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GORDON OF DUNCAIRN.

A NOVEL

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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GORDON OF DUNCAIRN.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Prospero.—Awake, dear heart, awake! thou hast slept well.

Awake!

Miranda.—The strangeness of your story put
Heaviness in me.

Pro.—Shake it off: come on.

Pro.—The hour's now come:
The very minute bids thee ope thine ears;
Obey and be attentive. Dost hear?

Mir.—Your tale, sir, would cure deafness.

TEMPEST.

MINNIE remained for days in the state of complete prostration in which Fairburn had found her. It was thought better to leave her to recover gradually, without forcing her back to a recollection of the circumstances that had so overpowered her. Nature seemed likely to be her best physician. She did not

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appear to have lost consciousness, nor were there any signs of fever, or wandering intellect. She lay perfectly still: from time to time when any one came to her bedside, and touched her hand, or looked at her, she would fix her eyes upon them, with an earnest, inquiring look, but without attempting to speak. She took what nourishment was thought fit for her, and was in all things perfectly passive. Sometimes there was an anxious, searching expression in the eyes that met those which looked upon her, but the appeal was mute, and she neither smiled nor shed tears.

Lily was her chief nurse, and scarcely left her room. On the fourth day as she was sitting as usual by her bedside, and bent down to kiss one of her pale, thin hands, Minnie looked into her face, with more than usual earnestness; and whispered, after a minute,

“I could not part from you, Lily dear.”

Lily kissed her cheek, and tears fell from her eyes, as she answered,

“Don’t let that distress you, dearest, in heart we shall be always sisters.”

“Many thoughts have passed through my mind as I have lain here.” continued Minnie, without noticing Lily’s words: “I have thought how

mysterious are God's ways, and how wrong it must be in mortals like ourselves to indulge in earnest wishes for any thing in this world: it may be our prayer or wish is granted, and then we find it has been given us in anger."

"But, Minnie, there can be no harm in our forming wishes, and even asking for their fulfilment—such a wish as that to which you allude could not be wrong?"

"Perhaps not; but I ought to have been content with God's appointment; he had placed me in the midst of a kind household, with loving friends. It was natural to wish to find my own family; but I was too anxious about it, and I am afraid the motive was not the highest. I ought to have left the matter in His hands, to bring it about in His own time. You remember when the Israelites were not content with the government God saw good for them, and clamorously demanded a king, Saul was given to them; their wish was granted, but as a punishment."

"But, dearest, how does this apply to you? You always seemed satisfied; it would have been unnatural not to wish to find your family, but you were never clamorous for it," and Lily laughed.

"In my heart I was, Lily, and in the motive

there was so much pride and rebellion, that it is not surprising my wish has been thus answered."

"Well, but after all, dear Minnie, your lot is not so hard; I don't see much cause for complaint."

"No, indeed, I will not be unthankful; but do you not see, Lily, that the man who turns out to be my brother is one whom I have so little cause to esteem, and he will be the means probably of separating me from that dear little sister whom I love so fondly."

Lily kissed the hand which lay in hers, and a tear dropped upon it, but she did not speak. Presently Minnie continued:

"No, dearest, it would not have been wrong to wish to find my relations, had it been from purer motives, and in a more subdued and humble spirit. My prayer should have had more of the—'Thy will, not mine, be done.' I should have been content to 'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him:' but I am not unthankful altogether: as you say, my prayer seems to have been granted in some ways beyond what I asked for; and who knows? if it be God's will, He can turn it all into blessing. I will try and leave it in His hands. But other thoughts have passed through my mind," she went on, after a pause, "I have dreaded to ask questions,

and have been trying to be submissive now to whatever may be ordered for me. I have thought sometimes that, if my dear mama still lives, my home will be with her, apart from him. But does she live, Lily?" she added eagerly, raising her head, "and is he indeed my brother?"

Lily shook her head. "I am afraid you must submit to be motherless still, and, though we have every reason to be sure that he is your brother, yet, Minnie darling, that need not make so great a barrier between us. He is married, and therefore your natural home will be with us still."

Minnie sighed—"God's will be done!" she said quietly; then pressing Lily's hand, which still held her own, "I have indeed still a tender mother in yours, my Lily. God grant that in finding a brother I may not lose my dearest sister; the exchange would not compensate—but I must not be ungrateful; what an infinite mercy has been shown in his preservation! I feel sure all will be ordered for the best.—Lily," she continued, after a minute's silence, "do you think you could sing that beautiful song, 'O rest in the Lord?' I have been so long trying to make the words my own, but my foolish, busy mind, will still be carving out its own ways and devices."

Minnie began to improve from this time; she did not relapse into her former silence, and in a few days she was able to be removed to Glenrowan; too much shattered in health to think of resuming her situation in Mrs. Baillie's family, had not her present circumstances made it unnecessary. It was a sorrowful parting, for both Mrs. Baillie and the girls were warmly attached to her, and the latter felt the benefit that they had received from her; there were however many promises of future intercourse, and indeed the friendship on both sides continued permanent. At Glenrowan she was welcomed with warm affection by all: Alice was proud to show her little girl, and hear her admiration of the small specimen of humanity. Mrs. Græme embraced her affectionately as she whispered, "Welcome, dearest Minnie! my own daughter, in every sense of the word."

Something like the old circle at Fairlands was gathered round the hearth in Alice's dressing-room, and the anxieties which mingled with its elements were almost forgotten in their joy at the recovery of Minnie as one of the family again.

Some uneasiness began to be felt at Fairburn's not having written since his departure; but in this Minnie could hardly be said to share; she had by no means recovered the elasticity of her mind, and

her late communings with her own spirit had inclined her to wait quietly the course of events. Towards Lily only was there any change of manner perceptible, and that only in increased affection. She could hardly bear to lose sight of her; and often, after gazing tenderly at her for some minutes, the tears would be seen slowly coursing one another down her pale cheeks.

At last Fairburn wrote. The letter explained the cause of his previous silence. He told them of Lady Gordon's serious illness, adding that in the state of anxiety he had found Leslie on his arrival, he had thought it necessary to delay imparting intelligence which would so much increase his agitation. He gave an account of the success of all his inquiries in London, and apologised for the postponement of the happiness of the brother and sister, which he hoped would be only for a few days, as, whatever might be the issue of Lady Gordon's illness, a very short time must determine it.

Minnie breathed a sigh of relief when the letter was ended; for a short time longer, at all events, she should not be separated from Lily.

A great reaction had indeed taken place in her mind. She had so often dwelt upon the idea of the discovery of her family as an event that would be as

the keystone to the arch of her happiness, fulfil all her wishes, and place her in a position to become the wife of Archie. She had her wish; but how? Archie was gone—by her own wish was endeavouring to crush his love for her, and perhaps had but too well succeeded. She had indeed gained more than her wildest wishes could have desired in finding a brother,—but who was he? The man who had blighted her Lily's happiness, and whom she could never esteem!

Such was the state of things at Glenrowan. At Duncairn, events were taking another course. Lady Gordon was pronounced out of danger; youth and a strong constitution had triumphed over the shock which her nervous system had received; and now, there was nothing to prevent Fairburn's communicating his tale of joy to Duncairn. He had had some difficulty in parrying Leslie's questions as to the reason of his absence from home; but he had managed to put them aside, however, and had sympathised heartily with his sorrow, not only for the loss of his son, but for the imprudence which had been the cause of the disappointment. The faithful old man found it difficult to offer any consolation on this latter subject; and was obliged to lay great restraint on himself in order to prevent expressing his own opinion of the lady.

At last, the moment so long watched for came. Sir Leslie had just carried his wife for the first time into her dressing-room; and, having arranged her comfortably on the couch with her dinner beside her, Fanny Osborne to amuse, and Slater to attend upon her, he went down to the library, where Fairburn was waiting for him.

"Come, Fairburn," he said, "I have not breathed the outer air since my return, and Strathmaer must be wanting me: let us walk there together, and you can talk of the business as we go along; a walk this lovely morning will be most refreshing."

"'Deed will it, Duncairn, and sae will be the business whilk I hae to tell ye," answered Fairburn cheerfully. They walked on for some distance, Fairburn thinking how best to introduce the subject. At length, when they had entered the wood which overhung the hamlet of Strathmaer, he took the ring from his pocket, and, putting it into Leslie's hand, said,

"Ye'll maybe know that, Duncairn; it's like ye may hae seen it before noo."

Leslie took the ring, and turned it round and round with a perplexed air, examining the inscription on the inside, and the united hair under the crystal.

“Know it?” he said, “of course I do; I have seen it often: this is the ring which, after my father’s death, my mother always wore. I have played with it many a time on her finger; and, on the morning of the wreck, I well remember her taking it off and attaching it to a chain which my poor little sister wore, with a miniature hanging to it. She saw we must be separated, and——Know it!” he repeated with a bewildered look, “to be sure I know it; but where did you find this——?” he added, suddenly stopping and turning upon Fairburn.

“Then ye’ll maybe recognise this as weel,” answered the latter, evading the question, and placing the miniature in his hands.

“My mother!” exclaimed Leslie, in a low voice, stopping and turning pale, as he leaned for support against the trunk of a tree. “My own lovely and beloved mother,” he continued as he pressed the portrait to his lips. For a minute he stood, lost in the memories that rushed over him as he contemplated the picture; then, suddenly looking up into the steward’s face, he exclaimed, “My sister!—my little Minnie!—is it—can it be possible? oh, Fairburn!” seizing his arm and pressing it so forcibly that the old man almost cried out with the

pain, "I dare not say the words — it is too improbable — I dare not ask — tell me, old man," he shouted fiercely, as he flung him to a distance, "do you dare to mock me — to trifle with me? do you dare to —?" he hid his face in his hands, and sobbed aloud as he strode up and down.

"Hech, sirs!" exclaimed the old man under his breath, as, terrified at the demon he had roused, he gathered himself together again, "Hech, sirs! but I didna reckon o' this! Mock ye, Duncairn? trifle wi' ye? what for suld I trifle wi' ye? Are ye no my ain bairn, and wadna I cut aff my richt han' to pleasure ye?"

Leslie flung himself on the ground.

"Forgive me! I was wrong to doubt you for a moment, my kind old friend. You, at least, I ought to know, are faithful and honest; but oh, Fairburn! if you but knew what this miniature recalls to me! — the memories connected with it — the sweet mother I have lost — the darling sister whom I loved almost as dearly, and whose love might now be such a balm to my sore heart —!" and the tears gushed from his eyes.

"I've been a doited auld fule, Duncairn," replied Fairburn, the tears running down his cheeks, "but I didna ken hoo best to tell ye this; an'

ye maist frightened the auld life out o' me. Your sister lives; it was frae her—frae Minnie Gray—that I got thae things."

"Lives?" exclaimed Leslie starting up, and once more seizing Fairburn's arm, "Lives—oh! where?—and when did you get these?—and why did you not tell me sooner?—why is she not here?—why——oh! fool, fool, that I have been! this is no home to bring her to. I have marred my own happiness, and that of every one belonging to me!" and again his face was buried in his hands.

"Noo calm yersel', Laird, and listen to me," said Fairburn, and sitting down on the bank, he made Leslie seat himself beside him, while he told his tale; how the advertisement in the Times had caught his attention; how he had thought better to go to Glasgow instead of writing; how they had missed each other in London; and why he had so long delayed his communication."

The conversation was long and earnest. Strathmaer was abandoned—forgotten for that day, and, returning to the house, Leslie hastened to Jane's room, to impart his happiness, and announce his intention of starting for Glenrowan that afternoon, to bring back his darling sister.

Jane pouted, and looked sullen, but she felt she had given Leslie too much cause for annoyance lately to venture to dispute his wishes at present; so she contented herself with telling him that "Of course he could do as he pleased, he would know she must be very glad to hear he had found his sister, but she was too weak to talk about it now, or to fall into raptures;" saying which she began to cry, and it was some little time before she suffered herself to be coaxed and caressed into good-humour again. But as soon as he was gone she poured out her opinion with tolerable volubility to Fanny, and vented her vexation and annoyance, at having to be associated in future with this prig of a sister, who, no doubt, was as straitlaced as himself, and would give herself all manner of airs, and keep her on her good behaviour, by carrying all kinds of tales to her dear brother. Adding, that she had better take care what she did—"I am mistress in Duncairn at all events, and I'll take pretty good care to let the minx know the meaning of the word."

CHAPTER XXIX.

J'écoutais ses chants mélancoliques, qui me rappeloient que dans tout pays le chant naturel de l'homme est triste, lors même qu'il exprime le bonheur. Notre cœur est une instrument incomplet, une lyre où il manque des cordes, et où nous sommes forcés de rendre les accents de la joie sur le ton consacré aux soupirs.

CHATEAUBRIAND.

SURROUNDED by kind friends, and able to enjoy the delights of the country without restraint, Minnie was beginning to recover, and to return to some of her former habits. The still delayed visit of Leslie was felt as a relief, which she hardly ventured to analyse. Alice was beginning to rejoin the family in the morning-room upstairs, and happy in the society of her mother, and the little lady who chiefly engrossed her attention at present, Minnie and Lilius were therefore at liberty to pursue their own pleasures, which consisted often in long rambles among the beautiful scenery which the banks of the Clyde so liberally afford.

They had been out longer than usual one afternoon, and wearied with the first beginning of spring warmth, and with the distance to which they had

wandered, they were making a short cut across the lawn and flower-garden to the drawing-room window, their hands filled with wildflowers, and their drawing materials slung over their shoulders, when they saw David leaning against the open window, in earnest conversation with a stranger, whose back was towards them.

Lily recognised him at once; that manly form, and peculiar attitude of careless grace, could never be mistaken. A faintness came over her; she dropped the flowers from her hands, and silently pressed the arm of Minnie: the latter looked up, and, intuitively feeling who that stranger must be, her first impulse was to rush forward; her second to turn towards Lily, who, pale and trembling, seemed rooted to the spot. There was no time for thought, for, even while these feelings flashed across her mind, David had seen, and called the stranger's attention to them, and he turned towards the two girls. He made an eager bound, with arms extended, to Minnie, his countenance lighted up with a look of sparkling joy, when at the moment he saw Lilies; a sudden emotion checked him, and turning as pale as marble, he remained fixed in the attitude described, while a conflict of agitated feelings worked in his features.

A momentary pause occurred on both sides, and then Lily, summoning all her powers, and at once regaining her composure, advanced calmly, though the blood rushed rapidly over cheek and brow, a moment before so pale, and, making a grave inclination as she passed him, entered the house, and ran quickly to her own room. For an instant their eyes met, and then silently returning her salutation, he stood following her retreating figure with his looks. All this was almost instantaneous, and turning again to Minnie, "My long-lost treasure!" he exclaimed, as she threw herself into his outstretched arms, "my darling little Minnie!" and the two remained locked in a close embrace.

How many thoughts hurried through either mind, during those few moments of ecstatic silence! From the instant when they had stood together last, on the deck of that sinking ship, and had a moment after been torn from each other's sight, how rapidly, but how vividly every event of their succeeding lives passed in review before them! Their childhood, their more advanced years;—how strongly each particular joy and sorrow stood out in their minds, ending, with Leslie, in domestic misery, self-inflicted; with Minnie, in lost happiness self-discarded: all merging at that instant in the conscious-

ness of mutual love and protection. Where was Minnie's dread of him whom she had thought she could never esteem as a brother? Lost—swallowed up in the overwhelming happiness of knowing that her head reposed on a brother's breast—that she was no longer a lonely orphan.

When they looked up from that long, ardent embrace, they were alone; feeling that such emotions were too sacred for other eyes, David had left them, as soon as he had seen the mutual recognition.

For some time they sat together hand in hand, sometimes talking of their early life, sometimes silent from excess of joy, and content with the silent pressure of the hand, while their eyes mutually ran over face and form, and connected the manly, noble expression and figure of Leslie, and the gentle, graceful beauty of Minnie, with their childish recollections of each other.

But both were too unselfish not to wish to share their bliss: Minnie was eager to introduce her brother to those who had given the little orphan a home, and a warm place in their hearts: Leslie was desirous of making the acquaintance of those to whom his sister and himself owed so deep a debt of gratitude: “Which, alas! I have but ill repaid,

darling Minnie," he said with a sigh. "But I little knew the treasure I was throwing from me," he continued. "I was miserably deceived; bitterly have I repented of my foolish credulity, and, if Miss Græme has any revenge in her disposition, it would be most fully gratified could she read my heart. But of this another time: I do not wish to cloud our happy reunion with the history of my own folly and consequent sorrow, and my only hope is that the suffering is all on my side." In which sentiment, it is to be feared, the perfect sincerity of Leslie is doubtful.

Minnie pressed his hand: "I know something of your history," she said, "and it will indeed comfort me to know that my beloved brother is not so blameable as he has seemed. But now I must go and find my second mother, who I am sure is anxious to give you a cordial welcome."

And Lily?—had Minnie forgotten her sorrows in her own joy? By no means; and, as soon as she had assembled Mrs. Græme and David in the drawing-room, she stole away to seek her poor Lily. It was a hard task, for now she longed to clear her dear brother from the odium that yet rested on him, and which his unexplained conduct had occasioned. His few words had let much light into a mind,

predisposed by his open expression of countenance, and frank manly manner, to exonerate him from much, if not from all, blame; but yet she dared not tell Lily that he was true, and had been deceived, and found out the deceit: she could not say any thing that would revive former sentiments or awaken pity in Lily's heart: she felt already that there was indeed a barrier between herself and her darling sister: she did not love Lily one iota less, but there was a subject tabooed, and that, one with which the happiness and misery of their individual lives were most closely connected.

So it was with a slow step and a heavy heart that she entered Lily's room, prepared to find her overwhelmed with sorrow and sad recollections. But her fears were quickly relieved: Lily sprang towards her as she entered, and threw her arms affectionately round her neck, exclaiming,

"I knew, dearest! you would come to me as soon as you had a moment's leisure, so I have waited here for you, that I might say how truly and unreservedly I sympathize in your happiness. It was the first look of those eyes, recalling my own Minnie's to my mind, though I could not then identify them, which led me to take an interest in Sir Leslie. You remember, Minnie, not many

months ago, I told you I was sure the falsehood did not lie at his door; I think so still, nay, I am sure of it: I have looked once more into those clear, honest eyes, where it is impossible that falsehood could lurk. I feel happier for having seen him,—for having this conviction of my heart confirmed. He will not wean my sister from me, I know, and though, of course, he and I can never meet, at least not for long years—it is happiness to feel that I have loved one who is worthy of my love; and when you come again, dearest Minnie, to visit your old friends at Fairlands, I shall rejoice in hearing you speak his praises, and you and I will love each other as we have ever loved. And now you must not think of me, love; I am going to spend the rest of the day with Alice and her little woman; she will consider herself most fortunate in securing such a valuable waif from the sheaf of happiness downstairs, and I shall be very gay and happy in amusing her, and acting nurse,” she said, kissing and pressing her again warmly to her heart.

“Dearest Lily, you have indeed gladdened me; and to know that, notwithstanding appearances, you still exonerate Leslie, and esteem him, is more than I could have hoped. See!” she added, laughing,

“how quickly your grave monitress has turned round to support the opposite cause.”

It was a happy group that evening; Minnie often stole away from the pleasure of looking at and listening to her newly-found brother, to carry her smiles to the cheerful party upstairs, and even the prospect of her departure next day was robbed of much of what would have been painful, by this unavoidable division of the family. Leslie could not remain longer away from home; he had not forgotten how his conscience had smitten him for his former absence, and he was anxious to repair to Jane the imaginary wrong he had done her; neither could he bear to part from his sister at the first moment of finding her. “Were I to leave you behind me now, Minnie, darling, it would seem like a dream to me on my return; besides, I am anxious to shew you to our good old Fairburn, who has been like a father to me all my life.” So it was settled that she was to accompany him on his return to Duncairn next morning.

It is doubtful whether that was a night of much repose to the greater part of the inmates of Glenrowan. Mrs. Græme was haunted by regrets for the course she had pursued with regard to Archie; for the banishment which she had recommended,

and the perverseness which had led him to follow her advice so much farther than she contemplated when giving it; visions of what might have been had she sanctioned Minnie's acceptance of his love tormented her, and apprehensions that, with altered circumstances, Minnie might perhaps become ambitious and look for rank, since fortune would no longer be an object; and occasional doubts whether, in following out her worldly policy, she had not been the destroyer of her son's welfare as well as his happiness.

Lily too passed the night in sleeplessness. In spite of her cordial sympathy in Minnie's happiness, she could not but be sensible of the difference her present position would make in their former unrestrained intercourse, and many a tear moistened her pillow at the thought of the separation of the ensuing morning. Some too fell on more exclusively selfish grounds; she recalled over and over again the many sweet memories connected with her visit at Battesden; she recurred to the last delicious day she had spent there in the cherished society of Leslie; she permitted herself for once the free indulgence of all these dear, but painful reminiscences; she remembered the words he had spoken that night; she repeated them more than once, and

listened in imagination to the tone of his voice; then she thought of the words and tones of the next morning, and her own sufferings. Again and again she thought of him as she had seen him a few hours ago; his emotion on recognising her, his rapid change of colour and countenance; the expression of his eyes, those soft, full, speaking eyes, as they met hers for a moment; she felt that notwithstanding all her efforts she had failed in displacing his image, and she wept bitter tears of grief and self-compassion.

Neither were Minnie's slumbers undisturbed: her heart still bounded with the joy she had experienced that morning, but it was joy mingled with much bitterness. The separation from Lily,—not so much in fact, for she might spend more time at Fairlands perhaps than she had done for the last two years; but the knowledge that the one object so dear to them both was as a sealed book to them now: the sad expressions that her brother—she loved to think of him as such—had dropped that morning, when alluding to his domestic circumstances: his evident deep love still for Lily, and the reflection how grievously the happiness of both had been marred; how perfect, humanly speaking, it might have been:—these and similar thoughts occupied

many of the dark, weary hours. Then there were fears for the nature of her own reception by Lady Gordon, and apprehensions that her presence might arouse Jane's jealousy, and not conduce to Leslie's happiness. There was also another, and still deeper and more poignant, source of suffering, which indeed formed a perpetual undercurrent to the others—Archie. She was now in a position to acknowledge how fully she returned his love, and he was gone from her!—even his life was doubtful:—oh what joy would it have been, could she have shared her present bliss with him! Would he ever return? What could have happened to him? And that vision which had swept over her the morning when she had first read Leslie's name, came back to her, and she wondered, whether it were really a kind of second sight, or only the effect of an excited imagination. But if he did come back, what effect might not one, perhaps even many years of absence and struggle, have produced upon his heart and affections? The thought produced nothing but anguish, and, as she restlessly paced her room, or leant against the window-frame, she tried to look forward into the future, even while she was endeavouring to submit calmly to the Ruler of all things. She gazed upon all those bright stars which gemmed

the sky, and thought of what astrologers have said of their influence over our destinies, and the possibility of reading our fate in their light: she tried to select one which might perhaps be her especial destiny: then, looking beyond those bright orbs, she raised her mental vision to realms of yet purer and more intense light, and remembered that her own lot, and that of all others, was overruled in its minutest particular by Him who holds the stars in His hand, and who is all merciful, all just, all wise.

The recollection soothed and restored her calmness, but, though she thus tried to "commit her way unto the Lord and trust in Him," the dawn found her still a watcher.

And Leslie—were there no thorns in his pillow? Alas! many, and his were the sharpest and most piercing, for they had been planted by his own hands. Oh how he writhed, when he contrasted his actual home with what it might have been! How he loathed himself for his folly in listening to doubts of the truth of that pure, sweet being who had passed him with such haughty coldness that day! How despicable he must seem in her eyes! she would not even condescend to meet him as the brother of her dearest friend; anxiously as he had

watched, and hoped that in her calm indifference she might have joined the circle, his hopes had been disappointed: he would even have rejoiced in her coldness, if that would have permitted him to bask in her presence:—but then came a startling thought, Did not the very absence of indifference—her very resentment and haughtiness—prove the presence of some stronger feeling?—Hate?—that was no bosom to cherish such a guest:—could it be—the sentence was not finished, and yet, as he too gazed on the stars, that long and deep reverie seemed any thing but an unhappy one. The first beams of the rising sun however burst upwards from the horizon, and dissipated the sweet dream wherever it might have led him. His old self-reproach for wronging his wife even in thought returned in full force, and, as it was vain to think of sleep when the sun was already bathing the landscape in living gold, he made a hasty toilette, and leaving the house, wandered along the banks of the beautiful river, still pursuing his tormenting reflections, which resulted at last in the conviction that even his newly-found sister, his darling Minnie, lovely as she was in mind and person, must have learned to despise him for his treachery to her friend, and would now hate him

for coming as a dark shadow to separate them in heart as well as life.

In short he was excruciating his mind with every topic that he could find to swell the list of his faults, and when he returned to the breakfast-table it required all the tender and unreserved affection of Minnie, and all the kind feeling so plainly shewn by the rest, to reconcile him to himself. There was no resisting his sweet sister though, and, in spite of Lily's still vacant place, he felt happier at that breakfast-table than he had been for a year before; and when, shortly after the meal was ended, he and Minnie set off for Duncairn, he was fain to acknowledge that all his morning's misgivings with regard to Minnie's affection were quite unfounded.

CHAPTER XXX.

And as at the tramp of a horse's hoof on the turf of the prairies,
Far in advance are closed the leaves of the shrinking mimosa,
So at the hoof-beats of Fate, with sad forebodings of evil,
Shrinks and closes the heart ere the stroke of the doom has attained it.

EVANGELINE.

It was late at night when Leslie and his sister arrived at Duncairn, and, after partaking of some refreshment, they separated at once.

Minnie slept the sleep of tired nature, and when she opened her eyes next morning the sun had already risen. For a few moments she was unable to recall the events of the previous days, or to comprehend where she was: every thing around her was so different to her former life, that she knew not whether she was still dreaming, or whether some enchantment had been at work upon her, the elegance and luxury she saw looked so unlike her own room in Glasgow, and very different to the neat and simple beauty of Fairlands or Glenrowan. It was not long however before the remembrance of all that

had passed, and the change in her own position, came clearly to her mind: her first thought was a sigh for the companionship of dear Lily, and a wish that she were the Lady Gordon who was the mistress of all this splendour; but she knew it was folly to give way to vain regrets, so with a sigh she got up and drew back the window-curtains to gaze upon the glorious prospect which lay outspread before her.

The sun was shining brilliantly, though with the coldness of a March morning, and the first object which greeted her was the sea, bright, blue, and glorious as she used to see it from her bedroom window at home. It was like the face of an old and valued friend, welcoming her to another home, which was to divide her affections with that of her childhood,—it seemed like a link connecting the two together. The difference too in its aspect suited the character of the two homes—at Fairlands it was like a bright lake, surrounded with sweet, cultivated, home-like scenery, the wilder and more rugged nature only forming the background;—here it was the ocean in all its grandeur and immensity, with no limit but the sky, which formed the horizon. She dressed herself quickly, and ran downstairs, to enjoy an early ramble along the cliffs, which looked so tempting. In the hall she met Leslie:

“So my sweet sister is no sluggard,” he said, kissing her fondly and drawing her arm through his own; “come then, dear Minnie, and I will show you some of my favourite spots, and try how our tastes coincide.”

Their walk was long and delightful to both; not that the distance they traversed was great; they walked for some little way along the top of the cliffs, looking down upon the long rolling waves, as one after another they swept onwards, and dashed headlong upon the rocky shore beneath, throwing up clouds of pure, white foam. Then they descended to the beach, and, sitting down on one of the boulders there, Leslie talked to his sister of his plans and projects. It was soon evident that the sympathy between the brother and sister was perfect. He spoke of Strathmaer; of the dedication of it to the memory of their mother, and of herself; of the joy it was to have her now living, and by his side; he told her all he recollected of that dear mother, and of the events of his early life; he listened to her relation of her life at Fairlands; of the life she had latterly adopted; of her reason for so doing; and gave his full approbation of the course she had taken. There was but one corner of her heart which was reserved even from him, and the slight allusions

she made to Archie did not give him any insight into that sealed sepulchre, where hope and love lay buried. It was late when they returned to breakfast; happiness had made them selfish; and Fanny Osborne had wearied of waiting for them. She was however more amiable than her sister, and willingly accepted their apologies, and entered cordially into the pleasure both must naturally experience in reunion, after such a separation.

Lady Gordon was not anxious for the introduction to her sister-in-law, and declared herself unequal to the exertion of seeing her till the afternoon, when she should be in her dressing-room. There was plenty to engage Minnie's attention, and, when Fanny was obliged to leave her to attend upon her sister, she by no means found her solitude irksome. Leslie was occupied with his lawyer, who was empowered to arrange that a proportionate part of old Gordon's legacy should be given to Minnie, according to the directions in his will: and then Minnie had to be made acquainted with Fairburn, whose reception of her was very different to that he had given to Lady Gordon, as indeed the greeting he received from the one was very different from that of the other. It was a new life to Leslie to have the companionship of one so suited to his

mind; it was an alleviation of his domestic discomforts, which made all now seem easy to endure, and he looked with pride, as well as deep affection, upon his lovely and loveable sister.

It was rarely that he spoke of Lady Gordon; the name was always accompanied with a sigh, and Minnie soon became aware that she took no interest in the pursuits of her husband, nor was she looked up to with any of the affection and reverence that he so plainly received from all about him. She sometimes feared her life would be a difficult one with her sister-in-law, but her object was to make Leslie as happy as possible, and she resolved to conciliate the haughty Jane, and give her no excuse to quarrel with her.

There was certainly not much congeniality between the two; but it is not easy to quarrel where no opposition is shewn, and, as Jane always found Minnie ready to yield her own wishes in all things, yet maintaining a certain firmness, especially where any principle was concerned, that was not to be daunted, and even inspired a degree of respect, she could only have recourse to the weapon of the tongue, irritating by spiteful and ungenerous speeches; and for this purpose she made it her study to find out where a dart skilfully thrown could

inflict the greatest amount of pain, and the knowledge once obtained was not again lost sight of.

It was now the beginning of April. Minnie had been six weeks at Duncairn, and was well acquainted with all the tenantry and the poor; a welcome visitor wherever she came; and had pretty well explored the beautiful scenery which surrounded the place. She had entered into all Leslie's plans for the management of Strathmaer; and, as her morning hours before luncheon were generally unfettered by Jane, who seldom left her dressing-room till that meal, much of her time was spent in attending to, and carrying out, her brother's arrangements in the little colony. The afternoons were generally given up to some excursion, either on horseback or in carriages. Zohrab once more rejoiced in feeling his mistress's hand; and, though Zoë was still revelling in the *otium cum dignitate* of the "large paddock," Minnie was in no want of a mount; indeed Leslie had made her a present of Gossamer, and a horse for her groom, as well as a charming pair of little shelties, with a carriage proportioned to their size. Minnie thoroughly enjoyed these afternoon excursions; and longed for the season to speed on, that her sketch-book might come into use.

There was generally music in the evening; Jane, indeed, played nothing but dance music, and she and Fanny cared but little for the amusement. The latter had usually some interesting novel to absorb her attention, while Jane indulged in reveries of future gaieties in town and country. Minnie, however, had an inexhaustible stock of national airs; and she and Leslie took great delight in these, as well as more elaborate compositions of old and modern masters.

They had thus been indulging their taste for some time one evening, when Jane, wearied of her own thoughts, suddenly exclaimed,

“So that Antinous, young Græme, has buried himself in the sands of Africa!” She knew well that the name had become a painful one to her husband; she had not forgotten the effect produced on the last occasion when it was the subject of discussion; but Lady Gordon was not one to care for others when self was concerned; and, tired of seeing the pleasure which Leslie and his sister were enjoying, her object was literally to mar the harmony in any way she could devise. “How is it, Marion,” she continued, “that you let such a *parti* slip through your fingers?—young, and handsome, and rich, and what you would call intellectual. I am

not given to romance, but I assure you I had quite spun one there for you; you must at least have managed badly."

It was a random shot of Jane's, fired, indeed, at her husband, but, like many another which,

at random sent,

Finds aim the archer never meant,

this one struck home where Jane least anticipated. Minnie, taken by surprise, lost her self-possession. Her face first flushed crimson, then turned deadly pale; her lips parted, but quivered too violently to enable her to articulate a word. She had just finished a duet with Leslie, and still sat at the piano, while he stood beside her. She made a convulsive effort to laugh, which becoming hysterical, ended in her covering her face and bursting into a passion of tears.

"Heyday!" exclaimed Jane, looking round, "Why, Miss Prudence, what does this mean?" She was silenced, however, by a look from Leslie, which even she knew better than to brave. At the same time, Leslie threw his arm round Minnie and said gently, "My poor Minnie, your nerves have not quite yet regained their tone."

She recovered herself, however, in a moment, and, apologising for her weakness, said,

“ You do not know, Jane, what a source of grief and anxiety the uncertain fate of Ar — of Mr. Græme has been at Fairlands; if you did you would not wonder that the sudden question unnerved me.”

“ Oh! I see,” answered Jane with a sneer, “ it has been a failure. I beg your pardon, Marion, I am not at all surprised now at the effect of my foolish question.”

Leslie turned a half-beseeching half-angry glance at his wife, who still continued to look at Minnie triumphantly; and, drawing his sister towards the fire, he placed her, trembling from head to foot, in a *fauteuil*; and then, with an effort of self-command, he turned to Jane, and soon drew her attention quite away from the subject, giving Minnie time to subdue her agitation, till, after a time, she was able to join in the conversation. But a light had broken in upon both husband and wife, which each failed not to treasure up for their own purposes. Jane was happy in having discovered an excellent flaw in the armour of her sister-in-law, at which she might always aim her arrows with the certainty of their taking effect. Leslie made no farther allusion to the subject; but it made him more watchful and tender to his sister.

Jane's health was now quite re-established, and

she became anxious for amusement again, and impatient to display herself and her grandeur to the world assembled in London for the season. She therefore began to remind Leslie of the necessity there was for his returning to town, whence her illness had summoned him so long ago, and to urge their going thither together early in May. It was much against his wishes to leave the home which had become doubly dear to him since his precious Minnie had been added to it, but, acknowledging that it was only fair to consult Jane's tastes as well as their own, a day was fixed for their departure.

"I am not going to play *chaperone* to that pragmatical sister of yours, mind Leslie," exclaimed Jane, when she found her wishes were acceded to. "If she wants to go out in town she must look to Mrs. Sherwood; I have enough to do to amuse myself, and Marion is not at all in my style."

"You're quite right, Jane," replied her husband with a meaning smile; "but you need not be alarmed on Minnie's account. I asked her yesterday about her own wishes, and she infinitely prefers spending the time of our absence at Fairlands."

"Oh! no doubt," sneered Jane; "I might have expected as much from such a prudent young lady;

but, at all events, I applaud her sense and good resolution."

Minnie left Duncairn a few days before the party started for London. Leslie accompanied her to the station; and, as they drove along, he took out the bracelet which Fairburn had brought from Glasgow. Minnie's eyes sparkled with delight at seeing it again, and, answering her look, he said,

"Yes, Minnie, I have kept it a long time, but I wished to have a life-size picture made from it by a first-rate artist. It is done now, and, when you return to Duncairn, I hope you will see it in the drawing-room. In the mean time, you will not find that the bracelet has lost in value." He clasped it on her arm. The same sweet features were there in the same golden case, but the whole clasp had been richly and elegantly set in diamonds.

"I know," he added, in answer to her look, half of admiration half of reproach, "I know it did not want anything to enhance its own value; but you must consider this only as a token of the value I set upon it, and upon the dear wearer. As for the ring," he went on, shewing his hand, "you see I have appropriated that as my own, so I was obliged to offer a little bribe

for fear you should insist strenuously on your rights. I only received the bracelet this morning."

The journey was soon over, and in the afternoon of the next day Minnie once more found herself one of the old and beloved circle at Fairlands.

Sir Leslie and Lady Gordon did not remain at home many days after Minnie's departure. They were no sooner arrived in town, than Jane gave her whole attention to the enjoyment of the gaieties which were at their height. There were drives in the park, and rides in the row, and flower *fêtes* and *déjeuners* in the morning; and dinners, and balls, and *soirées*, and operas, to fill up the evening hours. Lady Gordon's balls and *réunions* soon began to be *renommés*, and her house was the centre of all that was attractive and elegant in the world of fashion. Jane was in her element, and, could such celebrity have been pleasing to Leslie, he might have been fully gratified, in hearing everywhere his wife talked of as the most brilliant star in the hemisphere of London's gay world.

But there were other rumours, which, had they reached his ear, might have grated more harshly upon it; though, according to the usual custom on such occasions, he was the last to catch the whispers which soon began to float about. He seldom however

suffered her to go anywhere unaccompanied by himself: even had not Lord Charles Lascelles been in London, and the remembrance of what had occurred at Duncairn during his absence been fresh in his memory, he would not have exposed one so gay and careless to the remarks which might have been made upon his avoiding society. It is true she often rallied him on the absurdity of his being her constant attendant, and cited the example of others who were allowed out of leading-strings (as she said), but he had always some playful mode of parrying her satire without departing from his rule. Even with all his care, there were many opportunities for Lord Charles to be in her society, and his constant, unremitting, and devoted attention to Lady Gordon was soon the gossip of all the drawing-rooms. By some unaccountable freemasonry he seemed always to know when she would ride in the park without Leslie; when some question in the House would prevent his accompanying her to ball or opera; and her carriage no sooner appeared on the bank of the Serpentine, than the grey horse of Lord Charles was at its side, and his gloved hand upon the door panel. When at last a murmur of these rumours reached Leslie's ear, he redoubled his attention to his wife, and sought, by the sanction of

his presence, to silence the voice of scandal: he apprised her of the observation her conduct was attracting, and, affecting to believe what he indeed really hoped, that there was nothing but thoughtlessness in her conduct, he appealed to all her best feelings, and urged her by her own conduct to crush the report. But unhappily Jane had but few good feelings—her husband's gentleness she considered weakness, his excellence she was unable to appreciate, and indeed it seemed a continual reproach which only drove her farther on in her course of folly. She had always entertained a preference for Lord Charles, and now an infatuation seemed to have blinded her to the precipice on which she was standing. On his part, probably amusement had been his first object, and the *éclat* of being coupled in name with the leader of the fashion, led him farther than he had any intention in pursuit of a game which he presently found was carrying him on into real earnest, so true it is that “*En ce qu'on appelle fantasie, amour, passion, on sait d'où l'on part, mais on ignore où l'on arrivera.*”

As soon as Leslie found his remonstrances useless then, he resolved to take the only step left to him, and announcing to Jane his determination to leave town the following day, he gave her the choice

either to return to Duncairn, or go with him on the continent: she chose the former, and the establishment received orders for immediate departure.

Lady Gordon was engaged in the afternoon of that day to a *fête champêtre* at the villa of a friend in the neighbourhood of London. Leslie had an appointment which could not well be postponed; he therefore implored Jane to give up the party, but, finding her inexorable, he committed her to the care of a lady with whom Fanny Osborne was to go, and promised to follow, as soon as he could arrange to put off the engagement which detained him in town.

It was now towards the end of July, and all the fashionables who still remained in town were assembled at the villa; the grounds were extensive and beautifully laid out, there were bands stationed in different parts, and there was to be a ball in the evening. The *déjeuner* was under canvas on the lawn about three o'clock, after which the guests were expected to amuse themselves in the grounds, and reassemble for a concert in the house about seven, previous to the ball. On Jane's arrival with her party, Lady Vernon, at whose villa the *fête* was given, announced with something like disappointment, that she had just received a note from Lord

Charles telling her that he was unexpectedly prevented from joining the party, which did not seem to discompose Jane much, and satisfied her *chaperone* thoroughly. Leslie arrived just as the guests were sitting down to dinner, and was welcomed with a good grace by his wife. The amusements went on: after dinner people roamed as they liked about the grounds; but when the time came for making the evening toilette, between six and seven, Jane was not among them, and a note was put into her friend's hand, saying that a dreadful headache had obliged her to return home. The fact was at once communicated to Leslie, who, jumping into his brougham, drove back again as fast as he could go. There he was told that Lady Gordon had come in about five, changed her dress, and walked out alone. Leslie went at once to her dressing-room: there stood her jewel-case upon the toilette, unlocked; he opened it, and found it emptied of its contents: a faintness came over him; he sat down for a moment to recover himself, and then rang for Slater; but she could tell him nothing; only, when he called her attention to the empty jewel-case, she remembered that her lady had shewn her a box in the morning containing, as she supposed, dresses, which she ordered her to send to her milliner's, and say that

Lady Gordon would call about it. On looking into her wardrobes, she saw that many articles of wearing apparel were also gone. Leslie's next step was to hasten to Madame Larobe's, where he was told such a box had been received, and that Lady Gordon had called about two hours before, with a gentleman in a cab, and saying she had changed her mind, desired the box to be put on to the cab.

It was then certain that she had eloped, and no doubt could remain in Leslie's mind as to the companion of her flight. He felt stunned: at first he could not collect his thoughts sufficiently to think what course was best to pursue. This indecision, however, did not last long, and he had soon set such vigorous measures on foot for tracing the fugitives, that in a very short time it was known they had started by train for Folkstone. The continent then was their destination; he might yet overtake them before they could cross, call Lord Charles to an account, and rescue Jane. He left directions for the establishment to return to Duncairn next day, as before intended, and taking his own man with him, he started for Folkstone, whence he wrote a hasty line to Fairburn, and also to Minnie.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Le sanctuaire est fermé, mais son Image est dans le Temple.

HOPE was kept alive at Fairlands: a paragraph copied from a foreign paper spoke of the African travellers having been heard of, though not under the most cheering circumstances; one or two of the party were missing, the rest were under great apprehensions for their safety, and were more eager to trace their companions than to pursue their researches; but the names of those lost were not mentioned, and hope whispered that Archie was not one of them.

Minnie was now in her original position at Fairlands, with the exception of the gifts of fortune, which had become hers. These enabled her to carry out many plans for the comfort of her poor village friends, which had formerly only amounted to wishes, without a hope of ever having the power to realize them. In heart she was unchanged; as humble, as gentle, as when wholly dependent on those who had adopted her. But she had now also

the means of contributing in many ways unostentatiously to their pleasures, and in these ways herself enjoying the purest and highest happiness. Lily and herself had resumed all their old occupations, and fallen into their former ways: the studious mornings, the afternoon rambles, the musical evenings, were all enjoyed as before: a good deal of anxiety was among them, but they did not give way to needless fears, and tried to hope and trust, and not go out to meet sorrow.

The first interruption to the calm monotony of this life was the receipt of Leslie's scroll from Folkstone, announcing Jane's elopement. Minnie dropped the letter from her hands and hid her face, as she exclaimed,

"Poor Leslie, what a cruel blow!--How dreadful for him!"

Lily turned pale: Mrs. Græme caught up the letter and ran her eyes eagerly over it, exclaiming: "What is it, Minnie? what has happened?—Worthless woman!" she went on as she deciphered the almost illegible writing:—and then added with an air of satisfaction: "But he may at least obtain a divorce!"

