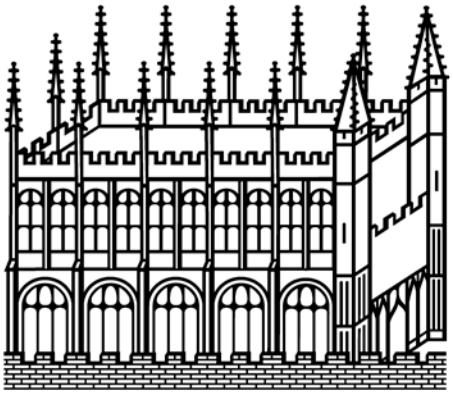

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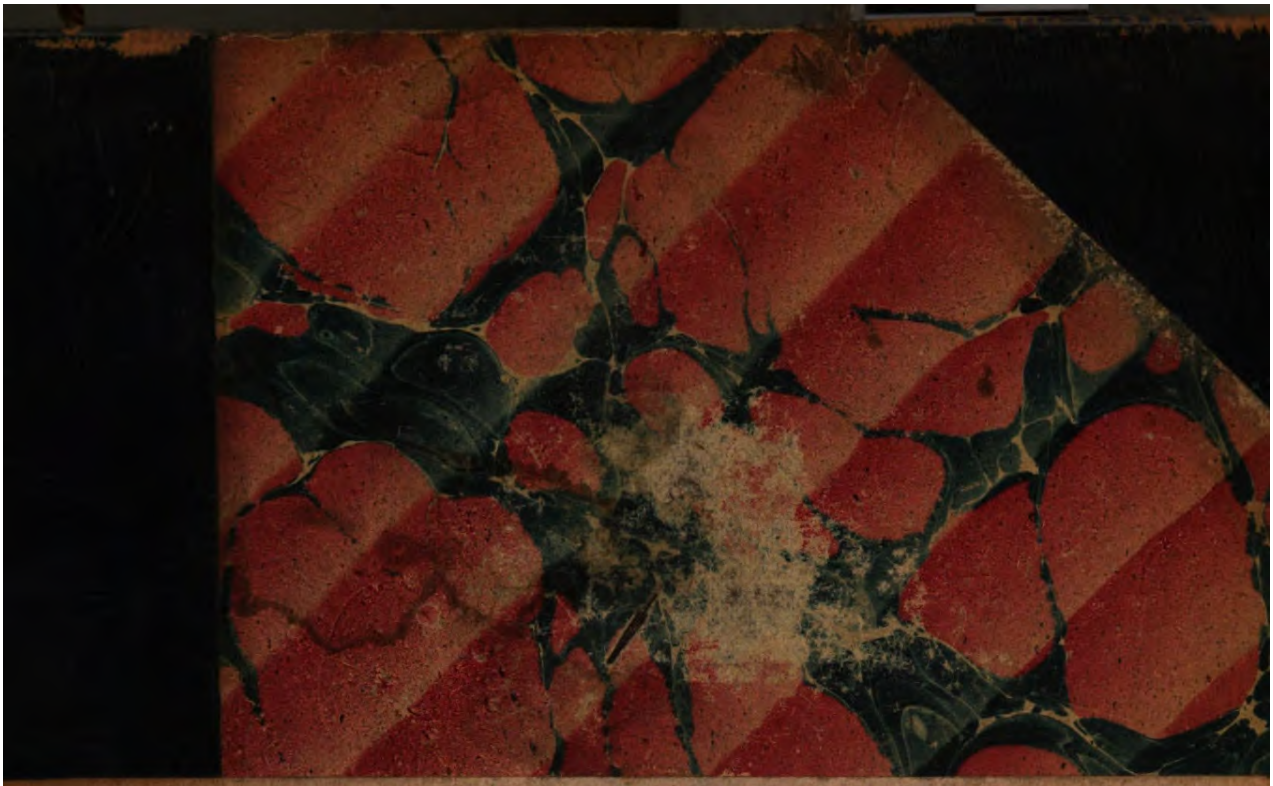

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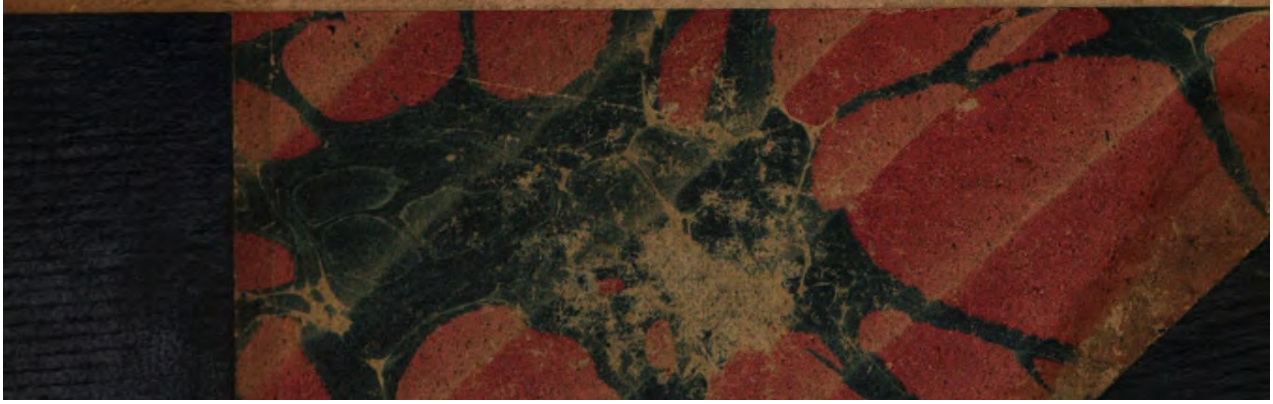

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THE

MILL ON THE FLOSS

BY

GEORGE ELIOT

AUTHOR OF

"SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE" AND "ADAM BEDE"

"In their death they were not divided."

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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BOOK SIXTH

THE GREAT TEMPTATION

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS.

CHAPTER I.

A DUET IN PARADISE.

THE well-furnished drawing-room, with the open grand piano, and the pleasant outlook down a sloping garden to a boat-house by the side of the Floss, is Mr Deane's. The neat little lady in mourning, whose light-brown ringlets are falling over the coloured embroidery with which her fingers are busy, is of course Lucy Deane; and the fine young man who is leaning down from his chair to snap the scissors in the extremely abbreviated face of the "King Charles" lying on the young lady's feet, is no other than Mr Stephen Guest, whose diamond ring, attar of roses, and air of nonchalant leisure, at twelve o'clock in the day, are the grace-

ful and odoriferous result of the largest oil-mill and the most extensive wharf in St Ogg's. There is an apparent triviality in the action with the scissors, but your discernment perceives at once that there is a design in it which makes it eminently worthy of a large-headed, long-limbed young man; for you see that Lucy wants the scissors, and is compelled, reluctant as she may be, to shake her ringlets back, raise her soft hazel eyes, smile playfully down on the face that is so very nearly on a level with her knee, and holding out her little shell-pink palm, to say—

"My scissors, please, if you can renounce the great pleasure of persecuting my poor Minny."

The foolish scissors have slipped too far over the knuckles, it seems, and Hercules holds out his entrapped fingers hopelessly.

"Confound the scissors! The oval lies the wrong way. Please, draw them off for me."

"Draw them off with your other hand," says Miss Lucy, roguishly.

"O, but that's my left hand: I'm not left-handed." Lucy laughs, and the scissors are drawn off with gentle touches from tiny tips, which naturally dispose Mr Stephen for a repetition *da capo*. Accordingly, he watches for the release of the scissors, that he may get them into his possession again.

"No, no," said Lucy, sticking them in her band, "you shall not have my scissors again—you have strained them already. Now don't set Minny growling again. Sit up and behave properly, and then I will tell you some news."

"What is that?" said Stephen, throwing himself back and hanging his right arm over the corner of his chair. He might have been sitting for his portrait, which would have represented a rather striking young man of five-and-twenty, with a square forehead, short dark-brown hair standing erect, with a slight wave at the end, like a thick crop of corn, and a half-ardent, half-sarcastic glance from under his well-marked horizontal eyebrows. "Is it very important news?"

"Yes—very. Guess."

"You are going to change Minny's diet, and give him three ratafias soaked in a dessert-spoonful of cream daily."

"Quite wrong."

"Well, then, Dr Kenn has been preaching against buckram, and you ladies have all been sending him a round-robin, saying—'This is a hard doctrine; who can bear it?'"

"For shame!" said Lucy, adjusting her little mouth gravely. "It is rather dull of you not to

guess my news, because it is about something I mentioned to you not very long ago."

"But you have mentioned many things to me not long ago. Does your feminine tyranny require that when you say the thing you mean is one of several things, I should know it immediately by that mark?"

"Yes, I know you think I am silly."

"I think you are perfectly charming."

"And my silliness is part of my charm?"

"I didn't say *that*."

"But I know you like women to be rather insipid. Philip Wakem betrayed you: he said so one day when you were not here."

"O, I know Phil is fierce on that point; he makes it quite a personal matter. I think he must be love-sick for some unknown lady—some exalted Beatrice whom he met abroad."

"By the by!" said Lucy, pausing in her work, "it has just occurred to me that I have never found out whether my cousin Maggie will object to see Philip, as her brother does. Tom will not enter a room where Philip is, if he knows it: perhaps Maggie may be the same, and then we shan't be able to sing our glees—shall we?"

"What! is your cousin coming to stay with

you?" said Stephen, with a look of slight annoyance.

"Yes; that was my news, which you have forgotten. She's going to leave her situation, where she has been nearly two years, poor thing—ever since her father's death; and she will stay with me a month or two—many months, I hope."

"And am I bound to be pleased at that news?"

"O no, not at all," said Lucy, with a little air of pique. "*I* am pleased, but that, of course, is no reason why *you* should be pleased. There is no girl in the world I love so well as my cousin Maggie."

"And you will be inseparable, I suppose, when she comes. There will be no possibility of a *tête-à-tête* with you any more, unless you can find an admirer for her, who will pair off with her occasionally. What is the ground of dislike to Philip? He might have been a resource."

"It is a family quarrel with Philip's father. There were very painful circumstances, I believe. I never quite understood them, or knew them all. My uncle Tulliver was unfortunate and lost all his property, and I think he considered Mr Wakem was somehow the cause of it. Mr Wakem bought Dorlcote Mill, my uncle's old place, where he always

lived. You must remember my uncle Tulliver, don't you?"

"No," said Stephen, with rather supercilious indifference. "I've always known the name, and I daresay I knew the man by sight, apart from his name. I know half the names and faces in the neighbourhood in that detached, disjointed way."

"He was a very hot-tempered man. I remember, when I was a little girl, and used to go to see my cousins, he often frightened me by talking as if he were angry. Papa told me there was a dreadful quarrel, the very day before my uncle's death, between him and Mr Wakem, but it was hushed up. That was when you were in London. Papa says my uncle was quite mistaken in many ways: his mind had become embittered. But Tom and Maggie must naturally feel it very painful to be reminded of these things. They have had so much — so very much trouble. Maggie was at school with me six years ago, when she was fetched away because of her father's misfortunes, and she has hardly had any pleasure since, I think. She has been in a dreary situation in a school since uncle's death, because she is determined to be independent, and not live with aunt Pullet; and I could hardly wish her to come to me then, because dear mamma was

ill, and everything was so sad. That is why I want her to come to me now, and have a long, long holiday."

"Very sweet and angelic of you," said Stephen, looking at her with an admiring smile; "and all the more so if she has the conversational qualities of her mother."

"Poor aunty! You are cruel to ridicule her. She is very valuable to *me*, I know. She manages the house beautifully—much better than any stranger would — and she was a great comfort to me in mamma's illness."

"Yes, but in point of companionship, one would prefer that she should be represented by her brandy-cherries and cream-cakes. I think with a shudder that her daughter will always be present in person, and have no agreeable proxies of that kind—a fat, blonde girl, with round blue eyes, who will stare at us silently."

"O yes!" exclaimed Lucy, laughing wickedly and clapping her hands, "that is just my cousin Maggie. You must have seen her!"

"No, indeed: I'm only guessing what Mrs Tulliver's daughter must be; and then, if she is to banish Philip, our only apology for a tenor, that will be an additional bore."

"But I hope that may not be. I think I will ask you to call on Philip and tell him Maggie is coming to-morrow. He is quite aware of Tom's feeling, and always keeps out of his way; so he will understand, if you tell him, that I asked you to warn him not to come until I write to ask him."

"I think you had better write a pretty note for me to take: Phil is so sensitive, you know, the least thing might frighten him off coming at all, and we had hard work to get him. I can never induce him to come to the Park: he doesn't like my sisters, I think. It is only your faëry touch that can lay his ruffled feathers."

Stephen mastered the little hand that was straying towards the table, and touched it lightly with his lips. Little Lucy felt very proud and happy. She and Stephen were in that stage of courtship which makes the most exquisite moment of youth, the freshest blossom-time of passion—when each is sure of the other's love, but no formal declaration has been made, and all is mutual divination, exalting the most trivial word, the lightest gesture, into thrills delicate and delicious as wafted jasmine scent. The explicitness of an engagement wears off this finest edge of susceptibility: it is jasmine gathered and presented in a large bouquet.

"But it is really odd that you should have hit so exactly on Maggie's appearance and manners," said the cunning Lucy, moving to reach her desk, "because she might have been like her brother, you know; and Tom has not round eyes; and he is as far as possible from staring at people."

"O, I suppose he is like the father: he seems to be as proud as Lucifer. Not a brilliant companion, though, I should think."

"I like Tom. He gave me my Minny when I lost Lolo; and papa is very fond of him: he says Tom has excellent principles. It was through him that his father was able to pay all his debts before he died."

"Oh, ah; I've heard about that. I heard your father and mine talking about it a little while ago, after dinner, in one of their interminable discussions about business. They think of doing something for young Tulliver: he saved them from a considerable loss by riding home in some marvellous way, like Turpin, to bring them news about the stoppage of a bank, or something of that sort. But I was rather drowsy at the time."

Stephen rose from his seat, and sauntered to the piano, humming in falsetto, "Graceful Consort," as he turned over the volume of "The Creation," which stood open on the desk.

"Come and sing this," he said, when he saw Lucy rising.

"What! 'Graceful Consort?' I don't think it suits your voice."

"Never mind; it exactly suits my feeling, which, Philip will have it, is the grand element of good singing. I notice men with indifferent voices are usually of that opinion."

"Philip burst into one of his invectives against 'The Creation' the other day," said Lucy, seating herself at the piano. "He says it has a sort of sugared complacency and flattering make-believe in it, as if it were written for the birthday fête of a German Grand-Duke."

"O pooh! He is the fallen Adam with a soured temper. We are Adam and Eve unfallen, in paradise. Now, then—the recitative, for the sake of the moral. You will sing the whole duty of woman — 'And from obedience grows my pride and happiness.'"

"O no, I shall not respect an Adam who drags the *tempo*, as you will," said Lucy, beginning to play the duet.

Surely the only courtship unshaken by doubts and fears, must be that in which the lovers can sing together. The sense of mutual fitness that springs

from the two deep notes fulfilling expectation just at the right moment between the notes of the silvery soprano, from the perfect accord of descending thirds and fifths, from the preconcerted loving chase of a fugue, is likely enough to supersede any immediate demand for less impassioned forms of agreement. The contralto will not care to catechise the bass; the tenor will foresee no embarrassing dearth of remark in evenings spent with the lovely soprano. In the provinces, too, where music was so scarce in that remote time, how could the musical people avoid falling in love with each other? Even political principle must have been in danger of relaxation under such circumstances; and a violin, faithful to rotten boroughs, must have been tempted to fraternise in a demoralising way with a reforming violoncello. In this case, the linnet-throated soprano, and the full-toned bass, singing,

> "With thee delight is ever new,
> With thee is life incessant bliss,"

believed what they sang all the more *because* they sang it.

"Now for Raphael's great song," said Lucy, when they had finished the duet. "You do the 'heavy beasts' to perfection."

"That sounds complimentary," said Stephen,

looking at his watch. "By Jove, it's nearly half-past one. Well, I can just sing this."

Stephen delivered with admirable ease the deep notes representing the tread of the heavy beasts: but when a singer has an audience of two, there is room for divided sentiments. Minny's mistress was charmed; but Minny, who had intrenched himself, trembling, in his basket as soon as the music began, found this thunder so little to his taste that he leaped out and scampered under the remotest *chiffonière*, as the most eligible place in which a small dog could await the crack of doom.

"Adieu, 'graceful consort,'" said Stephen, buttoning his coat across when he had done singing, and smiling down from his tall height, with the air of rather a patronising lover, at the little lady on the music-stool. "My bliss is not incessant, for I must gallop home. I promised to be there at lunch."

"You will not be able to call on Philip, then? It is of no consequence: I have said everything in my note."

"You will be engaged with your cousin to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Yes, we are going to have a little family-party. My cousin Tom will dine with us; and poor aunty will have her two children together for the first

time. It will be very pretty; I think a great deal about it."

"But I may come the next day?"

"O yes! Come and be introduced to my cousin Maggie—though you can hardly be said not to have seen her, you have described her so well."

"Good-by, then." And there was that slight pressure of the hands, and momentary meeting of the eyes, which will often leave a little lady with a slight flush and smile on her face that do not subside immediately when the door is closed, and with an inclination to walk up and down the room rather than to seat herself quietly at her embroidery, or other rational and improving occupation. At least this was the effect on Lucy; and you will not, I hope, consider it an indication of vanity predominating over more tender impulses, that she just glanced in the chimney-glass as her walk brought her near it. The desire to know that one has not looked an absolute fright during a few hours of conversation, may be construed as lying within the bounds of a laudable benevolent consideration for others. And Lucy had so much of this benevolence in her nature that I am inclined to think her small egoisms were impregnated with it, just as there are people not altogether unknown to you, whose small

benevolences have a predominant and somewhat rank odour of egoism. Even now, that she is walking up and down with a little triumphant flutter of her girlish heart at the sense that she is loved by the person of chief consequence in her small world, you may see in her hazel eyes an ever-present sunny benignity, in which the momentary harmless flashes of personal vanity are quite lost; and if she is happy in thinking of her lover, it is because the thought of him mingles readily with all the gentle affections and good-natured offices with which she fills her peaceful days. Even now, her mind, with that instantaneous alternation which makes two currents of feeling or imagination seem simultaneous, is glancing continually from Stephen to the preparations she has only half finished in Maggie's room. Cousin Maggie should be treated as well as the grandest lady visitor—nay, better, for she should have Lucy's best prints and drawings in her bedroom, and the very finest bouquet of spring flowers on her table. Maggie would enjoy all that—she was so fond of pretty things! And there was poor aunt Tulliver, that no one made any account of —she was to be surprised with the present of a cap of superlative quality, and to have her health drunk in a gratifying manner, for which Lucy was going

to lay a plot with her father this evening. Clearly, she had not time to indulge in long reveries about her own happy love-affairs. With this thought she walked towards the door, but paused there.

"What's the matter, then, Minny?" she said, stooping in answer to some whimpering of that small quadruped, and lifting his glossy head against her pink cheek. "Did you think I was going without you? Come, then, let us go and see Sindbad."

Sindbad was Lucy's chestnut horse, that she always fed with her own hand when he was turned out in the paddock. She was fond of feeding dependent creatures, and knew the private tastes of all the animals about the house, delighting in the little rippling sounds of her canaries when their beaks were busy with fresh seed, and in the small nibbling pleasures of certain animals which, lest she should appear too trivial, I will here call "the more familiar rodents."

Was not Stephen Guest right in his decided opinion that this slim maiden of eighteen was quite the sort of wife a man would not be likely to repent of marrying?—a woman who was loving and thoughtful for other women, not giving them Judas-kisses with eyes askance on their welcome defects, but with real care and vision for their half-hidden

pains and mortifications, with long ruminating enjoyment of little pleasures prepared for them? Perhaps the emphasis of his admiration did not fall precisely on this rarest quality in her—perhaps he approved his own choice of her chiefly because she did not strike him as a remarkable rarity. A man likes his wife to be pretty: well, Lucy was pretty, but not to a maddening extent. A man likes his wife to be accomplished, gentle, affectionate, and not stupid; and Lucy had all these qualifications. Stephen was not surprised to find himself in love with her, and was conscious of excellent judgment in preferring her to Miss Leyburn, the daughter of the county member, although Lucy was only the daughter of his father's subordinate partner; besides, he had had to defy and overcome a slight unwillingness and disappointment in his father and sisters—a circumstance which gives a young man an agreeable consciousness of his own dignity. Stephen was aware that he had sense and independence enough to choose the wife who was likely to make him happy, unbiassed by any indirect considerations. He meant to choose Lucy: she was a little darling, and exactly the sort of woman he had always most admired.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

"HE is very clever, Maggie," said Lucy. She was kneeling on a footstool at Maggie's feet, after placing that dark lady in the large crimson-velvet chair. "I feel sure you will like him. I hope you will."

"I shall be very difficult to please," said Maggie, smiling, and holding up one of Lucy's long curls, that the sunlight might shine through it. "A gentleman who thinks he is good enough for Lucy must expect to be sharply criticised."

"Indeed, he's a great deal too good for me. And sometimes, when he is away, I almost think it can't really be that he loves me. But I can never doubt it when he is with me—though I couldn't bear any one but you to know that I feel in that way, Maggie."

"Oh, then, if I disapprove of him, you can

give him up, since you are not engaged," said Maggie, with playful gravity.

"I would rather not be engaged. When people are engaged, they begin to think of being married soon," said Lucy, too thoroughly preoccupied to notice Maggie's joke; "and I should like everything to go on for a long while just as it is. Sometimes I am quite frightened lest Stephen should say that he has spoken to papa; and from something that fell from papa the other day, I feel sure he and Mr Guest are expecting that. And Stephen's sisters are very civil to me now. At first, I think they didn't like his paying me attention; and that was natural. It *does* seem out of keeping that I should ever live in a great place like the Park House—such a little, insignificant thing as I am."

"But people are not expected to be large in proportion to the houses they live in, like snails," said Maggie, laughing. "Pray, are Mr Guest's sisters giantesses?"

"O no; and not handsome—that is, not very," said Lucy, half-penitent at this uncharitable remark. "But *he* is—at least he is generally considered very handsome."

"Though you are unable to share that opinion?"

"O, I don't know," said Lucy, blushing pink over brow and neck. "It is a bad plan to raise expectation; you will perhaps be disappointed. But I have prepared a charming surprise for *him;* I shall have a glorious laugh against him. I shall not tell you what it is, though."

Lucy rose from her knees and went to a little distance, holding her pretty head on one side, as if she had been arranging Maggie for a portrait, and wished to judge of the general effect.

"Stand up a moment, Maggie."

"What is your pleasure now?" said Maggie, smiling languidly as she rose from her chair and looked down on her slight, aërial cousin, whose figure was quite subordinate to her faultless drapery of silk and crape.

Lucy kept her contemplative attitude a moment or two in silence, and then said—

"I can't think what witchery it is in you, Maggie, that makes you look best in shabby clothes; though you really must have a new dress now. But do you know, last night I was trying to fancy you in a handsome fashionable dress, and do what I would, that old limp merino would come back as the only right thing for you. I wonder if Marie Antoinette looked all the

grander when her gown was darned at the elbows. Now, if *I* were to put anything shabby on, I should be quite unnoticeable—I should be a mere rag."

"O, quite," said Maggie, with mock gravity. "You would be liable to be swept out of the room with the cobwebs and carpet-dust, and to find yourself under the grate, like Cinderella. Mayn't I sit down now?"

"Yes, now you may," said Lucy, laughing. Then, with an air of serious reflection, unfastening her large jet brooch, "But you must change brooches, Maggie; that little butterfly looks silly on you."

"But won't that mar the charming effect of my consistent shabbiness?" said Maggie, seating herself submissively, while Lucy knelt again and unfastened the contemptible butterfly. "I wish my mother were of your opinion, for she was fretting last night because this is my best frock. I've been saving my money to pay for some lessons: I shall never get a better situation without more accomplishments."

Maggie gave a little sigh.

"Now, don't put on that sad look again," said Lucy, pinning the large brooch below Maggie's fine throat. "You're forgetting that you've left

that dreary schoolroom behind you, and have no little girls' clothes to mend."

"Yes," said Maggie. "It is with me as I used to think it would be with the poor uneasy white bear I saw at the show. I thought he must have got so stupid with the habit of turning backwards and forwards in that narrow space, that he would keep doing it if they set him free. One gets a bad habit of being unhappy."

"But I shall put you under a discipline of pleasure that will make you lose that bad habit," said Lucy, sticking the black butterfly absently in her own collar, while her eyes met Maggie's affectionately.

"You dear, tiny thing," said Maggie, in one of her bursts of loving admiration, "you enjoy other people's happiness so much, I believe you would do without any of your own. I wish I were like you."

"I've never been tried in that way," said Lucy. "I've always been so happy. I don't know whether I could bear much trouble; I never had any but poor mamma's death. You *have* been tried, Maggie; and I'm sure you feel for other people quite as much as I do."

"No, Lucy," said Maggie, shaking her head slowly,

"I don't enjoy their happiness as you do—else I should be more contented. I do feel for them when they are in trouble; I don't think I could ever bear to make any one *un*happy; and yet I often hate myself, because I get angry sometimes at the sight of happy people. I think I get worse as I get older —more selfish. That seems very dreadful."

"Now, Maggie!" said Lucy, in a tone of remonstrance, "I don't believe a word of that. It is all a gloomy fancy—just because you are depressed by a dull, wearisome life."

"Well, perhaps it is," said Maggie, resolutely clearing away the clouds from her face with a bright smile, and throwing herself backward in her chair. "Perhaps it comes from the school diet—watery rice-pudding spiced with Pinnock. Let us hope it will give way before my mother's custards and this charming Geoffrey Crayon."

Maggie took up the "Sketch Book," which lay by her on the table.

"Do I look fit to be seen with this little brooch?" said Lucy, going to survey the effect in the chimney-glass.

"O no, Mr Guest will be obliged to go out of the room again if he sees you in it. Pray make haste and put another on."

Lucy hurried out of the room, but Maggie did not take the opportunity of opening her book: she let it fall on her knees, while her eyes wandered to the window, where she could see the sunshine falling on the rich clumps of spring flowers and on the long hedge of laurels—and beyond, the silvery breadth of the dear old Floss, that at this distance seemed to be sleeping in a morning holiday. The sweet fresh garden scent came through the open window, and the birds were busy flitting and alighting, gurgling and singing. Yet Maggie's eyes began to fill with tears. The sight of the old scenes had made the rush of memories so painful, that even yesterday she had only been able to rejoice in her mother's restored comfort and Tom's brotherly friendliness as we rejoice in good news of friends at a distance, rather than in the presence of a happiness which we share. Memory and imagination urged upon her a sense of privation too keen to let her taste what was offered in the transient present: her future, she thought, was likely to be worse than her past, for after her years of contented renunciation, she had slipped back into desire and longing: she found joyless days of distasteful occupation harder and harder —she found the image of the intense and varied life she yearned for, and despaired of, becoming more

and more importunate. The sound of the opening door roused her, and, hastily wiping away her tears, she began to turn over the leaves of her book.

"There is one pleasure, I know, Maggie, that your deepest dismalness will never resist," said Lucy, beginning to speak as soon as she entered the room. "That is music, and I mean you to have quite a riotous feast of it. I mean you to get up your playing again, which used to be so much better than mine, when we were at Laceham."

"You would have laughed to see me playing the little girls' tunes over and over to them, when I took them to practice," said Maggie, "just for the sake of fingering the dear keys again. But I don't know whether I could play anything more difficult now than 'Begone, dull care!'"

"I know what a wild state of joy you used to be in when the glee-men came round," said Lucy, taking up her embroidery, "and we might have all those old glees that you used to love so, if I were certain that you don't feel exactly as Tom does about some things."

"I should have thought there was nothing you might be more certain of," said Maggie, smiling.

"I ought rather to have said, one particular thing. Because if you feel just as he does about

that, we shall want our third voice. St Ogg's is so miserably provided with musical gentlemen. There are really only Stephen and Philip Wakem who have any knowledge of music, so as to be able to sing a part."

Lucy had looked up from her work as she uttered the last sentence, and saw that there was a change in Maggie's face.

"Does it hurt you to hear the name mentioned, Maggie? If it does, I will not speak of him again. I know Tom will not see him if he can avoid it."

"I don't feel at all as Tom does on that subject," said Maggie, rising and going to the window as if she wanted to see more of the landscape. "I've always liked Philip Wakem ever since I was a little girl, and saw him at Lorton. He was so good when Tom hurt his foot."

"O, I'm so glad!" said Lucy. "Then you won't mind his coming sometimes, and we can have much more music than we could without him. I'm very fond of poor Philip, only I wish he were not so morbid about his deformity. I suppose it *is* his deformity that makes him so sad—and sometimes bitter. It is certainly very piteous to see his poor little crooked body and pale face among great strong people."

"But, Lucy," said Maggie, trying to arrest the prattling stream . . . .

"Ah, there is the door bell. That must be Stephen," Lucy went on, not noticing Maggie's faint effort to speak. "One of the things I most admire in Stephen is, that he makes a greater friend of Philip than any one."

It was too late for Maggie to speak now: the drawing-room door was opening, and Minny was already growling in a small way at the entrance of a tall gentleman, who went up to Lucy and took her hand with a half-polite, half-tender glance and tone of inquiry, which seemed to indicate that he was unconscious of any other presence.

"Let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss Tulliver," said Lucy, turning with wicked enjoyment towards Maggie, who now approached from the farther window. "This is Mr Stephen Guest."

For one instant Stephen could not conceal his astonishment at the sight of this tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair; the next, Maggie felt herself, for the first time in her life, receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person towards whom she herself was conscious of timidity. This new experience was very agreeable to her—so agreeable, that it almost

effaced her previous emotion about Philip. There was a new brightness in her eyes, and a very becoming flush on her cheek, as she seated herself.

"I hope you perceive what a striking likeness you drew the day before yesterday," said Lucy, with a pretty laugh of triumph. She enjoyed her lover's confusion—the advantage was usually on his side.

"This designing cousin of yours quite deceived me, Miss Tulliver," said Stephen, seating himself by Lucy, and stooping to play with Minny—only looking at Maggie furtively. "She said you had light hair and blue eyes."

"Nay, it was you who said so," remonstrated Lucy. "I only refrained from destroying your confidence in your own second-sight."

"I wish I could always err in the same way," said Stephen, "and find reality so much more beautiful than my preconceptions."

"Now you have proved yourself equal to the occasion," said Maggie, "and said what it was incumbent on you to say under the circumstances."

She flashed a slightly defiant look at him: it was clear to her that he had been drawing a satirical portrait of her beforehand. Lucy had said he was inclined to be satirical, and Maggie had men-

tally supplied the addition — "and rather conceited."

"An alarming amount of devil there," was Stephen's first thought. The second, when she had bent over her work, was, "I wish she would look at me again." The next was, to answer:

"I suppose all phrases of mere compliment have their turn to be true. A man is occasionally grateful when he says 'thank you.' It's rather hard upon him that he must use the same words with which all the world declines a disagreeable invitation—don't you think so, Miss Tulliver?"

"No," said Maggie, looking at him with her direct glance; "if we use common words on a great occasion, they are the more striking, because they are felt at once to have a particular meaning, like old banners, or everyday clothes, hung up in a sacred place."

"Then my compliment ought to be eloquent," said Stephen, really not quite knowing what he said while Maggie looked at him, "seeing that the words were so far beneath the occasion."

"No compliment can be eloquent, except as an expression of indifference," said Maggie, flushing a little.

Lucy was rather alarmed: she thought Stephen

and Maggie were not going to like each other. She had always feared lest Maggie should appear too odd and clever to please that critical gentleman. "Why, dear Maggie," she interposed, "you have always pretended that you are too fond of being admired, and now, I think, you are angry because some one ventures to admire you."

"Not at all," said Maggie; "I like too well to feel that I am admired, but compliments never make me feel that."

"I will never pay you a compliment again, Miss Tulliver," said Stephen.

"Thank you; that will be a proof of respect."

Poor Maggie! She was so unused to society that she could take nothing as a matter of course, and had never in her life spoken from the lips merely, so that she must necessarily appear absurd to more experienced ladies, from the excessive feeling she was apt to throw into very trivial incidents. But she was even conscious herself of a little absurdity in this instance. It was true, she had a theoretic objection to compliments, and had once said impatiently to Philip, that she didn't see why women were to be told with a simper that they were beautiful, any more than old men were to be told that they were venerable: still, to be so irri-

tated by a common practice in the case of a stranger like Mr Stephen Guest, and to care about his having spoken slightingly of her before he had seen her, was certainly unreasonable, and as soon as she was silent she began to be ashamed of herself. It did not occur to her that her irritation was due to the pleasanter emotion which preceded it, just as when we are satisfied with a sense of glowing warmth, an innocent drop of cold water may fall upon us as a sudden smart.

Stephen was too well-bred not to seem unaware that the previous conversation could have been felt embarrassing, and at once began to talk of impersonal matters, asking Lucy if she knew when the bazaar was at length to take place, so that there might be some hope of seeing her rain the influence of her eyes on objects more grateful than those worsted flowers that were growing under her fingers.

"Some day next month, I believe," said Lucy. "But your sisters are doing more for it than I am: they are to have the largest stall."

"Ah, yes; but they carry on their manufactures in their own sitting-room, where I don't intrude on them. I see you are not addicted to the fashion-

able vice of fancy-work, Miss Tulliver," said Stephen, looking at Maggie's plain hemming.

"No," said Maggie, "I can do nothing more difficult or more elegant than shirt-making."

"And your plain sewing is so beautiful, Maggie," said Lucy, "that I think I shall beg a few specimens of you to show as fancy-work. Your exquisite sewing is quite a mystery to me—you used to dislike that sort of work so much in old days."

"It is a mystery easily explained, dear," said Maggie, looking up quietly. "Plain sewing was the only thing I could get money by; so I was obliged to try and do it well."

Lucy, good and simple as she was, could not help blushing a little: she did not quite like that Stephen should know that—Maggie need not have mentioned it. Perhaps there was some pride in the confession: the pride of poverty that will not be ashamed of itself. But if Maggie had been the queen of coquettes she could hardly have invented a means of giving greater piquancy to her beauty in Stephen's eyes: I am not sure that the quiet admission of plain sewing and poverty would have done alone, but assisted by the beauty, they made Maggie more unlike other women even than she had seemed at first.

"But I can knit, Lucy," Maggie went on, "if that will be of any use for your bazaar."

"O yes, of infinite use. I shall set you to work with scarlet wool to-morrow. But your sister is the most enviable person," continued Lucy, turning to Stephen, "to have the talent of modelling. She is doing a wondering bust of Dr Kenn entirely from memory."

"Why, if she can remember to put the eyes very near together, and the corners of the mouth very far apart, the likeness can hardly fail to be striking in St Ogg's."

"Now, that is very wicked of you," said Lucy, looking rather hurt. "I didn't think you would speak disrespectfully of Dr Kenn."

"I say anything disrespectful of Dr Kenn? Heaven forbid! But I am not bound to respect a libellous bust of him. I think Kenn one of the finest fellows in the world. I don't care much about the tall candlesticks he has put on the communion-table, and I shouldn't like to spoil my temper by getting up to early prayers every morning. But he's the only man I ever knew personally who seems to me to have anything of the real apostle in him—a man who has eight hundred a-year, and is contented with deal furniture and boiled beef because he gives away

two-thirds of his income. That was a very fine thing of him—taking into his house that poor lad Grattan who shot his mother by accident. He sacrifices more time than a less busy man could spare, to save the poor fellow from getting into a morbid state of mind about it. He takes the lad out with him constantly, I see."

"That is beautiful," said Maggie, who had let her work fall, and was listening with keen interest. "I never knew any one who did such things."

"And one admires that sort of action in Kenn all the more," said Stephen, "because his manners in general are rather cold and severe. There's nothing sugary and maudlin about him."

"O, I think he's a perfect character!" said Lucy, with pretty enthusiasm.

"No, there I can't agree with you," said Stephen shaking his head with sarcastic gravity.

"Now, what fault can you point out in him?"

"He's an Anglican."

"Well, those are the right views, I think," said Lucy, gravely.

"That settles the question in the abstract," said Stephen, "but not from a parliamentary point of view. He has set the Dissenters and the Church people by the ears; and a rising senator like myself,

of whose services the country is very much in need, will find it inconvenient when he puts up for the honour of representing St Ogg's in parliament."

