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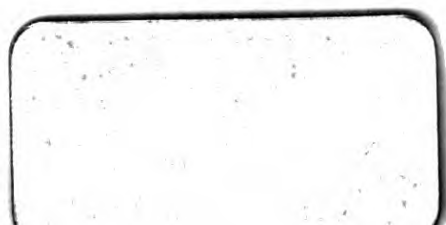


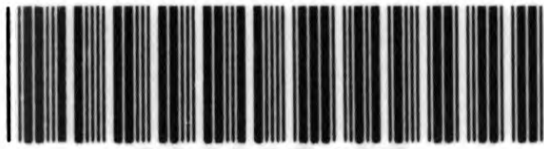
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LONGLEAT.

BY
ELLERAY LAKE.

It were a breaking of God's high decree,
If Lethe should be passed, and such food tasted,
Without the cost of some repentant tear!

DANTE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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LONGLEAT.



CHAPTER I.

FACILIS DESCENSUS AVERNI.

They were alone once more ; for them to be
Thus was another Eden.

BYRON.

. He seemed
To bear with being but because she loved him.
She was the sheath wherein his soul had rest,
As hath a sword from war.

FESTUS.

NOT many hours passed after the Earl had awakened Helena before they were driving to Mr. Ross's. Mrs. Heslop received the Countess, and conducted her to a dressing-room.

"Mr. Ross is better, I understand?"

"He is, my Lady, thank you. There is quite a change."

"Has he been long ill?" was her next inquiry. "We have been travelling, and the Earl had not heard from him."

"He has been ill more than three months, my Lady. He came to town most unexpectedly in September. I was sadly put out, everything being unprepared ; and I saw he was ailing, for he ate nothing at all, and he scarcely ever went out. So one morning I made bold to ask him if he

were ill? He only laughed, in a way that I did not quite like, and he said,

“‘Well, now, Mrs. Heslop, and what do you think should ail me?’

“‘Well, sir,’ I said, ‘you don’t seem well; and isn’t it a pity for you not to be in the country, sir?’

“‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I am here to be quiet, Mrs. Heslop. You know London is empty.’

“‘For great folks it is, sir,’ I said; ‘but wouldn’t you be happier with your friends?’

“‘The Master gave me the strangest look, my Lady, and he said,

“‘Mrs. Heslop, you are the best friend I have in all the world! Don’t fear. I am not going to die yet. None such luck!’

“‘Nay, sir,’ I said; ‘a gentleman like you, so sought after, should be talking of marrying—not of dying.’

“‘The Master turned away, and I was going out of the room, when he called me.

“‘Mrs. Heslop,’ he said, ‘what was my mother like?’

“‘I was quite taken aback, for he had not mentioned her for years, my Lady. I said,

“‘She was a very grand-looking lady, with a splendid dark blue eye, and long black eyelashes, very thick—partickler the under one; and her face and bearin’ was haughty. She was just like a Queen, was Mrs. Ross; but a sweeter-tempered lady, or a sweeter-spoken, I never knew.’ The Master is just the image of his mother, my Lady. And then suddenly, in a jaunty way, he said,

“‘Mrs. Heslop, you’ll be wantin’ to shop a little bit, now you are in London (for I am mostly at Gaythorne, my Lady), and here’s something to get a new dress and cap with. I’ll be bound I spoilt many a one for you when I was a youngster.’

“‘I laughed, and said, ‘Did he remember, when the

young Earl came to see him, taking my best gown (near a bran new silk, my Lady) and my best cap for a scarecrow?’

“‘Yes, he remembered it; and said, that he would buy another, and if it wasn’t enough I must let him know; and I’d better get a good black silk, he said, for it was useful in any case.’

“I near burst out crying, my Lady, at that; so I made my obedience to him, and went away very anxious.”

“Then have you always lived with Mr. Ross?” asked the Countess, who had been listening eagerly to every word.

“Yes, my Lady. His mother died in my arms, and after her death I had the entire care of Mr. Glen. When he was at school the housekeeper at Gaythorne died, and I was put in her place. Gaythorne is one of the Master’s residences, it is near Oxford, my Lady, a beautiful place as ever you saw. Mr. Ross was at Oxford with the Earl, but he is not much of a Churchman; he inclines to the Baptists, for he doesn’t quite think as Church people do about baptizing babies, my Lady. I daresay the Master is right, but I have been brought up, you know, to believe christenin’ is respectable, so he will joke with me; and when I’ve been godmother—I have stood once or twice—he’ll say, ‘Now, Mrs. Heslop, have you been telling stories again for those little rascals, promisin’ all sorts of things for them that they’ll never keep?’ And he always says it is an excuse to spend my savings on new caps and silver spoons. That’s his pleasant way, my Lady, you know; for he always gives me a five pound to put in the bank for my godchild. So I got to be asked so often, my Lady,” said Mrs. Heslop, laughing, “that I was forced to tell them my Master wouldn’t let me tell any more stories. That did make them stare, you may be sure, being Church folk. But, my Lady, I do ask your pardon for talking so long, I forgot myself.”

“ And how long was Mr. Ross really ill ?” the Countess asked.

“ He had a bad cold on him all the time, that nothing would rid him of, my Lady. And he got so weak, that his step on the stair was like an old man’s. I was very uneasy but he would not have a doctor ; he said if he must have an old woman, he’d rather have me than any other ; for he was always jokin’ and careless, my Lady, about his health. But one morning he didn’t get up, and I sent for the doctor. When he came, he said he believed it would be gastric fever ; but that was thrown off, and it ended in one ‘ not so bad,’ they said, which I’d like to know what they’d have, and Mr. Glen dyin’ by inches !” she said, indignantly. “ He has been lyin’ in that bed more like a corpse than anything else. And eh, so low, my Lady ! he might have had his heart broken. I never was so thankful in all my life as when I knew my Lord Longleat was coming ; for you see, my Lady, they were always like brothers. The Dowager Countess was a mother to him. Last night, after you had gone, he sent for me, and such a change I never saw ! He gave me so many directions about your reception to-day. I could have cried for joy, my Lady. You see he has been, as I may say, like one of my Lord’s family so long, I was very glad to know that you, the Earl’s lady, loved him too.”

Loved him too ! Her eyes drooped before the honest look of that good servant, who seemed the very embodiment of English faithfulness and honor. One of those comely matrons that you often find in our own England—with bright blue eyes, clear skin, fresh, ruddy cheeks, and open brow ; at the sight of whom, the sleek cows will come and hang their heads over the field-gate, to be noticed and caressed ; into whose capacious pocket the fat horse will poke his nose, for the rosy apple sure to be ready for him ; round whose feet the little downy chicks will gather, as the

mother-hen trips about for grain, knowing that her brood is safe with her. The tired tramp, with her child slung upon her back, wending her weary way to the "night-lodging" in the distant country town, never fears to ask her for the "sup of milk for the child," for her face looks tenderly on "the poor and the needy;" and to use those expressive words of King Lemuel's mother, "She is not afraid of the snow: for all her household is clothed with scarlet." One in whom "the heart of her husband" may "safely trust."

Such a woman was Mrs. Heslop! and it was before her unsuspecting, honest look, that the eyes of the fair young Countess drooped. For the first time she saw how great was her sin. Yes, gloss it over as she would, her love for him was sin. It frightened her. For a moment she glanced at the door, as if she would escape.

"Will your Ladyship allow me to assist you?" asked Mrs. Heslop; then she recollected herself, and laid aside her bonnet and mantle as calmly as if the agony of an awakened conscience, the misery of bitter remorse, were not torturing her heart. And the housekeeper was looking at her and thinking she never in all her life saw such a lovely, pure young creature.

Helena had chosen to wear a drab terry velvet dress, thinking that its color would be pleasant to the eye of the invalid, and its folds too soft to disturb him when she moved. The pink topaz which fastened the dainty lace round her throat, was her only ornament. She wore a beautiful white camellia in her band. Even to her own gaze she seemed fair; for a moment, one brief moment, she almost hated the loveliness which had first led him into this sin.

The Earl called her name softly at the door. "You have been very long," he said, when she went to him.

"Mrs. Heslop has been talking to me, Cranford."

“Talking! I could have gone all through the ‘Times,’ child, since you left me.”

“Longleat, I suppose it is quite right for me to go in?” she said, at the door of Mr. Ross’s room.

“Right, Helena! what do you mean?”

She hesitated and colored. He laughed almost contemptuously.

“My dear little snowdrop, is not Glen my brother? and are not you my wife?”

He kissed her tenderly in his great trust. And oh! how his confidence wrung her heart. She entered the room under the influence of this feeling, which threw a constraint over her manner that Mr. Ross noticed in a moment. He wore an Indian dressing-gown, and was supported by velvet cushions. A rich silk coverlet had been laid over the bed. In Glen’s every word and action his instinctive delicacy was manifested, but, where Helena was concerned, it became subtle refinement. It was his greatest charm in her eyes. She at once noticed how carefully the room had been prepared. A low easy-chair was placed beside his pillow, but a most luxurious little couch was drawn up before a brilliant fire. Flowers and books were on the tables; there was also a basket filled with magnificent fruits, whose fragrance might have tempted any Eve. The curtains of the windows were looped back, the bright sun shone on them, and on a merry scene outside of children playing in the park, and of boys skating or sliding on the water; such a scene as always braces one, and sends the blood at quicker pace through the veins. Mr. Ross’s room was not like a sick chamber; but for the sunken eyes, the white face, the wasted hands, it would have been difficult to have believed that he had recently been in such danger—there was so much brightness in his greeting to the Countess. He saw her shyness, and wondered at its cause; but she smiled at

his inquiring look, and then the shadow passed from him.

What a meeting that was! It may be believed that angels were gathered round that bed, where death had hovered so lately, and that they were watching anxiously for the end. There had been a holy purpose in Glen's heart, which his strong will had followed by prompt action. When he left the valley in the sunrise, it was with the determination to conquer his love or die; but it had been in his own strength. Perhaps Mr. Ross had never once sincerely prayed, "Deliver us from evil," so, when sickness came, he was doubly weak. Ah, there is solemn truth in the words, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"—a truth which we better understand when we have often stumbled.

Helena went to the couch by the fire. Cranford sat beside his friend. They had a long talk, almost in a whisper. Presently she rose to give Mr. Ross his medicine. The Earl asked her to take the easy-chair, to be near them; as she did so, she saw her own portrait. She started, as was natural, and Cranford laughed.

"Are you surprised?" he said.

"No; Mr. Ross told me he had it," she answered, quietly; "but I am angry with Marachetti for selling it. He was only allowed to have this copy because he said he wanted it for the face of an angel in an altar-piece."

Both Glen and the Earl smiled.

"It was finished, Cranford, the day I paid my visit to the convent." Turning to Mr. Ross, she told him the story. "And do you know, Longleat," she said to the Earl, "Marachetti suspected that Father Felix of stealing a duplicate of the miniature I sent to you. It certainly disappeared after a visit of his to the studio."

Mr. Ross's eyes were fixed on Helena, and they had in them an expression that quite startled the Earl, who

happened at the moment to look at him. The fact was, it had suddenly occurred to Mr. Ross—how or whence the impression came he could not tell—but it did suddenly occur to him, that Helena was the child named in the story told by the convict to Edward Seymour in the Manchester prison. It seemed at first to flash upon his mind, as lightning is born suddenly from the womb of midnight; but when she named the theft of the miniature, he was convinced that his surmise was correct, because he recollected now, what he had forgotten before, that Edward Seymour said the priest came to him after the man had died, and assured him that the story was true, for even the portrait of the child was in the possession of one Father Felix, in Rome.

“Poor child!” was his first thought; then an irrepressible longing to bear her sorrow filled his heart. He had no thought of the stain on her birth. He would have dowered her with the wealth of his great heart, if her whole ancestry had been laden with guilt, so long as she herself was pure. No pride ever could have weakened Glen’s love for Helena; but his pride in her did strengthen it. Perhaps it was the excitement of this strange suspicion that was too much for Mr. Ross, or it might be the pleasure of having Helena by his side; but, from whatever cause, his cheeks flushed, and fever advanced with rapid strides. Before the night was over he was delirious, and in danger.

Helena returned to Eglinton House, but the Earl remained with his friend, and through the succeeding weeks of Glen’s illness he rarely left him.

It was most beautiful to see his devotion—so beautiful, that when the doctors remarked upon it once to Mrs. Heslop, she said, with tears in her eyes, “Eh, sirs, God only knows what the Earl is to my master.”

At last the crisis was passed, and, feeble as a babe, Mr.

Ross lay, without strength to grasp his friend's hand, but with a look that was most touching when he saw Cranford's wan face, and guessed that he had been with him through all. The first day he was able to sit up in bed, Cranford's arm supported him. Glen tried to whisper something, but a finger was laid upon his lips, and the Earl said, "To see you well, my dear fellow, is all I care for."

Then, for the first time in all their years of intercourse, he saw a tear glisten in those dark eyes. Remorse was very keen in the heart of the sick man.

April passed. The Earl and Countess were still in London; but Helena had not seen Mr. Ross since the night he became worse. The mild, bright spring weather brought health back to him rapidly. He was able to sit up in his library, and was almost independent of nursing; but Cranford saw that his face never lost its look of patient sadness—never regained its old expression. He seemed painfully indifferent to everything, until Helena came to see him, and then something of the old look returned. He had not once asked for her; but there was this change when she came; yet no suspicion of the truth ever crossed the Earl's mind. All he felt was joy that she had power to exorcise his friend's melancholy, and he attributed it to that same inexpressible charm which influenced everyone with whom she associated. She frequently read aloud to him, and he interested himself in her studies, which was a pleasant pastime for him. He was surprised to find how much she had gained in solid knowledge during the past month. She had shown rare judgment and true taste in the selection of her literature during their separation. Under the influence of study and reflection, her beautiful face had acquired a higher, nobler beauty. Lord Cranford saw it, and marvelled. Very often he longed for his old Helena, the child whom he had wooed and loved; but it could not be. When once

we have passed such a stage in life's journey, the steps can never be retraced. The child-wife could henceforth be no more than a memory to him—her husband. Helena was a sweet, noble, thoughtful, dignified woman now, with only the supple graces, the tender loveliness of a child. He, whose influence had wrought that change, stood by, and worshipped her more idolatrously than ever; but it was a silent worship. No allusion to his love escaped his lips. May came in, with a jubilant chorus of soft warm winds, a singing of birds, and a trickling of rills released from their icy bondage—crowned, too, with sweet-smelling flowers—violets and primroses, hawthorn white and red—and the hedges were all bursting into delicate green, and white buds were speckling the black branches. A bright, a most glorious May! London was filling fast. Cards seemed to snow upon Eglinton House. It had been rumoured that the Earl and Countess of Longleat had spent the whole of the winter in town. Curiosity was on tip-toe.

“Is it true that your Ladyship has been in London for some weeks?” inquired the “Iron Duke,” as he sat beside Helena at dinner, one night.

“Quite true, your Grace. You are, of course, aware that Longleat's dearest friend, Mr. Ross, has been very ill. We could not leave him.”

She looked up into the face of Waterloo's hero with such winning frankness, that he thought an illness was a small price to pay for the tender interest of the most beautiful creature he had ever known.

She had not seen Mr. Ross for a week. He was just wearying for a sight of her, when early one morning the Earl entered his breakfast-room. It was the Derby Day. Mr. Ross laid down his book. “Well, Longleat, I thought you were going to Epsom.”

“So I am, and, as you know, I intended taking Helena; but she does not seem inclined to endure the fatigue. I

don't quite like leaving her, but I must go, as I promised Cardigan." He stopped. Mr. Ross wondered what was coming.

"Glen," he said, "will you be kind, and make an effort? I know it's a good deal to expect from you to leave your books for a day; but I have been thinking that if you would drive over to Richmond with Helena, that it would do you both good, and I should not feel selfish in leaving her alone. Are you well enough?"

The blood mounted to Glen's temples, receded, and left him pale again.

Be kind! make an effort! to drive with her to Richmond—to spend a whole day alone with her amid such calm, quiet scenery, with the golden sunshine making all nature radiant, and the spring flowers scenting the air, as in that *other* day!

He could not answer.

"Never mind," said the Earl, kindly; "I feared you could not go."

"Stay, Longleat, what a hurry you are in always. Would the Countess like this arrangement?"

"Indeed, she would. The suggestion brought fresh color into her cheek. She has been far too pale long enough."

"Then I am sure I shall only be too happy to be of service to her. You have done me honor, Longleat, by entrusting to me such a precious charge."

"I would not have asked you, old fellow, had she been like some of our fair friends. The Lord help their husbands! But you will not be bored by even a whole day's *tête-à-tête*, with my Helena, old bachelor though you are! Come, and I will drive you round."

"Thank you, Longleat. I think I can make a better arrangement. If you are going to Eglinton House, will you tell her Ladyship that I will do myself the honor of

calling for her in an hour, provided that time be agreeable to her. I will try my phaeton to-day for the first time, and drive her myself."

"Bravo!" said Cranford, with glee. "We shall see you as of old in no time."

Away he went, that trusting friend—that true-hearted Earl!—and Mr. Ross was left alone. He craved this, just to calm his excitement; his almost irrepressible joy. He looked out on the park, where the pale buds were glinting in the sun. What would it be at Richmond—in those lanes, in that valley—with *her* alone! In all the past two years, in all their freedom of intercourse, he had never had that joy. Never two hours with her *quite* alone. He scarcely believed in his happiness. He rang the bell, and surprised his servant by ordering the phaeton. It was a new and most elegant light carriage, of Roman form. The Countess had seen it, and had greatly admired it. It only held two—there was no coachman's seat.