Lily looked painfully from one to the other: eager to know what had happened, but afraid to trust her

voice: Minnie, guessing her anxiety, quietly placed the letter in her hands, while she answered Mrs. Græme's remark.

"If I know anything of Leslie, that is the last thing he will think of. His object will be to rescue her from that man, and all I fear is that he will overtake them, and a duel must ensue."

"He will not find that so easy a matter," answered Mrs. Græme; "depend upon it they will be clever enough to evade him: but I thought he did not care much for her, and that they were not happy."

"Most unsuited to each other, they certainly were," replied Minnie, "but it was her own fault if she was not happy; she never could have discovered any want of love in him: his extreme and tender attention to her could hardly be imagined by those who had not seen their everyday life, or her provoking ways. Without any weak yielding of principle or dignity, he studied and humoured her in everything. He seemed anxious, by the most considerate devotion and kindness, to compensate for the want of real affection, and reproached himself continually for not being able to return the love he believed once that she felt for him. When he found that he had been deceived in this and other things, it made no difference. If possible he seemed

only to study her more, and I should have thought him the fondest lover had I not known the *dessous des cartes*. He had sacrificed his whole happiness by her means. Old Fairburn used to shed tears when talking of his goodness, and what he had to put up with."

Minnie had never said so much on the subject before, but the thought of Jane's unworthiness and ingratitude had made her forget her usual caution. Mrs. Græme turned to her own letters:

"Here is a letter from Mrs. Sherwood; perhaps this will give us more particulars," she said. But it contained nothing beyond the ordinary gossip of the town, which she said rang with the conduct of Lady Gordon and Lord Charles, while enough could not be said in praise of the exemplary attention and care of Leslie. The final step had not then been taken; there were only anticipations of the coming event.

Many days passed, and there was no further news of Leslie; the papers of course bruited the report from one end of Europe to the other, and a letter from Mrs. Sherwood had detailed all that was known of it: she spoke of it in the light laughing tone that people living always upon the surface of society habitually fall into, when anything of the kind

occurs: jesting with what wrings the hearts of the sufferers, and makes angels weep. No clue had been discovered to their whereabouts, and Leslie remained on the continent, but probably now more from disinclination to return, than from any hope of reclaiming his lost wife. He himself had not written again, and Minnie anxiously waited to hear from him, that she might write.

A calm once more settled upon the group, when, a few days later, it was interrupted again by a letter from the Berkeley Square housekeeper.

It announced the sudden death of Mr. Sherwood, who had been seized with a fit on his return from the house the previous night, and died early the next morning. The housekeeper said that Mrs. Sherwood was too much overcome to be able to write herself, but begged that Mrs. Græme would meet her at Battesden, whither she was going next day, and where her husband was to be buried.

Mr. Sherwood dead, and Archie absent—perhaps dead too!—what was to be done? and what would become of Battesden? It was another trouble added to those which had already fallen heavily enough.

Mrs. Græme lost no time in complying with the wishes of her sister-in-law, and reached Battesden a few hours before the mournful *cortège* arrived from

town. Till Archie returned, or something authentic was heard of him, Mrs. Sherwood intended remaining there, and it was agreed that either Mrs. Græme, or Liliass, or Minnie, should be almost constantly with her.

The two girls then remained for the present at Fairlands, and tried again to fall into old habits, which latterly had been so often interrupted; but it would not do. Each was consumed with anxiety, and neither was able to speak freely of the cares which gnawed at her heart. In spite of her utmost efforts, the thoughts of Lily would keep hovering round Leslie,—dwelling on the few bright touches which Minnie had almost unconsciously thrown upon his character; lingering over the words which had escaped her, that he had sacrificed his happiness in marrying Jane, and that her falsehood had become known to him at last. How she treasured these words in her inmost heart! burying them in its remotest depths: and from time to time she would bring her hoarded treasure to light, and gaze upon it as a miser upon his hidden gold, and then again consign it to the dark caverns of memory. She did not venture to ask herself what hope these words gave her, she dared not probe the recesses of her soul: for something whispered, that, even before

the change of position between Minnie and herself, she would not have expressed such thoughts to her, therefore she ought not to harbour them at all; she heard the suggestion of conscience, but she was not yet strong enough to stand without a visible support, and she had no longer Minnie's arm to rest upon: she was like the clinging ivy, which the storm has torn from the tree which upheld it; it can no longer struggle upwards by its own strength, but trails its tender shoots upon the earth. For this cause cheerfulness gradually forsook her; she no longer sought Minnie's society; she loved to sit in her own room, or to wander away alone, and, as her spirits sank, her habits became listless.

It was not till later that Minnie noticed the change, for she too had her secret griefs; there was much anxiety for her brother in her heart, and it was a subject on which she could not speak freely to Lily: there was yet another corroding care which was eating away her life; so she too courted solitude, and found it in her own watch-tower, hallowed almost, as it had become to her, by the memorable parting between herself and Archie. It was a spot seldom visited by others, and Minnie had made it so her own, that few ever thought of intruding there: even Lily in her gayest days had never cared

to go there much; she preferred nature in her gentler garb,—from the watch-tower she assumed too savage an aspect.

Thus the watch-tower was Minnie's frequent resort, where she would be secure from all interruption. Thither she carried her sorrows, and held communings with her own bruised spirit. For her, the wildness of the scene was its peculiar charm; she loved to watch the dark, swelling billows, as they rolled majestically onwards, and broke with a roar upon the cliffs beneath, flinging up columns of white spray high above the rocks. She compared these fancifully to the ghosts of her hopes, as they had successively risen, and then been dashed back again, broken and scattered into fragments, into her own bosom. She loved to listen to the ocean when, in its softer moods, it fell with gentle murmurs, kissing the feet of those cliffs, over which at other times its arms were so wildly flung. She loved to hear it gurgling and making sweet music, in the deep caves and cavities it had worn in the surface of those rude, rocky barriers:

“Whispering how meek and gentle he can be.”

She liked to watch the pure white birds, skimming over the surface of the waves, or resting peacefully

on their heaving bosom; to listen to the plaintive wail of their mournful cry: she loved to look upon the rugged islands, and amused herself in making all kinds of fanciful comparisons; and then her eye would rest on that distant shore, often bathed in sunshine when the ocean and its rocky islets were wrapped in gloom. She would compare it to another far distant shore, calm and bright, on which her mental eye was fixed, and to attain which she must cross the dark stormy ocean of life, with its rugged rocks, and rough hard promontories, obstructing her course. The birds as they skimmed the surface, or rested on it, or rose into the sky, reminded her of her own thoughts; often resting quietly on this nether world, sometimes scarcely rising above its surface, at other times soaring upward into brighter regions. Sometimes her imagination pleased itself in thinking, that distant land of sunshine might figure out a haven in this world, which she might one day reach; and when she looked upon the surging waves, and the islands which rose amidst them, she would count how many of those jagged peaks she had already passed, and how many there still remained to be overcome before her weary, wandering feet, would rest in the sunshine of that far-off land. Somehow, that line of coast on

the horizon was always connected in her mind with Archie. She remembered noticing unconsciously, on the one morning, which always stood out in bold relief from every other morning of her life, that the whole intervening scene was overcast by the shadow of the very mountain on which she and Archie then stood, as if they themselves threw the gloom upon their lives, and still that far distant spot lay calm and smiling in the beams of the bright morning sunlight.

She was getting into her old habit of musing and dreaming, and, though active employment was not quite given up, she used to look forward to the moment when she might steal away to this loved spot, and indulge her reveries, dwelling upon the past, and often resting her head on the same stone where it had lain so heavily that dreary morning, or, when the sea was tempestuous and the huge waves dashed high above the cliffs, she would shout his name, and listen to the melancholy answer which the sea-birds returned to her cry.

The thought of Leslie too always ran like a dark thread in the web of her waking dreams. She longed to be able to talk of him with Lily; to tell her of all his excellence, of all that she had heard of him from the people at Duncairn; of her grief

for the shadow that crossed his life, of her proud love for that noble brother, and her ardent wishes that he might yet have happiness in store for him in this world, and that Lily might still be permitted to make the sunshine of his life.

She had heard from him more than once. He had given up the hope of finding any trace of his miserable wife. It was evident that every precaution had been taken to prevent their route from being discovered. Now and then he thought he had come upon their track, but had always found himself deceived; still he continued wandering about from a dread of returning at present to the home so full of all painful remembrances. He requested her to visit Duncairn, to supply his place there, to comfort old Fairburn, and to carry out several projects which he detailed, and, hard as it seemed to her to tear herself from a spot so full of sweet memories as Fairlands had become, she would have considered a far heavier sacrifice easy, if it were to lighten, ever so little, the sorrows of her adored brother.

Sometimes Lily and herself would spend a few weeks at Glenrowan, and it was during one of these visits, that, leaving Lily in the company of Alice, she made a journey to Duncairn, taking

Helen Baillie as her companion. Fain would she have had Lily, but the latter could not bring herself to go to the house of Leslie, even though he was himself far away, and Minnie could not urge her to a step which in her place she would not herself have taken.

It was on a gloomy afternoon early in the month of September when she once more entered the park gates. The richness of the summer foliage was beginning in some places to be heightened by the brighter tints of autumn, in others, fading from the rich green to a dull brown. The house looked bleak and unwelcoming, for, though she was expected, those rooms which opened upon the park were shut up. The servants welcomed her gladly, and overwhelmed her with questions about their master. Old Fairburn met her at the door, and the tears stood in his eyes as he spoke of his dear Duncairn. The housekeeper followed Helen and herself into the morning-room, which by her desire had been prepared for them, instead of the drawing-rooms, and expressed her hope that the laird would soon return to them, and that Minnie was going to make a long stay. How this morning-room spoke of former days! for, when they were alone, it was the room they generally inhabited; the room itself

remained almost as when she had left it six months before; the conservatory was as gay with flowers,—but what a moral change had come over the inmates!

By degrees she visited all the places of peculiar interest, devoting many mornings to Strathmaer, taking great delight in talking with the people there of her brother, and listening to his praises. The portrait of her mother had been hung up in one of the drawing-rooms, and it was a great pleasure to stand and contemplate the “counterfeit presentment” of one of whom her recollections were so vivid.

As to Helen, she was in raptures with the place, and never tired of exploring its beauties and wilder recesses. Minnie used to exercise her horse and herself in the early morning among the uplands of the park, and after an early dinner, she and Helen used to take long drives in the pony-carriage in the afternoon, or go to Strathmaer, or wander along the sea-beach. There was plenty to occupy their time, and with the exercise of mind and body Minnie’s health rapidly regained strength, and her mind recovered much of its former healthy tone.

Poor old Fairburn declared that the sight of his young leddy did his auld hairt and e’en guid, and

he wished only that the mistress had been such another. Ah! if Duncairn had but made a mair wise-like choice! and the old man shook his head, and fell into deep thought.

“I feared nae guid wad cam o’ sic a marriage when the laird tauld me what he was goin’ to do; an’ to see her with her gran’ friens, tackin’ sic airs on hersel’, an’ she no fit to haud a candle to Duncairn, wha was aye thinkin’ how he could be a comfort to his folk, an’ gie pleasure to his leddy wife;” the old man would ramble on, as he walked sometimes by the side of Minnie and Helen among the cabins at Strathmaer. Only one consolation could he find, and that in the death of the young heir: “What could we hae lookit for frae the bairn o’ sic a mither!” he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A simple violet graced a ruin'd wall,—
How small a key unlocks the yielding heart !
That little flower did many a scene recall,
And bade the mist from bygone years depart.
Again my mind was in the forest green,
And one was with me
.
We travers'd many a well-remember'd scene,
And linger'd in the old wood's dreamy light;
And then I sighed, and knew such things had been,
Like a bright day closed by a cheerless night.

ANON.

BUT it is time that we should return to Archie, who has been too long hidden from our view. When last we saw him he was, like one of Ossian's heroes, "shrowded in the mists of the morning;" his subsequent steps partake still of the nature of that "meteor of the night." Truly "his soul was sad for *Minnie*, his eyes could not behold her. Lonely, sad, along the heath he slowly moved with silent steps."

The description is not unapt, and if the despair and reckless sorrow of his heart were not shown in

“ the hair flying loose from his brow, and a tear in his downcast eye,” such was at least the attitude of his soul.

Feeling himself bereft of his great interest in life, he sought to forget the soreness of his heart in bodily activity, careless of the dangers he might encounter, rather, on the contrary, courting them as a means of excitement. Europe seemed too conventional; society was irksome to him, the companionship of Minnie had made the common run of young ladies vapid and distasteful to him. The ordinary routine of travelling did not offer adventure enough; he was in no mood for the amenities of life, he wished only to fly from himself; just then a friend suggested the journey to the East: the idea pleased; it would at least take him from the world of kid gloves, and ess. bouquet, and hollow society.

The two friends therefore started for Cairo, whence Archie wrote his last letter home, in July of the previous year. At Cairo they met with two Germans, scientific men, who were going on an exploring expedition into the interior of Africa, and as such a journey presented a field of adventure sufficiently attractive to the two Englishmen, they accepted the proposal of their new friends to join their party. It is not, however, our purpose to

follow them in their researches, or in the hair-breadth 'scapes that such an expedition must necessarily encounter. Archie had certainly not engaged in it for scientific purposes: the only study he seems to have pursued during the journey was that of his own heart, which with most of us is a country almost as unknown as the African continent: mountains we know there are in it, as inaccessible as the Mountains of the Moon, whose peaks of pride in various forms resist our feeble efforts to surmount or lower them; deep valleys, whose dark recesses we fear to descend into, knowing that the trail of the serpent is to be found there; hard rocks of self-will, and caverns full of ravenous animals: wide sandy deserts where no kindly thoughts or good deeds can do more than spring up and wither away for lack of moisture. Many fertile spots no doubt there are, and some refreshing streams, but we are content to remain within these small enclosures, satisfied with their produce, charming our senses with the flowers, and the gay plumage and sweet song of the birds which nestle in the branches of the trees; and finding at the mouths of the rivers sufficient to carry on our commerce with the world, advantageously, as we believe, for ourselves, we care not to extend our researches, or carry cultivation into the interior of

the country. It was to the improvement of this unexplored land that Archie devoted his energies, with perhaps more success than his companions found in their researches. There were at least ample opportunities of bringing its best qualities into active exercise, one sure means of increasing their power. Putting aside his own sorrow, he gave himself up to his fellow-travellers, supporting and encouraging those whose spirits were less elastic than his own: cheering them by his untireable energy, when difficulties apparently insurmountable would have led them to despair, and suggesting a thousand resources to aid them in troubles and perplexities. When dangers threatened, it was in his coolness and intrepidity that all confided: his fearless nature and good judgment saved them often from the attacks of wild animals, or man almost as savage. His pencil was useful in making views and maps of the country, and his voice often soothed them during their noon-tide or evening repose. When any one of the number, overpowered by fatigue and dispirited, lagged behind and lost the party, it was he who was the ready volunteer to search for him, and his courage and prudence never failed to reanimate the drooping spirits of the most desponding: more than once he was the means of saving those who, without his

help and ready resource, would probably have perished in those vast solitudes. And when his companions were sleeping in their encampment, girdled by the circle of fire necessary to protect them from dangerous nocturnal visitors, he would often outwatch the stars in commune with his own heart ; his thoughts bearing him far from present scenes and difficulties, and his mental vision fixed on his Northern home, and on one fair form moving in that home.

He dwelt upon the noble thoughts and counsels that had fallen from the lips of Minnie, and on the life which spread itself out before him, till he learned gradually to realize more and more fully his position, and the object of that life. He began to understand that, as an immortal being, the inheritance of property involved more than mere personal gratification. He considered what Minnie had said of responsibilities attached to wealth and station, and the duty of usefulness imperative upon all grades, and by degrees he came to comprehend more of the nature of his stewardship. It was common to find on the backs of his sketches plans of usefulness, rough drafts of projects for the benefit of others, and in fact a sort of journal of his heart was kept in hieroglyphics by this means. Little by little he

came to realize the purpose for which both wealth and life were bestowed,—the duties which would devolve upon him individually, whether rich or poor, to dependents, were he in a station to be a superior, at all events to his equals, and to his country. He communed with his heart in the calm stillness of the tropical night, when the clear stars shone down, like bright lamps, shedding a light of which, in our vapoury atmosphere, we have little conception. He learned to look beyond those shining orbs, and to recognise the Eye and the Hand, surveying all things, and giving to each one his own peculiar work. He understood the trials and sorrows of life permitted by that overruling Being, as well as the blessings bestowed by Him as all means working together for our good. He saw how his own great trial might become a means of leading him to lean less upon visible support, and to look upwards,—how the very fact of Minnie's love, which he had so ardently yearned for, being denied him, might wean him from centering his affections on the earth, and lead his soul to higher views and hopes! He sought to acquiesce in the destiny which had once (and even still, at times) seemed so insupportable; he strove to bow to the decree which severed him from all

that would have made life so sweet; to look into the dreary wilderness of his future, and to plant it with flowers and herbs and sheltering trees, not solely for his own gratification, but for the enjoyment and good and protection of others, and so by reflection to cheer his own solitary path. He asked for aid and firmness and judgment to enable him to mature and work out his theories. Minnie's words often recurred to him,—“she would watch his career with interest.” If he might but have felt, with love also, love deeper than a sister's! He thought he could better have borne to relinquish her could he but feel that she loved as he did; but that thought was not cherished, it was too selfish; no, he would rejoice that she did not know such sufferings as his. It showed him, however, what a work there was before him ere his heart could be thoroughly subdued, and could learn to submit willingly to the lot appointed to him. He felt that even the consciousness of those dear earnest, thoughtful eyes, watching, perhaps approving, would be a great solace; and he resolved bravely to support the load of life away from her—to bear it even gratefully, and never again to pain her gentle spirit by showing her the dark sorrow of his own heart. He would strive to curb his

own strong love — to subdue it to what she could share, to live on through the years of solitude before him, trying, with God's help, to fulfil the post assigned him faithfully. He would even try to think of Minnie as the wife of another, cut off from him for ever; but the wild pang which shot through his heart with this thought showed him that as yet, at least, that was too great an effort of his submission. No, Minnie must still shine in his distant horizon as he saw her now, piercing the gloom around with her gentle radiance, and shedding a mild, soft, starlike light on his own rugged, dreary path.

Such were some of his solitary communings. The silent grandeur of all around him served to tranquillize and elevate his heart: his character gained strength from the contemplation of the vast nature amidst which he was living. He had explored an interior which, for all practical purposes, was perhaps of more importance than that in which his scientific companions were engaged; and, when they once more emerged in safety into civilised life after an absence of two years, he felt that he had done much towards becoming that conqueror who is "greater than he that taketh a city."

It was late in July of the second year after their departure that the little band once more reached Cairo, from whence Archie again wrote home; this time to announce his safety, but, of course, in total ignorance of the various events which had occurred in his own circle during those two years of wandering; and, desirous of testing the sincerity of his resolves, now that the return to old associations would put them to the proof, he determined to accompany his friend, whose route led him homeward through Germany. The trial was a harder one than he imagined; his heart yearned for his home, and to be once more among all the dear ones there, after so long a separation from them. His hand hesitated as he committed his letter to the post, but he would not yield to the strong pleadings of his soul; and, having given his address as Baden Baden, he refused to listen to its suggestions. For a time, even the fact of being once more in Europe, and amongst civilised beings, was delightful; and by continual movement, and recalling the associations of former years, he contrived to still the strong desires of his soul to fly homewards.

He was at Baden then, and in the conversation rooms there, standing in the outer room among the large circle congregated round the roulette table on

the day after his arrival: he had been for some little time watching the game, and looking with a melancholy interest at the faces, hard, anxious, and careworn, of those who were engaged in the play. Suddenly, the report of a pistol in the inner room, followed instantaneously by the piercing shriek of a woman, arrested the attention even of the players. There was a rush and a bustle for a few minutes before he could learn the cause, which was at last related in a tone of coolness that well proved how hardening was the effect of the occupation to which those present devoted their existence. A young English nobleman, who had staked his last thaler with ruinous result, had committed suicide at the table, and a lady, apparently his wife, who stood behind him, had fallen into strong convulsions.

Inexpressibly shocked, he made inquiries as to the name of the unfortunate, and having obtained a foreign variation of the name of Lascelles, and the address of the chambers he had been living in for some weeks, he retired at once to his hotel, with the intention of calling later in the day with offers of service to his countrywoman. At the hotel he found a packet of letters awaiting him, which soon drew his attention for a time from the tragedy of the morning. The first news which greeted him

was the announcement of the sudden death of his uncle, which gave him possession of the Battesden property, and, of course, rendered his immediate return home necessary. Then came the discovery of Minnie's family, and of her being now not only independent but wealthy. This news occupied his attention longer than the other.

Yes, he had attained now the position which he had of late been studying how to fill; and it was clear that, according to his own theories, he ought to lose no time in returning home. Now, indeed, was the time to try the soundness of his principles. Now indeed!—what was this news about Minnie? Gifted with beauty of mind and person as she was, and now acknowledged to be of good family and endowed with wealth:—he shuddered to look further; were his resolutions at once to be put to so vigorous a trial? With her heart free and unoccupied — and surrounded by admirers, as she could not fail to be—perhaps she had already chosen—perhaps she was separated from him for ever! He remained for many minutes with the letter crumpled between his hands, and his head bowed down upon it. Battesden, and all his own wealth, seemed hateful to him—they were separated for ever. What had he to do in England? Why not give up all with her who alone could

make the value of all, and fly away again—any where—to the antipodes. Oh! Archie, where was the result of all your solitary desert musings? where your magnanimous resolves?—Gone—swept away by the torrent which at that moment rushed over his soul!—No, not utterly swept away, only overwhelmed for a time by the force of the wave, to rise again when the first fury of the waters had subsided.

Long he remained in that deep struggle; outwardly still, but inwardly shaken to his very heart's core. Then stole in first the recollection of his determination not to see her again, till he could comply with her condition of mere fraternal love:—the very necessity of his remaining for a time at Battesden at all events made this easier. Thought upon thought poured through his heart; gradually something like a calm came down into it; he had overcome the first fearful struggle. He raised his head, and resumed his letters. How he reproached himself for his coldness to the happiness of Alice, for his indifference to his mother and Lily! but everything seemed so small in comparison with the one thought of Minnie, which loomed out alone, leaving all else in misty uncertainty.

He read on: the name of Lascelles met his eye; his interest was again aroused. He read the com-

mencement of the sad tale, whose tragical finale he had just witnessed. He almost blushed to think how he had quivered and sunk under a load that was light compared to that which Gordon had to bear. Her brother, too—and no doubt all her feelings were bound up in his! Then he remembered his intention of calling at the hotel that evening; he took his hat and went out at once. He easily found the house, for it was not far from the conversation rooms, and in answer to his inquiries learned that the lady had been in delicate health ever since her arrival, some two or three weeks before; that the dreadful event of the morning had affected her terribly. She had continued to fall from one fit to another, and the doctors were under great apprehensions that her life or her reason must give way. He also heard that a gentleman who seemed much interested in her, and appeared to have arrived only an hour before, was now in the house. Archie at once concluded this to be Sir Leslie; so, writing his name and address on a slip of paper, he desired it to be given to the gentleman, with an assurance that he was ready to be of any assistance in his power, and then returned to his hotel.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It is only after the Rubicon has been crossed, that people discover their errors : and there is much intenser infelicity in vicious pleasures, than in the direst calamities which have not originated in guilt. Happy for those whose circumstances have not seduced them into sinking beneath temptation : the first step is irretrievable ; and happiness, like morning dew, has evaporated. Those who have been on the brink of the abyss, and rescued from the downfall, may form some estimate of the depths from which they have been mercifully delivered : and truly those who stand, are not supported by their own strength ; they ought therefore to think charitably on the ill-destined, who, for wise purposes, have been suffered to stumble.

ANON.

ARCHIE shut himself up in his room. He was in no mood to ramble about a gay watering-place, even if the tragedy of the morning had not connected it with the most horrible recollections. He made many deep comments upon this his first return to civilised life, but he did not carry them far out, for his thoughts were busied with matters more nearly concerning himself. This stranger, then, who had just arrived was Minnie's brother, and the hero of whom his aunt had spoken in such laudatory terms at Battesden. He tried to recollect if Lily had de-

scribed him, and what the description amounted to, but he had only seen her once since, at the time of Alice's wedding, just before he went abroad, and he could not remember that she had mentioned his name, though he did recollect how loudly Wentworth had sounded his praises at Fairlands one evening. He knew he had extolled him greatly, and that Lily had assented to the praises he gave; and a trait also recurred to him that his uncle had mentioned which had struck him as noble and liberal at the time: he had also spoken of him as talented and prudent; and the little anecdote which had caused Wentworth's mention of him, showed kind and gentlemanly feeling. Was he any thing like Minnie? and with the name his thoughts wandered away from Baden, and found themselves once more on that memorable watch-tower. His head was down again on his folded arms, and he was oblivious of all that was passing around him.

Presently there was a quick knock at his door, which opened at the same moment, and a stranger was shown in. There was no need to ask his name: there were Minnie's features, with the same thoughtful eyes, looking down upon him, as rousing himself from his reverie, and tossing his hair away from his forehead, Archie rose to welcome his guest.

The two young men looked earnestly at each other, as their hands were mutually grasped. They were a noble pair; both tall and slight, giving the idea of combined strength and activity, though in point of height Archie had the advantage. In complexion Leslie was the fairer, and his eyes of a violet blue, while Archie's complexion, at all times dark, was from exposure to an African sun become absolutely swarthy, and his eyes were of a soft hazel. Archie was at once struck with the resemblance of Leslie to his sister, while no one could have traced the faintest likeness in himself to the fair and delicate Lily. Both young men were singularly free from any sort of affectation, and one would not often meet with two finer specimens of male beauty and manly bearing.

"I come to thank you for your kind wish to aid the unfortunate sufferer of this morning's sad tragedy," said Leslie, in a tone of grave sadness. "You are probably aware that it is my misfortune to be called her husband."

"My letters made me aware of the fact," answered Archie; "I found a packet on my return from the fearful scene, and, when they told me of your arrival at the lodgings, I at once conjectured the truth. How is Lady Gordon, and in what can I be of service?"

“She is in a terrible condition. I am told she has gone through much suffering, and I fear that, at least latterly, she has not met with very kind treatment. I hear from a servant who is with her, that there have been sad scenes; at first, their course was reckless, and, when all the money which could be raised by the sale of her jewels was expended, he had recourse to the gaming-table, with varying luck, and whenever it failed he did not scruple to upbraid her with reducing him to poverty. He drank a good deal too, which in him I believe was a novel vice; altogether her nerves seem to have been severely shaken, and the doctor is apprehensive of her losing her reason.”

“I am indeed grieved for her and for you,” replied Archie, casting aside at once his own troubles, in the desire to serve others. “I fear too that your presence is more likely to increase than to mitigate her illness, if she knows you.”

“That is exactly my own idea,” replied Leslie; “at present, she is not sufficiently recovered to recognise me, though, even in the unconscious state she is in, my approach, or the sound of my voice even, affects her wonderfully. I have therefore left her in the care of her servant, and the woman of the house, who has shewn great kind-

ness, hoping that my absence may help to restore her."

"If there is any way in which I can be of any use, Sir Leslie, remember that you may command me; shall I go at once to the house? I will watch her as I would my sister."

The word made Leslie shrink.

"You are too good," he said; "but it is only what I might expect from one of a family who have all shown such great kindness to the poor little orphan, my sister. You have been told of course that Minnie Gray, who owes everything to Captain and Mrs. Græme, is my sister?" he said, glancing at the heap of letters before Archie.

"Yes," replied the latter thoughtfully; then rousing himself, he went on: "I must congratulate — you are happy—that is—" rising and walking to the window, "such a discovery just at this moment is a peculiarly happy circumstance for you."

There was a pause; Leslie watched his companion narrowly. Archie continued to stand at the window, trying to command himself; from time to time brushing back the long hair that fell over his forehead. Leslie replied, speaking slowly,

"It would indeed be a great boon at any time, were it not that a sister is at best but an insecure

treasure, which one may be called upon to relinquish at any moment, and I cannot expect Minnie to be an exception."

"You are right," replied Archie, hastily approaching the table, and then again returning to the window, "she is of all others the least likely to be so; and yet," he added earnestly, "do not bestow her hastily, Sir Leslie, for few are worthy of her."

"Quite true," was the reply, "but I think Minnie herself would be hard to please, and I shall be in no hurry to lose her."

There was another pause; Archie leaned against the window-frame, with his eyes fixed upon the street. Leslie went on:

"I have really been very remiss not to have given you joy on coming into your property, it is a pleasant announcement after two years among the savages."

"Thank you—yes," replied Archie, thoughtfully, "it is however always a doubtful pleasure to gain by the death of a relative. I could have wished my poor uncle had held the property many years longer, for I fear I am very unfit for the trust."

"Viewing it in that light, rather proves the contrary," was Leslie's reply; then rising, he added, "but it is time that I should return to this poor

sufferer, and attend to the arrangements for burying that unhappy man, and apprising his poor mother. I conclude you will be anxious to return home immediately, and indeed your presence there must be much wanted." He held out his hand; Archie wrung it, then taking up his hat, he said,

"I cannot let you go thus, Sir Leslie. I have no wish to return home yet—that is—it was not my intention to go immediately; a slight further delay can be of no consequence, and there are reasons why I had rather put off the day of trial. I will walk with you now, and can at least spare you the task of arranging with the authorities about this wretched suicide, and also of writing to Lady Milford."

Leslie pressed his hand in silence, and the two friends walked out together.

Their way obliged them to pass within view of the conversation rooms. Both looked at the spot with a shudder. The event seemed however to have produced but little effect on the loungers of the place. There was the band as usual, in its little orchestra, playing with its accustomed spirit to a crowd of promenaders; the chairs in front of the building were all occupied as on other occasions, and the neat waiters belonging to the *restaurant* at the end of

the building were as busily engaged as ever, in attendance upon the parties at the different little tables, who were taking their coffee or tea, or more substantial repast. Only within the rooms there was a change; the inner room was closed, and, in the outer one, it seemed as if there were not quite as many players as were generally to be found there.

They came to the house; Archie remained in the *salon*, while Leslie passed on into the bed-chamber. He remembered so well that day at Battesden when he was told that Sir Leslie and the poor sufferer in the next room were expected. He had seen her the spring before in town, though he was but slightly acquainted with her. He had heard her spoken of in various ways as "fast," and a "coquette," and "a great flirt." He recollected waltzing with her two or three times, and being warned to beware of her, as "a fortune hunter," and smiling inwardly at the time with the thought that one who had conversed and lived on intimate terms with Minnie Gray, and loved her, had no need to be warned against the seductions of such a girl as Jane Osborne. He remembered the conversation at Fairlands that evening when her name was coupled with Leslie's. Then he thought of Lord Charles Lascelles, and the days he had spent at his mother's villa at Kew;

he wondered how that poor mother would support this dreadful blow; he mused upon the misery that what had begun in mere flirtation had ended in. Then he recurred again to the Battesden visit, and wondered how such a man as Leslie could have found attraction in such a girl; and how, with such a husband, she could have acted thus. He felt sure there could be no blame to a man who showed such tender consideration for her, even in her present fallen state. Then, if she were really a fortune-hunter, why had she stepped down from the pedestal of her greatness to fly with a man, not only bearing the character for dissipation that Lord Charles did, but who was so poor? Could it be that the perpetual presence of goodness was too oppressive to a woman naturally coarse in mind? And he thought of the words which Milton puts into Satan's mouth

" Yet all his good prov'd ill in me
And wrought but malice."

While he stood meditating thus, leaning with his arm against the window-frame, his thoughts interrupted at intervals by the sound of music in the distance, as the band played airs from various well-known operas, Leslie re-entered the apartment. Archie turned to inquire with his eyes, more than

in words, what change he found: Leslie shook his head as he answered,

“ But little improvement. There is a slight return of consciousness occasionally; she evidently knew me as I stood by the bed: for, after fixing her eyes upon me with a wild stare for a minute, she buried her head beneath the clothes. She is quiet now, and has two or three times named her sister and her former home—I mean her father’s. If the improvement should continue I shall try and get her to England; her own family I know will have nothing more to say to her; I could not take her to Duncairn, but she shall be placed at Boortree Glen, and well cared for. But this is a terrible welcome to you, my dear Græme, and these rooms are insufferable to me; let us stroll out into the quiet country, and breathe less polluted air, this balmy evening: and with your permission I will share your apartments at the Hotel de Russie: as you are good enough to remain an exile on my account, you will not grudge me the great balm your society will be to me.”

An arrangement so agreeable to both parties was soon made, and having returned to the hotel, and secured another bed-room, they strolled on, under the avenue of lime-trees, out into the country, following the winding walks, which led them

through the pine-forest to the Felsen, exchanging thoughts which continually increased their mutual esteem, and both enjoying the secret charm of recognising from time to time sentiments, tones, and even expressions, which recalled to mind those at home, so dear to the heart of each.

Lady Gordon gained a little ground day by day, but the gleam of consciousness which she showed occasionally, flickered so fitfully, that it was a week before any decided opinion could be formed of her condition: at the end of that time, the doctor considered that with care she might be able to make the journey to England. It was however necessary that Leslie should keep carefully out of her sight or hearing: the mere sound of his voice in a whisper, would cause fits of the most alarming agitation. Her intellect had not yet power enough to carry on any chain of thought, and it was doubtful whether she really knew what had happened. She never mentioned Lord Charles, nor did she seem to look for him; her one cry was for home, but whether the idea was connected with her father's house or Duncairn could not be clearly ascertained. Sometimes she asked for Fanny: but then a spasm would pass over her face, and she would look about anxiously, as if in search of something—"Papa's letter," she

said sometimes—"where is it?" and then, not being able to find it, she would add—"Cruel; unkind, not to let Fanny see me!"

Hitherto they had failed in making her shed tears; she seemed to have lost the power to weep. One day Leslie suggested, that, when she asked for her father's letter, it should be given to her. It was in answer to one which she had written to Fanny a few weeks before, in which she had implored her to intercede with her father for her, and come to her. Colonel Osborne's letter was full of the bitterest reproaches, forbidding her ever to write or hold any future intercourse with any member of her family. The experiment was tried, and succeeded: she seized the letter eagerly, tore it open, and, spreading it on the table before her, burst into a passion of tears. From that moment the doctor declared there was hope of her recovery; but her manner was peculiar, she seldom spoke, and seemed always to be fearful of something, they could not tell what; it was shown in an anxious, startled look, when any one entered the room or approached her; but whether it related to Lord Charles or to Leslie, could not be ascertained, nor could they tell whether she was aware of the death of the former, or the presence of the latter.

He was constant in his visits to her, calling several times a day, and sometimes when she slept he would stand for a few moments by her side, and on his return to Archie, who waited in the next room, there were always traces of tears in his eyes.

At last the day arrived when it was said she might begin the journey. It was arranged that the servant who had waited upon her hitherto, should accompany her to Scotland, as her permanent attendant. Leslie and Archie travelled in the same train, the former keeping carefully out of her sight. The latter had by no means lost the habit of forgetting self for the sake of others. During the journey, as while at Baden, his powers of serving and gratifying others were called into full play: he was always devising means to add to the comfort of Lady Gordon, to cheer and sustain the spirits of Leslie, to lighten the weariness and sadness of the journey home, and a friendship grew up between the young men, which nothing in after-life could ever weaken.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Hope rules a land for ever green :
All powers that serve the bright-eyed Queen
Are confident and gay :
Clouds at her bidding disappear ;
Points she to aught ? The bliss draws near,
And Fancy smoothes the way.

WORDSWORTH.

CAPTAIN Græme had lately returned from his second voyage, and he was now eagerly looked for, with Mrs. Græme, at Fairlands. She was at Battesden when his ship arrived at Portsmouth, and there he had joined her as soon as he was free. It was a painful meeting with Mrs. Sherwood, for the most indifferent can hardly stand on the spot from whence one familiarly connected with us has been removed, without deep sadness, and, though a year had elapsed since the event, it seemed to Captain Græme but as yesterday when they had parted. But he was of too jovial a temperament for such a grief to interfere long with the pleasure of feeling himself once more restored to his family. He looked grave indeed when told of Archie's prolonged absence and

silence; but he had been knocking about the world too much himself, and had seen too many hair-breadth 'scapes from dangers more imminent than those his son was in, to give way to immoderate alarm on his account.

“Never fear,” he said to his wife, “Heaven will protect him, as it has protected me in all my wanderings and dangers; though why the devil the young fellow should choose to thrust himself into such dangers, is more than I can understand. But come, my lady wife, I am impatient to see Alice, and my little grand-daughter, and Lily. I trust the little fairy is as bright as ever,—and then there’s my rich young heiress, Miss Marion Gray! That bit of news did my old heart good, for a better, dearer girl lives not than our own Minnie: and to my mind that young scamp Archie would show more sense in sitting quietly at Battesden with Minnie by his side, than in looking after niggers. But at all events it is time that we should steer away for Fairlands.”

The day was soon fixed, and it was no distant one, for Captain and Mrs. Græme to leave Battesden. Alice and David were already with the family circle at Fairlands; Minnie and Liliass had been busily preparing for the expected arrival, and were now

listening eagerly to catch the first sound of the carriage-wheels. At last the pleasant grating of the gravel was heard, and both ran to the door to give a hearty welcome to their happy parents.

“Come, Miss Gray,” said the old sailor, holding Minnie at arm’s length as they entered the drawing-room, “let us see what change this achievement of wealth and dignity has made in the wee bairnie, who was dragged up the ship’s side like a bit of wet seaweed, some sixteen years ago.”

“No change, dear papa, except that I can live amongst you all now, and that, in addition to all my dear friends here, I have a brother, who is quite as much disposed to spoil me.”

“Ah, well! he’ll find that difficult, I’m thinkin’; it was a day’s work, finding you, that I have never had cause to repent of:—But now, Lily, heave ahead there, and make room for my bit gran’child, who’s laughin’ an’ croonin’ in Alice’s arms. No just respectfu’ in you neither, Alice, to mak’ me into an auld grand-dad, as if it was nae eneugh to call this old fellow son,” slapping David on the shoulder. “And what’s this fellow Archie doing, philandering about after African squaws, or whatever they call themselves, and leaving Battersden to take care of itself?”

Minnie stooped to pick up a rose which the baby had dropped, and then held out her arms to tempt her from her grand-papa. The little creature struggled to get down upon her feet.

"There, gang yer ways," the old man exclaimed, "she's like the lave, a' for change, an' soon tired o' her grand-dad. Well, Minnie, this is a sad tale I hear of your sister-in-law," he added more gravely.

"It is a sad tale indeed; poor Leslie! he deserves something better. I must bring you together, dear papa, for he's something to be proud of, I assure you."

It was now Lily's turn to blush, but, as soon as she found which way the conversation was turning, she fairly bolted out of the window. Minnie went on:

"It makes him sadly unsettled; he, who used to be so fond of his home, now spends most of his time on the continent."

"No wonder, no wonder: but this will wear off we must hope. It is a sad blight upon his life, an' it's no to be wondered at that he's drifted from his moorings for a time. How long is it since the jade left him?"

"Just a year this month, and it's only about two years they've been married, and two years of misery they have been to poor Leslie."


“ Well, my child, it’s just one of the mysteries of our present life, that we see the best amongst us often the sorest tried; I suppose it’s a’ for our guid.”

“ Every branch that beareth fruit,”—quoted Minnie.

“ Yes, bairn, that’s it, nae doot, and though we mustn’t think that trials are a proof of our being good, they are sent, we may be sure, to try what is in us, and mak’ us so, ’gin we take them rightly. Well, Lily, you little fairy, what now?” he exclaimed, as the latter came running into the room.

“ Now, papa dear,” she said taking his arm, “ we have arranged the prettiest bower for you and mama; the tea is ready, and you must come and take your places.”

“ A fine idea, you minx,” he said as he pinched her cheek, “ to get your poor old parents out and give them the rheumatism drinking tea on the damp grass !” but he went nevertheless; and when he saw how well all was arranged, that the old people should sit under the verandah, and enjoy the meal and the exquisite view, while the young ones waited upon them, he kissed the two girls, and said he should forget he was at home, with that sea before him, and fancy himself on his own quarter-deck; “ and there you know I’m a king, so mind how you behave.”



It was a happy evening: David, and the Captain, and Mrs. Græme, and Alice, sat and talked on heedless of the summer dews: there was so much to tell and to hear; and, when the shadows began to fall, the piano was opened, and sweet music floated out on the evening air, the spirits were soothed and calmed, and the many anxieties which agitated even this happy meeting were charmed to rest.

Captain Græme's late absence had been a time more fertile than usual in family events. He had left Alice a young bride: he found her now a happy mother, with a new link to life and a stronger bond of affection between herself and her excellent husband. The two old friends, who, notwithstanding their difference of age, had been so much thrown together in early life, had always some reminiscence or other of former days to talk about, which led the old sailor into many a long yarn, and, while the other members of the family were variously occupied during the morning, he and David were generally to be found pacing up and down the terrace overlooking the sea, at the bottom of the lawn.

Mrs. Græme and Alice were engrossed in conversations and employments equally interesting to themselves, and were usually closeted in the dressing-room of the former till luncheon time. Thus Minnie

and Liliass were free to pursue their own devices. These led them sometimes to solitary musings, but more frequently to walks and expeditions in company: always with some end useful to others in view; for the visit of Minnie to Duncairn had aroused her from the habit, in which she had latterly been indulging too much, of dwelling upon her own feelings, and forgetting that she had been placed in this world to be of use, and not to spend her time in yielding to vain regrets and wishes which incapacitated her mind for healthful exercise.

When Archie first left, she had fallen unconsciously into this habit of musing; the excitement she underwent on first discovering her brother, while her health and spirits had been weakened by previous illness, increased the languor. Her visits to Duncairn, however, had latterly done much towards bracing her nerves and rousing her from this listlessness. It was impossible to be in Leslie's home, and not recognise how fully he accepted and carried out the principle of the necessity of active usefulness in the world; and this not only for himself; all his plans were so constituted as to be only a graduated and fuller development of the principle. In the hamlet of Strathmaer, for example, every one was made to feel that they had something to do for

others.—While to the men and women fell the natural arrangement of providing for families and keeping the house, the girls and young women were taught needle-work and useful knowledge. One out of their number was selected as school-mistress; some had to attend upon those who had no natural relations: a schoolmaster, trained for the purpose, taught the boys and superintended both schools, and care was taken that the children were well taught in religious principles. The old women were encouraged to spend their time in spinning and knitting; and the old men, in helping to make and mend nets for the fishermen, found constant employment. Minnie had begged to be allowed to endow the kirk that Leslie had erected, so that, a comfortable manse having been built jointly, a minister was on the spot to attend to the parish.