"Do you really think of that?" said Lucy, her eyes brightening with a proud pleasure that made her neglect the argumentative interests of Anglicanism.

"Decidedly—whenever old Mr Leyburn's public spirit and gout induce him to give way. My father's heart is set on it; and gifts like mine, you know" —here Stephen drew himself up, and rubbed his large white hands over his hair with playful self-admiration—"gifts like mine involve great responsibilities. Don't you think so, Miss Tulliver?"

"Yes," said Maggie, smiling, but not looking up; "so much fluency and self-possession should not be wasted entirely on private occasions."

"Ah, I see how much penetration you have," said Stephen. "You have discovered already that I am talkative and impudent. Now superficial people never discern that—owing to my manner, I suppose."

"She doesn't look at me when I talk of myself," he thought, while his listeners were laughing. "I must try other subjects."

Did Lucy intend to be present at the meeting of the Book Club next week? was the next question.

Then followed the recommendation to choose Southey's "Life of Cowper," unless she were inclined to be philosophical, and startle the ladies of St Ogg's by voting for one of the Bridgewater Treatises. Of course Lucy wished to know what these alarmingly learned books were; and as it is always pleasant to improve the minds of ladies by talking to them at ease on subjects of which they know nothing, Stephen became quite brilliant in an account of Buckland's Treatise, which he had just been reading. He was rewarded by seeing Maggie let her work fall, and gradually get so absorbed in his wonderful geological story that she sat looking at him, leaning forward with crossed arms, and with an entire absence of self-consciousness, as if he had been the snuffiest of old professors, and she a downy-lipped alumnus. He was so fascinated by this clear, large gaze, that at last he forgot to look away from it occasionally towards Lucy; but she, sweet child, was only rejoicing that Stephen was proving to Maggie how clever he was, and that they would certainly be good friends after all.

"I will bring you the book, shall I, Miss Tulliver?" said Stephen, when he found the stream of his recollections running rather shallow. "There

are many illustrations in it that you will like to see."

"O, thank you," said Maggie, blushing with returning self-consciousness at this direct address, and taking up her work again.

"No, no," Lucy interposed. "I must forbid your plunging Maggie in books. I shall never get her away from them; and I want her to have delicious do-nothing days, filled with boating, and chatting, and riding, and driving: that is the holiday she needs."

"Apropos!" said Stephen, looking at his watch. "Shall we go out for a row on the river now? The tide will suit for us to go the Tofton way, and we can walk back."

That was a delightful proposition to Maggie, for it was years since she had been on the river. When she was gone to put on her bonnet, Lucy lingered to give an order to the servant, and took the opportunity of telling Stephen that Maggie had no objection to seeing Philip, so that it was a pity she had sent that note the day before yesterday. But she would write another to-morrow and invite him.

"I'll call and beat him up to-morrow," said Stephen, "and bring him with me in the evening,

shall I? My sisters will want to call on you when I tell them your cousin is with you. I must leave the field clear for them in the morning."

"O yes, pray bring him," said Lucy. "And you *will* like Maggie, shan't you?" she added, in a beseeching tone. "Isn't she a dear, noble-looking creature?"

"Too tall," said Stephen, smiling down upon her, "and a little too fiery. She is not my type of woman, you know."

Gentlemen, you are aware, are apt to impart these imprudent confidences to ladies concerning their unfavourable opinion of sister fair ones. That is why so many women have the advantage of knowing that they are secretly repulsive to men who have self-denyingly made ardent love to them. And hardly anything could be more distinctively characteristic of Lucy, than that she both implicitly believed what Stephen said, and was determined that Maggie should not know it. But you, who have a higher logic than the verbal to guide you, have already foreseen, as the direct sequence to that unfavourable opinion of Stephen's, that he walked down to the boat-house calculating, by the aid of a vivid imagination, that Maggie must give him her hand at least twice in conse-

quence of this pleasant boating plan, and that a gentleman who wishes ladies to look at him is advantageously situated when he is rowing them in a boat. What then? Had he fallen in love with this surprising daughter of Mrs Tulliver at first sight? Certainly not. Such passions are never heard of in real life. Besides, he was in love already, and half-engaged to the dearest little creature in the world; and he was not a man to make a fool of himself in any way. But when one is five-and-twenty, one has not chalk-stones at one's finger-ends that the touch of a handsome girl should be entirely indifferent. It was perfectly natural and safe to admire beauty and enjoy looking at it—at least under such circumstances as the present. And there was really something very interesting about this girl, with her poverty and troubles: it was gratifying to see the friendship between the two cousins. Generally, Stephen admitted, he was not fond of women who had any peculiarity of character—but here the peculiarity seemed really of a superior kind; and provided one is not obliged to marry such women, why, they certainly make a variety in social intercourse.

Maggie did not fulfil Stephen's hope by looking at him during the first quarter of an hour: her

eyes were too full of the old banks that she knew so well. She felt lonely, cut off from Philip—the only person who had ever seemed to love her devotedly, as she had always longed to be loved. But presently the rhythmic movement of the oars attracted her, and she thought she should like to learn how to row. This roused her from her reverie, and she asked if she might take an oar. It appeared that she required much teaching, and she became ambitious. The exercise brought the warm blood into her cheeks, and made her inclined to take her lesson merrily.

"I shall not be satisfied until I can manage both oars, and row you and Lucy," she said, looking very bright as she stepped out of the boat. Maggie, we know, was apt to forget the thing she was doing, and she had chosen an inopportune moment for her remark: her foot slipped, but happily Mr Stephen Guest held her hand, and kept her up with a firm grasp.

"You have not hurt yourself at all, I hope?" he said, bending to look in her face with anxiety. It was very charming to be taken care of in that kind graceful manner by some one taller and stronger than one's-self. Maggie had never felt just in the same way before.

When they reached home again, they found uncle and aunt Pullet seated with Mrs Tulliver in the drawing-room, and Stephen hurried away, asking leave to come again in the evening.

"And pray bring with you the volume of Purcell that you took away," said Lucy. "I want Maggie to hear your best songs."

Aunt Pullet, under the certainty that Maggie would be invited to go out with Lucy, probably to Park House, was much shocked at the shabbiness of her clothes, which, when witnessed by the higher society of St Ogg's, would be a discredit to the family, that demanded a strong and prompt remedy; and the consultation as to what would be most suitable to this end from among the superfluities of Mrs Pullet's wardrobe, was one that Lucy as well as Mrs Tulliver entered into with some zeal. Maggie must really have an evening dress as soon as possible, and she was about the same height as aunt Pullet.

"But she's so much broader across the shoulders than I am—it's very ill-convenient," said Mrs Pullet, "else she might wear that beautiful black brocade o' mine without any alteration; and her arms are beyond everything," added Mrs Pullet, sorrowfully, as she lifted Maggie's large round arm. "She'd never get my sleeves on."

"O, never mind that, aunt: pray send us the dress," said Lucy. "I don't mean Maggie to have long sleeves, and I have abundance of black lace for trimming. Her arms will look beautiful."

"Maggie's arms *are* a pretty shape," said Mrs Tulliver. "They're like mine used to be—only mine was never brown: I wish she'd had *our* family skin."

"Nonsense, aunty!" said Lucy, patting her aunt Tulliver's shoulder, "you don't understand those things. A painter would think Maggie's complexion beautiful."

"May be, my dear," said Mrs Tulliver, submissively. "You know better than I do. Only when I was young a brown skin wasn't thought well on among respectable folks."

"No," said uncle Pullet, who took intense interest in the ladies' conversation, as he sucked his lozenges. "Though there was a song about the 'Nut-brown Maid,' too; I think she was crazy—crazy Kate—but I can't justly remember."

"O dear, dear!" said Maggie, laughing, but impatient; "I think that will be the end of *my* brown skin, if it is always to be talked about so much."

CHAPTER III.

CONFIDENTIAL MOMENTS.

WHEN Maggie went up to her bedroom that night, it appeared that she was not all inclined to undress. She set down her candle on the first table that presented itself, and began to walk up and down her room, which was a large one, with a firm, regular, and rather rapid step, which showed that the exercise was the instinctive vent of strong excitement. Her eyes and cheeks had an almost feverish brilliancy; her head was thrown backward, and her hands were clasped with the palms outward, and with that tension of the arms which is apt to accompany mental absorption.

Had anything remarkable happened?

Nothing that you are not likely to consider in the highest degree unimportant. She had been hearing some fine music sung by a fine bass voice —but then it was sung in a provincial, amateur

fashion, such as would have left your critical ear much to desire. And she was conscious of having been looked at a great deal, in rather a furtive manner, from beneath a pair of well-marked horizontal eyebrows, with a glance that seemed somehow to have caught the vibratory influence of the voice. Such things could have had no perceptible effect on a thoroughly well-educated young lady, with a perfectly balanced mind, who had had all the advantages of fortune, training, and refined society. But if Maggie had been that young lady, you would probably have known nothing about her: her life would have had so few vicissitudes that it could hardly have been written; for the happiest women, like the happiest nations, have no history.

In poor Maggie's highly-strung, hungry nature —just come away from a third-rate schoolroom, with all its jarring sounds and petty round of tasks —these apparently trivial causes had the effect of rousing and exalting her imagination in a way that was mysterious to herself. It was not that she thought distinctly of Mr Stephen Guest, or dwelt on the indications that he looked at her with admiration; it was rather that she felt the half-remote presence of a world of love and beauty and delight, made up of vague, mingled images from all the

poetry and romance she had ever read, or had ever woven in her dreamy reveries. Her mind glanced back once or twice to the time when she had courted privation, when she had thought all longing, all impatience, was subdued; but that condition seemed irrecoverably gone, and she recoiled from the remembrance of it. No prayer, no striving now, would bring back that negative peace: the battle of her life, it seemed, was not to be decided in that short and easy way—by perfect renunciation at the very threshold of her youth. The music was vibrating in her still—Purcell's music, with its wild passion and fancy—and she could not stay in the recollection of that bare, lonely past. She was in her brighter aërial world again, when a little tap came at the door: of course it was her cousin, who entered in ample white dressing-gown.

"Why, Maggie, you naughty child, haven't you begun to undress?" said Lucy, in astonishment. "I promised not to come and talk to you, because I thought you must be tired. But here you are, looking as if you were ready to dress for a ball. Come, come, get on your dressing-gown, and unplait your hair."

"Well, *you* are not very forward," retorted Maggie, hastily reaching her own pink cotton gown, and

looking at Lucy's light-brown hair brushed back in curly disorder.

"O, I have not much to do. I shall sit down and talk to you, till I see you are really on the way to bed."

While Maggie stood and unplaited her long black hair over her pink drapery, Lucy sat down near the toilette-table, watching her with affectionate eyes, and head a little aside, like a pretty spaniel. If it appears to you at all incredible that young ladies should be led on to talk confidentially in a situation of this kind, I will beg you to remember that human life furnishes many exceptional cases.

"You really *have* enjoyed the music to-night, haven't you, Maggie?"

"O yes, that is what prevents me from feeling sleepy. I think I should have no other mortal wants, if I could always have plenty of music. It seems to infuse strength into my limbs and ideas into my brain. Life seems to go on without effort, when I am filled with music. At other times one is conscious of carrying a weight."

"And Stephen has a splendid voice, hasn't he?"

"Well, perhaps we are neither of us judges of that," said Maggie, laughing, as she seated herself

and tossed her long hair back. "You are not impartial, and *I* think any barrel-organ splendid."

"But tell me what you think of him, now. Tell me exactly—good and bad too."

"O, I think you should humiliate him a little. A lover should not be so much at ease, and so self-confident. He ought to tremble more."

"Nonsense, Maggie! As if any one could tremble at me! You think he is conceited—I see that. But you don't dislike him, do you?"

"Dislike him! No. Am I in the habit of seeing such charming people, that I should be very difficult to please? Besides, how could I dislike any one that promised to make you happy, you dear thing!" Maggie pinched Lucy's dimpled chin.

"We shall have more music to-morrow evening," said Lucy, looking happy already, "for Stephen will bring Philip Wakem with him."

"O Lucy, I can't see him," said Maggie, turning pale. "At least, I could not see him without Tom's leave."

"Is Tom such a tyrant as that?" said Lucy, surprised. "I'll take the responsibility, then—tell him it was my fault."

"But, dear," said Maggie, falteringly, "I promised Tom very solemnly—before my father's death—I

promised him I would not speak to Philip without his knowledge and consent. And I have a great dread of opening the subject with Tom—of getting into a quarrel with him again."

"But I never heard of anything so strange and unreasonable. What harm can poor Philip have done? May I speak to Tom about it?"

"O no, pray don't, dear," said Maggie. "I'll go to him myself to-morrow, and tell him that you wish Philip to come. I've thought before of asking him to absolve me from my promise, but I've not had the courage to determine on it."

They were both silent for some moments, and then Lucy said—

"Maggie, you have secrets from me, and I have none from you."

Maggie looked meditatively away from Lucy. Then she turned to her and said, "I *should* like to tell you about Philip. But, Lucy, you must not betray that you know it to any one—least of all to Philip himself, or to Mr Stephen Guest."

The narrative lasted long, for Maggie had never before known the relief of such an outpouring: she had never before told Lucy anything of her inmost life; and the sweet face bent towards her with sympathetic interest, and the little hand pressing hers.

encouraged her to speak on. On two points only she was not expansive. She did not betray fully what still rankled in her mind as Tom's great offence—the insults he had heaped on Philip. Angry as the remembrance still made her, she could not bear that any one else should know it all—both for Tom's sake and Philip's. And she could not bear to tell Lucy of the last scene between her father and Wakem, though it was this scene which she had ever since felt to be a new barrier between herself and Philip. She merely said, she saw now that Tom was, on the whole, right in regarding any prospect of love and marriage between her and Philip as put out of the question by the relation of the two families. Of course Philip's father would never consent.

"There, Lucy, you have had my story," said Maggie, smiling, with the tears in her eyes. "You see I am like Sir Andrew Ague-cheek—*I* was adored once."

"Ah, now I see how it is you know Shakespeare and everything, and have learned so much since you left school; which always seemed to me witchcraft before—part of your general uncanniness," said Lucy.

She mused a little with her eyes downward, and then added, looking at Maggie, "It is very beautiful

that you should love Philip: I never thought such a happiness would befall him. And in my opinion, you ought not to give him up. There are obstacles now; but they may be done away with in time."

Maggie shook her head.

"Yes, yes," persisted Lucy; "I can't help being hopeful about it. There is something romantic in it—out of the common way—just what everything that happens to you ought to be. And Philip will adore you like a husband in a fairy tale. O, I shall puzzle my small brain to contrive some plot that will bring everybody into the right mind, so that you may marry Philip, when I marry—somebody else. Wouldn't that be a pretty ending to all my poor, poor Maggie's troubles?"

Maggie tried to smile, but shivered, as if she felt a sudden chill.

"Ah, dear, you are cold," said Lucy. "You must go to bed; and so must I. I dare not think what time it is."

They kissed each other, and Lucy went away—possessed of a confidence which had a strong influence over her subsequent impressions. Maggie had been thoroughly sincere: her nature had never found it easy to be otherwise. But confidences are sometimes blinding, even when they are sincere.

CHAPTER IV.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

MAGGIE was obliged to go to Tom's lodgings in the middle of the day, when he would be coming in to dinner, else she would not have found him at home. He was not lodging with entire strangers. Our friend Bob Jakin had, with Mumps's tacit consent, taken not only a wife about eight months ago, but also one of those queer old houses pierced with surprising passages, by the water-side, where, as he observed, his wife and mother could keep themselves out of mischief by letting out two "pleasure-boats," in which he had invested some of his savings, and by taking in a lodger for the parlour and spare bedroom. Under these circumstances, what could be better for the interests of all parties, sanitary considerations apart, than that the lodger should be Mr Tom?

It was Bob's wife who opened the door to Maggie. She was a tiny woman, with the general physiog-

nomy of a Dutch doll, looking, in comparison with Bob's mother, who filled up the passage in the rear, very much like one of those human figures which the artist finds conveniently standing near a colossal statue to show the proportions. The tiny woman curtsied and looked up at Maggie with some awe as soon as she had opened the door; but the words, "Is my brother at home?" which Maggie uttered smilingly, made her turn round with sudden excitement, and say—

"Eh, mother, mother — tell Bob! — it's Miss Maggie! Come in, Miss, for goodness do," she went on, opening a side-door, and endeavouring to flatten her person against the wall to make the utmost space for the visitor.

Sad recollections crowded on Maggie as she entered the small parlour, which was now all that poor Tom had to call by the name of "home"— that name which had once, so many years ago, meant for both of them the same sum of dear familiar objects. But everything was not strange to her in this new room: the first thing her eyes dwelt on was the large old Bible, and the sight was not likely to disperse the old memories. She stood without speaking.

"If you please to take the privilege o' sitting

down, Miss," said Mrs Jakin, rubbing her apron over a perfectly clean chair, and then lifting up the corner of that garment and holding it to her face with an air of embarrassment, as she looked wonderingly at Maggie.

"Bob is at home, then?" said Maggie, recovering herself, and smiling at the bashful Dutch doll.

"Yes, Miss; but I think he must be washing and dressing himself—I'll go and see," said Mrs Jakin, disappearing.

But she presently came back walking with new courage a little way behind her husband, who showed the brilliancy of his blue eyes and regular white teeth in the doorway, bowing respectfully.

"How do you do, Bob?" said Maggie, coming forward and putting out her hand to him; "I always meant to pay your wife a visit, and I shall come another day on purpose for that, if she will let me. But I was obliged to come to-day, to speak to my brother."

"He'll be in before long, Miss. He's doin' finely, Mr Tom is: he'll be one o' the first men hereabouts —you'll see that."

"Well, Bob, I'm sure he'll be indebted to you, whatever he becomes: he said so himself only the other night, when he was talking of you."

"Eh, Miss, that's his way o' takin' it. But I think the more on't when he says a thing, because his tongue doesn't overshoot him as mine does. Lors! I'm no better nor a tilted bottle, I arn't—I can't stop mysen when once I begin. But you look rarely, Miss—it does me good to see you. What do you say now, Prissy?"—here Bob turned to his wife. "Isn't it all come true as I said? Though there isn't many sorts o' goods as I can't over-praise when I set my tongue to't."

Mrs Bob's small nose seemed to be following the example of her eyes in turning up reverentially towards Maggie, but she was able now to smile and curtsy, and say, "I'd looked forrard like aenything to seein' you, Miss, for my husband's tongue's been runnin' on you, like as if he was light-headed, iver since first he come a-courtin' on me."

"Well, well," said Bob, looking rather silly. "Go an' see after the taters, else Mr Tom 'ull have to wait for 'em."

"I hope Mumps is friendly with Mrs Jakin, Bob," said Maggie, smiling. "I remember you used to say, he wouldn't like your marrying."

"Eh, Miss," said Bob, grinning, "he made up his mind to't when he see'd what a little un she was. He pretends not to see her mostly, or else to think

as she isn't full-growed. But about Mr Tom, Miss," said Bob, speaking lower and looking serious, "he's as close as a iron biler, he is; but I'm a 'cutish chap, an' when I've left off carrying my pack, an' am at a loose end, I've got more brains nor I know what to do wi', an' I'm forced to busy myself wi' other folks's insides. An' it worrets me as Mr Tom 'ull sit by himself so glumpish, a-knittin' his brow, an' a-lookin' at the fire of a night. He should be a bit livelier now—a fine young fellow like him. My wife says, when she goes in sometimes, an' he takes no notice of her, he sits lookin' into the fire, and frownin' as if he was watchin' folks at work in it."

"He thinks so much about business," said Maggie.

"Ay," said Bob, speaking lower; "but do you think it's nothin' else, Miss? He's close, Mr Tom is; but I'm a 'cute chap, I am, an' I thought tow'rt last Christmas as I'd found out a soft place in him. It was about a little black spaniel—a rare bit o' breed—as he made a fuss to get. But since then summat's come over him, as he's set his teeth again' things more nor iver, for all he's had such good-luck. An' I wanted to tell *you*, Miss, 'cause I thought you might work it out of him a bit, now

you're come. He's a deal too lonely, an' doesn't go into company enough."

"I'm afraid I have very little power over him, Bob," said Maggie, a good deal moved by Bob's suggestion. It was a totally new idea to her mind, that Tom could have his love troubles. Poor fellow!—and in love with Lucy too! But it was perhaps a mere fancy of Bob's too officious brain. The present of the dog meant nothing more than cousinship and gratitude. But Bob had already said, "Here's Mr Tom," and the outer door was opening.

"There's no time to spare, Tom," said Maggie, as soon as Bob had left the room. "I must tell you at once what I came about, else I shall be hindering you from taking your dinner."

Tom stood with his back against the chimney-piece, and Maggie was seated opposite the light. He noticed that she was tremulous, and he had a presentiment of the subject she was going to speak about. The presentiment made his voice colder and harder as he said, "What is it?"

This tone roused a spirit of resistance in Maggie, and she put her request in quite a different form from the one she had predetermined on. She rose from her seat, and, looking straight at Tom, said—

"I want you to absolve me from my promise about Philip Wakem. Or rather, I promised you not to see him without telling you. I am come to tell you that I wish to see him."

"Very well," said Tom, still more coldly.

But Maggie had hardly finished speaking in that chill, defiant manner, before she repented, and felt the dread of alienation from her brother.

"Not for myself, dear Tom. Don't be angry. I shouldn't have asked it, only that Philip, you know, is a friend of Lucy's, and she wishes him to come—has invited him to come this evening; and I told her I couldn't see him without telling you. I shall only see him in the presence of other people. There will never be anything secret between us again."

Tom looked away from Maggie, knitting his brow more strongly for a little while. Then he turned to her and said, slowly and emphatically—

"You know what is my feeling on that subject, Maggie. There is no need for my repeating anything I said a year ago. While my father was living, I felt bound to use the utmost power over you, to prevent you from disgracing him as well as yourself, and all of us. But now I must leave you to your own choice. You wish to be independent—you told me so after my father's death. My opinion

is not changed. If you think of Philip Wakem as a lover again, you must give up me."

"I don't wish it, dear Tom—at least as things are: I see that it would lead to misery. But I shall soon go away to another situation, and I should like to be friends with him again while I am here. Lucy wishes it."

The severity of Tom's face relaxed a little.

"I shouldn't mind your seeing him occasionally at my uncle's—I don't want you to make a fuss on the subject. But I have no confidence in you, Maggie. You would be led away to do anything."

That was a cruel word. Maggie's lip began to tremble.

"Why will you say that, Tom? It is very hard of you. Have I not done and borne everything as well as I could? And I have kept my word to you—when—when . . . . My life has not been a happy one, any more than yours."

She was obliged to be childish—the tears would come. When Maggie was not angry, she was as dependent on kind or cold words as a daisy on the sunshine or the cloud: the need of being loved would always subdue her, as in old days it subdued her in the worm-eaten attic. The brother's goodness came uppermost at this appeal, but it could

only show itself in Tom's fashion. He put his hand gently on her arm, and said in the tone of a kind pedagogue—

"Now listen to me, Maggie. I'll tell you what I mean. You're always in extremes—you have no judgment and self-command; and yet you think you know best, and will not submit to be guided. You know I didn't wish you to take a situation. My aunt Pullet was willing to give you a good home, and you might have lived respectably amongst your relations, until I could have provided a home for you with my mother. And that is what I should like to do. I wished my sister to be a lady, and I would always have taken care of you, as my father desired, until you were well married. But your ideas and mine never accord, and you will not give way. Yet you might have sense enough to see that a brother, who goes out into the world and mixes with men, necessarily knows better what is right and respectable for his sister than she can know herself. You think I am not kind; but my kindness can only be directed by what I believe to be good for you."

"Yes—I know—dear Tom," said Maggie, still half-sobbing, but trying to control her tears. "I know you would do a great deal for me: I know how you

work, and don't spare yourself. I am grateful to you. But, indeed, you can't quite judge for me—our natures are very different. You don't know how differently things affect me from what they do you."

"Yes, I *do* know: I know it too well. I know how differently you must feel about all that affects our family, and your own dignity as a young woman, before you could think of receiving secret addresses from Philip Wakem. If it was not disgusting to me in every other way, I should object to my sister's name being associated for a moment with that of a young man whose father must hate the very thought of us all, and would spurn you. With any one but you, I should think it quite certain that what you witnessed just before my father's death, would secure you from ever thinking again of Philip Wakem as a lover. But I don't feel certain of it with you—I never feel certain about anything with *you*. At one time you take pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial, and at another you have not resolution to resist a thing that you know to be wrong."

There was a terrible cutting truth in Tom's words — that hard rind of truth which is discerned by unimaginative, unsympathetic minds. Maggie always writhed under this judgment of

Tom's: she rebelled and was humiliated in the same moment: it seemed as if he held a glass before her to show her her own folly and weakness—as if he were a prophetic voice predicting her future fallings —and yet, all the while, she judged him in return: she said inwardly that he was narrow and unjust, that he was below feeling those mental needs which were often the source of the wrong-doing or absurdity that made her life a planless riddle to him.

She did not answer directly: her heart was too full, and she sat down, leaning her arm on the table. It was no use trying to make Tom feel that she was near to him. He always repelled her. Her feeling under his words was complicated by the allusion to the last scene between her father and Wakem; and at length that painful, solemn memory surmounted the immediate grievance. No! She did not think of such things with frivolous indifference, and Tom must not accuse her of that. She looked up at him with a grave, earnest gaze, and said—

"I can't make you think better of me, Tom, by anything I can say. But I am not so shut out from all your feelings as you believe me to be. I see as well as you do, that from our position with regard

to Philip's father—not on other grounds—it would be unreasonable—it would be wrong for us to entertain the idea of marriage; and I have given up thinking of him as a lover. . . . . I am telling you the truth, and you have no right to disbelieve me: I have kept my word to you, and you have never detected me in a falsehood. I should not only not encourage, I should carefully avoid any intercourse with Philip on any other footing than that of quiet friendship. You may think that I am unable to keep my resolutions; but at least you ought not to treat me with hard contempt on the ground of faults that I have not committed yet."

"Well, Maggie," said Tom, softening under this appeal, "I don't want to overstrain matters. I think, all things considered, it will be best for you to see Philip Wakem, if Lucy wishes him to come to the house. I believe what you say—at least you believe it yourself, I know: I can only warn you. I wish to be as good a brother to you as you will let me."

There was a little tremor in Tom's voice as he uttered the last words, and Maggie's ready affection came back with as sudden a glow as when they

were children, and bit their cake together as a sacrament of conciliation. She rose and laid her hand on Tom's shoulder.

"Dear Tom, I know you mean to be good. I know you have had a great deal to bear, and have done a great deal. I should like to be a comfort to you—not to vex you. You don't think I'm altogether naughty, now, do you?"

Tom smiled at the eager face: his smiles were very pleasant to see when they did come, for the grey eyes could be tender underneath the frown.

"No, Maggie."

"I may turn out better than you expect."

"I hope you will."

"And may I come some day and make tea for you, and see this extremely small wife of Bob's again?"

"Yes; but trot away now, for I've no more time to spare," said Tom, looking at his watch.

"Not to give me a kiss?"

Tom bent to kiss her cheek, and then said—

"There! Be a good girl. I've got a great deal to think of to-day. I'm going to have a long consultation with my uncle Deane this afternoon."

"You'll come to aunt Glegg's to-morrow? We're going all to dine early, that we may go there to tea. You *must* come: Lucy told me to say so."

"O pooh! I've plenty else to do," said Tom, pulling his bell violently, and bringing down the small bell-rope.

"I'm frightened—I shall run away," said Maggie, making a laughing retreat; while Tom, with masculine philosophy, flung the bell-rope to the farther end of the room—not very far either: a touch of human experience which I flatter myself will come home to the bosoms of not a few substantial or distinguished men who were once at an early stage of their rise in the world, and were cherishing very large hopes in very small lodgings.

CHAPTER V.

SHOWING THAT TOM HAD OPENED THE OYSTER.

"AND now we've settled this Newcastle business, Tom," said Mr Deane, that same afternoon, as they were seated in the private room at the Bank together, "there's another matter I want to talk to you about. Since you're likely to have rather a smoky, unpleasant time of it at Newcastle for the next few weeks, you'll want a good prospect of some sort to keep up your spirits."

Tom waited less nervously than he had done on a former occasion in this apartment, while his uncle took out his snuff-box and gratified each nostril with deliberate impartiality.

"You see, Tom," said Mr Deane, at last, throwing himself backward, "the world goes on at a smarter pace now than it did when I was a young fellow. Why, sir, forty years ago, when I was much such a strapping youngster as you, a man

expected to pull between the shafts the best part of his life, before he got the whip in his hand. The looms went slowish, and fashions didn't alter quite so fast: I'd a best suit that lasted me six years. Everything was on a lower scale, sir—in point of expenditure, I mean. It's this steam, you see, that has made the difference: it drives on every wheel double pace, and the wheel of fortune along with 'em, as our Mr Stephen Guest said at the anniversary dinner (he hits these things off wonderfully, considering he's seen nothing of business). I don't find fault with the change, as some people do. Trade, sir, opens a man's eyes; and if the population is to get thicker upon the ground, as it's doing, the world must use its wits at inventions of one sort or other. I know I've done my share as an ordinary man of business. Somebody has said it's a fine thing to make two ears of corn grow where only one grew before; but, sir, it's a fine thing, too, to further the exchange of commodities, and bring the grains of corn to the mouths that are hungry. And that's our line of business; and I consider it as honourable a position as a man can hold, to be connected with it."

Tom knew that the affair his uncle had to speak of was not urgent; Mr Deane was too shrewd and

practical a man to allow either his reminiscences or his snuff to impede the progress of trade. Indeed, for the last month or two, there had been hints thrown out to Tom which enabled him to guess that he was going to hear some proposition for his own benefit. With the beginning of the last speech he had stretched out his legs, thrust his hands in his pockets, and prepared himself for some introductory diffuseness, tending to show that Mr Deane had succeeded by his own merit, and that what he had to say to young men in general was, that if they didn't succeed too, it was because of their own demerit. He was rather surprised, then, when his uncle put a direct question to him.

"Let me see—it's going on for seven years now since you applied to me for a situation—eh, Tom?"

"Yes, sir; I'm three-and-twenty now," said Tom.

"Ah—it's as well not to say that, though; for you'd pass for a good deal older, and age tells well in business. I remember your coming very well: I remember I saw there was some pluck in you, and that was what made me give you encouragement. And I'm happy to say, I was right —I'm not often deceived. I was naturally a little shy at pushing my nephew, but I'm happy to say

you've done me credit, sir; and if I'd had a son o' my own, I shouldn't have been sorry to see him like you."

Mr Deane tapped his box and opened it again, repeating in a tone of some feeling—"No, I shouldn't have been sorry to see him like you."

"I'm very glad I've given you satisfaction, sir; I've done my best," said Tom, in his proud, independent way.

"Yes, Tom, you've given me satisfaction. I don't speak of your conduct as a son; though that weighs with me in my opinion of you. But what I have to do with, as a partner in our firm, is the qualities you've shown as a man o' business. Ours is a fine business—a splendid concern, sir—and there's no reason why it shouldn't go on growing: there's a growing capital, and growing outlets for it; but there's another thing that's wanted for the prosperity of every concern, large or small, and that's men to conduct it—men of the right habits; none o' your flashy fellows, but such as are to be depended on. Now this is what Mr Guest and I see clear enough. Three years ago, we took Gell into the concern: we gave him a share in the oil-mill. And why? Why, because Gell was a fellow whose services were worth a premium. So it will always

be, sir. So it was with me. And though Gell is pretty near ten years older than you, there are other points in your favour."

Tom was getting a little nervous as Mr Deane went on speaking: he was conscious of something he had in his mind to say, which might not be agreeable to his uncle, simply because it was a new suggestion rather than an acceptance of the proposition he foresaw.

"It stands to reason," Mr Deane went on, when he had finished his new pinch, "that your being my nephew weighs in your favour; but I don't deny that if you'd been no relation of mine at all, your conduct in that affair of Pelley's bank would have led Mr Guest and myself to make some acknowledgment of the service you've been to us; and, backed by your general conduct and business ability, it has made us determine on giving you a share in the business—a share which we shall be glad to increase as the years go on. We think that'll be better, on all grounds, than raising your salary. It'll give you more importance, and prepare you better for taking some of the anxiety off my shoulders by-and-by. I'm equal to a good deal o' work at present, thank God; but I'm getting older—there's no denying that. I told Mr Guest I would open the

subject to you ; and when you come back from this northern business, we can go into particulars. This is a great stride for a young fellow of three-and-twenty, but I'm bound to say, you've deserved it."

"I'm very grateful to Mr Guest and you, sir ; of course, I feel the most indebted to *you,* who first took me into the business, and have taken a good deal of pains with me since."

Tom spoke with a slight tremor, and paused after he had said this.

"Yes, yes," said Mr Deane. "I don't spare pains when I see they'll be of any use. I gave myself some trouble with Gell—else he wouldn't have been what he is."

"But there's one thing I should like to mention to you, uncle. I've never spoken to you of it before. If you remember, at the time my father's property was sold, there was some thought of your firm buying the Mill : I know you thought it would be a very good investment, especially if steam were applied."

"To be sure, to be sure. But Wakem outbid us —he'd made up his mind to that. He's rather fond of carrying everything over other people's heads."

"Perhaps it's of no use my mentioning it at present," Tom went on, "but I wish you to know

what I have in my mind about the Mill. I've a strong feeling about it. It was my father's dying wish that I should try and get it back again whenever I could: it was in his family for five generations. I promised my father; and besides that, I'm attached to the place. I shall never like any other so well. And if it should ever suit your views to buy it for the firm, I should have a better chance of fulfilling my father's wish. I shouldn't have liked to mention the thing to you, only you've been kind enough to say my services have been of some value. And I'd give up a much greater chance in life for the sake of having the Mill again—I mean, having it in my own hands, and gradually working off the price."

Mr Deane had listened attentively, and now looked thoughtful.

"I see, I see," he said, after a while; "the thing would be possible, if there were any chance of Wakem's parting with the property. But that I *don't* see. He's put that young Jetsome in the place; and he had his reasons when he bought it, I'll be bound."

"He's a loose fish, that young Jetsome," said Tom. "He's taking to drinking, and they say he's letting the business go down. Luke told me about

it—our old miller. He says, he shan't stay unless there's an alteration. I was thinking, if things went on in that way, Wakem might be more willing to part with the Mill. Luke says he's getting very sour about the way things are going on."

"Well, I'll turn it over, Tom. I must inquire into the matter, and go into it with Mr Guest. But, you see, it's rather striking out a new branch, and putting you to that, instead of keeping you where you are, which was what we'd wanted."

"I should be able to manage more than the mill when things were once set properly going, sir. I want to have plenty of work. There's nothing else I care about much."

There was something rather sad in that speech from a young man of three-and-twenty, even in uncle Deane's business-loving ears.

"Pooh, pooh! you'll be having a wife to care about one of these days, if you get on at this pace in the world. But as to this Mill, we mustn't reckon on our chickens too early. However, I promise you to bear it in mind, and when you come back, we'll talk of it again. I am going to dinner now. Come and breakfast with us to-morrow morning, and say good-by to your mother and sister before you start."

CHAPTER VI.

ILLUSTRATING THE LAWS OF ATTRACTION.

IT is evident to you now, that Maggie had arrived at a moment in her life which must be considered by all prudent persons as a great opportunity for a young woman. Launched into the higher society of St Ogg's, with a striking person which had the advantage of being quite unfamiliar to the majority of beholders, and with such moderate assistance of costume as you have seen foreshadowed in Lucy's anxious colloquy with aunt Pullet, Maggie was certainly at a new starting-point in life. At Lucy's first evening-party, young Torry fatigued his facial muscles more than usual in order that "the dark-eyed girl there, in the corner," might see him in all the additional style conferred by his eye-glass; and several young ladies went home intending to have short sleeves with black lace, and to plait their hair in a broad coronet at the back of their head—

"That cousin of Miss Deane's looked so very well." In fact, poor Maggie, with all her inward consciousness of a painful past and her presentiment of a troublous future, was on the way to become an object of some envy—a topic of discussion in the newly-established billiard-room, and between fair friends who had no secrets from each other on the subject of trimmings. The Miss Guests, who associated chiefly on terms of condescension with the families of St Ogg's, and were the glass of fashion there, took some exception to Maggie's manners. She had a way of not assenting at once to the observations current in good society, and of saying that she didn't know whether those observations were true or not, which gave her an air of *gaucherie*, and impeded the even flow of conversation; but it is a fact capable of an amiable interpretation, that ladies are not the worse disposed towards a new acquaintance of their own sex because she has points of inferiority. And Maggie was so entirely without those pretty airs of coquetry which have the traditional reputation of driving gentlemen to despair, that she won some feminine pity for being so ineffective in spite of her beauty. She had not had many advantages, poor thing! and it must be admitted there was no pretension about her: her abruptness and unevenness

of manner were plainly the result of her secluded and lowly circumstances. It was only a wonder that there was no tinge of vulgarity about her, considering what the rest of poor Lucy's relations were: an allusion which always made the Miss Guests shudder a little. It was not agreeable to think of any connection by marriage with such people as the Gleggs and the Pullets; but it was of no use to contradict Stephen, when once he had set his mind on anything, and certainly there was no possible objection to Lucy in herself—no one could help liking her. She would naturally desire that the Miss Guests should behave kindly to this cousin of whom she was so fond, and Stephen would make a great fuss if they were deficient in civility. Under these circumstances the invitations to Park House were not wanting; and elsewhere, also, Miss Deane was too popular and too distinguished a member of society in St Ogg's for any attention towards her to be neglected.