"Drive me to Eglinton House," he said, to his servant. "I shall not require you afterwards."

Robert happened to be in the entrance-hall as Mr. Ross went in. His delight on seeing that gentleman was very manifest. The favoritism was mutual.

When the Countess entered the room, Glen was standing before a window. She was struck by his apparently increased height, which was owing to his thinness. His elegance had certainly not suffered; but he was far too ethereal. He turned round as she closed the door, and advanced to meet her. They were both inwardly agitated, though outwardly calm. She gave him her hand, he bent his head, and raised it to his lips—almost reverently.

"Longleat asked me to come," he said. "Will you like to go to Richmond?"

Her face grew whiter. She did not raise her eyelids.

“Little fairy,” he said, lightly, to soothe her agitation. “I have never been able to thank you for all your deeds of mercy to me.”

“Oh, Mr. Ross.” She looked up now.

“Nay,” he said, “grant me the grace of thanksgiving. It was sweet to be indebted to you; it is sweeter still to take care of you to-day.”

Without a word, she came closer to him; and the resolution he had made to be worthy the Earl's trust in him was forgotten. He folded her in his arms, laid her head upon his breast, and kissed her brow. “As I came here, my little one, I thought of a line—

If there be an elysium on earth, it is this—it is this!

And I wondered if all poets were seers also.”

He saw by her quivering lip, and the deeper violet of her eye, all that she was so keenly feeling; and smothering his great passion—his unhappy love, he released her, and she went away.

The servants came to the carriage with wraps and furs; but Mr. Ross himself carefully attended to every detail for Helena's comfort.

As they turned into a lane, she said, “Mr. Ross, did we not come this way before?”

“Yes. I want everything to remind me of that day. I want another impetus also.”

“Another impetus?”

“Don't you remember my cloister fancy? I never thought that my ‘little monitor’ would become all the world to me.”

Her eyes filled with tears.

“Don't, Mr. Ross,” she pleaded. “It is of no use; I belong to another.”

Ay! that she did. He bit his lips, and giving a lash of the whip, the horses dashed along until they

arrived at a hill-foot. "Fairy," he said, "tell me your thoughts."

"I was thinking, Mr. Ross," she said, after a pause, "how sad it is to be trusted, and to deceive; and that if one could only always act according to Longleat's favorite motto—'In the face of the sun, in the eye of light'—how much misery we should be spared."

He did not speak again until they arrived at Richmond. Then, after leaving the carriage, as if with one mind, they strolled away down the path to the place where he gathered the violets on their first meeting-day. She feared that he was vexed with her; and glanced shily at his face, so stern-looking, and so noble! She timidly put her little hand in his; then he turned his head, and there flashed upon her such a brilliant smile, such a tender look, that she was fain to turn away her eyes once more.

"You will not tire yourself for me, Mr. Ross, I hope."

"I would die for you," he answered.

"Perhaps so; but that would not be a satisfactory arrangement to me." He laughed, and raising a heavy branch said,

"This is our way."

She walked under, he let the bough fall, and in a few moments they emerged from the shadow of the trees, on to a broad open glade—a fair expanse of mossy grass, with the Thames rolling on, laving its banks. They were completely shut in by the belt of trees.

Mr. Ross laid down the rug which he had carried, and telling her that she was the fairy of the solitudes, prayed her to let her wand rest lightly upon him. He threw himself at her feet, and they both listened in silence to those sounds which you may hear upon the stillest spring day—the cracking of boughs as the sap rises, the flutter of young birds in their downy nests, the cry of the wood-pigeon, the rustle of the field-mouse; all those

pleasant voices that come from nature's heart, and so go straight to man's—unless he be so steeped in sin that nothing pure, nothing holy, can touch his senses, or influence his soul.

“Mr. Ross,” she said, suddenly breaking the silence, “how is all this to end?”

“Don't, for heaven's sake!” he said, passionately. “Don't poison my *one* day of happiness. Let me believe for this time at least, that you are mine. Life will be a short journey now. If the illusion can gild its sunrise, you will not regret it when the night—the long, long night, that can never know a morn—has fully come.”

“What do you mean?” she said.

He did not answer. He was gazing into her face with such unutterable love, that she burst into tears. He waited a while.

“So you do care for me!” he said, gloomily; “that will bring me some comfort. Child, I feel as if my death-warrant had been signed. I don't think I shall live long. I don't wish to live. It is of no use to disguise the truth. This world without *you* now, would be hell to me. I have struggled with my resolve, and my pain in vain—all in vain! I want you to believe one thing, that your happiness is my only thought. If I live, I shall be devoted to that in all times, under all circumstances. You are my sacred trust. If I die, all that I have will be yours, and when I am in another world, if guardian angels are permitted, I shall be yours. Perhaps in a while I shall leave you. You must only think this: he has gone away to become more worthy of me!”

He waited in vain for a response. Her face was buried in her hands, her slight frame shook, she was thrilled by such devotion. The river's murmur, the rustling leaves, sounded on the quiet air. And a bird, which had been hopping and fluttering round them (so reminding her of

the night before her marriage) flew to a tree close by, and broke into such an ecstasy of song, that they listened in silence.

“Let us go with the sound of that bird’s *Te Deum*, making melody in our hearts,” said Glen. Over a carpet of spring flowers they passed into the gloom of a little wood—unconscious that they were fast drifting on a perilous stream towards a rock upon which they might be lost.

Ah ! it is not the sea,
It is not the sea that sinks and shelves,
But ourselves
That rock and rise,
With endless and uneasy motion,
Now touching the very skies ;
Now sinking into the depths of ocean.

Mr. Ross had formed, and had acted upon good resolves ; his honor he was determined to keep bright, to suffer no stain to fall upon himself or upon her. She had supported him in all this. Even but an hour ago, she had quoted that brave motto through *fear*, lest they should forget Lord Cranford’s claims. And yet now, their love was stronger, and found more fervent utterance than it had ever done. The law of right was still the same, unchanging as God is true. They were conscious that they stood, and they dared to stand on a perilous verge from which natures less confident in their own strength, would have shrunk. Ah, it is we who make shipwreck of our own lives whilst the great ocean of truth lies in calm, still grandeur beneath God’s eye. It is we who, refusing the aid of Him, the Great Pilot, are wrecked on the rocks that strew the coast of this life whilst His help is freely offered, that we may enter safely into the haven of rest. No sooner did temptation come with her honeyed words than these two who had vowed so much, and had suffered so much, listened and followed—they knew not yet whither.

It was a conflicting day, and a too too happy one !

As they walked along the bank, they came to a boat chained to some steps.

“How I should like a row!” said Helena, whose serenity had returned during their quiet ramble.

“Would you, my Lady? then if you will condescend to convert this rock into a throne, by resting, and to honor Father Thames by a Miss Clarendon conversation, you shall have one.”

She was puzzled.

“Don’t you remember?” he said, laughing, “the first morning I saw you, you had had an opiate.”

“I don’t indeed, Mr. Ross, you have a good memory.”

“Under all circumstances never treacherous to you, my child,” he answered quietly, as he left her. She sat dreamily watching the scene. It was so beautiful, the sunshine was so cheering, the river so sparkling, the banks so green. Oh, how she luxuriated in that hour, whilst waiting for Glen. She was careless of all the future.

Mr. Ross returned with a servant-man, who carried some scarlet cushions. He had presented his card at the house, and found that he knew the owner of the boat.

He took the oars, she the helm. He rowed quietly towards Twickenham—past gardens, and lawns, and pretty homes, whose blue smoke curled above the pale green foliage without defiling the sweet air. As the noon hour came, the kine strolled down to the river, and drank in the shallows; then lowed to each other beneath the boughs.

Mr. Ross devoted his whole soul to her service. He blended the resources of his memory with his own fertile thoughts. She listened like one in an enchanted dream. He rested on his oars, and then she roused herself.

"Are you tired, Mr. Ross? Will you allow me to row?"

He responded by a droll look; and then she found that, in her reverie, she had steered into a mass of flag-leaves.

"Ah, I cannot guide you," she said.

He smiled, and worked one oar until they were gliding in the clear water.

"Life has its analogy in everything," he said, as they landed.

"How so?"

"You said you could not guide me; but I was strong enough for both."

Ah! would that it had been so; that his strength had been greater than her weakness!

Involuntarily she placed her hand in his. He clasped it firmly, and they returned to the place where she had stood with her husband that long-ago spring day, and had given Mr. Ross his "impetus." There he stopped, and looked round gravely; then down at her. She had taken off her hat, for the day was warm as June. He smoothed her hair gently with his two hands, and said,

"You must trust me, my bairnie."

"Elspie calls me that."

"Does she? I must know Elspie some day."

"She does so love me, Mr. Ross."

He smiled tenderly.

"So do I."

The drive home was delightful.

They dined alone, for the Earl was not expected until late. Mr. Ross followed her into the drawing-room directly.

"Will you give me some music?" he asked. "And don't have lights. Like all who sing with feeling, you can do without notes, I know; and the light of that young moon is so holy."

She sang as even she rarely did sing. Several servants stole into the gallery outside the doors to listen. Upon Glen her voice exercised a weird influence.

“Are you tired?” he asked, after a pause.

“Not at all.”

“Then give me my favorite, ‘The Lord is mindful of his own.’”

She played the prelude exquisitely, and then followed the rich low music of that most beautiful composition. She sang it as one inspired, and he listened with his eyes closed, his face hidden by his hand. His heart-strings were all vibrating. He could not thank her as the music ended. But another voice did that.

“Cranford!”

She started up.

“Well, Helena, where are you? I am in a dilemma. If you will ring the bell, I may perhaps get out of it.”

Mr. Ross rang, and almost at the same instant servants entered with lights.

“Ah! you there, Glen? Tired to death, I know. What have you been doing with our Lady there? Are the flowers in bloom? If so, a nice chase she has led you.”

Helena answered. “Longleat, I never enjoyed a day so much.”

“Thank you, dear, for the compliment.”

He and Mr. Ross laughed.

“And you?” she said.

“‘Never enjoyed a day so much,’” he answered, banteringly. “The dust was so plentiful. Then I betted a little—and lost, of course. Like my luck! I missed Cardigan; drove back alone; upset one donkey-cart; Prince and Cupid took fright; was sworn at by the costermonger; and expect to figure in the Court for damages.”

“Longleat!”

He laughed heartily at her innocent look of concern;

and, as he kissed her, told her that he had thought the Derby Day all vanity, and had longed to be with them in beautiful Richmond.

"Have you really lost?" she said, interrupting him quickly; for neither of his auditors could hear quite calmly such assurance.

"I have indeed," he said. "But it's always the same with me."

He spoke quite in playfulness, looking with a smile into her eyes. But Mr. Ross rose and said gravely,

"Be thankful, my dear Longleat. You have not lost all. Some men risk that on one cast of the die—and lose!"

"You are not going, Ross? Stay the night."

"Not to-night, I thank you."

Lord Cranford urged in vain. Glen could not have borne to have seen her with him after such a day. So he went to his solitary mansion; and he sat alone in his sombre library, with the "holy moon" shining upon his face, lost in a reverie. At length he rose, and reached down from a high shelf of books a large old volume: it was the Family Bible, which he had not opened for a long time. There was a marker between the pages. The book opened there, and the first words his eye fell upon were,

"The wages of sin is death."

CHAPTER II.

FATAL INDECISION.

Alas! how easily things go wrong :
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.

Alas, how hardly things go right!
'Tis hard to watch in a summer's night,
For the sigh will come, and the kiss will stay,
And the summer night is a winter day.

GEORGE MACDONALD.

ONE night, some time after the day at Richmond, Mr. Ross was sitting alone after dinner, with his feet on the fender. The night was so damp and chilly that a fire had been lighted. Beside him was a small table, on which were placed a claret-jug and some superb grapes. If his appetite was moderate and simple, his tastes were not, for both jug and fruit-dish belonged to a service which had cost a regal price. They were of Florentine workmanship. The chased green glass was encased in golden fruit and leaves. The mouth of the jug was the bud of a water-lily; the flower-spray wreathed the glass, and spread a broad leaf for it to rest upon. The whole service was a perfect work of art. Mr. Ross had been sitting for a long time with his arms folded, his eyes fixed upon the fire, when suddenly he pushed back his chair and rose. In doing so he overthrew the stand. He was looking at the

shattered glass with such an expression of surprise as to be almost comic, when the door opened, and Lord Cranford walked in. Whether it was owing to the accident, or to his most unexpected appearance, Cranford could not tell, but Glen did not take his offered hand.

“What in the world have you been doing, Ross?”

“A most provoking act of stupidity, Longleat,” he said, stooping to pick up the dish.

“It is a pity. You will never replace it,” said the Earl.

“I never can, Longleat,” he answered, taking up the lily spray. “It was the most exquisite specimen of art that I brought from Firenze la Bella, and was the exact copy of a favourite service in the Medici family. The artist is dead, and you see his works must die also.”

He put down the spray, and rang the bell for the fragments to be removed.

“What a stoic you are, Glen!—nothing moves you.”

“Am I so insensible, Longleat? Life has its keener sorrows.”

“I should have been vexed, though.”

“And have said, ‘Like my luck!’” continued Mr. Ross.

They both laughed at the familiar expression, and went to the library. A fire was there also, and Mr. Ross stirred it to a blaze. Lord Cranford stood before one of the windows whistling an operatic air.

“Will you sit down,” said Glen, wondering what kept him silent. “It is long since you have been here.”

Cranford turned round. “Yes, you make yourself scarce, old fellow. How long is it since you were with us? You didn’t come that night we expected you.”

“No, I had one of my headaches.” He was beginning to dread an interview with the friend whom he had wronged, and rather to avoid him when he could.

There was a pause.

“How is the Countess?”

“Pretty well.” This was said moodily.

“What is the matter, Longleat?”

The Earl did not answer for a few moments, then, in an impulsive way, as if he had suddenly come to a resolution, he turned round and sat down in the easy-chair. “The fact is, I am not happy about Helena. She is very much changed; her spirits are variable. I cannot think she is well, and yet she does not complain. I have seen a gradual change in her for the last two years. You remember that morning at Grasmere, when we had our walk, Ross?”

Remember! It was burnt on Mr. Ross’s brain.

He gave some sort of an assent, which Cranford scarcely heeded.

“Well, I don’t think she was quite herself all that summer after. When we went to Strathaven she didn’t take a bit of interest in anything; and, when we got to Longleat, my mother told me she was altered.” He stopped, and gazed through the window half as if he feared to go on. Every word had been a stab to his hearer. “I would give anything to see her her old bright self again,” went on Cranford; “and, dash it! I know I am inclined to be morbid, but the change is *so* great!” He leaned his forehead upon his hand, and again was silent.

If he could have seen the white look of agonized remorse on that face before him! The large eyes were like burning coals; the dark brows were contracted; the lips were tightly compressed. But, when the Earl did raise his head, Mr. Ross merely looked thoughtful.

“Perhaps she is tired of town,” he said.

“That is just it,” answered Cranford, briskly, and rising. “Now I am coming to my point, Glen”—putting his hand upon his friend’s shoulder, and looking down

with a smile—"Do you know, I sometimes think we never get on so well as when you are with us. Old bachelor brother! you cannot attend the House; Dr. Farnworth says Helena is pining for the country. Let us go back to Longleat—you and us. My mother writes that the place is a paradise, and her postscript is this. Listen." He took out his mother's letter and read—

"I am sorry, dear Longleat, that Glen is so unwell still. Tell him that his motherly friend is prepared to give him a welcome. Longleat air will restore both of the invalids."

"Now, what can you say to that? The season is lovely, and the old place is a paradise, even when the sun does not shine."

Glen heard, and every nerve quivered. Less than an hour ago he had been pondering all the circumstances of his position, and he had resolved to travel—to leave England, and never to see her until he had conquered his passion. As he rose from his chair, he had exclaimed, "I will—," and the shattered glass had arrested his sentence. Would his resolution prove as frail as those fragments?

"A paradise!" said Longleat; and, long afterwards, Glen told Helena these words came into his thoughts at the same moment, "And in the garden was a sepulchre." The temptation soon came to test his strength.

"Well, Glen, what say you? Come, *we* want you."

The same clinging trust as in the old days! It had dated from their childhood, when, in comparison with the lame, delicate Earl, Ross had seemed a Hercules of strength. And now he sat there with Cranford, whose face beamed with affection, and he dared not look up into it. To be entreated to become Longleat's honored guest!

to be with her daily in that sweet place, where everything that could charm the eye was gathered; no suspicion to poison his peace, no cold-heartedness to chill his happy serenity—to have this offered in exchange for the penance of banishment which he had imposed upon his future—banishment in lands which could offer to him no new charm, with no companionship but his own memories and unavailing longings, was, indeed, a test of principle, a trial of strength, from which the strongest might have shrunk.

Both the Earl and he had kept a good deal aloof from society. Mr. Ross was peculiar, too self-reliant to care for general acquaintance. He never sought an introduction, and, excepting in rare instances, he never encouraged one. No man might have visited so much; no man in his position visited so little.