On revisiting these places alone, Minnie had been more and more struck with the practical acceptance of this duty of universal usefulness, which Leslie had shown: and remembering under what adverse circumstances he had worked, how harassed his mind had been by the trials of his domestic life, she blushed to think how far more real and pressing his sorrows had been than her own, and how much more nobly he had borne them, and struggled on, while

of late she had been gradually letting her hands hang down; even while, in being restored to her family, her blessings had at least balanced her trials.

She had indeed given herself up to much solitary thought even at Duncairn, but it was healthy, vigorous thought, not idle, dreaming reverie. Her morning rides, taken as they were alone, even without the *gêne* of a servant, were generally occupied by these meditations: she would think over the long conversations she held with Fairburn, often, when he detailed all Leslie's arrangements, and spoke with such enthusiasm of his noble abnegation of self, and devotion to whatever work he found to do; not alone in Strathmaer, but every where that his influence extended, over high and low, the same mind and principle were clearly visible, and she shuddered to think how much had been in her power to effect, even without the aid of money, that she had neglected to do.

After Fairburn then she took counsel of the fine bracing air, and of her horse; the exercise and the sea-breezes invigorated her nerves, and gave tone to her mind. Nor did she neglect to seek for higher counsel. She knew that our work is given us according to our powers, that we have no hard Taskmaster, expecting us to do the task assigned and

refusing us the means to do it, and she prayed earnestly for more wisdom and guidance, that she might have strength to subdue herself and to use her gifts, whatever they might be, for the glory of the giver.

Thus she had returned to Fairlands stronger in health, in mind, and in principle, and Helen Baillie, who had always been her companion on these visits, had little suspected the earnest will that was continually at work beneath that gentle and loving surface, ever apparently yielding her own wishes to those of her companion, and bent solely on her gratification. But it was a part of Minnie's nature to work silently and mole-like in her own heart, and, as the progress of that little animal is only traced by the mounds of rich earth which he throws up above his unseen pathway, so the workings of Minnie's mind were only discoverable by the good acts they produced.

Even now she might be seen occasionally, alone and musing, but we should find none of the purposeless reveries and fanciful conceits which formerly occupied her solitary hours on the watch-tower; she had set herself to play the real part in life which seemed given to her. Her first endeavour was to rouse Lily from the habit which

her own example had fostered, and which, for her, she felt was even more dangerous. Lily was not one wilfully to pursue a path which had once been shown to be a wrong one, and the two girls were once more united in their endeavours. There was no hasty pulling down and building up, or large means expended, or striking works undertaken. To general observers there was little alteration in their mode of life. No studies were neglected, no refinements forgotten, no outward austerities practised. But there was steady determination to overcome all vain repinings, and cheerfully to accept the lot which had no doubt been wisely ordered for them. Duties in their own family circle, and duties in the village, were not difficult to find. In the latter they suffered all their undertakings to be directed by the prudent old rector. Where money was wanted, Minnie's purse was open. A village dispensary became by degrees unostentatiously established, a village doctor soon followed, which saved the poor cottager the trouble and expense and often dangerous delay of having to send to Tarbet for advice and medicines. A handsome commodious schoolhouse was built, and a few cottages with garden-ground allotted to some of the old people, where each could have his separate dwelling. The ladies were not always to be

seen attending upon these works, but all was under supervision; trustworthy agents were appointed, and their own visits were quietly and naturally made without any interference with home occupations; so that, if Captain Græme wanted the companionship of his girls, they were always at hand and ready for him, nor had Mrs. Græme ever far to seek when any household duty called for them. At other times it seemed that they had nothing else to do but to play with and amuse Alice's baby, while David always found them willing to enter into any expedition in the afternoon on foot, on their ponies, or in the boat. Sketching, music, and reading were as much practised as ever, and the only thing they could not find time for was discontent or vain repining.

Things were in this state, when Archie's letter from Cairo arrived. For the first time then for many weeks did Minnie make a visit to her watch-tower. She wanted the feeling of vastness and solitude: her own room was too confined; there was no church where she might enter and lay her gratitude and happiness at the foot of the cross. It is a want often felt in this country, where liberty reigns in most things, and only the privilege of drawing near to God, in His own House, and at all times, is debarred us. How often when joy or sorrow over-

whelms the soul, would we lift up our overladen hearts in the place appointed for His worship. There is something peculiarly calming and elevating in being able at all times to enter His holy temple. It is true He is as near us in our own closet, but there are often hindrances there. It is a curious remark that I have often heard, and can testify to its truth, that if a person is more than usually desirous of privacy and communion with God in his or her own chamber, the housemaid has a particular desire to remove cobwebs at that time; the door may be locked, but it is not only distracting to be called upon to answer continual knocks, but there is always some urgent business that at last obliges one in sheer despair to give up the idea of solitude. If this be so with the better classes, what a boon must an open church be to a poor cottager, who has not even the pretence of a private room to put up a prayer in! How soothing to those who live in the bustle and turmoil of a town, to feel that there is a place of holy retirement where one may be alone with God! Those who have felt the blessing of a church open to all, hallowing as it were our hourly employments, will I think admit that it is a privilege which we might enjoy in our own country, without the sacrifice of any of our Protestant princi-

ples, or the admission of any doctrine or custom incompatible with the pure worship of our own church.

But what would become then of the verger's or sexton's fees?

CHAPTER XXXV.

Come home! there is a sorrowing breath
In music since ye went,
And the early flower-scents wander by
With mournful memories blent ;
The tones in every household voice
Are grown more sad and deep :
And the sweet word " brother " wakes a wish
To turn aside and weep.

MRS. HEMANS.

So it was to her watch-tower that Minnie retired, with her bounding heart full of gratitude for Archie's safety, and desirous of pouring out her thanks to his Almighty Protector. She had once more seen his handwriting, and heard that after his long absence and silence he was again restored to them, and would doubtless soon be among them. Not immediately, it was true, but they knew of his whereabouts, and could exchange letters. And, when he knew of his uncle's death, that would of course hasten him home; and now she no longer dreaded his coming, she longed for it; for now she might acknowledge his love returned. She had ceased to be

the poor nameless, portionless, dependent on the bounty of his family, or on her own exertions; she was the acknowledged sister of Sir Leslie Gordon, with a fortune almost beyond her station. Even his mother would now be proud to call her daughter; had not her look assured of that this morning when his letter was read? and even while the tears of joy were running down her cheeks had she not called her so, and embraced her as one of her own children? Yes, there was now no obstacle to their union, for a thought of inconstancy in Archie never crossed her mind.

She knelt for some time, her heart so full of gratitude that it could find no utterance in words, only a passion of tears gave vent to her feelings. After a time she became calmer, and, seating herself on the stone she had occupied that memorable morning, she folded her hands before her, and gave herself up to her happy thoughts. The sea was in one of its calmest moods, and lay like a mirror before her; the distant Irish coast was only visible through the hazy atmosphere, and seemed to tremble in the radiation caused by the noontide heat. The sky was cloudless, and only now and then could be distinguished a faint murmur from below, where the sea softly rippled to the foot of the cliffs. Every

thing spoke of calm and repose; and the passion of joy which had lately agitated her breast gradually subsided under the influence of universal stillness, and gave place to a sensation of ineffable peace and thankfulness.

She did not long surrender herself to the selfish contemplation of her happiness; having relinquished the habit of indulging her feelings when the languor consequent on long-continued struggles against concealed sorrow had made occupation a labour, she was not going to fall into it again now, when the blood was coursing so joyously through her veins, and hope smiled so cheerily upon her. So she once more knelt to offer up her grateful thanks, and then taking one long steady look upon the scene around and beneath, as if she were bidding a long adieu to the spot, and would fix its features indelibly on her memory, she turned to descend the mountain, with a light, springy step, very different to the thoughtful, quiet pace which had become habitual to her of late years.

How full of happiness was the group that she rejoined! All were trying to conjecture when Archie's arrival might be expected. Letters were to be sent to Baden Baden, so it was clear that he did not intend an immediate return; but those very letters

might greatly alter his plans; they would tell him that he was now the possessor of Battesden, which of course required his presence; that there was to be an election for the county on account of the recent death of one of the members, and he would see that it was of importance that ordinary matters should be put aside, and he should hasten home. In the course of a week, then, they might expect him. The letters should be despatched by that day's post, and Mrs. Græme went to write them, while Alice wrote to apprise her aunt of Archie's re-appearance. Everybody found something to do; Captain Græme went down to the pier to overhaul the boat and her tackling, and see that she was ready for sea, as he said, as soon as she should be signalled from Tarbet to take the admiral on board. David puzzled his brains over a continental Bradshaw; tracing Archie's route from Cairo to Baden, and thence to England, calculating distances and trying to accommodate trains. His was, perhaps, the longest occupation, and the least satisfactory in its results. The servants were all partaking in the joy of their superiors. Old Elspie's joy found a vent in (as she expressed it) "reddin' up the house frae th'ane end till the tither;" and, while the tears ran down her old cheeks, she kept up a continual current of words,

now heaping "blessin's on the dear young laird, wha, she had feared, wadna gladden the sight o' her auld een mair," now abusing the other servants for "pawky lassies, na worth their saut."

Minnie and Lily had their own pleasure in communicating the good news to their friends in the village, and making them partakers in their joy.

The week passed away, but no Archie came. Once more David sat down with patience to the Bradshaw, vainly seeking to account for the delay. Every morning, as the letter-bag was emptied, and no news came from Archie, the blank looks brightened with the thought, "Well, perhaps we shall see him to-day." Every probability and possibility was eagerly discussed; everything that could cause delay was canvassed; the time necessary for the conveyance of letters to and fro was conned over. Then came a fear, imagined but not expressed, "Could he have fallen ill after the exposure to climate and hardships of all kinds?" The letter was again carefully studied, to see if incipient illness were to be traced in the handwriting or in any expression; but no, the former was as firm and clear as ever, and in the whole tone there was the quiet composure which gave no indication of weakness. "To-morrow, then, we must certainly see him, or, at least, hear

something;" and outward expressions of anxiety were laid aside for another four-and-twenty hours, though in the heart of each the question was perpetually reiterated, "What can be the cause of delay? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" All returned to their usual avocations, and tried to convince themselves and others that there could be no real cause for anxiety — that, in fact, they were not anxious,—

But, through all, through all,
Steals the tinkling, silvery murmur
Of the fountain's fall !

At last, about a fortnight after the receipt of Archie's first letter, and when, from very fear of confirming the anxiety all felt, each had abstained from naming the subject, or even questioning by a rapid glance, as rapidly withdrawn, the contents of the post-bag, came two letters bearing the Baden post-mark, one of which was for Mrs. Græme from her son, the other from Leslie to his sister. Both contained a slight account of the terrible event and its consequences, and of their having made each other's acquaintance. Archie wrote,

"Until I found myself, so to speak, within reach of dear Scotland again, and of all the beloved group

at Fairlands, I had little conception how full of love for them my heart was; how I yearned to take the wings of the morning, and nestle once more in that dear home; how my heart pleaded with my determination to delay my return for a few weeks still; how hard I found it to keep a resolution which, for cogent reasons, I had made—”

“Hang his reasons!” interrupted Captain Græme, “why didn’t the fellow come home at once? I should like to know what business he had to make such fool’s resolutions as that, when he knew hearts were pining for him at home.”

The letter went on:

“But strong will carried the day against strong love; the victory is gained, and it is a victory that I am very proud of, you may be sure—” “I don’t see why,” muttered Captain Græme.—“It brought its own reward, too: first, in leading me to make the acquaintance of one, who, as a man, a Christian, and a gentleman, is the finest specimen of that rare combination I have ever met with; I mean Sir Leslie Gordon, Minnie’s brother, and as worthy of her as she is of him—”

“At least there’s some sense in that,” put in the captain.

Archie then expressed his pleasure at Minnie’s

good fortune, and entered into some details of the cause of his detention at Baden; adding, that, as he could not leave Gordon in his present circumstances, he must wait the issue of events on which would depend the time of his return. "As to Battesden," he continued, "I am truly grieved for my uncle's death; I hoped the property would have continued many more years in his possession. I feel more and more my own inadequacy for the right administration of such a stewardship——" "What the devil! does the man think himself nothing but a steward?" exclaimed the irate old sailor,—“and receive the trust with a most sober-minded gladness. For the election, of course I must try and fill the same seat my uncle once held, if I can get to England in time. About this, I have written to Raby, and also to my aunt, who I hope will remain there, and take pity on my bachelor establishment. To live there alone would be too dull, and the idea of marrying is now quite gone by.”

“Take pity on his bachelor establishment, indeed!” grumbled his father, “a poor home that would be for his aunt! A good idea that of not marrying! I wonder how long he’ll keep to it.”

Mrs. Græme laughed a little forced laugh, and glanced rapidly at Minnie: she saw little, however, as her face was bent down apparently reading her own letter; the face was indeed deadly pale, but whether that was in consequence of what Leslie wrote, or what Mrs. Græme had read, she could not discern.

Minnie made no remark; it was not even certain that she had been listening to Archie's letter; she seemed absorbed in her own, which evidently gave her much pain. Only for a moment her countenance had brightened into a smile, and a blush had overspread it; the smile and the blush both passed away before Mrs. Græme had ended, and the deadly paleness had taken their place.

Presently they all rose from the table, and Minnie followed Mrs. Græme to her dressing-room: she put Leslie's letter into her hands, as she said,

"You will like to read it, because of the high praise he gives Archie, and the evident esteem he feels for him; you will also like to see his account of Archie's kind and delicate thoughtfulness for Leslie and Lady Gordon, so unlike the world in general: you will make allowance for a brother's fondness in the wish that he expresses," she continued, her features becoming rigid and her face

till paler; "it is evident he does not know our relative positions, or he would not have written so; at all events I can fully trust his delicacy, and feel sure he has given no such hint to Archie."

"And why should this wish annoy you, dearest Minnie?" asked Mrs. Græme, running her eye quickly over the passage to which the former pointed; "I am sure it is a wish we must all share. And I think," she continued, placing her hand on Minnie's arm, "I think my sweet child knows that Archie's wishes tend in the same direction."

"Dear mama," replied Minnie, speaking in a constrained tone, as if with a strong effort to master the emotion she could hardly conceal, "I have abstained from speaking on the subject from the wish to save you annoyance."

"I have felt your goodness, Minnie, though for some time past I only suspected what had passed between Archie and yourself. He told me, however, the night before his departure; he told me of his unconquerable love for you, and your rejection of it. I thanked my sweet girl in my heart, then, for her prudence, for I need not mind telling you Minnie that my wish is to see Archie marry well, in point of fortune and family: the whole thing is altered now; you are in these respects at least his equal,

and in everything else he could not match with one more worthy of him, or more welcome to us all."

But Minnie's countenance retained all its former rigidity; now and then as Mrs. Græme spoke a shade of colour flitted across her cheek and faded again: once, while she alluded to the evening before Archie's departure, something like a tear had trembled on her downcast lashes, but it had not been suffered to fall; and, as Mrs. Græme concluded, an expression akin to that of scorn was visible for a moment: all passed away, however, and, with the same coldly fixed expression, Minnie resumed, in the same constrained tone as before:

"It is these altered circumstances which make me now reveal what hitherto I have kept to my own bosom, in order that on—on his return, there may be no misunderstanding on this subject. The morning on which I first left Fairlands for Glasgow, Archie declared his love—I had hoped to be spared the trial—I had endeavoured to avoid the disclosure of what I had long read in his eyes. In spite of my efforts the moment came; I gave him the answer which you know; I repeated it at the time of Alice's wedding: my own mind is fixed; and when he returns I wish to be spared any allusion to a subject so painful to me."

“ But, Minnie, why is this? surely you love him? I have read it in a thousand things, and I remember, that very night when he confessed it to me, I smiled to myself at the blindness which made invisible to him what was at once so patent to me.”

“ Dearest mama, I do love him,—as you or as Lily and Alice love him. I should be ungrateful indeed if I did not love all those who have shewn so much affection to me. But gratitude is not needed to arouse love, for it flows willingly towards all. Archie will have grown wiser no doubt during these two years’ absence, and I should not have mentioned the past now but from the remark Leslie makes; and, as your manner has betrayed to me your knowledge of my secret, I feared you might lead Archie to put the same construction on my feelings as you have done.”

There was a manner in Minnie while speaking which Mrs. Græme had never seen in her before; she felt as if they had changed places, and, though she could not penetrate what she felt to be a mystery, she was silenced and dared not press the matter farther. Minnie left her to read the letter, and an hour after Mrs. Græme saw her cross the lawn with Lily, talking cheerfully, but with her late elastic step once more composed into her former quiet pace.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Daughter, thy words are not idle, nor are they to me without meaning.
Feeling is deep and still; and the word that floats on the surface
Is as the tossing buoy, that betrays where the anchor is hidden.

EVANGELINE.

And the stillness—like Nature's hand laid upon the soul,—
—bidding it think.

“So they really are in England, mama!” exclaimed Alice, as she sat with her mother in the dressing-room of the latter, about ten days after the conversation recorded in the last chapter: “and that dreadful Lady Gordon still lives! I declare that woman has as many lives as a cat; nothing kills her, and yet she only seems to live for the torment of her husband, who certainly is worthy of a better fate.”

“He is to be pitied indeed, Alice; few men would think of taking so much trouble about one so worthless; for my part, I never could imagine what induced him to marry her. They must have been most thoroughly unsuited to each other, and yet, when he came to Glenrowan, I remember he had not a moment's peace till he was going back to her

again, though at that very time her folly, or perhaps something worse, had lost him an heir."

"As for the marriage, mama, I have always had a little romance of my own about that; I have an idea there was something between him and Lily at Battesden; what it was, or what interrupted it, I know not, but she came back wonderfully changed in manner; and you remember her sudden illness, and the break up of the party? She has never been her old *insouciant*e self since that visit; and, though she is often in high spirits now, she has lost all that wild gaiety; she always gives me the idea of one who has stood, though it may be but for a moment, face to face with sorrow, and the shadow still remains on her spirit. I think Minnie knows her secret, if there be one; they seem to cling to each other more than ever."

"True enough," replied her mother, "and it has often struck me how carefully Sir Leslie has avoided us; he has only been at Fairlands once for a few days, and that was when Lily was at Battesden; his visits to Minnie are always made at Glenrowan, when she is alone there. And Minnie has her secret too, though I don't fancy Lily suspects that, for I believe she never divulged it to any one, till she spoke to me yesterday."

"I can guess, mama! she loves Archie: oh, I am so glad!"

"Not so fast, Alice," said her mother laughing, "I confess I thought so myself, but, would you believe it?—she has refused him twice."

"Ah, that was because she knew you would disapprove. Don't you remember my saying once that she was too noble and high-minded not to stand in her own light, as people say? Poor Minnie! But that's all over now; when Archie comes home this time there need surely be no obstacle, real or imaginary."

"There again is the profoundest part of the riddle, Alice. She followed me upstairs the day we got their first letters, told me all that had passed, and said she would do the same again, or something of the sort; looking all the time as I never saw Minnie look before, so proud, and almost scornful, that I was literally unable to say a word."

Alice looked up from her work with surprise; then after sitting for a moment in deep thought, with her eyes fixed on her mother's face, she said,

"I wonder whether it was anything which Archie said in his letter that brought her to that resolution. Don't you remember, mama, he made some remark about a bachelor establishment, and

his will conquering his love?—Oh, yes, and he said that all idea of marrying he had given up, I think. Minnie would naturally see more in those words than the uninitiated could understand, and I confess, with her key, I think I should interpret them into meaning he had changed his mind.”

“ Stuff and nonsense, Alice ! In the first place she was so engrossed with her own letter she paid no attention to what I was reading, for I looked to see if she were listening: and then he meant his love for us all, not for her individually; and as to his not marrying—Archie is not one to change lightly, and no doubt if he meant any thing it was only just a feeler to see how she would take it.”

“ She has taken it seriously enough then, it seems: but I own she is not easy to understand. She always appears so yielding, and yet no rock is firmer. I cannot think how any one could refuse to love Archie if he tried to win love; I should have thought him irresistible; but she has wonderful notions of perfection, I own, and also strange command over herself; and the latter I think she has been teaching our little Lily: but it is quite possible that if she has refused Archie, and given him no hope, he may have changed: poor Love cannot live without some food, you know, and hope

is his chosen diet. Well, she's a very dear girl, and I am sorry for Archie: look at Lily and herself, mama, in the flower-garden now, how busy they are training those roses, and hark to Lily's merry laugh as she shakes the bough and sprinkles Minnie with the rain-drops! Do look at Minnie's graceful attitude as she kneels on the grass, turning half round and defending herself with her pretty hands: what a picture they would make!"

They did make a sweet picture, and Alice and her mother watched them for some time; but there was a picture still prettier in Alice's eyes, as she looked down at her little girl, who was sitting on the floor at her feet, destroying something with all a baby's earnestness in the employment; and when at last, having fully accomplished her task, she looked up and challenged her mother's attention with her merry laugh, as she held up a shred in each little hand, the two girls were forgotten, as well as the conversation with her mother, and every thing else, in the rapture with which she caught up the little fairy and pressed it to her bosom.

Letters had been received from the travellers that morning, dated London. They were now on their way northwards, going first to Boortree Glen, and, having brought Lady Gordon so far, they intended

remaining there one night to see that all was right, and put the remaining touches to her comfort. By Fairburn's help, a small establishment had been already placed in the house, and the servant who had accompanied them from Germany was to remain as Lady Gordon's special attendant. Arrangements had been made for a physician of eminence to meet them from Edinburgh, who was to visit her two or three times a week. Leslie also wished to make the acquaintance of the clergyman of the parish to which Boortree Glen belonged, that he might place Jane under his care. The two young men were then to go on to Edinburgh, where Leslie would be detained for a day or two, and where Archie would leave him. Leslie also made it a request that Minnie would join him in Edinburgh, so that they might proceed together to Duncairn.

As soon as Captain Græme heard the plan, he declared his intention of accompanying Minnie himself, and going on to Duncairn. It was natural enough, he said, that, situated as Leslie was, he should not like to come amongst their merry party, and that he should wish for his sister's society; "So, Minnie, just gie him a scratch o' the pen, an' say that we'll meet him at Duncairn i' the stead o'

goin' to Edinbro'. I wad like to know the gallant fellow mysel'. To be sure it's a wee hard upon the lad Archie, but he's no that helpless that he canna follow gin he wishes it."

Minnie was very glad of the arrangement; it would leave her only one clear day to be thrown with Archie. Little more than a week ago how differently had she thought of his coming! how bright the future had appeared! A few words of Archie's had shut out all its brightness. He had followed her advice but too literally; the struggle had been made, and the mastery won; he would now make no farther attempts to change her resolution; all was over for her! Her dream of happiness, and such happiness as it would have been—all was passed. There might indeed yet remain much enjoyment for her in life, but Archie would form no part of it. She forgot that to him she had never assigned the true reason for her rejection of his love. It did not occur to her that the change of circumstances, which made all the difference from the point of view she took, said nothing to him. She only felt that twice she had thrown his heart from her, and that now it was no longer hers.

The day dawned at last that before its close would really see Archie at home again. All were early

astir. Captain Græme, while he affected to laugh at the joy and the preparations for his welcome, yet insisted upon himself going to Tarbet in the boat to meet him. The ladies were to be on the little pier at Fairlands to welcome him.

Gallantly the little boat bore up to her moorings at the end of the jetty about four o'clock, and before she had well touched the pier Archie had leapt ashore.

"Ah, young blood and young muscles!" laughed the captain as he followed more leisurely, "these youngers make us count our years. Well, madam, what think you of your nigger son? They say you may live with the lame till you halt; I think he's lived among the niggers till he's as black as they are. Archie, boy, are there any Nubian lions or such small deer to be landed, and are we to have a bonnie Scotsman roasted for your dinner?"

"Not to-day, I think, sir," returned Archie gaily; "they're generally more bony than bonnie, so I think I'll content myself with other fare."

"You seem to be devouring the womankind anyhow," as his mother and sisters were alternately clasped in his embrace. "But where's the piccaninny? she's just the thing we want. Ah, I see, Alice is na sae daft as to bring her bairnie before the een of sic an unchristian cannibal."

“She’s not far off, papa!” exclaimed Minnie, coming forward with the baby in her arms, whom she had just taken from the nurse. She had seized upon the child as a shield under cover of which to greet Archie and hide her own emotion. He seemed to enter into her intentions, and as he took her hand and lightly kissed her cheek, he fell immediately to caressing the child, who, terrified at the strange dark face, turned shrieking and clinging to Minnie’s neck, who at once carried her off towards the house.

The rest soon followed, but Minnie did not reappear till dinner-time. In the mean time there had been much to talk about in the various events that had occurred during these two years, so that her absence was hardly noticed, except perhaps by Archie, who at every opening of the door turned a quick inquiring glance as if in search of her.

In the evening he brought down many of the curiosities and treasures which he had picked up in his wanderings: there were valuable presents for all; specimens of antiquity from Egypt, as well as curiosities from the wilder parts where he had been, and costly productions of art from European cities.

“Here are sketches in plenty,” he said, opening a portfolio of water-colour drawings, “and in town

I have a great variety of things which I was obliged to forward from Cairo; I had just time in passing through to ascertain their safe arrival. Skins of animals, and elephants' tusks, and collections of plants and insects, and also some birds, which I shall have stuffed on my return; Battesden will be turned into a museum, I think."

"But what could put such a mad scheme into your head, my boy, as travelling in the wilds of Africa?" asked Captain Græme. "I should have thought there was plenty of the civilized world to visit, without going amongst the niggers."

"Mad? Well I believe I was mad; at all events I was sick of civilisation for the moment; I wanted to see man in his wild state; but I don't know that he shows to much more advantage when stripped of refinements; I doubt whether in point of habits some of the quadrupeds do not beat the biped race. I have, indeed, seen some fine specimens of form among the untamed; in Nubia, for instance, I have seen men who were perfect models of manly beauty, and with the *pose* and *aplomb* that many a European exquisite might envy; but when you get amongst the niggers one sees forms of mind and body that make one look upon some of the wild beasts, the lion for example, as far the nobler animal. The latter

indeed have an uncomfortable habit of sacrificing our species to their appetite; but amongst some tribes of the lords (so called) of the creation one hears of human sacrifices to their deities, which are rather more to be dreaded of the two. The lions and such as they at all events afforded us splendid sport; I had more than one hunt with the natives, and most of the skins I have brought home are the result of my own prowess."

"At all events, Archie," said his mother, "you have seen enough of barbarism to reconcile you to civilised life I hope now; there is no fear of your preferring a desert life, I conclude."

"No, civilisation has its charms, and yet there is a grandeur in those solitudes that is very elevating. One seems nearer to God; there are not the thousand little fretting cares that come between Him and our souls, the trifles that enclose us lion-like in a net which can be only nibbled through by the patience and perseverance of the mouse. God's noble works are seen, undisturbed by the petty contrivances of man for gain or selfishness. Our wants are fewer, our habits more simple; we hunt our game, and the exercise gives us appetite for its consumption, and the bodily fatigue makes our sleep sound."

"Then," said Lillas, "you consider that the

aim and end of man's life is to eat, drink, and sleep."

"It is all that is necessary for his animal existence, and our highest civilised refinements mostly result in enabling him to gratify these three necessities in the most luxurious manner. A savage is content with a blanket or a string of shells or berries—you would have the covering of satin or velvet, and the shells or berries exchanged for diamonds or pearls. The value of either is a matter of taste—conventional; were shells or berries difficult and expensive to attain, we should see all the ladies throwing away their diamonds, and coveting the berries; but for mental food ——"

"You find well-stored libraries, scientific associations, museums, and all things necessary for its provision."

"You are not far wrong. What museum is so rich as nature's own? In Africa, the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms are richly represented. Nature supplies an ample studio for science wherein to work out her problems; and for libraries—you have heard of 'sermons in stones'—there is at least very good divinity to be learned amongst them, as well as in other things, if only one has the power of reading nature's page. Of course I

am not speaking of savage life *as* a savage, one must take into the desert the power of observing and appreciating what one finds there."

"And of what use are these vast libraries and museums of which you speak, if you have no opportunity of imparting the result of your researches? Must we all choose our own desert, and dwell there alone for our sole benefit?"

"You take me too much *au pied de la lettre*, Lily. I am not advocating anchoretism, neither am I in love with barbarism; I merely contend that to a civilised mind there is nothing so elevating as the solitude of the desert. I have watched through the night ——"

"I thought you quoted sound sleep as one of its advantages," maliciously put in Lily.

"You forget that I took my civilisation with me, consequently its cares and troubles; often the fatigues of the day overcame these, and I have slept sounder on the bare ground than ever I did in the most luxurious bed in Europe, in spite of the possibility of nocturnal visitors, to which in Europe we are perhaps equally liable, though their attacks are on a smaller scale. But there were many, many nights when all were sleeping around me, and I heard only the distant wild cries of our four-footed

enemies, which enabled me perhaps better to understand the stillness of the wilderness, while the stars in their clear brilliancy, instead of being set into the sky, as we see through our dense atmosphere, looked like bright lamps of fire suspended in mid-air; and the fire-flies gleamed and sparkled like stars which had wandered down to earth. At such times I seemed to comprehend something of the immensity and grandeur of God—night seemed

but the dark and sable robe
The Almighty gathers round Him, when He walks
In privacy abroad, along the Heavens,
The innumerable hosts of glittering stars
Lighting His onward way! ———

“All very fine and romantic, Archie,” said David, laughing, “but I don’t think you have made out a case, and after all it only amounts to this, that a wild life is very grand for a time, and uncultivated nature very imposing, but for general wear and tear, life in a civilised country, say at Battersden, or Fairlands, or Glenrowan, is more comfortable.”

“I suppose,” replied Archie, “it must be conceded on the whole; no doubt savages have their troubles, and, if the causes of them would seem trivial to us, it is only the difference between the child and the man, it is the reality of the thing that

makes the misery or the happiness. At all events, it is very well to have these homes to fall back upon; but I think I learned a few things in the desert that are of value to me, which makes the recollection satisfactory."

"Well, I confess myself content with what Europe will teach me. I don't think life in the desert would suit Alice or myself, or baby either. These vast polytechnic galleries would be beyond our understanding, and the creature comforts of Glenrowan are more comprehensible. What thinks Minnie?"

"I think that at least Archie has been turning opportunities to very good account," she answered, as she laid down one of the sketches, the back of which she had been intently studying.

"What have you there?" asked David, taking it up; Minnie looked earnestly at Archie, who, half laughing and half disconcerted, quietly took the drawing from David's hand, as he said,

"Only some memoranda which were not meant for the general eye."

"Oh, I see! plans for Battesden, I suppose. No doubt we shall see the park converted into a 'vast solitude,' lighted by bright lamps suspended from the trees (there is gas at Woodford, I suppose?) to

imitate an African night, and a few stuffed beasts made to roar at fitting intervals, with sundry other adjuncts of savage life."

"Come, Lily!" exclaimed Archie, gathering his drawings hurriedly together, and going to the piano, "give us a specimen of your 'roaring,' and I will join you, just to show this dog of an unbeliever that the desert does not quite unfit one for society."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

How often, ah how often, between the desire of the heart and its accomplishment lies only the briefest space of time or distance, and yet the desire remains for ever unfulfilled ! It is so near that we can touch it with the hand, and yet so far away that the eye cannot perceive it !

THE EARL'S DAUGHTER.

“YES, he is changed!” sighed Minnie, as she laid her head on the pillow that night: “kind, gentle, thoughtful as ever, but stronger, and it is plain that my own weapons are turned against me. These solitary communings have enabled him to subdue an attachment which seemed so hopeless. He was even annoyed at my discovering that he had so far thought of me as to have adopted some of the plans we used to discuss together; he took it from David, and gathered all the boards together with an air of absolute displeasure. Well, at all events he shall not find me weak now that he is strong,” she went on as pride came to her aid; “I will at least assume as much distance and self-command as he has gained; the task will not be so very difficult as we are only to remain together for

one day." And in proof of the conquest she had obtained she buried her face in the pillow and sobbed till the very exhaustion brought repose.

Meanwhile Archie had been labouring hard to subdue all traces of emotion, and to meet her with calmness, for she had given him no reason to suppose that her poverty and friendlessness were the only obstacles between them. He had avoided speaking to her, for he feared to trust his voice; or meeting her eyes, for he felt that his own would betray him; but he had nevertheless watched her, whenever he could do so unobserved; his whole soul had been hanging upon her; he had listened to every intonation of her voice, and had strained every faculty to discover something in look, word, or manner that might give hope the slightest loophole whereby to enter his heart. In vain! The very consciousness that her heart was fluttering to meet his had thrown insensibly more than usual constraint into her manner towards him, and thus, as each marked the unwonted reserve of the other, they had entrenched themselves more and more behind a semblance of cold indifference.

The next morning, however, Archie might have corroborated his assertion of the previous evening with regard to sleep, for the first night of his return

to Fairlands had been wholly passed in watching. The very restraint he had put upon himself in Minnie's presence produced a fearful reaction when he was alone. For a time he paced his room distractedly; "Cold, proud, heartless!" he exclaimed. "Why do I continue to cherish the thought of her in my heart of hearts? Why cannot I tear her image from the niche that it has made for itself?—And yet, heartless? No, she cannot be heartless, full of love as she is to all the world but me. What is it in myself that is so abhorrent to her? Oh, if I only knew why it is that she cannot love me! I would study her mind in everything; I would mould myself to her slightest wish. In vain!" he sighed, as stopping he leaned his arm against the window-frame. He looked out into the night: it was not an African scene, truly. The moon struggled through a sky mottled with fleecy clouds, now forming a bright halo round her, now almost totally obscuring her beams, then retreating from her as she emerged for a minute from them and shone in a field of clear azure. There was a quiet hush over all things; the gentle ripple of the waves on the beach below, or the passing breeze as it sighed lightly through the woods, alone disturbed the silence. He opened his window; the air was

filled with fragrance from the garden beneath, and from the jasmin and Japan honeysuckle which covered the house. The room seemed insupportable, and, gently letting himself down from the low window, he descended into the garden. He went round to Minnie's window; it was open, but the curtains were closed, and no light was visible. "She sleeps calmly," he muttered, "undisturbed by the torments I am suffering. Oh, Minnie, how weak are all my efforts to destroy your power! One glance of those sweet eyes, one tone of that soft musical voice, and all my strong purposes have faded like stars before the purple dawn."

Morning found him still a watcher: it was a mode of passing the night to which he was not unaccustomed. A plunge into the sea and a long swim braced his nerves and muscles, and when he joined the breakfast party he was able to resume the cold self-possession of the previous evening.

Archie was a good deal occupied with his father after breakfast; there were many things to be discussed, and it was late when he rejoined the drawing-room coterie.

"David and I are going to take a long ramble this afternoon," he said; "he is afraid I have forgotten our own wild valleys and rugged mountains,

so we are going in search of—not exactly the picturesque—but the savage.”

“ I really think you are become something of a savage yourself, Archie,” remarked Lily poutingly; “ time was when you would not have been content without we were all of your party, at least Minnie and myself.”

“ Time was, dearest Lily,” he echoed with a sigh, “ when all was very different to what time is; I believe I am become somewhat savage, or at least enamoured of savage life, but in this instance I don’t know that I said anything which should exclude any one who liked to join our party; indeed I shall be only too glad to have you. But I warn you it is no lazy stroll we are going to take. Mother, will you and Alice venture so far?”

“ No, my dear Archie, Alice and I confine our interests too much to the nursery now to join in such expeditions, so we will content ourselves with the account of your adventures this evening.”

“ Well, then, Lily, I will have the ponies made ready, for we shall go further than you could walk, and in the meantime equip yourself. Minnie, will you not go with Lily?” he exclaimed, as the former was leaving the room.

“ Of course she will; how can you ask, Archie?”

Come, Minnie, put aside that business-like expression. I know what you are going to say: but that you do leave early in the morning is the very reason why you should remain wholly with me to-day, and Slater can make all your arrangements, far better than you could; so now come, I allow no deserters, come and put your hat on."

The party was soon in order; the two girls mounted, and David and Archie on foot. Their route led them through the richly-cultivated and wooded scenery which borders the loch for some distance, then, winding round the head of it, they ascended gradually till the country became wild and mountainous, and the road crossed continually by those bright, clear torrents, which seam the hill sides, and in places form themselves deep beds, the sides of which are overhung with the graceful weeping-birch. The path became narrower and more rocky, and the way more precipitous; but the ponies were surefooted, and their riders mountain lassies, too well accustomed to such places to give way to fear. The exhilarating air indeed braced up their nerves, and made the scramble only pleasurable. At last they reached the summit, and a grand and extensive view lay before them. On one side the rugged granite peaks rose one above another, like the pe-

trified waves of a stormy ocean; some of them clothed with wreaths of soft mist, which lay lightly on their summits, or floated gently half-way down the declivities; while the grey mountain sides were streaked with silver streamlets foaming and leaping, and making pleasant music to the ear. Lower down were rocky hills, clothed to the summit with oak and silver birch, and broken up by romantic ravines: then came miles and miles of moorland, glowing with the bright purple of the heather. Looking away from this prospect, the eye rested on the blue mirror of Loch Tarbet, reflecting the rich foliage and bright villas which adorn its coasts, and from its opposite shore the mountains rose again into wild sublimity, beyond which, from the height on which they were standing, the wide ocean was discernible.

It was a scene which none could look upon without emotion; Archie stood long with folded arms, gazing upon it: at last David laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying as he did so,

“Come, Græme, confess that there is beauty in civilised country after all, and that even in Scotland we can boast of some scenery.”

“Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land !”

exclaimed Archie; "but, irrespective of the pride every Scot must feel in his magnificent land, I am the last to dispute the beauty of such a scene as this, in any part of the world. It is not that I do not appreciate the charm of civilisation, in spite of the excitements of savage life; I fully estimate the blessing of living in such a country as this, and perhaps I never thought more fondly of my fatherland, or yearned for it more earnestly, than when in the deep solitude and stillness of nature I used to recall scenes and memories that filled my eyes with tears and my heart with sadness.—But what has happened to Lily? surely that was her voice calling for help!"

They looked down and saw her standing on the point of a granite rock, or rather crouching upon it, and unable to move. In a spirit of hardihood she had evidently clambered up there, and her nerve had failed when she found the position in which she had placed herself; she was calling to David for assistance.

He darted down the hill-side as fast as the uncertain footing would let him, at the same time calling to her to remain still, till he could reach her. Archie turned to look for Minnie: she was sitting upon the ground at a little distance, her back supported by an upright rock; her eyes wandering abstractedly over the wild mountainous scene, while

between the clasped hands which rested upon her lap she held loosely the rein of the pony, which cropped the short herbage near. Archie approached, and, leaning his arm on the neck of the pony, he said after a moment's silence,

“ You leave us to-morrow, Minnie, for Duncairn, I hear? ”

Afraid to trust her trembling voice, she merely bowed in reply. He continued:

“ I saw much of your brother in Germany; we were thrown intimately together, and I saw him under the most trying circumstances: a nobler fellow never walked the earth; I congratulate you infinitely more on calling him your brother, than on any gifts of fortune you have obtained.”

“ I was glad you met, and felt sure you would rightly appreciate his excellence; you cannot value his character too highly: I have indeed much to be thankful for in finding such a brother; and, though I hope I am not sordid, I am truly grateful for the gifts of fortune. At one time indeed they bore an unspeakable value—that is past; but, as my strength failed me in the task I had undertaken, they came very opportunely.”

“ At all events, Minnie, none would know better than yourself how to use them.”

“I feel it a great trust,” she replied, “and hope I may never be led to look upon money as valuable only for its own sake. I would gladly—indeed my wish was to—have received only an allowance, but Leslie would not listen to that. He said it belonged to me by my uncle’s will, and I knew therefore I had no right to refuse the duties it entailed. But you are rich now,” she continued, raising her eyes to his, for the first time, and immediately withdrawing them, “and, from some words and projects which I read last night, I see you are, as I knew you would be, conscious that wealth and power are only desirable inasmuch as they extend our means of usefulness.” She spoke in a dry, hurried tone, as if she feared to give him an opportunity of answering her.

“Ah, then, it was those which you were looking at on the reverse of the drawing,” he said in a tone of relief; “I was foolish enough to make my drawings often the means of recording my thoughts. I thought I had carefully selected those which bore no journalising—I did not quite understand to what your words might have referred, when I saw that some were mixed——” She looked up again, surprised at the confusion his unconnected sentences betrayed at what seemed so simple: he appeared to

be making an effort to command himself: presently he resumed:

“ There are records of hard struggles on those drawings, struggles that have left their scars deep in my heart, which I would willingly conceal from every eye, since they are over now, and the wounds they once made are healed. I have been wishing to speak, alone, for a few minutes with you, Minnie, not to tell you of what is now past, but to assure you that solitude and the absence of hope have not failed of their end. I now understand my position, and feel that all is at an end between us. I was a fool and a coxcomb ever to hope for the gift of such a heart.—It is over now, and, though it may be wise not to trust myself too much in daily intercourse with you at present, I hope the time is come when I may claim the affection of a sister, and learn to be content with what I shall highly prize.”

There was a pause of a few minutes. Many feelings struggled in her bosom: pride and love and maiden modesty. Was it true that he had overcome his love? and did he really wish for no more than he asked for? He spoke so calmly: could she dare to throw herself into his arms, and tell him how fondly she had always loved him? She rose, and, extending her hand, she said hesitatingly,

“ Archie, our positions are now changed——”

“ I know it, Minnie,” he interrupted, taking her hand, “ but that could make no alteration in my feelings, nor would it, I am sure, in yours. I rejoice that you have now the means of—making others happy. I do not wish to work upon your feelings—to arouse your compassion ; my desire is to relieve you from any anxiety or self-reproach that in my folly I may have occasioned your kind heart. You have twice told me the impossibility of my ever being more to you than a brother; my meaning now is to convince you that I am content to look upon you as a sister.”

“ Be it so, then, Archie, if such be your wish; it is not for me —” she began; but her words were interrupted by the sudden appearance of Lily, who, flinging her arms round her, exclaimed,

“ Oh! Minnie, I have had such an escape, and been so frightened! and, but for ‘douce Davie’ there, I must have remained for ever on that rock, a warning to all generations of the folly of misguided ambition.”

A minute after David followed, indemnifying himself for the alarm Lily had given him by scolding her now that the danger was happily over. Lily flung herself on the ground panting, and still

hardly knowing whether to cry or laugh at the recollection of her adventure; and Minnie reseated herself beside her and tried to soothe the poor girl's fluttered spirits, while David gave her the particulars of what had occurred.

Meanwhile, Archie went in search of Lily's pony, which, like his mistress, had been running wild. He was caught after some trouble; and, when Archie led him back, the two girls mounted again, and the party set out on their homeward way, David begging Archie to take care of Lily, whose wild pranks, he said, were beyond his skill to control, so he would be Minnie's esquire.