Thus Maggie was introduced for the first time to the young lady's life, and knew what it was to get up in the morning without any imperative reason for doing one thing more than another. This new sense of leisure and unchecked enjoyment amidst the soft-breathing airs and garden-scents of advancing spring,

—amidst the new abundance of music, and lingering strolls in the sunshine, and delicious dreaminess of gliding on the river,—could hardly be without some intoxicating effect on her, after her years of privation ; and even in the first week Maggie began to be less haunted by her sad memories and anticipations. Life was certainly very pleasant just now : it was becoming very pleasant to dress in the evening, and to feel that she was one of the beautiful things of this spring-time. And there were admiring eyes always awaiting her now ; she was no longer an unheeded person, liable to be chid, from whom attention was continually claimed, and on whom no one felt bound to confer any. It was pleasant, too, when Stephen and Lucy were gone out riding, to sit down at the piano alone, and find that the old fitness between her fingers and the keys remained, and revived, like a sympathetic kinship not to be worn out by separation—to get the tunes she had heard the evening before, and repeat them again and again until she had found out a way of producing them so as to make them a more pregnant, passionate language to her. The mere concord of octaves was a delight to Maggie, and she would often take up a book of studies rather than any melody, that she might taste more keenly by abstraction the more

primitive sensation of intervals. Not that her enjoyment of music was of the kind that indicates a great specific talent; it was rather that her sensibility to the supreme excitement of music was only one form of that passionate sensibility which belonged to her whole nature, and made her faults and virtues all merge in each other—made her affections sometimes an impatient demand, but also prevented her vanity from taking the form of mere feminine coquetry and device, and gave it the poetry of ambition. But you have known Maggie a long while, and need to be told, not her characteristics, but her history, which is a thing hardly to be predicted even from the completest knowledge of characteristics. For the tragedy of our lives is not created entirely from within. "Character," says Novalis, in one of his questionable aphorisms — "character is destiny." But not the whole of our destiny. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, was speculative and irresolute, and we have a great tragedy in consequence. But if his father had lived to a good old age, and his uncle had died an early death, we can conceive Hamlet's having married Ophelia, and got through life with a reputation of sanity notwithstanding many soliloquies, and some moody sarcasms towards the fair daughter of Polonius,

to say nothing of the frankest incivility to his father-in-law.

Maggie's destiny, then, is at present hidden, and we must wait for it to reveal itself like the course of an unmapped river: we only know that the river is full and rapid, and that for all rivers there is the same final home. Under the charm of her new pleasures, Maggie herself was ceasing to think, with her eager prefiguring imagination, of her future lot; and her anxiety about her first interview with Philip was losing its predominance: perhaps, unconsciously to herself, she was not sorry that the interview had been deferred.

For Philip had not come the evening he was expected, and Mr Stephen Guest brought word that he was gone to the coast—probably, he thought, on a sketching expedition; but it was not certain when he would return. It was just like Philip—to go off in that way without telling any one. It was not until the twelfth day that he returned, to find both Lucy's notes awaiting him: he had left before he knew of Maggie's arrival.

Perhaps one had need be nineteen again to be quite convinced of the feelings that were crowded for Maggie into those twelve days—of the length to

which they were stretched for her by the novelty of her experience in them, and the varying attitudes of her mind. The early days of an acquaintance almost always have this importance for us, and fill up a larger space in our memory than longer subsequent periods, which have been less filled with discovery and new impressions. There were not many hours in those ten days in which Mr Stephen Guest was not seated by Lucy's side, or standing near her at the piano, or accompanying her on some out-door excursion: his attentions were clearly becoming more assiduous; and that was what every one had expected. Lucy was very happy: all the happier because Stephen's society seemed to have become much more interesting and amusing since Maggie had been there. Playful discussions—sometimes serious ones—were going forward, in which both Stephen and Maggie revealed themselves, to the admiration of the gentle unobtrusive Lucy; and it more than once crossed her mind what a charming quartet they should have through life when Maggie married Philip. Is it an inexplicable thing that a girl should enjoy her lover's society the more for the presence of a third person, and be without the slightest spasm of jealousy that the third person had the conversation habitually directed to her?

Not when that girl is as tranquil-hearted as Lucy, thoroughly possessed with a belief that she knows the state of her companions' affections, and not prone to the feelings which shake such a belief in the absence of positive evidence against it. Besides, it was Lucy by whom Stephen sate, to whom he gave his arm, to whom he appealed as the person sure to agree with him; and every day there was the same tender politeness towards her, the same consciousness of her wants and care to supply them. Was there really the same?—it seemed to Lucy that there was more; and it was no wonder that the real significance of the change escaped her. It was a subtle act of conscience in Stephen that even he himself was not aware of. His personal attentions to Maggie were comparatively slight, and there had even sprung up an apparent distance between them, that prevented the renewal of that faint resemblance to gallantry into which he had fallen the first day in the boat. If Stephen came in when Lucy was out of the room—if Lucy left them together, they never spoke to each other: Stephen, perhaps, seemed to be examining books or music, and Maggie bent her head assiduously over her work. Each was oppressively conscious of the other's presence, even to the finger-ends. Yet each looked and longed

for the same thing to happen the next day. Neither of them had begun to reflect on the matter, or silently to ask, "To what does all this tend?" Maggie only felt that life was revealing something quite new to her; and she was absorbed in the direct, immediate experience, without any energy left for taking account of it, and reasoning about it. Stephen wilfully abstained from self-questioning, and would not admit to himself that he felt an influence which was to have any determining effect on his conduct. And when Lucy came into the room again, they were once more unconstrained: Maggie could contradict Stephen and laugh at him, and he could recommend to her consideration the example of that most charming heroine, Miss Sophia Western, who had a great "respect for the understandings of men." Maggie could look at Stephen — which, for some reason or other, she always avoided when they were alone; and he could even ask her to play his accompaniment for him, since Lucy's fingers were so busy with that bazaar-work; and lecture her on hurrying the *tempo*, which was certainly Maggie's weak point.

One day—it was the day of Philip's return—Lucy had formed a sudden engagement to spend the evening with Mrs Kenn, whose delicate state of

health, threatening to become confirmed illness through an attack of bronchitis, obliged her to resign her functions at the coming bazaar into the hands of other ladies, of whom she wished Lucy to be one. The engagement had been formed in Stephen's presence, and he had heard Lucy promise to rise early and call at six o'clock for Miss Torry, who brought Mrs Kenn's request.

"Here is another of the moral results of this idiotic bazaar," Stephen burst forth, as soon as Miss Torry had left the room—"taking young ladies from the duties of the domestic hearth into scenes of dissipation among urn-rugs and embroidered reticules! I should like to know what is the proper function of women, if it is not to make reasons for husbands to stay at home, and still stronger reasons for bachelors to go out. If this goes on much longer, the bonds of society will be dissolved."

"Well, it will not go on much longer," said Lucy, laughing, "for the bazaar is to take place on Monday week."

"Thank heaven!" said Stephen. "Kenn himself said the other day, that he didn't like this plan of making vanity do the work of charity; but just as the British public is not reasonable enough to bear

direct taxation, so St Ogg's has not got force of motive enough to build and endow schools without calling in the force of folly."

"Did he say so?" said little Lucy, her hazel eyes opening wide with anxiety. "I never heard him say anything of that kind: I thought he approved of what we were doing."

"I'm sure he approves *you*," said Stephen, smiling at her affectionately; "your conduct in going out to-night looks vicious, I own, but I know there is benevolence at the bottom of it."

"O, you think too well of me," said Lucy, shaking her head, with a pretty blush, and there the subject ended. But it was tacitly understood that Stephen would not come in the evening, and on the strength of that tacit understanding he made his morning visit the longer, not saying good-by until after four.

Maggie was seated in the drawing-room alone, shortly after dinner, with Minny on her lap, having left her uncle to his wine and his nap, and her mother to the compromise between knitting and nodding, which, when there was no company, she always carried on in the dining-room till tea-time. Maggie was stooping to caress the tiny silken pet, and comforting him for his mistress's absence, when the

sound of a footstep on the gravel made her look up, and she saw Mr Stephen Guest walking up the garden, as if he had come straight from the river. It was very unusual to see him so soon after dinner! He often complained that their dinner-hour was late at Park House. Nevertheless, there he was, in his black dress: he had evidently been home, and must have come again by the river. Maggie felt her cheeks glowing and her heart beating: it was natural she should be nervous, for she was not accustomed to receive visitors alone. He had seen her look up through the open window, and raised his hat as he walked towards it, to enter that way instead of by the door. He blushed too, and certainly looked as foolish as a young man of some wit and self-possession can be expected to look, as he walked in with a roll of music in his hand, and said with an air of hesitating improvisation—

"You are surprised to see me again, Miss Tulliver—I ought to apologise for coming upon you by surprise, but I wanted to come into the town, and I got our man to row me; so I thought I would bring these things from the 'Maid of Artois' for your cousin: I forgot them this morning. Will you give them to her?"

"Yes," said Maggie, who had risen confusedly with Minny in her arms, and now, not quite knowing what else to do, sat down again.

Stephen laid down his hat, with the music, which rolled on the floor, and sat down in the chair close by her. He had never done so before, and both he and Maggie were quite aware that it was an entirely new position.

"Well, you pampered minion!" said Stephen, leaning to pull the long curly ears that drooped over Maggie's arm. It was not a suggestive remark, and as the speaker did not follow it up by further development, it naturally left the conversation at a stand-still. It seemed to Stephen like some action in a dream, that he was obliged to do, and wonder at himself all the while—to go on stroking Minny's head. Yet it was very pleasant: he only wished he dared look at Maggie, and that she would look at him,—let him have one long look into those deep strange eyes of hers, and then he would be satisfied, and quite reasonable after that. He thought it was becoming a sort of monomania with him, to want that long look from Maggie; and he was racking his invention continually to find out some means by which he could have it without its appearing singular and entailing subsequent em-

barrassment. As for Maggie, she had no distinct thought—only the sense of a presence like that of a closely-hovering broad-winged bird in the darkness, for she was unable to look up, and saw nothing but Minny's black wavy coat.

But this must end some time—perhaps it ended very soon, and only *seemed* long, as a minute's dream does. Stephen at last sat upright sideways in his chair, leaning one hand and arm over the back and looking at Maggie. What should he say?

"We shall have a splendid sunset, I think; shan't you go out and see it?"

"I don't know," said Maggie. Then, courageously raising her eyes and looking out of the window, "If I'm not playing cribbage with my uncle."

A pause: during which Minny is stroked again, but has sufficient insight not to be grateful for it—to growl rather.

"Do you like sitting alone?"

A rather arch look came over Maggie's face, and, just glancing at Stephen, she said, "Would it be quite civil to say 'yes'?"

"It *was* rather a dangerous question for an intruder to ask," said Stephen, delighted with that glance, and getting determined to stay for another. "But you will have more than half an hour to your-

self after I am gone," he added, taking out his watch. "I know Mr Deane never comes in till half-past seven."

Another pause, during which Maggie looked steadily out of the window, till by a great effort she moved her head to look down at Minny's back again, and said—

"I wish Lucy had not been obliged to go out. We lose our music."

"We shall have a new voice to-morrow night," said Stephen. "Will you tell your cousin that our friend Philip Wakem is come back? I saw him as I went home."

Maggie gave a little start—it seemed hardly more than a vibration that passed from head to foot in an instant. But the new images summoned by Philip's name, dispersed half the oppressive spell she had been under. She rose from her chair with a sudden resolution, and, laying Minny on his cushion, went to reach Lucy's large work-basket from its corner. Stephen was vexed and disappointed: he thought, perhaps Maggie didn't like the name of Wakem to be mentioned to her in that abrupt way—for he now recalled what Lucy had told him of the family quarrel. It was of no use to stay any longer. Maggie was seating herself at the table with her

work, and looking chill and proud; and he—he looked like a simpleton for having come. A gratuitous, entirely superfluous visit of that sort was sure to make a man disagreeable and ridiculous. Of course it was palpable to Maggie's thinking, that he had dined hastily in his own room for the sake of setting off again and finding her alone.

A boyish state of mind for an accomplished young gentleman of five - and - twenty, not without legal knowledge! But a reference to history, perhaps, may make it not incredible.

At this moment Maggie's ball of knitting-wool rolled along the ground, and she started up to reach it. Stephen rose too, and, picking up the ball, met her with a vexed complaining look that gave his eyes quite a new expression to Maggie, whose own eyes met them as he presented the ball to her.

"Good-by," said Stephen, in a tone that had the same beseeching discontent as his eyes. He dared not put out his hand—he thrust both hands into his tail-pockets as he spoke. Maggie thought she had perhaps been rude.

"Won't you stay?" she said timidly, not looking away, for that would have seemed rude again.

"No, thank you," said Stephen, looking still into the half-unwilling, half-fascinated eyes, as a thirsty

man looks towards the track of the distant brook. "The boat is waiting for me, ... You'll tell your cousin?"

"Yes."

"That I brought the music, I mean."

"Yes."

"And that Philip is come back."

"Yes." (Maggie did not notice Philip's name this time.)

"Won't you come out a little way into the garden?" said Stephen, in a still gentler tone, but the next moment he was vexed that she did not say, "No," for she moved away now towards the open window, and he was obliged to take his hat and walk by her side. But he thought of something to make him amends.

"Do take my arm," he said, in a low tone, as if it were a secret.

There is something strangely winning to most women in that offer of the firm arm: the help is not wanted physically at that moment, but the sense of help—the presence of strength that is outside them and yet theirs, meets a continual want of the imagination. Either on that ground or some other, Maggie took the arm. And they walked together

round the grass-plot and under the drooping green of the laburnums, in the same dim dreamy state as they had been in a quarter of an hour before; only that Stephen had had the look he longed for, without yet perceiving in himself the symptoms of returning reasonableness, and Maggie had darting thoughts across the dimness:—how came she to be there?—why had she come out? Not a word was spoken. If it had been, each would have been less intensely conscious of the other.

"Take care of this step," said Stephen, at last.

"O, I will go in now," said Maggie, feeling that the step had come like a rescue. "Good evening."

In an instant she had withdrawn her arm, and was running back to the house. She did not reflect that this sudden action would only add to the embarrassing recollections of the last half-hour. She had no thought left for that. She only threw herself into the low armchair, and burst into tears.

"O Philip, Philip, I wish we were together again—so quietly—in the Red Deeps."

Stephen looked after her a moment, then went on to the boat, and was soon landed at the wharf. He spent the evening in the billiard-room, smoking

one cigar after another, and losing "lives" at pool. But he would not leave off. He was determined not to think—not to admit any more distinct remembrance than was urged upon him by the perpetual presence of Maggie. He was looking at her, and she was on his arm.

But there came the necessity of walking home in the cool starlight, and with it the necessity of cursing his own folly, and bitterly determining that he would never trust himself alone with Maggie again. It was all madness: he was in love, thoroughly attached to Lucy, and engaged—engaged as strongly as an honourable man need be. He wished he had never seen this Maggie Tulliver, to be thrown into a fever by her in this way: she would make a sweet, strange, troublesome, adorable wife to some man or other, but he would never have chosen her himself. Did she feel as he did? He hoped she did—not. He ought not to have gone. He would master himself in future. He would make himself disagreeable to her — quarrel with her perhaps. Quarrel with her? Was it possible to quarrel with a creature who had such eyes—defying and deprecating, contradicting and clinging, imperious and beseeching—full of delicious opposites. To see

such a creature subdued by love for one would be a lot worth having—to another man.

There was a muttered exclamation which ended this inward soliloquy, as Stephen threw away the end of his last cigar, and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, stalked along at a quieter pace through the shrubbery. It was not of a benedictory kind.

CHAPTER VII.

PHILIP RE-ENTERS.

THE next morning was very wet: the sort of morning on which male neighbours who have no imperative occupation at home are likely to pay their fair friends an illimitable visit. The rain, which has been endurable enough for the walk or ride one way, is sure to become so heavy, and at the same time so certain to clear up by-and-by, that nothing but an open quarrel can abbreviate the visit: latent detestation will not do at all. And if people happen to be lovers, what can be so delightful, in England, as a rainy morning? English sunshine is dubious; bonnets are never quite secure; and if you sit down on the grass, it may lead to catarrhs. But the rain is to be depended on. You gallop through it in a mackintosh, and presently find yourself in the seat you like best—a little above or a little below the

one on which your goddess sits (it is the same thing to the metaphysical mind, and that is the reason why women are at once worshipped and looked down upon), with a satisfactory confidence that there will be no lady-callers.

"Stephen will come earlier this morning, I know," said Lucy: "he always does when it's rainy."

Maggie made no answer, She was angry with Stephen: she began to think she should dislike him; and if it had not been for the rain, she would have gone to her aunt Glegg's this morning, and so have avoided him altogether. As it was, she must find some reason for remaining out of the room with her mother.

But Stephen did not come earlier, and there was another visitor—a nearer neighbour—who preceded him. When Philip entered the room, he was going merely to bow to Maggie, feeling that their acquaintance was a secret which he was bound not to betray; but when she advanced towards him and put out her hand, he guessed at once that Lucy had been taken into her confidence. It was a moment of some agitation to both, though Philip had spent many hours in preparing for it; but like all persons who have passed through life with little expectation of sympathy, he seldom lost his self-control, and

shrank with the most sensitive pride from any noticeable betrayal of emotion. A little extra paleness, a little tension of the nostril when he spoke, and the voice pitched in rather a higher key, that to strangers would seem expressive of cold indifference, were all the signs Philip usually gave of an inward drama that was not without its fierceness. But Maggie, who had little more power of concealing the impressions made upon her than if she had been constructed of musical strings, felt her eyes getting larger with tears as they took each other's hands in silence. They were not painful tears: they had rather something of the same origin as the tears women and children shed when they have found some protection to cling to, and look back on the threatened danger. For Philip, who a little while ago was associated continually in Maggie's mind with the sense that Tom might reproach her with some justice, had now, in this short space, become a sort of outward conscience to her, that she might fly to for rescue and strength. Her tranquil, tender affection for Philip, with its root deep down in her childhood, and its memories of long quiet talk confirming by distinct successive impressions the first instinctive bias—the fact that in him the appeal was more strongly to her pity and womanly devot-

edness than to her vanity or other egoistic excitability of her nature, seemed now to make a sort of sacred place, a sanctuary where she could find refuge from an alluring influence which the best part of herself must resist, which must bring horrible tumult within, wretchedness without. This new sense of her relation to Philip multiplied the anxious scruples she would otherwise have felt, lest she should overstep the limit of intercourse with him that Tom would sanction; and she put out her hand to him, and felt the tears in her eyes without any consciousness of an inward check. The scene was just what Lucy expected, and her kind heart delighted in bringing Philip and Maggie together again; though, even with all *her* regard for Philip, she could not resist the impression that her cousin Tom had some excuse for feeling shocked at the physical incongruity between the two—a prosaic person like cousin Tom, who didn't like poetry and fairy tales. But she began to speak as soon as possible, to set them at ease.

"This was very good and virtuous of you," she said, in her pretty treble, like the low conversational notes of little birds, "to come so soon after your arrival. And as it is, I think I will pardon you for running away in an inopportune manner, and giving

your friends no notice. Come and sit down here," she went on, placing the chair that would suit him best, "and you shall find yourself treated mercifully."

"You will never govern well, Miss Deane," said Philip, as he seated himself, "because no one will ever believe in your severity. People will always encourage themselves in misdemeanours by the certainty that you will be indulgent."

Lucy gave some playful contradiction, but Philip did not hear what it was, for he had naturally turned towards Maggie, and she was looking at him with that open, affectionate scrutiny, which we give to a friend from whom we have been long separated. What a moment their parting had been! And Philip felt as if he were only in the morrow of it. He felt this so keenly—with such intense, detailed remembrance—with such passionate revival of all that had been said and looked in their last conversation—that with that jealousy and distrust which in diffident natures is almost inevitably linked with a strong feeling, he thought he read in Maggie's glance and manner the evidence of a change. The very fact that he feared and half expected it, would be sure to make this thought rush in, in the absence of positive proof to the contrary.

"I am having a great holiday, am I not?" said

Maggie. "Lucy is like a fairy godmother: she has turned me from a drudge into a princess in no time. I do nothing but indulge myself all day long, and she always finds out what I want before I know it myself."

"I'm sure she is the happier for having you, then," said Philip. "You must be better than a whole menagerie of pets to her. And you look well—you are benefiting by the change."

Artificial conversation of this sort went on a little while, till Lucy, determined to put an end to it, exclaimed, with a good imitation of annoyance, that she had forgotten something, and was quickly out of the room.

In a moment Maggie and Philip leaned forward, and the hands were clasped again, with a look of sad contentment like that of friends who meet in the memory of recent sorrow.

"I told my brother I wished to see you, Philip—I asked him to release me from my promise, and he consented."

Maggie, in her impulsiveness, wanted Philip to know at once the position they must hold towards each other; but she checked herself. The things that had happened since he had spoken of his love for her were so painful that she shrank from being

the first to allude to them. It seemed almost like an injury towards Philip even to mention her brother —her brother who had insulted him. But he was thinking too entirely of her to be sensitive on any other point at that moment.

"Then we can at least be friends, Maggie? There is nothing to hinder that now?"

"Will not your father object?" said Maggie, withdrawing her hand.

"I should not give you up on any ground but your own wish, Maggie," said Philip, colouring. "There are points on which I should always resist my father, as I used to tell you. *That* is one."

"Then there is nothing to hinder our being friends, Philip—seeing each other and talking to each other while I am here: I shall soon go away again. I mean to go very soon—to a new situation."

"Is that inevitable, Maggie?"

"Yes: I must not stay here long. It would unfit me for the life I must begin again at last. I can't live in dependence—I can't live with my brother—though he is very good to me. He would like to provide for me; but that would be intolerable to me."

Philip was silent a few moments, and then said in

that high, feeble voice which with him indicated the resolute suppression of emotion :—

"Is there no other alternative, Maggie? Is that life, away from those who love you, the only one you will allow yourself to look forward to?"

"Yes, Philip," she said, looking at him pleadingly, as if she entreated him to believe that she was compelled to this course. "At least, as things are; I don't know what may be in years to come. But I begin to think there can never come much happiness to me from loving: I have always had so much pain mingled with it. I wish I could make myself a world outside it, as men do."

"Now, you are returning to your old thought in a new form, Maggie—the thought I used to combat," said Philip, with a slight tinge of bitterness. "You want to find out a mode of renunciation that will be an escape from pain. I tell you again, there is no such escape possible except by perverting or mutilating one's nature. What would become of me, if I tried to escape from pain? Scorn and cynicism would be my only opium; unless I could fall into some kind of conceited madness, and fancy myself a favourite of Heaven, because I am not a favourite with men."

The bitterness had taken on some impetuosity as

Philip went on speaking: the words were evidently an outlet for some immediate feeling of his own, as well as an answer to Maggie. There was a pain pressing on him at that moment. He shrank with proud delicacy from the faintest allusion to the words of love—of plighted love that had passed between them. It would have seemed to him like reminding Maggie of a promise; it would have had for him something of the baseness of compulsion. He could not dwell on the fact that he himself had not changed; for that too would have had the air of an appeal. His love for Maggie was stamped, even more than the rest of his experience, with the exaggerated sense that he was an exception—that she, that every one, saw him in the light of an exception.

But Maggie was conscience-stricken.

"Yes, Philip," she said with her childish contrition when he used to chide her, "you are right, I know. I do always think too much of my own feelings, and not enough of others'—not enough of yours. I had need have you always to find fault with me and teach me: so many things have come true that you used to tell me."

Maggie was resting her elbow on the table, leaning her head on her hand and looking at Philip with half-penitent dependent affection, as she said

this; while he was returning her gaze with an expression that, to her consciousness, gradually became less vague—became charged with a specific recollection. Had his mind flown back to something that *she* now remembered?—something about a lover of Lucy's? It was a thought that made her shudder: it gave new definiteness to her present position, and to the tendency of what had happened the evening before. She moved her arm from the table, urged to change her position by that positive physical oppression at the heart that sometimes accompanies a sudden mental pang.

"What is the matter, Maggie? Has something happened?" Philip said, in inexpressible anxiety—his imagination being only too ready to weave everything that was fatal to them both.

"No—nothing," said Maggie, rousing her latent will. Philip must not have that odious thought in his mind: she would banish it from her own. "Nothing," she repeated, "except in my own mind. You used to say I should feel the effect of my starved life, as you called it, and I do. I am too eager in my enjoyment of music and all luxuries, now they are come to me."

She took up her work and occupied herself resolutely, while Philip watched her, really in doubt

whether she had anything more than this general allusion in her mind. It was quite in Maggie's character to be agitated by vague self-reproach. But soon there came a violent well-known ring at the door-bell resounding through the house.

"O what a startling announcement!" said Maggie, quite mistress of herself, though not without some inward flutter. "I wonder where Lucy is."

Lucy had not been deaf to the signal, and after an interval long enough for a few solicitous but not hurried inquiries, she herself ushered Stephen in.

"Well, old fellow," he said, going straight up to Philip and shaking him heartily by the hand, bowing to Maggie in passing, "it's glorious to have you back again; only I wish you'd conduct yourself a little less like a sparrow with a residence on the house-top, and not go in and out constantly without letting the servants know. This is about the twentieth time I've had to scamper up those countless stairs to that painting-room of yours, all to no purpose, because your people thought you were at home. Such incidents embitter friendship."

"I've so few visitors—it seems hardly worth while to leave notice of my exit and entrances,"

said Philip, feeling rather oppressed just then by Stephen's bright strong presence and strong voice.

"Are you quite well this morning, Miss Tulliver?" said Stephen, turning to Maggie with stiff politeness, and putting out his hand with the air of fulfilling a social duty.

Maggie gave the tips of her fingers, and said, "Quite well, thank you," in a tone of proud indifference. Philip's eyes were watching them keenly; but Lucy was used to seeing variations in their manner to each other, and only thought with regret that there was some natural antipathy which every now and then surmounted their mutual good-will. "Maggie is not the sort of woman Stephen admires, and she is irritated by something in him which she interprets as conceit," was the silent observation that accounted for everything to guileless Lucy. Stephen and Maggie had no sooner completed this studied greeting than each felt hurt by the other's coldness. And Stephen, while rattling on in questions to Philip about his recent sketching expedition, was thinking all the more about Maggie because he was not drawing her into the conversation, as he had invariably done before. "Maggie and Philip are not looking happy," thought Lucy: "this first interview has been saddening to them."

"I think we people who have not been galloping," she said to Stephen, "are all a little damped by the rain. Let us have some music. We ought to take advantage of having Philip and you together. Give us the duet in 'Masaniello:' Maggie has not heard that, and I know it will suit her."

"Come, then," said Stephen, going towards the piano, and giving a foretaste of the tune in his deep "brum-brum," very pleasant to hear.

"You, please, Philip—you play the accompaniment," said Lucy, "and then I can go on with my work. You *will* like to play, shan't you?" she added, with a pretty inquiring look, anxious, as usual, lest she should have proposed what was not pleasant to another; but with yearnings towards her unfinished embroidery.

Philip had brightened at the proposition, for there is no feeling, perhaps, except the extremes of fear and grief, that does not find relief in music—that does not make a man sing or play the better; and Philip had an abundance of pent-up feeling at this moment, as complex as any trio or quartet that was ever meant to express love and jealousy, and resignation and fierce suspicion, all at the same time.

"O yes," he said, seating himself at the piano,

"it is a way of eking out one's imperfect life and being three people at once—to sing and make the piano sing, and hear them both all the while—or else to sing and paint."

"Ah, there you are an enviable fellow. I can do nothing with my hands," said Stephen. "That has generally been observed in men of great administrative capacity, I believe. A tendency to predominance of the reflective powers in me!—haven't you observed that, Miss Tulliver?"

Stephen had fallen by mistake into his habit of playful appeal to Maggie, and she could not repress the answering flush and epigram.

"I *have* observed a tendency to predominance," she said, smiling; and Philip at that moment devoutly hoped that she found the tendency disagreeable.

"Come, come," said Lucy; "music, music! We will discuss each other's qualities another time."

Maggie always tried in vain to go on with her work when music began. She tried harder than ever to-day; for the thought that Stephen knew how much she cared for his singing was one that no longer roused a merely playful resistance; and she knew, too, that it was his habit always to stand so that he could look at her. But it was of no use:

she soon threw her work down, and all her intentions were lost in the vague state of emotion produced by the inspiring duet—emotion that seemed to make her at once strong and weak: strong for all enjoyment, weak for all resistance. When the strain passed into the minor, she half-started from her seat with the sudden thrill of that change. Poor Maggie! She looked very beautiful when her soul was being played on in this way by the inexorable power of sound. You might have seen the slightest perceptible quivering through her whole frame, as she leaned a little forward, clasping her hands as if to steady herself; while her eyes dilated and brightened into that wide-open, childish expression of wondering delight, which always came back in her happiest moments. Lucy, who at other times had always been at the piano when Maggie was looking in this way, could not resist the impulse to steal up to her and kiss her. Philip, too, caught a glimpse of her now and then round the open book on the desk, and felt that he had never before seen her under so strong an influence.

"More, more!" said Lucy, when the duet had been encored. "Something spirited again. Maggie always says she likes a great rush of sound."

"It must be 'Let us take the road,' then," said Stephen—"so suitable for a wet morning. But are you prepared to abandon the most sacred duties of life, and come and sing with us?"

"O yes," said Lucy, laughing. "If you will look out the 'Beggar's Opera' from the large canterbury. It has a dingy cover."

"That is a great clue, considering there are about a score covers here of rival dinginess," said Stephen, drawing out the canterbury.

"O, play something the while, Philip," said Lucy, noticing that his fingers were wandering over the keys. "What is that you are falling into?—something delicious that I don't know."

"Don't you know that?" said Philip, bringing out the tune more definitely. "It's from the *Somnambula*—'Ah! perchè non posso odiarti.' I don't know the opera, but it appears the tenor is telling the heroine that he shall always love her though she may forsake him. You've heard me sing it to the English words, 'I love thee still.'"

It was not quite unintentionally that Philip had wandered into this song, which might be an indirect expression to Maggie of what he could not prevail on himself to say to her directly. Her ears had been open to what he was saying, and when he

began to sing, she understood the plaintive passion of the music. That pleading tenor had no very fine qualities as a voice, but it was not quite new to her: it had sung to her by snatches, in a subdued way, among the grassy walks and hollows, and underneath the leaning ash-tree in the Red Deeps. There seemed to be some reproach in the words—did Philip mean that? She wished she had assured him more distinctly in their conversation that she desired not to renew the hope of love between them, *only* because it clashed with her inevitable circumstances. She was touched, not thrilled, by the song: it suggested distinct memories and thoughts, and brought quiet regret in the place of excitement.

"That's the way with you tenors," said Stephen, who was waiting with music in his hand while Philip finished the song. "You demoralise the fair sex by warbling your sentimental love and constancy under all sorts of vile treatment. Nothing short of having your heads served up in a dish like that mediæval tenor or troubadour, would prevent you from expressing your entire resignation. I must administer an antidote, while Miss Deane prepares to tear herself away from her bobbins."

Stephen rolled out, with saucy energy—

> "Shall I, wasting in despair,
> Die because a woman's fair?"

and seemed to make all the air in the room alive with a new influence. Lucy, always proud of what Stephen did, went towards the piano with laughing, admiring looks at him; and Maggie, in spite of her resistance to the spirit of the song and to the singer, was taken hold of and shaken by the invisible influence—was borne along by a wave too strong for her.

But angrily resolved not to betray herself, she seized her work, and went on making false stitches and pricking her fingers with much perseverance, not looking up or taking notice of what was going forward, until all the three voices united in "Let us take the road."

I am afraid there would have been a subtle, stealing gratification in her mind if she had known how entirely this saucy, defiant Stephen was occupied with her: how he was passing rapidly from a determination to treat her with ostentatious indifference to an irritating desire for some sign of inclination from her—some interchange of subdued word or look with her. It was not long before he found an opportunity, when they had passed to the music

of "The Tempest." Maggie, feeling the need of a footstool, was walking across the room to get one, when Stephen, who was not singing just then, and was conscious of all her movements, guessed her want, and flew to anticipate her, lifting the footstool with an entreating look at her, which made it impossible not to return a glance of gratitude. And then, to have the footstool placed carefully by a too self-confident personage—not *any* self-confident personage, but one in particular, who suddenly looks humble and anxious, and lingers, bending still, to ask if there is not some draught in that position between the window and the fireplace, and if he may not be allowed to move the work-table for her—these things will summon a little of the too-ready, traitorous tenderness into a woman's eyes, compelled as she is in her girlish time to learn her life-lessons in very trivial language. And to Maggie such things had not been everyday incidents, but were a new element in her life, and found her keen appetite for homage quite fresh. That tone of gentle solicitude obliged her to look at the face that was bent towards her, and to say, "No, thank you;" and nothing could prevent that mutual glance from being delicious to both, as it had been the evening before.

It was but an ordinary act of politeness in Stephen; it had hardly taken two minutes; and Lucy, who was singing, scarcely noticed it. But to Philip's mind, filled already with a vague anxiety that was likely to find a definite ground for itself in any trivial incident, this sudden eagerness in Stephen, and the change in Maggie's face, which was plainly reflecting a beam from his, seemed so strong a contrast with the previous overwrought signs of indifference, as to be charged with painful meaning. Stephen's voice, pouring in again, jarred upon his nervous susceptibility as if it had been the clang of sheet-iron, and he felt inclined to make the piano shriek in utter discord. He had really seen no communicable ground for suspecting any unusual feeling between Stephen and Maggie: his own reason told him so, and he wanted to go home at once that he might reflect coolly on these false images, till he had convinced himself of their nullity. But then, again, he wanted to stay as long as Stephen stayed—always to be present when Stephen was present with Maggie. It seemed to poor Philip so natural, nay, inevitable, that any man who was near Maggie should fall in love with her! There was no promise of happiness for her if she were beguiled into loving Stephen Guest; and this

thought emboldened Philip to view his own love for her in the light of a less unequal offering. He was beginning to play very falsely under this deafening inward tumult, and Lucy was looking at him in astonishment, when Mrs Tulliver's entrance to summon them to lunch came as an excuse for abruptly breaking off the music.

"Ah, Mr Philip," said Mr Deane, when they entered the dining-room, "I've not seen you for a long while. Your father's not at home, I think, is he? I went after him to the office the other day, and they said he was out of town."

"He's been to Mudport on business for several days," said Philip; "but he's come back now."

"As fond of his farming hobby as ever, eh?"

"I believe so," said Philip, rather wondering at this sudden interest in his father's pursuits.

"Ah!" said Mr Deane, "he's got some land in his own hands on this side the river as well as the other, I think?"

"Yes, he has."

"Ah!" continued Mr Deane, as he dispensed the pigeon-pie; "he must find farming a heavy item—an expensive hobby. I never had a hobby myself—never would give in to that. And the worst of all hobbies are those that people think they can get

money at. They shoot their money down like corn out of a sack then."

Lucy felt a little nervous under her father's apparently gratuitous criticism of Mr Wakem's expenditure. But it ceased there, and Mr Deane became unusually silent and meditative during his luncheon. Lucy, accustomed to watch all indications in her father, and having reasons, which had recently become strong, for an extra interest in what referred to the Wakems, felt an unusual curiosity to know what had prompted her father's questions. His subsequent silence made her suspect there had been some special reason for them in his mind.