The Earl, partly from delicacy, partly from natural reserve, had led a somewhat secluded life at Longleat; and after his marriage, whether owing to the sad secret connected with his wife, or from whatever cause, he visited as little as his high position would admit. When he and Glen went to college, their exclusive habits told against them at first; but they outlived all prejudice, and when they left their *Alma Mater*, St. Paul's College, few ever did who were, especially in Glen's case, followed by so many regrets, or crowned with so many laurels.

Now, if he did travel, Ross knew what was before him—simply a lonely wandering life, with an undying yearning for what he had left. He despised himself for his irresolution; he thought, "I am a giant shorn of my strength by a woman. Poor, pitiful fool. The evil I would not, that I do." He thought all these hard things against himself, quite as strongly as his bitterest enemy would have done; and then he suddenly resolved to tell the Earl why he feared to go to Longleat. Not to impli-

cate *her*. Not that. God strike him down if ever he could harm one hair of her head! but he might tell Longleat that he was not quite "an old bachelor" in feeling: that he liked and admired her so much in his secret heart, that it was possible the feeling might grow into a warmer sentiment. Longleat might look at him in wonder, in scorn possibly. Well, what of that? His *honor* would be safe; and when years had passed, they might meet again as two old men, and they would look into each other's eyes and grasp each other's hand, and talk of the old old time when he had been a trustworthy friend, and had endured great sorrow to be that. *Then* Longleat would not laugh in scorn; they would go down to the grave together, and as in life, so in death, they would not be divided. It might be that he himself would soon die; Longleat would mourn for him; and perhaps in his sorrow would tell her all, and then she would know how true he had been when he had said he left her "to become more worthy of her." Would it not be better so?

Ah, yes; and it would have so been, perhaps, had not Longleat said, "Now, don't meditate any more. You need the change as much as Helena does, and *she* looks as if she were sinking into her grave."

Then her face rose vividly before Glen, as her eyes had filled with tears in the Grasmere lane; and he heard again her passionate voice, crying in agony, "I shall be desolate!" What if she were sinking; if he *did* return, to find her in her grave. Would he be answerable? He was so stung, he dropped his face on his hand, and groaned.

"Ross! Ross! what's the matter?" Cranford was alarmed; he went to the bell, but Mr. Ross lifted his head.

"No, no; do not ring. It was only a spasm." He put his hand to his heart; great drops stood upon his brow.

Yes, Glen Ross was sinning for a fool's paradise; but

there was his conscience within which is "the worm that dieth not."

"Leave me now, Longleat," he said, sadly, but with a smile. "I will think it all over. I had other plans."

"I would much rather you did not think at all, Glen. You need rest."

This was said so kindly, with so much simple feeling, that Mr. Ross looked away; but the Earl laid his arm upon the back of his chair, and bent down, so that he could not shun his gaze.

"I had used to feel, Glen," he said, "as if I were your charge, your young brother, you were so strong, so brave, so glorious! I was a weak fellow, delicate, and—and—maimed; idle, too, and languid; 'every inch a lord,' as you said once," smiling brightly; "but now our positions somehow are reversed. You are *my* charge. You will come to dear old Longleat, where we were so happy as lad; and we will forget all our troubles, Glen, all our politics, all our wearinesses in the old woods, where we used to hunt the shy hares basking in the sunbeams, and set the dogs after the hedgehogs, and watch the deer feed among the fern brakes, and then try who could hit with a stone the highest bough in the grand old elms. Do you remember, Glen? And there's the stream: we'll see if we can't tickle the trout in the shallows, as we did in our wading days, when our mother—God bless her!—was so afraid we should get colds, and fevers, and all sorts of evils; that was just an excuse for giving to us everything a couple of scapegraces could desire; and we'll go to the old church, Glen, and hear Mr. Hamilton, and watch the trees wave past the window, as we did in those old days, when, for mischief, we set each other to count how many times a branch bobbed against the panes whilst Mr. Hamilton read his psalm-verse, and how many times when the clerk read his. You recollect we offered old Tom a quart of ale

to beat the parson, and he got so flurried that he read the wrong verse. Yes, we'll go there, and we'll try to be as we were then—two happy lads, without a care in the world; just for a time, Glen—just for a time. Then you shall come back to your fame, and I—well, no matter what; but we shall always be to each other the same—ever the same."

The Earl, in his half-romantic, half-dreamy, half-earnest, truly feeling way, had talked on in a low voice; and Mr. Ross, with his cheek resting on his hand, had listened, but he neither stirred nor answered. And then Cranford went quietly away, and Glen was left alone.

The fire died out—the evening glimmer faded before he rose from his chair. That was an hour of solemn conflict. Such an one, let us hope, as comes to few.

He went to his room with a heavy step; Mrs. Heslop heard it and was anxious. He dismissed his valet at once, and laid down with a weary longing to be at rest.

Morning dawned! On shores where the waves lapped shelving sands, or dashed in fury against rocks of peril, leaving their peace-offerings of shell and weed for little children's play; on rural hamlets where the kine lowed musically, and the sheep bells tinkled; on lonely moors where the sweet winds whistled through the heather, and the lark rose from her nest on pinion of song, floating far away into the bright blue lift, leaving the solitudes more lonely for her flight; on deep ravines where shadows ever brooded, and verdure never came; on wild passes and on mountains hoary with eternal age, their brows now crowned with radiant beams; on peaceful valleys and on grand old woods, in ages past the minsters of the Druids; on dim dun cities, where the call to labor wakened tired ones to their endless toil; on London, with its countless mass of human beings, crowded, crushed, and scarred with misery and sin. Morning dawned

on all! But from the Queen in her palace to the lowest "Arab" who had slept in a kennel and wakened to thieve, surely there was none on whom the sunbeams shone, who had passed such a night of thought as he who had but just fallen into a heavy doze, and now lay with his face turned from the light, even as his steps might henceforth be turned in the way of darkness.

When Lord Cranford came, he said this idea of going to Longleat had put new life into Helena. Ross having once decided would not torture himself by reflection. He had made up his mind to go; and so he made his arrangements with an energy that was delightful to the whole household, for all his servants loved him.

Four days afterwards a travelling chariot passed through the gates of Eglinton House. It was a lovely morning. As the equipage dashed along, its four splendid greys scattering the foam from their mouths, many an envious glance was cast upon it by pedestrians; and not a few stopped for a longer glimpse at the beautiful face that looked so joyously through the open window. Every sign of depression had departed thence; and her continuous merry talk, her piquant observations, her witty repartees, kept her two companions in as glorious spirits as her own.

The sun was setting behind the old towers, and all the massive front was in grey shadow as the travellers arrived at Longleat. The Dowager did not receive them this time at the entrance. There had been a gloom over her spirit ever since that conversation with Helena—a dread of impending evil. She sat in a room close by, and she heard the Earl say, anxiously, "Where is my mother?" her lip quivered, then the door opened quickly, and she was in her son's arms.

If she had dreaded evil, the dread was all gone now, as she looked at Helena's smiling face, flushed with being so long in a closed carriage.

“Must my greeting ever be ‘more lovely still,’ dear child?” she said, as she kissed the blushing girl. “Longleat, London has added brilliance to your gem. I need not ask if it be as valued as in former days.”

She said this with a meaning, loving look at the Countess. And then Mr. Ross came into the room.

“Ah, Mr. Glen!”

“I did not tell you, mother, that we were bringing him,” Cranford said, gaily.

“A glad surprise, Longleat. He needs no herald to ensure my welcome to your home. I have another son to care for now.”

Mr. Ross was bending over the Lady’s hand; but she stooped and kissed his forehead.

“It was thus we welcomed you in old days, Glen, and now that you have come in your weakness, we must forget that you are a grown man, a famous man, a scholar, and a statesman, if only to make you know that you have come home to your mother to be nursed!”

The Dowager had yet her arm round Helena, with the other hand she clasped Glen’s; and her face was beaming with benignity and happiness.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe his feelings or Helena’s, as the Dowager stood in her nobility and her honor between them. Every word was like a knife, cutting through their hearts. But the night wore on, and never had Lady Cranford seen Helena more beautiful, more brilliant; never had she seen Mr. Ross more fascinating, nor her son more gay. It was a very happy evening. And the last sound heard in the old hall was the merry ring of Helena’s laugh, when she went to her room.

About a week after their arrival, one sunny morning, Mr. Ross and the Countess were fishing in the lake, which was some distance from the house. At last he threw down his rod, and laid on the cool, soft grass, watching her as

she stood with an eager, expectant look, prepared to draw in her line.

“Little cruel thing!” he said, in a teasing manner. The next instant she pulled it in, and a fine fish was floundering on the grass. He detached it from the hook for her, and the wee, tormented thing, looked all silver in the sun, as it took flying leaps. She stood watching it with an expression that surprised him.

“I am cruel!” she exclaimed, passionately; then she took her handkerchief, caught the fish in one of its leaps, then dropped it in the water again. She sat down on the grass beside Mr. Ross, and leaned her chin upon her hand. He thought she would have been an exquisite study for a sculptor in that attitude.

“Miss Helena!”

“Oh, Elspie! dear Elspie!”

She was in her nurse’s arms in an instant. “My blessed lamb!”

Mr. Ross’s face was a comic picture of intense astonishment.

“Why, bairnie, ye are mair white than a snaw-drap. Hae ye been ailin’?” asked Elspie, anxiously.

Helena clung to her in her love.

“Ye’ll nane gang awa’ awhile? Ye’ll bide in your ain hoose, for auld Elspie is her lane when ye gang awa’.”

She looked wistfully at the child.

“I will not, nurse, dear. I will not leave you for *ever* so long,” said Helena, looking up at the earnest old face, in which every strong line was smoothed to softest curve by the love she bore her nursling.

“See, noo!” said Elspie, in a changed tone, “an’ it’s an auld dame wad be keepin’ ye frae the court o’ our Leddy the Queen. Niver heed, bairnie, auld Elspie’s day is wearin’ fast to its caum; the glint that blinds her e’en is

the set o' the sun; she'll sune bide i' the valley, noo, bairn!"

Mr. Ross listened in greater surprise.

Helena nestled her head in Elspie's bosom. "Don't, nurse; it is cruel to talk so to me."

"Nay, my wean," she answered, fondly. "I am leevin' owre lang; but the Laird kens weel his ain purpose, an' a' his mercies are verra tender—my Laird!" She turned round, and then stopped speaking.

"That is Mr. Ross, nurse; did you think it was Lord Cranford?—he is his great friend," she added, in a lower voice.

Elspie's keen, piercing eyes, looked at the dark face; at the tall figure of the man before her, and she thought as Margaret Seymour had once—a long time ago—that truly opposites had met in friendship.

"I wad ask your pardon, sir," she said, "for the free talkin'; but this dear wean—this leddy, I'm meanin'—is my ain nurslin', an' my heart's bin sair wearyin' for her comin'."

Mr. Ross, with his inborn grace, raised his cap, and held out his hand. "I thank you," he said, "for giving me a glimpse into such a true heart."

"If you are a freen o' the Earl," she answered, quietly, "your ain is pure gowd, sir; he is a gude an' a noble man—a' his freens maun be."

He glanced at Helena. "At least you do me grace," he said, lightly.

"I mind not your meanin', sir," she answered. "My tongue is Scotch, an' I kenna a' your English words, sir." Suddenly she exclaimed, "ye are nane frae yon land o' papistry, the vine-land, are ye?"

"I do come from a land of Papists, nurse," he answered, laughing, "for I was born in Ireland; but don't fear, I have never lived there for long together."

“Hae ye a sister there, then, sir?” she asked, anxiously, “a puir misguided leddy, in ane o’ those dens o’ Babylon—a convent, sir?”

“Unfortunately, I have no sister, either in a convent or out of one. Why do you ask?”

“Your een are sae like a leddy’s I saw in yon land.”

“Why, Elspie,” said Helena, “you must mean my nun—where did you see her?”

Elspie was confused by the question; she had been startled by what she fancied was a likeness between Mr. Ross and Stephanie. In her surprise, she had forgotten that she ought not to have named that nun, so she did not reply, but said, “My bairnie, I am ower tired.”

“Come in and rest,” said Helena.

Mr. Ross saw Elspie’s confusion, and he immediately thought she too knew the story. And then his heart yearned tenderly over that fair girl, who walked with her nurse’s hand in hers, so like a child—as unconscious, and as loving!

“How did you find me, Elspie?”

“I came, Miss Helena, in my ain shandry, that your faither, the General, kindly put to my keepin’; an’ ane o’ the gardeners telled me ye were at the lake, sae I walked ower the grass, an’ I just found ye, my bonnie stray lamb!”

Though Mr. Ross smiled, he thought there was great pathos in such love. They met the Earl coming in search of them.

“Have you finished your business, Longleat?”

“Not quite, Ross. I hate these steward-days, and I am nearly stifled with heat. Where have you been?”

“Fishing, until I turned lazy, and your Lady, tender; she caught one and put it back again.”

“Queer sport, that, child!” said Cranford. “And how are you, Mistress Cameron? You see what your training has done. The Countess is too soft-hearted to kill a fish.”

“Who was it that once said he thought Miss Davenant had no heart?” asked the Countess, mischievously.

“Nay, niver!” exclaimed Elspie. “The Laird o’ Longleat niver said the lee. Her heart, my Laird, was iver like a snaw-broo.* I saw her greet ance, till I thocht she wad be like to dee, because her faither laid his hand in passin’ on her bit bricht heid, an’ kissed her for the beauty God had gi’en his bairn.”

“It’s too bad, Elspie,” he said, laughing. “You know that I am too warm to contend with you. I will admit that your bairn has a heart.”

“One so tender I never knew,” said Glen, in a low voice, as Helena ran up the steps.

Elspie’s eyes flashed him a look of beaming gratitude. “Yon’s a braw gentleman,” she said to Helena, who took her to her room, and insisted on unpinning her shawl and taking off her neat black satin bonnet—from which fashion the dame never diverged—just as she had often done when a child, at Calton, after one of their strolls in the park.

Elspie protested in vain. “Yon’s a braw gentleman,” she said again.

“Whom, nurse?”

“Wha, bairnie! The man wi’ een like stars. Is he bidin’ here?”

The Countess was unusually particular to roll up the bonnet strings as she knew Elspie liked them to be. She answered, as if pre-occupied, “Yes; he is staying here.”

But Mr. Ross had made an impression upon Elspie. “I was feared he came frae yon Papist land,” she said; “he’s nane like ony I hae seen in this—sae grand an’ sae braw, sae powerfu’-lookin’; but just as lithe as a saugh-wand† swayin’ i’ the win’. I was just sturtin,‡ when I

* Melted snow-flake.

† Willow-stem.

‡ Frighted.

saw ye thegither; ye were sae like a bonnie lint-white that had settlet doun wing-weary anent a tower o' strength."

That evening, as the Countess walked on the terrace, in the moonlight, Mr. Ross joined her, and she told him what Elspie had said.

"Yes," he said; "so I would be to thee a mighty tower! Not a hiding-place where sunshine could not enter, but a shelter from life's storms."

Four weeks winged their flight rapidly. Mr. Ross sometimes talked of leaving; the Earl turned a deaf ear; Helena *looked* her remonstrance; and the Dowager told him he "was not cured yet;" so he stayed on. They were all happier for his presence. Even Lady Cranford felt this—that nameless dread was upon her at times—she could not account for it; but so it was. And Helena lived only in his presence. All that he had told her his love would be it was; shown in a thousand delicate ways: in his coming to her rescue if the Earl were irritable—smoothing every little rough incident—tuning every jarring string to harmony. Yes, they were all happier for his being there. Sometimes, in the quiet of his own rooms, he would ask himself if all his life were to be wasted in an unavailing love, or how it was to end; but he put aside the thought impatiently. The end was nearer than he dreamed.

One morning they were all on a terrace, waiting for a carriage to come round. The Earl was going to drive Helena to his mother's school. They were chatting and laughing, for Helena was in one of her capriciously droll, defiant humors, and was teasing Mr. Ross about some of his peculiarities, at which Cranford laughed whilst he pretended to reprove, not knowing how Glen would like it. Mr. Ross himself was looking pretty much as a lion might, if a wee linnet had chosen to flutter round and

round it, and then to take shelter in its mane; for, after saying all manner of fascinating impertinences, she nestled up to him, and looked in his face with a blushing confidence of being forgiven that was a pretty thing to see.

"She is very naughty to you, Glen," said the Dowager, smiling.

"Very, my Lady. I shall leave Longleat, I think," he said, looking down gravely at the delinquent.

"No, you won't," said Helena, saucily; "you can't; you'd be miserable if you did, and be ill; and we should have to nurse you again, and it wouldn't be convenient. Besides, you must stay to keep *this* oddity in countenance. Mamma, we will call Longleat a cabinet of curiosities, if more come. Who is he, Cranford?"

They looked, and saw an old gentleman.

"Mr. Hendon, I declare, mother."

Lord Cranford ran down the terrace to meet him.

"That, my dear, was the late Earl's steward, a gentleman for whom we have very high regard. His health failed so that he had to resign his stewardship; but nothing has ever been done at Longleat without our consulting him."

"I didn't mean anything, mamma," Helena said, quickly. "You will forgive me?"

The Dowager smiled. "When that little silver tongue talks so sweetly and so fast, who would not? Yes, dear, Mr. Ross and I will both forgive you?"

His look endorsed her words; and then Cranford came, with Mr. Hendon, who was introduced to the Countess; and, as he bowed with old-fashioned grace—a fashion that has long gone out, more's the pity!—as if he felt that he was in the presence of a lady, Helena thought her "curiosity" was a true gentleman. He looked at her curiously—very curiously.