The hours wore on, and night again closed in without allowing any further opportunity for conversation between Minnie and Archie. It was one of those cases which occur so frequently when the thing we most wish for is noiselessly going by, and even lingering for an invitation to enter, and, in our blindness, we let the moment pass, which years of vain endeavour can never recall. Could Archie have understood Minnie's reasons on former occasions, how different would have been his words now! He reproached himself with coxcombry, and it was the very absence of conceit which made his misery. He felt now that the seal

was affixed to the act which excluded him from happiness for ever. Hitherto, though his course had been resolved on, it was confined to his own breast — circumstances might have enabled him to change it; now it was declared, and he had no power to retract his words. A truce had been proclaimed; and, hollow as he felt his part of it to be, it must be kept. There were no restless wanderings to-night: hope was crushed, despair gave a sort of repose; and he slept as the criminal does when the door of uncertainty is closed for ever.

And Minnie! Upon her, too, the door of hope and uncertainty was closed — here was the end of all her anticipations, of all her trials! To be rejected at the very moment when she had been ready to fall upon his neck! To be told that a sister's affection was sufficient, when she had stood with her heart in her hand, ready to give it into his keeping for ever! Oh! why had she so marred her happiness? Why had she not at the first acknowledged her love, and told him the real cause that prevented an union? He would have understood and respected her scruples and feelings, and now they might have been happy; and tears of deep self-pity fell on the picture she conjured up. Long she remained with

her face hidden in her hands which supported her head; sometimes recalling the past, sometimes diving into the future; then going over again the interview of the morning. She could not command her wandering and rebellious thoughts—she hardly tried to do so; she bent her head to the storm that rushed over it and held it down. Many hours passed thus; till, at last, the early dawn of an August morning stole into her room, reminding her of the commencement of the day which would close upon her when she was far away from Fairlands. She opened her window to admit the freshness of the morning, richly laden as it was with sweet perfumes. She felt how all nature was exhaling sweetness and offering it up to Heaven; she looked back upon her own thoughts, grovelling as they had been upon the earth; she fell upon her knees, and strove to collect and lift them up too. “Those that have made a covenant with me with sacrifice,” came into her mind. Did she then repent of the sacrifice she had once been so willing to make now that it was demanded again of her? Had not this trial been suffered to come for some wise purpose? She was still too earthly — still looking too much for her reward here. She thought of the promise that “All things work together for the

good of them that believe." "Shall I indeed receive good, and shall I not receive evil?" she said; "and can it really be evil when it is ordered for me?" Once more she saw the Cross which she had been so anxious to lay aside, and, taking it up with humility, she exclaimed, "Father, not my will, but thine be done!"

The temptation was over, the victory once more won; and, as she laid her head upon the pillow, her wearied eyes closed in sweet sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll;
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?
Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object cannot live.

COLERIDGE.

ONCE more then they were separated: Minnie was at Duncairn, helping, and comforting, and cheering her brother, lightening his load as far as lay in her power, and bearing her own in the strength that was given her. A week after her departure Archie left Fairlands to take possession of his home, and then things sank down into their ordinary routine, and Lily struggled on in her loneliness, making the best of every thing, and doing whatever came to her hand to do, without supposing that any praise was due to her unselfishness.

And so Archie was at Battesden. How his heart sank within him as he drove through that proud gateway and along the beautiful approach to the

house. The road wound for some distance through thick plantations, sometimes opening out into sweet ferny glades, where the browsing deer, disturbed by the sound of wheels, lifted their antlered heads and stood to gaze on the carriage, or, tripping away to a little distance, turned to follow it with their soft shy eyes: then again plunging into woods and copses, through which many an opening admitted views of the distant scenery: now skirting the border of the lake, and then passing through a group of noble cedars, it emerged into the open space, and the irregular, castellated house, crowning an elevation, and backed by hanging woods, burst upon the view. A winding road led up the hill to the terrace which surrounded the house, and which in front formed a flower-garden, in the centre of which played a fountain. A hatchment now surmounted the entrance, and the group of servants assembled at the door to receive their young master were still clothed in mourning.

The weather harmonized with the feeling of sadness which these circumstances could not fail to excite. A still summer rain had fallen incessantly throughout the day, saturating the whole landscape with moisture. The trees drooped their rich foliage heavily, no breeze stirred the branches, and only

the quiet rustle of the rain, as it pattered continually through the thick foliage, was audible, except where the little river which intersected the park might be heard, pouring its swollen waters between the steep banks which enclosed it.

Notwithstanding the warmth of an August evening, therefore, it was both cheering and comfortable to Archie to be welcomed by a bright fire in the small drawing-room, where Mrs. Sherwood awaited him: for his thoughts had been busied since he passed the lodge gates; visions of how he had once hoped, with Minnie beside him, to take possession of his inheritance; of the charm her presence would have thrown over all, strewing flowers along his path, giving him sweet counsel, and smiling a sweet welcome with those gentle thoughtful eyes. His heart felt sad and solitary; Minnie had given him grander views of life, she had set duties and responsibilities before him, as they had never previously appeared to him; a bright light had been suddenly thrown on to his future, and as suddenly withdrawn, leaving him bewildered and fearful. He felt like one who has been walking along the edge of a steep precipice in a dark and stormy night, without knowing his danger, when suddenly a bright lightning flash reveals the abyss

which yawns beside him, destroying his confidence, and leaving him dazzled and confused, and fearful in the obscurity which has closed down again, to take one step onward, in the narrow path, which a moment before had seemed so safe and easy. But why should he look upon these possessions differently from others? Were they not his to be enjoyed? What so easy and comfortable as to do so? Had he not been congratulated on all sides on his position and affluence, and did he not see others similarly endowed leading a life of carelessness and indulgence? Why should not riches bring exemption from toil and labour? Why should not all the cares and troubles devolve upon his steward, and he but eat, drink, and be merry? He tried to shake off the gloom that oppressed him—it was folly to spend his life in bemoaning the loss of one who was so cold to him—there were many doubtless as lovely as Minnie, who would show less coldness—many—no doubt. But something whispered, could the love of any one else be equal to the mere esteem of Minnie? Pure, gentle, noble-hearted Minnie! Yes, in spite of her coldness, her image should be cherished in his heart of hearts, never to be displaced by mortal. Had not her warnings been mercies to him, for, while they had shown him his danger, they had pointed

out the path of safety, so that he might avoid it. He would try and follow it, straight and narrow though it might be; if for her sake only, he would shun the broader path trodden by so many others. But Minnie had given him a higher motive than her esteem, she had pointed onwards, she had reminded him of the words, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth: and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes, but know thou, that for all things God will bring thee to judgment." She had shown him where to find a wiser Counsellor than herself, and a stronger staff to lean on:

There was one whom I made my stay,
But Thou didst set 'her' far away,
That I might courage take, on Thee to lean;
And, lest I hang on earthly love,
Thou didst with sorrow me reprove,
And bad'st me fix my eyes on Thee unseen."

Yes! he felt that with the gifts the duties were thrust upon him, and, do what he might, neither might be put aside with impunity; however he might try to ignore and neglect them, he knew that his eyes having once been opened to see and understand them, he should not dare to do so, and a gentle voice seemed whispering in his ear, that only

in the path of duty could happiness, even earthly happiness, be found.

It was therefore with a serious and thoughtful smile that he returned the welcome of the servants, all of whom had been retained since his uncle's death, and who now met him at the door, and ushered him into Mrs. Sherwood's presence.

"Welcome to your own home at last, Archie!" she exclaimed, as she advanced to meet him; adding, as she kissed his forehead, "though this grave brow does not become Archie Græme at such a moment as this."

Archie knew that the thoughts which had recently occupied his mind would neither be shared nor even comprehended by his aunt, so he tried to throw off the melancholy which had oppressed him on his entrance, and, leading her cheerfully back to the fire, he said,

"This at least looks cheery and homelike, my dear aunt, but for to-night you must suffer me to be your guest. I must get accustomed to my dignities gradually, and have now stolen home, as it were, to avoid the rejoicings which Raby told me the good people of Woodford and Battesden would think necessary to welcome me with. They shall have rejoicings by-and-bye, and when they will better know whether or not they have cause to rejoice."

The look of seriousness had overspread his face again, and, leaning his elbow on the chimney-piece, he glanced round the room and went on :

“ I little thought to have been called so soon to fill my dear uncle’s place ; I hoped to have seen you and him in the enjoyment of all this for many years to come. At all events, my dear aunt,” he added after a pause, “ I hope for the present you will cheer my bachelorhood, and not leave me to solitary grandeur.”

Mrs. Sherwood would have replied with a jest, for there had been too much disparity in age and taste between Mr. Sherwood and herself to make her grief very poignant at the end of a twelvemonth, besides that, having spent that time immured in the country, always distateful to her, she was not desirous of remaining there much longer ; but when she looked on that young face, leaning with such an expression of seriousness, almost sadness, on the supporting hand, she changed her tone, and said,

“ I shall perhaps take you at your word for a short time, Archie, but there is plenty of work cut out for you, to prevent your feeling lonely yet : as soon as it becomes known that you are here, which it no doubt will be to-morrow, you will have your committee from Millworth waiting on you ; the election is to take place during this month : the

Address you forwarded from Baden has given great satisfaction to your party, and, though there is a Mr. Ainslie canvassing in the same interest, he is a stranger in the county, and will most likely have the sense to withdraw, for the moment it was known that you intended to stand he made little or no progress."

"Then there is no attempt to return another opposition member? I thought the good people of Millworth would have brought forward one of their great guns."

"There was a talk of it; and Mr. Newson, the leading manufacturer in Millworth, who owns that beautiful place on the London road, started, but he could get so few to vote for him, spite of dinners and balls and donations to charities, and all such claptraps, that he soon gave the matter up: indeed his own party seem quite content to have both interests fairly represented."

"*Tant mieux pour moi*; it seems mine will be an easy race."

"Very, I should say; but I think there is one fact you ought to be made aware of." Archie looked inquiringly, and she continued:

"That Leeson, who, you know, has one of the largest farms on the estate, absolutely gave him both

his votes. As he never presumed to vote contrary to your uncle, it was evidently done in contempt of you: indeed it was one of Mr. Sherwood's principles that his tenantry should not oppose him: I conclude you will not continue Leeson in his farm?"

"On the contrary," said Archie, "I respect the man for his independence, and will by no means have him disturbed. The times when my uncle formed his political principles were very different to the present. I think every man has a right to his own political creed, and I would never have a coerced tenantry. The old-fashioned notion that all men must follow the lead of their landlord is exploded now, and for my own part I prefer an honest opponent to a forced and unwilling supporter."

"Ah! you Fairlands people have odd notions, not fit for our work-a-day world, as you will find in time, Archie. There was Lily three years ago set on foot a crusade against waltzing, by which I verily believe she lost the best chance in the world of being Lady Gordon."

"Lily Lady Gordon!" exclaimed Archie, seating himself in the fauteuil by the side of the fire; "do you mean to say that Leslie Gordon ever thought seriously of my poor little petulant Lily?"

"Not only thought of her, but was evidently very

much *épris* with her. There was a great scene here one evening when he asked her to waltz, and she fairly ran out of the room: he behaved admirably, and did his best not to see her folly, but it was too absurd: however, I believe the foolish move might have been recovered, for he was quite dazzled with her charming, pretty ways, but then Jane Osborne got hold of him, and it ended in Lily's being taken suddenly ill,—from a cold she took, I suppose,—the party broke up, and so he married Jane when he had lost sight of Lily. By-the-bye you fell in with that happy couple, I hear; and so he is simpleton enough to take her back again?"

"And so Leslie really did admire the little gypsy?" said Archie dreamily, without heeding the latter remark of Mrs. Sherwood. "Well, that accounts for many things which at the time seemed unaccountable to me. Poor Leslie! and poor Lily!—for it would have been a happy lot for both of them, I think." Then after a moment's thought he went on: "Yes, I made Leslie's acquaintance at Baden,—noble fellow that he is!—he has indeed given his wretched wife the shelter of his house, though he has not taken her to his home of Duncairn. I dare say the world thinks him a fool; for my part I think him an angel. But it has often struck me

that, if the angelic race were to mingle with ours, they would always be liable to that appellation. Poor Lily! I wonder if she liked him! I should think she could not escape it."

"I half thought her illness was caused by her irritation at herself, and disappointment, and jealousy of Miss Osborne, all combined, and coming upon a severe cold that she took by sitting on the damp grass at a pic-nic party. It was plain enough that she liked the attention he paid her, which certainly was most devoted."

"Poor Lily!" sighed Archie again, "God knows what is best for us all!"

"You are all odd people up in the North, I think," was Mrs. Sherwood's remark; "just as if it wasn't purely her own doing: I don't think you are at all fit to come amongst us every-day folk; certainly some of the sentiments I have heard to-day would rather astonish the weak minds of your country neighbours hereabouts."

"Ah, by-the-bye, aunt, you must give me a *carte du pays*. I know very little about the neighbourhood; what does it consist of?"

"Oh you know we have every variety: there are mushroom gentry, and old gentry, and a sprinkling of old nobility. There's the Duke of Courtown, who

has that magnificent place of Worthley Abbey: he's an elderly man, and has no son, and so the title and property go to a distant branch. The duchess is dead, and Lady Clara, a superb creature, is his only unmarried daughter. Then there's Sir James Ingram, the other member; he has a fine property, Cottlesdale. One of his sons is in the Guards, another at college, and the eldest travelling with a tutor: there are some daughters now chipping the shell; they are pretty and will have money, and are worthy your notice, Archie."

Archie smiled rather a melancholy smile, and said, "Another edition of *I Capuletti ed i Montecchi*, I suppose you think, my dear aunt; but I am not romantic enough for that."

"Well, you have choice enough: there's Mr. Wainwright, one of the oldest families in the county; they are not rich, but there are some very nice girls, and Mrs. Wainwright is a charming person. Then, nearer Millworth, there are the manufacturers, men of immense wealth, whose sons and daughters, in point of beauty, education, and fortune, are equal to the best in the land, and would be only glad to step into Battesden. You shake your head; I suppose that means they won't do either. Then we'll descend in the scale: you'll find plenty of interesting widows,

retired officers with pretty daughters and slender purses—What, another shake? Well, you are hard to please, but wait till you see Lady Clara Varnley, and I think you'll alter your tone."

"I am afraid I shall be insensible to her charms, as well as to those of the others you have named, and, except for the sake of Battesden, which would be too mercenary, it is probable, as you say, the young ladies will find me too odd a fish to fascinate their hearts."

"Well, I begin to think you must have a counter charm, Archie. I have told you of beauty, rank, and wealth, as well as simplicity, and you shake your head at all. I remember once thinking that Minnie Gray had found the soft side of your heart; it would have been a good thing then for her, though a foolish one for you; but I suppose I was mistaken; or was it that you would not have her when she was poor, and she will not have you now she's rich? Is that it, Archie?"

"She would not have me poor or rich," said Archie, throwing himself back in the fauteuil and shading his eyes with his hand. The tone he spoke in deceived Mrs. Sherwood, and she continued,

"Ah, no doubt, she thinks Sir Leslie Gordon's sister and an heiress may look for rank as well as

fortune. You Scots are a canny race, that's certain. Well, if I settle in town, as I think of doing,—indeed a friend has fixed upon a house in Lowndes Square which I think will suit me exactly, I must have Misses Marion and Lily up there, and see what I can do. Of course I shall not go myself into general society, but I shall be glad of their company, and shall visit in a select circle, so perhaps they may be able to suit themselves among our southern aristocrats."

Archie winced, whether at the tone or the subject of Mrs. Sherwood's speech, did not appear, as he did not continue the conversation, but, after sitting for a few minutes in silence, he rung the bell, and addressing the servant who entered, he said,

"Have the kindness to send Maitland to show me the room Mrs. Harper has prepared for me." Then turning to his aunt, he continued: "It must be getting near the dinner time, and I have an appetite in proportion to my day's journey, so I will go and prepare for it."

But, with all the anxiety he affected, Archie did not seem to be very desirous of hastening the meal. His toilette was quickly made, and then taking out his writing-case, he seated himself before it in his dressing-room. He took out a number of letters

in Lily's handwriting, the contents of which seemed to absorb his whole attention. Often during their perusal he leaned his head upon his hand, and indulged in long fits of reverie. It was some time before he replaced the letters, and as he did so there was a puzzled expression on his countenance, as if there were things in them hard to be understood. He sat a minute, and then, opening a secret drawer, he took out a rose-spray carefully dried and preserved; for some minutes he seemed to surrender himself to the memories it recalled. He folded his arms over it, and buried his head upon them; then raising himself after a time, and taking up the flower, he pressed it almost reverentially to his lips, and replaced it in the drawer he had taken it from, saying as he did so,

“Yes, dearest Minnie! I accept all as a trust, and will, with God's help, so discharge it as you would have me.”

So saying, he closed the case, and throwing back the dark hair from his forehead, he rose to obey the summons to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Sounds of music in the palace,
Festal lute and lyre,
Swelling in a sudden triumph,
Higher still and higher !
Sounds of dancers in their gladness,
Bounding through the hall ;
Sounds of sweet young singing voices :
While through all, through all,
Steals the tinkling, silv'ry murmur
Of the fountain's fall !

So within the palace chambers
Of full many a heart,
One thought oftentimes doth linger,
And will not depart ;
Grief may moan, or sadness languish,
Or bright joy befall ;
That one thought is interwoven
Still through all, through all—
Like the tinkling, silv'ry murmur
Of the fountain's fall !

BALLAD.

THE sun rose gloriously next morning, changing the whole aspect of nature, bringing out the bright colours, heightening the lights, and producing gay tints even out of the deepest obscurities, like varnish

on a picture, or imagination in the mind, not creating new tints, but bringing out those which had been previously concealed by the gloom.

The verdure was refreshed and renewed by the gentle rain of yesterday, which still hung in sparkling drops upon the flowers and foliage. It was very early when Archie threw open his window: the beams of the sun came slanting through the gullies of the hills, lighting up the wooded dells with a halo of golden mist. A few white vapoury clouds still hung upon the summits, waiting till the sun had risen high enough to absorb them into the blue ether. Some rooks in their near-by colony were holding noisy conclave, and a keeper was crossing the open level of the park, his gun on his shoulder, and two dogs following close at his heels, their reflection clearly imaged in the still lake their path skirted. It was a lovely sylvan scene, and Archie stood for some minutes contemplating it before he descended to enjoy the freshness of the autumn morning.

He found, as Mrs. Sherwood had said, plenty to occupy his time and attention, so that there was not much opportunity for dwelling on what was painful in his lot. There was much business to be attended to connected with the estate, and after

breakfast he remained closeted with Raby the whole morning. Afterwards he went out to visit some of the tenants, and to make himself personally acquainted with the circumstances and characters of all, it being his intention to look into and superintend everything himself, Raby being only his agent, so as to see that all were fairly dealt with. He soon made himself master of all the details, and won the respect and affection of his tenantry. The labourers and other dependents were equally considered by Archie; he examined into the condition of their families, and endeavoured to give a higher tone of mind and a loftier spring of action to all than mere earthly success or recompense,—not by dogmatism, but by example, judicious encouragement, and a scrupulous justice. A quick insight into character aided him much, enabling him to detect easily and to repel hypocritical assumptions of any sort, to encourage the timid and weaker minded, and to deal fairly in all difficulties. He was careful that each cottager should have a piece of ground allotted to him for his own cultivation. By degrees he established horticultural meetings, confined to his own people, offering prizes, not only for vegetables and fruits, but for the cultivation of flowers. Rewards were given to the children and young

girls for tasteful arrangements of their gardens, as well as to men and boys for neatness and good economy in the management of their bits of land and garden ground. Besides the school which was already flourishing in the village of Woodford, immediately outside the park gates, under the superintendence of the rector, he built one in the park, at a place where a number of labourers' cottages were congregated, and where, from its remoteness, the children could not easily or regularly attend the village school. At the same place he built a chapel, which he gifted with a small endowment, so that one service on the Sunday might be performed there for the old and infirm or those unable to go to Woodford. It was not indeed until he had been at Battesden a year that he was able to carry out these plans, and many others, but they were begun at once, and were the fruit of many an hour of prayer and thought under an African sky.

Just now, however, there were other subjects which divided his attention. His arrival was soon known, and the gentlemen of his committee in Millworth came out to him at once, with details of their proceedings and success hitherto. The day of nomination was fixed to take place in the third week after his arrival, and till then, between can-

vassing and the necessity of being continually in Millworth, and returning the visits of those neighbours who called to welcome him to the county, he had little leisure for other thoughts or occupations. An agreeable surprise occurred a few days before the important day, in the arrival of his father, who came, as he said, to witness his boy's triumph. His old friend Wentworth too joined him very soon after he came to Battesden, and the hospitalities at the house soon began again to afford conversation to the neighbours.

Archie tried to interest himself in all the stir which surrounded him, and succeeded tolerably well. The county gentlemen were much pleased with his frank and unaffected manners, the real talents he shewed for the part he was called upon to play, and his fine and honourable conduct throughout the election. He soon won all hearts; even those opposed to him in politics did full justice to his honest and manly character. The Millworth candidate very soon retired from the field; from the first he had not been warmly welcomed, even by his own party, who were fearful of his eventually shaking the seat of the present Opposition member, Sir James Ingram, who as a gentleman of the county had great influence. The preponderance

too which the fact of his belonging to the county, independently of the charm of his manner, gave Archie over his other opponent Mr. Ainslie, proved to the latter that a continuance of the contest would only be a useless expenditure of money; he therefore signified his intention of withdrawing a day or two before the nomination.

- So, when the day of election dawned, Archie found himself master of the field. From the earliest dawn, Millworth was in the state of excitement usual on such occasions. The bells rung merrily, and, though the prestige of bands and colours was no longer permitted, they were hardly wanted to increase the animation of the scene. The fame of Archie had spread quickly; his youth, his position, and his personal and mental gifts were already the theme of every tongue, and many were drawn to Millworth on that day as much out of curiosity to see the new member as interest in the proceedings. The streets were crowded with voters and people from the country, and the windows and balconies filled with gaily-dressed ladies, the majority of whom contrived to evade the law, by making Archie's colour conspicuous in some article of dress. When Archie, accompanied by his father and friends, and followed by a long train of carriages and horse-

men, drove into the town, he was received with cheers and rejoicings which more resembled the popular ovation of a Roman victor.

He looked full of animation as he stood upon the hustings surrounded by a large circle of friends. The preliminaries were gone through, the people scarcely listening with patience to the business routine, and, all opposition having been withdrawn, his proposal was quickly followed by the declaration of his being duly elected. Then, hat in hand, Archie came forward to thank the electors. He spoke unostentatiously and without effort; detailed his intended line of politics; hoped that his constituents would always find him in his place ready to watch their interests, to redress their grievances, and to advocate all measures which he considered beneficial to his country. He concluded by making a touching allusion to his uncle who had been for so many years their representative; claiming their indulgence for himself, adverting slightly and gracefully to the position in which his recent accession to his late uncle's property placed him in the county, and his hopes that as a landlord, a neighbour, and their trusted representative, he should inherit with his possessions the esteem they had accorded to his late uncle.

The cheers were vociferous; nor was his popularity lessened, when it was noticed by a few keen observers among the ladies, that, as the excitement of addressing his audience subsided, and his eyes traversed the lines of fair faces which greeted him from the houses, a shade of abstraction and seriousness stole over and saddened the animation of his expressive countenance.

Captain Græme spoke a few hearty and sailor-like words, and one or two of his other friends followed in his wake. Enthusiasm was at its utmost, and, as the new member descended the hustings, so many hard, brown fists were thrust forward to shake hands with him and his father, that it was with difficulty he could make his way to his carriage.

After driving slowly about the town, amidst cheering, bell-ringing, and every demonstration of popularity, he, with the gentlemen who had formed his committee, and his own private friends, returned to Battesden for dinner, after which they were to attend a public ball in Millworth, in his honour.

It was late when the Battesden party entered the room, which was crowded with the aristocracy of the county as well as the *bourgeoisie* of the town. The Duke of Courtown was among the first to accost Archie on his entrance. He was not a stranger

to the owners of Worthley Abbey, and he soon after led Lady Clara Varnley to the dance. She was a good specimen of the female aristocracy of England, —lofty and refined in her air, without being decidedly handsome, graceful and dignified, without any assumption or pride. All eyes watched the new member and his fair partner, and many were the whispers of admiration and smiling inuendoes as to the suitableness of the pair, as they whirled round in the waltz. But, had he been inclined for exclusive attention, Archie would hardly have had any opportunity to indulge in it that evening. Mamas vied with each other in getting him as a partner for their daughters: there was no room for fine gentlemanism; he must run the gauntlet with the *bourgeoisie* as well as the aristocracy; and, by the time that daylight began to assert its supremacy over gas, Archie was ready to acknowledge that a day of popularity in England was fully as fatiguing a chase as that of the wild animals of the desert, or any other exertions he had undergone among savages, biped or quadruped.

But all things come to an end; and the moment came at last when he could once more close his bedroom door on the world, and be alone with his own thoughts. Wrapping himself in his dressing-

gown, he threw open the window. The slanting beams of the rising sun were tinging the woods with gold, exhaling sweet odours from the fir and larch plantations, and drawing out the perfume of the glowing parterres on the terrace. The fountain splashed and gurgled and decked itself with innumerable gems, as the sunbeams played with its waters. The dew lay thickly on the grassy walks which intersected the flower-beds, and strung the waving gossamer with rows of pearl.

“How exquisite is nature!” was Archie’s thought; “how poor a thing is man! how trifling and paltry must all the hubbub and parade of yesterday look in the eyes of the holy angels! How unworthy of the grandeur of an immortal soul! What homage, almost worship, have I received, and what is there in me that should deserve it? Though I believe myself to have been honest in all I have said and done to-day, and have certainly tried to estimate the ovation received at its real value, and have at times felt my own littleness, and continually reminded myself that I am but an instrument raised up for a purpose—yet it has had its effect upon me, and the pride of my dear father, and the plaudits of the people, the compliments of my friends, and the delicate flatteries of Lady Clara Varnley, have not

been ungrateful to my ear. Vain fool! I have assumed a grave responsibility, I have suffered myself to be made one of the mouth-pieces of my country—and I have forgotten the seriousness of the undertaking in the vanity of the popularity won! I have accepted the triumph with pleasure, not remembering that any failure on my part—less than that, a mere caprice on theirs—will draw all those mouths upon me in reprobation, which yesterday uttered but applause!—And dare I reckon on my own stability—on my own will even—to carry out all the engagements I have entered into yesterday?

But now, my soul, prepare
To ponder what and where we are :
How frail is life ; how vain a breath
Opinion; how uncertain death ;
How only a poor stone shall bear
Witness, that once we were!"

The thought oppressed him, and, clasping his hands over his face, he stood long in silent communion with his soul; then dropping on his knees, he offered up to God the triumph of the preceding day, and prayed for help to fulfil that which he had undertaken, and to keep himself lowly and humble.

Presently he rose, and, stepping into the dressing-room, opened his writing-case. "Now," he said,

“ may I turn to thee, beloved Minnie; the fiends of self-love and vanity are exorcised for the present; I may venture to claim thy sweet sympathy.” He took out the dried flower and laid it before him: “ Dearest! what are all these triumphs unshared by thee? How willingly would I barter all for one of those dear smiles! for the assurance of thy pure love! Alas, alas!”—and, when he raised his head again from the arms on which it had sunk, tears had moistened the withered petals of the rose.

It was a strange finale to such a day; and few—none indeed, among his guests, or those who had lent their voices to his triumph—would have expected their hero so to spend the hours of his retirement. It is given indeed only the noblest natures thus to feel their own littleness in the moment of greatest exaltation; that true humility of heart which can at once transfer all praise and glory from itself to the great Giver, is one of God’s rarest and finest gifts to man.

It was late when the party met at the breakfast-table: Captain Græme rallied his son much on the lack-lustre expression of his eyes as he took his place.

“ Ah, my boy!” he exclaimed, laughing, as he shook his head at Archie, “ it is easy to see how

you have employed the hours that we less favoured mortals have dedicated to sleep; not in complaining to the moon of your mistress's cruelty certainly, whatever you might do to the sun, who seldom listens to such tales; and i' faith it strikes me there was small reason to complain at all; from Lady Clara downwards, you had the pick of a' the hearts I'm thinking, Archie; fine tales I shall have to carry home to our womankind! Eh, boy?"

Mrs. Sherwood darted a quick glance at Archie, but she could not satisfactorily interpret the expression of his face. He laughed, though rather a forced laugh, as he said,

"I suppose I ought to ride round this morning and inquire after my various partners. What say you, Wentworth? One is not good for much after such a day of fatigue and excitement; suppose I order the horses?" as he rose to ring the bell.

Captain Græme made a grimace as he remarked drily,

"In my young days, we esteemed the sex higher than to offer them the dregs of a day of excitement, which could be got through in no other way."

"That would perhaps depend upon the shrine you offered at, sir," returned Archie; "universal homage you know is no individual compliment."

“ Oh ! then, there is to be one bright exception in the round of to-day, I presume,” remarked Mrs. Sherwood; “ I wonder whether I can guess the enshrined goddess ! Let me see, who did you tell me were the partners of last night, Captain Græme ? ”

“ My dear aunt, spare me the recital ! ” exclaimed Archie, starting up, “ there were ‘ *Gross und Klein und Dick und Dünn* ; ’ the catalogue would rival Leporello’s list of Don Juan’s mistresses : why, their name was Legion ! ”

“ Well then to select one ; I think you cannot do better than head the list with Lady Clara Varnley : I assure you she is one

Whose worth
Stands challenger on mount of all the age
For her perfections.”

“ Nay,” replied Archie mock-heroically, half in, half out of the French window, “ I bar personalities ; but, if you take the Shakesperian line, I reply,

It were all one
That I should love some bright particular star
And think to wed it,—she’s so far above me !

“ Come Wentworth, ‘ To horse, to horse ! ’—this is more than my poor picked brains are equal to to-day.”

The two young men crossed the terrace towards the stables, and were soon afterwards seen riding across the park.

Captain Græme and Mrs. Sherwood separated, the one to write to his wife with details of Archie's success, and the golden opinions he had won, not forgetting to speak of the bright eyes that had smiled upon him, and his apparent enjoyment of his honours; the other to cogitate her future plans, and re-consider all the arrangements she had been making as to her residence on leaving Battesden. One thing she had become more and more anxious for, viz. that Minnie Gray and Lily should spend some weeks with her during the London season, should she finally resolve on taking the house she had spoken of. Archie would gladly have had her occupy the one in Berkeley Square; but she felt that it would be very preferable to have a house of her own, where she could arrange the establishment according to her own wishes; and, besides, she thought, "there is no knowing how soon a wife might step in and once more break up all my comfort." She communicated her plans to Captain Græme, who coincided in them, and was quite willing that the two girls should accept her invitation, which he looked upon as an excellent mode of giving them

the advantages of London society without any trouble to himself.

Meanwhile the two friends continued their ride, avoiding the town of Millworth, but calling at some of the houses in the outskirts. Archie had no wish to have a *réchauffé* of the cry of the preceding day, "Græme (or, as it was pronounced, Graham) for ever!" served up by the more infantine members of the constituency; so they went on through the lanes engaged in such desultory conversation as circumstances gave rise to, till at last it was discovered that the instinct of their horses had led them to the entrance-gates of Worthley Abbey.

They found the family with some other friends at the luncheon table, and soon fell into the easy home-like feelings which that most sociable of meals produces.

After luncheon the party lounged into the conservatories and beautiful gardens which adjoined the house: Lady Clara was in her most agreeable mood: she was plainly very well pleased with the assiduity, or appearance of it, which had brought the new Member to call there to-day. She complimented him on his success, and made many flattering allusions to his speech: then she spoke of the beauty of Battesden, and consulted him upon the arrange-

ment of her own conservatories; and, when other subjects were under discussion, it was to Archie that Lady Clara always appealed for his opinion on the matter: she questioned him much about his travels, and seemed anxious to discover what were his tastes and occupations. Wentworth looked on with amusement, for it appeared plain to him that her Ladyship would be quite willing that Archie should inscribe his name on the roll of her admirers. But though Archie paid every attention that politeness required, and was ready with all the little *soins* that gallantry demanded, there was a something scarcely to be defined in his manner which prevented the most wilfully blind from supposing him ready to fall into the character of a lover.

There were numberless delicate little flatteries heaped upon him, and when, after an hour of lively chatting, Archie and Wentworth took leave, Lady Clara expressed a hope that they would find their way to the Abbey again before long, adding that she should have accompanied her father in his visit to Battesden, and taken the opportunity of calling on Mrs. Sherwood, but that, aware the call was only a matter of ceremony upon the new proprietor, she had feared she should be considered an intruder.

Archie begged that her Ladyship would never

again suffer such an impossible supposition to interfere with so agreeable a scheme, and an early day was fixed for the Duke and Lady Clara to ride over and lunch at Battesden, and make Mrs. Sherwood a visit.

CHAPTER XL.

Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler, sister woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennin' wrang,
To step aside is human.
One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving *why* they do it ;
And just as lamely can ye mark,
How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone,
Decidedly can try us,
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring—its various bias:
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's *done* we partly may compute,
But know not what's *resisted*.

BURNS.

MEANWHILE at Boortree Glen the autumnal sun looked down upon a far different scene to the gaieties of Battesden. Lady Gordon still lived, if such an apparently apathetic existence could be called life. Her system had never perfectly rallied from the severe shock she had received at Baden, coming as it did upon a frame much weakened by

previous suffering and sorrow. Ever since her return, she had remained in the same state of insensibility into which she had fallen immediately after the horrible catastrophe. She was generally quite passive, submitting to whatever her attendants suggested. By the directions of the Edinburgh physician, much of her time was spent in the open air; whenever the weather would permit she was placed in a wheel chair, and either moved about or stationed in some shady or sunny nook, according to the state of the atmosphere; but she expressed no interest; she did not even inquire where she was living; the beauty of the scenery elicited no remark, and almost the only sign of consciousness she gave, was an occasional burst of tears. Sometimes her attendant read to her, but could not discover whether she gave any heed to the words. Mr. Baird, the clergyman, was constant in his daily visits, talking quietly to her, and endeavouring to win her confidence: sometimes she would look earnestly into his face, as if desirous to speak, and then either turn away with a shake of the head or burst into tears. The physician watched her narrowly, and tried all means to rouse her from this apathy, but without success.

At stated periods Leslie visited Boortree Glen;

he always passed one night there and remained till late in the following day, and during these visits he was careful to keep out of her sight, and even to prevent the sound of his voice or his step reaching her ears, yet by some inexplicable sympathy she seemed always to be aware of his presence: it was the only thing that produced any decided effect upon her, and on these occasions her consciousness was chiefly shown in the most abject terror. She would start, and look hurriedly to the door when it opened, endeavouring to cover her face with the shawls that were heaped over her on the sofa. If her attendant was near, she would clutch her arm, drawing her so as to interpose between herself and the person entering. It was at these times only that she lost her usual passiveness, and resisted vehemently being either taken into the grounds or even beyond the precincts of her own apartments. Sometimes her repugnance was so strongly expressed, that it was thought advisable to yield to her; but, if they did succeed in getting her out, she would sit looking anxiously but furtively about her, her face completely hidden by a thick veil. On hearing what effect these efforts produced, the physician forbade their being continued. Sometimes it was suggested that the experiment of

bringing Leslie suddenly into her presence might be tried, but the physician considered it much too dangerous; and, for Leslie himself, his aversion to such a plan was unconquerable.

When she had been at Boortree Glen about a month, an event occurred to which all had been looking forward in anticipation of the effect it might produce. A little girl was born; and for a moment it was hoped that this might be the means of arousing the mother from her melancholy state. A ray of pleasure did indeed play over her face as she heard the first wail of her infant; but it subsided immediately, and was succeeded by a more than usually violent burst of weeping. Gordon was in the house at the time—he remained there for some days; and, though she showed some degree of alarm when the medical man or any one else approached her bed, she appeared to have less than her former keen consciousness of his vicinity. Her attendants thought they could perceive a shade of improvement: she took pleasure in fondling her child; though, while doing so, she often shed such bitter tears, that it was sometimes thought necessary to take it from her. She even spoke to it in words of endearment. Gradually, however, another horror dawned upon the attendants; they became aware that the child

was an idiot! It was evident in the meaningless eye, in the careworn, old face, in the absence of smiles, and want of instinct to grasp the finger that was placed in its little hand. The fact was carefully concealed from the mother; and, for a time, she remained in happy ignorance of it.

To Leslie it was a great relief that the child was a girl; still more so when she was found to be mindless. She was, however, healthy, and seemed likely to live; but the health of Lady Gordon did not rally. There was no real complaint, but a gradual sinking of all the powers of life. It was on the first day of her being moved into an adjoining room that she discovered the misfortune of her child. She had been much overcome; perhaps memory suggested a former occasion, when she had been lifted in a tender husband's arms into her dressing-room at Duncairn. No sooner was she placed upon the couch, than she gave way to an uncontrollable passion of tears, which could not be checked; cordials, soothing, scolding, all in turn were tried, and all failed; at last her maid brought the infant and laid it in her lap. For a moment she looked at it, and her tears ceased; weakness overpowered her, and she slept; after some little time she awoke, and began as usual to caress and talk to her baby. It

was the first time she had seen it, except in the darkened bedroom; she looked into its eyes, and a horror came over her countenance; she turned with a look of anxious inquiry to the nurse: "What is this?" she asked. The silence explained all. "It is just," she said, "the sin of the parents is visited on the child."

From that time her health sank more and more. Mr. Baird continued his visits, and she seemed to take more heed to what he said, though she still often shook her head and turned away in tears. He spoke to her of baptizing the child, and she caught eagerly at the idea: it was settled that it should be taken to the church the next day.

"While I am alone," she said hurriedly, "before ——"

They spoke of the name, and suggested that it should be called after herself. "No, no," she said, shaking her head, "not my name." Then, after a minute of silence, "Name her Liliās.—Oh," she went on, with a burst of weeping, "I must bribe him to love my child! but he will at least love the name."

She said no more: the child was named Liliās. When they brought it home again, and laid it in her lap, she shed many tears over it, and mur-

mured, "My poor little scathed Lily, God has stricken thee, but He has at least placed thee in safety."

Daily she became more and more feeble: it was clear that she could never rally, and Sir Leslie was written to and apprised of her condition. He was soon at Boortree Glen. It was the middle of September, and the evenings were chilly, and beginning to lengthen materially. It was late, and her maid had drawn the curtains in Lady Gordon's dressing-room; the lamp was lighted, and a bright fire shed a cheerful glow over the comfortable apartment. Lady Gordon lay on the sofa: her eyes were closed, though she was not sleeping, and the baby, which she would scarcely suffer out of her sight, was on her lap; everything about the house was still.

Suddenly she opened her eyes: "He is come!" she exclaimed, grasping the hand of her maid; "you have sent for him: this is not his usual time for coming: he knows I am dying!" and a sharp cry burst from her.

Her maid tried to comfort her, to assure her that immediate danger was not apprehended.

"It is not that," she said, shaking her head, "I have long known that I must die soon—Oh, that I

had never been born! I know that I shall not die at once—I have yet something to do—Oh, I must see him—I must commit my little Lily to him: I must bespeak his compassion for her. No one else will pity her: none else will love her: none else cared for her poor mother but he; and he was only too good to her!”

She sank back exhausted. Dr. Melvil, who latterly generally slept there, was summoned: he administered a soothing draught, and ordered her to bed; but she insisted so vehemently on seeing Mr. Baird that at last her request was complied with, and he was sent for. He remained long with her, and left her composed and willing to obey the physician's directions; and morphine and exhaustion soon produced deep sleep.

Meantime Leslie awaited Mr. Baird in the dining-room, and learned from him particulars of her state of mind, and of all that had taken place during his last absence. “Dr. Melvil says she cannot survive many days,” he added, “perhaps not many hours, but her urgent wish is to see you, Sir Leslie; till she has done so she says it is impossible to compose her mind.—Do you think you can grant her wish?”

“God help me!” he said, his face hidden in his

hands, "I may not refuse her; but it will be a fearful trial for both."

The artificial repose of the night had given composure to the nerves of Lady Gordon next morning, and by mid-day she was placed as usual on the sofa in the dressing-room, enveloped in shawls. All her attendants had left her and she remained alone. Presently Leslie entered the room noiselessly; he gazed upon her for a few minutes, without advancing. Her face was hidden in her thin, pale, transparent hands; a thousand memories rushed over him, as he stood there looking upon those hands, which were all that was distinguishable of her. A slight movement caused her to look up: she uttered a cry and tried to throw herself on to the floor; Leslie hastened forward to prevent her, and fell on his knees by the side of the couch. Her face was once more covered by her hands; he gently removed one of them:—"Jane," he said softly; she struggled to release the hand he held, and to hide her face in the cushions: he spoke again softly:

"Jane, you are forgiven!"

"No!" she cried wildly, "you know not what you say: you can never forgive me; it was not for that I asked to see you:—you know not how deeply I have injured you!—It was not alone this last

fearful step,—perhaps that was the least injury I ever did you; from the first moment of our meeting I have been your curse; it has recoiled upon myself, and now, when you know all, you too will curse me!” and, with a loud cry, she snatched away her hand and threw her arms wildly over her head.

“Calm yourself Jane,” he replied gently, once more possessing himself of her hand. “I repeat, you are forgiven: through Christ’s blood there is forgiveness with God for the worst penitent sinner, and shall a mortal refuse pardon to a fellow-sinner?”

“Forgiveness! Ah,” she replied, “Mr. Baird has told me of forgiveness; and God may forgive, because he knows the heart, and the temptations, and the weakness, and the repentance; but you only know the sin and its consequences.”

“True, Jane, but, though I do not know all that may serve to extenuate your sin, I know that I am prone to it like yourself: I feel that there is much to be forgiven on both sides; I know that I wronged you in the first instance, and in thought have often done so since, and I can only say, May God forgive you, poor sufferer, as freely and fully as I do!”

“Then there is hope for me; but now listen to my confession:—I never loved you, I loved—*him*,

long before I saw you; but I was vain and ambitious, and desired wealth: I thought it would make me happy:—I thought, when surrounded with all that could pamper my proud heart, I could be content to live without love—that I could associate with him as before:—you piqued me too; I saw that you only cared to amuse yourself with me, and I resolved to be revenged for your cold indifference, and to win at least the station which being your wife would give me. When we were at Battesden, I saw plainly that you loved Lilius Græme deeply, and that she returned your love. Oh, that makes your hand tremble; well it may! I dreaded to lose the prize I had resolved to gain; and I poisoned her mind against you, and yours against her. It had a deeper effect upon her than I meditated: the day you left Battesden and for several subsequent days, her life was despaired of.”

Leslie started up suddenly, in spite of his resolution to command himself, and took several quick turns before he could regain his composure. He looked to the sofa; Jane had once more covered her face with her hands, and the tears were streaming through her fingers. He mastered his emotion, and, kneeling again at her side, he resumed her hand:

“I knew you would retract your forgiveness

when you had heard all," she said, amid her sobs.

"No, Jane, again I say it: from my heart I forgive you: it was not you that I was blaming, it was my own blind folly in having doubted one so pure and true: but I never knew of her illness."

