endurance, and a constitution which has already borne several severe tests, are likely to stand him in good stead. But come the summons when it may, it will come as the voice of a friend; for his heart and his treasure are stored in Paradise.

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