"Glen," said the Earl, "will you drive Helena? Mr. Hendon has come to see me on business."

"More business!" echoed Glen, laughing. "Unfortunate Longleat!"

"A matter of importance, I said, my Lord," Mr. Hendon interposed, as if truth to the letter were his rule.

His manner struck the Dowager as being strange. Then the carriage came, and the three watched Mr. Ross and the Countess drive off. Lady Cranford kissed her hand, and the Earl waved his cap, with a smile, as Helena looked back. His face was bright, very bright.

She remembered it ever afterwards, for it was the last time she saw her husband smile.

At first she was a little too self-conscious to talk; there was always a degree of shyness in Helena when alone with Mr. Ross; but she was too happy to be silent long.

"And so it would be 'inconvenient' to nurse me again, fairy!" he said, looking down at her fondly.

"Oh, Glen, I was naughty!" She put her hand through his arm, and joined it to the other. "Now, forgive me," she said, coaxingly.

"On one condition, I will."

"What is that?"

"That I may taste the sweets of the rosebud?"

"What do you mean?"

"You little innocent!" He suddenly bent his head, and kissed her lips.

She was very quiet for a while after that. They did not go to the school; they drove through the Longleat woods, where a carriage-drive had just been made. The day was very sunny, but the light could only come quivering through the rich foliage, so that it was like rambling through some dim cloister, where you could hear now and

then the low wail of organ-music, or the fuller swell of a jubilant chorale; for the wind was harping on the trees, and rose and fell in soughs, that made a grand accompaniment to the songs of a thousand singing-birds. It may be imagined what that drive was to those two.

It was so late when they returned, that the first gong was sounding for dressing. Helena ran in through the cloak-room door, at the side of the hall. The room and all the passages, somehow, seemed chill. There had been no sunshine on that side since early morning. At the foot of the staircase she met the Dowager's maid.

"Where is your lady?" she asked.

"I believe, in the library with his Lordship," she answered.

Helena went there—a thing she would not have done, recollect, if Cranford had been there alone. That day had gone by.

She turned the handle. The door was fast.

"Are you here, mamma?" she called.

There was a short pause; then a step.

"I am particularly engaged," said Cranford. He spoke huskily.

She went away at once to Lady Cranford's rooms. In the ante-room she saw the waiting-woman again.

Is mamma here?" she inquired.

The maid looked surprised.

"No, your Ladyship, she is in the library."

Helena thought it strange, and went to her own apartments. The house was so still that not a sound was heard. As she passed a bronze clock, that stood on a pedestal in a corridor, it struck the hour, and so startled her that she hurried on, past white gleaming statues, through the picture-gallery.

Again she thought of Lady Cranford's words, "Ours

is an honorable line." What staring eyes all those Earls and Countesses had! She did not like to look at them.

She laid down upon a couch with such a depressed, melancholy feeling that she burst into tears. Her maid found her, an hour afterwards, fast asleep, with the traces of tears on her pale cheeks. She wakened with a start.

Directly afterwards, Elspie came in, looking a little flushed, very stern and dignified.

"It's time that her Leddyship, the Countess of Longleat, was dressed for denner," she said to Evans, with gravity.

There was something unusual in her tone. Even her Scotch "o'" was changed to the English "of," and it sounded strange.

"Well, nurse, dear?" Helena said.

Elspie's chest heaved; the snowy cambric folds upon her bosom rose and fell almost like waves.

"My Leddy, may I choose your gown?" she asked.

"Yes, nurse. Why?"

"Nae mind," she said; and then a less good-tempered maiden than Evans would have been sadly fidgeted by the dame's fastidious ways.

Helena was not noticing what passed. She was startled to find herself arrayed in a robe of rich white silk, and a tiara of diamonds upon her brow.

"Elspie," she said, "there are no guests to-night."

"I know it, my Leddy."

There was something in Elspie's manner which the Countess could not understand. She dismissed Evans.

"Now, nurse," she said, "come and sit down."

"My Leddy. - You are the Countess of Longleat. I, Elspie Cameron, am your servin'-woman."

"Elspie! Elspie!"

It was a terrible cry ; for this came upon Helena with such force, after the depression before she had slept. What was there in the Hall this day that had begun so brightly ?

Elspie sat down on the couch. The Countess knelt at her knee, with her arms round her waist, and her eyes dilated with tearless emotion. The withered hand was laid on the fair hair, where the jewels gleamed brightly. The face, which seemed aged years since morning, looked down with infinite tenderness—with sorrow that was too deep for words. Twice her lips parted, but closed again ; and she held the Countess in a close strain.

“Elspie, you will kill me if you look so. What is the matter ?”

“Wæ’s me ! my bairn. Ye *are* the Leddy of Longleat lawful and true.”

A great fear smote Helena. Was her love for Mr. Ross discovered ? She turned so white that Elspie was alarmed now, and did her best to soothe Helena, but very ineffectually ; for, in her honest truth, she would not tell a falsehood to avert any consequence—and so all she could say was that she had been “fretted.” And Helena, fearful through her guilt, dared not ask more.

Elspie noticed that most unusual circumstance, for Helena had ever been so impetuous in her inquiries if curious ; but she said nothing.

The Countess went down to the drawing-rooms. She thought they were empty, until Mr. Ross rose from a distant couch, and came to her. He looked his surprise at her dazzling appearance. Her eyes drooped before his gaze ; and, overcome with excitement, she burst into tears.

“My darling,” he whispered, “what has happened ?”

“I cannot tell, Glen. There seems to be such a strange

desolation in the Hall—and Elspie has frightened me—and Cranford is shut up in the library—and I can't find mamma——”

The same fear struck him that had paled Helena's cheek in Elspie's presence; but he hid it from her, and soon soothed her by diverting her thoughts to other topics.

They looked for the appearance of the Earl and the Dowager. Neither of them came. Mr. Ross and the Countess dined alone.

CHAPTER III.

THE EARL'S SECRET.

Say thou
If this be true. A charge so grievous needs
Thine own avowal
A mingled sense
Of fear and of confusion, from my lips
Did such a "Yea" produce, as needed help
Of vision to interpret.

IL PURGATORIO.

WE must return to the moment of Mr. Hendon's arrival.

When the little carriage had driven away, the Earl gave his arm to his mother.

"Suppose we have a few turns on the terrace," he said. "The morning is too lovely, Mr. Hendon, to be given entirely to business."

Mr. Hendon bowed without speaking. There was unusual gravity on his face. The Countess felt uneasy, having noticed his words previously.

"I hope you have brought no ill tidings, Mr. Hendon?" she said.

"I cannot tell you, my Lady. It will be for the Earl to decide that."

The words seemed wrung from him—they were said with such evident reluctance, yet with such nervous haste. Both Lord Cranford and she were startled—he especially, for he always felt as if a day might destroy his happiness.

“We will go in,” the Dowager said.

They went through the cloak-room, straight to the library.

It must here be said that the late Earl had made his will—being a methodical, orderly man, who left nothing to chance—just after the birth of Cranford, and had appointed his wife the guardian of her son until he came of age. She was also one of his trustees; so that, of necessity, the Dowager had transacted many business matters with Mr. Hendon, the steward. Since his resignation of the office, they had (as she told Helena) consulted him many times—he so well understood the Longleat affairs. As, during those twenty-one years, the Countess had taken such an active part in the management of the estates, it seemed quite a natural thing that she should be present afterwards, when Mr. Lewis came to be steward. Indeed, the Dowager's clear head and good judgment had often been of service; so that now she went to the library according to her usual custom. And for the first time Cranford wanted her to be absent. He did not know why, but he was nervous. To ask her to withdraw was an insult he could not give to his mother.

Mr. Hendon looked irresolute, as if he did not know how to proceed. The Countess made many courteous inquiries about his health, and his family, and so they got into a chatting vein—for they had arrived at that age when life's waves seem to have rolled over the bar, and to have entered the bay, where a storm can scarcely ruffle them to foam.

“Cranford, will you give me my knitting-basket?” she said. “You see, Mr. Hendon, I still keep a little work in my son's room, though I am afraid I am not of much use to him now.”

She spoke cheerfully. Cranford brought the basket, devoutly hoping that they would go on talking of old days

until she had forgotten all about the object of Mr. Hendon's visit.

"It seems a long time, Mr. Hendon, since the late Earl introduced you to me. It was in this room. I was a bride then, and I remember feeling rather proud because he would have my opinion about the building of those cottages on the brow. Do you remember?"

"I do, my Lady—I do; and I remember too what your Ladyship did not hear. 'Mr. Hendon,' he said, looking at the door you had just gone through, 'Mr. Hendon, do you think that in all the portrait gallery there is one Countess to compare with mine?' 'I don't think there is, my Lord,' I said. 'No,' said my Lord, 'she is peerless. God bless her, my bonnie Mary!' And I scarcely think, my Lady, that he quite remembered he was talking to me then, for he said it again in a few minutes, 'My bonnie Mary!'"

Her cheek flushed, and the click of her needles was stilled, her knitting fell on to her lap.

"Ah," Mr. Hendon, she said, "our happiness was soon over. God's will be done. But it was long before I could say, 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it.' I rebelled sorely. But how time passes! Why,"—she looked up almost radiantly—"it cannot be long before I go to Longleat again. And I shall not be his widow then—no, no! not his widow, his wife again!"

"Please God, my Lady, it will be a long time, I trust, before that time comes. My Lord and his beautiful Countess——" Here Mr. Hendon stopped suddenly, and then, recollecting himself, said, "They would miss you sadly, my Lady."

The Dowager had looked at him when he stopped speaking. Immediately afterwards she said, "You have not told us yet what the 'matter of importance' is, Mr. Hendon."

The old gentleman crossed one leg over the other, then back again ; he pushed his chair a little aside, and wiped his forehead as if he were warm.

“Excuse me a moment, sir,” said Cranford. “Mother, are you not tired? Suppose you go to your room and rest, or let me order your pony gig, it is so lovely.” He spoke hurriedly.

“No, my dear, thank you,” she answered in her calm manner. “I don’t care to go out, and I am very glad to see Mr. Hendon again.”

There was no help for it. Lord Cranford pushed his chair back where his mother could not see him ; his pale face was turned to their guest with a fearfully desperate look, his arms were tightly folded. He felt sure that the crisis had come—why he felt so, he knew not.

“It’s only a bit of gossip, my Lord,” said the old gentleman, “but I thought it my duty to tell you of it as soon as I heard it, for it is not fitting that the honor of this house should be assailed. At any rate, I could not be such a traitor to it as to let scandal go by uncontradicted.”

“Scandal!” echoed Lady Cranford. “The honor of this house!”

“Yes, my Lady,” said the old man, warming to his subject, “a shameful scandal, which is one of the biggest lies, saving your presence, I ever heard ; but I’ll tell you all about it. You know, my Lady, my house is in a very lonely part of the country, and, feeling a little nervous last winter, I cut off one wing, for the house is large, and turned it into a small villa, with the view of letting it to some gentleman—just for the sake of having a neighbor. I had an application for it through my solicitor, from a very respectable man, a bachelor, who had been a cable manufacturer, but had retired from business. He came to see it, liked it, and I liked him, so I let the cottage to him, and he has been a nice neighbor. We generally

have had our cigar together after dinner, and a game at picquet, or a talk. This has been all through the winter. He was a Catholic, I knew, but that made no difference to me; he was none the less either a gentleman or a pleasant neighbor. Well, last night"—Mr. Hendon coughed, and paused a moment—"remember, my Lord, I totally denied it, and I only name it to you because it is my duty."

"Go on," said the Earl, for he had begun to wonder now if it had anything to do with the matter he dreaded—"go on, sir."

"Yes, my Lord. Last night the conversation turned upon my having been the Longleat steward. It happened to be my birthday, so we both had an extra glass of wine, and we were chatty and genial, you know. I told him a good deal about the old days, and he listened with much interest—about the improvements that had been made, and the names of the estates, and so on. 'Ah!' he said, after awhile, 'but it's very true, Mr. Hendon, there's a skeleton in every man's cupboard. The Earl of Longleat has got his safe enough.' I said, 'Nay, nay, there's no skeleton at Longleat. There isn't a nobleman in the land in a finer position than is the Earl. Free from debt; without a single vice himself; a lady mother as noble as any that ever lived, and a Countess, I am told, that is the beauty of England! There is not a bit of a farm, no, nor a cottage perhaps, belonging to the property, that I don't know something about; and I have studied every branch of the pedigree, and know it to be one of the oldest, as it is about the most stainless Earldom in the land. There has not been a hitch in all the line—not one!' I was quite roused, my Lord. He shook his head, and said, 'I don't think you know this, Mr. Hendon.' He spoke quietly, as one sure of his ground. I was nettled. 'Then no one else does,' I said. He puffed his cigar, and sat looking out at the garden, very quietly still, not answering a word. 'But,' I said, 'as you

are so well informed, sir, perhaps you will tell me.' My Lord, you will excuse me saying again I did not believe it, but you might have knocked me down with a feather." He stopped. "These were his words, 'The young Countess of Longleat is illegitimate!'"

Lord Cranford closed his eyes, for the room seemed to be going round and round. Mr. Hendon's voice sounded a great way off, as he repeated, "Illegitimate, my Lord!"

"What!" exclaimed the Dowager, in a loud, almost terrible voice.

"Yes, my Lady, I said 'What?' for I knew it was a lie. I said, 'Did not General Davenant marry the Lady Edith Clare? and was not my Lady present? and was it not the grandest wedding talked of for ever so long? And then this young lady was born. I have not seen her since she was a child, but I have heard what she is like.'"

"'Yes,' he said, 'I know all that, sir; nevertheless, what I tell you is true. An old woman, once a servant of my mother's, was an unseen witness to General Davenant's first marriage. By a singular coincidence, Mrs. Davenant afterwards lodged with her. She has told me this herself—for the General had cast off his wife. In order to prove to you that I am correct, I can only say that any day the facts may be brought before the world, for she has been visited by a priest, who came to learn all she knew. The first wife is living, and is probably going into a convent.'

"My Lord," continued Mr. Hendon, "I said 'it's an infernal Popish plot—and nothing more;' but he was obstinate in his assertion that it was all true. I told him that either he was a villain to repeat such a scandal, or that the Earl was the most unfortunate nobleman on God's earth."

"'He is that,' he said, 'but he knew it all when he married.'

"My Lord, I did not know what to think. I should not have come to Longleat with such a story on my lips,

but——” the old gentleman’s voice faltered, and for a few moments he could not speak, but, he went on presently, “ he was so positive, that I wanted your authority to contradict it. *It was my duty.*”

Mr. Hendon drew himself up with haughty pride as he said the words, as if the honor of the old house were in his keeping ; then he looked wistfully at the Earl—who kept strangely silent.

Just for a moment he was glad the blow had come ; it had been such a terrible dread, such a poison in his cup of happiness.

“ Nay, my Lady, nay,” said Mr. Hendon, suddenly, “ it is all a lie, you must not take it like this.”

Her knitting had fallen, the ball of wool had rolled across the floor ; her eyes were staring at the Earl ; her hands grasped the chair-arms tightly ; her face was livid.

If it had been to save her life, Cranford could not have moved. The blow had stunned him.

“ Speak to her, my Lord ; tell her, that it is all a lie, a sinful lie !” said the old steward, who had been at Longleat, when she came a bride ; who had grown old in her service, and had loved her so well,—that old faithful steward ! He took one of her hands and chafed it.

The Earl rose, staggered towards her, for his brain was dizzy, and putting his arms around her, laid her head upon his breast.

“ Oh ! mother, mother !”

Those words had sounded once before in her ears, when all she had dreaded had been that her only son should mate unworthily. Ah, what hopes she had had in his future, when a curly-headed, beautiful child, he had comforted her girl-widowhood. Then when that love-time came, she had feared his marriage with General Davenant’s daughter ; but she had never dreamed of this. Her doubts of Helena’s fitness to be her son’s wife, the youngest Countess

of the old line, were pitiful indeed, contrasted with this stain!

His cry told her that Mr. Hendon's terrible story was true, and then her indignation restored her calmness.

She thought of her dead husband, that stainless Earl! who had left the honor of his house, the unsullied name, in her keeping, his "peerless Mary." Her son—her only son—had brought dishonor upon it. How could she meet him in that hour so near—the hour to which she had looked, for which she had waited so long—how, with this upon her heart?

She raised her head suddenly, and her son interpreted the action.

She looked at him, but one glance at his woe-worn face broke down the woman's pride, brought back the mother's love.

"Oh, my son! my own son!" her arms were clasping him; her tears were raining on his breast. He held her tightly to his heart, soothing her with the gentlest love, as he had often done in her little ailments in former happy years. He forgot the sorrow of his own breaking heart, while covering with the healing leaves of tenderness the bitterness of hers.

Mr. Hendon walked away to one of the windows, laid his arms against it, and sobbed aloud. "Oh, my Lord!" he said, suddenly coming back to him, "I never thought that this was true. I wish I had died before I came to Longleat this day. Forgive me, my Lord." The old man laid one hand upon the Earl's arm, with the other he covered his face, weeping as only the aged can weep, when the long-locked fountains are unsealed.

"Nay, Mr. Hendon," said the Countess raising herself, "faithful old friend! this is not your fault, it must not be your sorrow. It is my son's, and *being that*, his mother must learn how to bear it. It is a sad blow," she said

with a wintry smile, "perhaps the most fearful that could have come to Longleat's widow; but it will be her *last*."