"No one did till after you had left the house.—Pure and true?—Yes, she was both, and yet I was permitted to win, and she to suffer! Oh, God, how mysterious are thy ways!—You learned afterwards how I deceived you, by pretending that her sister's marriage was hers. I gained my point, and you married me: but I was not happy:—I loved—him, with a love I never suspected my heart was capable of—and in spite of your goodness, I hated you! Nay, I believe I hated you the more for what seemed to be a continual reproach to me. You know most of the rest, and may well be spared the details of folly and sin. It was my folly which disappointed your hopes of an heir: perhaps you rejoice though in that, now that you see me as I am. But I have still one more injury to show you,"—she uncovered the cradle which stood on the other side—"this child the law obliges you to adopt, and look at her—she is an idiot!—I know your goodness," she continued rapidly as she saw him about to speak:

“ I know you would not make the poor innocent a sufferer for my sin; but I have added another claim upon your pity, if not your love—I have had her baptized by the name of Lillas.”

He bowed his head upon her hand and said calmly:

“ It needed not that claim to my care, Jane; poor little helpless innocent! for God’s sake, and for the sake of its own misfortune, it should have been cared for; have no fears for her, she shall want for nothing in this world. But, Jane, I must not suffer you to remain ignorant of my wrongs to you: if you did not love me, you never had my love: as you know, I only trifled with you, but to Lillas Græme I gave the full intensity of my love: and though I had reason afterwards, as I believed, to doubt her worth, I never could displace her from my affections. I married you because I believed that I had gained your heart, and trifled too much with you, but it was not till I feared Lillas was unworthy of my affection; and, though I struggled against the love I still felt for her, I never overcame it, and much of the sin you have been led into may be laid to my charge.”

“ No,” she said, “ I may not so palliate my own guilt: I knew all; I knew, when you married me,

not only that you did not love me, but that you adored her, and I saw all your after struggles, though no one else could have thought you any thing but devoted to me; your consideration, your indulgence, your real tenderness was so unremitting; and what did I throw all aside for?—" and she shaded her face with her other hand. "But then I did not want your love, I only desired your name and wealth: I took delight in irritating and vexing you. You remember the morning you left Duncairn, because some part of my falsehood had come to light:—my first act when you were gone was to send for him; and afterwards in town, when you were so careful, so attentive, so gentle, I laughed at the advice and warnings you gave, and was only considering how best to elude your vigilance!—Oh, if you knew the vileness of this heart, you would loathe me!—Forgiveness from you?—no, never!" a spasm passed over her face, and she lay for a minute motionless. Leslie passed his arm under her head, and drawing it unto his bosom, he said,

"We have been mutually wronged and wronging, Jane: let us mutually forgive, as we hope to be forgiven; be this the seal of pardon between us." He bent his head and pressed his lips to hers; she threw her arms wildly round him:

“ Oh, Leslie ! this is more than I could have hoped for ! How often while I have felt and seen your tender consideration for such a thing as I am, since you took me home again, and placed me in all this luxury, and saved me from what I must otherwise have fallen to—how has my heart yearned to tell you of my sins and my repentance, and to lie groveling at your feet for pardon ! I have known of your being near me, but I dreaded to meet you, and shrunk from you—oh, with such fear ! I have compared your conduct with that of my own family, to whose want of early care I owe so much of what I am ; they cast me off and would have let me sink to the lowest abyss of sin and misery—truly they knew not what they did !—But you have been a guardian angel to me, body and soul : and oh—to die thus in your arms—what bliss ! ”

They both remained silent for some minutes : she was much exhausted ; he pressed her tenderly to his bosom : at last she whispered, slowly unclosing her eyes, “ God will reward you for your goodness ; even in this world you will not be unblest. ” Again she closed her eyes, then after a minute’s silence she added :

“ Leslie, do you think Lilius can forgive me ?—and Minnie ?—I was often cruel to her in mere wantonness. ”

“ Be satisfied, dear Jane, they forgive you, poor heart ! as I do. But now you are fatigued ; let me lay your head on the cushion that you may sleep awhile.”

“ Not yet, Leslie ; I shall soon fall into a long and deep sleep ; but one thing more as a seal of your perfect forgiveness, and of my earnest and true repentance, not only for the sufferings I have caused you, but for every pang which my wickedness added to those of my dying Saviour, and as a pledge of my hopes of pardon through that agony, might we not together partake of the Holy Communion ?”

“ With all my heart, dear Jane,” he answered, placing her head on the sofa cushion, and once more kissing her pale lips, as he rose to desire that Mr. Baird should be summoned.

An hour elapsed ; and then Leslie and the clergyman left the room. Both countenances wore a solemn expression : Leslie’s was wet with tears. They parted at the head of the stairs ; Leslie turned towards his own room ; the clergyman prepared to descend, saying as he pressed Sir Leslie’s hand :

“ Farewell, my dear Sir Leslie ; I am no longer wanted here, so I shall return to my home ; but I am ready at your command if I can be of use.”

Leslie returned the pressure without speaking,

and went on to his own room. A few days afterwards he quitted Boortree Glen, carrying with him the remains of Lady Gordon for interment in the family burying-place at Duncairn.

With him also went the attendant who had accompanied her from Germany, and the infant, of whom she was to have the future care, both of whom were to be placed in a cottage in the park of Duncairn.

CHAPTER XLI.

And saying, " Comes he thus, my friend ?

Is this the end of all my care ? "

And circle moaning in the air :

" Is this the end ? Is this the end ? "

* * * *

What reed was that on which I leant ?

Ah, backward Fancy, wherefore wake

The old bitterness again, and break

The low beginnings of content ?

TENNYSON.

AND Leslie was free !—Free to throw himself at the feet of Lily, and compensate to her and to himself for the months and years of trial and sorrow which both had known.

But this was not the thought with which he was occupied now, in that melancholy journey from Boortree Glen to Duncairn. His mind was busy with the events of the last few months, especially with those of the last week. He did not care to look forward : the remembrance of that rapid journey he had made on a former occasion from London to Duncairn, to what he then believed to be the death-bed of his wife, and the pictures which had then

crowded unbidden upon his mind, recurred to him now, but in another aspect. The difference between his own sin and that of Jane he saw was only that of the desire and the act. Had opportunity then occurred, would he not have fallen, and the world would only have pitied his wife, while it blamed him? Was he less sinful because the thought had been confined to his own bosom? Had he not only added the sin of hypocrisy to the more flagrant vice, which lurked in his heart then, and even after that time, when he had gone to Glenrowan to meet Minnie, and the sight of Lillas had rekindled all his regrets and his evil passions? Never had he been so struck with the necessity to all of charity in our judgment of others; never had the sin of his own heart come so forcibly in all its hideousness before him.

Oh, what are we,
Frail creatures as we are, that we should sit
In judgment, man on man! and what were we
If the All-merciful should mete to us
With the same rigorous measure wherewithal
Sinner to sinner metes!

He was too much humbled to dare to look forward to happiness, for how had he, of all others, deserved it? The very purity and truth of Lillas,

had he presumed to think of her then, would have awed him back to the contemplation of his own pharisaical and guilty heart.

But his thoughts did not travel beyond the present; they dwelt upon the poor remains of that being, once so gay and bright, whose life had been linked with his; on the mercy shown to her at last; on the terrible legacy she had left him; and it needed all Minnie's kind and tender sympathy to comfort him in his deep dejection.

Day by day, and little by little, he detailed to her all that had passed at Boortree Glen. She was not one to ridicule his feelings, or make light of the repentance of Lady Gordon; she sympathised truly with him; nor did she even suffer one sparkle of triumph to escape when she heard how fully Jane had vindicated Lily from all falsehood: she made no allusions to the feelings or sufferings of the latter; she listened to Leslie's bitter self-reproaches, and administered the best consolation she was able. Willingly did she undertake the superintendence of the unhappy infant, and not the most tender parents could have watched over a child more anxiously and carefully than did Minnie and Leslie over the little unfortunate of whom they had the charge.

Autumn passed away, and Christmas came again, and cheerfulness and some degree of festivity reigned once more at Duncairn; not like that of former years—quite a different spirit now pervaded all than when Lady Gordon was the presiding genius. Now there were no guests staying in the house, but neighbours and friends were welcomed, and servants and dependants all felt that they were invited to “eat, drink, and be merry,” not because of “much goods laid up for many years,” but because of hope laid up for eternity.

Christmas came to Fairlands too under a novel aspect, for the party who usually assembled around the hearth were all dispersed, and, except for the servants, the house was empty. Captain and Mrs. Græme and Lily were at Battesden. It was Archie’s wish that his first Christmas as proprietor of the place should be kept there, and his family were too well satisfied to feel that he was again among them to make any objection to his wish. But, though Fairlands was deserted, it was not desolate. Lily had not forgotten the wants and happiness of those she left behind her, and Minnie had sent her ample means to provide for the comfort of all, independently of the usual Christmas dole from Fairlands House.

At Battesden Christmas was greeted with all its customary festivities; but even there a spirit predominated through the whole which to Mrs. Sherwood was a thing inexplicable. Outwardly there was little difference between the Christmas gaieties now and in former years: friends were invited, the tenantry and the poor were feasted, there were sports and pleasures for them to join in; there were the usual seasonable amusements for friends of a higher grade, which always make time pass pleasantly in the country. Hunting, and shooting, and coursing, and skating, and walks, and drives, and dinners, and music, and dancing, and games filled up the mornings and the evenings; some few found other recreations too, but they were not joined in by the mass; and yet over all was diffused a spirit, felt, but unseen, which gave a higher and holier tone to the whole, and, without anything being obtruded, all knew that the outward festivities were but the expressions of a far higher inward joy.

To Lily there were many painful associations to be overcome in this her first visit to Battesden since the time she had met Sir Leslie there; there was scarcely a spot that did not in some way carry back her thoughts to that month which had passed so

speedily, and left such an enduring impression. Archie had partially penetrated her secret; Mrs. Sherwood's words in their conversation on the evening of his arrival had given him the first clue; he had referred to her letters written during that visit and since; he had looked back to many expressions of Leslie's at Baden, and in all he had found something which, read by the light of his own heart, gave him a clearer insight into his sister's. The conduct of Leslie was still impenetrable; but he felt convinced from his knowledge of his character that he must have acted under some strong delusion, and was at no loss to imagine its source. He kept his discoveries, however, to his own breast, and, except by an increased tenderness towards Lily, no one would have supposed that he had any suspicion of sorrow having touched her. But he observed her narrowly, and was continually contriving means to divert her from dwelling upon old associations, by giving her new subjects of interest.

One powerful means of doing so was afforded by the improvements he was planning in the little hamlet of labourers' cottages. These had hitherto gone on slowly, for there were other and more pressing duties which had claimed his attention first,

but, as soon as Lily arrived, he acquainted her with all his projects; together they visited the spot, and studied plans and devised methods, rectified blunders, and laughed at their own ignorance and stupidity, which so often obliged them to retrace their steps and reconsider their arrangements, and call in the more practical sense of Raby, whose clearer views of what was needful often disconcerted their more picturesque or romantic ideas. All that Minnie had told Lilius of Duncairn, and the projects reduced to practice there—all that Minnie had herself done and taught Lily to do at Fairlands, were discussed; and, while Archie was devising means to draw his young sister from painful memories, he was continually adding to his own store of bitter regrets.

Whenever he found Lily pensive or unemployed, giving way, as he feared, to recollections of the past, he was sure to claim her attention directly to help him out of some dilemma which had quite baffled him, or to walk or ride with him; to visit some farm where he wanted to introduce her to the wife or daughters, or else to make a call on some family in the neighbourhood. There was one house where both brother and sister were always welcome, and where they felt equal pleasure themselves in calling. Lady Clara Varnley had taken a great fancy to

Lily; she had fallen in love with her at first sight, and was always contriving some plan to decoy her over to Worthley Abbey. Soon after Christmas, Archie and his sister were invited to spend a few days at the Abbey, and, when the time was expired, Lady Clara begged so hard to be entrusted with Lily for a few days longer, that Archie was obliged to leave her there with a promise that he should have her again at the end of the week, if he would come and fetch her. And then came the hope that Lady Clara would accompany her friend to Battesden, which was gladly accorded; and rumours began to circulate in the neighbourhood that Lady Clara was to wed its handsome young master; and Mrs. Græme began to look back upon Minnie, and think that all that was over; and that after all, though she was a dear girl and a nice match for Archie, she would rather see him married to the daughter of the Duke of Courtown. So Lady Clara was always a welcome guest at Battesden, and Mrs. Græme took more interest in floriculture than she was ever known to do before, and entered quite into a rivalry of conservatories, trying to make Archie the messenger to report new discoveries or gain fresh information. He was not very readily pressed into this service, and it is to be feared that most of Mrs.

Græme's important despatches were sent through some of the under gardeners; but it was certain that Lady Clara interested herself wonderfully in all that occupied Lily and her brother in Woodford, and in their cottage horticultural schemes, and begged to be allowed to be on the committee when any more important question than ordinary was under discussion.

Mrs. Græme did not fail to write Minnie very flaming accounts of all that was going on at Batten-den, and indeed most unwittingly Lily's letters corroborated all that her mother wished to be inferred. They were so full of Lady Clara Varnley, her beauty, her friendship, her accomplishments, the frequent interchange of visits between the two families, that with all Minnie's resolution, and the consideration that she and Archie were separated for ever, and that she had learnt to acquiesce, Lily's letters caused her deep pain, and a cloud settled on her brow which nothing could effectually dispel. Leslie observed it, and, thinking that her health and spirits were suffering from too much devotion to himself and his pursuits, he advocated strongly her acceptance of the invitation which Mrs. Sherwood had given her to join Lily and herself in town in May.

Hitherto Minnie had always combated the plan, which was repugnant to her aching heart, and even Lily's entreaties that she would not let her go again alone into that gay world, of which her first experience had been so sad, had not prevailed to overcome her strong distaste to encountering the distractions of a London season, and tearing up the roots which had so firmly planted themselves at Duncairn and Fairlands. It was the nearest approach to selfishness which Minnie had ever exhibited, but, so far, she had been inexorable. Now, however, a change seemed to have come over her, and Leslie was agreeably surprised one day to hear her recur to the plan herself, and gradually enter into it with interest.

"Yes," said she mentally, "I will go to town and judge for myself. I will see them together. I will observe this Lady Clara, and see if she be really worthy of Archie. I will watch his manner to her, and ascertain whether he really loves her; if so, and she be one likely to make him happy, then I will return to Duncairn and Fairlands, with my secret buried for ever in my own bosom. I will never again suffer myself to be in his loved society, I will devote myself to Leslie till he marries again, and then my life shall be consecrated to giving others,

and especially this poor helpless little Lily, that happiness which I must never know again!" And, as the dreary blank of long years opened out before her, she buried her face in her hands, and burst into bitter tears. "But perhaps he does not love her!" she exclaimed, half aloud, as she suddenly raised her head and gazed out over the sea from the cliff on which she was resting. Her tears were checked, and a smile of triumph broke over her lips. "Perhaps it is all a dream, and he does not love her —— then ——! but what is that to me? Has he not conquered the love he once felt for me? I urged him to do so, and he told me he had obeyed my wishes; we are then as effectually separated as if Lady Clara were his wife, except that now I may look at him, and speak to him, and treasure his image in my heart of hearts, till it is become a part of my very life.—— God help me!—Oh, why was I snatched from the waves to endure this lingering death?" and, burying her face in her hands again, she gave herself up to the sad and bitter thoughts which consumed her heart.

CHAPTER XLII.

Seid munter, seid gut und,—wenn Ihr konnt, seid witzig! Tanzt, spielt, singt, aber thut alles dieses so, dass es Euch Vernügen macht!—Flechtet mit leichten Händen den Kranz unschuldiger Freuden — und dazu reiche ein Jeder anspruchlos seine kleine Blume dar!

Das Vergnügen der Unterhaltung sei Euch theuer. Lasst das Feuer der Ideen unter Euch circuliren, werfet einander die Funken des Scherzes zu, welche leuchten, aber nicht brennen.

EIN BRIEF ÜBER SOUPERS.

MONTHS passed on, and April drew to a close; and now that Leslie was regaining his former spirits, which had been so depressed by the events of the last twelvemonth, and entering again with interest into his former avocations, he became urgent with Minnie to fulfil her engagement to visit Mrs. Sherwood in town. He himself had only made one or two visits of a week at a time to London to vote on certain questions, and was desirous of avoiding a stay there during the gay season as much as was consistent with his parliamentary duties. Minnie, on the contrary, was now anxious to be there, with a desperate eagerness seeking for confirmation

of what she most dreaded to be assured of; "like the thirsty traveller who knows that the well to which he has crept is poisoned, and yet stoops and drinks large draughts." It was not, therefore, difficult to persuade her to fix the day for their journey; and, early in May, Minnie found herself one evening driving through the already lighted streets of London, from the Station to Lowndes Square, where Mrs. Sherwood was living. Leslie took her to the door in his own carriage; but, unwilling to run the risk of meeting Lily, he only saw her safe within the entrance, and then turned away to a solitary meal at the Travellers'. It was with the wildest delight that Lily ran down the stairs to welcome her dear Minnie, as, watching from the window, she saw Sir Leslie's carriage drive up; and, though it must be owned that, while embracing her friend, her looks did stray over her shoulder towards the figure in mourning who still remained in the carriage, and a shade of something like disappointment overcast her sunny brow as she saw the carriage driven off, and the street door closed,—her cordial delight in pressing Minnie to her heart was in no degree lessened thereby.

So Minnie was fairly embarked for a London season. Though Mrs. Sherwood talked sentimentally

now and then, declaring her aversion to return to society in her present circumstances, it was yet evident that she took as much, if not more, interest in its gaieties than the two girls; in compassion to whom, she would fain have had it believed, she did violence to her feelings by entering at all into the vortex. Hitherto, indeed, she had lived secluded; for, though she and Lily had come to town in March, none of Mrs. Sherwood's own set were there at that time; and her attention had been solely engaged in completing the luxurious and *recherche* arrangement of her new house and establishment, and preparing for the part she intended to play when *her* London should fill after Easter. She had fully determined to eschew all large parties, either at her own house or others; but, wherever there was a *réunion* of a few of the *élite*, Mrs. Sherwood would be among them, clad in the becoming half-mourning which admits of so much coquetry in its arrangement; and it was soon noticed that, although there were no more balls or large dinner-parties in Lowndes Square such as Berkeley Square had been celebrated for, there were frequently select small musical *soirées* or *conversazione* where the choicest guests were assembled; and occasional little dinners, not exceeding eight or ten, where both the viands

and arrangements were of the most refined description.

And now, having like a skilful general well organised her plans beforehand, and assembled her forces, Mrs. Sherwood was ready to take her part in the campaign—moderately, it is true; but, though there might be only two or three nights in the week engaged, and seldom more than one amusement in the same evening, it seemed like a whirl of dissipation to the two girls whose ordinary life was so quiet.

Two such bright stars, indeed, soon attracted a crowd of fluttering moths, whose assiduity was by no means lessened by finding themselves so far removed from the sphere they shone in; and to procure an invitation to one of Mrs. Sherwood's small parties, or to that of one of her intimates, soon became an object the more sought after as it was difficult of attainment.

Minnie had her horses in town, and Archie had not failed to supply Lily also with hers; but the two friends were not often to be met with in the fashionable resorts; their rides were generally taken in the morning before the world was awake, and when only the younger members of the aristocracy, unacknowledged as yet in the world, were

enjoying the freedom of a canter over the park with their attendant grooms. To the two novices in London there were also many things that claimed their interest, and it was but seldom they were to be met with in the morning.

The Duke of Courtown and Lady Clara had been in town about a fortnight when Minnie arrived. While alone, Lily had been much with Lady Clara, and with Archie had often joined her in her afternoon ride. Since Minnie's advent these meetings had ceased; Archie had subsided into club dinners and parliamentary evenings, and May had nearly passed without Lady Clara having seen Lily.

They met, at last, accidentally, at one of the small musical *réunions* which Mrs. Sherwood affected. Lady Clara and her father had been at other parties, and it was late when they entered. Minnie had just been singing, and was still standing by the piano; Lily was sitting alone close by the door; Lady Clara seated herself beside her. A buzz of general conversation had succeeded to the silence which Minnie's full, rich voice, and perfect management of it had imposed; a crowd of admiring connoisseurs concealed her at the moment of Lady Clara's entrance; and, turning to Lily, she paid no attention to what was going on at the piano.

Presently the knot dispersed, conversation became more general, and Lady Clara turned her eyes to where Minnie was still standing talking to one or two.

“Who is that exquisite creature?” she exclaimed to Lily, “I have never seen her before. What a perfect tint of complexion! What grace! How proudly she receives the incense of admiration, as if she knew its value, and despised it all! And what a strange sadness on her brow! How that slight mourning becomes her, and how classical her *coiffure* is! Those rich masses of dark hair drawn off her face and gathered in the full knot with those pure white camellias! No dangles down the shoulders, and odds-and-ends of flowers and ribbons! I must have Marie try this on me, I think; and yet I don’t know that it would suit my style, it is so very characteristic. Surely hers must be a noble character — I can fancy her a Roman matron. Who can she be, Lilius?” she said, turning to her companion, who, in silent amusement, sat listening to, and smiling at, her friend’s enthusiasm.

“Why are you amused, you little witch?” she continued, as she noticed Lily’s smiles, “are you laughing at my *entzückung*? Who is she? Is she English?”

“No,” answered Lilius.

“ Italian? ”

“ No.”

“ Indian? ”

“ No, and yes.”

“ You little oracle; why are you mystifying me so? What do you know about her? Has she dropped from the clouds? ”

Lily felt much disposed to give way to one of her own merry laughs, but, subduing the impulse, she replied with a smile suited to the precincts of a London drawing-room,

“ She was born in India, and brought up in Scotland, to which country her family belongs: she is the only sister of Sir Leslie Gordon, whom you know, I believe.”

“ The sister of Sir Leslie Gordon ! ” repeated Lady Clara. “ That man whose life is a romance. Picked up at sea, which had swallowed up family and fortune—brought home by a miracle to Scotland, where he presently falls into a baronetcy and a palace—then comes the blind goddess, and peeping surreptitiously under her bandage, pities his poverty and pours a fortune into his lap. Then he marries an adventuress, who runs away from him, and after a time has the grace to die and leave him free, and for whom, they say, he now mourns as if she had been a very Lucretia ! ”

“ Shall I introduce you to Miss Gray? ” asked Lily, whose complexion and expression had been undergoing a variety of changes during this speech.

“ Presently, when she is a little less *accablée* with all this homage. But see, she is sitting down to the piano again, with that disdainful, queen-like air, as if she was too proud to refuse even the worship she despises.”

“ She is not proud, nevertheless,” put in Lily, “ she is only indifferent.”

“ And what is that but pride? But perhaps she is only indifferent to general admiration, she only refuses incense that is offered by hearts not consecrated to her service. But tell me, Lily, how long have you known her? ”

“ How long!—it is difficult to reckon—almost all my life. She is as a sister—more than a sister—to me. She was brought up by my parents; papa saved her life at sea, for she was in the same wreck with her brother; but it is only within the last two years that her family could be traced. Brother and sister mutually thought each other drowned, so she lived with us as an orphan.”

“ All your life—a sister to you—” repeated Lady Clara slowly, with her eyes fixed upon Minnie, whose full, richly-toned voice was again filling the

room, and causing an involuntary hush throughout it. Lady Clara remained long silent; from time to time she looked earnestly at Minnie, and then gave a glance at the mirror opposite, which reflected her own face and figure. There was but a half-satisfied expression in her countenance, when after a time she turned again to Lily and said,

“And Mr. Græme, your brother? how has he withstood the fascinations of this beautiful piece of flotsam and jetsam? Is it his absence that makes her so cold to the adulation of the multitude? Does he look upon her as ‘more than a sister?’”

“Archie?” exclaimed Lily with a laugh, “oh! he loves her dearly, as she does him, and as we each love one another. Nobody could help loving Minnie Gray: indeed we have always looked upon her as our own sister. There, now she is leaving the piano, come and let me introduce you to each other; she has only been in town a week. Who is that young man watching her with such a deferential air, as if she were a being of another world?”

“That is Lord Venables; the handsomest man and the wildest in London. Like all of that sort too, he is the most fastidious with regard to women; and declares he has never yet seen the one who could satisfy him perfectly, except his own mother

(who is indeed a perfect creature), and till he meets with her equal he will never marry. I rather suspect his gay lordship has burned his wings at last, and is meditating matrimony at this very moment."

Lilias laid her hand on Minnie's arm as she said,

"Here is my friend Lady Clara Varnley, Minnie, let me introduce you to her."

Minnie turned quickly round with an air of interest, and took the hand which Lady Clara proffered frankly.

"You must not receive me as a stranger, Miss Gray," she said, "I have known our mutual little friend here too intimately, not to feel something more than a formal interest in one who she tells me is more than a sister to her."

Each looked at the other with earnestness, and the trio soon fell into conversation, which was only interrupted by Mrs. Sherwood's leaving the party. But to Minnie the introduction had been an event. This then was the Lady Clara of whom she had heard so much—Archie's Lady Clara. How she had studied her during those few minutes of light conversation while they sat together. How she had tried to judge by her countenance, by her turn of thought, whether she were one likely to be loved by Archie—whether her heart and mind were such

as would be worthy of him. She thought her very beautiful, with a refined, aristocratic style of beauty, that was very captivating: she had never considered whether any beauty in herself might have influenced Archie in his love for her. It had sprung up so imperceptibly and naturally between them, growing with their growth, and strengthening with their strength, that she hardly supposed it had entered into his mind to consider whether she were beautiful or not; but now, when she studied Lady Clara's dignified, gentle bearing, and her fine, delicate features, she could not but feel that such a one would have great power of attraction where she desired to please, and that it was just the style of loveliness calculated to charm Archie. These thoughts had occupied and kept her silent during the drive home; the stopping of the carriage roused her from her reverie, and, as it ended with a sigh, Lily laughingly asked her if that sigh was wafted to her evident admirer, Lord Venables?

The early rides in the park were continued, and now Lady Clara was often of the party. Archie, however, never joined them, and she sometimes asked Lily playfully what had made her brother turn such a hermit of late?

"When I first came up," she said "I met him

continually, and he was always in the park; now he seems to have forsworn all society and shut himself up in that great house in Berkeley Square, where I hear of nothing but stupid dinners. Papa dines there to-day, and I told him he must positively insist on his joining our party to Richmond to-morrow. You have never been at Richmond," turning to Minnie, "and I hear you are an artist, like my little friend, so you will be charmed with the scenery of the park and the river; for myself, the party will be quite pleasure enough without the scenery, which I know by heart. By-the-bye I believe Mr. Græme is a knight of the brush: well, though I am not of the guild, I can appreciate and admire, so I shall claim admittance as an honorary member."

"Honorary and honoured, I should think," exclaimed Lord Venables, as, overtaking the trio at that moment, he had caught Lady Clara's last words.

"Do you expect such a miserable apology for a compliment will admit you into the fraternity, my Lord?" said Lady Clara.

"I hardly think, Lady Clara, that you are qualified to reject or elect," was the reply; "if I mistake not, you were only now begging to be yourself

admitted on sufferance. I shall apply at the fountain head—Miss Gray, you reign supreme over the arts, will you admit me as an humble votary?"

"Nay, we admit no supremacy, my Lord," replied Minnie, laughing, "ours is a fraternity; we are republican in our form of government, like science and literature, so you must submit to be elected or rejected by a majority."

"Then I shall hope that my three fair companions will not have the cruelty to black-ball so devoted an admirer, and will consider myself duly elected, and free to join the artist coterie to-morrow."

"You are very presumptuous, and deserve to be black-balled on the spot, Lord Venables," said Lady Clara; "but, if you will do us worthy service to-day, perhaps we will look over the affront our dignity has received."

"You have only to name the service, Lady Clara; what shall it be? Are you going to throw your glove into the lion's cage, and command me to pick it up?"

"Not quite so bad; it is only a biped lion, whose roar is not very fierce, that we wish you to encounter; we require you to bring Mr. Græme, who is at present a mutinous rebel, to join our party to-morrow."

“Nay, that is too easy; I have only to whisper one magic name, and lo, I bring a captive in chains to your feet.”

“You are adding boldness to presumption, and I shall be obliged to play the *Fraülein* Cunigunde in real earnest, and send you among the quadruped lions; remember you are not yet elected, and may be excluded not only from our guild, but from the present company.”

“Now you are too cruel, Lady Clara, but, as upon Miss Gray’s showing I cannot take a vote of exclusion from one voice alone, I appeal to her clemency: will you protect one who promises to undertake the service imposed?” he said with an earnest look at Minnie. She laughed and replied,

“I don’t think we can afford to lose our Ritter Delorges; so, Lady Clara, if Lord Venables is willing to reclaim your gauntlet from Berkeley Square or the Regent’s Park, I think we must ‘admit him of our crew’.”

“You hear the conditions, my Lord?” said Lady Clara.

“And swear to fulfil these or any others that could be enjoined, if they but gain me the reward I seek,” was the answer, addressed by word to Lady Clara, but by look to Minnie.

“ See that you do so, then,” replied the former ;
“ and now let us put our horses into a canter.”

They rode on, but Minnie was annoyed with herself for her thoughtless words, which had evidently given such pleasure to Lord Venables. She had been thinking more of herself than of him at the time she uttered them, glad to find any means of bringing Archie and Lady Clara together in such a way as would enable her to judge of their relative position. The words of Lord Venables had shown her only more fully the view the world took of the matter, which Lady Clara had by no means disclaimed, and in such a party as that of the morrow she could not fail to see things in their true light. But now the construction that Lord Venables had put upon her foolish words was only too plainly shown by his altered manner: it was in vain that she retreated into her former dignified and cold reserve, the very change seemed to be accepted by him as no unfavourable symptom, till at last, worried and out of humour with herself, she proposed that they should return home, reminding Lily that Mrs. Sherwood had requested them to return early, that they might drive with her.

Lord Venables still continued to ride with them, and as they stopped in Lowndes Square, and Lady

Clara was saying a few parting words to Lily about the morrow, he offered his hand to assist Minnie in dismounting, saying, as she placed hers within it,

“Believe me, dear Miss Gray, I would venture more even than did the Ritter Delorges for the sweet reward I have had to-day.”

She coloured with vexation, and, hardly knowing what answer to make which would sufficiently disabuse him of the idea of encouragement, she stammered out,

“I am sorry, Lord Venables—I think you misunderstood me—I was only carrying on a foolish jest.”

There was no time for more, for Lady Clara called to him, and springing on his horse again, he replied to Minnie only with a bow and a meaning smile, and she entered the house, mortified at her folly and want of presence of mind, which had led her to answer in a way which, by showing she understood his meaning, only added to the encouragement her former foolish words had given.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Nina.—If Heaven had ta'en but one all-precious sense
It would have humbled, but not crush'd me thus !
Yes, had it quench'd the quick perceiving eye,
That sees the sweets of summer when they bloom,
The stars, kind faces, all things beautiful;
At least I should have heard him say he loved !
Or had it been the ear, that to the soul
Conveys the natural music of the grove ;
And language, thought's most sure interpreter ;
I could have seen him smile and been content !
But to lose all at once, in losing that
Which was the life of all—alas !—alas !
Is more than I can bear !

NINA SFORZA.—R. J. S. TROUGHTON.

THE next morning rose cloudless, and continued so till the fashionable world of London opened its eyes upon it, somewhere about noon. It was soon after that time that the party arranged for Richmond was to set out. The ladies were all in carriages; it was only some of the gentlemen who rode; Lady Clara's messengers had done "their spiriting" so well, and "gently," that Archie had obeyed her summons, and seemed resolved to be in his brightest

mood. Arrived at the rendezvous, the party was quite large enough to admit of its dividing itself into various little groups, thus enabling every one to select the amusement most agreeable. Some went on the water, some preferred rambling in the park, while others, and these chiefly the elders of the party, contented themselves with sitting in the balcony, or strolling in the gardens of the hotel.

Lady Clara, Minnie, and Lillas, with several others, chose the park; of course Lord Venables and Archie were to be found of the number. They sat under the trees, enjoying the delightful sensation of country freedom, so peculiarly welcome to the denizens of town; for a time it was sufficient pleasure to sit quiet, and allow the balmy breezes to fan them, while they abandoned themselves to the enjoyment of all the sweet, rural sounds, and sights, and scents which gladdened and refreshed every sense. By degrees they broke up into smaller knots, some to sketch, some to look on, others to find nooks still more picturesque.

Lord Venables was ever close by the side of Minnie; the slight encouragement which her words had given him the day before seemed to have raised hopes, which not all the studied reserve she threw into her manner to-day was sufficient to quell.

Archie looked on with anxious eyes and an aching heart, hidden under an air of more than usual gaiety: but he kept himself aloof from Minnie, and suffered himself to be engrossed by Lady Clara. They walked on together, but, in proportion as the distance between themselves and the larger party increased, his manner became *distract* and absent. At first his companion tried to interest him in subjects they had discussed together at Battesden; but he seemed incapable of giving his mind to such topics, and, in spite of his utmost efforts, his answers were often so *mal-à-propos*, that finding it impossible to fix his thoughts or draw him into a connected conversation, she gave up the attempt, and tried the effect of badinage, and the lighter style of touch-and-go ball-room talk. Gradually they wandered farther and farther away, for Archie's object was to keep as remote as possible from Minnie, while her endeavour was, by keeping in the midst of the gay group around her, to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with Lord Venables. But with her eyes she followed Archie; she wished to convince herself of the truth or falsehood of what report had told her of himself and Lady Clara. She dared not trust herself to speak on the subject to Lily, but the great friendship which existed between her and Lady Clara made her even

more ready to give credence to the rumour. And why not? Was it not all ended between Archie and herself? Had he not told her that he had striven against his passion and conquered it, in so far at least as he had relinquished the endeavour to win her? And was not Lady Clara in station, fortune, person, even mind, (as far as her acquaintance enabled her to determine, and the interest she felt had made her keen-sighted,) worthy to become his wife? What was this weakness then, which made her watch so eagerly, and yet tremble to discover confirmation of the gossip?

She saw them gradually fall away from the rest of the party; she was not near enough to hear the broken conversation or note the *distract* manner and wandering glances of Archie; indeed, could she have observed all this, it would probably have been attributed to a different cause.

Meanwhile Lord Venables tried more and more to detach Minnie from her companions; he saw the admiration of others, and for once confidence in his own powers failed him. He was anxious to know his fate; it was now the end of June, in a short time London would be breaking up, and he had joined the party that day, resolved on terminating the suspense of the last six weeks. He was quite at a

loss to account for the timidity which had restrained him so long; he was not naturally doubtful of his attractions, and had seen too many snares spread for him to make the lesson easy to him. But there was something in Minnie's manner which continually awed him back; he felt that the mere advantages of rank and fortune were not what would dazzle her, that something more was wanted to win that heart. He looked into himself, and tried to gain courage from an enumeration of his good qualities. He was at the head of fashion, of high rank, and ample fortune; considered the handsomest man in London; a "capital fellow" with all his companions, and courted equally by mamas and daughters: what more could Minnie desire? Still his usual self-reliance forsook him; he knew something more was necessary, but could not tell what: he was positively stupid and awkward before her, and despised himself for the diffidence with which one glance of those full, deep eyes, sufficed to inspire him.

To Minnie herself the day was anything but one of enjoyment, and she could not but envy the easy *abandon* with which Lily had given herself up to the pleasure of it. There was something in Lily too which puzzled her, and made her half inclined to be angry. Indeed I am afraid that just

at this time Minnie did not exhibit herself in the most amiable light, for she was ill at ease, and many things conspired to give her uneasiness. Since the death of Lady Gordon, Lily had never by letter or speech alluded to Leslie; she had even shunned the subject when Minnie had casually adverted to it. She seemed to have lost all interest in her brother. Her manner too was wholly changed; she was no longer sad or pensive, it was rarely, very rarely, that any shadow would steal over her; on the contrary, all her old gaiety and *insouciance* had returned; she was, as in former days, the life of every party; even now the musical cadence of her joyous laugh was ringing in her ears. When in society she was always surrounded by admirers vying with each other for her notice; she even seemed amused with this, and, though there was no shade of coquetry in her manner, or the slightest preference shown to any one, she was gay and *débonnaire* with all. Yet there had been no word between her and Leslie to alter their mutual position. Nine months had passed since his wife's death, and he had not even taken advantage of the many opportunities he might have had to see her. It was a conduct she could not understand, and felt

sometimes quite angry with Lily, and jealous for her brother.

At this moment, however, she could not but envy her, sitting under a tree with those other girls, flinging so carelessly her gay and lively repartees among the group of young men who lounged about the spot in various attitudes, each eager to ingratiate himself, while to all she showed equal indifference, and took an arch pleasure in so receiving their compliments and attentions as to make her companions equal sharers of them with herself. How gladly would Minnie have been able to imitate her careless *laissez aller*! for her own thoughts were painfully intent on imagining the subject of that *tête-à-tête*, apparently so interesting, at some distance before her, that she had hardly spirit enough to answer in the requisite tone of raillery the obvious attentions and implied flatteries with which Lord Venables persecuted her. Say what she would, he was bent upon interpreting her speech favourably to himself, and, if she raised her eyes with a look of indignation, they encountered such a look of pleading tenderness, that she was fain to drop them again immediately; and what added to her annoyance was, that in the little circle among which she sat there seemed a tacit acknowledgment

that she belonged to Lord Venables. She could have cried with vexation, which was increased when the pair she was so interested in watching turned into a path where they were concealed from her view.

Hitherto Lily had been too much occupied with her own amusement and her guerilla warfare to heed Minnie's distress; but on raising her eyes to appeal to her on some subject she was at once struck with the trouble in her countenance, and, starting up, she declared herself quite weary of having remained so long in one place when there were so many beauties to explore; and, putting her arm within Minnie's, she said,

"Come, Minnie dear, let us go on and overtake those truants who have not had the complaisance to wait upon my caprices."

Then after walking a little farther she suddenly exclaimed,

"By-the-bye, Lord Venables, do you remember the discussion we had in the Botanic Gardens on the best method of budding roses? *Les bienséances*, you know, prevented our experimentalising on our theories there, but this is a famous opportunity; here are brambles in abundance, and here are some choice specimens of the rarest roses in my bouquet;

we will graft them in this wild spot, and the present company shall act as umpires; and then we can parody Scott's lines:—

Some traveller then will find these flowers
Blooming amidst neglected bowers,
And, ignorant of our ability,
Marvel such roses here should be."

There was a general laugh at her gay sally, and Lord Venables could not refuse the challenge to show his skill in an art on which he was known rather to pique himself. In the mean time, while some remained with the rival gardeners, others strolled away, and Minnie followed eagerly in the track of those on whom her interest was so anxiously concentrated.

Like many another who seeks rashly to obtain confirmation of what he dreads, she had soon cause to repent bitterly her curiosity.

Lady Clara and Archie meanwhile had sauntered on. For a time there had been attempts at conversation, without much success, as we have seen, for Archie was preoccupied, and both his thoughts and eyes would wander away to the party which they were leaving. Lady Clara observed him narrowly. From the moment she had seen Minnie, the idea had fixed itself in her mind that two such people

could never have been domesticated together for so many years without something more than a mere fraternal affection existing between them. She had herself been much associated with Archie since he had been at Battesden, and had had many opportunities of estimating the fine qualities of his heart and mind. She felt that had he tried to win her affections it would not have been in vain, and could hardly suppose any one could be insensible to the charm of his society; she had often wondered at his coldness towards herself; without being vain, she was perfectly aware of her own beauty and refinement of mind and manner, so likely to be attractive to one of Archie's stamp, especially when thrown together in the intimate intercourse of a country house. She had been accustomed to much adulation, and Archie was almost the only one who had seemed utterly indifferent to her, except as the friend of his sister. He seemed to rejoice in her society for Lily's sake, and to accept it for himself as he would do the companionship of a friend of his own sex, or a sister, without attempting to excite any interest for himself. The sight and history of Minnie solved the enigma, and from that moment she resolved upon the course she would adopt. The reports that were current with

regard to Archie and herself had reached her own ears, and she knew that he was not ignorant of them; his careful avoidance of her society since she came to town proved the fact. She appreciated the delicacy of his motive, and, now that she believed she had found the clue to it, she wished to remove the *gêne* from between them, so as to avoid any misunderstanding of their mutual position. It was a step that few perhaps would have ventured upon, but Lady Clara, thoroughly feminine though she was, was also very straightforward, and accustomed to judge and act according to her own impulses. She esteemed Archie too much to let a mere punctilio separate him from her. It was therefore with the view of observing him and Minnie together that she had so urged his joining the Richmond party; and now she felt puzzled, for, though each seemed interested in the other, there was a mutual avoidance, and on his part an anxiety which she could not quite fathom.

She had drawn him away from the rest purposely, and now that they were out of sight, and Archie could no longer cast uneasy furtive looks at Minnie and Lord Venables, the conversation, if such it could be called, had ceased entirely. Archie walked by her side, but his thoughts were plainly elsewhere,

and, as he kept switching the heads of the flowers and brambles in his path malignantly, he looked as if he would willingly have exercised his riding-cane on other, and nobler, game.

Thus then they had walked on in silence for some minutes, Archie striking vehemently at everything that came in his way, and Lady Clara watching him attentively and archly. At length she said,

“Lord Venables is a great acquisition to such a party as this, don’t you think so, Mr. Græme?”

Archie started as if a wasp had stung him.

“Venables!” he said; “we men are no judges of what ladies admire; to me, he seems simply a coxcomb,” as he made a terrific stroke at the head of a nettle.

She went on maliciously:

“Oh! I thought you were friends, and you know what is said of ‘birds of a feather.’ You would not have me suppose you of such a plumage, I presume—that is, if he be a coxcomb. But I shall appeal to Miss Gray; she ought at least to be a good judge.”

“Miss Gray would perhaps tell you, Lady Clara, that at least one of us was a coxcomb,” he replied bitterly, while another nettle was beheaded at the moment.

“I think you do Miss Gray injustice, she seems

to me too sweet a creature to give so harsh a character of any one,—of Lord Venables, or of the brother of her friend Lilius.”

Archie turned quickly round, and looked sharply into her eyes, then, after a moment, he said,

“ She is indeed a sweet creature, and yet that is no term for her. She is an angel, Lady Clara, and neither Venables nor any other coxcomb of our sex is worthy of her.”

Aha! thought Lady Clara, I am at least right in my surmises: it is well I had just prudence enough not to fall in love with this hero:—then aloud:

“ You are rather severe on your own sex, Mr. Græme, and indeed I doubt if Miss Gray would thank you for thus condemning her to perpetual celibacy. But, though I may be still disposed to consider Lord Venables as an acquisition, it is by no means clear to me that Miss Gray views him in the same light.”