With this idea in her head, she resorted to her usual plan when she wanted to tell or ask her father anything particular: she found a reason for her aunt Tulliver to leave the dining-room after dinner, and seated herself on a small stool at her father's knee. Mr Deane, under those circumstances, considered that he tasted some of the most agreeable moments his merits had purchased him in life, notwithstanding that Lucy, disliking to have her hair powdered with snuff, usually began by mastering his snuff-box on such occasions.

"You don't want to go to sleep yet, papa, *do*

you?" she said, as she brought up her stool and opened the large fingers that clutched the snuff-box.

"Not yet," said Mr Deane, glancing at the reward of merit in the decanter. "But what do *you* want?" he added, pinching the dimpled chin fondly. "To coax some more sovereigns out of my pocket for your bazaar? Eh?"

"No, I have no base motives at all to-day. I only want to talk, not to beg. I want to know what made you ask Philip Wakem about his father's farming to-day, papa? It seemed rather odd, because you never hardly say anything to him about his father; and why should you care about Mr Wakem's losing money by his hobby?"

"Something to do with business," said Mr Deane, waving his hands, as if to repel intrusion into that mystery.

"But, papa, you always say Mr Wakem has brought Philip up like a girl: how came you to think you should get any business knowledge out of him? Those abrupt questions sounded rather oddly. Philip thought them queer."

"Nonsense, child!" said Mr Deane, willing to justify his social demeanour, with which he had taken some pains in his upward progress. "There's a report that Wakem's mill and farm on the other

side of the river—Dorlcote Mill, your uncle Tulliver's, you know—isn't answering so well as it did. I wanted to see if your friend Philip would let anything out about his father's being tired of farming."

"Why? Would you buy the mill, papa, if he would part with it?" said Lucy, eagerly. "O, tell me everything—here, you shall have your snuff-box if you'll tell me. Because Maggie says all their hearts are set on Tom's getting back the mill some time. It was one of the last things her father said to Tom, that he must get back the mill."

"Hush, you little puss," said Mr Deane, availing himself of the restored snuff-box. "You must not say a word about this thing—do you hear? There's very little chance of their getting the mill, or of anybody's getting it out of Wakem's hands. And if he knew that we wanted it with a view to the Tullivers getting it again, he'd be the less likely to part with it. It's natural, after what happened. He behaved well enough to Tulliver before; but a horse-whipping is not likely to be paid for with sugar-plums."

"Now, papa," said Lucy, with a little air of solemnity, "will you trust me? You must not ask me all my reasons for what I'm going to say—but I

have very strong reasons. And I'm very cautious—I am, indeed."

"Well, let us hear."

"Why, I believe, if you will let me take Philip Wakem into our confidence—let me tell him all about your wish to buy, and what it's for—that my cousins wish to have it, and why they wish to have it—I believe Philip would help to bring it about. I know he would desire to do it."

"I don't see how that can be, child," said Mr Deane, looking puzzled. "Why should *he* care?"—then, with a sudden penetrating looking at his daughter, "you don't think the poor lad's fond of you, and so you can make him do what you like?" (Mr Deane felt quite safe about his daughter's affections.)

"No, papa; he cares very little about me—not so much as I care about him. But I have a reason for being quite sure of what I say. Don't you ask me. And if you ever guess, don't tell me. Only give me leave to do as I think fit about it."

Lucy rose from her stool to seat herself on her father's knee, and kissed him with that last request.

"Are you sure you won't do mischief, now?" he said, looking at her with delight.

"Yes, papa, quite sure. I'm very wise: I've got all your business talents. Didn't you admire my accompt-book, now, when I showed it you?"

"Well, well, if this youngster will keep his counsel, there won't be much harm done. And to tell the truth, I think there's not much chance for us any other way. Now, let me go off to sleep."

CHAPTER VIII.

WAKEM IN A NEW LIGHT.

BEFORE three days had passed after the conversation you have just overheard between Lucy and her father, she had contrived to have a private interview with Philip during a visit of Maggie's to her aunt Glegg. For a day and a night Philip turned over in his mind with restless agitation all that Lucy had told him in that interview, till he had thoroughly resolved on a course of action. He thought he saw before him now a possibility of altering his position with respect to Maggie, and removing at least one obstacle between them. He laid his plan and calculated all his moves with the fervid deliberation of a chess-player in the days of his first ardour, and was amazed himself at his sudden genius as a tactician. His plan was as bold as it was thoroughly calculated. Having watched for a moment when his father had nothing more urgent

on his hands than the newspaper, he went behind him, laid a hand on his shoulder, and said—

"Father, will you come up into my sanctum, and look at my new sketches? I've arranged them now."

"I'm getting terribly stiff in the joints, Phil, for climbing those stairs of yours," said Wakem, looking kindly at his son as he laid down his paper. "But come along, then."

"This is a nice place for you, isn't it, Phil?—a capital light that from the roof, eh?" was, as usual, the first thing he said on entering the painting-room. He liked to remind himself and his son too that his fatherly indulgence had provided the accommodation. He had been a good father. Emily would have nothing to reproach him with there, if she came back again from her grave.

"Come, come," he said, putting his double eye-glass over his nose, and seating himself to take a general view while he rested, "you've got a famous show here. Upon my word, I don't see that your things aren't as good as that London artist's—what's his name—that Leyburn gave so much money for."

Philip shook his head and smiled. He had seated himself on his painting-stool, and had taken a lead pencil in his hand, with which he was making strong marks to counteract the sense of tremulousness. He

watched his father get up, and walk slowly round, good-naturedly dwelling on the pictures much longer than his amount of genuine taste for landscape would have prompted, till he stopped before a stand on which two pictures were placed—one much larger than the other—the smaller one in a leather case.

"Bless me! what have you here?" said Wakem, startled by a sudden transition from landscape to portrait. "I thought you'd left off figures. Who are these?"

"They are the same person," said Philip, with calm promptness, "at different ages."

"And what person?" said Wakem, sharply, fixing his eyes with a growing look of suspicion on the larger picture.

"Miss Tulliver. The small one is something like what she was when I was at school with her brother at King's Lorton: the larger one is not quite so good a likeness of what she was when I came from abroad."

Wakem turned round fiercely, with a flushed face, letting his eye-glass fall, and looking at his son with a savage expression for a moment, as if he was ready to strike that daring feebleness from the stool. But he threw himself into the armchair again, and thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets, still look-

ing angrily at his son, however. Philip did not return the look, but sat quietly watching the point of his pencil.

"And do you mean to say, then, that you have had any acquaintance with her since you came from abroad?" said Wakem, at last, with that vain effort which rage always makes to throw as much punishment as it desires to inflict into words and tones, since blows are forbidden.

"Yes: I saw a great deal of her for a whole year before her father's death. We met often, in that thicket—the Red Deeps—near Dorlcote Mill. I love her dearly: I shall never love any other woman. I have thought of her ever since she was a little girl."

"Go on, sir!—and you have corresponded with her all this while?"

"No. I never told her I loved her till just before we parted, and she promised her brother not to see me again or to correspond with me. I am not sure that she loves me, or would consent to marry me. But if she would consent—if she *did* love me well enough—I should marry her."

"And this is the return you make me for all the indulgences I've heaped on you?" said Wakem, getting white, and beginning to tremble under an

enraged sense of impotence before Philip's calm defiance and concentration of purpose.

"No, father," said Philip, looking up at him for the first time. "I don't regard it as a return. You have been an indulgent father to me; but I have always felt that it was because you had an affectionate wish to give me as much happiness as my unfortunate lot would admit of—not that it was a debt you expected me to pay by sacrificing all my chances of happiness to satisfy feelings of yours, which I can never share."

"I think most sons would share their father's feelings in this case," said Wakem, bitterly. "The girl's father was an ignorant mad brute, who was within an inch of murdering me. The whole town knows it. And the brother is just as insolent, only in a cooler way. He forbade her seeing you, you say; he'll break every bone in your body, for your greater happiness, if you don't take care. But you seem to have made up your mind: you have counted the consequences, I suppose. Of course you are independent of me: you can marry this girl to-morrow, if you like: you are a man of five-and-twenty—you can go your way, and I can go mine. We need have no more to do with each other."

Wakem rose and walked towards the door, but

something held him back, and instead of leaving the room, he walked up and down it. Philip was slow to reply, and when he spoke, his tone had a more incisive quietness and clearness than ever.

"No: I can't marry Miss Tulliver, even if she would have me—if I have only my own resources to maintain her with. I have been brought up to no profession. I can't offer her poverty as well as deformity."

"Ah, *there* is a reason for your clinging to me, doubtless," said Wakem, still bitterly, though Philip's last words had given him a pang: they had stirred a feeling which had been a habit for a quarter of a century. He threw himself into the chair again.

"I expected all this," said Philip. "I know these scenes are often happening between father and son. If I were like other men of my age, I might answer your angry words by still angrier —we might part—I should marry the woman I love, and have a chance of being as happy as the rest. But if it will be a satisfaction to you to annihilate the very object of everything you've done for me, you have an advantage over most fathers: you can completely deprive me of the only thing that would make my life worth having."

Philip paused, but his father was silent.

"You know best what satisfaction you would have, beyond that of gratifying a ridiculous rancour worthy only of wandering savages."

"Ridiculous rancour!" Wakem burst out. "What do you mean? Damn it! is a man to be horse-whipped by a boor and love him for it? Besides, there's that cold, proud devil of a son, who said a word to me I shall not forget when we had the settling. He would be as pleasant a mark for a bullet as I know—if he were worth the expense."

"I don't mean your resentment towards them," said Philip, who had his reasons for some sympathy with this view of Tom, "though a feeling of revenge is not worth much, that you should care to keep it. I mean your extending the enmity to a helpless girl, who has too much sense and goodness to share their narrow prejudices. *She* has never entered into the family quarrels."

"What does that signify? We don't ask what a woman does—we ask whom she belongs to. It's altogether a degrading thing to you—to think of marrying old Tulliver's daughter."

For the first time in the dialogue, Philip lost some of his self-control, and coloured with anger.

"Miss Tulliver," he said, with bitter incisiveness,

"has the only grounds of rank that anything but vulgar folly can suppose to belong to the middle class: she is thoroughly refined, and her friends, whatever else they may be, are respected for irreproachable honour and integrity. All St Ogg's, I fancy, would pronounce her to be more than my equal."

Wakem darted a glance of fierce question at his son; but Philip was not looking at him, and with a certain penitent consciousness went on, in a few moments, as if in amplification of his last words—

"Find a single person in St Ogg's who will not tell you that a beautiful creature like her would be throwing herself away on a pitiable object like me."

"Not she!" said Wakem, rising again, and forgetting everything else in a burst of resentful pride, half fatherly, half personal. "It would be a deuced fine match for her. It's all stuff about an accidental deformity, when a girl's really attached to a man."

"But girls are not apt to get attached under those circumstances," said Philip.

"Well, then," said Wakem, rather brutally, trying to recover his previous position, "if she doesn't

care for you, you might have spared yourself the trouble of talking to me about her — and you might have spared me the trouble of refusing my consent to what was never likely to happen."

Wakem strode to the door, and, without looking round again, banged it after him.

Philip was not without confidence that his father would be ultimately wrought upon as he had expected, by what had passed; but the scene had jarred upon his nerves, which were as sensitive as a woman's. He determined not to go down to dinner: he couldn't meet his father again that day. It was Wakem's habit, when he had no company at home, to go out in the evening—often as early as half-past seven; and as it was far on in the afternoon now, Philip locked up his room and went out for a long ramble, thinking he would not return until his father was out of the house again. He got into a boat, and went down the river to a favourite village, where he dined, and lingered till it was late enough for him to return. He had never had any sort of quarrel with his father before, and had a sickening fear that this contest, just begun, might go on for weeks—and what might not happen in that time? He would not allow himself to define what that involuntary ques-

tion meant. But if he could once be in the position of Maggie's accepted, acknowledged lover, there would be less room for vague dread. He went up to his painting-room again, and threw himself, with a sense of fatigue, into the armchair, looking round absently at the views of water and rock that were ranged around, till he fell into a doze, in which he fancied Maggie was slipping down a glistening, green, slimy channel of a waterfall, and he was looking on helpless, till he was awakened by what seemed a sudden, awful crash.

It was the opening of the door, and he could hardly have dozed more than a few moments, for there was no perceptible change in the evening light. It was his father who entered; and when Philip moved to vacate the chair for him, he said—

"Sit still. I'd rather walk about."

He stalked up and down the room once or twice, and then standing opposite Philip, with his hand thrust in his side-pockets, he said, as if continuing a conversation that had not been broken off—

"But this girl seems to have been fond of you, Phil, else she wouldn't have met you in that way."

Philip's heart was beating rapidly, and a transient

flush passed over his face like a gleam. It was not quite easy to speak at once.

"She liked me at King's Lorton, when she was a little girl, because I used to sit with her brother a great deal when he had hurt his foot. She had kept that in her memory, and thought of me as a friend of a long while ago. She didn't think of me as a lover, when she met me."

"Well, but you made love to her at last. What did she say then?" said Wakem, walking about again.

"She said she *did* love me then."

"Confound it, then, what else do you want? Is she a jilt?"

"She was very young then," said Philip, hesitatingly. "I'm afraid she hardly knew what she felt. I'm afraid our long separation, and the idea that events must always divide us, may have made a difference."

"But she's in the town. I've seen her at church. Haven't you spoken to her since you came back?"

"Yes, at Mr Deane's. But I couldn't renew my proposals to her on several grounds. One obstacle would be removed if you would give your consent—if you would be willing to think of her as a daughter-in-law."

Wakem was silent a little while, pausing before Maggie's picture.

"She's not the sort of woman your mother was, though, Phil," he said, at last. "I saw her at church—she's handsomer than this—deuced fine eyes and fine figure, I saw; but rather dangerous and unmanageable, eh?"

"She's very tender and affectionate; and so simple—without the airs and petty contrivances other women have."

"Ah?" said Wakem. Then looking round at his son, "But your mother looked gentler: she had that brown wavy hair and grey eyes, like yours. You can't remember her very well. It was a thousand pities I'd no likeness of her."

"Then, shouldn't you be glad for me to have the same sort of happiness, father—to sweeten my life for me? There can never be another tie so strong to you as that which began eight-and-twenty years ago, when you married my mother, and you have been tightening it ever since."

"Ay, Phil—you're the only fellow that knows the best of me," said Wakem, giving his hand to his son. "We must keep together, if we can. And now, what am I to do? You must come down-stairs

and tell me. Am I to go and call on this dark-eyed damsel?"

The barrier once thrown down in this way, Philip could talk freely to his father of their entire relation with the Tullivers—of the desire to get the mill and land back into the family—and of its transfer to Guest & Co. as an intermediate step. He could venture now to be persuasive and urgent, and his father yielded with more readiness than he had calculated on.

"*I* don't care about the mill," he said at last, with a sort of angry compliance. "I've had an infernal deal of bother lately about the mill. Let them pay me for my improvements, that's all. But there's one thing you needn't ask me. I shall have no direct transactions with young Tulliver. If you like to swallow him, for his sister's sake, you may; but I've no sauce that will make him go down."

I leave you to imagine the agreeable feelings with which Philip went to Mr Deane the next day, to say that Mr Wakem was ready to open the negotiations, and Lucy's pretty triumph as she appealed to her father whether she had not proved her great business abilities. Mr Deane was rather puzzled, and suspected that there had been something "going on" among the young people to which he

wanted a clue. But to men of Mr Deane's stamp, what goes on among the young people is as extraneous to the real business of life as what goes on among the birds and butterflies—until it can be shown to have a malign bearing on monetary affairs. And in this case the bearing appeared to be entirely propitious.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARITY IN FULL-DRESS.

THE culmination of Maggie's career as an admired member of society in St Ogg's was certainly the day of the bazaar, when her simple noble beauty, clad in a white muslin of some soft-floating kind, which I suspect must have come from the stores of aunt Pullet's wardrobe, appeared with marked distinction among the more adorned and conventional women around her. We perhaps never detect how much of our social demeanour is made up of artificial airs, until we see a person who is at once beautiful and simple: without the beauty, we are apt to call simplicity awkwardness. The Miss Guests were much too well-bred to have any of the grimaces and affected tones that belong to pretentious vulgarity; but their stall being next to the one where Maggie sat, it seemed newly obvious to day that Miss Guest held her chin too high, and

that Miss Laura spoke and moved continually with a view to effect.

All well-drest St Ogg's and its neighbourhood were there ; and it would have been worth while to come, even from a distance, to see the fine old hall, with its open roof and carved oaken rafters, and great oaken folding-doors, and light shed down from a height on the many-coloured show beneath : a very quaint place, with broad faded stripes painted on the walls, and here and there a show of heraldic animals of a bristly, long-snouted character, the cherished emblems of a noble family once the seigniors of this now civic hall. A grand arch, cut in the upper wall at one end, surmounted an oaken orchestra, with an open room behind it, where hothouse plants and stalls for refreshments were disposed : an agreeable resort for gentlemen disposed to loiter, and yet to exchange the occasional crush down below for a more commodious point of view. In fact, the perfect fitness of this ancient building for an admirable modern purpose, that made charity truly elegant, and led through vanity up to the supply of a deficit, was so striking that hardly a person entered the room without exchanging the remark more than once. Near the great arch over the orchestra was the stone oriel with painted

glass, which was one of the venerable inconsistencies of the old hall; and it was close by this that Lucy had her stall, for the convenience of certain large plain articles which she had taken charge of for Mrs Kenn. Maggie had begged to sit at the open end of the stall, and to have the sale of these articles rather than of bead-mats and other elaborate products, of which she had but a dim understanding. But it soon appeared that the gentlemen's dressing-gowns, which were among her commodities, were objects of such general attention and inquiry, and excited so troublesome a curiosity as to their lining and comparative merits, together with a determination to test them by trying on, as to make her post a very conspicuous one. The ladies who had commodities of their own to sell, and did not want dressing-gowns, saw at once the frivolity and bad taste of this masculine preference for goods which any tailor could furnish; and it is possible that the emphatic notice of various kinds which was drawn towards Miss Tulliver on this public occasion, threw a very strong and unmistakable light on her subsequent conduct in many minds then present. Not that anger, on account of spurned beauty, can dwell in the celestial breasts of charitable ladies, but rather, that the errors of persons who have once

been much admired necessarily take a deeper tinge from the mere force of contrast; and also, that to-day Maggie's conspicuous position, for the first time, made evident certain characteristics which were subsequently felt to have an explanatory bearing. There was something rather bold in Miss Tulliver's direct gaze, and something undefinably coarse in the style of her beauty, which placed her, in the opinion of all feminine judges, far below her cousin Miss Deane; for the ladies of St Ogg's had now completely ceded to Lucy their hypothetic claims on the admiration of Mr Stephen Guest.

As for dear little Lucy herself, her late benevolent triumph about the Mill, and all the affectionate projects she was cherishing for Maggie and Philip, helped to give her the highest spirits to-day, and she felt nothing but pleasure in the evidence of Maggie's attractiveness. It is true, she was looking very charming herself, and Stephen was paying her the utmost attention on this public occasion; jealously buying up the articles he had seen under her fingers in the process of making, and gaily helping her to cajole the male customers into the purchase of the most effeminate futilities. He chose to lay aside his hat and wear a scarlet fez of her embroidering; but by superficial observers this was necessarily liable

to be interpreted less as a compliment to Lucy than as a mark of coxcombry. "Guest is a great coxcomb," young Torry observed; "but then he is a privileged person in St Ogg's—he carries all before him: if another fellow did such things, everybody would say he made a fool of himself."

And Stephen purchased absolutely nothing from Maggie, until Lucy said, in rather a vexed undertone—

"See, now; all the things of Maggie's knitting will be gone, and you will not have bought one. There are those deliciously soft warm things for the wrists—do buy them."

"Oh, no," said Stephen, "they must be intended for imaginative persons, who can chill themselves on this warm day by thinking of the frosty Caucasus. Stern reason is my forte, you know. You must get Philip to buy those. By the way, why doesn't he come?"

"He never likes going where there are many people, though I enjoined him to come. He said he would buy up any of my goods that the rest of the world rejected. But now, do go and buy something of Maggie."

"No, no—see—she has got a customer: there is old Wakem himself just coming up."

Lucy's eyes turned with anxious interest towards Maggie, to see how she went through this first interview, since a sadly memorable time, with a man towards whom she must have so strange a mixture of feelings ; but she was pleased to notice that Wakem had tact enough to enter at once into talk about the bazaar wares, and appear interested in purchasing, smiling now and then kindly at Maggie, and not calling on her to speak much, as if he observed that she was rather pale and tremulous.

"Why, Wakem is making himself particularly amiable to your cousin," said Stephen, in an undertone to Lucy ; "is it pure magnanimity? you talked of a family quarrel."

"O, that will soon be quite healed, I hope," said Lucy, becoming a little indiscreet in her satisfaction, and speaking with an air of significance. But Stephen did not appear to notice this, and as some lady-purchasers came up, he lounged on towards Maggie's end, handling trifles and standing aloof until Wakem, who had taken out his purse, had finished his transactions.

"My son came with me," he overheard Wakem saying, "but he has vanished into some other part of the building, and has left all these charitable

gallantries to me. I hope you'll reproach him for his shabby conduct."

She returned his smile and bow without speaking, and he turned away, only then observing Stephen and nodding to him. Maggie, conscious that Stephen was still there, busied herself with counting money, and avoided looking up. She had been well pleased that he had devoted himself to Lucy to-day, and had not come near her. They had begun the morning with an indifferent salutation, and both had rejoiced in being aloof from each other, like a patient who has actually done without his opium, in spite of former failures in resolution. And during the last few days they had even been making up their minds to failures, looking to the outward events that must soon come to separate them, as a reason for dispensing with self-conquest in detail.

Stephen moved step by step as if he were being unwillingly dragged, until he had got round the open end of the stall, and was half hidden by a screen of draperies. Maggie went on counting her money till she suddenly heard a deep gentle voice saying, "Aren't you very tired? Do let me bring you something—some fruit or jelly—mayn't I?"

The unexpected tones shook her like a sudden accidental vibration of a harp close by her.

"O no, thank you," she said, faintly, and only half looking up for an instant.

"You look so pale," Stephen insisted, in a more entreating tone. "I'm sure you're exhausted. I must disobey you, and bring something."

"No, indeed, I couldn't take it."

"Are you angry with me? What have I done? *Do* look at me."

"Pray, go away," said Maggie, looking at him helplessly, her eyes glancing immediately from him to the opposite corner of the orchestra, which was half hidden by the folds of the old faded green curtain. Maggie had no sooner uttered this entreaty than she was wretched at the admission it implied; but Stephen turned away at once, and, following her upward glance, he saw Philip Wakem seated in the half-hidden corner, so that he could command little more than that angle of the hall in which Maggie sat. An entirely new thought occurred to Stephen, and, linking itself with what he had observed of Wakem's manner, and with Lucy's reply to his observation, it convinced him that there had been some former relation between Philip and Maggie beyond that childish one of which he had heard. More than one impulse made him immediately leave the hall, and go up-stairs to the

refreshment-room, where, walking up to Philip, he sat down behind him, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Are you studying for a portrait, Phil," he said, "or for a sketch of that oriel window? By George, it makes a capital bit from this dark corner, with the curtain just marking it off."

"I have been studying expression," said Philip, curtly.

"What, Miss Tulliver's? It's rather of the savage-moody order to-day, I think—something of the fallen princess serving behind a counter. Her cousin sent me to her with a civil offer to get her some refreshment, but I have been snubbed, as usual. There's a natural antipathy between us, I suppose: I have seldom the honour to please her."

"What a hypocrite you are!" said Philip, flushing angrily.

"What, because experience must have told me that I'm universally pleasing? I admit the law, but there's some disturbing force here."

"I am going," said Philip, rising abruptly.

"So am I—to get a breath of fresh air; this place gets oppressive. I think I have done suit and service long enough."

The two friends walked down-stairs together

without speaking. Philip turned through the outer door into the courtyard, but Stephen, saying, " O, by the by, I must call in here," went on along the passage to one of the rooms at the other end of the building, which were appropriated to the town library. He had the room all to himself, and a man requires nothing less than this, when he wants to dash his cap on the table, throw himself astride a chair, and stare at a high brick wall with a frown which would not have been beneath the occasion if he had been slaying " the giant Python." The conduct that issues from a moral conflict has often so close a resemblance to vice, that the distinction escapes all outward judgments, founded on a mere comparison of actions. It is clear to you, I hope, that Stephen was not a hypocrite—capable of deliberate doubleness for a selfish end ; and yet his fluctuations between the indulgence of a feeling and the systematic concealment of it, might have made a good case in support of Philip's accusation.

Meanwhile, Maggie sate at her stall cold and trembling, with that painful sensation in the eyes which comes from resolutely repressed tears. Was her life to be always like this? — always bringing some new source of inward strife? She heard confusedly the busy indifferent voices around her,

and wished her mind could flow into that easy, babbling current. It was at this moment that Dr Kenn, who had quite lately come into the hall, and was now walking down the middle with his hands behind him, taking a general view, fixed his eyes on Maggie for the first time, and was struck with the expression of pain on her beautiful face. She was sitting quite still, for the stream of customers had lessened at this late hour in the afternoon: the gentlemen had chiefly chosen the middle of the day, and Maggie's stall was looking rather bare. This, with her absent, pained expression, finished the contrast between her and her companions, who were all bright, eager, and busy. He was strongly arrested. Her face had naturally drawn his attention as a new and striking one at church, and he had been introduced to her during a short call on business at Mr Deane's, but he had never spoken more than three words to her. He walked towards her now, and Maggie, perceiving some one approaching, roused herself to look up and be prepared to speak. She felt a childlike, instinctive relief from the sense of uneasiness in this exertion, when she saw it was Dr Kenn's face that was looking at her: that plain, middle-aged face, with a grave, penetrating kindness in it, seeming

to tell of a human being who had reached a firm, safe strand, but was looking with helpful pity towards the strugglers still tossed by the waves, had an effect on Maggie at this moment which was afterwards remembered by her as if it had been a promise. The middle-aged, who have lived through their strongest emotions, but are yet in the time when memory is still half passionate and not merely contemplative, should surely be a sort of natural priesthood, whom life has disciplined and consecrated to be the refuge and rescue of early stumblers and victims of self-despair. Most of us, at some moment in our young lives, would have welcomed a priest of that natural order in any sort of canonicals or uncanonicals, but had to scramble upwards into all the difficulties of nineteen entirely without such aid, as Maggie did.

"You find your office rather a fatiguing one, I fear, Miss Tulliver?" said Dr Kenn.

"It is, rather," said Maggie, simply, not being accustomed to simper amiable denials of obvious facts.

"But I can tell Mrs Kenn that you have disposed of her goods very quickly," he added; "she will be very much obliged to you."

"O, I have done nothing: the gentlemen came very fast to buy the dressing-gowns and embroidered

waistcoats, but I think any of the other ladies would have sold more: I didn't know what to say about them."

Dr Kenn smiled. "I hope I'm going to have you as a permanent parishioner now, Miss Tulliver—am I? You have been at a distance from us hitherto."

"I have been a teacher in a school, and I'm going into another situation of the same kind very soon."

"Ah? I was hoping you would remain among your friends, who are all in this neighbourhood, I believe."

"O, *I must go*," said Maggie, earnestly, looking at Dr Kenn with an expression of reliance, as if she had told him her history in those three words. It was one of those moments of implicit revelation which will sometimes happen even between people who meet quite transiently—on a mile's journey, perhaps, or when resting by the wayside. There is always this possibility of a word or look from a stranger to keep alive the sense of human brotherhood.

Dr Kenn's ear and eye took in all the signs that this brief confidence of Maggie's was charged with meaning.

"I understand," he said; "you feel it right to go.

But that will not prevent our meeting again, I hope: it will not prevent my knowing you better, if I can be of any service to you."

He put out his hand and pressed hers kindly before he turned away.

"She has some trouble or other at heart," he thought. "Poor child! she looks as if she might turn out to be one of

> 'The souls by nature pitch'd too high,
> By suffering plung'd too low.'

There's something wonderfully honest in those beautiful eyes."

It may be surprising that Maggie, among whose many imperfections an excessive delight in admiration and acknowledged supremacy were not absent now, any more than when she was instructing the gypsies with a view towards achieving a royal position among them, was not more elated on a day when she had had the tribute of so many looks and smiles, together with that satisfactory consciousness which had necessarily come from being taken before Lucy's cheval-glass, and made to look at the full length of her tall beauty, crowned by the night of her massy hair. Maggie had smiled at herself then, and for the moment had forgotten everything in the sense of her own beauty. If that state of mind could have

lasted, her choice would have been to have Stephen Guest at her feet, offering her a life filled with all luxuries, with daily incense of adoration near and distant, and with all possibilities of culture at her command. But there were things in her stronger than vanity—passion, and affection, and long deep memories of early discipline and effort, of early claims on her love and pity; and the stream of vanity was soon swept along and mingled imperceptibly with that wider current which was at its highest force to-day, under the double urgency of the events and inward impulses brought by the last week.

Philip had not spoken to her himself about the removal of obstacles between them on his father's side —he shrank from that; but he had told everything to Lucy, with the hope that Maggie, being informed through her, might give him some encouraging sign that their being brought thus much nearer to each other was a happiness to her. The rush of conflicting feelings was too great for Maggie to say much when Lucy, with a face breathing playful joy, like one of Correggio's cherubs, poured forth her triumphant revelation; and Lucy could hardly be surprised that she could do little more than cry with gladness at the thought of her father's wish being fulfilled, and of Tom's getting the Mill again in reward for all his hard striving. The details of

preparation for the bazaar had then come to usurp Lucy's attention for the next few days, and nothing had been said by the cousins on subjects that were likely to rouse deeper feelings. Philip had been to the house more than once, but Maggie had had no private conversation with him, and thus she had been left to fight her inward battle without interference.

But when the bazaar was fairly ended, and the cousins were alone again, resting together at home, Lucy said—

"You must give up going to stay with your aunt Moss the day after to-morrow, Maggie: write a note to her, and tell her you have put it off at my request, and I'll send the man with it. She won't be displeased; you'll have plenty of time to go by-and-by; and I don't want you to go out of the way just now."

"Yes, indeed I must go, dear; I can't put it off. I wouldn't leave aunt Gritty out for the world. And I shall have very little time, for I'm going away to a new situation on the 25th of June."

"Maggie!" said Lucy, almost white with astonishment.

"I didn't tell you, dear," said Maggie, making a great effort to command herself, "because you've been so busy. But some time ago I wrote to our old governess, Miss Firniss, to ask her to let me

know if she met with any situation that I could fill, and the other day I had a letter from her telling me that I could take three orphan pupils of hers to the coast during the holidays, and then make trial of a situation with her as teacher. I wrote yesterday to accept the offer."

Lucy felt so hurt that for some moments she was unable to speak.

"Maggie," she said at last, "how could you be so unkind to me—not to tell me—to take *such* a step—and now!" She hesitated a little, and then added—"And Philip? I thought everything was going to be so happy. O Maggie—what is the reason? Give it up; let me write. There is nothing now to keep you and Philip apart."

"Yes," said Maggie, faintly. "There is Tom's feeling. He said I must give him up if I married Philip. And I know he will not change—at least not for a long while—unless something happened to soften him."

"But I will talk to him: he's coming back this week. And this good news about the Mill will soften him. And I'll talk to him about Philip. Tom's always very compliant to me: I don't think he's so obstinate."

"But I must go," said Maggie, in a distressed

voice. "I must leave some time to pass. Don't press me to stay, dear Lucy."

Lucy was silent for two or three minutes, looking away and ruminating. At length she knelt down by her cousin, and, looking up in her face with anxious seriousness, said—

"Maggie, is it that you don't love Philip well enough to marry him?—tell me—trust me."

Maggie held Lucy's hands tightly in silence a little while. Her own hands were quite cold. But when she spoke, her voice was quite clear and distinct.

"Yes, Lucy, I would choose to marry him. I think it would be the best and highest lot for me —to make his life happy. He loved me first. No one else could be quite what he is to me. But I can't divide myself from my brother for life. I must go away, and wait. Pray, don't speak to me again about it."

Lucy obeyed in pain and wonder. The next word she said was—

"Well, dear Maggie, at least you will go to the dance at Park House to-morrow, and have some music and brightness, before you go to pay these dull, dutiful visits. Ah! here come aunty and the tea."

CHAPTER X.

THE SPELL SEEMS BROKEN.

THE suite of rooms opening into each other at Park House looked duly brilliant with lights and flowers and the personal splendours of sixteen couples, with attendant parents and guardians. The focus of brilliancy was the long drawing-room, where the dancing went forward, under the inspiration of the grand piano; the library, into which it opened at one end, had the more sober illumination of maturity, with caps and cards; and at the other end, the pretty sitting-room, with a conservatory attached, was left as an occasional cool retreat. Lucy, who had laid aside her black for the first time, and had her pretty slimness set off by an abundant dress of white crape, was the acknowledged queen of the occasion; for this was one of the Miss Guests' thoroughly condescending parties, including no member of any aristocracy higher than that of

St Ogg's, and stretching to the extreme limits of commercial and professional gentility.

Maggie at first refused to dance, saying that she had forgotten all the figures—it was so many years since she had danced at school; and she was glad to have that excuse, for it is ill dancing with a heavy heart. But at length the music wrought in her young limbs, and the longing came; even though it was the horrible young Torry, who walked up a second time to try and persuade her. She warned him that she could not dance anything but a country dance; but he, of course, was willing to wait for that high felicity, meaning only to be complimentary when he assured her at several intervals that it was a "great bore" that she couldn't waltz—he would have liked so much to waltz with her. But at last it was the turn of the good old-fashioned dance, which has the least of vanity and the most of merriment in it, and Maggie quite forgot her troublous life in a childlike enjoyment of that half-rustic rhythm which seems to banish pretentious etiquette. She felt quite charitably towards young Torry, as his hand bore her along and held her up in the dance; her eyes and cheeks had that fire of young joy in them which will flame out if it can find the least breath to fan it; and her simple black dress,

with its bit of black lace, seemed like the dim setting of a jewel.

Stephen had not yet asked her to dance—had not yet paid her more than a passing civility. Since yesterday, that inward vision of her which perpetually made part of his consciousness, had been half-screened by the image of Philip Wakem, which came across it like a blot: there was some attachment between her and Philip; at least there was an attachment on his side, which made her feel in some bondage. Here then, Stephen told himself, was another claim of honour which called on him to resist the attraction that was continually threatening to overpower him. He told himself so; and yet he had once or twice felt a certain savage resistance, and at another moment a shuddering repugnance, to this intrusion of Philip's image, which almost made it a new incitement to rush towards Maggie and claim her for himself. Nevertheless he had done what he meant to do this evening: he had kept aloof from her; he had hardly looked at her; and he had been gaily assiduous to Lucy. But now his eyes were devouring Maggie: he felt inclined to kick young Torry out of the dance, and take his place. Then he wanted the dance to end that he might get rid of his partner. The possibility

that he too should dance with Maggie, and have her hand in his so long, was beginning to possess him like a thirst. But even now their hands were meeting in the dance—were meeting still to the very end of it, though they were far off each other.

Stephen hardly knew what happened, or in what automatic way he got through the duties of politeness in the interval, until he was free and saw Maggie seated alone again, at the farther end of the room. He made his way towards her round the couples that were forming for the waltz, and when Maggie became conscious that she was the person he sought, she felt, in spite of all the thoughts that had gone before, a glowing gladness at heart. Her eyes and cheeks were still brightened with her child-like enthusiasm in the dance; her whole frame was set to joy and tenderness; even the coming pain could not seem bitter—she was ready to welcome it as a part of life, for life at this moment seemed a keen vibrating consciousness poised above pleasure or pain. This one, this last night, she might expand unrestrainedly in the warmth of the present, without those chill eating thoughts of the past and the future.

"They're going to waltz again," said Stephen, bending to speak to her, with that glance and tone

of subdued tenderness which young dreams create to themselves in the summer woods when low cooing voices fill the air. Such glances and tones bring the breath of poetry with them into a room that is half-stifling with glaring gas and hard flirtation.

"They are going to waltz again: it is rather dizzy work to look on, and the room is very warm. Shall we walk about a little?"

He took her hand and placed it within his arm, and they walked on into the sitting-room, where the tables were strewn with engravings for the accommodation of visitors who would not want to look at them. But no visitors were here at this moment. They passed on into the conservatory.

"How strange and unreal the trees and flowers look with the lights among them," said Maggie, in a low voice. "They look as if they belonged to an enchanted land, and would never fade away:—I could fancy they were all made of jewels."