Ah, how little she knew as she said "her last," that ere she was laid in peace beside her lord, sorrow would befall her that would be more bitter still!

"Rise, my son," she whispered, as he knelt, and hid his face—"you bore your secret bravely for yourself; bear its exposure so for *me*." She did not mean to wound him; but his large mournful eyes met hers, and told her she had done so. With a wild, yearning burst of love she clasped him in her arms again; and her hysteric agony was so painful that he who had in silence borne all his dread and anguish, all his great fear—had to soothe her to calmness. And he did it as only he could have done. When she was quiet, he sat holding her hand in his tightly, with his arm round her; they both listened to the end of Mr. Hendon's tale.

"I told him," he said, sadly—so different from his tone of a few minutes ago—"I told him it was all false; but he said, 'Well, well, let the Earl prove that when the time comes.' So, my Lord, I came to day to tell you, that you might prove it."

There was a little pause. Mr. Hendon looked at him with pathetic agony.

"I cannot do that," answered Cranford, gloomily. "Nay, mother, don't you turn from me," he said, with a sad smile, as she started.

"No, my boy, no."

She drew closer to him whilst he told all. He began with the dawn of his love, going on to the history of the General, to his separation from Helena, described his misery of that time with such deep feeling that his mother forgot the stain in her sympathy, and she looked at him with tearful, loving eyes, and laid both

her hands in his. Then he came to Helena's illness, and their reunion. He did not try to gloss over his concealment of the truth from Helena and his mother; he only described it all as it had been, and both his listeners understood his great love. They were silent before it. He went on to his wedded life, told them how the secret had weighed him down by the dread of its discovery; then his mother understood the meaning of Helena's words to her that day of her return.

It took a long time to tell his story. As it ended, Helena called—

“Are you there, mamma?”

And the Earl answered. When he sat beside his mother again, she said—

“I dreaded your marriage, my son.”

That was her only comment. She lifted her white face from his breast, kissed him tenderly, then rose, saying she would go to her room.

“Do you forgive me, mother?” he asked.

“As I hope to be forgiven,” she answered.

So with slow, feeble step she went away, leaning upon his arm.

“I wish to see Elspie Cameron,” she said to her attendant on entering her room.

Mrs. Harcourt looked aghast at her Lady's stern face and still sterner tone.

“Not to-night, mother,” entreated the Earl when she had gone.

“I must,” she answered. “My resentment must not rest upon her *unjustly*. If she knew it, she at least must leave your father's Hall.”

“Mother! she was a mere servant.”

“More than that, Cranford, far more.”

“You will not, at least, visit this upon Helena?”

“Longleat! is she not your wife? She bears your

name, and, thank God! is innocent. Her father," a deep crimson flushed her delicate face—she paused, "General Davenant, thought, in days gone by, that I had done him a great wrong. He has avenged it."

"Mother," said Cranford, "he foresaw the evils of my marriage; but his child's life was endangered by my desertion, for I had won her heart. When I returned to her, I told him I could and would bear all the consequences. He could not refuse my pleading, and had I not the *right* to choose my wife? He knew nothing of my promise to you."

She did not answer, and he went away sorrowful.

Elspie came with the slow step of age, but with her innate dignity. She passed the Earl in the gallery, and bowed slightly, for her recognition of him could not have been called a curtsey. He looked at her with trembling anxiety. Never had her black silk gown looked so rich, the cambric handkerchief so white upon her bosom, her coif so remarkable, her bearing so stately, her eyes so keen.

"The day is gowden, my Laird," she said, in her clear, honest-sounding voice, "the harvest truly will be plenty. His tender mercies are ower all his works."

In an instant his thoughts flew to that night in the moonlight, beside the waterfall.

She entered the ante-room; then the waiting-woman came out, and closed the door. The Earl went quickly away down to the library, where Mr. Hendon left him; and then Cranford sent a little note to Helena to say that he could not dine with her.

Elspie waited in respectful silence for the Dowager to speak. Lady Cranford was unused to deception. She was not even a diplomatist, and she was utterly at a loss how to begin the subject now. She pointed to a seat, which, however, Elspie did not take. She looked calmly at the lady.

“Were you aware,” began the Dowager, suddenly, “when my son, the Earl, married Miss Davenant, that she was illegitimate?”

Elspie stared at her wonderingly. “Say ye, my Leddy?”

The Countess had expected a sudden flush, or at least confusion, on Elspie's face. She saw neither, and repeated her question in a less stern voice.

“Illegeetemate, my Leddy! I kenna your meanin' if ye are speakin' on my bairn, Miss Helena that was, noo the Leddy o' Longleat.”

The Dowager could not tell from the dame's cool, almost scornful manner whether her indifference was real or assumed. A little impatiently she said—

“Were you aware, when General Davenant's daughter married the Earl, that she ought not to have done so, that her birth was a shame, her father having another wife living at the time?”

Elspie's eye kindled. She controlled herself, however, and smiled pityingly.

“Wha has putten an insult on your auld age, my Leddy,” she said, calmly, “that the Laird himsel has crowned wi' honor? Shame on them that hae nae mair respect for ye, and even for the likes o' me that am wearin' fast to the land aboot which I mind quaverin' oft to the dear bairn, when she was the bonniest blossom in her faither's ha'. Tell me, my Leddy.”

“Elspie Cameron,” said the Dowager, rising and grasping in one hand the sable folds of her dress, “I don't know if this be acting; but I charge you now, as we must both so soon stand equals before our Judge—I charge you, tell me the truth. Did you know this dreadful fact? for I tell you it is one, be it known to you or not.”

Elspie stood erect, her tall form like a poplar in the sultriest air. A burning light seemed to strike at once in

her dark eye; her chest heaved; the cambric rose and fell, and on these smiled the face of her "bairn." Her hands clasped each other tightly. She paused a moment, as if she feared the tide of her indignation might sweep down the habits of long respectful years, and she might have to blush for weakness of her own. So those two noble women stood, gazing into each other's eyes. The one, high-born and stern, trying to read the other's soul; that other, lower born, yet bearing, with a pride that was majestic, the scrutinizing ordeal, and coming from it blameless, ay, unscathed.

"An' is it Elspie Cameron, o' the Burnside clan," she said at last, in a low, untrembling voice, "wha's forbears hae a' been godly, leal, and true? Is it *Elspie Cameron* that an English leddy, a titled Countess, the widow o' ane Earl, the mither o' anither, stoops to ask, nae to blister her tongue wi', a fou' lee? Ledy o' Longleat!" Elspie's mouth quivered, her eyes sparkled with repressed indignation, and she drew her head still higher, "I mind when I was in my ain countra, the chield that telled a fause word in the hoose was ne'er asked mair; his word was niver worth a herried* nest o' last year's simmer. Mebbe English thochts are ither-minded, that ye ask me for truth, yet fear me fause; that English tongues can tell the lee, an' be believed again — ca'ed *honorable* ance mair."

Not Marc Antony himself beside the bier of Cæsar uttered the word "honorable" with sublimer scorn than did that serving woman now.

"The Camerons o' Burnside, my Ledy, hae read the Word, and they're amang them that swear to their ain hurt, an' change not. To mak' ye happy, Ledy, that seem sae blythe to win the sorrow and dishonor on my wean, I dare nae tell a lee. I amna acquent wi' your story."

* Robbed.

She said this with the most intense scorn, yet with respectful manner.

“Elspie, Elspie! Cannot you see my misery? How can you think I am anxious for this sad tale to be true!”

“Ye hae been sae quick to believe the leein’ shame, my Leddy. Mebbe ye wull pardon my thoct.”

“Elspie, sit down,” said the Countess, in her doubt and despair; “I tell you it *is* true; but I don’t believe you knew it then.”

Elspie smiled a peculiar smile; she did not sit down, however.

“I did na deny it, my Leddy. I wad scorn the deed o’ noticin’ fause words. Ye are ower generous, an’ gude to me the day!”

She turned her head towards the window. The great sun that was nearing the western hills, shone full upon her calm, expressive face. Not a feature relaxed. They might have been carved in stone; but for the dark eyes, through which the soul shone luminous, you might have thought it was not the face of one in life.

“Elspie,” said the Dowager, in a low voice that sounded in humble contrast to her former haughty tones, “will you listen whilst I tell you all about this matter?”

“If your Leddyship wull nane think me forgetfu’ o’ my humble service, I would rather say ye nae. I mind iver turnin’ wi’ a Cameron’s scorn frae what was fou’. An’ ye’ll forgie me, if ye mind that iver sin’ my bonnie wean was mitherless, she has lain here like a wee white-bud rose. I canna thole the witherin’ breath to pass ower such a flower.”

Elspie laid her hand upon her breast; and there wa the first sign of tremor in her voice, as she thus spoke of the child.

“My dear Elspie, I want to talk to you, to consult you, not to wound you.”

“An’ I wad nae gie ye back the pain, my Leddy. I wad think forgieingly on ye, though ye stoned me wi’ the lee that my darlin’s birth was ‘shame.’ Can I do a service for your Leddyship, or wull I ca’ your ain tire-woman?”

Lady Cranford deliberated a moment, then with dignity she said, “General Davenant has been a dishonorable, yet still more, perhaps, an unfortunate man, Elspie. And now his innocent child has to suffer for his sin.”

This almost approached a ruse on the Lady’s part; but Elspie was not in the least moved by it from her height of scorn.

“Aiblins,* my Leddy, I canna say that the dear bairn’s faither, the General, is a man o’ God; but I canna judge the Measter wha’s bread I hae eaten for mony a year; an’ wha maun gie an account o’ his ain life an’ deeds to his ain God. Gin ye be ca’ing his dear bairn ‘innocent,’ for why wad ye be makin’ her suffer? She is the wife o’ your ain son, for better an’ waur. I mind the English words o’ the godly book o’ prayers, an’ I hae respect for the same; but I’ll be thinkin’ noo, if the Earl an’ his mither bring a tear to her een for her faither’s sin, that the words are a’ idle, an’ nae bindin’; an’ the troth plighted o’er the beck i’ bonnie Scotland, is mair to be luv’d an’ prized than English-kirk vows; for that troth, my Leddy, is iver sacred.”

“Elspie, I promise you that no sorrow shall fall upon her in this house, through *me*. If you will *not* listen, I need not further trouble you to stay, or myself to speak.”

“It wad be a pity, my Leddy,” she answered, quietly, with unmoved respect.

And then she was turning away; but the Countess said, “I pray God that we may not hear more of this, Mistress

* Perhaps.

Cameron. Unfortunately the first wife lives in a foreign convent."

Elspie started. "Was it in yon vine-land, my Leddy, that she leaved?" she asked hastily.

"Lives, Elspie! lives!"

"Hae she wonderfu' een, my Leddy?" asked Elspie again, in a sharp, ringing voice, clasping the great carved foot-board of the bed, for they were in the Dowager's chamber. "Say ye, my Leddy?"

"Yes, Elspie, she had, the Earl tells me."

"The Laird o' heaven save us a', my Leddy! I hae seen, and I hae had speech wi' her! Wae's me! Wae's me! Oh, my bairnie! my bairnie! I canna thole the bad, blisterin' sorrow, that wull niver be washed awa wi' greetin'. My Leddy! it is na true. It's a lee o' Babylon, the General telled me sae."

She had sunk down, but now started to her feet in wild excitement.

"Elspie, that woman was the General's wife."

"Nae, nae, my Leddy. Dinna believe the shamefu' tale. Dinna, my Leddy, I maun gang to *my* Leddy; my ain Leddy-bairn!"

Her emphatic assurance almost put hope into the heart of the Lady, but only for a moment. Cranford's story was too explicit to be disbelieved.

Elspie went away to find Helena flushed with her sleep, and with traces of tears still upon her face.

Mr. Ross's uneasiness grew stronger as the night wore on, until as he was pacing the terrace alone, Robert gave him a little billet. It was from the Earl, marked "private," just to say that a painful circumstance would prevent his being with him that evening. He was relieved at any rate from his misgivings; and he went through the open window into the drawing-room, with a smile that seemed very bright to Helena in her gloom.

“My beautiful!” he whispered as he wrapped a shawl around her, “never was fairy revel graced with the presence of such a queen. Your look to-night is scarce canny. You seem to me to be nothing more material than those moonbeams.”

“It was Elspie’s doing, her strange whim,” she said, sadly; then she told him more fully what had passed.

He understood it all; but gave no sign.

“Let us go into the garden,” he said, “out into the fair night. One feels enthralled, suffocated, bound in cerements, pent up within walls, when glorious heaven, and quiet earth are bidding us walk like Adam in the garden, that we may have converse with the Deity himself. Look at that golden planet, hanging in the purple space, following in the wake of that mighty globe!

‘That orbéd maiden with white fire laden,
Whom mortals call the moon.’

How grand are the testimonies of a Creator written in that sky! Who that ever gazed upon a single star dared to say within his heart, ‘There is no God.’ This lovely scene, flooded with light, would rebuke all scepticism, if such a thing ever were.”

“Don’t you believe there is, Glen?”

“I do not. It would be an insult to the spirit within myself, to believe that man could be reduced so low, to the mere level of an unthinking beast. All the great infidels have been filled with arrogance; resolving to become wise above what is written, they became fools, that they might win notoriety. But I am not going to be grave, my fairy queen. See what a bed of moonbeams lies yonder, perfumed too with airs from their native paradise. Let us see if any of your elf-sisters are hiding there; if Titania herself be holding her fairy revels.”

She laughed at his gay sallies, and they went down the

green slopes to a splendid bed of "white rocks," that gleamed in the light. The silver radiance fell upon her golden hair and flashing gems, on her spotless robe and on her exquisite face, as she stood beside the flowers.

"Moonbeams might have rested here, Glen, tired with their travel from the skies."

He smiled, and then on the still sultry air there floated the plaintive notes of a nightingale singing in the wood close by, so plaintive they could not waken joy, so sweet they might not call forth tears. They listened in silence. As they listened, the bird hushed its song. A little shiver ran through all the trees, as if there were the "sound of a going," as the night wind rose, and the white flowers were swayed like foam-crested waves.

"Darling," he said, "before we go in, I want you to give me a promise. If trouble ever comes to you, and I am away from you, will you, if possible, send to me?"

"What trouble, Glen? Don't frighten me as Elspie did."

He could see the fear in her eyes.

"My own love! My one ewe lamb! I would be your rock, your shelter, your sun, your shield! Could you bear to live without me quite?"

"Ah, no, Glen!"

The full holy moon shone upon her upturned face. He kissed her. "Will you promise, my darling?"

She gave him her hand and promised.

"I must say good-night," she said as they went in. Presently she left him, but it had been a lingering farewell.

Glen Ross knew in his heart of hearts, that that farewell might be very nearly the last.

With the knowledge of right from wrong, with the freedom to choose either path, the gift of a strong will to *do* that which he dared, he had allowed his soul to tamper with temptation, blinding his judgment—weakly, wilfully

blinding it by the mere phantasm of resolve that, hitherto, had never been formed but to be broken ; without one thought of the future stronger than his wish for happiness in the present ; without one thought now of his treachery to his friend, his more than brother, for the remorse which had once been so keen was now blunted, the conscience which had once been so tender that it would not meet Helena's look of pain by an answering one of sympathy, lest it might be disloyalty to that friend, was now seared. Without one thought for Helena higher than selfish passion, deeper than selfish love ; without one cry to God for help, without one stay more powerful than his own frail vows, Glen Ross was drifting like a broken reed upon the stream of his unhallowed love, and the dark waters were fast rising, threatening to engulf his soul, and the soul of one dearer to him than his own.

CHAPTER IV.

IRREVOCABLE.

. . . . Give my love its way!

A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate—
Grant me my heaven now! Let me know you mine,
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,
Hold you and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul!

ROBERT BROWNING.

It need scarcely be said that a strange, anxious night followed that eventful day. The Dowager could not sleep: she was restless until dawn, and then her troubles were lived over again in her dreams.

Helena dismissed Evans as soon as she went to her rooms. She wrapped herself in a dressing-gown, put out the lights, and then sat at a window looking out on the park, gloomily. The strange scene with Elspie perplexed her. The Earl's conduct was not more mysterious than had been many of his actions since her marriage. Unfortunately for him, her love for Mr. Ross had taken deep root, and it was a dangerous game to play, this trifling with her feelings. If he had but known it!

Mr. Ross kept his watch in the tower, where his rooms had been carefully arranged, under the superintendence of the Dowager, who had been a mother to him. And you may be sure that he felt the thorns he had planted, for conscience was not dead. He was one of those men whose

errors the world deplores the more because of the good which they might have done. It is difficult to portray him as he really was. There were so many noble traits in his character, that to name them seems like throwing a veil over his great sin. In seeing greater trials in store for Helena, he justified to himself his own wrong-doing by the thought of protecting her. It was late when Helena entered the breakfast-room. He was there, and told her that he was going. "I shall be near to you," he said. "Don't make it harder for me to go," as her color rose. "It will be better for both of us that I do so. You hear me, darling?" for her thoughts seemed wandering.

"Yes, Mr. Ross; but what does all this mean? I seem to have had a nightmare in my dreams, which has proved a reality this morning. Do they suspect my love for you?" She clung to him, and looked into his face with dread.

"No, no, my little one, they do not. You know I am quite 'an old bachelor!' Longleat doesn't give me credit for feeling in these tender matters."

"Only for honor," said Helena, quietly.