Archie turned quickly round, as if he gathered hope from the words of his companion, and would fain have it confirmed. But nobody was in sight, and, with a heavy sigh, he resumed his warfare upon the nettles. After a few minutes' silence, he said,

“ You know that the London world has united them? ”

“ I know,” she replied with a gay laugh, “ that the London world is very obliging, and that it has also united you and myself, and —— ”

“ I fear I am very unworthy of the great honour it does me,” interrupted Archie, speaking in a low voice, and very slowly, “ though it would be a happiness any one might be desirous to obtain, but —— ”

“ Well, as you give me Miss Gray’s authority for supposing you a coxcomb, I must agree to the unworthiness,” she answered, playfully; “ but pardon me, I was not going to entrap you into a proposal, though I have great regard for you; so don’t make one, for fear I should accept it; and I would rather not have a husband without a heart,” she added, smiling archly. “ The corollary I was going to deduce from my argument was this, that, knowing the world’s fallibility in one instance, I am not disposed to put faith in it in another. The world has not asked our consent, but it need not separate us, and though we entertain, mutually I hope, great regard and esteem, we understand each other too well to think of anything more. Why should it not be equally premature in Miss Gray’s case? ”

He took her hand and raised it to his lips, as he answered,

“ I hope ever to retain a regard and esteem which I prize so highly, and return so fully; but for your deduction, dear Lady Clara, it can matter but little to me in the case you allude to, whether the world be right or wrong.”

She looked earnestly at him, and then walked on in silence for a few minutes; at last, she said, timidly,

“ I have no right to pry into your secret, though I must say that you carry it rather too legibly written in your face to deserve that name. Of course I am quite ignorant of Miss Gray’s feelings. I can only say I think her —— very much like what you call her, and deserving of the deepest love.” He took her hand again, and was again about to raise it to his lips, but playfully withdrawing it, she said,

“ Nay, Mr. Græme, you must not make love to her by proxy. I was about to say, do not give way to needless fears or jealousy; my own idea is, that she carries some hidden armour in her heart, which makes her proof against the attractions of all who surround her here, for I have noticed the haughty —no, that’s not the word—the dignified coldness with which she repels all advances.”

“ Even those of Venables?” he asked, bitterly.

“Even those; but he is the spoiled pet of society, and is not easily daunted, so he is more pertinacious than others; and really he has so much to recommend him, that I think it must be a preoccupied heart which would be so insensible to his assiduities.”

“I wish you could verify your surmises, dear Lady Clara!” he replied, with almost a groan.

“I have only my own observation to guide me,” she said, “so I can say no more. Indeed I have already said too much perhaps, and have been trenching on ground where I had no business to set my foot. But you will forgive me, Mr. Græme; my disposition is frank, and, when a difficulty comes in my way, I like to look it straight in the face. I feared the foolish gossip was causing a *gêne* in our intercourse, which in the country was so free from anything of the kind, and I wished you to know that I understood you, and was no party to the silly gossip of the uninitiated. I thank you for the delicacy which has made you seek to silence the rumour on my account: when we meet again in the country, I hope our intimacy will be renewed, as we at least understand each other; so now we will return to our party,” she said, stopping and extending to him her hand, “and I yet hope to see you win a prize which an emperor might covet.”

“I may be permitted now,” he said with a smile, as taking the offered hand he pressed his lips upon it. “Dear Lady Clara, I thank you heartily for your noble frankness, and am truly grateful for your confidence in me and the friendship with which you honour me. As for the rest, though I have reason to fear you are mistaken in your ideas, you have at least given me a ray of hope which will somewhat lighten my heart.”

Little did either of them suppose that during these last few sentences Minnie's eyes had been fixed upon them! She was a little in advance of her companions, and had come in sight of the pair just as Lady Clara turned and gave her hand to Archie. —For a moment she stood spell-bound, a sickness came over her, and she leaned against a tree for support; then recovering herself with an effort, she turned, and murmuring something about fatigue, and inability to go further, she proposed returning to the hotel. Her looks indeed confirmed her plea of weariness, and, as it was now near the dinner-hour, the whole party returned to join those who were waiting for them.

CHAPTER XLIV.

So tief
Herabgestürzt von allen meinen Himmeln !
O das ist schrecklich.

* * * * *

Liebe
Kennt der allein, der ohne Hoffnung liebt.
SCHILLER.

It was with difficulty that Minnie contrived to support herself back to the hotel, where, on her arrival, her wan and haggard look quite alarmed Mrs. Sherwood. She wished to prevail on her to rest in another room, instead of joining the dinner party, but to this Minnie would by no means consent, so, after administering wine and restoratives, and making her sit quietly in the balcony till the party had re-assembled, she succeeded in restoring her sufficiently to take her place at the table, "Though indeed, my dear," she said "you tremble all over now, and your cheeks are burning, and your hands as cold as ice."

By little and little the various groups once more united, and the dinner commenced. Lady Clara

and Archie were among the last to enter, and they sat together at the bottom of the table; Minnie was too far from them to hear their conversation, which was not however confined exclusively to each other, but she could see a radiance on Archie's face, which had long been absent from it, and, though he glanced frequently at her varying complexion, he never met her eyes. By the time dinner was over Minnie felt so unwell, that she was glad to accept the offer of a seat back to town in the carriage of an old lady who, fearing the evening dews, was returning early. The arrangement was made quietly while the others were busily engaged in organizing boating-parties, and neither Lily nor Archie were aware of it till their return.

The next morning Minnie woke feverish and ill; she remained in bed, and it was thought she had taken a severe cold. The month of June was over, and families were beginning to arrange their continental or sea-side excursions, and daily leaving town. The Duke of Courtown and Lady Clara were going to Italy; they were to set out in a day or two, and the latter called to take leave of her friends in Lowndes Square. Minnie was not well enough to see her, but bade Lily assure her of her earnest wishes for her happiness. The message rather per-

plexed her ladyship, but, not being aware of what Minnie had seen in Richmond Park, she thought it alluded to her journey. Lord Venables continued constant in his calls of inquiry, but Minnie was still too ill to come downstairs. In a week's time however she was able to do so, but still refused to see any visitors. Lord Venables pleaded eagerly for an interview, and at last Mrs. Sherwood despairing of being able to overcome Minnie's resolution not to see him, contrived that a meeting should occur by accident.

Mrs. Sherwood and Lily were gone for their afternoon drive, and Minnie concluding herself free from interruption remained in the drawing-room; in the mean time Mrs. Sherwood had appointed Lord Venables to call, and left orders that he should be shown upstairs at once.

Totally unconscious of the scheme which had been laid, Minnie listened to the knock without uneasiness, feeling sure that, now Lady Clara was gone, no other visitors would be admitted during Mrs. Sherwood's absence. She sat in a listless attitude; her hand supporting her head, and a book, in which she was not reading, open on the table before her. Her complexion had lost its usual pearly tint, and was deadly white, while the long lashes which drooped over her cheek gave a deep shade to it.

A moment after the knock, the drawing-room door opened, and looking up, supposing it must be Lily and her aunt returned, her eyes rested on Lord Venables. For a moment her face flushed violently, and then the colour fixed in a burning spot on each cheek, leaving the rest deadly pale.

"There must be a mistake," she said, "Mrs. Sherwood is not at home."

"Pardon me, Miss Gray," said he advancing to where she sat, "I was aware of Mrs. Sherwood's absence, and am here by her permission. I have been so anxious during your illness—and fear I may in some degree have been the cause, by inducing you to walk too far that day at Richmond—I assure you I have been quite unequal to society since, and have known no peace,—and now your looks tell me that indeed there has been cause for uneasiness."

Minnie had drawn up her stately neck, and put on her coldest manner, while Lord Venables had hastily strung together the above sentences. When he ceased she said,

"I am very grateful for your kind interest, Lord Venables, and regret that you should have suffered uneasiness or self-blame on my account. My illness had nothing to do with the walk that

day, it was in consequence of a shock I received, quite distinct from those I was with. I am better now, and hope, in the course of a few days, to return to Scotland, which will quite restore me."

"Your words give me both pleasure and pain, Miss Gray," he said, as he seated himself near her at the table. "I would fain—" then, suddenly rising, he placed himself opposite to her, leaning upon the chimney-piece, and went on in an altered tone:

"Miss Gray, it is useless to trifle with words thus,—I love you with my whole heart. I have long wished to tell you so, though I think you must be aware of my feelings. I fully intended that day to tell you how deeply I adored you, to pray your compassion, and beg you to accept the heart which is so wholly yours. Your coldness awed me back—I dared not risk my happiness. I have no hope now," he continued rapidly, as, without speaking, she raised her hand as if to implore him to stop. "Once some words of yours, that I treasured deeply in my heart, led me to think I might hope; it was but a momentary glimpse of happiness; and now—but oh, Miss Gray, pause a moment before you destroy all hope. I dare not think myself in any way worthy of the treasure I

plead for; but think what it must be to despair, and pause before you doom me to it!"

He had advanced a step or two, his hands clasped and extended towards her. She was nerving herself, in her weakness trying to obtain sufficient self-command to enable her to reply. Her silence gave him hope,—he dropped on one knee, and endeavoured to take her hand; she disengaged it gently, and opened her lips to speak: weakness overpowered her; and, dropping her head on the open book before her, she burst into tears.

"Forgive me, dearest Miss Gray, I am distressing you too much; but, if you knew the blank of despair ——"

She raised her head and said:

"Illness has weakened me, my Lord; pray forgive me. I would not keep you in suspense; for, indeed, I can understand the bitterness of which you speak. Earnestly do I regret having uttered one word which may have given you a false hope. It was unintentional, for I would not willingly give pain; but I cannot ——"

"No hope!" he exclaimed, "Oh! Miss Gray, think, think! Could you not with time feel differently? I would wait any time — I would try and become anything you wished — I know I am not good enough for you——"

“ Oh, hush ! ” she said gently ; “ you do, indeed, grieve me. I shall always be grateful for the preference you have shown. Believe me, it is no fault of yours that I cannot return your love. You deserve to see the secret of my heart — I, too, love, and despair ! ”

She dropped her face, hidden in her hands, again on the book ; but, though her countenance was concealed, a crimson flush had spread even over her neck ; and the working of the veins and muscles told what the effort she had just made had cost her. There was silence for a few minutes ; then Lord Venables spoke in a low, subdued tone :

“ I grieve to have thus distressed you, my dear Miss Gray ; and feel deeply the effort you have now made for my sake — I hate myself for having forced you to it ; but you will believe that your secret is as safe in my bosom as your own. I will try and moderate my deep love into the measure of esteem which you may accept ; and trust that I may, in time, be blest with your friendship ; it shall be the study of my life to deserve it.”

Minnie reached out her hand without raising her head ; he took it in both his own, and pressed it reverentially to his lips. She did not withdraw it while she said,

“ I shall ever regard you with esteem, my Lord; and if hereafter you meet with one who will return your love, as assuredly you will, I hope we may always continue friends.”

She raised her face, which, with the exception of the glowing spot on either cheek, was pale as marble. He looked wistfully into her deep eyes —

“ Farewell, angel of brightness ! ” he said, “ forgive me for all that I must have made you suffer ; and may your happiness one day be as great as my own despair now is deep ! ”

She laid her other hand in his without speaking. He pressed them to his brow — to his lips : a tear fell upon them ; then, rising suddenly, he darted from the room, and out of the house.

Minnie remained for a time motionless, conscious only of that dull aching of the heart which follows painful excitement. Then she rose slowly, and dragged herself to her own room. When Mrs. Sherwood returned, Slater met her with the intelligence that her mistress had had a succession of fainting fits, and that with Cecile’s help they had laid her in bed. Before night she was raving in the delirium of fever.

Poor Lily was in deep distress ; and was earnestly

grieved when her aunt confessed that the visit of Lord Venables had been by her connivance.

“ I could not refuse his pleadings, dear Lily; the poor man was distractedly in love, and had no means of speaking to her. I thought Minnie’s retirement was all false modesty, for it was natural to suppose that, heiress as she is, a proposal from a man for whom all the girls in London are sighing, would be acceptable. But you north-country people pass me entirely—you have notions which I cannot understand. He is the only man that Minnie has given a shadow of encouragement to. He is in every respect unexceptionable; he has evidently no rival; and, when I think I have placed a coronet on her head, and given her a model husband—hey presto! the scene changes, and I find the coronet flung to the other end of the world, and Miss Minnie raving.”

“ Poor dear Minnie! she has been so ill, aunt; and was by no means recovered this morning, even when I told her that Archie was down stairs, and had called to know how she was before he started for Paris; she turned as pale as marble, and I thought she would have fainted. She was too weak to bear the slightest excitement, and what must she have undergone this afternoon?”

"Well, Lily, these delicate young ladies don't suit me; so, when she is well enough, the sooner she gets back to Scotland the better. I shall go to the sea-side this autumn, and if you like to come with me you may; for you seem made of better stuff than this fine lady Minnie."

"Thank you aunt, but where Minnie goes I will go: and I think you are very unjust to call her a fine lady. Think of all she has gone through of late years, and the energy she has shown."

"Gone through indeed! I think she has been in high luck all her life, and you have all turned her head at Fairlands; but I suppose you know best what you expect; and now that she's become an heiress she does not know how to take airs enough upon herself."

"Oh, aunt!" exclaimed Lily reproachfully: then added with a proud toss of the head,

"It is at least the first time I ever heard Minnie accused of such a thing: her old friend at Fairlands would never have had such an idea, and you may be sure, when she recovers, we will lose no time in returning to the home where she will be always welcome," and the little lady left the room really angry.

Mrs. Sherwood might indeed have some right to

be irritated: her great desire had been to establish these three girls well, as the world understands the term. Alice had entirely failed, and adopted her own line. The most brilliant opportunities had been within the grasp of the other two, and both had not only spurned them, but encumbered her afterwards with all the worry and trouble of a long illness. It was a hard return for all her anxious *chaperonage*, and, remembering the words of her late husband, she began to think he really was right, and that she had no talents for the office, which she fully resolved henceforward religiously to eschew.

Meanwhile Lily was Minnie's indefatigable and patient nurse; she shared the night-watches with Slater, but, even when it was not her turn to sit up, she only lay down in the adjoining room, with the door of communication open.

Poor Minnie's ravings at first were terrible: Lord Venables seemed to haunt her continually; but what she recurred to oftenest was a scene in Richmond Park, in which Lady Clara and Archie were plainly concerned. It puzzled Lily extremely. She would catch Lily's arm, and with her head averted would look over her shoulder, and speak in a hoarse whisper, "Look at them: what is she saying?—Hush! can't you hear? See the joy in his eyes!—that

bright smile—hush! he is speaking. Oh why does the sea roar so loudly—what did he say?—Minnie, I love you!—deeply—passionately. Ha! he kisses her hand—” and throwing her arms wildly up, she would break off into unnatural laughter.

By degrees the truth began to dawn upon Lily in these watches. Was it possible? did Minnie and Archie love each other, and had Lady Clara in any way come between them? She and Clara were such friends, yet she had never said one word of Archie having spoken of love; and, if he really had spoken that day at Richmond, why was it not made public? for she was quite sure there had been no refusal; they were better friends than ever; there was nothing constrained. But then she was on the continent, and Archie had gone there too the very day Minnie was taken so ill. He had seemed so distressed at her former comparatively slight illness; that was natural, as well as his wish to see her; but why should Minnie have always refused to go downstairs when he was there, and why had she turned so faint when she heard he was going to Paris? Then those words, “Minnie, I love you!” Were those Archie’s, or Lord Venables’? But if Archie’s, and they really loved each other—where was the difficulty? and what had Clara to do with

it? And again she came round to the starting-point. She had written to Archie the day after Minnie had been taken ill, so that the letter would probably be at Paris before himself: she thought, if he really loved her, the news of her illness would bring him back at once; if he did not come, she must believe the gossip about him and Lady Clara; so she waited.

Meanwhile the violence of Minnie's fever gradually yielded to the remedies of the physician and the care of her kind nurse; but the prostration which followed was so great that it was hardly thought possible she could rally. Lily was careful to conceal from her the words she had spoken in her ravings, and answered her inquiries by assurances that she had talked only a great deal of nonsense, which Lily could not understand, and could only gather that she seemed to have been very unkind to Lord Venables. It was long before Minnie could sufficiently collect her thoughts, or even had power, to make these inquiries. The greatest part of her time was spent in a kind of stupor. Sometimes Lily would read to her, at her request, and before she had read more than a verse or two of the psalm Minnie had fallen off again into a deep sleep, like a child in the arms of its nurse.

But it was not sleep that brought refreshment; she gained no strength, but sunk day by day. The physician placed his finger on her fluttering or languid pulse, and shook his head, and Lily could only watch, and hope, and weep, and pray that her beloved sister might be restored to her. She thought much of Leslie; he had been out of England since early in May, having accompanied a friend on a yachting excursion into the Mediterranean, and, though letters were sent to different places where he was likely to be, his movements were so eccentric and uncertain, that his receiving them was quite chance. With Fairlands a constant communication was kept up by telegraph, but, as Mrs. Græme's coming could not be of any use, it was thought better that she should not leave home.

Late on the fifth day a cab drove rapidly up to the Square, stopped at the entrance by the desire of the gentleman within, who, getting out, sent on the servant and portmanteau, while he himself ran quickly down the Square to Mrs. Sherwood's house. For an instant he scanned eagerly the outside, and then gently rang the bell.

"Miss Gray lives?" was the hurried question as the door was opened: the affirmative answer relieved his worst fear, and, entering the dining-room, he said:

"Be so kind as to ask my sister to come down to me." A very few minutes elapsed before Lily obeyed the summons.

"Oh, Archie, thank God you are come!" was Lily's exclamation, as bursting into tears she flew into her brother's arms. "Poor Minnie has been so ill!"

"Has been! but she is better now?" was the eager question.

"Better, in so far that the ravings are over; but she can hardly be called sensible, and Dr. Brett thinks her sinking fast."

"My God!" exclaimed Archie, sinking into a seat: then, after a minute of silence, "But what is the cause, Lily? she was pretty well when I left."

"Oh, I think it was in a great measure my aunt's fault; she allowed Lord Venables to be admitted that same afternoon, when we were out: Minnie was quite unprepared for such a thing, and it distressed her exceedingly. We can only gather that he made her an offer which she refused, and Slater said she was so overcome, that, though she managed to get up stairs after he left, she fell from one fainting fit to another, till she became quite terrified. She and Cecile managed to get her into bed and sent for Dr. Brett, but fearful ravings came on, and for

forty-eight hours there was sometimes no managing her. That violence has now subsided, and all fever is gone, but she sinks daily, even hourly. Nothing gives strength."

Archie sat shading his eyes with his hands: now and then the cry of "Oh Minnie, Minnie," burst from him, and a heavy sob showed the agony of his feelings. Lily stood by his side, her arm thrown round his neck, her tears streaming silently over her cheeks. She was thinking whether she should tell him what Minnie had said. Suddenly Archie looked up: "Lily, I must see her!" he said eagerly.

Lily hesitated.

"You cannot refuse me, Lily—I will be calm; I promise you to be so—I only want to look once more upon her; to see her while she yet——," he finished the sentence with a groan.

"I hardly know if she would notice you; she lies generally in a kind of sleep or stupor; but, if she should open her eyes, you must not be seen; it might be very hazardous."

"I will attend to all you tell me, only let me look upon her."

He took off his boots and followed Lily softly upstairs: they entered Minnie's room; the curtains of the bed were all drawn back, and the windows

wide open, as well as the door into Lily's room, to admit as much air as could find its way through the sultry, dusty atmosphere of London in July. Minnie lay with her head turned away from the light—her face as white as the pillow on which it rested, and the blue veins clearly visible in her closed eyelids. Her dark hair hung partly over her face, and lay in masses around it; while she was so violent it had been impossible to keep her head steady enough to remove it; now it was thought of little consequence. One thin transparent hand hung over the side of the bed.

Archie knelt down by the bed, and hid his face in the clothes, but the trembling of that manly frame revealed the powerful passion which was agitating his soul. Presently he raised his head, his face wet with tears, and said,

“Pray, Lily dear! I cannot put my prayers into words.”

His sister complied: some verses of the Psalms came into her mind:

“Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even unto my soul! I am come into deep waters where no ground is; so that the floods run over me: Oh, hide not thy face from thy servant, for I am in trouble.”

Minnie opened her eyes languidly; she did not see the head buried in the bedclothes; she looked only at Lily: "Thank you, dearest," she whispered: "go on." The languid eyes closed again, while Lily read. Archie took the thin pale hand between his own, and bowed his head upon it; he caressed it and bathed it with his tears: it was something frightful to witness the intense agony of that strong frame as it shook with emotion.

"Oh, if my love could save her!" he broke out, forgetful for a moment of his promise—"how willingly would I give up even life itself for her sweet sake!"

"Hush, Archie!" whispered Lily, laying her hand on his shoulder; "you had better go; even now I fear I may have done wrong—look at the tear on that pale cheek—it is the first I have seen."

There was indeed a tear stealing gently from under the long dark lashes, and rolling over the marble cheek: the lids slightly quivered, but did not uncloset. Lily pressed Archie's shoulder in silence. He rose from his knees, and, resisting Lily's efforts to drag him away, he stood for a moment looking on that still form, then stooping forward he bent over her and approached his lips to her brow without touching it, and, rising again, obeyed Lily's earnest signal to follow her from the room.

CHAPTER XLV.

Thee, O genial Hope,
Love's elder sister ! thee did I behold,
Dress'd as a bridesmaid, but all pale and cold,
With roseless cheek, all pale and cold and dim,
Lie lifeless at my feet !
And then came Love, a sylph in bridal trim,
And stood beside my seat :
She bent, and kiss'd her sister's lips,
As she was wont to do. —

COLERIDGE.

It was some hours after Lily had returned to her place at Minnie's bedside that the latter again opened her eyes, and, after fixing them for a minute in silence upon Lily, she said very feebly,

“ I have had such a sweet sleep, darling Lily ; I feel quite refreshed—and such a delightful dream.” She stopped, too weak to say more. Lily bent down and kissed her white cheek.

“ Bless you, dearest,” she said through her tears, “ I trust our prayers may at last be answered, and you may be restored to us.”

Minnie sighed ; “ I suppose I ought to wish the same,” she said ; “ whatever God appoints is best :—

but life looks very dreary—and oh! if I might sink to rest with that dream in my mind!” She spoke very feebly, and with long intervals, but her intellect seemed quite clear. Lily’s intellect was clearing too: she thought she knew what this sweet dream was; she had got a clue to the whole matter: Minnie’s ravings and Archie’s strong agony had revealed much; there were still some things which she could not understand, and Lady Clara’s part in it she could not unravel. She hardly knew how best to use the scraps of information she had collected; hitherto Minnie had been her only counsellor; there was no one else on whose judgment she could so well rely, except David Murdoch’s, and this was a case she hardly liked to consult him upon.

“ You have so many friends who will rejoice at your recovery, love, that you should not wish to leave us so soon.”

“ Don’t think me ungrateful, dear Lily; my heart has had some hard struggles, and is weary,—oh so weary!—It seems as if it would be so sweet to rest!—‘ Where the weary are at rest,’ ” she repeated, trying to fold her feeble hands together.—Presently she went on: “ But I know in Whose hands I am, and His ways are higher than my ways; ‘ It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait’—oh, it is often so difficult !”

She closed her eyes again, but not in sleep, and lay perfectly still. Soon after Dr. Brett came; he listened to Lily's report, and placed his finger on the languid pulse:—his countenance brightened: "There is yet plenty of work for us," he said, "but we have turned the corner."

And now every day brought amendment, and Minnie was able, after a time, to sit up in her own room for an hour. That was a happy day for Lily, and, when she went down to answer personally Archie's inquiries the second time, after she had seen the invalid replaced comfortably in bed, it was with a radiant countenance that she met him.

"She will be better quite quiet now, Archie," she said, "and will soon fall asleep; so Slater will remain with her while I take a turn in the Gardens with you; the air will quite revive me this lovely evening."

They went out together into the most secluded part of Kensington Gardens: Archie was in great spirits, and they talked much of Battesden, and what he was doing and had already done there. Gradually the conversation ceased, and a long silence ensued. They had sat down under one of the large trees near the water, to enjoy the soft and balmy air. It was a perfectly rural scene, such as

is seldom to be met with in the heart of any large town. The setting sun threw the shadows of the trees far out upon the smooth turf, which sloped gently down to the water, that lay like a clear mirror in front, imaging in its bosom every object on the opposite side. The bridge which spanned it a little higher up, threw an inky shadow on its still surface, and beyond its arch was seen the gleaming reflection of the evening sky; now and then a water-bird glanced quickly across, leaving behind it for an instant a track of bright light; and in the air some rooks were sailing slowly homeward, breaking the stillness with their solemn voices. Occasionally the distant roar and rush of the town was borne upon the breeze, like the surging of mighty Ocean; with these exceptions silence reigned supreme. It had fallen upon those who sat together contemplating that sweet scene. They had remained long without speaking; a deep sigh from Archie at last interrupted the stillness: Lily looked up at him; his face expressed the deepest sadness: she pressed the hand that held hers, and said,

“ Archie, why that heavy sigh? surely the hour of darkness is past, and hope has dawned.”

“ Hope?—Yes, Lily, but not for me; Minnie’s recovery sheds no light on my individual path.”

“What do you mean, Archie? And what is this mystery that hangs round Minnie and yourself, which I cannot penetrate? What is Minnie to you, or what are you to Minnie?”

“What is Minnie to me?—Everything!—Life, joy, love,—all the world, and far more than that!—What am I to Minnie?—Nothing.”

“Dear Archie, I believe there is some misunderstanding:—but tell me—what are you and Lady Clara Varnley to each other?”

Archie threw a quick glance at Lily’s face, and she felt his hand give a start, but he answered in a calm tone,

“We are very good friends, my little Lily: Why not?”

“And nothing more?”

“Nothing more!—we understand each other perfectly.—Why surely you are not such a little simpleton as to believe the town gossip?”

“No,” she replied, “it was not of that I was thinking: but what was it that passed between you that fatal day at Richmond?”

He looked puzzled for a moment, and then answered, laughing,

“She gave me some very kind advice, which, however, I fear was more kind than wise; and we

swore an eternal friendship: I don't know anything else."

"Then what was that about kissing her hand, and telling her you 'loved her passionately?'"

"I, say such words to Lady Clara?—What are you dreaming of, Lily?—I shall begin to fear that you are losing your reason: I certainly did kiss her hand; it was in token of a compact into which we entered—but how could you see that?—We were alone—far away from the group you were with,"—and he looked searchingly into her face.

"Quite true, Archie: *I* neither saw nor heard, for I was otherwise engaged, but there were eyes and ears, whose interest was keener, I suspect, and who saw and heard too much. I trust, Archie," she continued in a graver tone, "that you have not been carrying on a foolish, meaningless flirtation with Clara:—Oh, beware of that, Archie! I am sure," she went on, dropping her voice, "there has been a terrible warning to us lately on that subject."

"Reassure yourself perfectly on that matter, my little preacher," he answered, smiling; "I have not been doing any thing of the kind: I have the highest regard for Lady Clara; she is a noble girl, and deserves my best esteem: but flirting I never attempted with her; and as to love,—it never entered"

into my head in connection with her, and she knows it. We spoke together that day—indeed she herself alluded to—this very rumour, and agreed that our friendship should not be interrupted by it. Love!—No, never but to one person in my life have I spoken of passionate love;—and that one—but it is no matter—that is over,” and he heaved a deep sigh.

“Excuse me, Archie, it does matter. I must know to whom it was that you ever spoke of passionate love, and why it is over; and in fact what is in your heart; in one word, I must put you into the confessional, after which, if it suits me, I will tell you my reasons. So now begin!”

“You seem full of diplomacy, my sweet Lily; but, fairy as you are, I fear you will be unable to help my case.”

“You have no business to question my powers,” she replied gaily; “I suspect I have the power to be a very beneficent fairy, if you will let me; but I can do nothing till you have made your confession; or must I drag it from you? You have told me that Lady Clara is not the lady of your love; perhaps it is Helen Baillie? or Mary?—No again? Miss Ingram?—No? Well, then, perhaps Miss Erskine?—Ah, that grimace is too plain to be mis-

taken. Let me see—It is almost a hopeless task to go through all your acquaintance: at all events, it can't be Minnie Gray! Nay, have pity on my fingers! Then I have really touched the right chord, and you love dear Minnie as she ought to be loved! Oh, Archie, how happy this makes me! But now, tell me, why have you kept it secret all this time? The first dawn of suspicion in my mind was on your return to town when you heard of her illness."

"You may cease your rejoicings, Lily dear; my mother knows all about it,—has done from the first,—but there are always two sides to a question, and, though it is true I love Minnie with my whole soul, I have twice learned from her own lips, distinctly, that she does not love me."

A blank fell upon Lily's bright face for a moment: for some time she remained in deep thought; then, suddenly springing up, she exclaimed, "I see it all now! Oh, how blind I must have been! Poor Minnie! this indeed accounts for all her sadness, for all her struggles,—for so much that has been a marvel to me for many years! And now all is clear. Oh, how truly all things work together for the good of such as she! but for this cross, half the beauty of her character would never have been drawn out."

“I don’t understand what can make you so happy and so eloquent, Lily; you must recollect that I am in the dark; pray enlighten me.”

“Why, don’t you see, my wise brother, all this has been mama’s doing?—You know her ambition for us all, and for you in particular; who knew better than darling Minnie, that she would never approve of your marrying a poor orphan, without fortune or family? Who so ready as she to sacrifice her noble self to her idea of duty?—Oh, how well I recollect the deep thankfulness she expressed when her lineage was discovered! Just before that, she had sunk so very low, into such despondency, that her health completely failed, and, when the discovery was made, the revulsion overcame her, and she fairly broke down for days. I remember at the time feeling rather disappointed in Minnie, and thinking that she attached more importance to worldly position and wealth than was consistent with her character. I did not guess *why* she valued it. Then came a period of anxiety about you, and she faded again; but, as with the rest of us, gladness returned with the news of you; such real gladness she showed—I never saw any thing like it in her before. A gloom settled down again on the receipt of your letter from Baden. She had one at the same time from

her brother, and I attributed it to the account of Lady Gordon; from that time it fluctuated till your return, and then it closed over her, and has never been lifted since. It was she who saw the scene between you and Lady Clara at Richmond; her ravings revealed that story to me, and that was the cause of her first illness, no doubt, which the offer of Lord Venables aggravated. The first glimmer of improvement was seen on the day you were in her room; when she woke after you left, she was quite herself for the first time, and told me she had had such a sweet dream—what it was she did not say, but now I understand that it ‘was not all a dream.’ She seemed as if she would have rather died then than have recovered.—Oh, Archie, can you not read it all—and does it not make you happy?”

But, instead of answering her questions, Archie started up and paced hurriedly to and fro. Lily watched him attentively: nothing was said for some minutes; at last, resuming his seat beside her, he said,

“It is too good to be true, Lily: I cannot believe in such happiness, I dare not open my heart to receive it. Oh, if you knew what a storm you have raised in my heart! And now she is too ill to be spoken to—and yet this suspense will distract me!

Oh, Minnie, noble, adored Minnie, is it possible that you can indeed love me—that you have undergone all this—that you have loved me from the first? Lily, if this be not true, what have you done? And yet Lady Clara's words confirm what you say. Blind idiot that I have been! How could I be so deceived?"

It was long before he could at all calm himself. Lily began to tremble at the result of her diplomacy, though the more she considered the facts the more she was persuaded of her correctness. Archie's excitement, however, fairly terrified her; it was so far beyond what she could have anticipated, and she knew not how to allay it: at last a thought struck her, and she said quietly,

"We have forgotten time altogether, Archie, and Minnie must be wanting me to read to her."

It calmed him in a moment, and, coming up to her, he drew her arm within his own without speaking; then, bending down and kissing her, he said,

"You have raised such a turmoil in this heart, Lily—and at present I can have no means of ascertaining my fate. I must learn to bear and struggle as she has done. Yet it seems hard that I may not see her, though I feel I could hardly command myself in her presence, and she must not be agitated.

Oh, Lily! if you can in any way make her sensible of my deep anxiety, it may perhaps aid her recovery. Vain coxcomb that I am! how dare I fancy **such** a thing?—But at least you may disabuse her **mind** of the idea that there is any love between **Lady Clara** and myself.”

They walked home slowly. By degrees, Archie subdued his great excitement. He made Lily repeat over and over again all that she had told him, and gradually he seemed to gain more and more confidence from it.

“I dare not see her again, Lily, now, it would be impossible to refrain from saying what would agitate her too much. I will make a resolution not to do so till she is well enough to go to Fairlands. In the meantime I shall live, as now, between London and Battersden, and you will as usual tell me, almost from hour to hour, how she goes on, at whichever place I am. As soon as she is well enough, I will cross the Tweed again, and either win my **bonnie** bride, or —— Well, I dare not now think of the alternative!”

And so they walked slowly homewards. When they reached the house, Archie waited for a few minutes in the dining-room, while Lily ran up to bring him the last bulletin for the night. She soon

returned: Minnie had not thought her absence long, she said; Slater had been reading to her, and she was so glad to think her little nurse had been enjoying the Gardens with Archie, this lovely evening.

“God bless her, sweet angel!” said Archie as he kissed his sister and bade her good night. “Oh! Lily, how can I hope ever to win such a prize? So far beyond my deserts! Her very excellence makes me tremble for the result.”

He left the house, but not to go home; no walls could confine his restless nature at present. It was not much after eight o'clock; he wandered back into the Gardens, to the place where he and Lily had been sitting; he tried to recall her words one by one; he thought over all she had described, and tried to give it a contrary meaning, to try how he could now support the reverse; he paced up and down; he flung himself along the bench on which they had sat; then he got up and walked down to the water's edge; he stood with his arms folded, and gazed steadily upon the water, without seeing what he looked at; he thought of that morning when they had all gone up the mountain together: he recalled every varying expression of her countenance as he spoke; he dared not draw much hope from the recollection. After his first words he re-

remembered the stony look which came into her face and did not alter. Oh, if Lily's interpretation were the true one, what must she not have suffered then! He remembered how he had worked himself up to speak as he did, with what dogged resolution he had delivered himself of the words, so often conned over, how relieved he had felt at Lily's timely interruption, which just saved him from breaking down.

He had left his hat on the bench, and stood bare-headed, that the evening breeze might cool his throbbing brow. One of the keepers came up, and, reminding him of the closing time, requested him to leave the Gardens; he evidently feared he was meditating suicide, from the eccentricity of his movements. Archie saw his fears, and absolutely laughed aloud at the idea of his thinking of leaving life, now at the very moment that it was becoming valuable to him. His wild laugh and previous demeanour only confirmed the man's suspicions, and he continued to walk close behind him till he had seen him safely through the gates. His responsibility was then ended, according to his creed.

Archie found himself once more in Lowndes Square, walking up and down and trying to draw auguries from the blank walls of the house that held Minnie: after a time he bethought himself of

Westminster; it was something to do; he would go down to the House—it was only about ten o'clock. By instinct rather than observation he found himself in the lobby of the House; he asked what was under discussion, and was told it was a Sewerage Bill; he turned away; he was in no mood for anything so matter-of-fact. Again he found himself perambulating the pavement of Lowndes Square and examining the windows. Presently he became aware that he had excited the attention of a policeman, and, not being ambitious of a night in the station-house, he gave one more glance up to the window where the soft light burned so steadily, and moved away. He passed by houses brilliantly lighted, and caught sounds of music as they floated out through the open windows into the still night; he saw the votaries of pleasure and fashion arriving and departing, and he wondered how such frivolities could go on when *her* life still hung by a thread. He lifted his eyes to the lovely summer sky, resplendent as it was with myriads of stars: he thought how they had existed thus throughout all time, how steadily and unchangeably they pursued their respective courses, sustained by that Infinite Power which made and governed all things: he thought of the immensity of that system of which he

saw but so small a portion—of the mere atom that our planet was in comparison with the whole, and yet that not only it, but every thing even to the smallest reptile within it, was noticed and sustained by that great Being who had made all these things. The words “Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Heavenly Father” came into his mind—he recollected that His power was only equalled by His love, and thought upon the great proof of this. He saw how all things, even to the circumstances of his own life and Minnie’s, were overruled by the same Being of infinite wisdom and love: the contemplation overpowered him, and, lifting his hat, he exclaimed mentally, “Thou hast made us and fashioned us, undertake Thou for us, O Lord!”

He reached his own door and was admitted; then he remembered the neglected dinner which had so long awaited his return, and for the first time felt faint and weary; so, taking the glass of wine which the butler poured out, and a biscuit, he retired to his own room.

Meanwhile Lily had returned to the sick room and found Minnie still awake, and Slater with her. So, dismissing the maid, she sat down by the bedside. She described the walk they had taken, the beauty and balminess of the evening, and went on to speak of Archie.

“Dear Archie!” said Minnie, “how good of him to stay here with you when he must be so anxious to be elsewhere—but surely he went to Paris,” she said, recollecting herself, “Why did he come back so soon?”

“Why, Minnie, but on account of your illness?” and Lily told her how her letter had met him on his arrival at Paris and caused his immediate return. Minnie sighed, and then lay still for some minutes without speaking. At last she said,

“And Lady Clara?”

“She is in Italy,” was the reply.

“When does Archie go back to join her?”

“Never, that I know of; why should he, Minnie?”

“Why?—because you know they are engaged.—Nay,” she went on, seeing that Lily looked incredulous, and smiled archly at her words, “I saw them together in Richmond Park; I saw him kiss the hand she gave him, and she smiled so sweetly, and he looked—oh so radiantly happy!”

“You have told me this before, Minnie; but remember in this world of ours you should never believe anything you hear, and only half you see. What do you suppose they were speaking of then?”

“Of themselves to be sure, of their own happiness,” said Minnie, with a sigh.

"No such thing, Minnie, they were speaking of you." And Lily told her what she had just heard from Archie.

"Then why did he tell me that last day at Fairlands that he no longer wished for my love?"

"It was simply a falsehood, Minnie, to use a mild term."

"Can this be true, and ought I to believe it?" said Minnie in an agitated, low voice, as she raised herself in the bed.

"No, certainly not, if it excites you thus, dearest," said Lily, drawing her down again. "What a simpleton I am to be telling you all this, and spoiling your night's rest. What will Dr. Brett say to his little nurse?"

"He will say you are a better doctor than himself," said Minnie, throwing her arms round her. "You have given me something more healing than a night's rest, Lily dear."

"But one thing more, and I will promise to be as quiet as a mouse till morning: Was Archie in my room?"

"He was, dearest; and this was your 'sweet dream;' he was kneeling here by your side, blubbing over your hand like an overgrown baby, and I had hard work to keep him from speaking to you.

At last I got him out of the room, but not till he had stooped over you and brought his lips so close to your forehead that I thought he must have touched it." Minnie put her hands up to her brow. "And now, dearest, I have told you enough for to-night, and must try and soothe this fluttering little heart."

She sat down by the bedside, and began to read some of the verses and psalms that Minnie liked most to hear. After a time she ceased, and bent down to kiss her; Minnie threw her arm round her neck, as she lay overpowered by the happiness she had begun to taste, and said feebly, "Oh, Lily, how sweet to feel that in all things we may indeed 'commit our way unto the Lord, and he will bring it to pass,' if it be right for us; and, if not, that we have still the promise 'As thy day is, so shall thy strength be.'"

She was too weak to resist longer the fatigue that even happiness caused, and Lily soon saw her sleeping calmly.

Minnie was quite right; when Dr. Brett came in the morning he pronounced his patient wonderfully better, and said he must ask her little nurse for her prescription.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Nimm nur Führman, nimm die miethe
Die ich gerne dreifach biete !
Zween die mit mir überfuhren]
Waren geistige naturen.

UHLAND.

NOTHING has been said of Mrs. Sherwood during Minnie's illness, yet she was not altogether unconcerned about it. At first, indeed, she assumed the attitude of an injured person, as we have seen; but this soon yielded to better feelings, and she became really anxious about Minnie, perhaps the more so as her inadvertence had occasioned the relapse. A sick room, however, was not very congenial to her disposition. Minnie's violence at first frightened her, and her presence only added to the trouble of the attendants, so she yielded, not unwillingly, to their persuasions to keep aloof till the virulence of the fever was over. As the invalid began to regain health she made short visits morning and evening, during which she detailed for her amusement all the news and gossip she could collect, which poor Minnie would gladly have been spared, though, out

of consideration of the kindness of the intention, she affected to take interest in Mrs. Sherwood's communications.

She was not a solitary instance of such an inflection. There are so few comparatively blest with sufficient tact to understand the character of those they wish to gratify. Our friends come with the best intentions to beguile our hours of sickness or solitude, but, from some obtuseness of their nature, are unable to sympathise with the mind they wish to amuse, and so contrive to blunder upon the subject which most jars all our finest harmonies, and lacerates our tenderest feelings, and, acknowledging the kindness of motive, we have to smile, and listen, and affect interest, while the poor heart winces and quivers at every word, as the flesh trembles at and shrinks from the stab of the dagger. Thus had Mrs. Sherwood been perpetually killing poor Minnie, as it were, *à coup d'épingles*, while thinking only to beguile the tedium of the sick room. She had carefully collected all the gossip about Lady Clara and Archie, which she detailed every day, enlarging upon the advantages to both, and the prudence and good taste of the latter, and calling on Minnie to sympathise in her satisfaction. It was no wonder that on Lily's return

she generally found her patient in tears, and that her daily progress towards recovery was so slow.

Now, however, that Lily's conversation with Archie in the gardens had let a sunbeam into the gloom of Minnie's heart, she could listen to all Mrs. Sherwood's speculations on this inexhaustible theme almost with amusement. At length a happy thought struck the latter, which she hastened to communicate to Minnie.

"Why should you not make Battersden in your way to Scotland, Minnie, and spend a few days there? I could go there with you, and, as you have never seen the place and Archie is now there, it would be a charming way of breaking the long journey."

"Not for the world!" exclaimed Minnie; then, seeing Mrs. Sherwood's stare of amazement at her vehemence, she continued, "It is very good of you, dear Mrs. Sherwood, to propose such a plan, and I am bound to suppose Archie would be delighted to second it, but, besides that it would be hardly fair to encumber him with all the paraphernalia of an invalid so helpless as I am at present, I am really panting for a breath of my own breezy mountains; for you know I am a poor Scotch lassie," she went on in a caressing tone, observing Mrs. Sherwood's

disappointment, "and I feel as if nothing would so invigorate me as once again to place my foot on the heather."

"Ah, well, I thought you might have felt sufficient interest in Archie to wish to see his home," with an air of pique: "but you know your own feelings best."

"I do earnestly wish to see his home, dear Mrs. Sherwood, but not just now; I would rather wait till I can see it under brighter auspices." She pressed Lily's fingers as she looked up into her face with a bright smile.

"Oh, I see! you wish to wait till Lady Clara is there. Well, perhaps, you are right, but I think you owe Archie some return for the interest he showed in you; giving up such a journey with his intended bride, as he did, solely on your account."

"I am afraid, if I were to change places with Lady Clara, I should hardly be so indifferent. It was, indeed, a great compliment to me, and I should like to reward him if I could find out how to do so suitably."