She was looking at the tier of geraniums as she spoke, and Stephen made no answer; but he was looking at her—and does not a supreme poet blend light and sound into one, calling darkness mute, and light eloquent? Something strangely powerful there was in the light of Stephen's long gaze, for it made Maggie's face turn towards it and look upward at

it—slowly, like a flower at the ascending brightness. And they walked unsteadily on, without feeling that they were walking—without feeling anything but that long grave mutual gaze which has the solemnity belonging to all deep human passion. The hovering thought that they must and would renounce each other made this moment of mute confession more intense in its rapture.

But they had reached the end of the conservatory, and were obliged to pause and turn. The change of movement brought a new consciousness to Maggie: she blushed deeply, turned away her head, and drew her arm from Stephen's, going up to some flowers to smell them. Stephen stood motionless, and still pale.

"O, may I get this rose?" said Maggie, making a great effort to say something, and dissipate the burning sense of irretrievable confession. "I think I am quite wicked with roses—I like to gather them and smell them till they have no scent left."

Stephen was mute: he was incapable of putting a sentence together, and Maggie bent her arm a little upward towards the large half-opened rose that had attracted her. Who has not felt the beauty of a woman's arm?—the unspeakable suggestions of tenderness that lie in the dimpled elbow,

and all the varied gently-lessening curves down to the delicate wrist, with its tiniest, almost imperceptible nicks in the firm softness. A woman's arm touched the soul of a great sculptor two thousand years ago, so that he wrought an image of it for the Parthenon which moves us still as it clasps lovingly the time-worn marble of a headless trunk. Maggie's was such an arm as that—and it had the warm tints of life.

A mad impulse seized on Stephen; he darted towards the arm, and showered kisses on it, clasping the wrist.

But the next moment Maggie snatched it from him, and glared at him like a wounded war-goddess, quivering with rage and humiliation.

"How dare you?"—she spoke in a deeply shaken, half-smothered voice. "What right have I given you to insult me?"

She darted from him into the adjoining room, and threw herself on the sofa, panting and trembling.

A horrible punishment was come upon her for the sin of allowing a moment's happiness that was treachery to Lucy, to Philip—to her own better soul. That momentary happiness had been smitten with a blight—a leprosy: Stephen thought more lightly of *her* than he did of Lucy.

As for Stephen, he leaned back against the framework of the conservatory, dizzy with the conflict of passions—love, rage, and confused despair: despair at his want of self-mastery, and despair that he had offended Maggie.

The last feeling surmounted every other: to be by her side again and entreat forgiveness was the only thing that had the force of a motive for him, and she had not been seated more than a few minutes when he came and stood humbly before her. But Maggie's bitter rage was unspent.

"Leave me to myself, if you please," she said, with impetuous haughtiness, "and for the future avoid me."

Stephen turned away, and walked backwards and forwards at the other end of the room. There was the dire necessity of going back into the dancing-room again, and he was beginning to be conscious of that. They had been absent so short a time, that when he went in again the waltz was not ended.

Maggie, too, was not long before she re-entered. All the pride of her nature was stung into activity: the hateful weakness which had dragged her within reach of this wound to her self-respect, had at least wrought its own cure. The thoughts and temptations of the last month should all be flung away into an unvisited chamber of memory: there

was nothing to allure her now; duty would be easy, and all the old calm purposes would reign peacefully once more. She re-entered the drawing-room still with some excited brightness in her face, but with a sense of proud self-command that defied anything to agitate her. She refused to dance again, but she talked quite readily and calmly with every one who addressed her. And when they got home that night, she kissed Lucy with a free heart, almost exulting in this scorching moment, which had delivered her from the possibility of another word or look that would have the stamp of treachery towards that gentle, unsuspicious sister.

The next morning Maggie did not set off to Basset quite so soon as she had expected. Her mother was to accompany her in the carriage, and household business could not be despatched hastily by Mrs Tulliver. So Maggie, who had been in a hurry to prepare herself, had to sit waiting, equipped for the drive, in the garden. Lucy was busy in the house wrapping up some bazaar presents for the younger ones at Basset, and when there was a loud ring at the door-bell, Maggie felt some alarm lest Lucy should bring out Stephen to her: it was sure to be Stephen.

But presently the visitor came out into the garden

alone, and seated himself by her on the garden-chair. It was not Stephen.

"We can just catch the tips of the Scotch firs, Maggie, from this seat," said Philip.

They had taken each other's hands in silence, but Maggie had looked at him with a more complete revival of the old childlike affectionate smile than he had seen before, and he felt encouraged.

"Yes," she said, "I often look at them, and wish I could see the low sunlight on the stems again. But I have never been that way but once—to the churchyard, with my mother."

"I have been there—I go there—continually," said Philip. "I have nothing but the past to live upon."

A keen remembrance and keen pity impelled Maggie to put her hand in Philip's. They had so often walked hand-in-hand!

"I remember all the spots," she said—"just where you told me of particular things—beautiful stories that I had never heard of before."

"You will go there again soon—won't you, Maggie?" said Philip, getting timid. "The Mill will soon be your brother's home again."

"Yes; but I shall not be there," said Maggie. "I shall only hear of that happiness. I am

going away again—Lucy has not told you, perhaps?"

"Then the future will never join on to the past again, Maggie? That book is quite closed?"

The grey eyes that had so often looked up at her with entreating worship, looked up at her now, with a last struggling ray of hope in them, and Maggie met them with her large sincere gaze.

"That book never will be closed, Philip," she said, with grave sadness; "I desire no future that will break the ties of the past. But the tie to my brother is one of the strongest. I can do nothing willingly that will divide me always from him."

"Is that the only reason that would keep us apart for ever, Maggie?" said Philip, with a desperate determination to have a definite answer.

"The only reason," said Maggie, with calm decision. And she believed it. At that moment she felt as if the enchanted cup had been dashed to the ground. The reactionary excitement that gave her a proud self-mastery had not subsided, and she looked at the future with a sense of calm choice.

They sat hand-in-hand without looking at each other or speaking for a few minutes: in Maggie's mind the first scenes of love and parting were more

present than the actual moment, and she was looking at Philip in the Red Deeps.

Philip felt that he ought to have been thoroughly happy in that answer of hers: she was as open and transparent as a rock-pool. Why was he not thoroughly happy? Jealousy is never satisfied with anything short of an omniscience that would detect the subtlest fold of the heart.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE LANE.

MAGGIE had been four days at her aunt Moss's, giving the early June sunshine quite a new brightness in the care-dimmed eyes of that affectionate woman, and making an epoch for her cousins great and small, who were learning her words and actions by heart, as if she had been a transient avatar of perfect wisdom and beauty.

She was standing on the causeway with her aunt and a group of cousins feeding the chickens, at that quiet moment in the life of the farmyard before the afternoon milking-time. The great buildings round the hollow yard were as dreary and tumble-down as ever, but over the old garden-wall the straggling rose-bushes were beginning to toss their summer weight, and the grey wood and old bricks of the house, on its higher level, had a look of sleepy age in the broad afternoon sunlight, that suited the quiescent time. Maggie, with her bonnet over her

arm, was smiling down at the hatch of small fluffy chickens, when her aunt exclaimed—

"Goodness me! who is that gentleman coming in at the gate?"

It was a gentleman on a tall bay horse; and the flanks and neck of the horse were streaked black with fast riding. Maggie felt a beating at head and heart—horrible as the sudden leaping to life of a savage enemy who had feigned death.

"Who is it, my dear?" said Mrs Moss, seeing in Maggie's face the evidence that she knew.

"It is Mr Stephen Guest," said Maggie, rather faintly. "My cousin Lucy's—— a gentleman who is very intimate at my cousin's."

Stephen was already close to them, had jumped off his horse, and now raised his hat as he advanced.

"Hold the horse, Willy," said Mrs Moss to the twelve-year-old boy.

"No, thank you," said Stephen, pulling at the horse's impatiently tossing head. "I must be going again immediately. I have a message to deliver to you, Miss Tulliver — on private business. May I take the liberty of asking you to walk a few yards with me?"

He had a half-jaded, half-irritated look, such as a man gets when he has been dogged by some care

or annoyance that makes his bed and his dinner of little use to him. He spoke almost abruptly, as if his errand were too pressing for him to trouble himself about what would be thought by Mrs Moss of his visit and request. Good Mrs Moss, rather nervous in the presence of this apparently haughty gentleman, was inwardly wondering whether she would be doing right or wrong to invite him again to leave his horse and walk in, when Maggie, feeling all the embarrassment of the situation, and unable to say anything, put on her bonnet, and turned to walk towards the gate.

Stephen turned too, and walked by her side, leading his horse.

Not a word was spoken till they were out in the lane, and had walked four or five yards, when Maggie, who had been looking straight before her all the while, turned again to walk back, saying, with haughty resentment—

"There is no need for me to go any farther. I don't know whether you consider it gentlemanly and delicate conduct to place me in a position that forced me to come out with you—or whether you wished to insult me still further by thrusting an interview upon me in this way."

"Of course you are angry with me for coming," said Stephen, bitterly. "Of course it is of no consequence what a man has to suffer—it is only your woman's dignity that you care about."

Maggie gave a slight start, such as might have come from the slightest possible electric shock.

"As if it were not enough that I'm entangled in this way—that I'm mad with love for you—that I resist the strongest passion a man can feel, because I try to be true to other claims—but you must treat me as if I were a coarse brute, who would willingly offend you. And when, if I had my own choice, I should ask you to take my hand, and my fortune, and my whole life, and do what you liked with them! I know I forgot myself. I took an unwarrantable liberty. I hate myself for having done it. But I repented immediately—I've been repenting ever since. You ought not to think it unpardonable: a man who loves with his whole soul, as I do you, is liable to be mastered by his feelings for a moment; but you know—you must believe — that the worst pain I could have is to have pained you—that I would give the world to recall the error."

Maggie dared not speak — dared not turn her head. The strength that had come from resent-

ment was all gone, and her lips were quivering visibly. She could not trust herself to utter the full forgiveness that rose in answer to that confession.

They were come nearly in front of the gate again, and she paused, trembling.

"You must not say these things—I must not hear them," she said, looking down in misery, as Stephen came in front of her, to prevent her from going farther towards the gate. "I'm very sorry for any pain you have to go through; but it is of no use to speak."

"Yes, it *is* of use," said Stephen, impetuously. "It would be of use if you would treat me with some sort of pity and consideration, instead of doing me vile injustice in your mind. I could bear everything more quietly if I knew you didn't hate me for an insolent coxcomb. Look at me—see what a hunted devil I am: I've been riding thirty miles every day to get away from the thought of you."

Maggie did not — dared not look. She had already seen the harassed face. But she said gently—

"I don't think any evil of you."

"Then, dearest, look at me," said Stephen, in

deepest, tenderest tones of entreaty. "Don't go away from me yet. Give me a moment's happiness—make me feel you've forgiven me."

"Yes, I do forgive you," said Maggie, shaken by those tones, and all the more frightened at herself. "But pray let me go in again. Pray go away."

A great tear fell from under her lowered eyelids.

"I can't go away from you—I can't leave you," said Stephen, with still more passionate pleading. "I shall come back again if you send me away with this coldness—I can't answer for myself. But if you will go with me only a little way, I can live on that. You see plainly enough that your anger has only made me ten times more unreasonable."

Maggie turned. But Tancred, the bay horse, began to make such spirited remonstrances against this frequent change of direction, that Stephen, catching sight of Willy Moss peeping through the gate, called out, "Here! just come and hold my horse for five minutes."

"O no," said Maggie, hurriedly, "my aunt will think it so strange."

"Never mind," Stephen answered impatiently; "they don't know the people at St Ogg's. Lead him up and down just here, for five minutes," he

added to Willy, who was now close to them; and then he turned to Maggie's side, and they walked on. It was clear that she *must* go on now.

"Take my arm," said Stephen, entreatingly; and she took it, feeling all the while as if she were sliding downwards in a nightmare.

"There is no end to this misery," she began, struggling to repel the influence by speech. "It is wicked—base—ever allowing a word or look that Lucy—that others might not have seen. Think of Lucy."

"I do think of her—bless her. If I didn't——" Stephen had laid his hand on Maggie's that rested on his arm, and they both felt it difficult to speak.

"And I have other ties," Maggie went on, at last, with a desperate effort,—"even if Lucy did not exist."

"You are engaged to Philip Wakem," said Stephen, hastily. "Is it so?"

"I consider myself engaged to him—I don't mean to marry any one else."

Stephen was silent again until they had turned out of the sun into a side lane, all grassy and sheltered. Then he burst out impetuously—

"It is unnatural—it is horrible. Maggie, if you loved me as I love you, we should throw everything

else to the winds for the sake of belonging to each other. We should break all these mistaken ties that were made in blindness, and determine to marry each other."

"I would rather die than fall into that temptation," said Maggie, with deep, slow distinctness,—all the gathered spiritual force of painful years coming to her aid in this extremity. She drew her arm from his as she spoke.

"Tell me, then, that you don't care for me," he said, almost violently. "Tell me that you love some one else better."

It darted through Maggie's mind that here was a mode of releasing herself from outward struggle —to tell Stephen that her whole heart was Philip's. But her lips would not utter that, and she was silent.

"If you do love me, dearest," said Stephen, gently, taking up her hand again and laying it within his arm, "it is better—it is right that we should marry each other. We can't help the pain it will give. It is come upon us without our seeking: it is natural—it has taken hold of me in spite of every effort I have made to resist it. God knows, I've been trying to be faithful to tacit engagements, and I've only made things worse—I'd better have given way at first."

Maggie was silent. If it were *not* wrong—if she were once convinced of that, and need no longer beat and struggle against this current, soft and yet strong as the summer stream!

"Say 'yes,' dearest," said Stephen, leaning to look entreatingly in her face. "What could we care about in the whole world beside, if we belonged to each other?"

Her breath was on his face—his lips were very near hers—but there was a great dread dwelling in his love for her.

Her lips and eyelids quivered; she opened her eyes full on his for an instant, like a lovely wild animal timid and struggling under caresses, and then turned sharp round towards home again.

"And after all," he went on, in an impatient tone, trying to defeat his own scruples as well as hers, "I am breaking no positive engagement:—if Lucy's affections had been withdrawn from me and given to some one else, I should have felt no right to assert a claim on her. If you are not absolutely pledged to Philip, we are neither of us bound."

"You don't believe that—it is not your real feeling," said Maggie, earnestly. "You feel, as I do, that the real tie lies in the feelings and expectations

we have raised in other minds. Else all pledges might be broken, when there was no outward penalty. There would be no such thing as faithfulness."

Stephen was silent: he could not pursue that argument; the opposite conviction had wrought in him too strongly through his previous time of struggle. But it soon presented itself in a new form.

"The pledge *can't* be fulfilled," he said, with impetuous insistance. "It is unnatural: we can only pretend to give ourselves to any one else. There is wrong in that too—there may be misery in it for *them* as well as for us. Maggie, you must see that —you do see that."

He was looking eagerly at her face for the least sign of compliance; his large, firm, gentle grasp was on her hand. She was silent for a few moments, with her eyes fixed on the ground; then she drew a deep breath, and said, looking up at him with solemn sadness—

"O it is difficult—life is very difficult. It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling;—but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us—the ties that have made others

dependent on us—and would cut them in two. If life were quite easy and simple, as it might have been in paradise, and we could always see that one being first towards whom . . . . I mean, if life did not make duties for us before love comes—love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other. But I see—I feel it is not so now: there are things we must renounce in life: some of us must resign love. Many things are difficult and dark to me; but I see one thing quite clearly—that I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. Our love would be poisoned. Don't urge me; help me—help me, *because* I love you."

Maggie had become more and more earnest as she went on; her face had become flushed, and her eyes fuller and fuller of appealing love. Stephen had the fibre of nobleness in him that vibrated to her appeal; but in the same moment—how could it be otherwise?—that pleading beauty gained new power over him.

"Dearest," he said, in scarcely more than a whisper, while his arm stole round her, "I'll do, I'll bear

anything you wish. But—one kiss—one—the last —before we part."

One kiss—and then a long look—until Maggie said, tremulously, "Let me go—let us make haste back."

She hurried along, and not another word was spoken. Stephen stood still and beckoned when they came within sight of Willy and the horse, and Maggie went on through the gate. Mrs Moss was standing alone at the door of the old porch: she had sent all the cousins in, with kind thoughtfulness. It might be a joyful thing that Maggie had a rich and handsome lover, but she would naturally feel embarrassed at coming in again:—and it might *not* be joyful. In either case, Mrs Moss waited anxiously to receive Maggie by herself. The speaking face told plainly enough that, if there was joy, it was of a very agitating dubious sort.

"Sit down here a bit, my dear." She drew Maggie into the porch, and sat down on the bench by her:—there was no privacy in the house.

"O aunt Gritty, I'm very wretched. I wish I could have died when I was fifteen. It seemed so easy to give things up then—it is so hard now."

The poor child threw her arms round her aunt's neck, and fell into long, deep sobs.

CHAPTER XII.

A FAMILY PARTY.

MAGGIE left her good aunt Gritty at the end of the week, and went to Garum Firs to pay her visit to aunt Pullet according to agreement. In the mean time, very unexpected things had happened, and there was to be a family party at Garum to discuss and celebrate a change in the fortunes of the Tullivers, which was likely finally to carry away the shadow of their demerits like the last limb of an eclipse, and cause their hitherto obscured virtues to shine forth in full-rounded splendour. It is pleasant to know that a new ministry just come into office are not the only fellow-men who enjoy a period of high appreciation and full-blown eulogy: in many respectable families throughout this realm, relatives becoming creditable meet with a similar cordiality of recognition, which, in its fine freedom from the coercion of any antecedents, suggests the hopeful possibility that

we may some day without any notice find ourselves in full millennium, with cockatrices who have ceased to bite, and wolves that no longer show their teeth with any but the blandest intentions.

Lucy came so early as to have the start even of aunt Glegg; for she longed to have some undisturbed talk with Maggie about the wonderful news. It seemed—did it not? said Lucy, with her prettiest air of wisdom—as if everything, even other people's misfortunes (poor creatures!) were conspiring now to make poor dear aunt Tulliver, and cousin Tom, and haughty Maggie too, if she were not obstinately bent on the contrary, as happy as they deserved to be after all their troubles. To think that the very day—the *very day*—after Tom had come back from Newcastle, that unfortunate young Jetsome, whom Mr Wakem had placed at the mill, had been pitched off his horse in a drunken fit, and was lying at St Ogg's in a dangerous state, so that Wakem had signified his wish that the new purchasers should enter on the premises at once! It was very dreadful for that unhappy young man, but it did seem as if the misfortune had happened then, rather than at any other time, in order that cousin Tom might all the sooner have the fit reward of his exemplary conduct—papa thought so

very highly of him. Aunt Tulliver must certainly go to the Mill now, and keep house for Tom : that was rather a loss to Lucy in the matter of household comfort ; but then, to think of poor aunty being in her old place again, and gradually getting comforts about her there !

On this last point Lucy had her cunning projects, and when she and Maggie had made their dangerous way down the bright stairs into the handsome parlour, where the very sunbeams seemed cleaner than elsewhere, she directed her manœuvres, as any other great tactician would have done, against the weaker side of the enemy.

"Aunt Pullet," she said, seating herself on the sofa, and caressingly adjusting that lady's floating cap-string, "I want you to make up your mind what linen and things you will give Tom towards housekeeping ; because you're always so generous—you give such nice things, you know ; and if you set the example, aunt Glegg will follow."

"That she never can, my dear," said Mrs Pullet, with unusual vigour, "for she hasn't got the linen to follow suit wi' mine, I can tell you. She'd niver the taste, not if she'd spend the money. Big checks and live things, like stags and foxes, all her table-linen is—not a spot nor a diamont among 'em. But

it's poor work, dividing one's linen before one dies—I niver thought to ha' done that, Bessy," Mrs Pullet continued, shaking her head and looking at her sister Tulliver, "when you and me chose the double diamont, the first flax iver we'd spun—and the Lord knows where yours is gone."

"I'd no choice, I'm sure, sister," said poor Mrs Tulliver, accustomed to consider herself in the light of an accused person. "I'm sure it was no wish o' mine, iver, as I should lie awake o' nights thinking o' my best bleached linen all over the country."

"Take a peppermint, Mrs Tulliver," said uncle Pullet, feeling that he was offering a cheap and wholesome form of comfort, which he was recommending by example.

"O but, aunt Pullet," said Lucy, "you've so much beautiful linen. And suppose you had had daughters! Then you must have divided it, when they were married."

"Well, I don't say as I won't do it," said Mrs Pullet, "for now Tom's so lucky, it's nothing but right his friends should look on him and help him. There's the table-cloths I bought at your sale, Bessy; it was nothing but good-natur o' me to buy 'em, for they've been lying in the chest ever since.

But I'm not going to give Maggie any more o' my Indy muslin and things, if she's to go into service again, when she might stay and keep me company, and do my sewing for me, if she wasn't wanted at her brother's."

"Going into service" was the expression by which the Dodson mind represented to itself the position of teacher or governess, and Maggie's return to that menial condition, now circumstances offered her more eligible prospects, was likely to be a sore point with all her relatives, besides Lucy. Maggie in her crude form, with her hair down her back, and altogether in a state of dubious promise, was a most undesirable niece; but now, she was capable of being at once ornamental and useful. The subject was revived in aunt and uncle Glegg's presence, over the tea and muffins.

"Hegh, hegh!" said Mr Glegg, good-naturedly patting Maggie on the back, "nonsense, nonsense! Don't let us hear of you taking a place again, Maggie. Why, you must ha' picked up half-a-dozen sweethearts at the bazaar: isn't there one of 'em the right sort of article? Come, now?"

"Mr Glegg," said his wife, with that shade of increased politeness in her severity which she always put on with her crisper fronts, "you'll

excuse me, but you're far too light for a man of your years. It's respect and duty to her aunts, and the rest of her kin as are so good to her, should have kept my niece from fixing about going away again, without consulting us—not sweethearts, if I'm to use such a word, though it was never heared in *my* family."

"Why, what did they call us, when we went to see 'em, then, eh, neighbour Pullet? They thought us sweet enough then," said Mr Glegg, winking pleasantly, while Mr Pullet, at the suggestion of sweetness, took a little more sugar.

"Mr Glegg," said Mrs G., "if you're going to be undelicate, let me know."

"La, Jane, your husband's only joking," said Mrs Pullet; "let him joke while he's got health and strength. There's poor Mr Tilt got his mouth drawn all o' one side, and couldn't laugh if he was to try."

"I'll trouble you for the muffineer, then, Mr Glegg," said Mrs G., "if I may be so bold to interrupt your joking. Though it's other people must see the joke in a niece's putting a slight on her mother's eldest sister, as is the head o' the family; and only coming in and out on short visits, all the time she's been in the town, and then settling

to go away without my knowledge—as I'd laid caps out on purpose for her to make 'em up for me,—and me as have divided my money so equal——"

"Sister," Mrs Tulliver broke in, anxiously, "I'm sure Maggie never thought o' going away without staying at your house as well as the others. Not as it's my wish she should go away at all—but quite contrairy. I'm sure I'm innocent. I've said over and over again, 'My dear, you've no call to go away.' But there's ten days or a fortnight Maggie 'll have before she's fixed to go: she can stay at your house just as well, and I'll step in when I can, and so will Lucy."

"Bessy," said Mrs Glegg, "if you'd exercise a little more thought, you might know I should hardly think it was worth while to unpin a bed, and go to all that trouble now, just at the end o' the time, when our house isn't above a quarter of an hour's walk from Mr Deane's. She can come the first thing in the morning, and go back the last at night, and be thankful she's got a good aunt so close to her to come and sit with. I know *I* should, when I was her age."

"La, Jane," said Mrs Pullet, "it 'ud do your beds good to have somebody to sleep in 'em. There's that striped room smells dreadful mouldy, and the

glass mildewed like anything. I'm sure I thought I should be struck with death when you took me in."

"O, there is Tom!" exclaimed Lucy, clapping her hands. "He's come on Sindbad, as I told him. I was afraid he was not going to keep his promise."

Maggie jumped up to kiss Tom as he entered, with strong feeling, at this first meeting since the prospect of returning to the Mill had been opened to him; and she kept his hand, leading him to the chair by her side. To have no cloud between herself and Tom was still a perpetual yearning in her, that had its root deeper than all change. He smiled at her very kindly this evening, and said, "Well, Magsie, how's aunt Moss?"

"Come, come, sir," said Mr Glegg, putting out his hand. "Why, you're such a big man, you carry all before you, it seems. You're come into your luck a good deal earlier than us old folks did—but I wish you joy, I wish you joy. You'll get the Mill all for your own again, some day, I'll be bound. You won't stop half-way up the hill."

"But I hope he'll bear in mind as it's his mother's family as he owes it to," said Mrs Glegg. "If he hadn't had them to take after, he'd ha' been poorly off. There was never any failures, nor lawing, nor

wastefulness in our family — nor dying without wills——"

"No, nor sudden deaths," said aunt Pullet; "allays the doctor called in. But Tom had the Dodson skin: I said that from the first. And I don't know what *you* mean to do, sister Glegg, but I mean to give him a table-cloth of all my three biggest sizes but one, besides sheets. I don't say what more I shall do; but *that* I shall do, and if I should die to-morrow, Mr Pullet, you'll bear it in mind—though you'll be blundering with the keys, and never remember as that on the third shelf o' the left-hand wardrobe, behind the night-caps with the broad ties—not the narrow-frilled uns—is the key o' the drawer in the Blue Room, where the key o' the Blue Closet is. You'll make a mistake, and I shall niver be worthy to know it. You've a memory for my pills and draughts, wonderful—I'll allays say that of you—but you're lost among the keys." This gloomy prospect of the confusion that would ensue on her decease was very affecting to Mrs Pullet.

"You carry it too far, Sophy—that locking in and out," said Mrs Glegg, in a tone of some disgust at this folly. "You go beyond your own family. There's nobody can say I don't lock up; but I do

what's reasonable, and no more. And as for the linen, I shall look out what's serviceable, to make a present of to my nephey: I've got cloth as has never been whittened, better worth having than other people's fine holland; and I hope he'll lie down in it and think of his aunt."

Tom thanked Mrs Glegg, but evaded any promise to meditate nightly on her virtues; and Mr Glegg effected a diversion for him by asking about Mr Deane's intentions concerning steam.

Lucy had had her far-sighted views in begging Tom to come on Sindbad. It appeared, when it was time to go home, that the man-servant was to ride the horse, and cousin Tom was to drive home his mother and Lucy. "You must sit by yourself, aunty," said that contriving young lady, "because I must sit by Tom; I've a great deal to say to him."

In the eagerness of her affectionate anxiety for Maggie, Lucy could not persuade herself to defer a conversation about her with Tom, who, she thought, with such a cup of joy before him as this rapid fulfilment of his wish about the Mill, must become pliant and flexible. Her nature supplied her with no key to Tom's; and she was puzzled as well as

pained to notice the unpleasant change on his countenance when she gave him the history of the way in which Philip had used his influence with his father. She had counted on this revelation as a great stroke of policy, which was to turn Tom's heart towards Philip at once, and, besides that, prove that the elder Wakem was ready to receive Maggie with all the honours of a daughter-in-law. Nothing was wanted, then, but for dear Tom, who always had that pleasant smile when he looked at cousin Lucy, to turn completely round, say the opposite of what he had always said before, and declare that he, for his part, was delighted that all the old grievances should be healed, and that Maggie should have Philip with all suitable despatch : in cousin Lucy's opinion nothing could be easier.

But to minds strongly marked by the positive and negative qualities that create severity—strength of will, conscious rectitude of purpose, narrowness of imagination and intellect, great power of self-control, and a disposition to exert control over others—prejudices come as the natural food of tendencies which can get no sustenance out of that complex, fragmentary, doubt-provoking knowledge which we call truth. Let a prejudice be be-

queathed, carried in the air, adopted by hearsay, caught in through the eye—however it may come, these minds will give it a habitation: it is something to assert strongly and bravely, something to fill up the void of spontaneous ideas, something to impose on others with the authority of conscious right: it is at once a staff and a baton. Every prejudice that will answer these purposes is self-evident. Our good upright Tom Tulliver's mind was of this class: his inward criticism of his father's faults did not prevent him from adopting his father's prejudice; it was a prejudice against a man of lax principle and lax life, and it was a meeting-point for all the disappointed feelings of family and personal pride. Other feelings added their force to produce Tom's bitter repugnance to Philip, and to Maggie's union with him; and notwithstanding Lucy's power over her strong-willed cousin, she got nothing but a cold refusal ever to sanction such a marriage: "but of course Maggie could do as she liked—she had declared her determination to be independent. For Tom's part, he held himself bound by his duty to his father's memory, and by every manly feeling, never to consent to any relation with the Wakems."

Thus, all that Lucy had effected by her zealous mediation was to fill Tom's mind with the expectation that Maggie's perverse resolve to go into a situation again, would presently metamorphose itself, as her resolves were apt to do, into something equally perverse, but entirely different—a marriage with Philip Wakem.

CHAPTER XIII.

BORNE ALONG BY THE TIDE.

In less than a week Maggie was at St Ogg's again, —outwardly in much the same position as when her visit there had just begun. It was easy for her to fill her mornings apart from Lucy without any obvious effort; for she had her promised visits to pay to her aunt Glegg, and it was natural that she should give her mother more than usual of her companionship in these last weeks, especially as there were preparations to be thought of for Tom's housekeeping. But Lucy would hear of no pretext for her remaining away in the evenings: she must always come from aunt Glegg's before dinner—"else what shall I have of you?" said Lucy, with a tearful pout that could not be resisted. And Mr Stephen Guest had unaccountably taken to dining at Mr Deane's as often as possible, instead of avoiding that, as he used to do. At first he

began his mornings with a resolution that he would not dine there—not even go in the evening, till Maggie was away. He had even devised a plan of starting off on a journey in this agreeable June weather: the headaches which he had constantly been alleging as a ground for stupidity and silence were a sufficient ostensible motive. But the journey was not taken, and by the fourth morning no distinct resolution was formed about the evenings: they were only foreseen as times when Maggie would still be present for a little while—when one more touch, one more glance, might be snatched. For, why not? There was nothing to conceal between them: they knew—they had confessed their love, and they had renounced each other: they were going to part. Honour and conscience were going to divide them: Maggie, with that appeal from her inmost soul, had decided it; but surely they might cast a lingering look at each other across the gulf, before they turned away never to look again till that strange light had for ever faded out of their eyes.

Maggie, all this time, moved about with a quiescence and even torpor of manner, so contrasted with her usual fitful brightness and ardour, that Lucy would have had to seek some other cause for such

a change, if she had not been convinced that the position in which Maggie stood between Philip and her brother, and the prospect of her self-imposed wearisome banishment, were quite enough to account for a large amount of depression. But under this torpor there was a fierce battle of emotions, such as Maggie in all her life of struggle had never known or foreboded: it seemed to her as if all the worst evil in her had lain in ambush till now, and had suddenly started up full-armed with hideous, overpowering strength! There were moments in which a cruel selfishness seemed to be getting possession of her: why should not Lucy—why should not Philip suffer? *She* had had to suffer through many years of her life; and who had renounced anything for her? And when something like that fulness of existence—love, wealth, ease, refinement—all that her nature craved, was brought within her reach, why was she to forego it, that another might have it—another, who perhaps needed it less? But amidst all this new passionate tumult there were the old voices making themselves heard with rising power, till, from time to time, the tumult seemed quelled. *Was* that existence which tempted her the full existence she dreamed? Where, then, would be all the memories of early striving, all the deep

pity for another's pain, which had been nurtured in her through years of affection and hardship, all the divine presentiment of something higher than mere personal enjoyment which had made the sacredness of life? She might as well hope to enjoy walking by maiming her feet, as hope to enjoy an existence in which she set out by maiming the faith and sympathy that were the best organs of her soul. And then, if pain were so hard to *her*, what was it to others?—"Ah, God! preserve me from inflicting—give me strength to bear it."—How had she sunk into this struggle with a temptation that she would once have thought herself as secure from, as from deliberate crime? When was that first hateful moment in which she had been conscious of a feeling that clashed with her truth, affection, and gratitude, and had not shaken it from her with horror, as if it had been a loathsome thing?—And yet, since this strange, sweet, subduing influence did not, should not conquer her—since it was to remain simply her own suffering . . . . her mind was meeting Stephen's in that thought of his, that they might still snatch moments of mute confession before the parting came. For was not he suffering too? She saw it daily—saw it in the sickened look of fatigue with which, as soon as he was not com-

pelled to exert himself, he relapsed into indifference towards everything but the possibility of watching her. Could she refuse sometimes to answer that beseeching look which she felt to be following her like a low murmur of love and pain? She refused it less and less, till at last the evening for them both was sometimes made of a moment's mutual gaze:—they thought of it till it came, and when it had come, they thought of nothing else. One other thing Stephen seemed now and then to care for, and that was, to sing: it was a way of speaking to Maggie. Perhaps he was not distinctly conscious that he was impelled to it by a secret longing—running counter to all his self-confessed resolves—to deepen the hold he had on her. Watch your own speech, and notice how it is guided by your less conscious purposes, and you will understand that contradiction in Stephen.

Philip Wakem was a less frequent visitor, but he came occasionally in the evening, and it happened that he was there when Lucy said, as they sat out on the lawn, near sunset—

"Now Maggie's tale of visits to aunt Glegg is completed, I mean that we shall go out boating every day until she goes. She has not had half enough boating, because of these tiresome visits,

and she likes it better than anything. Don't you, Maggie?"

"Better than any sort of locomotion, I hope you mean," said Philip, smiling at Maggie, who was lolling backward in a low garden-chair, "else she will be selling her soul to that ghostly boatman who haunts the Floss—only for the sake of being drifted in a boat for ever."

"Should you like to be her boatman?" said Lucy. "Because, if you would, you can come with us and take an oar. If the Floss were but a quiet lake instead of a river, we should be independent of any gentleman, for Maggie can row splendidly. As it is, we are reduced to ask services of knights and squires, who do not seem to offer them with great alacrity."

She looked playful reproach at Stephen, who was sauntering up and down, and was just singing in pianissimo falsetto—

> "The thirst that from the soul doth rise,
> Doth ask a drink divine."

He took no notice, but still kept aloof: he had done so frequently during Philip's recent visits.

"You don't seem inclined for boating," said Lucy, when he came to sit down by her on the bench. "Doesn't rowing suit you now?"

"O, I hate a large party in a boat," he said, almost irritably. "I'll come when you have no one else."

Lucy coloured, fearing that Philip would be hurt: it was quite a new thing for Stephen to speak in that way; but he had certainly not been well of late. Philip coloured too, but less from a feeling of personal offence than from a vague suspicion that Stephen's moodiness had some relation to Maggie, who had started up from her chair as he spoke, and had walked towards the hedge of laurels to look at the descending sunlight on the river.

"As Miss Deane didn't know she was excluding others by inviting me," said Philip, "I am bound to resign."

"No, indeed, you shall not," said Lucy, much vexed. "I particularly wish for your company to-morrow. The tide will suit at half-past ten: it will be a delicious time for a couple of hours to row to Luckreth and walk back, before the sun gets too hot. And how can you object to four people in a boat?" she added, looking at Stephen.

"I don't object to the people, but the number." said Stephen, who had recovered himself, and was rather ashamed of his rudeness. "If I voted for a fourth at all, of course it would be you, Phil.

But we won't divide the pleasure of escorting the ladies; we'll take it alternately. I'll go the next day."

This incident had the effect of drawing Philip's attention with freshened solicitude towards Stephen and Maggie; but when they re-entered the house, music was proposed, and Mrs Tulliver and Mr Deane being occupied with cribbage, Maggie sat apart near the table where the books and work were placed—doing nothing, however, but listening abstractedly to the music. Stephen presently turned to a duet which he insisted that Lucy and Philip should sing: he had often done the same thing before; but this evening Philip thought he divined some double intention in every word and look of Stephen's, and watched him keenly—angry with himself all the while for this clinging suspicion. For had not Maggie virtually denied any ground for his doubts on her side? and she was truth itself: it was impossible not to believe her word and glance when they had last spoken together in the garden. Stephen might be strongly fascinated by her (what was more natural?), but Philip felt himself rather base for intruding on what must be his friend's painful secret. Still, he watched. Stephen, moving away from the piano, sauntered slowly to-

wards the table near which Maggie sat, and turned over the newspapers, apparently in mere idleness. Then he seated himself with his back to the piano, dragging a newspaper under his elbow, and thrusting his hand through his hair, as if he had been attracted by some bit of local news in the *Laceham Courier*. He was in reality looking at Maggie, who had not taken the slightest notice of his approach. She had always additional strength of resistance when Philip was present, just as we can restrain our speech better in a spot that we feel to be hallowed. But at last she heard the word "dearest," uttered in the softest tone of pained entreaty, like that of a patient who asks for something that ought to have been given without asking. She had never heard that word since the moments in the lane at Basset, when it had come from Stephen again and again, almost as involuntarily as if it had been an inarticulate cry. Philip could hear no word, but he had moved to the opposite side of the piano, and could see Maggie start and blush, raise her eyes an instant towards Stephen's face, but immediately look apprehensively towards himself. It was not evident to her that Philip had observed her; but a pang of shame, under the sense of this concealment, made her

move from her chair and walk to her mother's side to watch the game at cribbage.