He looked at her, but her eyes expressed nothing of the sarcasm which her words implied.

"Only for honor, Mr. Ross," she repeated; "you know Cranford trusts you, and, if he has called you that, it is only because you have seemed so insensible to all others."

He kissed her in silence. She never knew how unconsciously she had wounded him. Sometimes the random shot does more deadly mischief than the steady aim. Her simple testimony to Lord Cranford's trust in him lacerated his very soul.

"Then, if it be so, if you are not suspected, or I, what does all this mean? There is such a strange dread upon me. I never felt anything like it at Calton, and I was often desolate there."

She played with his watch-chain unconsciously, and looked at him for his answer. But he simply threw back his heavy hair impetuously, as was his custom in excitement, and the proud curve of his mouth relaxed as he laid his hand upon her shoulder, and said, "I think I know something of it, dear child, but, whatever trouble it may be, I will undertake to bear it for you, or to help you to bear it. If my surmise be correct, I know this, that what vexes Longleat ought to be borne, ay, a thousand times, for the sake of the alternative."

"What is it, Mr. Ross? Did he tell you of it?"

"No, my child; some one else told me of it, little knowing it; poor wee thing!"

It was strange that his tender tone did not tell her of whom he was speaking.

"It is a matter of unimportance, and I don't want you to ask anything about it, my dear one. You would be no happier for it, or I would tell you, and I shall be better pleased if you are ignorant."

Such power he had over her, she never dreamed of asking more, although she was curious.

With a voice full of tears, she said, "Are you really going to leave me?"

"Not for long, darling."

She laid her hot forehead against the cool glass. It wrung his heart to see how brave she tried to be.

Then Lord Cranford came in. He had evidently passed a sleepless night. There were dark rims round his eyes, and he was very pale. He came towards them with his old smile, that was so beautiful, but so melancholy. (The most beautiful, most heart-touching things in this world are melancholy.) There was so much sweetness in it, that Glen instinctively thought of old college days; and, as the Earl took his hand, he turned his head away from him. Helena was miserably affected as he drew her

close to him and kissed her. She dared not let her heart rise in judgment, the verdict would have been so terribly against her. Then she remembered that Longleat was not always thus, and thought it a mere accident—a mood. She drew from him, and went to the table to breakfast.

Mr. Ross was the first to break the silence.

“I am leaving this morning, Longleat.”

The Earl started. “How so, Ross? What freak is this?”

“No freak, my dear fellow! Do you suppose that all the world can afford to be as lazy as a lord? I have no end of business matters to look after, and now, after enjoying the sweets of old Longleat, I am ready for work again. Thanks to you and yours.”

For once the Earl did not oppose his going; perhaps he thought it better so.

“I was very sorry to leave you last night, Ross, but I could not help it.”

“All right, Longleat; don’t apologise to me. I am only sorry that my time here is over.”

“Over!” repeated Lord Cranford. “Nay, Glen, your days here never will, I hope, be over until you have passed into another sphere.”

Mr. Ross gave no reply; but he glanced at Helena, who sat silent as she drank a cup of tea with feverish thirst. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes—languid, through having passed a sleepless night—looked dreamy and soft. The thick black lashes seemed almost too heavy for the transparent lids. Never had she looked so lovely in Glen’s eyes. His carriage was announced immediately they left the table.

“I want to catch the up-train at eleven,” he said, in answer to Cranford’s look.

“Then you have ample time.” He said something about his mother.

“I will return to pay my devoirs to her as soon as possible, Longleat.”

“I shall be back again directly, Ross; you have plenty of time,” the Earl said, as he left the room. Then they were left alone.

She had gone into the window-recess, where the draperies shielded her; but Glen saw her from where he stood, looking so intensely miserable, and yet so child-like, in her cambric dress and azure ribbons, with her hair falling over her shoulders! Yes, so child-like! He was moved to pity, and to the unselfish wish that he had never known her. Through all the years, all the unhappy years that came afterwards, he could always recal her as she looked just before he left Longleat that day. He went to her; she raised her face, and, with a little moan, laid her head against him. His firm mouth, for once, quivered; he strained her to his heart. “My one ewe lamb!”

The words were spoken with intense feeling. She was fearfully excited, and looked up tearlessly.

He dared not trust himself more. He whispered, “God bless thee!” kissed her forehead, and in a moment she was alone.

Through the mist of feeling she heard the Earl’s voice calling to her. She went slowly.

“Have you said good-bye to Glen?” he asked.

“Certainly, Longleat,” said Mr. Ross, speaking for her. “Addio.” He kissed his hand, sprang into his carriage, and away it drove.

The Earl had seen his friend for the last time. The last! No, not quite that. There was another hour to come, when this would be a bitter remembrance.

Cranford watched the carriage as it dashed through the park—lost now, then appearing again on some elevation—watched until it was quite out of sight. Then he turned to Helena and was frightened. She looked

almost wild. Her eyes were strained to pierce the belt of trees.

“My dear,” he said, “what is this?”

She waved her hands, as if to keep him back—as if she would raise a barrier between them.

“Heaven help me!” she cried, passionately; and, without a word more, she fled from him.

He stood rooted to the ground for an instant; then he went quickly after her; but only in time to catch a glimpse of her white dress in the distance. Several times during the morning he went to her boudoir; but the door was locked—there was dead silence—no answer to his knocks. Then the Earl’s heart was indeed heavy, for he believed the worst had come—that Elspie had told Helena all. He lingered about the corridor for some time, hoping that she would come to him; but she did not. Then he went to his library—that same room which Helena had first entered when she came to Longleat a bride—the room in which his mother had taken her to her heart so tenderly, and first called her “daughter.” He thought of her as she was then, radiantly happy, radiantly lovely, flushed with emotion at the welcome of his people. His heart was very heavy; he laid his arms on the table, and his face down upon them, as if to shut out the contrast between now and then.

And why should there be a contrast? How had it arisen? Was his wife less lovely, less lovable? Could he charge her with one act which he could condemn? Had she not endeavoured to make herself more companionable by her studies, when others in the same high position frittered away all their days in idle pleasure? She had so graced her coronet, that he had seen none to compare with her. At one time he had been so brave in his love, he felt he could dare a world for her. Why was it that the tenor of their lives had changed? Was it *her* fault?

He started from his seat, flushed and trembling. "I have been a coward!" he exclaimed; and as he said the words he looked up, and met the noble, earnest face of his own father looking down upon him with dignity and tenderness. As if the painted lineaments could answer him, he cried, "Father! my father!" That voice might almost have called his spirit back from the dead.

It was long past noon when he went out into the wood. The gardeners doffed their caps as he passed, but he heeded them not; and many wondering looks followed the young Earl, usually so courteous to his lowest servant. As he walked in the wood, he thought of that night when Elspie talked to him of the goodness of God. He had been very confident of his own strength then; but now he looked at things differently; he saw clearly how a man's own way may bring him to sorrow, and he felt humbled. He struck out of the regular path into one called "the Earl's Own." There was a green, dim light there; the trees were close, the branches thick, a thousand song-birds were making melody, and every pine, and elm, and aspen had its instrument upon which the wind might play. They "made a noise of falling showers," as our Laureate says. God had not left Himself without witnesses of his love even in the solitude of the wood. In the multitude of his thoughts, the Earl was struck with that. He paced up and down, regardless of a chill that was creeping over his delicate frame, until a bar of sunset light shot across his path, and roused him from his reverie.

"I once vowed a vow," he thought, "that God should do me ill, if aught but death divided our lives. I have broken my vow, and the ill has come. I have alienated her heart—perhaps, it is almost broken now; but I cannot comfort her. I might have done. Ah, what a coward I have been! I will atone. I will atone."

He bared his head, and reverently prayed as he had

never done before, for strength to fulfil his resolution, that they might be happier—"if not too late!"

The wind softly rose, rustling the few fallen leaves, gently swaying the tree-boughs, and whispering a thousand sweet nothings to the listening ear; but to the Earl, fevered by anxiety and misery, it seemed only to echo his own last words, "Too late!" Ah, man's wisest purposes are often delayed until his day is near its end!

Cranford went back to Helena's rooms—Evans was there. "Where is the Countess?" he asked.

"I saw my Lady going towards the music-hall. Shall I see, my Lord?"

He went himself; but she was not there. The sculpture-gallery was beyond; the doors were closed; he passed through, scarcely expecting to find her there, however. He looked down the long, dim gallery, where the statues were so fair in the chastened light, and there was that ghostly, drear stillness, which always characterizes such a place, as if death himself had touched the creations, so perfect in loveliness, so wanting in life. He was turning back, when his eye caught sight of her in the distance, and quickly, but noiselessly, he went to her. As she was in white herself, it was no marvel that her motionless figure could not be distinguished from the statues around her. She was leaning over a babe, represented in that loveliest of infantine attitudes, when the dimpling, waking smile seems about to merge into a tearful pout on finding itself alone. In all that gallery there was nothing so beautiful as Canova's "Waking Innocent."

He was shocked when he looked in her face, to see the ravages which a few hours had made there. The light of her eye was dimmed; every trace of color was gone; every line in her drooping figure told of listless dejection. Never had his heart felt so tender; never, in all her happiest moments, when the brilliance of her eye had

rivalled the diamonds on her brow—the scarlet of her lips some rich flower in her band; never in such moments had her beauty so touched him, as her drooping loveliness did now. It smote him down.

“My Helena!” he said, softly.

She had not seen him, and a nervous shiver passed over her. He took one of her hands—it was cold—and he chafed it, but she did not turn to him. He saw how it was with her, and fearing to break down the barriers of such desolating misery too suddenly, he only caressed her silently for a time.

“I want to comfort you, dear. Don’t look so, Helena. Do you know you seem almost like a tired angel that has lost the way home, child. What made you say those words just now? What has grieved you?”

It cost him something to ask that question after these years of silence and concealment; but he was brave now that his mother knew, and he was determined to know the worst from Helena’s lips; but she did not answer. He tried to look into her eyes, but they were fixed on the “Innocent.”

He felt that the past, with its love, its joy, its dreams of the future, its hopes of happiness, was slipping away from him for ever. He was fearfully agitated; yet, true to his resolution, he controlled himself. “My sorrowful ‘Peri!’” he whispered.

She flushed to a deep red, and said, quickly, “Lord Cranford, you remember what won the Peri’s happiness.”

He smiled. “Yes, Helena.”

“If you call me ‘Peri,’ now, you may do it in time to come. If so, never think of me as she was in the end. I would scorn to give you one tear for all the past, for I should think it weakness to repent. You have destroyed my life by your fitful love, and—and by your deception.”

She spoke with such energy that her slight frame shook like a leaf. She was thinking how happy she might have been, but for the frequent changes in his feeling towards her, and his love for Margaret Seymour. And though he knew he had been capricious, moody, fitful, and weak, he could not understand all her meaning.

"Helena," he said, "what is this? What do you mean by saying 'in the time to come?' My darling, let us begin a new life."

"Too late, Longleat!—too late!"

She snatched her hand from his clasp, and almost ran down through the gallery, through the great doors, which parted, and then swung back with a rebound, and shut him in alone—with all those sightless faces round him, seeing nothing of his terrible misery; yet by their pure repose seeming to rebuke this scene of strife. Could she have looked into the future, had she stopped to think of it, would she have said those words, that left a sting which neither time nor death could wipe away?—words that would haunt her own life to its end. She went away to Elspie's room, for she could not bear to be alone. The dame was reading her own big Bible; she stopped with her finger on the line as the Countess entered, who kissed the old woman's cheek, and smoothed the silvery locks that lay so lightly under her coif.

"How are you, nurse?"

"Nane verra weel, my bairn—my Leddy, I'm meanin'."

Indeed, it had been a fearful night to Elspie; but she had been telling her trouble to her God, and He had given her consoling answers in his Word.

"Miss Helena," she said, "when auld Elspie's lyin' i' the kirkyard her lane, wull ye mind that she telled ye the Beeble brings mair comfort than a' the riches o' this world, than a' the freens ye can ca' your ain? It wull be the ane comfort when ye near the valley."

"Elspie! Elspie!" said the child, with a sob, for she *was* a child in all but her misery, "I am *so* sad."

"My ain bairn!" Tears rained down the cheeks more worn by one night's sorrow than by years of time. She couldn't say more; but she tenderly stroked the head resting upon her knee. She was powerless to comfort, through her intense feeling. There was a tap at the door; the Earl came in. Elspie tried to rise; but the Countess was leaning against her.

"My Leddy," she whispered.

"Don't move, nurse," he said, kindly; "I came to find my stray lamb. Helena dear, are you not going to dress?"

"I shall not dine downstairs this evening, my Lord."

Elspie gently laid her hand upon Helena's hair; only the firmer pressure told her meaning to the Countess; for wifehood, even in the bairn she loved, was too sacred for her slightest word of interference, Elspie thought.

Long years ago, when the babe was committed to her care, she took counsel with her own spirit, and she learned that the secret of training lay in self-government. To so govern herself that she might walk blameless in all things before her charge, had been her sole aim. Well and faithfully had she redeemed her vow of then. She knew that oft-times silent counsel is before words; and so she just laid her hand upon Helena's head, though her heart was aching; for now *she* believed the Dowager had told Helena all.

Lord Cranford turned to the window and looked out upon the orchard, where he had played so often when a boy. Just before the window was a great pear-tree, in which he, and Glen, and Robert had made a seat by binding the tender branches. And he had sat there hour after hour alone, conning his Latin and Greek for Mr. Hamilton. And once in the fruit season, he had plucked the pears and had flung them to Glen, whose daring had carried him

to the very top of an apple-tree beyond, where he peeped above, with the green branches and the rosy fruit around and below him; and then he had flung the fruit back; until Cranford suddenly fell from his branch throne; and they carried him into this very room—his own former nursery—and Glen never left him, night nor day, until his sprained foot was cured. They were lads then; but how tenderly Glen had helped to nurse him! he had almost made pain a sweetness.

“If I were as he,” Cranford thought now, “I would soon win her back to me.”

He went to her, and said, with gentle look and tone, smiling half gaily, “If you don’t feel disposed to honor me at dinner, darling, I must take heart of grace, and bear my loneliness. But you will come into the drawing-room?”

“Not to-night, my Lord;” just as if they had been strangers she spoke.

He merely bowed and left the room, deeply pained.

“My Leddy,” said Elspie, roused now, “you promised to tak’ a’ your steps thegither wi’ the Earl. I never spoke the marriage vow for my ainsel; but when I heard the bit sweet music o’ your ain, my heart vowed for ye; and, Miss Helena, ye may not break what e’en the lilies promised for ye round the table o’ the Laird. Ye ken their pure sayin’.”

“I do, Elspie;” then she sprang to her feet, “*Don’t* talk to me so. *Don’t* remind me of that time. I wish it had never——”

“Whisht, bairn!” said Elspie, raising her hand; “dinna speak the word that wull chill your ain heart. Dinna bairnie! It’s a dark day; but as the Laird leeves, if ye’ll trust Him, He’ll gie ye licht.”

It was a strange, a memorable scene. The one just on the verge of eternity—filled with love for her nursling—

dreading nothing so much as sin in her ; noble in her own integrity, blameless in her life ; a full ripe sheaf, golden in the ear. The other on the verge of womanhood, beautiful ; in the eye of the world spotless, yet weighed down with sadness, born of unhallowed love, which rendered all her thoughts of her husband harsh and cold. It might have been a lesson to the tempted to have known what agony filled her soul, as she sat there, listening to Elspie.

“Forgive me,” she said, suddenly.

Many times in her young life had she said that to her faithful nurse ; but never had the wrinkled hand stroked her hair so tenderly ; never had the answer been so quickly given, or been so full of love as now.

“My dear wean ! what sinfu’ feelin’ filled your heart that ye could na speak the answerin’ word o’ kindness to the Earl ? Did ye nae ken his pain ?”

“No, nurse !” She spoke with sad indifference ; and immediately afterwards went away to her room. She spent all the evening there. Rain had begun to fall—that misty drizzle, so depressing to the spirits ; presently the wind rose, the sultriness had been the herald of a storm, for thunder was heard muttering in the distance.

Helena had had a fire lighted in her boudoir, that pretty boudoir high up in the tower ! and she lay upon a couch beside it—not reading, only musing, and feeling desolate without Glen. She did not understand Lord Cranford’s conduct either of yesterday or to-day. She had grown too indifferent to think much about it, for she had lost confidence in him. And, after all, much of our happiness depends upon our *trust* in those we love. If doubt arises between friends, what misery it brings ! How much more so between husband and wife !

She had fallen asleep, but was wakened by a sound near to her. She opened her eyes, and found that the Earl had

come in. Helena had been dreaming of that storm at Calton, when Cranford came and she had opened the heavy doors to let him in. It was not all a dream, as a peal of thunder, which burst over the Hall, told her. It rattled sharp and clear, then died away in low mutterings.

The Earl looked wan and pale. He had heard that which had startled him. A few moments since she had turned upon her pillow, a long curl was entangled round her throat, he had gently drawn it away, and then kissed her flushed cheek. She murmured, "Dear Glen!"

He started as if stung, and looked down upon her sternly. Just then she wakened.

"Of what were you dreaming, Helena?"

After a moment, she said, "Of our engagement, Cranford, and I thought you were telling me that Mr. Ross wrote those lines."

His brow cleared; he smiled, and sat beside her.

"I feared the storm would frighten my bird in her nest—my bird, that left me so lonely."