Lily, who was standing over her, bent down and kissed her forehead.

"Well," continued Mrs. Sherwood, "I partly

agree with you that it is a compliment rather too much at Lady Clara's expense; but I dare say they understand each other. Once I thought—but it is no matter; things have turned out very differently to what I once supposed.”

“I think, at all events, dear Mrs. Sherwood, it is time that a day should be fixed for the commencement of my journey, which I am now quite equal to. I can never thank you enough for all your kindness, or express my sorrow for the trouble I have given.”

Minnie was, indeed, now quite sufficiently recovered to travel. For the last fortnight she had been able to drive out every day, and seemed really, as she said, to want only the invigorating breezes of her Scotch mountains to restore her perfectly. An early day in the following week was, therefore, fixed for her to leave London with Lily and Slater. It was the first week in August, and town being completely emptied of all its attractions, and insufferably hot and dusty, Mrs. Sherwood was glad to feel herself at liberty to put her plan of visiting the sea-side into execution.

And Leslie, where was he all this time that his sister had been lying at the point of death, and slowly recovering? Far away in the South of

Europe, little dreaming of the course events were taking at home, and anxious only to beguile the long weary months before he might venture to present himself before Lily again. For that he did intend to see her again was very certain, and also to woo, and, if possible, win her pure heart; but he would not insult her by seeking to gain her love at present; and to meet her with indifference he knew would be impossible, now more so than ever, so he resolved to wile away the twelvemonth's banishment from her, which he had imposed upon himself, as best he might, and in the yacht and company of a friend he had been cruising in the Mediterranean and among the Greek Islands since April last. Had Lily any perception of his intention? and was it this intuitive sense of his feelings and his honour which had restored her gaiety and her *insouciance*, and been such a shield of proof to her against all the assaults of her London admirers? It might be so; but, if it were, the secret was confined to her own bosom, for, as we have seen, not even Minnie had been made a sharer of her thoughts, and, but for her knowledge of the constancy of Lily's heart, she would have supposed all recollection of Leslie as a lover had been discarded. Therefore the subject was never alluded to by

either, and his name, even in their most ordinary conversations, was tacitly avoided.

Meanwhile Leslie, little suspicious of all that was occurring at home, was giving himself up to the enjoyment of his present life, and daily regaining his former elasticity of mind. The image of Lily was, indeed, ever with him, and hope and fear on her account alternated according to circumstances. Sometimes his heart would bound at the recollection of the proof which her illness at Battesden had given, that she was then at least not indifferent to him. Then would follow a train of doubts and fears as to whether it would be possible to revive the interest he had then inspired. True, she had not married, and he remembered (could it have been possible to forget?) all that Osborne had said of her altered manner, and her rejection of Wentworth. It might be that he was not a very attractive lover, but he had many of the better qualities which Lily knew so well how to appreciate—but then he remembered the hauteur and coldness, almost scorn, with which she had met and returned his greeting at Glenrowan, and her avoidance of him during his stay there. He could hardly have expected a different reception, indeed, unless she had felt perfect indifference, and then not only she

would not have shunned him, but would, perhaps, have taken pleasure in showing him how little power he had had to disturb her peace for a moment.

These and similar lucubrations used to occupy Leslie often in the calm summer night, as, solacing himself with a cigar, he leant over the taffrail of the yacht, which glided on under a sky, almost black with the intensity of its deep azure, and studded with stars, which shone clearly and steadily, reflecting themselves in the still surface of the sea, and sometimes shedding a line of light upon the waves, which they have seldom power to do through our dense atmosphere. By day other thoughts and subjects claimed his mind; and, though the same undercurrent went on, whatever might float over the surface, and no form of beauty, animate or inanimate, struck his eye, without recalling Lily to his imagination, it was only in the stillness of night that he abandoned himself to thoughts of her, and, lifting the heavy veil that always screened her fair image, he penetrated into the recesses of his heart, recalled the past, and tried to read the future.

Unconscious, therefore, of the events which had closed the London season in Lowndes Square, and

little anticipating such news as the danger of his beloved sister, Leslie had been rather indifferent about his letters; and, perhaps fearful of their containing any gossip or intelligence which might arouse him from his present dreamy life more rudely than was agreeable, he had suffered them to follow him from place to place, and had seldom found himself in the spot where he had ordered them to be addressed, at the time indicated. The friends, too, had often altered their course, sometimes leaving the vessel, which was to meet them at an appointed place, while they made an inland excursion, with their knapsacks on their shoulders. Thus they had made many excursions in Greece and on the coast of Syria.

It was on their return from this latter expedition, which had occupied some weeks, that they found a long arrear of letters awaiting them at Athens. It was then August, and they were already homeward bound, but the news which Leslie received made him anxious to make no further delay in returning to England. Undoubtedly he had been spared much anxiety, for, at the same time with the terrible account of Minnie's illness and subsequent prostration, he received one written by her own hand, just before leaving London, assuring him of

her convalescence, and begging him not to curtail his enjoyment on her account. But, though thus relieved from apprehension, he was not the less impatient to be in England again. There is something in the very fact of those near and dear to us having narrowly escaped from imminent danger, whether from sickness or any other cause, which makes us anxious to satisfy ourselves of their safety by actual observation. We tremble to think of the peril from which they have been snatched, of the sword which has been suspended over us, and long for the assurance of our own senses that they are still spared to us.

Perhaps, too, Minnie's letter, short as it was, might contain matter which made Leslie's heart beat as quickly as it did while he read of her illness and recovery. It is likely that she might have made some allusions to one who had nursed her so tenderly and untiringly through her danger and weakness; it is possible, too, that Minnie might dwell the more on her gratitude to her affectionate and cheerful nurse, from the fact that Leslie's conduct since his wife's death had been a little inexplicable to her, though the natural delicacy of her own heart had given her a partial clue to what was in his; but there is no doubt—for sisters will be exact-

ing, even the best of them—that Minnie had now and then thought her brother might have confided to her a little more of his hopes or intentions, and his silence made her feel sometimes a little zealous for Lily. Perhaps Leslie ought to have taken his sister into his confidence, and under other circumstances probably he would have done so, but, though he never doubted the delicacy and honour of Minnie, he reflected upon the close intimacy existing between the two girls, and, fearing that this friendship might place Minnie in a position of difficulty towards both himself and Lily, he was willing rather to incur a little temporary blame than subject his sister to anything unpleasant.

Leslie, therefore, was impatient to get to England again, and chafed at the gentle breezes which wafted him along so leisurely. There was, however, no occasion for him to chide the zephyrs, for in fact he was as well off, sailing over the bosom of the Mediterranean, as he would have been at home, as far as the two chief objects of his interest were concerned. He knew that Minnie was recovering rapidly; he knew also that she was at Fairlands, and that while there he was effectually separated from her; and, as he took counsel of the stars and his cigar by night, he revolved a hundred plans in his mind as to his

proceedings when he should reach home. But

“Time and the hour run through the longest day,”

and the softest breezes will at length bring the vessel to the port she is bound for, so towards the beginning of September the “white cliffs of Albion” once more rose upon the horizon, and soon after those who had been companions for the last five months parted for their several destinations.

London was that of Leslie. He went first to Mrs. Sherwood’s, but the house was deserted and closed, and the servant left in charge could tell him little, but that her mistress was gone to the coast, and the two young ladies to Scotland, and that Miss Gray was getting well before she left. At Berkeley Square he could gain no more intelligence, though the housekeeper believed her master had a shooting-party with him at Battesden. Leslie felt more strange and solitary than if he had been in a foreign town. Such a stillness reigned in the streets which he had left so crowded; the parks deserted, the houses in the streets and squares closed—it was as if some great plague had devastated the place, and as if “there was not a house in which there was not one dead.” Not one friendly face greeted him as he traversed the empty streets, where his foot-

steps seemed to make the silence only the deeper. He entered the Travellers', but no familiar voice saluted his ears; the rooms were as silent and deserted as the streets. He sat down and wrote :

Travellers', Sept. 13th.

DEAR GRÆME,—I find myself wrecked once more on this most inhospitable shore of London, literally now an iron-bound coast, for every door and window is barred against me: so profound a silence reigns in the room where I now write that the sound of my pen on this smoothest of paper is distinctly audible. I start for the North to-morrow, and intend giving you a call at Battesden, where I hope to hear tidings of other friends. The solitude here oppresses me, and I long for the look of a familiar face, and the pressure of a friendly hand.

Ever faithfully yours,

LESLIE G. GORDON.

As he finished his letter, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, making him start, as the well-known accents of his friend and neighbour, Lennox of Glenbrae, accosted him.

“Ha, Lennox!” he exclaimed, turning round, “my good fellow, what evil fate has stranded you like myself on this most inhospitable shore?”

“Faith, Duncairn, a fate that befalls us all in turn, be it good or evil. Affairs of State, man; business, of which more anon. I am just from Italy; whence come you, and whither are you bound?”

“For the ‘woher,’ I am from the South too, from Athens last; for the ‘wohin,’ I travel northwards, and have here just announced myself at the house of a friend *en route*, where I hope to hear news of the world,—*my* world, that is.”

“Aha! then we travel so far together,” answered Lennox, as he read the address of the letter which Gordon held up to him. “I, too, leave London to-morrow, and for the neighbourhood of Battesden. As to news, I could put you pretty well *au courant* as to that of your family; but it is all so pleasant, that I don’t think I ought to deprive Græme of the pleasure of detailing it himself. For me, I am about to take the irrevocable plunge into matrimony, and break up my bachelor establishment at Glenbrae. These are the state affairs that have kept me in ‘this dull town’ for the last week.”

“I wish you joy with all my heart, Glenbrae,” said Leslie, shaking his friend’s hand with warmth; “and who am I to welcome as my new neighbour?”

“One whom you know already, I think,” was the reply. Leslie winced; he could think of no one but Lilius; he was silent; he feared to ask, but his looks inquired, and Lennox replied to them :

“Well, I have long been a distant admirer, but, by Jove! I thought Græme would have been the happy man, so I held aloof.” Leslie breathed again. “But when I found that he was not in the field at all, but that it was open to all, I lost no time in following the lady to Italy, where she and her father, the Duke of Courtown, went in July, and my journey was a prosperous one.”

“So, Lady Clara Varnley is the lady? Well, my dear fellow, I congratulate you most heartily, for she is indeed gifted ‘with all perfections,’ and Minnie will be lucky in having such a neighbour : but certainly rumours reached me that she would not flit so far.”

“Ah, ‘Rumour, with her hundred tongues,’ like many another old lady, sometimes chatters a good deal too fast : as she did on this occasion, and had nearly caused me to lose a prize that is not to be found every day. But you talk of a neighbour to your sister—why, man, you have everything yet to learn; so as I see you are for your hotel, whither I am bound too, we will walk together, and, as we

‘fill the night with fragrance,’ I will initiate you into all that has happened during your absence.”

“You make me more than curious now,” said Leslie, a little anxiously; “what is it I have to hear?”

“Nothing very appalling, my good fellow, so don’t be alarmed, but come along and I will give you a rough outline, which Græme shall afterwards fill in.”

CHAPTER XLVII.

MIRA. Do you love me?

FER. O Heaven ! O Earth ! bear witness to this sound,
And crown what I profess with kind event
If I speak true : if hollowly, invert
What best is boded me, to mischief ! I
Beyond the limit of all else i' the world
Do love, prize, honour you.

MIRA. I am a fool
To weep at what I am glad of.

TEMPEST.

WHILE, then, Lennox is relating and Gordon listening, uttering at intervals many an interjection of surprise and satisfaction, during their homeward walk, we will look back to the events which have occurred since Minnie's recovery, which, indeed, form a part of the conversation between the two young men.

Lily Græme, with Minnie and Slater, left town a few days after the conversation with Mrs. Sherwood in the preceding chapter. The journey was made without difficulty, and the two girls were gladly welcomed by Captain and Mrs. Græme, on their arrival at Fairlands. Minnie was still pale and

thin, and very fragile in appearance, but there was a kindling in her deep earnest eyes, and an expression of ineffable happiness pervading her whole person and manner, which had long been strange to her.

“Why, Minnie!” exclaimed Captain Græme, “your illness has made ye a bairn again, lassie, I’m thinkin’. I have na seen sic a glint o’ joy in your bonny e’en for mony a year.”

“It is so sweet to be restored to life, dear papa, and to all my dear friends; to have stood, as it were, on the brink of the grave, and then to come back again amongst you all; and to have had such a dear, kind nurse. Oh! it seems to me that I never before half felt the value of all I possess, or could ever be grateful enough for all.” Perhaps there was one more cause for especial thankfulness which Minnie felt, but it lay so deeply buried in her heart, that she was hardly conscious of the brightness which it diffused over all the rest; it was, indeed,

the coloured atmosphere

Through which *she viewed* all earthly things.

But since the evening when Lily had first told her of the true state of Archie’s feelings the subject had never been renewed, and often as she had mentally dwelt upon what she had heard,—upon Archie’s

visit to her, and all that it had led to, she could hardly be said fully to understand the cause of the happiness which she felt.

Nearly a week had passed since their return, bringing to the invalid, almost hourly increase of health; the sweet invigorating mountain breezes, the sea air, the life of quiet and repose, the affection that she experienced from all around, the associations of former happy days, all combined to restore strength to her limbs, and the tint of health to her complexion. The calm row on the loch in the gloaming; the afternoon ramble; or the book and work in the garden, when seated with Lily under the shadow of the stately old Scotch fir, which reared its rugged trunk in the midst, and spread out its picturesque arms, as if it were the guardian of the place; the intercourse with her old village friends; all these were resumed, and now Minnie was able occasionally to take a ramble alone, and had already made one pilgrimage to her watch-tower, which indeed now seemed to her to be almost like sacred ground.

Towards the end of the week came a letter from Archie, announcing his intention of being at Fairlands a few hours after its arrival. It aroused a host of hopes, and fears, and apprehensions, in

Minnie's bosom. She became restless and unsettled, and Lily, who watched her with arch humour, could not succeed in fixing her attention steadily on anything. She tried reading to her, as they sat together upstairs; but on looking up presently she saw Minnie wholly forgetful of the book, with her hands clasped and resting on her knees, while her eyes fixedly but dreamily followed some object in the distance. She closed the book with a merry laugh, which awakened Minnie from her reverie and brought a bright glow into her cheek, as the arch eyes met hers.

"Ah, sweet sister mine," exclaimed Lily, as coming behind her she threw her arms round Minnie's neck, "your thoughts are far too excursive this morning to give me any hope of fixing them; and yet I dare say, were I to ask you on what object those glowing eyes were so steadily fixed a moment ago, you could no more tell me than you could say what I have been wasting so much breath in reading to you."

Minnie hid her blushing face in her hands as she said—

"I really do believe my thoughts were wandering a little from the subject of your lecture, my grave nurse; the water is so blue and so sparkling

this morning—and indeed I have been watching that little skiff dancing over its rippling waves so joyously, with its delicate white sails and slender masts.”

“And perhaps you have been thinking, that—

such a slender bark

Bears not the sun-burned fisher to his prey.

Eh, my most innocent sister?”

“Very likely it does not,” replied Minnie with assumed simplicity: “indeed the flag at the mizen shows it to be a pleasure-boat. It is so lifelike and beautiful! Nevertheless there were a hundred other things which conspired to draw my attention, and mingle with your ladyship’s sweet voice, till the sense rather escaped me; the hum of the insects—the whole atmosphere seems full of them—the bright scarlet tints of the autumnal flowers down in the garden, and the rich perfume of the heliotrope with which the air is loaded.”

“Well, I forgive your inattention, because ——— never mind the reason; but I shall certainly not consume more of my precious time in trying to edify one so insensible to my efforts. I think it will be right to go and take a nearer view of that boat, which to me wears a suspicious aspect.

Think, Minnie! it may be some marauder meditating an invasion of our coast, with a design to bear off some of the inhabitants. I shall certainly call out the guard and go down to the pier to be in readiness to resist the invader, who is evidently making for that spot," she said, going to the window, and becoming suddenly interested in the progress of the boat: "come, Minnie, don your hat, and accompany me as my aid-de-camp."

"Nonsense, Lily; I shall do no such thing! What, go and stand on the pier under this burning sun? Not I indeed! Besides, I have an errand in the village which I had nearly forgotten, and I must execute this afternoon." And rising hastily she tied on her large straw hat, and throwing a scarf over her shoulders she ran out of the room, pursued by Lily's merry, mocking laughter.

Minnie indeed doubted not that the boat they had been watching contained Archie, and just now wished for nothing more than to avoid a meeting in the midst of the family group. Now that the moment was come, too, her courage and confidence failed. What looked so bright in the distance wore a different aspect as it approached. The hope she had been living upon might prove nothing but a fabric of her imagination; and if her heart, flutter-

ing out to meet him, as it now was, were to be rejected as on a former occasion, she would rather have no witness of her humiliation. So she heeded not Lily's laughter, but hastily collecting what she could to take into the village, she ran downstairs and through the shrubberies till she found herself on the high road and within sight of the cottages.

Among these she lingered some time, till, having no farther excuse for staying, it became necessary to return. But how to do this?—she stopped a moment when she had passed the last cabin to consider. Return! that would be worse now than had she never run away. To walk coolly into the room where Archie would be surrounded by all the family? Impossible! Or to meet him on the lawn with the eyes of all upon her! He must know that she had run away from him; no doubt that wicked little Lily would tell him; what would he argue? And if he really did not care ——? The sentence remained unfinished; but she turned round and walked a few steps back again, then stopped once more. “No,” she said, half aloud, “I could not go to the school this morning, I should only betray myself.” Now she wished that she had gone with Lilies, or else remained in the morning-room where they had been sitting.

No, not that: he would have thought I waited for him alone! What could she do? Go back she dared not, to risk meeting him and that arch little sprite. Again she turned; she would go slowly up to the watch-tower, and beguile the time there till the dinner-hour; then she should be able to glide with Lilius into the drawing-room and greet him unperceived, or meet him perhaps under her protection in the garden. She looked at her watch; it was only half-past two; there were three good hours before her; she would dispose of them as best she might, only she rather wished it had occurred to her to bring a book.

She went on deliberately mounting and mounting, stopping every now and then to look at the prospect, or to gain breath, for the walk was yet rather an undertaking for her. At last she reached the platform, and seated herself on one of the blocks of stone. What a glorious view lay before her! The cloudless sky imaged itself in the calm mirror of the ocean; not a ripple disturbed the reflection of the islands and rocky shores which lay upon its bosom, as if set in ice; a few sails, red and white, dotted the blue expanse, but remained motionless, throwing like the islands their images far down into the depths below. Now and then a white

sea-bird sailed lazily over the still waters, and a misty haze hung trembling on the horizon, revealing only occasional glimpses of the distant coast. There was scarcely motion enough in the sea to cause a ripple on the shore; the whisper of the tiny wavelets could not be heard at the height from which Minnie looked down; the only sound which broke from time to time the silence of nature, was the gentle bleat of a sheep, as from among the rocky mountains one would call to its companions, and be answered. It was not often that Minnie had seen the view under this aspect, for it was seldom that she climbed so far in the heat of a summer's day; and while gazing on the calm beauty of the scene she no longer regretted the book which she had omitted to bring. Sheltered from the sun's rays by the rock which rose behind her, she laid aside her hat and abandoned herself to the dreamy feelings which the calm prospect induced.

She was aroused from her reverie by the sound of a quick step approaching; a consciousness of whose it was flashed upon her; she turned her head in the direction of the sound, and as quickly turned away again; she rose, and tried to make a step forward, extending her hand; a faintness came over her, and she leaned against the rock for support.

Archie advanced: he took the hand which she held towards him: he pressed it between both his own; he tried to speak, but his voice refused to obey him. There was a minute's silence.

Minnie was the first to recover herself; she endeavoured to assume an air of unconsciousness, and laughed a little forced laugh as she said,

“ You must make allowance for the remains of illness yet, Archie, and I did not expect you here; you took me by surprise.”

He had retained her hand all this time, fondling and caressing it, but without speaking: when she ceased, he said in a voice trembling with emotion,

“ When last I held this dear hand, Minnie, it was wan and transparent as a shadow; I would have drawn out my own heart's blood to fill its veins as I see them now.”

He bent towards her; she did not speak, but she raised her eyes timidly and fixed them, full of glistening tears, for a moment upon his; he made one step forward, her head sunk upon his shoulder, and his arms encircled her tenderly.

For a minute or two no word was spoken; then, as he gently raised her head and drew her face round towards him, he whispered,

“ Oh, beloved Minnie! how long have I pined

for such a moment as this! and, now that I hold you thus, I dare hardly believe in the reality." He pressed his lips on hers, she clasped her hands upon his shoulder, and once more buried her face upon it. He drew her towards the stone on which she had been sitting, and placed her there again; then sitting down beside her, he threw one arm round her waist, and in his other hand he imprisoned both her own.

They sat thus for some time; excess of emotion kept them silent, or only allowed them to speak in broken sentences; her eyes rested on the ground, or were now and then lifted, and fixed in tenderness upon his own as he looked down upon her, and from time to time pressed her closer to him, or raised the hands he held to his lips.

After a time they became calmer; he was able to pour out his overflowing soul in words, and she answered in sweet, touching, tender accents. By degrees they conversed; he told her of his strong and enduring affection; of his despair when four years ago on that very spot she had so unhesitatingly rejected his love: of his deep agony when a year later, on the mountain side, she had repeated her words: he told of the struggles he had made to subdue his passion, or moderate it to the limits she

prescribed; of his miserable attempt at self-deception in trying to believe the conquest achieved, of the fallacy it had proved itself at the very moment he told her of his fancied success. He spoke of his solitude on taking possession of Battesden; of his efforts to adopt her plans there; of his despair when last spring in town he saw the devotion of Lord Venables, and heard their names coupled together; of his madness on believing them betrothed; of the first glimmer of hope which he had caught from Lady Clara's words on that dreadful day when he had suffered such tortures of jealousy; of his departure for Paris, and Lily's letter of recal. He could find no words to describe his agony when on reaching Lowndes Square he had found her so pale and almost lifeless; he said little of the days which followed, for his sufferings were such as no language could depict; he dwelt upon the hope which Lily had awakened in the gardens, and the degrees by which she had raised that feeble, fitful spark, into a steady beacon, shining out far over his hitherto dark horizon. He pressed her to tell him if she had really loved him all this while, and when she owned how precious his love had been to her, and how she had yearned to soothe his grief and tell him how fully his affection was returned, he

drew her closer to his throbbing heart, declaring that the rapture of the present moment was worth every drop of agony he had tasted in all those miserable moments he had passed, and that henceforth the object of his life should be to repay her for all that she had undergone in the nobleness of her own heart, and her consideration for the weaknesses of others.

Time passed unheeded in such conversation. Shadows stole over the scene before them, but they marked them not,—there were no longer any shadows for those two loving hearts, basking now in the sunshine of mutual affection. Minnie had forgotten to look at her watch again, or calculate the time necessary for her to return to the house; it might be that Archie imprisoned her hands so closely that she had no power to move, but she never afterwards attempted an explanation of the omission, and only met any allusion to it with a laugh and a bright glance at Archie.

But, unheeded as they were, the hours fled by, and the first thing which recalled the lovers to a recollection of anything but each other was the voice of Lily, as she came panting up the hill, exclaiming, as she arrived at the platform,

“A nice pair you are to give me this chase! and

you, too, Miss Minnie, of all people in the world, who are always thinking of others, to forget us in this way altogether."

"O Lily, I am so shocked! Is it indeed so very late?"

But Lily rushed forward and clasped her in her arms, while Archie said laughing—

"Thinking of others, Lily? To be sure she is always, and never more so than now, only it must be in the singular instead of the plural; you don't suppose we have been thinking of anything but each other all this time, do you?"

"Answer for yourself, Sir Impudence," was Lily's reply. "I dare say you have wearied poor Minnie to death with your egotism; and at all events you cannot have been thinking much of her, or you would not have kept her here starving so long past the dinner hour. However, if Minnie can forgive you, I suppose I must, for I am just now too happy to quarrel with either of you." And again she kissed Minnie, and threw herself into the arms which Archie extended to her.

"But 'past the dinner hour,' Lily!" he exclaimed, as they began to descend; "have I really been so inconsiderate as to keep Minnie here so long, and make my father and mother wait for us?"

He looked at his watch: it was nearly eight o'clock! Lily burst into one of her merry laughs as she replied,

"No, we knew better than to wait for two lovers. So you have lost your dinner, my fine fellow, and must content yourself with the aerial diet you have been feeding on; but, as Minnie is not yet out of my charge, I could not allow her to exist upon such frothy nothings as you have been supplying her with, so I have provided a comfortable and substantial tea-table; and, if you have sufficient influence with her, perhaps she will allow you to sit at a corner and feed upon her smiles."

Archie laughed merrily, and, seizing his sister round the waist, he ran with her down the mountain path, bounding over the irregularities, and fairly carrying her off her feet. When they reached the bottom, where the path opened out into the road, he seated her panting on the trunk of a tree, and without waiting to breathe ran up again to bring Minnie down more gently; but she had nearly kept up with them in the race, and her arms were thrown round Lily's neck, where she sat, before the latter had well recovered her breath.

"Come, Lily," she exclaimed, "it's our turn to give Archie a race now;" and crossing the road they

plunged into the wood, and with their arms interlaced ran on till they came to the shrubbery gate, where great was their astonishment, and gay their laughter, to find Archie standing with outstretched arms ready to receive them as they came running down.

Captain and Mrs. Græme were waiting for them on the lawn. The trio advanced at a more subdued pace, Archie with his arm round Minnie, and Lily clinging to his other side. As soon as she saw them Minnie broke away, and ran to hide her blushing face on Mrs. Græme's bosom, who whispered as she kissed her,

"Bless you, my beloved Minnie, you have fulfilled my fondest wishes;" and, though Minnie might perhaps have told her that it was her own fault she had not done so long ago, she had either the prudence or the want of thought to abstain from such an expression.

"And am I not to be noticed?" exclaimed Captain Græme, after shaking hands with his son, and giving him a fervent blessing. "Come, Miss Marion, please to recollect that if I had not picked you up like a bunch of wet seaweed, we should never have had to wait dinner while yon gossoon was blethering into your ear; so come and give

your old father a kiss, and I can only say, if you're as good as a wife as you have been as a daughter, Mr. Archie may consider himself a lucky dog."

It would have been difficult within Her Majesty's dominions to find a happier group than that which soon assembled round Lily's tea-table, who had the satisfaction of seeing due honour paid to her arrangements.

Nor was the mirth wholly confined to the drawing-room. Old Elspie and the other servants partook warmly in the happiness of both Minnie and Archie, who were called upon to receive and acknowledge many an expression of their attachment. It had been throughout a day of fatigue even from its excess of happiness, and, as Minnie was not yet strong enough to undergo so much excitement with impunity, Lily insisted on carrying her off early to her own room.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

And dreams of that which cannot die,
Bright visions came to me,
As lapped in thought I used to lie
And gaze into the summer sky,
Where the sailing clouds went by,
Like ships upon the sea.

LONGFELLOW.

How merrily Time sped on now! Who would believe that the limping, lagging old mower, who sometimes moves on so heavily, as if the weight of his own scythe were too much, wading wearily through the bundles of grain, ripe and unripe, the tares, the flowers, the fruits continually falling before him, and encumbering his path, was identical with the youth of the springy step and jocund mien who at other times flies so rapidly before us, skimming over the sunlighted meadows, still eluding the grasp which would fain detain him and either totally arrest his steps amid the gay blossoms which he so recklessly treads down, or at least reduce his rapid flight to a more measured pace? Willingly now would Archie and Minnie have bound him and clipped his wings, but the very chace seemed only

to increase the rapidity of his flight. They had so much to talk about, so many plans and hopes for the future, so many reminiscences of the past. The seat under the old Scotch fir in the garden was their favourite resort, and Lily was not unfrequently with them, for she was closely associated in all their pleasures.

One morning, when Minnie was there alone, Archie joined her with a bundle of drawings in his hand.

"I am glad you have brought those out again," she said, "you would hardly suffer us to look at them when you were here before, and, in fact, I was too much occupied with the examination of the back of one that accidentally fell into my hands, to look at any more."

"Yes; you little thought what a thrill you gave me by the few words you spoke: but do you know why I collected them so carefully as soon as I saw you were looking at more than was meant for the public eye?"

"How should I? unless, indeed, it was done as a tacit reproof to my bad manners in presuming to examine the *dessous des cartes*."

"Which, after all," he said, laughing, "you had not penetration enough to discover." She held up

her finger with an archly reproachful look, "Oh, yes," he continued, imprisoning the uplifted finger, "I suppose I had not shown much of that quality myself; but you must own that you at least were more than a match for me in dissimulation, you little hypocrite."

"Well, but if these drawings were not to be examined by the vulgar eye, why did you bring them out?"

"Why, indeed, oh most beautiful! I ought to have made a selection, which I neglected to do, and, indeed, forgot at the moment what was there. When they were collected again I found there were several which I would not have had you see, then, on any account. You must know that I used to keep a kind of journal on those drawings, in an odd sort of way, sometimes in words, sometimes in hieroglyphics—never very consecutive. If an idea came into my head, whether belonging to past, present, or future, after I had considered it and digested it a little, I used to scribble it down on whatever was nearest, which was generally drawing-paper. Sometimes a plan, such as you saw, occurred to me, and I put it down for future use; sometimes other kinds of thoughts would intrude—never welcome, as you will believe, but, at all

events, they went down with the rest, either in letters or hieroglyphics. I was afraid that evening that it might have been one of these which had fallen into your hands, and had no intention of so flattering your vanity."

He was leaning over the back of the garden-chair on which Minnie was sitting, and as he spoke he placed the reverse of one of his drawings before her, on which was a variety of sketches of herself as a child, as a girl, as he had seen her last, between girlhood and womanhood, in combination with different views in and about Fairlands, sometimes alone, sometimes associated with himself.

Then followed another in which the scenery was less distinctly traced: saddle-horses stood before the door of an irregular castellated pile of building, standing on an eminence, with park-like scenery stretching into the distance. On one of the horses sat Minnie; the figure of her companion was imperfectly seen, as he appeared to be arranging her habit. A groom held his own and his master's horse at a little distance.

Then came another, an interior. Minnie was sitting in a drawing-room busied with some work, a bright fire blazed in the chimney, and a soft light from lamps pervaded the rest of the apartment; by

her side sat the same figure, his face concealed by a book, which he appeared to be reading to her.

A moonlight scene followed. The same pair was in the terrace-garden of Battesden; he was half leaning, half sitting, upon the stone balustrade, apparently pointing out some object in the distance to which his face was turned; Minnie stood by his side, her eyes following the direction of his, her clasped hands laid upon his shoulder.

There was an almost endless variety, in which every phase of domestic life had been embodied. Minnie examined them with a deeper interest than she chose to express, and which she endeavoured to hide under criticism and raillery, now and then pointing out some grievous defect, and, as she turned round with the words upon her lips, the artist was ready to stop her mouth in a way which made her quickly return to the examination.

“A very pretty picture gallery, truly!” she said, as, at last, vaulting over the back of the chair, he seated himself beside her, and throwing the drawings which she held on to the table, seized both her hands and covered them with kisses. “A most ingenious method of keeping ‘a tablet of unutterable thoughts!’ no wonder your high mightiness was alarmed at seeing them in my hands, considering

that next morning you intended to inform your slave that henceforth she was free, and you cared no more about her."

"And a pretty business I had nearly made of the act of manumission. If Lily had not come up at that moment I should have fairly broken down, and owned myself ten times more than ever the slave of *my* slave (as you say). There never was a more miserable attempt at self-command, and, but for the impenetrable stony mask which this dear face assumed, I could not have carried on the deception as long as I did."

"You little thought how very slight the mask was, that it was only a base counterfeit of stone, a mere bit of lath-and-plaster, or how near we were at that moment to a mutual understanding. Don't imprison my face as well as my hands, you tyrant! am I never again to have the free use of either?"

"There, rebel, you are free," he exclaimed, releasing her from his embrace; "and now what use will you make of your liberty? Ha, slave-like! to lay your head again on my shoulder, and rivet your own chains. Thus then you are twofold my prisoner," and he clasped his arms round her graceful form.

"And now, my princess," he resumed, "how

long do you mean to keep me in solitary confinement at Battesden? Have you no compassion, after torturing a poor fellow these years, as you have done."

"You must have a little more patience, dear Archie. I can say nothing till Leslie's return; and besides, I have a little scheme, a hope, a wish, which I am desirous to accomplish, or see accomplished rather, before —"

"And pray what may this redoubtable scheme be? The subversion of the present dynasty, perhaps, and restoration of some descendant of the Stewart line."

"You are not far wrong," she answered with a demure air, "only the first half is accomplished; the dynasty is overthrown; my scheme is only to place the legitimate monarch on the throne."

"And while you are plotting in Scotland, my bright ocean waif, suppose I were to enter into a counter-plot in England. Worthdown is not far from Battesden, you know, and you have already been witness to some passages between its fair occupant and myself. Ha! have I touched you there, my little plotter?"

"Not a whit, except that you are pressing my rings cruelly into my fingers. There, that will do; they are quite well again."

“Well, then, suppose I tell you that I am under Lady Clara’s orders to return to Battesden by the middle of September. Which sovereign am I to obey—the Scottish or English?”

“Oh, the English of course, as you must now be considered an Englishman, and the Scottish Queen, you see, is more disposed to banish than to claim you.”

“Well, then, so be it,” he replied, with an air slightly piqued; “then I am at liberty to go at once?”

Minnie laughed archly, “And perhaps,” she said, “you would like to take this pictorial journal to her ladyship,” as she gathered the drawings together.

“Oh no, you may keep them as reminiscences of what has been. I can make a fresh one for Lady Clara; and, besides, your figure would hardly do duty for hers.”

“Well, at all events it is time to go in now; the dressing-bell rung some time ago, and I see your father looking out impatiently for us.”

He rose reluctantly, and drawing her arm through his own they turned towards the house, and the slight shade of vexation soon faded from Archie’s countenance as Minnie joined the party again before dinner.

What a fresh charm had life acquired for Archie now ! The dark shadows which had so long obscured his prospects—the dull aching of the heart, bursting out at times into fits of almost frenzy—where were they ? He could hardly credit the reality of his own happiness, and feared to lose sight of his treasure, lest he should find it but a dream. Sometimes in the stillness of night he would let himself down from his own room that he might walk round and gaze upon the window of Minnie's, and assure himself that it was indeed no dream, but that the morning would reunite them. A long dreary waiting-time, however, might yet intervene before he could transplant his heart's treasure to Battesden, for on this point he could make no progress with Minnie.

“Wait at least till Leslie's return,” was her answer to his daily pleadings ; and never was traveller's return more ardently longed for than was his by Archie.

“And for how long is my banishment to last, Minnie ?” piteously asked Archie, as the subject was renewed one morning ; “and how am I to win through this weary waiting-time ? Remember, you are in the midst of a cheerful home circle, but think of me in the solitude of that great house at Battesden, alone with my thoughts.”

“And your picture gallery,” Minnie laughingly suggested: “with such a resource at your command, it is easy to people your solitude; and then Lady Clara —” she added, looking archly into his face.

“True; and I have a letter from her this morning, in which she lays her commands on me to be at Battesden before the 21st. She writes from Paris, where she and the Duke now are; but they are to be at home next week.”

“Then it is evident that your solitude will not be quite unbearable, at all events; but I was not aware that your friendship extended to a correspondence,” with a slight bridle of the graceful throat.

“Well, for the lady’s sake, I suppose I must admit my little schemer into her secret, particularly as this is the first letter I have received from herself. The former was written by her father at her request.”

“You are pleased to be oracular; can you also interpret?”

“It was to announce that I am about to be deprived of even that solace in my solitude at Battesden. Lady Clara is going to marry a neighbour of Gordon’s, Lennox of Glenbrae, Wentworth’s

friend. It appears he has been long attached to her; and, when he found that stupid gossip about her and myself was all moonshine, he followed her abroad, proposed, and was accepted. The wedding is to take place in the middle of September, and, after congratulating me on my own happiness, Lady Clara does me the honour to make a particular request that I will be present at her marriage. There is her letter, my treasure of the deep; you may see all the pretty things she says of my pearl of the sea," he said, as he gave her the letter. But Minnie clapped her hands for joy as she repeated,

"Lady Clara marry Lennox of Glenbrae, and he Leslie's neighbour! How charming! How delighted I am! Why, the grounds adjoin Duncairn; nothing could have been more perfect."

Her extreme pleasure astonished Archie, and made him half disposed to feel angry, not being himself able to see the cause for so much joy. He looked at her animated countenance as he said rather coldly,

"This is incomprehensible. I cannot see why the fact of Lady Clara leaving my neighbourhood and going into that of Duncairn, should be the subject of so much satisfaction."

"No, of course not, most potent signor, but that

is connected with my secret. Nevertheless you must contrive to believe that my rejoicing is not without reason, and when the Pretender is in possession of his own dominions you will fully acquiesce in my pleasure. Till then you must interpret it as best you may," she said, placing both her hands within his. He pressed them to his lips, and then throwing his arm round her, he drew her towards him as he replied:

"You are a dangerous little conspirator, Minnie, and I think it quite necessary that I should keep a strict *surveillance* over you: so, though I must comply with Lady Clara's flattering request, you must expect me here again as soon as I can get away. Wentworth and Vivian have proposed coming to me for some shooting after the First. Both Battersden and Berkeley Square are already in a course of refurnishing for the reception of my princess; this will require some personal superintendence, but I shall soon come back again."

"As soon as you please," she added, "and meanwhile be thankful that so dangerous a firebrand dwells not in your own dominions at present. Nay, don't interrupt me so rudely, sir! I was going to say that when Leslie returns, and I expect him now daily, I must either go to Duncairn, or induce him

to come here, which I earnestly hope he will do—but what brings Lily in such haste, and with a face of such importance?” she exclaimed, as the latter came running towards them with a letter in her hand.

“News from dear Clara!” replied the latter, as she seated herself by Minnie; “she is going to be married next month, and wishes me to be one of her bridesmaids; she tells me the whole plan is admirably managed, as she has written to invite Archie, who will therefore be my escort to Worthdown, and by this means she secures us both, otherwise she should fear the counteracting influence of the ‘Dark Ladie.’ ”

“So you see there are plotters besides my little Jacobite,” said Archie, as he turned to Minnie.

“Ah, you prepared me yesterday to expect a counterplot,” she said.

“Which proves me to have a prophetic vision I think, since, till this morning, I had no reason to expect they were coming home so soon, or that Lady Clara’s marriage was to take place immediately.”

“Well, I can only say I hope my plot will prove as successful in its issue.”

“You are both profoundly obscure,” observed Lily, “but for the present please to lay aside your

dark sayings and condescend to be comprehensible. The wedding is fixed for the 21st, Clara says, and she wishes to have me there a week or ten days at least before that time, as her sisters are there, whom she wishes to introduce me to, besides a number of other friends of her own and Mr. Lennox's: so when is the soonest you can tear yourself away from Fairlands Archie?"

The trio were soon engaged in lively altercation: Archie pleading for delay, while Lily was anxious to spend as long a time as possible with her friends: at last Minnie reminded him that he had just told her he expected some friends soon after the First, and, though he contended that, being self-invited, he considered himself at liberty to fix his own time, it was at last decided that he and Lily should leave so as the latter might arrive at Worthdown on the 10th.

And now quicker and quicker sped on the tyrant Time: the rosy garlands with which they sought to bind him were scattered one by one, and fell withered from their hands, as the day rapidly approached which was to separate the lovers.

It dawned at last, and Archie and Lily left Fairlands; the latter was left at Worthdown and Archie went on to Battesden, where his shooting friends joined him the following day.

CHAPTER XLIX.

But more than all his heart is wrung,
To think of one, almost a child :
A sweet and playful Highland girl,
As light and beauteous as a squirrel,
As beauteous and as wild.

WORDSWORTH.

GRÆME had been three or four days at Battesden, when the letter which we have seen Gordon write in London reached him, and was followed the same day by the writer himself.

The party had just returned from their day's sport as Leslie arrived; and, after they had remained a short time talking over their success and adventures, Wentworth and Vivian went to their rooms, and the two friends were left alone.

"I travelled from town with an old friend and neighbour," said Leslie; "he told me of the object of his own journey, and prepared me for some startling news in my own family. From him I learn that you, my dear fellow, are about to become a Benedick, and steal my little Minnie from me."

"Oh, in these telegraphic days there is no such thing as keeping a secret: yes, it is true—that is," he added smiling, "unless you intend to act the hard-hearted guardian, and interrupt our felicity."

"Not I, indeed, I know no one to whom I would sooner resign my right of guardianship than yourself; our acquaintance began, indeed, under adverse circumstances, but those very circumstances brought out—however," he added, laughing, "I am not going to make you blush—I think, though short, our friendship has been a tried one. But how long have you been engaged?"

"Our engagement is only of a few weeks' standing, but it has been on my part an attachment from childhood. I never remember the time when to win a smile from Minnie was not a reward to make any enterprise light. But she was very inexorable, and till now would never allow me the slightest gleam of hope."

"Well, my dear fellow, I am heartily glad you have won her at last: I know no one to whom I would so gladly commit the treasure,—for a rich treasure she is, Græme, as I suppose it is needless for me to tell you. But how is it, and what made Minnie so inexorable? I thought there was something of the kind when we first met, though I was

not clear about Minnie's being the object; indeed, I had some misgivings on that subject. I was not then intimate enough to ask your confidence, and from my own situation my mind was occupied with more painful thoughts."

"It was when I returned from the Continent, four years ago, that I first spoke of love to Minnie. She would not listen to me then: I believed she could not love me, and was in despair at having, by my folly, deprived myself even of the sisterly affection which might have been mine. I went abroad again for a year, and on my return made a second attempt, equally vain. I left England again, and almost wished never to return, for life without her was unendurable. I had no hope of winning her love, and I tried to overcome my passion, to sober it down to such friendship as she would accept: to live wholly debarred from her society I felt to be impossible. After two years I returned, believing I could submit to be as her brother, and no more. I found her in a different position; your acknowledged sister and a wealthy heiress. I went to Fairlands with the resolution of telling her that I abandoned all hope of love, and would be content with friendship. The first evening passed in her society showed me the hollowness of my supposed

victory; but I persevered in my resolution, and the next morning I prayed her to forget me as a lover and accept me again as a mere brother. She was colder than marble to me; I could have thrown myself down at her feet, and kissed the very ground she stood upon, if she would only have given me one kind look; as it was, I believe I should have done something equally outrageous but for a timely interruption. She left next day for Duncairn. When I saw her again it was in town; admired and sought after, but more particularly the object of devotion to Lord Venables. I was raving, and yet fascinated; I could not help following her everywhere, and yet dared not approach, and, indeed, made but a poor hand of assuming indifference, for Lady Clara Varnley soon penetrated my secret, and first gave me a glimpse of hope. Venables proposed, and then came her terrible illness. I had just started for Paris: she would not even see me to take leave; Lily's letter met me there, and I returned at once: hopeless as I was, I could not bear to think of her ill, perhaps dying, and I far away. It was during that illness that despair first yielded to hope."