Philip went home soon after in a state of hideous doubt mingled with wretched certainty. It was impossible for him now to resist the conviction that there was some mutual consciousness between Stephen and Maggie; and for half the night his irritable, susceptible nerves were pressed upon almost to frenzy by that one wretched fact: he could attempt no explanation that would reconcile it with her words and actions. When, at last, the need for belief in Maggie rose to its habitual predominance, he was not long in imagining the truth: —she was struggling, she was banishing herself— this was the clue to all he had seen since his return. But athwart that belief there came other possibilities that would not be driven out of sight. His imagination wrought out the whole story: Stephen was madly in love with her; he must have told her so; she had rejected him, and was hurrying away. But would he give her up, knowing—Philip felt the fact with heart-crushing despair — that she was made half helpless by her feeling towards him?

When the morning came, Philip was too ill to think of keeping his engagement to go in the boat.

In his present agitation he could decide on nothing: he could only alternate between contradictory intentions. First, he thought he must have an interview with Maggie and entreat her to confide in him; then again, he distrusted his own interference. Had he not been thrusting himself on Maggie all along? She had uttered words long ago in her young ignorance; it was enough to make her hate him that these should be continually present with her as a bond. And had he any right to ask her for a revelation of feelings which she had evidently intended to withhold from him? He would not trust himself to see her, till he had assured himself that he could act from pure anxiety for her, and not from egoistic irritation. He wrote a brief note to Stephen, and sent it early by the servant, saying that he was not well enough to fulfil his engagement to Miss Deane. Would Stephen take his excuse, and fill his place?

Lucy had arranged a charming plan, which had made her quite content with Stephen's refusal to go in the boat. She discovered that her father was to drive to Lindum this morning at ten: Lindum was the very place she wanted to go to, to make purchases—important purchases, which must by no means be put off to another opportunity; and aunt

Tulliver must go too, because she was concerned in some of the purchases.

"You will have your row in the boat just the same, you know," she said to Maggie when they went out of the breakfast-room and up-stairs together; "Philip will be here at half-past ten, and it is a delicious morning. Now, don't say a word against it, you dear dolorous thing. What is the use of my being a fairy godmother, if you set your face against all the wonders I work for you? Don't think of awful cousin Tom: you may disobey him a little."

Maggie did not persist in objecting. She was almost glad of the plan; for perhaps it would bring her some strength and calmness to be alone with Philip again: it was like revisiting the scene of a quieter life, in which the very struggles were repose, compared with the daily tumult of the present. She prepared herself for the boat, and at half-past ten sat waiting in the drawing-room.

The ring of the door-bell was punctual, and she was thinking with half-sad, affectionate pleasure of the surprise Philip would have in finding that he was to be with her alone, when she distinguished a firm rapid step across the hall, that was certainly

not Philip's: the door opened, and Stephen Guest entered.

In the first moment they were both too much agitated to speak; for Stephen had learned from the servant that the others were gone out. Maggie had started up and sat down again, with her heart beating violently; and Stephen, throwing down his cap and gloves, came and sat by her in silence. She thought Philip would be coming soon; and with great effort—for she trembled visibly—she rose to go to a distant chair.

"He is not coming," said Stephen, in a low tone. "*I* am going in the boat."

"O, we can't go," said Maggie, sinking into her chair again. "Lucy did not expect—she would be hurt. Why is not Philip come?"

"He is not well; he asked me to come instead."

"Lucy is gone to Lindum," said Maggie, taking off her bonnet, with hurried, trembling fingers. "We must not go."

"Very well," said Stephen, dreamily, looking at her, as he rested his arm on the back of his chair. "Then we'll stay here."

He was looking into her deep, deep eyes—far-off and mysterious as the starlit blackness, and yet

very near, and timidly loving. Maggie sat perfectly still—perhaps for moments, perhaps for minutes—until the helpless trembling had ceased, and there was a warm glow on her check.

"The man is waiting—he has taken the cushions," she said. "Will you go and tell him?"

"What shall I tell him?" said Stephen, almost in a whisper. He was looking at the lips now.

Maggie made no answer.

"Let us go," Stephen murmured, entreatingly, rising, and taking her hand to raise her too. "We shall not be long together."

And they went. Maggie felt that she was being led down the garden among the roses, being helped with firm tender care into the boat, having the cushion and cloak arranged for her feet, and her parasol opened for her (which she had forgotten)—all by this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will, like the added self which comes with the sudden exalting influence of a strong tonic—and she felt nothing else. Memory was excluded.

They glided rapidly along, Stephen rowing, helped by the backward-flowing tide, past the Tofton trees and houses—on between the silent sunny fields and pastures, which seemed filled with a natural

joy that had no reproach for theirs. The breath of the young, unwearied day, the delicious rhythmic dip of the oars, the fragmentary song of a passing bird heard now and then, as if it were only the overflowing of brim-full gladness, the sweet solitude of a twofold consciousness that was mingled into one by that grave untiring gaze which need not be averted—what else could there be in their minds for the first hour? Some low, subdued, languid exclamation of love came from Stephen from time to time, as he went on rowing idly, half automatically: otherwise, they spoke no word; for what could words have been but an inlet to thought? and thought did not belong to that enchanted haze in which they were enveloped—it belonged to the past and the future that lay outside the haze. Maggie was only dimly conscious of the banks, as they passed them, and dwelt with no recognition on the villages: she knew there were several to be passed before they reached Luckreth, where they always stopped and left the boat. At all times she was so liable to fits of absence, that she was likely enough to let her way-marks pass unnoticed.

But at last Stephen, who had been rowing more and more idly, ceased to row, laid down the oars, folded his arms, and looked down on the water as if

watching the pace at which the boat glided without his help. This sudden change roused Maggie. She looked at the far-stretching fields—at the banks close by—and felt that they were entirely strange to her. A terrible alarm took possession of her.

"O, have we passed Luckreth—where we were to stop?" she exclaimed, looking back to see if the place were out of sight. No village was to be seen. She turned round again, with a look of distressed questioning at Stephen.

He went on watching the water, and said, in a strange, dreamy, absent tone, "Yes—a long way."

"O what shall I do?" cried Maggie, in an agony. "We shall not get home for hours—and Lucy—O God, help me!"

She clasped her hands and broke into a sob, like a frightened child: she thought of nothing but of meeting Lucy, and seeing her look of pained surprise and doubt—perhaps of just upbraiding.

Stephen moved and sat beside her, and gently drew down the clasped hands.

"Maggie," he said, in a deep tone of slow decision, "let us never go home again—till no one can part us—till we are married."

The unusual tone, the startling words, arrested Maggie's sob, and she sat quite still—wondering: as

if Stephen might have seen some possibilities that would alter everything, and annul the wretched facts.

"See, Maggie, how everything has come without our seeking—in spite of all our efforts. We never thought of being alone together again: it has all been done by others. See how the tide is carrying us out—away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us—and trying in vain. It will carry us on to Torby, and we can land there, and get some carriage, and hurry on to York, and then to Scotland—and never pause a moment till we are bound to each other, so that only death can part us. It is the only right thing, dearest: it is the only way of escaping from this wretched entanglement. Everything has concurred to point it out to us. We have contrived nothing, we have thought of nothing ourselves."

Stephen spoke with deep, earnest pleading. Maggie listened—passing from her startled wonderment to the yearning after that belief, that the tide was doing it all—that she might glide along with the swift, silent stream, and not struggle any more. But across that stealing influence came the terrible shadow of past thoughts; and the sudden horror lest now, at last, the moment of fatal intoxication

was close upon her, called up feelings of angry resistance towards Stephen.

"Let me go!" she said, in an agitated tone, flashing an indignant look at him, and trying to get her hands free. "You have wanted to deprive me of any choice. You knew we were come too far—you have dared to take advantage of my thoughtlessness. It is unmanly to bring me into such a position."

Stung at this reproach, he released her hands, moved back to his former place, and folded his arms, in a sort of desperation at the difficulty Maggie's words had made present to him. If she would not consent to go on, he must curse himself for the embarrassment he had led her into. But the reproach was the unendurable thing: the one thing worse than parting with her was, that she should feel he had acted unworthily towards her. At last he said, in a tone of suppressed rage—

"I didn't notice that we had passed Luckreth till we had got to the next village; and then it came into my mind that we would go on. I can't justify it: I ought to have told you. It is enough to make you hate me—since you don't love me well enough to make everything else indifferent to you—as I do you. Shall I stop the boat, and try to get you out

here? I'll tell Lucy that I was mad—and that you hate me—and you shall be clear of me for ever. No one can blame you, because I have behaved unpardonably to you."

Maggie was paralysed: it was easier to resist Stephen's pleading, than this picture he had called up of himself suffering, while she was vindicated—easier even to turn away from his look of tenderness than from this look of angry misery, that seemed to place her in selfish isolation from him. He had called up a state of feeling in which the reasons which had acted on her conscience seemed to be transmuted into mere self-regard. The indignant fire in her eyes was quenched, and she began to look at him with timid distress. She had reproached him for being hurried into irrevocable trespass—she, who had been so weak herself.

"As if I shouldn't feel what happened to you—just the same," she said, with reproach of another kind—the reproach of love, asking for more trust. This yielding to the idea of Stephen's suffering was more fatal than the other yielding, because it was less distinguishable from that sense of others' claims which was the moral basis of her resistance.

He felt all the relenting in her look and tone—it was heaven opening again. He moved to her side,

and took her hand, leaning his elbow on the back of the boat, and saying nothing. He dreaded to utter another word; he dreaded to make another movement, that might provoke another reproach or denial from her. Life hung on her consent: everything else was hopeless, confused, sickening misery. They glided along in this way, both resting in that silence as in a haven, both dreading lest their feelings should be divided again—till they became aware that the clouds had gathered, and that the slightest perceptible freshening of the breeze was growing and growing, till the whole character of the day was altered.

"You will be chill, Maggie, in this thin dress. Let me raise the cloak over your shoulders. Get up an instant, dearest."

Maggie obeyed: there was an unspeakable charm in being told what to do, and having everything decided for her. She sat down again, covered with the cloak, and Stephen took to his oars again, making haste; for they must try to get to Torby as fast as they could. Maggie was hardly conscious of having said or done anything decisive. All yielding is attended with a less vivid consciousness than resistance; it is the partial sleep of thought; it is the submergence of our own personality by another.

Every influence tended to lull her into acquiescence: that dreamy gliding in the boat, which had lasted for four hours, and had brought some weariness and exhaustion—the recoil of her fatigued sensations from the impracticable difficulty of getting out of the boat at this unknown distance from home, and walking for long miles—all helped to bring her into more complete subjection to that strong mysterious charm which made a last parting from Stephen seem the death of all joy—which made the thought of wounding him like the first touch of the torturing iron before which resolution shrank. And then there was the present happiness of being with him, which was enough to absorb all her languid energy.

Presently Stephen observed a vessel coming after them. Several vessels, among them the steamer to Mudport, had passed them with the early tide, but for the last hour they had seen none. He looked more and more eagerly at this vessel, as if a new thought had come into his mind along with it, and then he looked at Maggie, hesitatingly.

"Maggie, dearest," he said, at last, "if this vessel should be going to Mudport, or to any convenient place on the coast northward, it would be our best plan to get them to take us on board. You are

fatigued—and it may soon rain—it may be a wretched business, getting to Torby in this boat. It's only a trading-vessel, but I daresay you can be made tolerably comfortable. We'll take the cushions out of the boat. It is really our best plan. They'll be glad enough to take us: I've got plenty of money about me; I can pay them well."

Maggie's heart began to beat with reawakened alarm at this new proposition; but she was silent —one course seemed as difficult as another.

Stephen hailed the vessel. It was a Dutch vessel going to Mudport, the English mate informed him, and, if this wind held, would be there in less than two days.

"We had got out too far with our boat," said Stephen. "I was trying to make for Torby. But I'm afraid of the weather; and this lady—my wife —will be exhausted with fatigue and hunger. Take us on board—will you?—and haul up the boat. I'll pay you well."

Maggie, now really faint and trembling with fear, was taken on board, making an interesting object of contemplation to admiring Dutchmen. The mate feared the lady would have a poor time of it on board, for they had no accommodation for such entirely unlooked-for passengers—no private cabin

larger than an old-fashioned church-pew. But at least they had Dutch cleanliness, which makes all other inconveniences tolerable; and the boat-cushions were spread into a couch for Maggie on the poop with all alacrity. But to pace up and down the deck leaning on Stephen—being upheld by his strength—was the first change that she needed: then came food, and then quiet reclining on the cushions, with the sense that no new resolution *could* be taken that day. Everything must wait till to-morrow. Stephen sat beside her, with her hand in his; they could only speak to each other in low tones, only look at each other now and then, for it would take a long while to dull the curiosity of the five men on board, and reduce these handsome young strangers to that minor degree of interest which belongs, in a sailor's regard, to all objects nearer than the horizon. But Stephen was triumphantly happy. Every other thought or care was thrown into unmarked perspective by the certainty that Maggie must be his. The leap had been taken now: he had been tortured by scruples, he had fought fiercely with overmastering inclination, he had hesitated; but repentance was impossible. He murmured forth in fragmentary sentences his happiness—his adoration—his tenderness—his belief that

their life together must be heaven—that her presence with him would give rapture to every common day—that to satisfy her lightest wish was dearer to him than all other bliss—that everything was easy for her sake, except to part with her: and now they never *would* part; he would belong to her for ever—and all that was his was hers—had no value for him except as it was hers. Such things, uttered in low broken tones by the one voice that has first stirred the fibre of young passion, have only a feeble effect—on experienced minds at a distance from them. To poor Maggie they were very near: they were like nectar held close to thirsty lips: there was, there *must* be, then, a life for mortals here below which was not hard and chill—in which affection would no longer be self-sacrifice. Stephen's passionate words made the vision of such a life more fully present to her than it had ever been before; and the vision for the time excluded all realities—all except the returning sun-gleams which broke out on the waters as the evening approached, and mingled with the visionary sunlight of promised happiness—all except the hand that pressed hers, and the voice that spoke to her, and the eyes that looked at her with grave, unspeakable love.

There was to be no rain, after all; the clouds rolled off to the horizon again, making the great purple rampart and long purple isles of that wondrous land which reveals itself to us when the sun goes down—the land that the evening star watches over. Maggie was to sleep all night on the poop; it was better than going below; and she was covered with the warmest wrappings the ship could furnish. It was still early, when the fatigues of the day brought on a drowsy longing for perfect rest, and she laid down her head, looking at the faint dying flush in the west, where the one golden lamp was getting brighter and brighter. Then she looked up at Stephen, who was still seated by her, hanging over her as he leaned his arm against the vessel's side. Behind all the delicious visions of these last hours, which had flowed over her like a soft stream and made her entirely passive, there was the dim consciousness that the condition was a transient one, and that the morrow must bring back the old life of struggle—that there were thoughts which would presently avenge themselves for this oblivion. But now nothing was distinct to her: she was being lulled to sleep with that soft stream still flowing over her, with those delicious visions melting and fading like the wondrous aërial land of the west.

CHAPTER XIV.

WAKING.

WHEN Maggie was gone to sleep, Stephen, weary too with his unaccustomed amount of rowing, and with the intense inward life of the last twelve hours, but too restless to sleep, walked and lounged about the deck, with his cigar, far on into midnight, not seeing the dark water—hardly conscious there were stars—living only in the near and distant future. At last fatigue conquered restlessness, and he rolled himself up in a piece of tarpauling on the deck near Maggie's feet.

She had fallen asleep before nine, and had been sleeping for six hours before the faintest hint of a midsummer daybreak was discernible. She awoke from that vivid dreaming which makes the margin of our deeper rest: She was in a boat on the wide water with Stephen, and in the gathering darkness something like a star appeared, that grew and grew

till they saw it was the Virgin seated in St Ogg's boat, and it came nearer and nearer, till they saw the Virgin was Lucy and the boatman was Philip—no, not Philip, but her brother, who rowed past without looking at her; and she rose to stretch out her arms and call to him, and their own boat turned over with the movement, and they began to sink, till with one spasm of dread she seemed to awake, and find she was a child again in the parlour at evening twilight, and Tom was not really angry. From the soothed sense of that false waking she passed to the real waking—to the plash of water against the vessel, and the sound of a footstep on the deck, and the awful starlit sky. There was a moment of utter bewilderment before her mind could get disentangled from the confused web of dreams, but soon the whole terrible truth urged itself upon her. Stephen was not by her now: she was alone with her own memory and her own dread. The irrevocable wrong that must blot her life had been committed: she had brought sorrow into the lives of others—into the lives that were knit up with hers by trust and love. The feeling of a few short weeks had hurried her into the sins her nature had most recoiled from—breach of faith and cruel selfishness; she had rent the ties

that had given meaning to duty, and had made herself an outlawed soul, with no guide but the wayward choice of her own passion. And where would that lead her?—where had it led her now? She had said she would rather die than fall into that temptation. She felt it now—now that the consequences of such a fall had come before the outward act was completed. There was at least this fruit from all her years of striving after the highest and best—that her soul, though betrayed, beguiled, ensnared, could never deliberately consent to a choice of the lower. And a choice of what? O God—not a choice of joy, but of conscious cruelty and hardness; for could she ever cease to see before her Lucy and Philip, with their murdered trust and hopes? Her life with Stephen could have no sacredness: she must for ever sink and wander vaguely, driven by uncertain impulse; for she had let go the clue of life—that clue which once in the far-off years her young need had clutched so strongly. She had renounced all delights then, before she knew them, before they had come within her reach. Philip had been right when he told her that she knew nothing of renunciation: she had thought it was quiet ecstasy; she saw it face to face now—that sad patient living strength which holds the clue of life, and saw that the thorns were for ever pressing

on its brow. The yesterday, which could never be revoked—if she could change it now for any length of inward silent endurance, she would have bowed beneath that cross with a sense of rest.

Daybreak came and the reddening eastern light, while her past life was grasping her in this way, with that tightening clutch which comes in the last moments of possible rescue. She could see Stephen now lying on the deck still fast asleep, and with the sight of him there came a wave of anguish that found its way in a long-suppressed sob. The worst bitterness of parting—the thought that urged the sharpest inward cry for help, was the pain it must give to *him*. But surmounting everything was the horror at her own possible failure, the dread lest her conscience should be benumbed again, and not rise to energy till it was too late.—Too late! It was too late already not to have caused misery—too late for everything, perhaps, but to rush away from the last act of baseness—the tasting of joys that were wrung from crushed hearts.

The sun was rising now, and Maggie started up with the sense that a day of resistance was beginning for her. Her eyelashes were still wet with tears, as, with her shawl over her head, she sat looking at the slowly-rounding sun. Something roused Stephen too, and, getting up from his hard

bed, he came to sit beside her. The sharp instinct of anxious love saw something to give him alarm in the very first glance. He had a hovering dread of some resistance in Maggie's nature that he would be unable to overcome. He had the uneasy consciousness that he had robbed her of perfect freedom yesterday: there was too much native honour in him, for him not to feel that if her will should recoil, his conduct would have been odious, and she would have a right to reproach him.

But Maggie did not feel that right: she was too conscious of fatal weakness in herself—too full of the tenderness that comes with the foreseen need for inflicting a wound. She let him take her hand when he came to sit down beside her, and smiled at him—only with rather a sad glance; she could say nothing to pain him till the moment of possible parting was nearer. And so they drank their cup of coffee together, and walked about the deck, and heard the captain's assurance that they should be in at Mudport by five o'clock, each with an inward burthen; but in him it was an undefined fear, which he trusted to the coming hours to dissipate; in her it was a definite resolve on which she was trying silently to tighten her hold. Stephen was continually, through the morning, expressing his

anxiety at the fatigue and discomfort she was suffering, and alluded to landing and to the change of motion and repose she would have in a carriage, wanting to assure himself more completely by presupposing that everything would be as he had arranged it. For a long while Maggie contented herself with assuring him that she had had a good night's rest, and that she didn't mind about being on the vessel—it was not like being on the open sea—it was only a little less pleasant than being in a boat on the Floss. But a suppressed resolve will betray itself in the eyes, and Stephen became more and more uneasy as the day advanced, under the sense that Maggie had entirely lost her passiveness. He longed, but did not dare, to speak of their marriage—of where they would go after it, and the steps he would take to inform his father and the rest of what had happened. He longed to assure himself of a tacit assent from her. But each time he looked at her, he gathered a stronger dread of the new, quiet sadness with which she met his eyes. And they were more and more silent.

"Here we are in sight of Mudport," he said, at last. "Now, dearest," he added, turning towards her with a look that was half-beseeching, "the worst part of your fatigue is over. On the land

we can command swiftness. In another hour and a half we shall be in a chaise together—and that will seem rest to you after this."

Maggie felt it was time to speak: it would only be unkind now to assent by silence. She spoke in the lowest tone, as he had done, but with distinct decision.

"We shall not be together — we shall have parted."

The blood rushed to Stephen's face.

"We shall not," he said. "I'll die first."

It was as he had dreaded—there was a struggle coming. But neither of them dared to say another word, till the boat was let down, and they were taken to the landing-place. Here there was a cluster of gazers and passengers awaiting the departure of the steamboat to St Ogg's. Maggie had a dim sense, when she had landed, and Stephen was hurrying her along on his arm, that some one had advanced towards her from that cluster as if he were coming to speak to her. But she was hurried along, and was indifferent to everything but the coming trial.

A porter guided them to the nearest inn and posting-house, and Stephen gave the order for the chaise as they passed through the yard. Maggie

took no notice of this, and only said, "Ask them to show us into a room where we can sit down."

When they entered, Maggie did not sit down, and Stephen, whose face had a desperate determination in it, was about to ring the bell, when she said, in a firm voice:—

"I'm not going: we must part here."

"Maggie," he said, turning round towards her, and speaking in the tones of a man who feels a process of torture beginning, "do you mean to kill me? What is the use of it now? The whole thing is done."

"No, it is not done," said Maggie. "Too much is done: more than we can ever remove the trace of. But I will go no farther. Don't try to prevail with me again. I couldn't choose yesterday."

What was he to do? He dared not go near her —her anger might leap out, and make a new barrier. He walked backwards and forwards in maddening perplexity.

"Maggie," he said, at last, pausing before her, and speaking in a tone of imploring wretchedness, "have some pity—hear me—forgive me for what I did yesterday. I will obey you now—I will do nothing without your full consent. But don't

blight our lives for ever by a rash perversity that can answer no good purpose to any one—that can only create new evils. Sit down, dearest; wait—think what you are going to do. Don't treat me as if you couldn't trust me."

He had chosen the most effective appeal; but Maggie's will was fixed unswervingly on the coming wrench. She had made up her mind to suffer.

"We must not wait," she said, in a low but distinct voice; "we must part at once."

"We *can't* part, Maggie," said Stephen, more impetuously. "I can't bear it. What is the use of inflicting that misery on me? The blow—whatever it may have been—has been struck now. Will it help any one else that you should drive me mad?"

"I will not begin any future, even for you," said Maggie, tremulously, "with a deliberate consent to what ought not to have been. What I told you at Basset I feel now: I would rather have died than fall into this temptation. It would have been better if we had parted for ever then. But we must part now."

"We will *not* part," Stephen burst out, instinctively placing his back against the door—forgetting everything he had said a few moments before; "I

will not endure it. You'll make me desperate—I shan't know what I do."

Maggie trembled. She felt that the parting could not be effected suddenly. She must rely on a slower appeal to Stephen's better self—she must be prepared for a harder task than that of rushing away while resolution was fresh. She sat down. Stephen, watching her with that look of desperation which had come over him like a lurid light, approached slowly from the door, seated himself close beside her, and grasped her hand. Her heart beat like the heart of a frightened bird; but this direct opposition helped her. She felt her determination growing stronger.

"Remember what you felt weeks ago," she began, with beseeching earnestness—"remember what we both felt—that we owed ourselves to others, and must conquer every inclination which could make us false to that debt. We have failed to keep our resolutions; but the wrong remains the same."

"No, it does *not* remain the same," said Stephen. "We have proved that it was impossible to keep our resolutions. We have proved that the feeling which draws us towards each other is too strong to be overcome: that natural law surmounts every other; we can't help what it clashes with."

"It is not so, Stephen—I'm quite sure that is wrong. I have tried to think it again and again; but I see, if we judged in that way, there would be a warrant for all treachery and cruelty—we should justify breaking the most sacred ties that can ever be formed on earth. If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment."

"But there are ties that can't be kept by mere resolution," said Stephen, starting up and walking about again. "What is outward faithfulness? Would they have thanked us for anything so hollow as constancy without love?"

Maggie did not answer immediately. She was undergoing an inward as well as an outward contest. At last she said, with a passionate assertion of her conviction, as much against herself as against him—

"That seems right—at first; but when I look further, I'm sure it is *not* right. Faithfulness and constancy mean something else besides doing what is easiest and pleasantest to ourselves. They mean renouncing whatever is opposed to the reliance others have in us—whatever would cause misery to those whom the course of our lives has made dependent on us. If we—if I had been better, nobler, those claims would have been so strongly

present with me—I should have felt them pressing on my heart so continually, just as they do now in the moments when my conscience is awake—that the opposite feeling would never have grown in me, as it has done: it would have been quenched at once—I should have prayed for help so earnestly—I should have rushed away, as we rush from hideous danger. I feel no excuse for myself—none. I should never have failed towards Lucy and Philip as I have done, if I had not been weak, selfish, and hard—able to think of their pain without a pain to myself that would have destroyed all temptation. O, what is Lucy feeling now? She believed in me—she loved me—she was so good to me. Think of her. . . . ."

Maggie's voice was getting choked as she uttered these last words.

"I *can't* think of her," said Stephen, stamping as if with pain. "I can think of nothing but you, Maggie. You demand of a man what is impossible. I felt that once; but I can't go back to it now. And where is the use of *your* thinking of it, except to torture me? You can't save them from pain now; you can only tear yourself from me, and make my life worthless to me. And even if we could go back, and both fulfil our engagements—

if that were possible now—it would be hateful—horrible, to think of your ever being Philip's wife—of your ever being the wife of a man you didn't love. We have both been rescued from a mistake."

A deep flush came over Maggie's face, and she couldn't speak. Stephen saw this. He sat down again, taking her hand in his, and looking at her with passionate entreaty.

"Maggie! Dearest! If you love me, you are mine. Who can have so great a claim on you as I have? My life is bound up in your love. There is nothing in the past that can annul our right to each other: it is the first time we have either of us loved with our whole heart and soul."

Maggie was still silent for a little while—looking down. Stephen was in a flutter of new hope: he was going to triumph. But she raised her eyes and met his with a glance that was filled with the anguish of regret—not with yielding.

"No — not with my whole heart and soul, Stephen," she said, with timid resolution. "I have never consented to it with my whole mind. There are memories, and affections, and longing after perfect goodness, that have such a strong hold on me; they would never quit me for long; they would come back and be pain to me—repentance.

I couldn't live in peace if I put the shadow of a wilful sin between myself and God. I have caused sorrow already—I know—I feel it; but I have never deliberately consented to it: I have never said, 'They shall suffer, that I may have joy.' It has never been my will to marry you: if you were to win consent from the momentary triumph of my feeling for you, you would not have my whole soul. If I could wake back again into the time before yesterday, I would choose to be true to my calmer affections, and live without the joy of love."

Stephen loosed her hand, and, rising impatiently, walked up and down the room in suppressed rage.

"Good God!" he burst out, at last, "what a miserable thing a woman's love is to a man's. I could commit crimes for you—and you can balance and choose in that way. But you *don't* love me: if you had a tithe of the feeling for me that I have for you, it would be impossible to you to think for a moment of sacrificing me. But it weighs nothing with you that you are robbing me of *my* life's happiness."

Maggie pressed her fingers together almost convulsively as she held them clasped on her lap. A great terror was upon her, as if she were ever and anon seeing where she stood by great flashes of

lightning, and then again stretched forth her hands in the darkness.

"No—I don't sacrifice you—I couldn't sacrifice you," she said, as soon as she could speak again; "but I can't believe in a good for you, that I feel —that we both feel is a wrong towards others. We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or for another: we can't tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us—for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard: it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go for ever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life."

"But Maggie," said Stephen, seating himself by her again, "is it possible you don't see that what happened yesterday has altered the whole position of things? What infatuation is it—what obstinate prepossession that blinds you to that? It is too late to say what we might have done or what we ought to have done. Admitting the very worst view of what has been done, it is a fact we must act on now; our position is altered; the right course is no longer what it was before. We must

accept our own actions, and start afresh from them. Suppose we had been married yesterday? It is nearly the same thing. The effect on others would not have been different. It would only have made this difference to ourselves," Stephen added, bitterly, "that you might have acknowledged then that your tie to me was stronger than to others."

Again a deep flush came over Maggie's face, and she was silent. Stephen thought again that he was beginning to prevail—he had never yet believed that he should *not* prevail: there are possibilities which our minds shrink from too completely for us to fear them.

"Dearest," he said, in his deepest, tenderest tone, leaning towards her and putting his arm round her, "you *are* mine now—the world believes it—duty must spring out of that now: in a few hours you will be legally mine, and those who had claims on us will submit—they will see that there was a force which declared against their claims.

Maggie's eyes opened wide in one terrified look at the face that was close to hers, and she started up—pale again.

"O, I can't do it," she said, in a voice almost of agony—"Stephen—don't ask me—don't urge me. I can't argue any longer—I don't know what is

wise; but my heart will not let me do it. I see—I feel their trouble now: it is as if it were branded on my mind. *I* have suffered, and had no one to pity me; and now I have made others suffer. It would never leave me; it would embitter your love to me. I *do* care for Philip—in a different way: I remember all we said to each other; I know how he thought of me as the one promise of his life. He was given to me that I might make his lot less hard; and I have forsaken him. And Lucy—she has been deceived—she who trusted me more than any one. I cannot marry you: I cannot take a good for myself that has been wrung out of their misery. It is not the force that ought to rule us—this that we feel for each other; it would rend me away from all that my past life has made dear and holy to me. I can't set out on a fresh life, and forget that: I must go back to it, and cling to it, else I shall feel as if there were nothing firm beneath my feet."

"Good God, Maggie!" said Stephen, rising too and grasping her arm, "you rave. How can you go back without marrying me? You don't know what will be said, dearest. You see nothing as it really is."

"Yes, I do. But they will believe me. I will

confess everything. Lucy will believe me—she will forgive you, and—and—O, *some* good will come by clinging to the right. Dear, dear Stephen, let me go!—don't drag me into deeper remorse. My whole soul has never consented—it does not consent now.'

Stephen let go her arm, and sank back on his chair, half stunned by despairing rage. He was silent a few moments, not looking at her; while her eyes were turned towards him yearningly, in alarm at this sudden change. At last he said, still without looking at her—

"Go, then—leave me—don't torture me any longer—I can't bear it."

Involuntarily she leaned towards him and put out her hand to touch his. But he shrank from it as if it had been burning iron, and said again—

"Leave me."

Maggie was not conscious of a decision as she turned away from that gloomy averted face, and walked out of the room: it was like an automatic action that fulfils a forgotten intention. What came after? A sense of stairs descended as if in a dream—of flagstones—of a chaise and horses standing—then a street, and a turning into another street where a stage-coach was standing, taking in passen-

gers—and the darting thought that that coach would take her away, perhaps towards home. But she could ask nothing yet; she only got into the coach.

Home—where her mother and brother were—Philip—Lucy—the scene of her very cares and trials—was the haven towards which her mind tended—the sanctuary where sacred relics lay—where she would be rescued from more falling. The thought of Stephen was like a horrible throbbing pain, which yet, as such pains do, seemed to urge all other thoughts into activity. But among her thoughts, what others would say and think of her conduct was hardly present. Love and deep pity and remorseful anguish left no room for that.

The coach was taking her to York—farther away from home; but she did not learn that until she was set down in the old city at midnight. It was no matter: she could sleep there, and start home the next day. She had her purse in her pocket, with all her money in it—a bank-note and a sovereign: she had kept it in her pocket from forgetfulness, after going out to make purchases the day before yesterday.

Did she lie down in the gloomy bedroom of the old inn that night with her will bent unwaveringly on the path of penitent sacrifice? The great struggles

of life are not so easy as that; the great problems of life are not so clear. In the darkness of that night she saw Stephen's face turned towards her in passionate, reproachful misery; she lived through again all the tremulous delights of his presence with her that made existence an easy floating in a stream of joy, instead of a quiet resolved endurance and effort. The love she had renounced came back upon her with a cruel charm; she felt herself opening her arms to receive it once more; and then it seemed to slip away and fade and vanish, leaving only the dying sound of a deep, thrilling voice that said, "Gone—for ever gone."

BOOK SEVENTH

THE FINAL RESCUE

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN TO THE MILL.

BETWEEN four and five o'clock on the afternoon of the fifth day from that on which Stephen and Maggie had left St Ogg's, Tom Tulliver was standing on the gravel-walk outside the old house at Dorlcote Mill. He was master there now: he had half fulfilled his father's dying wish, and by years of steady self-government and energetic work he had brought himself near to the attainment of more than the old respectability which had been the proud inheritance of the Dodsons and Tullivers.

But Tom's face, as he stood in the hot still sunshine of that summer afternoon, had no gladness, no triumph in it. His mouth wore its bitterest expression, his severe brow its hardest and deepest fold, as he drew down his hat farther over his eyes to shelter them from the sun, and thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, began to walk up and down

the gravel. No news of his sister had been heard since Bob Jakin had come back in the steamer from Mudport, and put an end to all improbable suppositions of an accident on the water by stating that he had seen her land from a vessel with Mr Stephen Guest. Would the next news be that she was married—or what? Probably that she was not married: Tom's mind was set to the expectation of the worst that could happen—not death, but disgrace.

As he was walking with his back towards the entrance gate, and his face towards the rushing mill-stream, a tall dark-eyed figure, that we know well, approached the gate, and paused to look at him, with a fast-beating heart. Her brother was the human being of whom she had been most afraid, from her childhood upwards: afraid with that fear which springs in us when we love one who is inexorable, unbending, unmodifiable—with a mind that we can never mould ourselves upon, and yet that we cannot endure to alienate from us. That deep-rooted fear was shaking Maggie now; but her mind was unswervingly bent on returning to her brother, as the natural refuge that had been given her. In her deep humiliation under the retrospect of her own weakness—in her anguish at the injury she had inflicted—she almost desired to endure the

severity of Tom's reproof, to submit in patient silence to that harsh disapproving judgment against which she had so often rebelled: it seemed no more than just to her now—who was weaker than she was? She craved that outward help to her better purpose which would come from complete, submissive confession—from being in the presence of those whose looks and words would be a reflection of her own conscience.

Maggie had been kept on her bed at York for a day with that prostrating headache which was likely to follow on the terrible strain of the previous day and night. There was an expression of physical pain still about her brow and eyes, and her whole appearance, with her dress so long unchanged, was worn and distressed. She lifted the latch of the gate and walked in—slowly. Tom did not hear the gate; he was just then close upon the roaring dam; but he presently turned, and, lifting up his eyes, saw the figure whose worn look and loneliness seemed to him a confirmation of his worst conjectures. He paused, trembling and white with disgust and indignation.

Maggie paused too—three yards before him. She felt the hatred in his face: felt it rushing through her fibres; but she must speak.

"Tom," she began, faintly, "I am come back to you—I am come back home—for refuge—to tell you everything."

"You will find no home with me," he answered with tremulous rage. "You have disgraced us all. You have disgraced my father's name. You have been a curse to your best friends. You have been base—deceitful—no motives are strong enough to restrain you. I wash my hands of you for ever. You don't belong to me."

Their mother had come to the door now. She stood paralysed by the double shock of seeing Maggie and hearing Tom's words.

"Tom," said Maggie, with more courage, "I am perhaps not so guilty as you believe me to be. I never meant to give way to my feelings. I struggled against them. I was carried too far in the boat to come back on Tuesday. I came back as soon as I could."