He would not notice the movement which showed she tried to avoid having his arm round her. He beguiled her into conversation, and very soon his theme was Glen, for he never wearied talking of him. And the storm went on, rattling over the Hall, booming in the distance; but ever seeming to come back quickly to the tower.

The next day came rumours of frightful accidents; and the coasts were strewn with wrecks, and there was wailing in many a fisher's cottage round Margaret Seymour's home for those who would never more cross the bar, and go down to the sea.

Life is full of such sorrow. Years have passed since that storm; but just now there lie before me newspapers, and letters which tell of wrecks and corpses that strew an Irish shore; and in every gust of wind I seem to hear the shrieks of drowning ones at sea. It brings back so vividly

that night when a great woe loomed over Longleat, that I cannot linger over the time. I must hurry on.

A month passed away, not marked by a single incident of note. Elspie was still at Longleat. She never referred to that memorable conversation with the Dowager.

Lord Cranford made many efforts to show Helena that he was anxious their lives should be different; but she received his overtures so coldly, that he began to wonder if she had ever truly loved him. Finally, he ended by leaving her to herself as the best reparation in his power to make for the past. Her nature so trusting, so loving had been warped by his varying moods. She liked now to be freed from his demonstrations, and she would go into the Longleat woods with Fidèle, and would ramble for hours—only too thankful if she were so tired that she could give an excuse for going at once to her room. It was a sad time; but Cranford had great patience, because he knew that she had been much sinned against, and more than that, he was in daily dread of hearing a flying rumour, which would set all the world talking, and which he knew would blight his wife's happiness. His pity was very tender at this time.

One lovely day (it was the middle of September), the Countess was in her dressing-room, looking at some jewels which her father had sent as a gift to her. Evans was in ecstasies, Helena was indifferent, and languid.

“Will you have some salvolatile, my Lady?” asked Evans, “you look so pale and tired.”

“Do I?” answered the Countess with a short dry laugh; “no, I will go out into the garden.”

But she went first to Elspie's room. She found her sleeping in an old-fashioned, high-backed chair. Her fine face was white as the pillow that supported her head. Helena stood beside her quietly for a while, then Elspie wakened.

She looked at the Countess, as if she did not recognize her, and passed her hand over her brow, bewilderedly—then she said, “Hae your faither, the General, asked for ye, bairn? It’s ower time ye were dressed for denner.”

“Elspie,” said the Countess, “we are not at Calton.”

“See, your wee white frock is a’ stained wi’ fruit, my wean. Hae ye bin wi’ auld Thomas?”

“Nurse, you are at Longleat. I am married. Old Thomas is dead. Don’t you remember?”

“Say ye, Miss Helena?”

Helena was frightened; Elspie stared at her so strangely but gradually her recollection returned. A glass of water stood on the table. Helena gave her a little, and then she seemed to be quite herself.

“I hae bin dreamin’ o’ a’ manner o’ fruits,” she said, “an’ that’s iver a sign o’ sorrow to the Camerons.”

“Nay, Elspie,” said Helena, “if I had said that, you would have been angry, and talked about trusting in the Lord.”

“Whisht, bairn! It’s nae sinfu’, nae distrustfu’ i’ the Laird’s sicht, to mind the signs He sends. There are folk i’ this warld that niver ken sorrow but the shadow steals on to the fore. They’re nae waur for takin’ tent o’ the token. Before the Laird Christ poured licht on ane puir creetur, He wet the clay, an’ laid it on his sightless een. It was nae because He could na gie the sicht without the clay; but mebbe he was of a weak an’ ower teemorous speerit, an’ it wad hae bin a sair trial to hae the gurt sun, an’ the big warld, an’ the wonderin’ folk a’ poured on his een i’ a moment; sae the Laird gied him his ain time, an’ he felt the clay on his sightless balls; an’ he saw men as trees walkin’, then the gurt licht, an’ the heart within him nae mair stouned. It was nane sae, the Laird healed a’, some saw by a word, an’ some by a look; but I mind oft thinkin’ I

wad rather hae bin him healed wi' sae mich tender thocht, than ane wha saw by a passin' word. For I was iver o' a feelin', tender speerit; and mebbe it's because sae, that the Laird sends the shadow o' my trouble. It was iver sae; iver sae!"

She folded her hands over her knees and looked into the fire thoughtfully. There was a something about her that struck Helena. Her coif looked higher, her face whiter and grander, her whole bearing more stately than she had ever noticed it.

"Nurse," she said kneeling, and looking up into her face, "will you bless me, as you had used to do when I was a little child?"

"Eh, my bairnie! ye are mair dear to auld Elspie, than when I brocht ye frae the land o' the vine."

The venerable woman laid one hand upon the golden head, the other she raised, and lifting up her face cried in trembling tones, "The Laird bless my wean! May the Laird guard thee frae sin, save thee frae sorrow; smile on thee i' the day-dawn, bide near thee i' the night. May He hide thee i' his rock-cleft frae storm, an' when death comes to thee, an' auld Elspie lies her lane, may the Laird, i' his tender mercy, send her speerit wi' the angels, to bear thee hame. My bairn! my bairn!"

She bent over the child, and clasped her to her breast. Helena was deeply affected. She pressed her scarlet lips upon Elspie's quivering mouth, and without speaking a word, she went away.

Those were the last moments, they were the last words, that was the last kiss that passed between Elspie and the child.

The Countess strolled out into the gardens. The air had become hot, and oppressive. She went into the wood-glen, where the stream ran, in which she had often waded, making the Earl laugh heartily, at her gipsy ways. Then

she went to the open glade, where all the first spring flowers were sure to be found; and she sat down for a while at the foot of an old tree, on which Cranford had carved her initials when she came as his bride. There was a great cluster of dying ferns, and damp dead leaves there; her foot kicked something. She looked to see what it was, and then took it up with a glad cry. It was the little spade—belonging to a box of miniature garden tools which the General had once given to her. She had lost this spade in her first spring at Longleat, and here it was; her initials, “H. D.” were carved in the mahogany. It was in her hand when she left the wood; and strolled on to the terraces, past the tower, in which her boudoir was—its window looked only like an eye up among the leaves. She pictured the landscape seen from thence, and thought she would go there; but the quiet gardens tempted her—quiet indeed, for every fold of the flag which told Longleat’s Lord was at home, drooped heavily. How much depends upon a trifle! Had she gone to her boudoir, this story might not have been written, because all the course of her life might have been turned.

A garden-chair stood against the wall near to the Dowager’s morning-room. Helena sat down there. Presently she heard voices, for the window was open. She knew they were Lord Cranford’s and his mother’s; but she did not heed them, nor did she move. It never struck her that there was any reason why she should. The Dowager’s low murmur sounded indistinctly for some time; but suddenly, she was startled by hearing the Earl say,

“Yes, Helena is changed, mother. She must know; yet I have not dared to ask Elspie if she told her. And Helena shuns me, as well as you. It is a painful subject to name to Elspie.”

“Nor have I dared to ask her, Cranford. Oh, my son! Do you remember giving me your promise, in this

room, that you would never ask Miss Davenant to be your wife until I knew of your intention? How little I guessed the truth of my instinct that you should not marry her."

"Mother; she is my wife now."

He spoke pleadingly, as if wounded. Helena could tell that, although she was startled beyond power of reasoning.

"Well, Cranford, you must forgive me. But, when I think of your father—of all the old race—I cannot forget. I feel that it would be treachery to forget. If you had not known the truth when you married, I could have forgiven you; but you seem to have played us both so false. It was mistaken kindness."

"I know it, mother. I know it now. I did it for the best; but my punishment has come. I loved her so dearly then—ay, as I——"

Helena could hear no more. She did not hear, "as I do now." She left her little spade on the grassy terrace; her hat rolled close beside the window, to tell its own tale when found. Past the tower, through the cloak-room, meeting no one, never pausing—away she ran to her own apartments; locked the outer door; then every inner one; and flung herself upon the bed trembling in every limb. Now, she knew the worst. Her husband did not love her. He had told her a false tale; and the old thick Davenant blood was roused to fury—for even his mother had not wished his marriage, and even now repented it! Elspie, too, had played some treacherous game. Ah! that was keen agony, sharp pain—the rest was contemptible.

She pressed her hands against her burning eyes until sparks rained from them. Then she lay still and cold, one moment resolving to go down and face those two—the next, scorning the thought.

So two hours passed!

Evans came to the ante-room. Her Lady threw open

the door, and the waiting-woman gazed in wonder at her crimson cheeks and flashing eyes. Her beauty was quite dazzling. She gave her commands briefly.

“I will wear white, Evans.”

“Yes, my Lady.”

“He told me he loved me when I wore that,” she thought to herself. “I will tell him I hate him in the same.”

Yes, a deep hatred of him—of Longleat—of the Dowager—was filling her heart; but bitterer than all was her enmity against Elspie.

When she was dressed, she still stayed in her own rooms, pacing to and fro. Some time since, she had heard the sound of wheels beneath her windows; but had not asked Evans if there were visitors.

As she was going down the stairs, a note was given to her by Robert. It was from the Earl, stating that he had been suddenly summoned to town, and feared it would be late the following day before he could return.

She felt like one baulked of revenge.

She wrote a line, on the back of this note, to the Dowager, asking her to excuse her from dinner. The answer was that her Ladyship was not well, and had retired for the evening. It was Robert who brought this reply. He had maimed his hand, and could not fulfil his valet duties for a time—hence he had not accompanied the Earl.

It was very nearly dark, though there was a moon that would soon pierce the cloudy sky, when the Countess heard a carriage dash up to the entrance. She had gone into the library, for it was her favorite room; she loved it dearly. Its windows commanded an exquisite prospect of sloping park-land, that finally dipped down into St. Sylvia's Vale. The winding river, the scattered woods, the distant hills, formed a landscape lovelier than is often seen even in our lovely pastoral land. It was fair to the eye,

suggestive of thought, at all times ; but never so much so as in the gloaming.

The door opened ; a footman glanced round, and saw the Countess.

“ My Lady, Mr. —— ”

Before he could utter the name, she saw the tall form, the grand head, and her heart bounded with joy.

Mr. Ross advanced, calm and dignified as usual. She could scarcely control herself until the man had closed the door.

“ My darling ! ”

“ Oh, Mr. Ross ! ”

She burst into convulsive sobs, laid her head upon his breast, and then, raising it, he saw the deep misery, yet the wild happiness, written upon her face.

He was not prepared for this.

“ My child ! ” he said, “ what does this mean ? Be calm, and tell me. ”

He led her to a seat—for she had been standing clinging to him. His own face was white as drifted snows on moor-land. He was terrified by her agitation ; but he was one of those men on whom women lean. He never lost his own sense of power, never his self-control, and never his gentleness. There lay the great secret of his influence.

“ Have you wine or water here ? ” he asked. He was afraid to call the servants when she was so agitated.

She shook her head.

“ Try to calm yourself, my dearest. ”

She shivered, and looked up at him with strange wistfulness. This scene was a fearful ordeal to him.

“ Glen, ” she said, in a heart-broken voice, “ I never knew until now—until this hour, how terrible our separation has been. ”

He sat down and drew her close to his side.

“ My one little lamb ! ”

"I *am* desolate!" she cried. It was a cry wrung from the very extremity of her anguish.

"My darling!" he whispered, "don't say that, you will break my heart. Tell me what is the matter. Can you not trust me?" His eyes were blazing with excitement and fear for her.

She told him all then, often a little incoherently, often with sobs, excepting at the first, when she began with that afternoon—every word of that conversation was burnt on her brain—but she went back, almost without knowing it, to the days when Cranford loved her. With great pathos—all the greater because so unstudied, she related that conversation overheard at the Duke's, and she spoke bitterly of her outraged feelings, and of Cranford's love for Margaret, whom she would not name but as "another." For Helena, in her sinfulness and her passion, was still delicately-minded, and still true to her old friendship with Margaret. And had not *she* been also wronged? So she did not name Margaret's name.

Mr. Ross listened, he could have supplied it, and his dark eye grew darker, his repressed passion stronger, and he thought that if Longleat had not loved that other, he would have better borne the sad secret.

Ah, how they wronged him!

But he sat quiet whilst she talked, looking up into his face now, then dropping her head again, with the tears raining down on her white dress, and the sobs bursting from her full heart. He would gently smooth her hair, or draw her closer to his side, but no word passed his lips. And when she ceased to speak at last, there was a long silence, that seemed like the sultry lull before a storm. It was so oppressive—so full of fearful meaning.

"Glen!"

"Yes, my child."

“Why are you so silent? Why have you come back to me?”

“I came to see Longleat,” he answered, sighing, “about a mere business matter, little dreaming of this. You don’t know what this month has been. I feared to see you to-night—feared, because—— Well, no matter, I *must* say it, Helena. The wildest idolatry of which the human heart was ever capable, seems to me to pale beside mine. You are the life of my life. Since I saw you, I have prayed God to take it, to let me sleep on and on in dreamless sleep until you came, when I might claim you, and call you mine for ever. It has been a desolating love, my little one, too full of earnest truth to be forgotten for a moment. You have not been alone in your misery.”

She lay still upon his breast, scarcely daring to breathe, his words so thrilled her. Then she started up, and exclaimed, “What am I to do, Glen, now, when you have left me?”

He did not answer. He was looking over her head at St. Sylvia’s Valley and the park-land that lay between, so shadowy, so dim, but so beautiful in the rising moon. The throbbing of their hearts sounded loud in the stillness.

“Helena,” he said at last, taking both her hands in his, “do you really so love me? My one ewe lamb! Will you then come away with me?”

“Away with you!” she echoed, with white lips and wondering eyes.

“Yes, my darling, away to peace and joy, with one who loves you better than his own soul, and who will never change—never change! I cannot bear to leave you in your misery; it would kill me. We will go far away to some fair land, and forget the past. Will you come, my child? My own dear, tender, frail, beautiful child!” His eyes were fastened upon her with an intense, earnest look, that was full of suspense.

Still she was silent and trembling. Moonrise had now fully come, and the white gleams paled the gilding of Helena's harp, placed there in happier days; they sent a ray across the Earl's portrait, his eyes seemed to gaze upon them; touched a vase of withered flowers beside his empty chair, and then travelled on until they left their silvery shine upon Helena's golden hair, and showed too the pallid face, and trembling lips of Longleat's treacherous wife.

"Will you come?"

"I will," she said, suddenly and firmly; "there is no one here who will care. *No one loves me here. I will come.*"

His heart bounded and throbbed. He strained her to his breast. "You shall never repent in all time," he said. "I will be so true."

Never repent! The words startled her. She thought of hours she had passed with Longleat's Christian mother. She shuddered, and then he whispered quickly—

"My carriage is here. Put on your bonnet. Don't bring anything which he ever gave to you. Make haste, my darling."

"To-night?" she gasped.

"Now, my dearest."

She rose, but sank down again.

"Be brave," he said, "for a few minutes. Afterwards, I will bear all."

His words put life into her. She went to her rooms quite calmly. Evans was in the ante-room, on her knees, beside a trunk of dresses which had just come down from London.

"My lady," she said, in a vexed tone, "there is a mistake here, there is——"

"Leave those things," answered her Lady; "I want you." She passed into the dressing-room. The fire had just been kindled, a loose white wrapper was thrown over

the chair before it. The dressing-case stood open, the brushes, combs, and all the etceteras of the toilette were prepared for use. Beyond was the bed-room, with its wax-lights and its comfortable fire. Beyond that the bath-room, also rosy with light and warmth; a bright vista of elegance, and yet more of home, where her comfort was so cared for.

“I am going to London, Evans, at once,” she said.

“To London, my Lady!”

The maid looked astounded.

“Put one or two things together”—naming them; “just what I shall require until to-morrow. Stay,” she said, glancing at the trunk through the open door, “you shall put a dress in that; I might require it in the morning.” And, mentioning one or two other articles, said, “Hurry, if you please, Evans.”

“How soon must I be ready, my Lady?”

“You!” said Helena, startled. Then, recovering herself. “Oh, of course, you did not know. I am not taking you. I shall not need you.”

“I not going, my Lady!” Evans looked as if her wits were going. “Your Ladyship is not going alone!”

“No; Mr. Ross is taking me.”

The woman’s countenance expressed her increased surprise; but, as the Countess turned aside, she saw how she was trembling.

“Pardon me, my Lady,” she asked, respectfully, “but is my Lord ill? Mr. Robert said he had gone to town.”

“Yes—no—that is, not very,” Helena stammered.

Evans began and finished her preparations in complete silence.

The Countess looked round the dressing-room. How she and Elspie had admired it, the day she came to Longleat! It was exactly the same, excepting for some added ornaments, gifts from Longleat—exquisite trifles, to please her

eye and taste. She passed quickly into the bed-room, and looked through one of its windows upon the grass where the people gave her their welcome. She started back, and then Evans came in, bustling.

“You will change your dress, my Lady?”

“Certainly. No, Evans, not that light one. I will wear black silk.”

She took off her white robe (it seemed like laying aside her innocence). “Leave that *here*,” she said, putting it upon the bed—“don’t remove it.”

“No, my Lady.” Evans looked more and more surprised.

“Remember,” said the Countess—impressively, and then she donned her black dress and black mantle. She did not once look at herself, for she feared to meet her own eyes. “Leave me now,” she said.

The maid went into the ante-room. Helena walked to the bed, laid her face down upon the cambric pillow, where her head would never rest more—never more!