"I can understand her conduct," said Leslie. "No doubt she felt that as a nameless and portion-

less orphan, she had no right to destroy the hopes which your parents might naturally form as to your alliance. A glimmer of the truth broke in upon me at Duncairn once, when a little altercation had occurred in which your name was coupled with hers. It excited an emotion I thought inadequate to the cause, but, though I observed her afterwards, I could discover nothing, and I feared the attachment might be on her side alone. She has throughout acted in all respects worthy of herself, and exactly as I could have wished," concluded Leslie, as he wrung Græme's hand warmly.

"God bless her!" returned the latter, "she is worth any amount of suffering. Such was her influence even at the coldest, that, though I tried at first to drown the remembrance of her in dissipation, she came like a guardian angel, waving me away from all vicious pleasures with her pure eyes, and leading me on to the performance of duties which, but for her, I should never have understood."

"And when am I to give her up? for I suppose the surrender must be made ere long."

"Ah, she is a tyrant, with all her goodness, and will hardly hear me name the subject till she has worked out some plot in which you are concerned,

and in which she will not let me share. She will say nothing till your return, and tries to make me live upon patience."

"Which you find insufficient diet," said Græme, laughing. "Dear Minnie!" he continued, after a minute's thoughtful silence, "I can unravel her plot, and am but too willing to do so, as far as my share is concerned. Can you forgive me the delay of your happiness? Minnie has understood me rightly, and I will venture to betray her secret and my own. Græme, I love your sister—loved her from the first moment of seeing her,—and have never ceased to love her. A misunderstanding caused me to forfeit her esteem, and if she ever did regard me with anything but indifference, as I once flattered myself she did, I fear it has long since subsided into contempt. But she alone could make the happiness of my life, as she now makes the misery of it; if I dared to hope it were possible to win her heart, I would devote my whole future life to repairing the insult I once offered her. I would not add to this insult by seeking her immediately on Lady Gordon's death, but during the twelvemonth of banishment that I inflicted on myself I have suffered tortures. The year is now elapsed,—have I at least your sanction to endeavour to gain her love?"

It was now Græme's turn to wring the hand of his friend as he replied,

"You are the man of all the world whom I should wish to see the husband of my darling Lily; and she must be made of other stuff than I think if she is indifferent to the offer of such a heart. Lily is now at Worthdown; come there with me to-morrow, my dear fellow, and we will at least reconnoitre the enemy." Leslie looked grave.

"It is a charming proposal," he said, "but your sister has such good cause to be irreconcilably offended with me, that I don't know how she would receive me. What looked comparatively easy at a distance, makes me fearful when so near."

"I think the meeting may be effected in a very informal manner," replied Archie; "I am invited to lunch, and join a riding party afterwards; my friends have declined; Wentworth would not trust himself at present, and returns to town in the morning, and Vivian is going to Sir James Ingram's; so you and I will ride over, and, amidst the numerous guests now staying at Worthdown, I think we can inform ourselves as to how the land lies, without attracting much notice."

"The plan is too tempting to be discarded," said Leslie with a sigh; "but it is at Battesden that

I feel more than ever how little cause I have to entertain hope for a moment. Lennox may have mentioned my being in the neighbourhood, so—," another deep sigh finished the sentence; and their farther conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Wentworth.

"What, still here!" he exclaimed; "my dear Græme, recollect we are not all in love, and have besides been toiling over the stubble till we have acquired appetites that require more substantial fare than that with which, I conclude, you have been entertaining Sir Leslie."

"You shall not have to wait long, my good fellow; for my own part I am quite aware of the necessity of some less aerial diet than love to live upon: I know Gordon can make as speedy a toilet as myself, so we will be ready by the time Jameson announces the dinner served."

Worthdown was full of guests; besides mutual friends, Lord and Lady Bridport and Mr. and Lady Charlotte Templemore were there to assist at the wedding of their sister Lady Clara.

It was late before Græme and Leslie could leave home, and the luncheon party was mostly dispersed when they arrived at Worthdown; only Lady Clara, Lennox, Lady Bridport, and a few others

still lingered at the table. Leslie felt it almost as a relief in the rapid glance that he threw round the room on entering, to find that Lily was not there.

Lennox greeted his old friend cordially, and was about to present him to Lady Clara, when the latter held out her hand, saying, as she did so,

“I have already a ball-room acquaintance with Sir Leslie himself, and as the friend of his sister, whom I met in town last year, may venture, I hope, to lay claim to him as one of my own friends.”

Leslie made a suitable reply, alluding to the pleasure with which he looked forward to welcoming her into his own neighbourhood.

“Yes,” observed Lennox, “I regret for both our sakes that Græme is going to deprive us of your sister, for, notwithstanding the short time she has been known to the neighbourhood, we felt a pride in considering her as belonging to us.”

“I trust she may often be at Duncairn, though it will be her home no longer,” replied Leslie; “indeed, hitherto she has had no rightful home, though kind friends have given her welcome; both she and myself are but waifs and strays from the ocean; I dropped quickly into the nook prepared for me, but she has continued floating about on the

surface of society, and I rejoice to think the tide has at last carried her into so secure a haven."

He had taken the vacant chair on the other side of Lady Clara, and the three entered into a lively and earnest conversation, which, beginning at Battersden, led them to Glenbrae and Duncairn, and then more generally through Scotland. Leslie described eloquently the beauties of his own country, and made both Lady Clara and Lennox laugh heartily at the humorous pictures he drew of the peculiarities of his countrymen, and the duties which would devolve on her as the "Laird's leddy;" but a keen observer might have detected through all the gaiety of his present conversation the anxious, searching glance, which from time to time was sent towards door or window, more particularly towards the oriel window of a room at the opposite corner of the house to that in which they were sitting, and where a group of young people were assembled. Leslie wondered whether Lily were one of the group, and whether she would know of his being at Battersden, and speculate on the possibility of his coming to Worthdown; how and when their meeting would be accomplished, and whether even at this moment she might not be endeavouring to avoid the rencontre. Græme was sitting at the

further end of the table in conversation with Lady Bridport, the sister of Lady Clara. It was therefore a welcome interruption to Leslie when Lord Bridport, looking in at the window, asked Lady Clara if she were not going to dress for riding, as the horses were even now at the door.

“I had almost forgotten the afternoon excursion in our agreeable conversation,” she said, rising, “but I will go and collect my forces.”

Leslie longed to ask of whom these would consist, but there was no excuse for such apparently idle curiosity, and he had to control his impatience as best he could, while with the other gentlemen he lounged into the hall, and with them discussed the merits and demerits of the horses, which were being led about before the door. He scanned those which bore side-saddles; there were only four, and he anxiously speculated upon who their riders would be. He was leaning against one of the side pillars, and partly concealed by other columns, absorbed in this speculation, while the party was gradually collecting on the steps of the portico, and the horses were being brought up. One of the four ladies, he saw at a glance, was Lily; she was talking earnestly with her brother, and seemed unaware of his presence; he wondered whether Græme was telling

her of his arrival, but from her unmoved air he rather thought not. He dared not present himself, and remained in the same place, while the grooms and gentlemen were busily attending to the fair equestrians.

Lady Clara and another lady were already mounted, and Archie beckoned a groom to bring up the horse he was leading, for Lily, when Lady Clara exclaimed,

“Not that horse, Mr. Græme! That chestnut mare is Lily’s own peculiar favourite; she has named it Zoë, and will ride no other.”

Leslie had already noticed the mare, and been struck by her resemblance to the Zoë who was now taking her ease in the paddock at Duncairn. The association had deepened the reverie in which he was indulging, and carried him back to his last ride with Lily. He started forward as Lady Clara spoke, and then, fearing to offend Lily by appearing to presume on what had been said, he drew back again; he mingled among the other gentlemen, and mounting his horse, fell rather into the rear of the party, which now moved on, first, in a compact body, and then gradually separating into knots and pairs. Lennox and Lady Clara rode on together, and Lily and her brother were amongst a group of

others. Lily seemed quite unconscious of Leslie's being of the party: he listened to her gentle voice and silvery laugh, and dreading lest the sight of him should cloud that happy, careless gaiety, he cautiously avoided attracting her notice.

At last the road led from the open park into a narrow lane, which obliged the party to divide into pairs, and Leslie found himself riding by the side of Lily. She turned to address some remark to her companion, and then seemed for the first time to become aware of who that companion was.

For a moment the colour forsook her cheek, and then as rapidly rushed over cheek and brow: he leaned forwards as if to speak, but his words were strangely unintelligible; she could not catch the sense of them, but feeling the necessity of saying something, and perhaps emboldened by his evident timidity, she said something about having heard of his being at Battesden, but not expecting to see him.

"I should hardly have ventured to present myself, Miss Græme, earnestly as I might wish it, but for the sanction of your brother, even now." He stopped; he felt he was going too far, he hardly knew whether to affect forgetfulness of the past, or at once to plunge into the remembrance.

There was a silence of some minutes: Lily occupied herself with her horse, which she caressed and

patted; the creature arched her neck proudly under her hand; she felt that Leslie was watching her earnestly. Lady Clara's words, in all their full meaning, rushed into her mind, and sent a burning blush to her cheek; she ceased to caress Zoë, and sat still and silent.

Leslie gained courage: "Your horse seems to be a favourite, Miss Græme," he said, "and to appreciate the caresses of its mistress; I think Lady Clara called her Zoë—it is the name of one I have, whose value to me is beyond price—indeed so valuable is she that I never suffer any one to mount her, and she has led a life of perfect idleness for the last four years."

Lily coloured deeply, though she endeavoured not to appear conscious of the meaning of Leslie's words; she said with a smile, though without raising her eyes,

"And do you think a life of perfect idleness, then, one of perfect happiness?"

"I was only alluding to the quadruped, Miss Græme; I did not mean to include any more responsible being of our own race."

Lily blushed again; she saw that her question had betrayed the connection of her thoughts. She remained silent, and the constraint was becoming painful, when the Duke, riding back, addressed Gordon:

“I have just been trying to persuade Græme to send for his traps and remain here to-night, Sir Leslie. He tells me his movements must depend upon your wishes. I hope you will not prevent our having the pleasure of his company, more especially as it was partly in the hope of securing yours that we asked him. Your friend Lennox will be an inducement, perhaps; and Clara wants to make acquaintance with her nearest neighbour in her new home.”

While the Duke spoke, Gordon raised an eager look towards Lily's face, as if to read there what his answer must be; he met her eyes fixed with a look of anxiety on his; it was only for an instant, for with a deep blush hers were immediately withdrawn; but there was something he fancied in the expression, momentary as the meeting of their eyes had been, which gave him hope that his acceptance would not be disagreeable, and turning to the Duke, he replied in the same frank tone in which the proposal had been made, that nothing could give him greater pleasure than to avail himself of such an opportunity of improving his acquaintance with Lady Clara, and enjoying the agreeable society in which he so unexpectedly found himself.

CHAPTER L.

Um der Schönheit willen zu heirathen, ist eben so viel, als um der Rose willen ein Handgut kaufen. Ja das letztere wäre um Vernünftiger, denn die Rosenzeit kommt doch jährlich wieder.

Um zu heirathen, muss man lieben; um zu lieben, muss man hochachten. Denn Hymen ist ein gebrechlicher Knabe, wenn er sich nicht links und rechts auf Achtung und Liebe stützt.

KOTZEBUE.

“ I WONDER if my wedding is to be an exception to the general rule,” exclaimed Lady Clara, coming softly behind the chair on which Lily was sitting with a book in her hand, though her eyes were in reality watching the movements of a group of gentlemen in the park, among whom were Leslie and Græme, who were trying the paces and leaping powers of a couple of horses.

Lily started at the sound of her friend’s voice, which roused her from the reverie into which she had fallen.

“ What rule?—why not?—that is—what do you mean?” she asked, unable at once to collect her thoughts, and laughing at her own confusion.

“ Oh! perhaps you don’t know our old saying,

that one wedding always brings another; there is some rhyme about it, but I cannot recollect what it is."

"There may be rhyme," said Lily laughing, "but apparently no reason. I have not remarked any symptoms of pairing amongst the company here; and, if I cannot see any, you cannot expect your own vision to be clearer, since Love is proverbially blind, you know."

"True, Lily; blind to his own faults, but not to those of his neighbour."

"I am still at a loss for your meaning," answered Lily, though with rather a conscious manner.

Lady Clara laughed as she sat down beside her, and, shading her eyes with her hand, looked fixedly at the group of gentlemen in the distance, who were now beginning to disperse, as the horses were being led back to the stables, and repeated, half aloud, in a kind of soliloquy, the lines from *Cristabel*:

And Constancy dwells in realms above,
And life is stormy, and youth is vain,
And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness in the brain.

"You are wonderfully oracular this morning," said Lily poutingly, while a deep blush overspread

her face; "it is impossible for me to understand you."

"You know nothing about love or constancy, poor little innocent," answered Lady Clara, as she looked into Lily's blushing face.

"Oh! if you want information on these points you had better apply to Archie or Mr. Lennox," remarked Lily, drily, taking up her book again.

"But do you not think constancy ought to be rewarded?" persisted her friend.

"Well, and so it has been very sufficiently by both Minnie and yourself."

"That is nothing to the point; I want your sentiments; what would you do if like constancy to that of your brother were shown towards yourself?"

"I cannot possibly say, never having been tried," answered Lily coldly, and affecting deep interest in the book she held.

"Oh! you little hypocrite!" exclaimed Lady Clara, placing her hand upon the page, "how demure you are. But here comes Sir Leslie; perhaps he can tell us more about it."

Lily flushed crimson, and made an effort to rise, which Lady Clara, with her arm round her waist, prevented her doing.

"What is the subject of dispute?" asked Leslie,

as, approaching, he leaned against the window. Lily looked imploringly at Lady Clara; the latter replied with an arch glance,

“We have been admiring your feats of noble horsemanship.”

“Ah! we were trying the leaping powers of Lennox’s new purchases; what do you think of them? The brown one he intends for your own riding; it is very docile.”

Lily had once more fixed her eyes on the book, which she seemed intently reading.

“I am afraid the perfections or imperfections of the animals were lost upon me, for I was engaged in a metaphysical discussion with Miss Græme, who, perhaps, knows more about them, as I disturbed what seemed to be a most close and critical examination of them.”

“I believe I was looking at without thinking of them,” observed Lily, coldly, without raising her eyes. Leslie looked earnestly at her varying colour and expression.

“Miss Græme seems to be too much interested in her book to care at all about such things,” he remarked stiffly.

“Ah!” said Lady Clara, who seemed bent on mischief, “I have been propounding deeper matter

for the consideration of the little philosopher, and she is probably studying the subject."

"May I ask what were the propositions?" asked Leslie.

"What reward was due to con——"

"Clara!" exclaimed Lily, starting up, her neck and face flushing crimson, and placing her hand over Lady Clara's mouth; then, turning to Leslie with an attempt at indifference, she added, "Sir Leslie, I beg you will not listen to what Lady Clara says; she is in wild spirits this morning, and is indeed only jealous of my book."

"It is a pardonable fault," said Leslie, with a glance from those eyes which always so thrilled Lily's heart. "But," he added, smiling, "I will not interrupt your philosophical discussions any longer; and here comes Lennox, so I will yield my place to him;" and he turned from the window towards the shrubbery walk.

"Clara, how could you be so provoking!" said Lilies, reproachfully, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Dearest Lily, I am very sorry if I really annoyed you; but I hardly suspected when I began that it was such tender ground; indeed, it was you who gave my words any peculiar meaning."

"I believe I have been very foolish," said Lily,

half inclined to cry, "I always have been so, and Sir Leslie, I believe, thinks me little better than an idiot."

"I am inclined to differ on that question," answered her companion.

"Well, it is no matter what he thinks," she said, with a sigh; "it can make no difference to me."

"What is the matter?" asked Lennox, who stood now in the place Gordon had just left.

"We were discussing —," began Lady Clara, — Lily interrupted her.

"Oh, Mr. Lennox, in pity put Lady Clara upon one of those young horses, and tame her wild spirits, for I cannot cope with her at all."

"The fact is, I have gotten the better of her in a point of metaphysics; she cannot refute my argument, and the fairy philosopher does not like defeat; but seriously, dear Lily, I did not mean to vex you, and am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

"I suppose I must," said Lily, accepting the proffered embrace; "but it must be on condition of future good conduct."

"*Parole d'honneur!*" said Lady Clara, laughing; "I see now the treacherous nature of the ground, and will beware of pitfalls henceforward."

Lily cast a half smiling, half reproachful, look

as she held up her finger, and turned to go to her own room, there to think over all that had passed, and to recall looks, and words, and innumerable little nothings which yet sent a blush to her cheek and a thrill through her heart. She turned to the window, which commanded the shrubby walk, and was soon absorbed in watching the movements of a figure pacing slowly along, with arms folded, and eyes bent on the ground, sometimes standing fixed in deep thought, sometimes striking his forehead as he walked rapidly on again, till a turn in the plantation hid him from her view.

Lily did not join the riding party that afternoon, but begged Lady Bridport to give her a seat in the pony carriage. She did not see Sir Leslie again till dinner-time, when all were assembled in the drawing-room. She felt, more than saw, that as she entered he moved a chair towards her, and fearing his design was to keep in her vicinity, and hand her in to dinner, she affected not to notice the movement, and placed herself by the side of Mr. Templemore, who was standing in the embrasure of a window. Her manoeuvre succeeded, and she had the satisfaction of seeing Leslie offer his arm to Lady Bridport, and take the left hand of Lady Clara at the table, while she and Mr. Templemore

were lower down on the opposite side; still she was conscious that those thrilling eyes were continually upon her; she dared not turn her own that way, but contrived to keep up a tolerable show of conversation with her neighbour. In the evening it was more difficult to avoid him, and she found herself obliged to accept a thousand little nameless attentions from him, too slight to attract the notice of others, but bearing an unmistakeable meaning to herself.

Music was going on, and Lily was sitting a little in the rear of the knot collected round the piano, apparently attentive to the performance, but in reality listening to the sound of Leslie's voice, though the tone was too low to allow of her hearing what he said, when her attention was caught by a few words spoken in rather a louder key.

"Yes; to-morrow, or the next day at latest, I must start for Scotland. I believe I ought to have gone much sooner."

She gave an involuntary start, and looked up; the movement caught his attention, and their eyes met. Hers were withdrawn instantly, and her face suffused with a deep blush; he went on with the conversation, and soon after she managed to slip unperceived away.

It wanted now only three days to that fixed for the wedding, and Leslie had said last evening that he must leave either to-day or to-morrow. Græme and Lily too were to take their departure for Scotland immediately after the wedding, as the former was anxious to return to Fairlands, and there would be no inducement for Lily to remain when her friend Lady Clara was no longer at Worth-down. Workmen and upholsterers had full possession of Battesden, and Græme rode over daily to inspect their progress.

This morning, when breakfast was over, he asked Lily to accompany him, that he might have the benefit of her taste as to the manner in which Minnie's own morning-room was being arranged. It was a lovely September morning, the air fresh and autumnal, and the ride gave colour and animation to Lily's cheek, which had looked paler than usual when she came down to breakfast.

The opinion required was soon given, and after having gone over the house with Archie, and admired and approved all that he had been doing, finding that she was no longer required, she left him to superintend the workmen, and looping up her habit she walked across the park to renew her acquaintance with her old friends in Woodford.

All welcomed her with joy, and after visiting their cottages, and spending a short time in the school-room, she set out to return, loaded with bouquets of garden and wild flowers, which the children had vied with each other in collecting for her. She walked slowly and thoughtfully, her eyes bent towards the ground, and revolving in her mind the occurrences of the past week, without daring to speculate on the future.

Thus she reached the gate which opened from the park into the shrubberies: the spot recalled to her mind a little incident which had taken place there four years ago, when Leslie was by her side. She leant over the gate, giving herself up to the recollection, her head drooped upon the flowers which filled her hands. The train of thought into which she had fallen occupied her whole mind, and carried her away from the present into times past; she remained long in the attitude she had first assumed. After a time the sound of an approaching footstep on the gravel caught her ear, and caused her to raise her head. Leslie stood before her. For a minute she remained motionless, with her eyes fixed upon him; it seemed as if her imagination, busied as it had been with former days, had conjured up a phantom. He too stood still for a moment, as if

taken by surprise; then, recovering himself, he advanced to open the gate, and offering his arm, he said,

“You look fatigued, Miss Græme; allow me to assist you, and to relieve you of this load of flowers, enough to overwhelm Hercules himself.”

She took his proffered arm without speaking; she longed indeed to ask him how he came to be at Battesden now, and in this very spot too; but her utterance failed her, and she had no power to command her voice; she placed the flowers silently in the hand he extended for them.

“You have walked too far after the ride,” he said, “will you not rest a moment on this seat?”

“No,” she replied, half withdrawing her arm, and releasing her hand from the slight pressure of his, as he received the flowers: “I am not tired, and was only surprised at your unexpected appearance; the suddenness made me almost fancy it must be your wraith,” she continued, endeavouring to force a laugh.

He looked very serious, and did not even attempt to join in her laugh.

“If you will not sit down,” he said, “at least do not refuse the support of my arm.”

She felt that she could not at that moment have

walked without it, so she replaced her hand, and they walked on in silence for some paces; at last he said, in a low and slightly tremulous voice,

“I feel that I have incurred your anger, Miss Græme, and deserved it; I cannot forgive myself, but, if sorrow and suffering be of any avail to atone for error, then surely I may dare to hope for forgiveness of the past. I cannot now explain all the miserable causes of conduct which must have seemed so inexcusable to you. I can only say I was miserably deceived—I believe we were mutually deceived—and I discovered my error too late.”

“I know it all,” she replied, in a tone so low as hardly to be audible. “I have long since known the truth, and fully exculpated you; believe me, all is quite forgiven and forgotten.”

He bent down to look into her face, as he said earnestly,

“Recall that last word, I implore you, dear Miss Græme! Forgive my folly—my stupid blindness—my incomprehensible obtuseness; but do not, oh do not forget the deep, true, unfathomable love which I then expressed and felt for you! which I have ever since felt—feel at this moment—and must ever continue to feel till this heart has ceased to beat; and even then, on—on into eternity!”

She was silent, but he felt her steps falter; he

withdrew the arm she leant on, and passed it round her waist: her head sank upon his shoulder, and he strained her with rapture to his throbbing heart.

* * * * *

It was long before they thought of returning to the house. As they did so, at last, they met Archie coming in search of them; and Lily, as he approached, disengaging herself from Leslie's encircling arm, ran forward and flung herself into the arms of her brother, hiding her blushing face on his shoulder. Archie pressed her fondly to him, while he held out his other hand to Leslie, who shook it warmly.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Græme, "my happiness seems now indeed almost complete. Take her, Gordon," he continued, placing her in his arms, "she is a treasure only equalled in value by the jewel you have confided to me."

"My pure, sweet Lily! my Belladonna!" murmured Leslie, as folding her in his arms he imprinted a fond kiss upon her lips.

After a moment Archie said, laughing,

"But now, my dear fellow, as I don't wish to be as malicious as this little fairy was to me on a similar occasion, I must not let you lose your dinner, so it is time we mounted, once more to return to Worthdown."

CHAPTER LI.

There's joy on the mountains ;
There 's life in the fountains ;
Small clouds are sailing,
Blue sky prevailing ;
The rain is over and gone !

WORDSWORTH.

LESLIE left Worthdown next day, as he had previously announced his intention of doing, though not now entirely from his own inclination ; indeed he would willingly have altered his plan, but Lily was so fearful that the notice of the numerous guests at Worthdown would be attracted to their mutual relation, that she urged his departure earnestly. She had stipulated as they returned from Battesden that there should be no alteration that evening in Leslie's former bearing towards her ; but she knew it would be impossible to conceal the state of affairs beyond that time, or drill him into a longer submission to her wishes on that point if he remained.

To Lady Clara she confided her secret before dinner, entreating her forbearance ; and, after encountering a little good-natured raillery, and a

great deal of warm sympathy, she obtained a promise that only to Lennox, who with herself might be considered interested in the event, should the news be imparted.

Archie met her as she came downstairs before dinner, and they entered the drawing-room together. One shy glance she darted towards the spot where she seemed to know intuitively that Leslie would be. He stood leaning with careless ease over the back of a chair and chatting with Lady Clara, who sat in the corner of a sofa. A look full of meaning from those deep, loving eyes, but imperceptible to all but herself, was the only notice he took of her entrance, and she glided into her usual place near the window, where Lennox soon joined her, and spoke a few earnest words of congratulation, but in so low a tone as to reach no ear but hers.

There was no change in the dinner arrangements, except that Lily contrived to place herself on the same side of the table as Leslie, so as to avoid the magnetic influence of those eloquent eyes. Only in the evening he approached and challenged her to a game of chess, in which the small amount of science displayed on either side, and the eccentricity of the moves, would have startled the *conoscenti*, had they been allowed to assemble as usual round

the players ; but the admirable tact of Lady Clara was so well exerted in the disposition of her guests, that the recess in which the chess-table stood was unmolested, and the lovers at full liberty to play the game according to any rules they might choose to improvise for the occasion ; so it is not to be wondered at that the only result they could report of a trial of skill which lasted throughout the evening was, that the game was a drawn one.

The next morning Leslie started for Fairlands, to ask the consent of Captain and Mrs. Græme to transplant his precious Lily into his own conservatory of Duncairn ; a permission by no means difficult to win, since a son-in-law more entirely to the satisfaction of both parents could hardly have been found. A change indeed seemed to have come over Mrs. Græme, but whether it arose from the perfect fulfilment of her most ambitious wishes with regard to her children, or, as she affirmed, to the effect which Minnie's influence had at last produced even upon herself, would not be easy to determine. At all events she was ready to acknowledge that a wiser and a kinder Hand had by a series of trials brought about those arrangements which she would most have desired, thus elevating and purifying their hearts, and rendering them better fitted for

the high responsibilities they were called to fulfil, and into which she would fain have hurried them, utterly disregarding of their own wishes or affections, and intent only on securing their worldly prosperity.

In a conversation indeed which some weeks later she held with Mrs. Sherwood at Fairlands, she could not help confessing, that often as she had lamented what she then considered her husband's inconsiderate whim of adopting Minnie into their own family, without calculating probable consequences, it had turned out, even viewing it in the most worldly light, a better stroke of policy than the coldest calculator could have devised.

"I have often laughed at Græme's simplicity," she said, "when he quoted, against my arguments, the words, 'Be not backward to entertain strangers, for thereby many have entertained angels unawares.' But I little thought that this ocean waif, Minnie, who indeed has always been as an angel in the house, and her conduct with regard to Archie especially irreproachable throughout, would also so completely satisfy all my more worldly desires, and not only that, but would also be the indirect means of Lily's forming so charming a marriage—one promising so much domestic happiness, and placing her

too in so delightful a position. These waifs and strays have certainly in the end proved real blessings to us; and I think I can enter better into the meaning now of the passage I have quoted than ever I did before."

"Do you mean to say that 'angels' mean handsome young baronets and rich heiresses?" asked Mrs. Sherwood, with an air of simplicity.

"Not exactly," replied Mrs. Græme, laughing, "whatever I might once have thought; but at least Minnie may be considered as an angel, for it is her influence that has been the means of moulding the character of both Archie and Lily to what they are, and giving them a tone which I am sure they would never have received from me; for at one time my desire was only to counteract her views, regarding them as romantic, and likely to interfere with what I imagined was their real good. If she were not literally sent, she has at least done the work of a faithful messenger, and has made me fully understand that what we are so apt to call 'chances,' or 'accidents,' are simply Providences, each bearing its message of joy or trial; and that in receiving and using rightly such waifs and strays, we are oftentimes entertaining angels unawares."

Mrs. Sherwood shook her head incredulously, as she replied,

“I very much fear, my good sister, that, if Sir Leslie and Minnie did not hold the position they do now, you would still be sceptical as to their angelic nature.”

“It may indeed be so,” replied Mrs. Græme, “for I am but a novice in the creed, and am so far from depending upon my own strength in following it, that I even acknowledge myself quite unable to explain what I do understand of it; but I have long noticed Minnie, and studied her ways without her knowledge. I have seen her adopt some circumstance that has happened to her, what might be called a ‘chance,’ and handle it and turn it into a duty, and at last, somehow, convert it into a blessing; for if it did not make her happy in a worldly sense of the word, or in the way she might have wished, it always ended in bringing her another kind of happiness.

“*Par exemple?*” asked Mrs. Sherwood.

“Well, for one, there was that idiot child of Lady Gordon’s, who happily died last month; her having anything to do with the charge of that might fairly be called an accident, and a most unpleasant one; no one could have thought that anything but

a misery at first sight, and probably so it appeared to her, but at last it had become quite a pleasure. The nurse who had charge of it told me that when at Duncairn, had it been Minnie's own, she could not have shown more interest or anxiety about it ; seeking to allay its sufferings, and always devising something for the comfort of the poor child or its nurse. Even when she went to town it was not forgotten, but she continually wrote to its nurse, and was always sending something that might give it pleasure or ease, till her illness of course interrupted her ; but when she was sufficiently recovered and able to think again, and write, she made arrangements for its being moved to Fairlands, and had that cottage which adjoins the schoolmistress's fitted up to receive the nurse and baby ; and when she came home she watched over it till its death as if she really loved it, though a more revolting little creature I never saw, and it certainly had not the remotest natural claim upon her, but rather the reverse. I used to remonstrate with her, and lament the chance that had thrown such a painful charge upon her ; but her answer was always, ' Dear mama, be sure it is meant for my own good as much or more than the poor child's ; I must only try and do the duty properly and the

blessing will come.' Then again with regard to Archie—"

"Well, she certainly made no pleasure of that, for it almost killed her."

"No, it was more than she could manage; but still she struggled hard, and at least turned it into a means of improving her own character and Archie's too. She did not look upon that trial as an accidental thing, as you or I might have done; and she never resented my interference with her happiness, as I am sure I should had the case been mine. She took the whole as a cross which was given her to bear; and, if sometimes she found it heavier than she could sustain, she never complained of the burden, or tried to release herself from it, as she might easily have done, by complying with Archie's love, and marrying him in spite of us all. In all her troubles, and difficulties, and struggles, her motto always was, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and trust in Him;' and she fully acted up to her motto."

"Well," replied Mrs. Sherwood, still incredulous, "we shall see how she will act now that she has got all she wished for; many can bear adversity and trouble well who fail in prosperity."

"I don't fear for her," said Mrs. Græme; "the

cquisition of wealth and position produced no change, except in making her even more energetic and watchful over herself. Her heart is so well disciplined, and she is so deeply impressed with the idea that neither our lives nor our possessions are our own to squander on our own pleasures, but sacred trusts, for which we are accountable to God, from whom we have received them, that I feel sure she will always remain the same humble, simple-minded being she has always been, enjoying all the pleasures, and filling well the position she will occupy (for no one more thoroughly enjoys such pleasures, or knows how to make others enjoy them), but ever keeping in mind the responsibilities which will equally attach to her."

"Well, I must own she is a sweet creature, and either she or some one else has imbued Archie with very similar ideas to what you have been describing. He astonished me when he first took possession of Battesden, not only by what he did on the estate, but by the principle he showed. I always thought Mr. Sherwood a good man and a good landlord, but Archie went altogether on a principle I had never heard of, and yet everything was done in the simplest way. There was no ostentation or parade of goodness; whatever he did or does seems just

the most commonplace thing in his own eyes, and he is the most cheerful and delightful of companions. He is adored as a landlord and a neighbour; and some of his tenants, who set out by opposing and defying him, would now go through fire and water, as the saying is, to serve or oblige him. I admire all he does, but I could not have done it myself, even if it had occurred to me to try."

"Yes, Minnie has infused her principles into both Archie and Lily, and her brother seems just the same kind of person, though he is not quite equal to Minnie, I think; at least his trials were different, and he partly brought them on himself."

Meanwhile at Worthdown the anticipated event, which had been the cause of the gaieties there, came off on the second day after Leslie's departure. The wedding was like all other weddings, so there is no need to chronicle it here. The curious may refer to the columns of the "Morning Post;" there they will find it fully recorded, or, should they fail to find this identical one, any of the marriages in "High Life," there announced, will suit the occasion,—the beauty and Brussels lace of the bride; the grace and gossamer of the bridesmaids; the flowers which strewed the path of the bridal pair, with the names of all the noble and fashionable

guests who assisted at the ceremony, and partook afterwards of the elegant *déjeuner*; the feastings and rejoicings of the tenantry; the fireworks and bonfire in the park, and the ball to the neighbourhood, which closed the day after the departure of the "happy pair" for Fern Hall, Lancashire, the seat of the noble father of the bride, *en route* to that of the bridegroom, Glenbrae, N.B.

The same paper also hinted at the probability of similar festivities at the neighbouring estate of B——n, whose wealthy owner was about to lead to the altar of hymen, at no distant future, the beautiful and accomplished sister of a talented Scotch baronet recently returned from the East.

Græme and Lily left Worthdown the next morning, and after spending an hour or two at Battedden, and satisfying themselves that everything was in process of rapid completion, proceeded northwards. Leslie met them at Glasgow, and in the course of a few hours they found themselves on the Fairlands jetty, surrounded by all the family, including David and Alice and their children.

It was long since so perfectly happy a group had been assembled round the bright fire, which was welcome in the late September evenings; there was no longer any drawback to their enjoyment; the

sorrows of the past only enhanced the pleasure of the present, as a dark background throws out the brightness of a picture, while before them lay a future full of promise, and in the present or middle distance they enjoyed "the sober certainty of waking bliss."

"And now," said Minnie, as next morning she and Archie strolled along the banks of the loch together, "now you can understand the reason of my satisfaction on hearing that Lady Clara was to be transferred from Worthdown to Glenbrae, and most unconsciously you did 'yeoman's service' in my conspiracy to place the sovereign on her rightful throne."

"So this was my little schemer's plot! and you would not admit me into your secret, though somehow I blundered by a sort of sympathy into accomplishing your wishes."

"I don't give you any credit for that," replied Minnie laughing, "you did just what came in your way, as most others do, without understanding or even guessing that the part had been written for and assigned to you; and, had you refused to undertake it, you would have marred the performance for the time, but some other actor would have adopted the *rôle*; so there is no particular merit due

to you," she continued, looking archly in his face. "And as to admitting you into the secret, it was none of mine, and I had no right to betray it, more especially as since the death of Lady Gordon neither party had taken me into their confidence, so I could only form my own surmises."

"Well, any way I hold such a little *intrigante* far too dangerous a subject to be suffered to go at large; so, if she will not surrender on my repeated summonses, I shall appeal to Gordon, and request his authority may be exerted to enable me to transport, and place her 'in durance vile' at Battesden, which is quite ready for the reception of the fair prisoner."

They stood upon the shore, his arm encircling her waist, and her head resting on his shoulder; she hid her blushing face on it, as she replied,

"There is no need of authority, dear Archie; when Leslie can persuade Lily to give up her liberty, I am willing to surrender at discretion. It shall be a double marriage on the same day, and, when Leslie has handed me over to you, papa shall reward him by the gift of dearest Lily."

A fond embrace, and many murmured words of love and happiness, expressed Archie's thanks for

this concession, and slowly they walked back again to the house.

No great difficulty arose in the arrangement of a matter which contained so little pretext for delay. Lawyers and *couturières* were induced to work with equal rapidity, and about six weeks after the above conversation another paragraph appeared in the columns of the *Morning Post*, announcing the marriages of—

“Archibald Græme, Esq. of Battersden, Notts. M.P., only son of Capt. Græme, R.N. of Fairlands, in the co. of Ayr, to Marion, only daughter of the late Eric Leslie Gray, Esq. H.E.I.C.S. Colonel of the —th Bengal N.I., and sister of Sir Leslie Gray Gordon, Bart. M.P.; and immediately afterwards, Sir Leslie Gray Gordon, Bart. of Duncairn and Boortree Glen, N.B. M.P. for the co. of Inverness, to Liliass, younger daughter of Capt. Græme, R.N. of Fairlands, Ayrshire, N.B.”

CHAPTER LII.

The book is completed,
And closed, like the day ;
And the hand that has written it
Lays it away.

Dim grow its fancies ;
Forgotten they lie ;
Like coals in the ashes,
They darken and die.

Song sinks into silence,
The story is told,
The windows are darkened,
The hearthstone is cold.

LONGFELLOW.

SOME two or three years had passed since the double announcement recorded in the last chapter. It was a bright morning in the early part of the month of July, and Minnie stood at the open window of the breakfast-room at Battesden. Breakfast was over, and the freshness of the early morning was giving way to the influence of the sun's rays. The gay terrace garden into which Minnie looked was redolent of sweets, and a rich perfume streamed out through the open doors and windows of the conser-

vatory which formed the connection between the breakfast and drawing rooms. The gentle plash and gurgle of the fountain in the middle of the *parterre* gave a sensation of coolness and refreshment to all around. Gamboling among the flower-beds was a little boy of about eighteen months old, while a little girl, still an infant, was carried in the arms of her nurse; the mother stood gazing on them with looks of fond delight, and Helen and Mary Baillie were chasing the little boy, and apparently enjoying the sport as much as did the child himself.

Presently an arm was passed gently round Minnie's waist, and looking up she met the loving eyes of her husband, as smiling down upon her he imprinted a fervent kiss upon her lips.

"Thinking of the brilliant season in town, Minnie love, and regretting

Those scenes so gay,

Where thou wert fairest of the fair?"

"No, indeed," she replied, "far otherwise. The balls and operas—aye, and the admiration too," she added with an arch smile, looking into his eyes, and laying her clasped hands upon his shoulder, "were very charming in their way, and no one could enjoy

them all more than I did—the more so as there were no fears or drawbacks to my happiness and thirst of admiration; I was always sure of all that I ever coveted—that of my own dear husband.”

“You vain thing!” once more kissing her parted lips, “is it likely, think you, that I should look twice at this white, saucy face, when there were beauties so much more brilliant all round me?”

“Perhaps not likely—but simply undeniable; yet, for all that, there is nothing like the country, and all these home delights—seeing those dear children able to enjoy pure air, dear Sherwood so healthy and happy—and being surrounded with so much love and happiness. I almost grudge the promise we made Lily to be at Duncairn for the 12th of August, much as I long to see her in her own home; and our dear parents, and Alice and David, and all the wee bairns, Gordons and Murdochs, not forgetting the Lennoxes and old Fairburn; and, though last, not least—the sea, my glorious old friend, with whom I have held so many communings, sweet and sad, and who was always ready to meet me in all my various moods?”

“And to whom I owe my little wife, and all my own happiness,” interrupted Archie, pressing her closer to him.

“Yes,” she replied thoughtfully, “we have both much to thank the sea for; and yet in times long past, but never to be forgotten, there have been moments when I was tempted to wish the waves had been less merciful to me; they were bitter, bitter days and years of struggling and fear, and sometimes despair; I used to try to ‘commit my way unto the Lord and trust in Him,’ and, though it was often hard to do, the struggle was not wholly in vain, and now ‘He has indeed brought it to pass and given me my heart’s desire.’”

Another fond kiss stopped the speaker’s utterance.

“You have been a blessing to us all hitherto, my star of the sea, and at the darkest I never could be otherwise than thankful to the Providence, which not only saved you from the wreck, but guided you to our home; I always felt ’t was

better to have lov’d and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

May we be spared to each other for many a year yet, till these young, graceful things before us have learned to tread in their mother’s steps: but I had almost forgotten our old friend Wentworth,” he continued, giving her a letter, “who pays his tribute too, to the success of your training: he

writes that he is coming down this afternoon for the express purpose of asking the fair Helen to be more compassionate than Lily was : he seems hopeful of success ; what do you think of his chance ? ”

“ I think that Helen is by no means indifferent to him, and rejoice at the prospect for both of them. He is a high-principled, high-hearted man, and a charming companion now that he has shaken off so much of that shyness and awkwardness which used to make dear Lily laugh so mercilessly. By-the-bye, what an exquisite fairy Lily has become, now that she has added that touch of matronly dignity and thought to her graceful *insouciance*, and how proud Leslie was of her in town,—his *Belladonna*, as he calls her. Poor fellow ! it is so delightful to see him so thoroughly happy after all he has undergone ; and she enters into all his schemes so delightfully, and meets his wishes in every way so charmingly ! We used to have long talks together often, about Duncairn, and Strathmaer, and all the people there ; I am sure old Fairburn must doat upon her ; and then the Lennoxes are such excellent neighbours. Those are two noble boys of hers, and she is as vain as a peacock of them, though she did pretend to say she envied me my little Alice.”

“ Yes, when they came here the year before last,

on their way from the Continent, she had scarcely seen Duncairn, and then our being abroad all last year prevented our going to Duncairn," said Archie. "Gordon says I have been leading such a lazy life at Battesden, that I shall never be able to go through a day's grouching on the moors: do you remember David challenging me to a mountain walk at Fairlands, Minnie, and the result of that walk?"

"Well do I remember it! what a brace of simpletons we were that day, misunderstanding and making each other miserable! But it is all past away, and the sunshine is all the brighter for having been for awhile obscured: and that reminds me that the sun is getting too hot now for that merry little urchin to be out there, so I must go and call him in."

"And then you must get your hat and give yourself up to me for a time," replied Archie, as she stepped out into the garden, "I want to consult you about those almshouses you planned for what you call Waif-land; the pony-chair is at the door, and I am going to take you a long round, so you must ask Helen and Mary to amuse themselves without you this morning; you know the time is short before we go to Duncairn."

“ Ah, yes ! hardly one little month, and so much to look after and enjoy in that space ; and then the delight of a month or two at Duncairn, and Fairlands, and Glenrowan, and home to dear Battesden for Christmas ! it seems as if too much happiness had fallen to my share.”

“ All those around us, to whose happiness you so largely contribute, are unceasing in their prayers for a continuance and even increase of your own, my precious Ocean Waif ; and no one prays for this more earnestly than your husband, for no one so well knows the worth of the gem he possesses.”

“ Hush, dearest,” she exclaimed, as she placed her hand over his lips, “ such praise is not for me or for any mortal ; you will find many a flaw, believe me, in this gem, if you do but hold it up to the light, the true light I mean ; so let us try to walk in that light, and help each other : and beware how you praise me or you will make me a conceited prig : you don’t know the value I set upon it. So now I will just send these little people in, and speak to Helen and Mary, and then I am at your disposal for the rest of the day, which promises to be a day of happiness to me at least.”

* * * * *

There is no need to trace farther the lives of
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those whose history has occupied these pages. We will leave them here, trusting that that happiness here and hereafter, which is the result of

Tasks well performed and duties nobly done,

will be the lot of all those who, like Minnie Gray, in all their trials, whether of sorrow or of joy, "COMMIT THEIR WAY UNTO THE LORD, AND TRUST IN HIM."

THE END.

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