"I can't believe in you any more," said Tom, gradually passing from the tremulous excitement of the first moment to cold inflexibility. "You have been carrying on a clandestine relation with Stephen Guest—as you did before with another. He went to see you at my aunt Moss's; you walked alone with him in the lanes; you must have behaved as no modest girl would have done to her cousin's

lover, else that could never have happened. The people at Luckreth saw you pass—you passed all the other places; you knew what you were doing. You have been using Philip Wakem as a screen to deceive Lucy—the kindest friend you ever had. Go and see the return you have made her: she's ill—unable to speak—my mother can't go near her, lest she should remind her of *you*."

Maggie was half stunned—too heavily pressed upon by her anguish even to discern any difference between her actual guilt and her brother's accusations, still less to vindicate herself.

"Tom," she said, crushing her hands together under her cloak, in the effort to speak again. "Whatever I have done, I repent it bitterly. I want to make amends. I will endure anything. I want to be kept from doing wrong again."

"What *will* keep you?" said Tom, with cruel bitterness. "Not religion; not your natural feelings of gratitude and honour. And he—he would deserve to be shot, if it were not——But you are ten times worse than he is. I loathe your character and your conduct. You struggled with your feelings, you say. Yes! *I* have had feelings to struggle with; but I conquered them. I have had a harder life than you have had; but I have found *my* comfort

in doing my duty. But I will sanction no such character as yours: the world shall know that *I* feel the difference between right and wrong. If you are in want, I will provide for you—let my mother know. But you shall not come under my roof. It is enough that I have to bear the thought of your disgrace: the sight of you is hateful to me."

Slowly Maggie was turning away, with despair in her heart. But the poor frightened mother's love leaped out now, stronger than all dread.

"My child! I'll go with you. You've got a mother."

O the sweet rest of that embrace to the heart-stricken Maggie! More helpful than all wisdom is one draught of simple human pity that will not forsake us.

Tom turned and walked into the house.

"Come in, my child," Mrs Tulliver whispered. "He'll let you stay and sleep in my bed. He won't deny that, if I ask him."

"No, mother," said Maggie, in a low tone, like a moan. "I will never go in."

"Then wait for me outside. I'll get ready and come with you."

When his mother appeared with her bonnet on,

Tom came out to her in the passage, and put money into her hands.

"My house is yours, mother, always," he said. "You will come and let me know everything you want—you will come back to me."

Poor Mrs Tulliver took the money, too frightened to say anything. The only thing clear to her was the mother's instinct, that she would go with her unhappy child.

Maggie was waiting outside the gate; she took her mother's hand, and they walked a little way in silence.

"Mother," said Maggie, at last, "we will go to Luke's cottage. Luke will take me in. He was very good to me when I was a little girl."

"He's got no room for us, my dear, now; his wife's got so many children. I don't know where to go, if it isn't to one o' your aunts; and I hardly durst," said poor Mrs Tulliver, quite destitute of mental resources in this extremity.

Maggie was silent a little while, and then said—

"Let us go to Bob Jakin's, mother: his wife will have room for us, if they have no other lodger."

So they went on their way to St Ogg's—to the old house by the river-side.

Bob himself was at home, with a heaviness at heart which resisted even the new joy and pride of possessing a two months' old baby—quite the liveliest of its age that had ever been born to prince or packman. He would perhaps not so thoroughly have understood all the dubiousness of Maggie's appearance with Mr Stephen Guest on the quay at Mudport, if he had not witnessed the effect it produced on Tom when he went to report it; and since then, the circumstances which in any case gave a disastrous character to her elopement, had passed beyond the more polite circles of St Ogg's, and had become matter of common talk, accessible to the grooms and errand-boys. So that when he opened the door and saw Maggie standing before him in her sorrow and weariness, he had no questions to ask, except one, which he dared only ask himself—where was Mr Stephen Guest? Bob, for his part, hoped he might be in the warmest department of an asylum understood to exist in the other world for gentlemen who are likely to be in fallen circumstances there.

The lodgings were vacant, and both Mrs Jakin the larger and Mrs Jakin the less were commanded to make all things comfortable for "the old Missis and the young Miss"—alas! that she was still "Miss."

The ingenious Bob was sorely perplexed as to how this result could have come about—how Mr Stephen Guest could have gone away from her, or could have let her go away from him, when he had the chance of keeping her with him. But he was silent, and would not allow his wife to ask him a question; would not present himself in the room, lest it should appear like intrusion and a wish to pry; having the same chivalry towards dark-eyed Maggie, as in the days when he had bought her the memorable present of books.

But after a day or two Mrs Tulliver was gone to the Mill again for a few hours to see to Tom's household matters. Maggie had wished this: after the first violent outburst of feeling, which came as soon as she had no longer any active purpose to fulfil, she was less in need of her mother's presence; she even desired to be alone with her grief. But she had been solitary only a little while in the old sitting-room that looked on the river, when there came a tap at the door, and turning round her sad face as she said, "Come in," she saw Bob enter with the baby in his arms, and Mumps at his heels.

"We'll go back, if it disturbs you, Miss," said Bob.

"No," said Maggie, in a low voice, wishing she could smile.

Bob, closing the door behind him, came and stood before her.

"You see, we've got a little un, Miss, and I wanted you to look at it, and take it in your arms, if you'd be so good. For we made free to name it after you, and it 'ud be better for your takin' a bit o' notice on it."

Maggie could not speak, but she put out her arms to receive the tiny baby, while Mumps snuffed at it anxiously, to ascertain that this transference was all right. Maggie's heart had swelled at this action and speech of Bob's: she knew well enough that it was a way he had chosen to show his sympathy and respect.

"Sit down, Bob," she said presently, and he sat down in silence, finding his tongue unmanageable in quite a new fashion, refusing to say what he wanted it to say.

"Bob," she said, after a few moments, looking down at the baby, and holding it anxiously, as if she feared it might slip from her mind and her fingers, "I have a favour to ask of you."

"Don't you speak so, Miss," said Bob, grasping the skin of Mumps's neck; "if there's anything I can do for you, I should look upon it as a day's earnings."

"I want you to go to Dr Kenn's, and ask to speak to him, and tell him that I am here, and should be very grateful if he would come to me while my mother is away. She will not come back till evening."

"Eh, Miss—I'd do it in a minute—it is but a step; but Dr Kenn's wife lies dead—she's to be buried to-morrow—died the day I come from Mudport. It's all the more pity she should ha' died just now, if you want him. I hardly like to go a-nigh him yet."

"O, no, Bob," said Maggie, "we must let it be —till after a few days, perhaps—when you hear that he is going about again. But perhaps he may be going out of town—to a distance," she added, with a new sense of despondency at this idea.

"Not he, Miss," said Bob. "*He'll* none go away. He isn't one o' them gentlefolks as go to cry at waterin'-places when their wives die; he's got summat else to do. He looks fine an' sharp after the parish—he does. He christened the little un; an' he was *at* me to know what I did of a Sunday, as I didn't come to church. But I told him I was upo' the travel three parts o' the Sundays—an' then I'm so used to bein' on my legs, I can't sit so long on end—' an' lors, sir,' says I, ' a packman can

do wi' a small 'lowance o' church: it tastes strong,' says I; 'there's no call to lay it on thick.' Eh, Miss, how good the little un is wi' you! It's like as if it knowed you: it partly does, I'll be bound—like the birds know the mornin'."

Bob's tongue was now evidently loosed from its unwonted bondage, and might even be in danger of doing more work than was required of it. But the subjects on which he longed to be informed were so steep and difficult of approach, that his tongue was likely to run on along the level rather than to carry him on that unbeaten road. He felt this, and was silent again for a little while, ruminating much on the possible forms in which he might put a question. At last he said, in a more timid voice than usual,—

"Will you give me leave to ask you only one thing, Miss?"

Maggie was rather startled, but she answered, "Yes, Bob, if it is about myself—not about any one else."

"Well, Miss, it's this: *Do* you owe anybody a grudge?"

"No, not any one," said Maggie, looking up at him inquiringly. "Why?"

"O, lors, Miss," said Bob, pinching Mumps's neck harder than ever, "I wish you did—an' 'ud tell me—I'd leather him till I couldn't see—I would—an' the Justice might do what he liked to me arter."

"O Bob," said Maggie, smiling faintly, "you're a very good friend to me. But I shouldn't like to punish any one, even if they'd done me wrong; I've done wrong myself too often."

This view of things was puzzling to Bob, and threw more obscurity than ever over what could possibly have happened between Stephen and Maggie. But further questions would have been too intrusive, even if he could have framed them suitably, and he was obliged to carry baby away again to an expectant mother.

"Happen you'd like Mumps for company, Miss," he said, when he had taken the baby again. "He's rare company—Mumps is—he knows iverything, an' makes no bother about it. If I tell him, he'll lie before you an' watch you—as still—just as he watches my pack. You'd better let me leave him a bit—he'll get fond on you. Lors, it's a fine thing to hev a dumb brute fond on you; it'll stick to you, an' make no jaw."

"Yes, do leave him, please," said Maggie. "I think I should like to have Mumps for a friend."

"Mumps, lie down there," said Bob, pointing to a place in front of Maggie, "an' niver do you stir till you're spoke to."

Mumps lay down at once, and made no sign of restlessness when his master left the room.

CHAPTER II.

ST OGG'S PASSES JUDGMENT.

IT was soon known throughout St Ogg's that Miss Tulliver was come back: she had not, then, eloped in order to be married to Mr Stephen Guest—at all events, Mr Stephen Guest had not married her—which came to the same thing, so far as her culpability was concerned. We judge others according to results; how else?—not knowing the process by which results are arrived at. If Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs Stephen Guest—with a post-marital *trousseau*, and all the advantages possessed even by the most unwelcome wife of an only son, public opinion, which at St Ogg's, as elsewhere, always knew what to think, would have judged in strict consistency with those results. Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender—not the world, but the world's wife: and she would have seen, that

two handsome young people—the gentleman of quite the first family in St Ogg's—having found themselves in a false position, had been led into a course which, to say the least of it, was highly injudicious, and productive of sad pain and disappointment, especially to that sweet young thing, Miss Deane. Mr Stephen Guest had certainly not behaved well; but then, young men were liable to those sudden infatuated attachments; and bad as it might seem in Mrs Stephen Guest to admit the faintest advances from her cousin's lover (indeed it *had* been said that she was actually engaged to young Wakem — old Waken himself had mentioned it), still she was very young — "and a deformed young man, you know!—and young Guest so very fascinating; and, they say, he positively worships her (to be sure, that can't last!) and he ran away with her in the boat quite against her will—and what could she do? She couldn't come back then: no one would have spoken to her. And how very well that maize-coloured satinette becomes her complexion! It seems as if the folds in front were quite come in; several of her dresses are made so; —they say, he thinks nothing too handsome to buy for her. Poor Miss Deane! She is very pitiable; but then, there was no positive engagement; and

the air at the coast will do her good. After all, if young Guest felt no more for her than *that*, it was better for her not to marry him. What a wonderful marriage for a girl like Miss Tulliver—quite romantic! Why, young Guest will put up for the borough at the next election. Nothing like commerce nowadays! That young Wakem nearly went out of his mind—he always *was* rather queer; but he's gone abroad again to be out of the way—quite the best thing for a deformed young man. Miss Unit declares she will never visit Mr and Mrs Stephen Guest—such nonsense! pretending to be better than other people. Society couldn't be carried on if we inquired into private conduct in that way—and Christianity tells us to think no evil—and my belief is, that Miss Unit had no cards sent her."

But the results, we know, were not of a kind to warrant this extenuation of the past. Maggie had returned without a *trousseau*, without a husband—in that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead; and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of Society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind. Could anything be more detestable? A girl so much indebted to her friends—whose mother as

well as herself had received so much kindness from the Deanes—to lay the design of winning a young man's affections away from her own cousin, who had behaved like a sister to her! Winning his affections? That was not the phrase for such a girl as Miss Tulliver: it would have been more correct to say that she had been actuated by mere unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion. There was always something questionable about her. That connection with young Wakem, which, they said, had been carried on for years, looked very ill—disgusting, in fact! But with a girl of that disposition!—To the world's wife there had always been something in Miss Tulliver's very physique that a refined instinct felt to be prophetic of harm. As for poor Mr Stephen Guest, he was rather pitiable than otherwise: a young man of five-and-twenty is not to be too severely judged in these cases—he is really very much at the mercy of a designing bold girl. And it was clear that he had given way in spite of himself: he had shaken her off as soon as he could; indeed, their having parted so soon looked very black indeed—*for her*. To be sure, he had written a letter, laying all the blame on himself, and telling the story in a romantic fashion so as to try and make her appear quite innocent: of course he could

do that! But the refined instinct of the world's wife was not to be deceived: providentially!—else what would become of Society? Why—her own brother had turned her from his door:—he had seen enough, you might be sure, before he would do that. A truly respectable young man—Mr Tom Tulliver: quite likely to rise in the world! His sister's disgrace was naturally a heavy blow to him. It was to be hoped that she would go out of the neighbourhood—to America, or anywhere—so as to purify the air of St Ogg's from the taint of her presence—extremely dangerous to daughters there! No good could happen to her: it was only to be hoped she would repent, and that God would have mercy on her: He had not the care of Society on His hands—as the world's wife had.

It required nearly a fortnight for fine instinct to assure itself of these inspirations; indeed, it was a whole week before Stephen's letter came, telling his father the facts, and adding that he was gone across to Holland—had drawn upon the agent at Mudport for money—was incapable of any resolution at present.

Maggie, all this while, was too entirely filled with a more agonising anxiety, to spend any thought on the view that was being taken of her conduct by the

world of St Ogg's: anxiety about Stephen—Lucy—Philip—beat on her poor heart in a hard, driving, ceaseless storm of mingled love, remorse, and pity. If she had thought of rejection and injustice at all, it would have seemed to her that they had done their worst—that she could hardly feel any stroke from them intolerable since the words she had heard from her brother's lips. Across all her anxiety for the loved and the injured, those words shot again and again, like a horrible pang that would have brought misery and dread even into a heaven of delights. The idea of ever recovering happiness never glimmered in her mind for a moment; it seemed as if every sensitive fibre in her were too entirely preoccupied by pain ever to vibrate again to another influence. Life stretched before her as one act of penitence, and all she craved, as she dwelt on her future lot, was something to guarantee her from more falling: her own weakness haunted her like a vision of hideous possibilities, that made no peace conceivable except such as lay in the sense of a sure refuge.

But she was not without practical intentions: the love of independence was too strong an inheritance and a habit for her not to remember that she must get her bread; and when other projects looked

vague, she fell back on that of returning to her plain sewing, and so getting enough to pay for her lodging at Bob's. She meant to persuade her mother to return to the Mill by-and-by, and live with Tom again; and somehow or other she would maintain herself at St Ogg's. Dr Kenn would perhaps help her and advise her. She remembered his parting words at the bazaar. She remembered the momentary feeling of reliance that had sprung in her when he was talking with her, and she waited with yearning expectation for the opportunity of confiding everything to him. Her mother called every day at Mr Deane's to learn how Lucy was: the report was always sad —nothing had yet roused her from the feeble passivity which had come on with the first shock. But of Philip, Mrs Tulliver had learned nothing: naturally, no one whom she met would speak to her about what related to her daughter. But at last she summoned courage to go and see sister Glegg, who of course would know everything, and had even been to see Tom at the Mill in Mrs Tulliver's absence, though he had said nothing of what had passed on the occasion.

As soon as her mother was gone, Maggie put on her bonnet. She had resolved on walking to the Rectory and asking to see Dr Kenn: he was in deep

grief—but the grief of another does not jar upon us in such circumstances. It was the first time she had been beyond the door since her return; nevertheless her mind was so bent on the purpose of her walk, that the unpleasantness of meeting people on the way, and being stared at, did not occur to her. But she had no sooner passed beyond the narrower streets which she had to thread from Bob's dwelling, than she became aware of unusual glances cast at her; and this consciousness made her hurry along nervously, afraid to look to right or left. Presently, however, she came full on Mrs and Miss Turnbull, old acquaintances of her family; they both looked at her strangely, and turned a little aside without speaking. All hard looks were pain to Maggie, but her self-reproach was too strong for resentment: no wonder they will not speak to me, she thought—they are very fond of Lucy. But now she knew that she was about to pass a group of gentlemen, who were standing at the door of the billiard-rooms, and she could not help seeing young Torry step out a little with his glass at his eye, and bow to her with that air of nonchalance which he might have bestowed on a friendly bar-maid. Maggie's pride was too intense for her not to feel that sting, even in the midst of her sorrow; and for the first time the

thought took strong hold of her that she would have other obloquy cast on her besides that which was felt to be due to her breach of faith towards Lucy. But she was at the Rectory now; there, perhaps, she would find something else than retribution. Retribution may come from any voice: the hardest, cruelest, most imbruted urchin at the street-corner can inflict it: surely help and pity are rarer things—more needful for the righteous to bestow.

She was shown up at once, after being announced, into Dr Kenn's study, where he sat amongst piled-up books, for which he had little appetite, leaning his cheek against the head of his youngest child, a girl of three. The child was sent away with the servant, and when the door was closed, Dr Kenn said, placing a chair for Maggie,—

"I was coming to see you, Miss Tulliver; you have anticipated me; I am glad you did."

Maggie looked at him with her childlike directness as she had done at the bazaar, and said, "I want to tell you everything." But her eyes filled fast with tears as she said it, and all the pent-up excitement of her humiliating walk would have its vent before she could say more.

"Do tell me everything," Dr Kenn said, with

quiet kindness in his grave firm voice. "Think of me as one to whom a long experience has been granted, which may enable him to help you."

In rather broken sentences, and with some effort, at first, but soon with the greater ease that came from a sense of relief in the confidence, Maggie told the brief story of a struggle that must be the beginning of a long sorrow. Only the day before, Dr Kenn had been made acquainted with the contents of Stephen's letter, and he had believed them at once, without the confirmation of Maggie's statement. That involuntary plaint of hers, "*O, I must go,*" had remained with him as the sign that she was undergoing some inward conflict.

Maggie dwelt the longest on the feeling which had made her come back to her mother and brother, which made her cling to all the memories of the past. When she had ended, Dr Kenn was silent for some minutes: there was a difficulty on his mind. He rose, and walked up and down the hearth with his hands behind him. At last he seated himself again, and said, looking at Maggie—

"Your prompting to go to your nearest friends —to remain where all the ties of your life have been formed—is a true prompting, to which the Church

in its original constitution and discipline responds —opening its arms to the penitent—watching over its children to the last—never abandoning them until they are hopelessly reprobate. And the Church ought to represent the feeling of the community, so that every parish should be a family knit together by Christian brotherhood under a spiritual father. But the ideas of discipline and Christian fraternity are entirely relaxed—they can hardly be said to exist in the public mind: they hardly survive except in the partial, contradictory form they have taken in the narrow communities of schismatics; and if I were not supported by the firm faith that the Church must ultimately recover the full force of that constitution which is alone fitted to human needs, I should often lose heart at observing the want of fellowship and sense of mutual responsibility among my own flock. At present everything seems tending towards the relaxation of ties—towards the substitution of wayward choice for the adherence to obligation, which has its roots in the past. Your conscience and your heart have given you true light on this point, Miss Tulliver; and I have said all this that you may know what my wish about you—what my advice to you

—would be, if they sprang from my own feeling and opinion unmodified by counteracting circumstances."

Dr Kenn paused a little while. There was an entire absence of effusive benevolence in his manner; there was something almost cold in the gravity of his look and voice. If Maggie had not known that his benevolence was persevering in proportion to its reserve, she might have been chilled and frightened. As it was, she listened expectantly, quite sure that there would be some effective help in his words. He went on.

"Your inexperience of the world, Miss Tulliver, prevents you from anticipating fully the very unjust conceptions that will probably be formed concerning your conduct—conceptions which will have a baneful effect, even in spite of known evidence to disprove them."

"O, I do—I begin to see," said Maggie, unable to repress this utterance of her recent pain. "I know I shall be insulted: I shall be thought worse than I am."

"You perhaps do not yet know," said Dr Kenn, with a touch of more personal pity, "that a letter is come which ought to satisfy every one who has known anything of you, that you chose the steep and

difficult path of a return to the right, at the moment when that return was most of all difficult."

"Oh—where is he?" said poor Maggie, with a flush and tremor that no presence could have hindered.

"He is gone abroad; he has written of all that passed to his father. He has vindicated you to the utmost; and I hope the communication of that letter to your cousin will have a beneficial effect on her."

Dr Kenn waited for her to get calm again before he went on.

"That letter, as I said, ought to suffice to prevent false impressions concerning you. But I am bound to tell you, Miss Tulliver, that not only the experience of my whole life, but my observation within the last three days, makes me fear that there is hardly any evidence which will save you from the painful effect of false imputations. The persons who are the most incapable of a conscientious struggle such as yours, are precisely those who will be likely to shrink from you; because they will not believe in your struggle. I fear your life here will be attended not only with much pain, but with many obstructions. For this reason—and for this only—I ask you to consider whether it will not perhaps

be better for you to take a situation at a distance, according to your former intention. I will exert myself at once to obtain one for you."

"O, if I could but stop here!" said Maggie. "I have no heart to begin a strange life again. I should have no stay. I should feel like a lonely wanderer—cut off from the past. I have written to the lady who offered me a situation to excuse myself. If I remained here, I could perhaps atone in some way to Lucy—to others: I could convince them that I'm sorry. And," she added, with some of the old proud fire flashing out, "I will not go away because people say false things of me. They shall learn to retract them. If I must go away at last, because—because others wish it, I will not go now."

"Well," said Dr Kenn, after some consideration, "if you determine on that, Miss Tulliver, you may rely on all the influence my position gives me. I am bound to aid and countenance you, by the very duties of my office as a parish priest. I will add, that personally I have a deep interest in your peace of mind and welfare."

"The only thing I want is some occupation that will enable me to get my bread and be independ-

ent," said Maggie. "I shall not want much. I can go on lodging where I am."

"I must think over the subject maturely," said Dr Kenn, "and in a few days I shall be better able to ascertain the general feeling. I shall come to see you: I shall bear you constantly in mind."

When Maggie had left him, Dr Kenn stood ruminating with his hands behind him, and his eyes fixed on the carpet, under a painful sense of doubt and difficulty. The tone of Stephen's letter, which he had read, and the actual relations of all the persons concerned, forced upon him powerfully the idea of an ultimate marriage between Stephen and Maggie as the least evil; and the impossibility of their proximity in St Ogg's on any other supposition, until after years of separation, threw an insurmountable prospective difficulty over Maggie's stay there. On the other hand, he entered with all the comprehension of a man who had known spiritual conflict, and lived through years of devoted service to his fellow-men, into that state of Maggie's heart and conscience which made the consent to the marriage a desecration to her: her conscience must not be tampered with: the principle on which she had acted was a safer guide than any balancing of

consequences. His experience told him that intervention was too dubious a responsibility to be lightly incurred: the possible issue either of an endeavour to restore the former relations with Lucy and Philip, or of counselling submission to this irruption of a new feeling, was hidden in a darkness all the more impenetrable because each immediate step was clogged with evil.

The great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it: the question, whether the moment has come in which a man has fallen below the possibility of a renunciation that will carry any efficacy, and must accept the sway of a passion against which he had struggled as a trespass, is one for which we have no master key that will fit all cases. The casuists have become a by-word of reproach; but their perverted spirit of minute discrimination was the shadow of a truth to which eyes and hearts are too often fatally sealed: the truth, that moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot.

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because

such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality—without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly-earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human.

CHAPTER III.

SHOWING THAT OLD ACQUAINTANCES ARE CAPABLE OF SURPRISING US.

WHEN Maggie was at home again, her mother brought her news of an unexpected line of conduct in aunt Glegg. As long as Maggie had not been heard of, Mrs Glegg had half-closed her shutters and drawn down her blinds: she felt assured that Maggie was drowned: that was far more probable than that her niece and legatee should have done anything to wound the family honour in the tenderest point. When, at last, she learned from Tom that Maggie had come home, and gathered from him what was her explanation of her absence, she burst forth in severe reproof of Tom for admitting the worst of his sister until he was compelled. If you were not to stand by your "kin" as long as there was a shred of honour attributable to them, pray what were you to stand by? Lightly to admit

conduct in one of your own family that would force you to alter your will, had never been the way of the Dodsons; and though Mrs Glegg had always augured ill of Maggie's future at a time when other people were perhaps less clear-sighted, yet fair-play was a jewel, and it was not for her own friends to help to rob the girl of her fair fame, and to cast her out from family shelter to the scorn of the outer world, until she had become unequivocally a family disgrace. The circumstances were unprecedented in Mrs Glegg's experience—nothing of that kind had happened among the Dodsons before; but it was a case in which her hereditary rectitude and personal strength of character found a common channel along with her fundamental ideas of clanship, as they did in her life-long regard to equity in money matters. She quarrelled with Mr Glegg, whose kindness, flowing entirely into compassion for Lucy, made him as hard in his judgment of Maggie as Mr Deane himself was; and, fuming against her sister Tulliver because she did not at once come to her for advice and help, shut herself up in her own room with "Baxter's Saint's Rest" from morning till night, denying herself to all visitors, till Mr Glegg brought from Mr Deane the news of Stephen's letter. Then Mrs Glegg felt that she

had adequate fighting-ground—then she laid aside Baxter, and was ready to meet all comers. While Mrs Pullet could do nothing but shake her head and cry, and wish that cousin Abbot had died, or any number of funerals had happened rather than this, which had never happened before, so that there was no knowing how to act, and Mrs Pullet could never enter St Ogg's again, because "acquaintances" knew of it all,—Mrs Glegg only hoped that Mrs Wooll, or any one else, would come to her with their false tales about her own niece, and she would know what to say to that ill-advised person!

Again she had a scene of remonstrance with Tom, all the more severe, in proportion to the greater strength of her present position. But Tom, like other immovable things, seemed only the more rigidly fixed under that attempt to shake him. Poor Tom! he judged by what he had been able to see; and the judgment was painful enough to himself. He thought he had the demonstration of facts observed through years by his own eyes which gave no warning of their imperfection, that Maggie's nature was utterly untrustworthy, and too strongly marked with evil tendencies to be safely treated with leniency: he would act on that demonstration at any cost;

but the thought of it made his days bitter to him. Tom, like every one of us, was imprisoned within the limits of his own nature, and his education had simply glided over him, leaving a slight deposit of polish: if you are inclined to be severe on his severity, remember that the responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision. There had arisen in Tom a repulsion towards Maggie that derived its very intensity from their early childish love in the time when they had clasped tiny fingers together, and their later sense of nearness in a common duty and a common sorrow: the sight of her, as he had told her, was hateful to him. In this branch of the Dodson family aunt Glegg found a stronger nature than her own—a nature in which family feeling had lost the character of clanship, in taking on a doubly deep dye of personal pride. Mrs Glegg allowed that Maggie ought to be punished—she was not a woman to deny that—she knew what conduct was; but punished in proportion to the misdeeds proved against her, not to those which were cast upon her by people outside her own family, who might wish to show that their own kin were better.

"Your aunt Glegg scolded me so as niver was, my dear," said poor Mrs Tulliver, when she came

back to Maggie, "as I didn't go to her before—she said it wasn't for her to come to me first. But she spoke like a sister, too: *having* she allays was, and hard to please—O dear!—but she's said the kindest word as has ever been spoke by you yet, my child. For she says, for all she's been so set again' having one extry in the house, and making extry spoons and things, and putting her about in her ways, you shall have a shelter in her house, if you'll go to her dutiful, and she'll uphold you against folks as say harm of you when they've no call. And I told her I thought you couldn't bear to see nobody but me, you was so beat down with trouble; but she said, 'I won't throw ill words at her—there's them out o' th' family 'ull be ready enough to do that. But I'll give her good advice; an' she must be humble.' It's wonderful o' Jane; for I'm sure she used to throw everything I did wrong at me—if it was the raisin wine as turned out bad, or the pies too hot—or whativer it was."

"O mother," said poor Maggie, shrinking from the thought of all the contact her bruised mind would have to bear, "tell her I'm very grateful—I'll go to see her as soon as I can; but I can't see any one just yet, except Dr Kenn. I've been to him—he will advise me, and help me to get some

occupation. I can't live with any one, or be dependent on them, tell aunt Glegg; I must get my own bread. But did you hear nothing of Philip—Philip Wakem? Have you never seen any one that has mentioned him?"

"No, my dear: but I've been to Lucy's, and I saw your uncle, and he says they got her to listen to the letter, and she took notice o' Miss Guest, and asked questions, and the doctor thinks she's on the turn to be better. What a world this is—what trouble, O dear! The law was the first beginning, an' it's gone from bad to worse all of a sudden, just when the luck seemed on the turn." This was the first lamentation that Mrs Tulliver had let slip to Maggie, but old habit had been revived by the interview with sister Glegg.

"My poor, poor mother!" Maggie burst out, cut to the heart with pity and compunction, and throwing her arms round her mother's neck, "I was always naughty and troublesome to you. And now you might have been happy if it hadn't been for me."

"Eh, my dear," said Mrs Tulliver, leaning towards the warm young cheek; "I must put up wi' my children—I shall never have no more; and if they bring me bad luck, I must be fond on it—there's

nothing else much to be fond on, for my furnitur' went long ago. And you'd got to be very good once; I can't think how it's turned out the wrong way so!"

Still two or three more days passed, and Maggie heard nothing of Philip; anxiety about him was becoming her predominant trouble, and she summoned courage at last to inquire about him of Dr Kenn, on his next visit to her. He did not even know if Philip was at home. The elder Wakem was made moody by an accumulation of annoyance: the disappointment in this young Jetsome, to whom, apparently, he was a good deal attached, had been followed close by the catastrophe to his son's hopes after he had conceded his feelings to them, and incautiously mentioned this concession in St Ogg's,—and he was almost fierce in his brusqueness when any one asked him a question about his son. But Philip could hardly have been ill, or it would have been known through the calling-in of the medical man; it was probable that he was gone out of the town for a little while. Maggie sickened under this suspense, and her imagination began to live more and more persistently in what Philip was enduring. What did he believe about her?

At last Bob brought her a letter, without a post-

mark, directed in a hand which she knew familiarly in the letters of her own name—a hand in which her name had been written long ago, in a pocket Shakespeare which she possessed. Her mother was in the room, and Maggie, in violent agitation, hurried up-stairs, that she might read the letter in solitude. She read it with a throbbing brow.

"MAGGIE,—I believe in you—I know you never meant to deceive me—I know you tried to keep faith to me, and to all. I believed this before I had any other evidence of it than your own nature. The night after I last parted from you I suffered torments. I had seen what convinced me that you were not free; that there was another whose presence had a power over you which mine never possessed; but through all the suggestions—almost murderous suggestions—of rage and jealousy, my mind made its way to belief in your truthfulness. I was sure that you meant to cleave to me, as you had said; that you had rejected him; that you struggled to renounce him, for Lucy's sake and for mine. But I could see no issue that was not fatal for *you;* and that dread shut out the very thought of resignation. I foresaw that he would not relinquish you, and I believed then, as I believe now, that the strong attraction

which drew you together proceeded only from one side of your characters, and belonged to that partial, divided action of our nature which makes half the tragedy of the human lot. I have felt the vibration of chords in your nature, that I have continually felt the want of in his. But perhaps I am wrong; perhaps I feel about you as the artist does about the scene over which his soul has brooded with love: he would tremble to see it confided to other hands; he would never believe that it could bear for another all the meaning and the beauty it bears for him.

"I dared not trust myself to see you that morning; I was filled with selfish passion; I was shattered by a night of conscious delirium. I told you long ago that I had never been resigned even to the mediocrity of my powers: how could I be resigned to the loss of the one thing which had ever come to me on earth, with the promise of such deep joy as would give a new and blessed meaning to the foregoing pain,—the promise of another self that would lift my aching affection into the divine rapture of an ever-springing, ever-satisfied want?

"But the miseries of that night had prepared me for what came before the next. It was no surprise to me. I was certain that he had prevailed on you

to sacrifice everything to him, and I waited with equal certainty to hear of your marriage. I measured your love and his by my own. But I was wrong, Maggie. There is something stronger in you than your love for him.

"I will not tell you what I went through in that interval. But even in its utmost agony—even in those terrible throes that love must suffer before it can be disembodied of selfish desire—my love for you sufficed to withhold me from suicide, without the aid of any other motive. In the midst of my egoism, I yet could not bear to come like a death-shadow across the feast of your joy. I could not bear to forsake the world in which you still lived and might need me; it was part of the faith I had vowed to you—to wait and endure. Maggie, that is a proof of what I write now to assure you of—that no anguish I have had to bear on your account has been too heavy a price to pay for the new life into which I have entered in loving you. I want you to put aside all grief because of the grief you have caused me. I was nurtured in the sense of privation; I never expected happiness; and in knowing you, in loving you, I have had, and still have, what reconciles me to life. You have been to my affections what light, what colour is to my eyes

—what music is to the inward ear; you have raised a dim unrest into a vivid consciousness. The new life I have found in caring for your joy and sorrow more than for what is directly my own, has transformed the spirit of rebellious murmuring into that willing endurance which is the birth of strong sympathy. I think nothing but such complete and intense love could have initiated me into that enlarged life which grows and grows by appropriating the life of others; for before, I was always dragged back from it by ever-present painful self-consciousness. I even think sometimes that this gift of transferred life which has come to me in loving you, may be a new power to me.

"Then—dear one—in spite of all, you have been the blessing of my life. Let no self-reproach weigh on you because of me. It is I who should rather reproach myself for having urged my feelings upon you, and hurried you into words that you have felt as fetters. You meant to be true to those words; you *have* been true. I can measure your sacrifice by what I have known in only one half-hour of your presence with me, when I dreamed that you might love me best. But, Maggie, I have no just claim on you for more than affectionate remembrance.

"For some time I have shrunk from writing to you, because I have shrunk even from the appearance of wishing to thrust myself before you, and so repeating my original error. But you will not misconstrue me. I know that we must keep apart for a long while; cruel tongues would force us apart, if nothing else did. But I shall not go away. The place where you are is the one where my mind must live, wherever I might travel. And remember that I am unchangeably yours: yours—not with selfish wishes—but with a devotion that excludes such wishes.

"God comfort you,—my loving, large-souled Maggie. If every one else has misconceived you, remember that you have never been doubted by him whose heart recognised you ten years ago.

"Do not believe any one who says I am ill, because I am not seen out of doors. I have only had nervous headaches—no worse than I have sometimes had them before. But the overpowering heat inclines me to be perfectly quiescent in the daytime. I am strong enough to obey any word which shall tell me that I can serve you by word or deed.

"Yours, to the last,

"PHILIP WAKEM."

As Maggie knelt by the bed sobbing, with that letter pressed under her, her feelings again and again gathered themselves in a whispered cry, always in the same words :

" O God, is there any happiness in love that could make me forget *their* pain ? "

CHAPTER IV.

MAGGIE AND LUCY.

By the end of the week Dr Kenn had made up his mind that there was only one way in which he could secure to Maggie a suitable living at St Ogg's. Even with his twenty years' experience as a parish priest, he was aghast at the obstinate continuance of imputations against her in the face of evidence. Hitherto he had been rather more adored and appealed to than was quite agreeable to him; but now, in attempting to open the ears of women to reason, and their consciences to justice, on behalf of Maggie Tulliver, he suddenly found himself as powerless as he was aware he would have been if he had attempted to influence the shape of bonnets. Dr Kenn could not be contradicted; he was listened to in silence; but when he left the room, a comparison of opinions among his hearers yielded much the same result as before. Miss Tulliver had undeniably acted in a

blamable manner; even Dr Kenn did not deny that: how, then, could he think so lightly of her as to put that favourable interpretation on everything she had done? Even on the supposition that required the utmost stretch of belief—namely, that none of the things said about Miss Tulliver were true—still, since they *had* been said about her, they had cast an odour round her which must cause her to be shrunk from by every woman who had to take care of her own reputation—and of Society. To have taken Maggie by the hand and said, "I will not believe unproved evil of you: my lips shall not utter it; my ears shall be closed against it: I, too, am an erring mortal, liable to stumble, apt to come short of my most earnest efforts; your lot has been harder than mine, your temptation greater; let us help each other to stand and walk without more falling;"—to have done this would have demanded courage, deep pity, self-knowledge, generous trust—would have demanded a mind that tasted no piquancy in evil-speaking, that felt no self-exaltation in condemning, that cheated itself with no large words into the belief that life can have any moral end, any high religion, which excludes the striving after perfect truth, justice, and love towards the individual men and women who come across our own path. The

ladies of St Ogg's were not beguiled by any wide speculative conceptions; but they had their favourite abstraction, called Society, which served to make their consciences perfectly easy in doing what satisfied their own egoism—thinking and speaking the worst of Maggie Tulliver, and turning their backs upon her. It was naturally disappointing to Dr Kenn, after two years of superfluous incense from his feminine parishioners, to find them suddenly maintaining their views in opposition to his; but then, they maintained them in opposition to a Higher Authority, which they had venerated longer. That Authority had furnished a very explicit answer to persons who might inquire where their social duties began, and might be inclined to take wide views as to the starting-point. The answer had not turned on the ultimate good of Society, but on "a certain man" who was found in trouble by the wayside.

Not that St Ogg's was empty of women with some tenderness of heart and conscience: probably it had as fair a proportion of human goodness in it as any other small trading town of that day. But until every good man is brave, we must expect to find many good women timid: too timid even to believe in the correctness of their own best promptings, when these would place them in a minority. And

the men at St Ogg's were not all brave by any means: some of them were even fond of scandal—and to an extent that might have given their conversation an effeminate character, if it had not been distinguished by masculine jokes, and by an occasional shrug of the shoulders at the mutual hatred of women. It was the general feeling of the masculine mind at St Ogg's that women were not to be interfered with in their treatment of each other.

And thus every direction in which Dr Kenn had turned in the hope of procuring some kind recognition and some employment for Maggie, proved a disappointment to him. Mrs James Torry could not think of taking Maggie as a nursery governess, even temporarily—a young woman about whom "such things had been said," and about whom "gentlemen joked;" and Miss Kirke, who had a spinal complaint, and wanted a reader and companion, felt quite sure that Maggie's mind must be of a quality with which she, for her part, could not risk *any* contact. Why did not Miss Tulliver accept the shelter offered her by her aunt Glegg?—it did not become a girl like her to refuse it. Or else, why did she not go out of the neighbourhood, and get a situation where she was not known? (It was not, apparently, of so much importance that she

should carry her dangerous tendencies into strange families unknown at St Ogg's.) She must be very bold and hardened to wish to stay in a parish where she was so much stared at and whispered about.

Dr Kenn, having great natural firmness, began, in the presence of this opposition, as every firm man would have done, to contract a certain strength of determination over and above what would have been called forth by the end in view. He himself wanted a daily governess for his younger children; and though he had hesitated in the first instance to offer this position to Maggie, the resolution to protest with the utmost force of his personal and priestly character against her being crushed and driven away by slander, was now decisive. Maggie gratefully accepted an employment that gave her duties as well as a support: her days would be filled now, and solitary evenings would be a welcome rest. She no longer needed the sacrifice her mother made in staying with her, and Mrs Tulliver was persuaded to go back to the Mill.

But now it began to be discovered that Dr Kenn, exemplary as he had hitherto appeared, had his crotchets,—possibly his weaknesses. The masculine mind of St Ogg's smiled pleasantly, and did not wonder that Kenn liked to see a fine pair of eyes

daily, or that he was inclined to take so lenient a view of the past; the feminine mind, regarded at that period as less powerful, took a more melancholy view of the case. If Dr Kenn should be beguiled into marrying that Miss Tulliver! It was not safe to be too confident even about the best of men: an apostle had fallen, and wept bitterly afterwards; and though Peter's denial was not a close precedent, his repentance was likely to be.

Maggie had not taken her daily walks to the Rectory for many weeks, before the dreadful possibility of her some time or other becoming the Rector's wife had been talked of so often in confidence, that ladies were beginning to discuss how they should behave to her in that position. For Dr Kenn, it had been understood, had sat in the schoolroom half an hour one morning, when Miss Tulliver was giving her lessons; nay, he had sat there every morning: he had once walked home with her—he almost *always* walked home with her—and if not, he went to see her in the evening. What an artful creature she was! What a *mother* for those children! It was enough to make poor Mrs Kenn turn in her grave, that they should be put under the care of this girl only a few weeks after her death. Would he be so lost to propriety as to marry her before the year

was out? The masculine mind was sarcastic, and thought *not.*

The Miss Guests saw an alleviation to the sorrow of witnessing a folly in their Rector: at least their brother would be safe; and their knowledge of Stephen's tenacity was a constant ground of alarm to them, lest he should come back and marry Maggie. They were not among those who disbelieved their brother's letter; but they had no confidence in Maggie's adherence to her renunciation of him; they suspected that she had shrunk rather from the elopement than from the marriage, and that she lingered in St Ogg's, relying on his return to her. They had always thought her disagreeable; they now thought her artful and proud; having quite as good grounds for that judgment as you and I probably have for many strong opinions of the same kind. Formerly they had not altogether delighted in the contemplated match with Lucy, but now their dread of a marriage between Stephen and Maggie added its momentum to their genuine pity and indignation on behalf of the gentle forsaken girl, in making them desire that he should return to her. As soon as Lucy was able to leave home, she was to seek relief from the oppressive heat of this August by going to the coast with

the Miss Guests; and it was in their plans that Stephen should be induced to join them. On the very first hint of gossip concerning Maggie and Dr Kenn, the report was conveyed in Miss Guest's letter to her brother.

Maggie had frequent tidings through her mother, or aunt Glegg, or Dr Kenn, of Lucy's gradual progress towards recovery, and her thoughts tended continually towards her uncle Deane's house: she hungered for an interview with Lucy, if it were only for five minutes—to utter a word of penitence, to be assured by Lucy's own eyes and lips that she did not believe in the willing treachery of those whom she had loved and trusted. But she knew that even if her uncle's indignation had not closed his house against her, the agitation of such an interview would have been forbidden to Lucy. Only to have seen her without speaking, would have been some relief; for Maggie was haunted by a face cruel in its very gentleness: a face that had been turned on hers with glad sweet looks of trust and love from the twilight time of memory: changed now to a sad and weary face by a first heart-stroke. And as the days passed on, that pale image became more and more distinct—the picture grew and grew into more speaking definiteness under the

avenging hand of remorse; the soft hazel eyes, in their look of pain, were bent for ever on Maggie, and pierced her the more because she could see no anger in them. But Lucy was not yet able to go to church, or any place where Maggie could see her; and even the hope of that departed, when the news was told her by aunt Glegg, that Lucy was really going away in a few days to Scarborough with the Miss Guests, who had been heard to say that they expected their brother to meet them there.

Only those who have known what hardest inward conflict is, can know what Maggie felt as she sat in her loneliness the evening after hearing that news from Mrs Glegg,—only those who have known what it is to dread their own selfish desires as the watching mother would dread the sleeping-potion that was to still her own pain.

She sat without candle in the twilight, with the window wide open towards the river; the sense of oppressive heat adding itself undistinguishably to the burthen of her lot. Seated on a chair against the window, with her arm on the window-sill, she was looking blankly at the flowing river, swift with the advancing tide,—struggling to see still the sweet face in its unreproaching sadness, that seemed now

from moment to moment to sink away and be hidden behind a form that thrust itself between, and made darkness. Hearing the door open, she thought Mrs Jakin was coming in with her supper, as usual; and with that repugnance to trivial speech which comes with languor and wretchedness, she shrank from turning round and saying she wanted nothing: good little Mrs Jakin would be sure to make some well-meant remarks. But the next moment, without her having discerned the sound of a footstep, she felt a light hand on her shoulder, and heard a voice close to her saying, "Maggie!"

The face was there—changed, but all the sweeter: the hazel eyes were there, with their heart-piercing tenderness.

"Maggie!" the soft voice said. "Lucy!" answered a voice with a sharp ring of anguish in it; and Lucy threw her arms round Maggie's neck, and leaned her pale cheek against the burning brow.

"I stole out," said Lucy, almost in a whisper, while she sat down close to Maggie and held her hand, "when papa and the rest were away. Alice is come with me. I asked her to help me. But I must only stay a little while, because it is so late."

It was easier to say that at first than to say anything else. They sat looking at each other. It

seemed as if the interview must end without more speech, for speech was very difficult. Each felt that there would be something scorching in the words that would recall the irretrievable wrong. But soon, as Maggie looked, every distinct thought began to be overflowed by a wave of loving penitence, and words burst forth with a sob.

"God bless you for coming, Lucy."

The sobs came thick on each other after that.

"Maggie, dear, be comforted," said Lucy now, putting her cheek against Maggie's again. "Don't grieve." And she sat still, hoping to soothe Maggie with that gentle caress.

"I didn't mean to deceive you, Lucy," said Maggie, as soon as she could speak. "It always made me wretched that I felt what I didn't like you to know. . . . . It was because I thought it would all be conquered, and you might never see anything to wound you."

"I know, dear," said Lucy. "I know you never meant to make me unhappy. . . . . It is a trouble that has come on us all:—you have more to bear than I have—and you gave him up, when . . . . you did what it must have been very hard to do."

They were silent again a little while, sitting with clasped hands, and cheeks leaned together.

"Lucy," Maggie began again, "*he* struggled too. He wanted to be true to you. He will come back to you. Forgive him—he will be happy then. . . ."

These words were wrung forth from Maggie's deepest soul, with an effort like the convulsed clutch of a drowning man. Lucy trembled and was silent.

A gentle knock came at the door. It was Alice, the maid, who entered and said—

"I daredn't stay any longer, Miss Deane. They'll find it out, and there 'll be such anger at your coming out so late."

Lucy rose and said, "Very well, Alice—in a minute."

"I'm to go away on Friday, Maggie," she added, when Alice had closed the door again. "When I come back, and am strong, they will let me do as I like. I shall come to you when I please then."

"Lucy," said Maggie, with another great effort, "I pray to God continually that I may never be the cause of sorrow to you any more."

She pressed the little hand that she held between hers, and looked up into the face that was bent over hers. Lucy never forgot that look.

"Maggie," she said in a low voice, that had the solemnity of confession in it, "you are better than I am. I can't. . . . ."

She broke off there, and said no more. But they clasped each other again in a last embrace.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST CONFLICT.

In the second week of September, Maggie was again sitting in her lonely room, battling with the old shadowy enemies that were for ever slain and rising again. It was past midnight, and the rain was beating heavily against the window, driven with fitful force by the rushing, loud-moaning wind. For, the day after Lucy's visit there had been a sudden change in the weather: the heat and drought had given way to cold variable winds, and heavy falls of rain at intervals; and she had been forbidden to risk the contemplated journey until the weather should become more settled. In the counties higher up the Floss, the rains had been continuous, and the completion of the harvest had been arrested. And now, for the last two days, the rains on this lower course of the river had been incessant, so that the old men had shaken their heads and talked of sixty years ago, when the same sort of

weather, happening about the equinox, brought on the great floods, which swept the bridge away, and reduced the town to great misery. But the younger generation, who had seen several small floods, thought lightly of these sombre recollections and forebodings, and Bob Jakin, naturally prone to take a hopeful view of his own luck, laughed at his mother when she regretted their having taken a house by the river-side; observing that but for that they would have had no boats, which were the most lucky of possessions in case of a flood that obliged them to go to a distance for food.

But the careless and the fearful were alike sleeping in their beds now. There was hope that the rain would abate, by the morrow; threatenings of a worse kind, from sudden thaws after falls of snow, had often passed off in the experience of the younger ones; and at the very worst, the banks would be sure to break lower down the river when the tide came in with violence, and so the waters would be carried off, without causing more than temporary inconvenience, and losses that would be felt only by the poorer sort, whom charity would relieve.

All were in their beds now, for it was past midnight: all, except some solitary watchers such as Maggie. She was seated in her little parlour to-

wards the river with one candle, that left everything dim in the room, except a letter which lay before her on the table. That letter, which had come to her to-day, was one of the causes that had kept her up far on into the night—unconscious how the hours were going—careless of seeking rest—with no image of rest coming across her mind, except of that far, far off rest, from which there would be no more waking for her into this struggling earthly life.

Two days before Maggie received that letter, she had been to the Rectory for the last time. The heavy rain would have prevented her from going since; but there was another reason. Dr Kenn, at first enlightened only by a few hints as to the new turn which gossip and slander had taken in relation to Maggie, had recently been made more fully aware of it by an earnest remonstrance from one of his male parishioners against the indiscretion of persisting in the attempt to overcome the prevalent feeling in the parish by a course of resistance. Dr Kenn, having a conscience void of offence in the matter, was still inclined to persevere—was still averse to give way before a public sentiment that was odious and contemptible; but he was finally wrought upon by the consideration of the peculiar

responsibility attached to his office, of avoiding the appearance of evil—an "appearance" that is always dependent on the average quality of surrounding minds. Where these minds are low and gross, the area of that "appearance" is proportionately widened. Perhaps he was in danger of acting from obstinacy; perhaps it was his duty to succumb: conscientious people are apt to see their duty in that which is the most painful course; and to recede was always painful to Dr Kenn. He made up his mind that he must advise Maggie to go away from St Ogg's for a time; and he performed that difficult task with as much delicacy as he could, only stating in vague terms that he found his attempt to countenance her stay was a source of discord between himself and his parishioners, that was likely to obstruct his usefulness as a clergyman. He begged her to allow him to write to a clerical friend of his, who might possibly take her into his own family, as governess; and, if not, would probably know of some other available position for a young woman in whose welfare Dr Kenn felt a strong interest.

Poor Maggie listened with a trembling lip: she could say nothing but a faint "thank you—I shall be grateful;" and she walked back to her lodgings,

through the driving rain, with a new sense of desolation. She must be a lonely wanderer; she must go out among fresh faces, that would look at her wonderingly, because the days did not seem joyful to her; she must begin a new life, in which she would have to rouse herself to receive new impressions—and she was so unspeakably, sickeningly weary! There was no home, no help for the erring: even those who pitied, were constrained to hardness. But ought she to complain? Ought she to shrink in this way from the long penance of life, which was all the possibility she had of lightening the load to some other sufferers, and so changing that passionate error into a new force of unselfish human love? All the next day she sat in her lonely room, with a window darkened by the cloud and the driving rain, thinking of that future, and wrestling for patience:—for what repose could poor Maggie ever win except by wrestling?

And on the third day—this day of which she had just sat out the close—the letter had come which was lying on the table before her.

The letter was from Stephen. He was come back from Holland: he was at Mudport again, unknown to any of his friends; and had written to her from that place, enclosing the letter to a person

whom he trusted in St Ogg's. From beginning to end, it was a passionate cry of reproach: an appeal against her useless sacrifice of him—of herself: against that perverted notion of right which led her to crush all his hopes, for the sake of a mere idea, and not any substantial good—*his* hopes, whom she loved, and who loved her with that single overpowering passion, that worship, which a man never gives to a woman more than once in his life.

"They have written to me that you are to marry Kenn. As if I should believe that! Perhaps they have told you some such fables about me. Perhaps they tell you I have been 'travelling.' My body has been dragged about somewhere; but *I* have never travelled from the hideous place where you left me—where I started up from the stupor of helpless rage to find you gone.

"Maggie! whose pain can have been like mine? Whose injury is like mine? Who besides me has met that long look of love that has burnt itself into my soul, so that no other image can come there? Maggie, call me back to you!—call me back to life and goodness! I am banished from both now. I have no motives: I am indifferent to everything. Two months have only deepened the certainty that I can never care for life without you. Write me

one word—say, 'Come!' In two days I should be with you. Maggie—have you forgotten what it was to be together?—to be within reach of a look—to be within hearing of each other's voice?"

When Maggie first read this letter she felt as if her real temptation had only just begun. At the entrance of the chill dark cavern, we turn with unworn courage from the warm light; but how, when we have trodden far in the damp darkness, and have begun to be faint and weary—how, if there is a sudden opening above us, and we are invited back again to the life-nourishing day? The leap of natural longing from under the pressure of pain is so strong, that all less immediate motives are likely to be forgotten—till the pain has been escaped from.

For hours Maggie felt as if her struggle had been in vain. For hours every other thought that she strove to summon was thrust aside by the image of Stephen waiting for the single word that would bring him to her. She did not *read* the letter: she heard him uttering it, and the voice shook her with its old strange power. All the day before she had been filled with the vision of a lonely future through which she must carry the burthen of regret, upheld only by clinging faith. And here—close within her reach—urging itself upon her even as a claim—was

another future, in which hard endurance and effort were to be exchanged for easy delicious leaning on another's loving strength! And yet that promise of joy in the place of sadness did not make the dire force of the temptation to Maggie. It was Stephen's tone of misery,—it was the doubt in the justice of her own resolve, that made the balance tremble, and made her once start from her seat to reach the pen and paper, and write "Come!"

But close upon that decisive act, her mind recoiled; and the sense of contradiction with her past self in her moments of strength and clearness, came upon her like a pang of conscious degradation. No—she must wait—she must pray—the light that had forsaken her would come again: she should feel again what she had felt, when she had fled away, under an inspiration strong enough to conquer agony—to conquer love: she should feel again what she had felt when Lucy stood by her, when Philip's letter had stirred all the fibres that bound her to the calmer past.

She sat quite still, far on into the night: with no impulse to change her attitude, without active force enough even for the mental act of prayer: only waiting for the light that would surely come again. It came with the memories that no passion could

long quench: the long past came back to her, and with it the fountains of self-renouncing pity and affection, of faithfulness and resolve. The words that were marked by the quiet hand in the little old book that she had long ago learned by heart, rushed even to her lips, and found a vent for themselves in a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan and roar of the wind: "I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me."

But soon other words rose that could find no utterance but in a sob: "Forgive me, Stephen! It will pass away. You will come back to her."

She took up the letter, held it to the candle, and let it burn slowly on the hearth. To-morrow she would write to him the last word of parting.

"I will bear it, and bear it till death. . . . But how long it will be before death comes! I am so young, so healthy. How shall I have patience and strength? Am I to struggle and fall and repent again?—has life other trials as hard for me still?" With that cry of self-despair, Maggie fell on her knees against the table, and buried her sorrow-stricken face. Her soul went out to the Unseen

Pity that would be with her to the end. Surely there was something being taught her by this experience of great need; and she must be learning a secret of human tenderness and long-suffering, that the less erring could hardly know? "O God, if my life is to be long, let me live to bless and comfort——"

At that moment Maggie felt a startling sensation of sudden cold about her knees and feet: it was water flowing under her. She started up: the stream was flowing under the door that led into the passage. She was not bewildered for an instant—she knew it was the flood!

The tumult of emotion she had been enduring for the last twelve hours seemed to have left a great calm in her: without screaming, she hurried with the candle up-stairs to Bob Jakin's bedroom. The door was ajar; she went in and shook him by the shoulder.

"Bob, the flood is come! it is in the house! let us see if we can make the boats safe."

She lighted his candle, while the poor wife, snatching up her baby, burst into screams; and then she hurried down again to see if the waters were rising fast. There was a step down into the room at the door leading from the staircase: she saw

that the water was already on a level with the step. While she was looking, something came with a tremendous crash against the window, and sent the leaded panes and the old wooden framework inwards in shivers,—the water pouring in after it.

"It is the boat!" cried Maggie. "Bob, come down to get the boats!"

And without a moment's shudder of fear, she plunged through the water, which was rising fast to her knees, and by the glimmering light of the candle she had left on the stairs, she mounted on to the window-sill, and crept into the boat, which was left with the prow lodging and protruding through the window. Bob was not long after her, hurrying without shoes or stockings, but with the lanthorn in his hand.

"Why, they're both here—both the boats," said Bob, as he got into the one where Maggie was. "It's wonderful this fastening isn't broke too, as well as the mooring."

In the excitement of getting into the other boat, unfastening it and mastering an oar, Bob was not struck with the danger Maggie incurred. We are not apt to fear for the fearless, when we are companions in their danger, and Bob's mind was absorbed in possible expedients for the safety of the

helpless in-doors. The fact that Maggie had been up, had waked him, and had taken the lead in activity, gave Bob a vague impression of her as one who would help to protect, not need to be protected. She too had got possession of an oar, and had pushed off, so as to release the boat from the over-hanging window-frame.

"The water's rising so fast," said Bob, "I doubt it 'll be in at the chambers before long—th' house is so low. I've more mind to get Prissy and the child and the mother into the boat, if I could, and trusten to the water—for th' old house is none so safe. And if I let go the boat . . . . but *you*," he exclaimed, suddenly lifting the light of his lanthorn on Maggie, as she stood in the rain with the oar in her hand and her black hair streaming.

Maggie had no time to answer, for a new tidal current swept along the line of the houses, and drove both the boats out on to the wide water, with a force that carried them far past the meeting current of the river.

In the first moments Maggie felt nothing, thought of nothing, but that she had suddenly passed away from that life which she had been dreading: it was the transition of death, without

its agony—and she was alone in the darkness with God.

The whole thing had been so rapid—so dream-like—that the threads of ordinary association were broken: she sank down on the seat clutching the oar mechanically, and for a long while had no distinct conception of her position. The first thing that waked her to fuller consciousness, was the cessation of the rain, and a perception that the darkness was divided by the faintest light, which parted the overhanging gloom from the immeasurable watery level below. She was driven out upon the flood:—that awful visitation of God which her father used to talk of—which had made the nightmare of her childish dreams. And with that thought there rushed in the vision of the old home—and Tom—and her mother—they had all listened together.

"O God, where am I? Which is the way home?" she cried out, in the dim loneliness.

What was happening to them at the Mill? The flood had once nearly destroyed it. They might be in danger—in distress: her mother and her brother, alone there, beyond reach of help! Her whole soul was strained now on that thought; and

she saw the long-loved faces looking for help into the darkness, and finding none.

She was floating in smooth water now—perhaps far on the over-flooded fields. There was no sense of present danger to check the outgoing of her mind to the old home; and she strained her eyes against the curtain of gloom that she might seize the first sight of her whereabout—that she might catch some faint suggestion of the spot towards which all her anxieties tended.

O how welcome, the widening of that dismal watery level—the gradual uplifting of the cloudy firmament—the slowly defining blackness of objects above the glassy dark! Yes—she must be out on the fields—those were the tops of hedgerow trees. Which way did the river lie? Looking behind her, she saw the lines of black trees: looking before her there were none: then, the river lay before her. She seized an oar and began to paddle the boat forward with the energy of wakening hope: the dawning seemed to advance more swiftly, now she was in action; and she could soon see the poor dumb beasts crowding piteously on a mound where they had taken refuge. Onward she paddled and rowed by turns in the growing twilight: her wet clothes clung round her, and her streaming hair

was dashed about by the wind, but she was hardly conscious of any bodily sensations—except a sensation of strength, inspired by mighty emotion. Along with the sense of danger and possible rescue for those long-remembered beings at the old home, there was an undefined sense of reconcilement with her brother: what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity, when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal needs? Vaguely, Maggie felt this;—in the strong resurgent love towards her brother that swept away all the later impressions of hard, cruel offence and misunderstanding, and left only the deep, underlying, unshakable memories of early union.

But now there was a large dark mass in the distance, and near to her Maggie could discern the current of the river. The dark mass must be—yes, it was—St Ogg's. Ah, now she knew which way to look for the first glimpse of the well-known trees —the grey willows, the now yellowing chestnuts—and above them the old roof! But there was no colour, no shape yet: all was faint and dim. More and more strongly the energies seemed to come and put themselves forth, as if her life were a stored-up

force that was being spent in this hour, unneeded for any future.

She must get her boat into the current of the Floss, else she would never be able to pass the Ripple, and approach the house: this was the thought that occurred to her, as she imagined with more and more vividness the state of things round the old home. But then she might be carried very far down, and be unable to guide her boat out of the current again. For the first time distinct ideas of danger began to press upon her; but there was no choice of courses, no room for hesitation, and she floated into the current. Swiftly she went now, without effort; more and more clearly in the lessening distance and the growing light she began to discern the objects that she knew must be the well-known trees and roofs; nay, she was not far off a rushing muddy current that must be the strangely altered Ripple.

Great God! there were floating masses in it, that might dash against her boat as she passed, and cause her to perish too soon. What were those masses?

For the first time Maggie's heart began to beat in an agony of dread. She sat helpless—dimly conscious that she was being floated along—more in-

tensely conscious of the anticipated clash. But the horror was transient: it passed away before the oncoming warehouses of St Ogg's : she had passed the mouth of the Ripple, then: *now*, she must use all her skill and power to manage the boat and get it if possible out of the current. She could see now that the bridge was broken down : she could see the masts of a stranded vessel far out over the watery field. But no boats were to be seen moving on the river—such as had been laid hands on were employed in the flooded streets.

With new resolution, Maggie seized her oar, and stood up again to paddle ; but the now ebbing tide added to the swiftness of the river, and she was carried along beyond the bridge. She could hear shouts from the windows overlooking the river, as if the people there were calling to her. It was not till she had passed on nearly to Tofton that she could get the boat clear of the current. Then with one yearning look towards her uncle Deane's house that lay farther down the river, she took to both her oars and rowed with all her might across the watery fields, back towards the Mill. Colour was beginning to awake now, and as she approached the Dorlcote fields, she could discern the tints of the trees—could see the old Scotch firs far to the right,

and the home chestnuts—Oh! how deep they lay in the water: deeper than the trees on this side the hill. And the roof of the Mill—where was it? Those heavy fragments hurrying down the Ripple—what had they meant? But it was not the house—the house stood firm: drowned up to the first story, but still firm—or was it broken in at the end towards the Mill?

With panting joy that she was there at last—joy that overcame all distress, Maggie neared the front of the house. At first she heard no sound: she saw no object moving. Her boat was on a level with the up-stairs windows. She called out in a loud piercing voice,

"Tom, where are you? Mother, where are you? Here is Maggie!"

Soon, from the window of the attic in the central gable, she heard Tom's voice:

"Who is it? Have you brought a boat?"

"It is I, Tom—Maggie. Where is mother?"

"She is not here: she went to Garum, the day before yesterday. I'll come down to the lower window."

"Alone, Maggie?" said Tom, in a voice of deep astonishment, as he opened the middle window on a level with the boat.

"Yes, Tom: God has taken care of me, to bring me to you. Get in quickly. Is there no one else?"

"No," said Tom, stepping into the boat, "I fear the man is drowned: he was carried down the Ripple, I think, when part of the mill fell with the crash of trees and stones against it: I've shouted again and again, and there has been no answer. Give me the oars, Maggie."

It was not till Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water—he face to face with Maggie—that the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force—it was such a new revelation to his spirit, of the depths in life, that had lain beyond his vision which he had fancied so keen and clear—that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutely gazing at each other: Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face —Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation. Thought was busy though the lips were silent: and though he could ask no question, he guessed a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort. But at last a mist gathered over the blue-grey eyes, and the lips found a word they could utter: the old childish —"Magsie!"

Maggie could make no answer but a long deep

sob of that mysterious wondrous happiness that is one with pain.

As soon as she could speak, she said, "We will go to Lucy, Tom: we'll go and see if she is safe, and then we can help the rest."

Tom rowed with untired vigour, and with a different speed from poor Maggie's. The boat was soon in the current of the river again, and soon they would be at Tofton.

"Park House stands high up out of the flood," said Maggie. "Perhaps they have got Lucy there."

Nothing else was said; a new danger was being carried towards them by the river. Some wooden machinery had just given way on one of the wharves, and huge fragments were being floated along. The sun was rising now, and the wide area of watery desolation was spread out in dreadful clearness around them—in dreadful clearness floated onwards the hurrying, threatening masses. A large company in a boat that was working its way along under the Tofton houses, observed their danger, and shouted, "Get out of the current!"

But that could not be done at once, and Tom, looking before him, saw death rushing on them. Huge fragments, clinging together in fatal fellowship, made one wide mass across the stream.

"It is coming, Maggie!" Tom said, in a deep hoarse voice, loosing the oars, and clasping her.

The next instant the boat was no longer seen upon the water—and the huge mass was hurrying on in hideous triumph.

But soon the keel of the boat reappeared, a black speck on the golden water.

The boat reappeared—but brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted: living through again in one supreme moment, the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together.

CONCLUSION.

NATURE repairs her ravages—repairs them with her sunshine, and with human labour. The desolation wrought by that flood, had left little visible trace on the face of the earth, five years after. The fifth autumn was rich in golden corn-stacks, rising in thick clusters among the distant hedgerows; the wharves and warehouses on the Floss were busy again, with echoes of eager voices, with hopeful lading and unlading.

And every man and woman mentioned in this history was still living—except those whose end we know.

Nature repairs her ravages—but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again; the parted hills are left scarred: if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past, there is no thorough repair.

Dorlcote Mill was rebuilt. And Dorlcote churchyard,—where the brick grave that held a father whom we know, was found with the stone laid prostrate upon it after the flood,—had recovered all its grassy order and decent quiet.

Near that brick grave there was a tomb erected, very soon after the flood, for two bodies that were found in close embrace; and it was visited at different moments by two men who both felt that their keenest joy and keenest sorrow were for ever buried there.

One of them visited the tomb again with a sweet face beside him—but that was years after.

The other was always solitary. His great companionship was among the trees of the Red Deeps, where the buried joy seemed still to hover—like a revisiting spirit.

The tomb bore the names of Tom and Maggie Tulliver, and below the names it was written—

"In their death they were not divided."

THE END.

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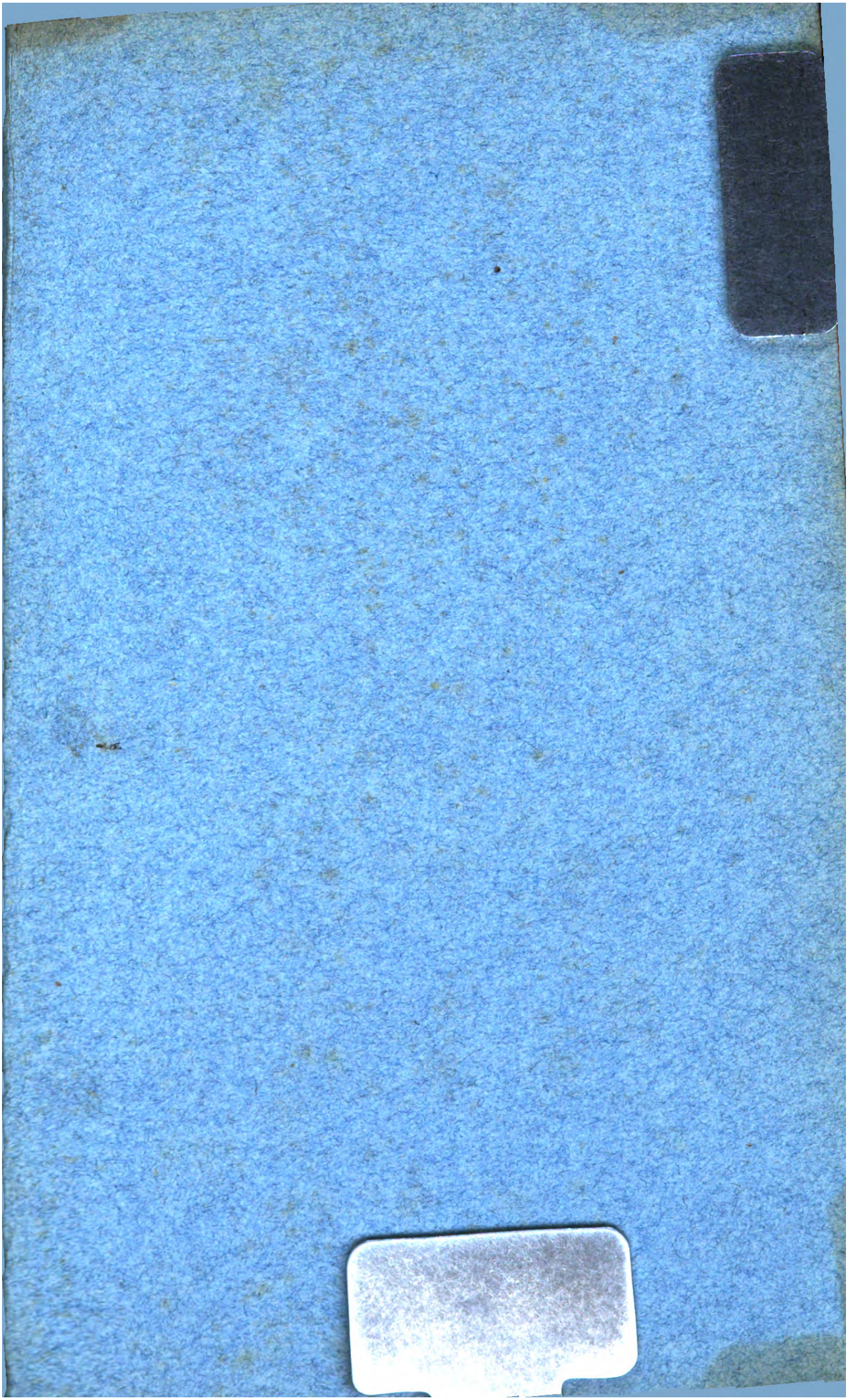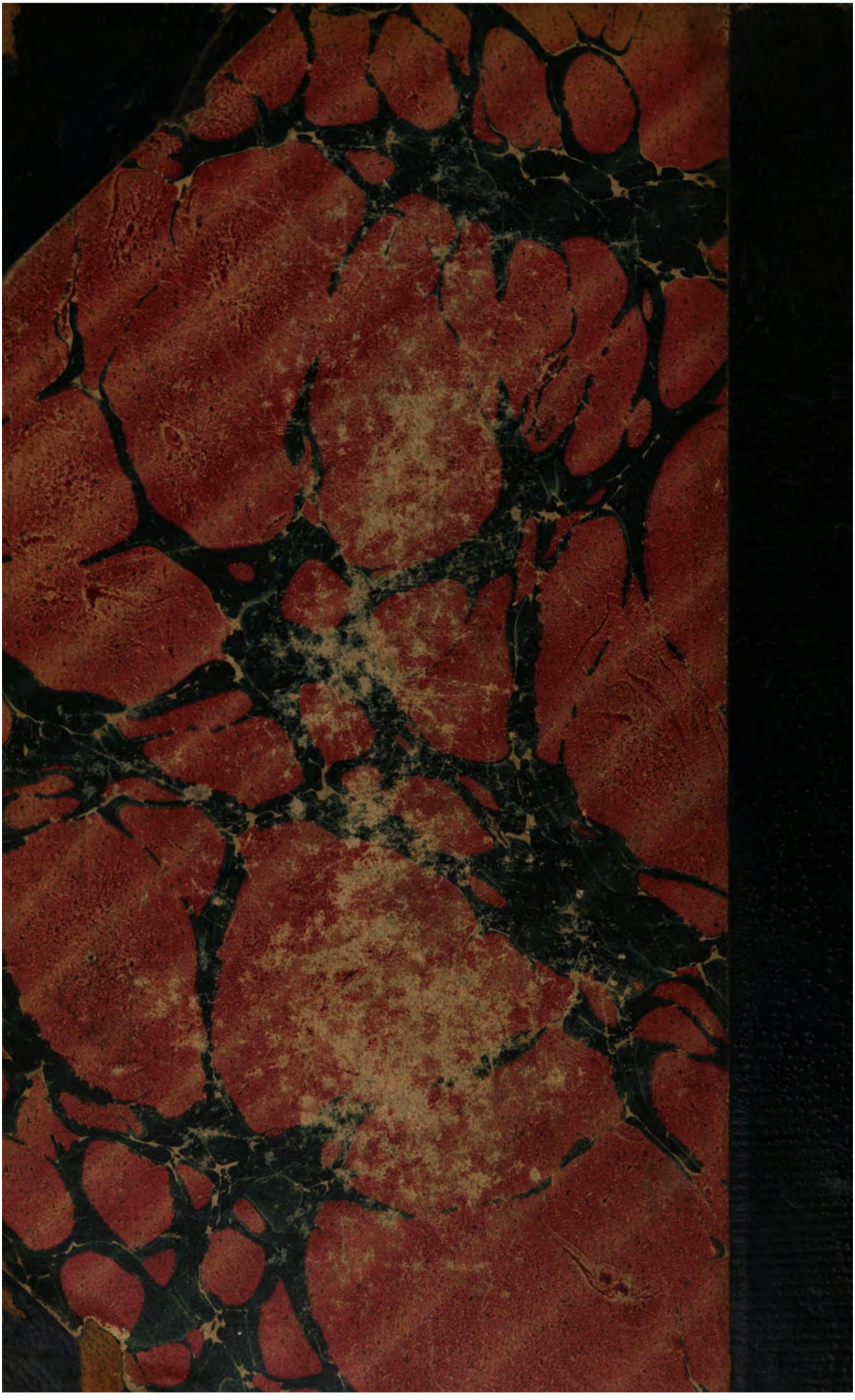
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