Did regret even then steal into her heart? Did she think with pity of the husband whom she had so wronged—who had so trusted in her? God alone knows. But a quick sob broke from her heart—only one.

“What I do now,” she whispered, so that one near to her might have heard, “I do because *he* has been faithless, and Glen so true;” but a tear fell on the pillow. The only sign of feeling—the only tribute to the past.

Evans opened the outer door, the Countess passed through without speaking. Her veil was closely drawn over her face. So shrouded, she passed the Dowager’s rooms with noiseless but quick steps; then the end of the corridor which led to Elspie’s—the Earl’s old nurseries! She half stopped, and looked down wistfully, but went on again more quickly, on through the portrait-galleries. Every face seemed to be looking down in scorn, to be fling-

ing after her words of accusation. The cry rang in her ears—"Ours is an honorable line!"

She dared not look round; she almost flew past them; and she met servants bearing lights, saw footmen lounging here and there—others placing fresh flowers in the vases scattered on the staircases and in the galleries. She heeded nothing of their wondering looks as she passed.

Mr. Ross came to her at the foot of the stairs. Among the attendants in the hall was Robert.

"My Lady," he said, hurriedly, "if the Earl be ill, may I not go to him?"

She looked at Mr. Ross.

"My good Latham," he said, "I have already told you that it is nothing. Don't detain the Countess. The Earl will return to-morrow."

Robert bowed respectfully; but he pushed aside a footman, and he himself opened the carriage door. The Countess took her seat; Mr. Ross followed; and in another moment they were gone.

Robert stood watching until the carriage was out of sight. There was a troubled look on his face, a fear in his heart which he could neither define nor account for.

The Dowager was in her dressing-room, reclining upon a couch beside the window, that she might look out upon the beautiful night. Her waiting-woman sat at a distance, reading aloud the psalms for the evening. Nothing could be purer or more peaceful than the aspect of that room. The soft lamplight fell upon the sacred lines, but moonbeams alone flooded the room. Lady Cranford had a rich Indian shawl wrapped round her; the little lace cap, which she usually wore was laid aside; her hair had been unbound, to ease her aching head—that luxuriant, bright hair, in which scarcely a silvery line could be traced! Her face looked so statuesque against the dark velvet cushions, that more than once Harcourt

had involuntarily stopped reading to look at her. Suddenly the Dowager raised herself, leaned forward, and looked out earnestly. Harcourt stopped reading.

“Is that a carriage?” asked her Lady.

An equipage, whose wheels were not heard, owing to the distance, was bowling past the western tower.

“It is, my Lady.”

“I wonder whose, at this hour?”

“Shall I inquire, my Lady?”

“No, Harcourt; continue reading, please.”

The woman sat down again, and went on in a singularly clear, though low-toned voice:

“Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonor: mine adversaries are all before Thee. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none: and for comforters, but I found none——”

At these words, the lamp-light went down. Harcourt paused to turn the wick higher. She glanced at the Countess. Her eyes were raised, her hands lay upon her breast, as if she were praying. The stillness was profound; the next words fell with startling solemnity:—

“Let their table become a snare before them, and that which should have been for their welfare let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened that they see not, and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate, and let none dwell in their tents.”

Again the flame flickered; in another instant it went quite out. The moon, too, had sailed behind a huge cloud, that seemed like a black rock in the sea of heaven. The room would have been in total darkness but for a dimly-burning fire.

Harcourt groped her way, without speaking, to the

corridor, where wax-lights were placed. When she returned, her Lady was sitting up with a scared look.

“Don’t read more, Harcourt,” she said. “What a fearful curse there is in those lines!”

She shivered, and sat down before the fire. Her maid went away to order some refreshment for her. In passing the rooms of the young Countess, she saw Evans standing at the window of the ante-room. She coughed to attract attention. Evans turned round, and called—

“Is that you, Mrs. Harcourt?”

“It is,” she answered, walking in. “You are in the dark, like the rest of us. I was reading to my lady just now, and the lamp went out. Then the moon must needs go in. I felt quite queer. Do you notice how the night is changed? An hour ago it was beautiful, and now—do look at that sky!”

“It’s just like a sea in a storm,” said Evans.

“So it is, child, though I couldn’t have said so. You look cheerful enough in there,” she said, peeping through the dressing-room door, and into the bed-room beyond, where the fires blazed.

“Yes,” said Evans, going in.

Mrs. Harcourt followed. Lights were scattered up and down; several on the toilette shed their soft, beautiful effulgence on the gold and silver ornaments; on a vase of superb flowers; on rings that had been carelessly thrown down, and lay glittering in their costly purity; on an open case of magnificent jewels that Evans had been arranging to put away; and on a tiny watch, with a portrait of Marie Antoinette set in diamonds on the back. It had been the Earl’s latest gift to Helena, on her birthday. She left it there, for *his* eye when he came to seek the missing wanderer. She had carefully enjoined Evans not to touch it—not to put it away.

“I never saw such a beautiful room as this,” said

Harcourt. "My Lord bestowed some thought, and some money on it too, before he brought his Lady."

"I'm sure!" said Evans. "Well, it's a grand thing to be rich, Mrs. Harcourt."

"Ay, it is, Miss Evans; but, as my poor father used to say to us girls, when he saw us stuck up with a bit of finery—my father was a well-to-do farmer in Kent, a very good, religious man, for he was churchwarden many a year—'Ay,' he'd say, 'fine feathers make fine birds; but the Almighty gives the best of us but a shroud at last. And a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.'"

"That's true enough," said Evans, shutting the jewel-case with a snap, and placing it in the cabinet, "and some folks may swallow it to their comfort, for they've got nothing else, goodness knows!"

"A pretty face ain't to be despised," said her companion, significantly.

Evans looked at herself, with a smile that was half-conscious, half-shy. The reflection told her that she had at least *that* for her portion; and the trim little figure, with its fluttering pink ribbons, did not move less jauntily for the compliment of the elder Abigail, who had arrived at grave middle age, and wore caps that *were* caps, not plates; and "decidedly," thought Miss Evans, "unbecoming."

"What are you doing, child?" she asked, as Evans began to extinguish the wax-lights.

"Doing?"

"You are putting the lights out."

"Oh, goodness! I forgot you wouldn't know. My lady has gone to London."

Harcourt stared at her, as if she thought she had lost her senses.

"Gone to London!" she said; "and *you* here?"

Evans nodded.

"Yes, I'm here, safe enough! It's queer, isn't it?"

"Queer! Why, child, are you right?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Harcourt, I'm as right as most folks; but I'll tell you. I was down on my knees unpacking a lot of dresses that Madame Fanchon had just sent—and isn't she tiresome?—what do you think?"

"Never mind that," said Harcourt, impatiently.

"Oh, indeed! I dare say; and I'd just like to know who is to dress my Lady, with never a top-skirt to put on that *has* to go on. And the dinner to-morrow! It's all very fine for you, Mrs. Harcourt, that has a lady who wears nothing but velvets and silks as thick as leather, that stand like a tub on its own bottom; but just *you* dress your lady in three skirts of tulle, and come to miss the top one trimmed, and see how *you'll* feel, and a character to lose!"

"Well, it is hard," said the other maid, whose old instincts were pricking up their ears. "I'm sure, when my lady's Spanish lace, that went to Guilford's to be cleaned, didn't come home in time, I thought I should never look at meat again. It turned my stomach so, it was as if my liver wouldn't act too. It was a hard time was that, and my lady going out so little, and looking so grand in that lace. But what did *your* lady say?"

"Well, let me see. Where was I?" Evans put her head on one side, and took a side glance in the mirror at the same time. "Oh, I remember. 'Well,' she says, 'leave those things, Evans, I want you,' and her voice was shaking. 'I'm going to London,' she said, and then she told me what to put up; and when I asked her what time she'd require me to be ready, she said she didn't need me, and I wasn't to go. I asked if my Lord was ill. I think she said, 'Very ill;' but I don't know; it was something to that effect. And then I said, 'My Lady, you are not

going alone?" "No," she said, "Mr. Ross is taking me."

"Mr. Ross!" echoed Harcourt.

Evans nodded. She had taken up one of the wax candles; it was between their faces. The two women looked into each other's eyes without speaking. Evans put it down, and turned aside. Harcourt stood still.

"Either my Lord is very ill, or it is *very* strange," she said, slowly.

"Now, Mrs. Harcourt, don't, please," said Evans, with a sudden passionate burst of feeling. She loved her lady so dearly, and she had been troubled all the evening with strange fears inexplicable to herself.

"My lady will be back to-morrow, for she charged me particularly not to move that dress, nor the watch. It showed she was coming home to-morrow."

"Why, what did she say?"

Evans told her. Harcourt gave no reply, but looked round the room. She stopped at the door.

"I shall not tell my lady of this," she said; "she is not at all well. She would be anxious about the Earl. It could do no good."

Evans shook her head. Then she was left alone, and she wept bitterly.

The housekeeper, to whom Harcourt went, thought her lady should be told; but Robert came, and repeated Mr. Ross's words; so they decided *not* to tell Lady Cranford. But it was an anxious night to all those servants. They waited impatiently for the Earl's return.

CHAPTER V.

YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE.

In uncommunicating misery
Silent they stood.

THALABA.

THE next morning was one of surpassing splendor. It really seemed as if summer had come back with all her hoarded wealth; and ambitious of admiration, had flung her gifts at the feet of earth with reckless prodigality. Since sunrise, there had not been a cloud in heaven. The heat would have been intense, but for the soft wind that came with a joyous whistle, laden with fragrance from heathery moors and purple hills. Butterflies, that had long been hidden, came out again "to feel the sun." Birds sang and chirped in the Longleat woods. Gardeners threw open the doors of their hot-houses and conservatories; brought out their plants upon the terraces, until they were a blooming paradise. Every window in the Hall was open; curtains waved with wind-taught grace; fresh flowers were in all the rooms. A new thrill of life ran through the whole house that was felt by every inmate, from the Dowager to the lowest servant.

Lady Cranford's park-carriage was ordered for twelve o'clock. She intended to take advantage of the day, to call at the Rectory, visit her school, and see one or two of her pensioners in the village. She had not seen Helena, nor, indeed, had she asked for her. It was not to be expected

that she would be within-doors on such a morning. And as the Dowager drove through the park, she looked through the vistas of the noble avenues as she passed them to see if she were there, but she looked in vain. She lunched with Mr. Hamilton at the Rectory, then visited her school, and walked through the village—it was only a long, straggling, picturesque street of pretty cottages; and the ponies walked slowly after her, until her visits were all paid but one—that was to little Mary, who was now in a decline. At the door of nearly every cottage some of the inmates stood watching their Lady. She was continually nodding and smiling—a great many blessings followed her. Never had she seemed so kind in the eyes of her humble friends. They all remembered afterwards, with feelings of regretful tenderness, of mournful pleasure, that last visit of hers to the village. Mary lived a short way off, just on the edge of Longleat Common.

The child was sitting with her grandfather in their cottage-porch. She was wrapped in a woollen shawl, with her feet upon a chair; her back was supported by pillows. The little Lucy, who had once said, “the sky had fallen,” was standing beside her, with a plate of something tempting, which “mother sent,” she said. When the little carriage stopped, a faint rose-tint came into Mary’s cheek; she turned her blue eyes, so large and liquid now, with a very grateful look upon the lady as she bent down and inquired very tenderly about her health.

“Are you quite sure, Mary, that this is prudent?”

“I think so, my Lady; it is such a beautiful day. I have been telling grandfather that God perhaps has sent it purposely *at the last*, that I may think what a lovely world I have left him in. It won’t be for long; grandfather is very old.”

The child took his hand in hers, and stroked it gently

—so white, so transparent—hers seemed like a lily-leaf that had floated on to a gnarled, brown fragment of a tree. His other hand was behind his ear: he was trying to catch what Mary said. He nodded, pleased like a child; for this was the time of second childhood with him.

“She’s better, my Lady. Yes, yes, my little Mary’s better. I telled her she’d get well when summer came back, and it’s come to-day.”

The Countess did not speak; the child looked at him tenderly.

“She used to talk of dyin’, did my Mary; but there’s to be no dyin’ for her. God A’mighty wouldn’t take an old man’s only blessing, would He, my Lady? I telled her that ever so often. Would you like a posy, Mary?” he said; “there’s a deal o’ sweet-smellin’ things yet.”

He rose, and tottered on his stick a few steps; and then he turned his head, with its long, white hair, again to her, and he smiled with such unconsciousness of how very soon his “only blessing” would be taken from him, that Lady Cranford’s eyes filled with tears.

“My dear,” she whispered, “don’t allow this to distress you. I promise to care for your grandfather, when——” She stopped.

The child did not remove her eyes from the old man; but a beautiful expression of peaceful serenity stole into them.

“Thank you, my Lady! but I think *God* will take care of him, and soon bring him home.” She said that word “home” with a quiet triumph, as if they were both so nearly there already that the pain of parting was almost over.

The Countess was silent awhile. The warm breeze swayed the few flowers, and fanned the dying girl’s forehead.

“Is the beautiful Lady well?” she asked.

The Dowager smiled. "Quite well, I thank you, Mary. I don't think that among all her little village-friends she has one so enthusiastic as you. Would you like to see her? I am sure she will come. Shall I ask her?"

"Oh, my Lady! I should so like it. I have known what angels are like since I saw her in her white frock. I've seen them in my dreams since then. I should like to die with her beside me, I think, my Lady." Here the child turned aside her delicate face, and looked over the hills. "I think I shouldn't be afraid of looking at them yonder if I had just seen her. It would be like meeting her sisters."

There was the most guileless admiration here expressed in simplest sincerity. Once, after the Countess had driven past the cottage, Mary had said to her grandfather, that she felt as if she had seen an angel. The words had pleased his fancy. He afterwards spoke of the Countess as "Mary's Angel." Even in the village she was oftener called by that name than she was by her title; and when Helena walked up the aisle to the old oak pew in Longleat Church, where so many generations of her husband's line had worshipped, little children, old men and women, young men and maidens, all looked at her with the same admiration, and none wondered that the child had baptized one so lovely with the heavenly name.

"Ay, ay," said the grandfather, who had caught the last scrap of conversation. "Has she my little Mary's handkerchief?"

Lady Cranford answered, raising her voice to meet his deafness.

Indeed, she had! It was one of the few things she had carried away with her—that, and the General's flower. One had been the offering of a pure and innocent child such as God ever gathers before the innocence has gone;

the other, was that of an aged veteran, whose years were a crown of glory, because of his long life of honor and good deeds. They were strange gifts to be carried away by a dishonorable, dishonoring wife; but each had its silent testimony to bear in time to come. When she was leaving, the Countess stooped, and kissed Mary's brow. "We will come together, perhaps, to-morrow," she said.

Mary looked wistful.

"What is it, my dear? Can I do anything more for you? Tell me."

"No, my Lady, thank you." Then her color deepened, her thin fingers moved nervously, she said, with slow hesitation, "Will you tell the beautiful lady that if I go before she comes I shall be always looking for her, waiting for her, among the angels."

The lady's eyes filled, she couldn't speak, and she went down the little garden strangely affected. All the way home she seemed to hear Mary's words. She walked for a time on the terraces; she was not exactly sad, but she felt pensive. Somehow Mary's purity had rebuked the strife of the late days. The dying girl's nearness to eternity had seemed to lessen the importance of everything connected with time. This birth-stain upon Helena seemed a very little thing to grieve about, when she herself was so lovely, so loveable. Mary's admiration of her had awakened recollections of that time when she came to Longleat first—it was something like a mirror reflecting Helena's bridal days, and it brought back much of that time's tenderness. As she walked up and down, she thought bitter things against herself. She remembered all that she had promised to be, and yet, during the past month, how strong had been her pride, how weak her love! How harsh now seemed her words spoken to Longleat but yesterday!—how infinitely nobler had Elspie proved than herself. The Countess felt humbled before

the serving maid, and she resolved to be a tenderer, more loving mother to the beautiful girl, because of the cruel wrong that had been done to her; then perhaps happier days would dawn for them all. "My besetting sin is pride," she said in her heart, "and God has sent this trouble, it may be, to prove me and humble me. His will be done!"

As she thought this, the Longleat bells rang out a merry wedding peal. The Dowager stood for some time listening. She was reminded of the welcome they gave to her long years ago; of the welcome they gave to her son's bride; and then the bells were confusedly mingled with the words of the dying child. Their music seemed set to them—"Waiting for her among the angels—the angels, waiting for her among the angels." She could have declared they said or sang the very words; and so, low-speaking them to their chime, she entered the Hall. No one had mentioned to her that the Countess had gone to London. Harcourt had felt loth to spoil her lady's morning by anxiety when she seemed so much better. And the very brightness of the day had set the servants all to rights; they confidently looked for their lord and lady. All but Robert.

Lady Cranford had gone up the staircase, and was in the first gallery when she heard a carriage dash up under the entrance. She turned back at once, guessing that it would be the Earl. She walked more quickly than she usually did now to meet her son. There were many servants in the Hall—amongst them was Robert. She happened to see him before she reached the foot of the stairs, and she stopped. His look froze her blood; his face was actually livid, his lips were tightly drawn over his teeth, like a dead man's who had died in agony or terror. He was staring into the carriage—staring at the Earl, it seemed to her—with horror. Lord Cranford saw his mother, and sprang out. He did not notice the look of

the servant who opened the carriage-door; it was one of wonder, as if he expected to see some one there beside his lord. He went to her with glad surprise.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, my Lady-mother. Have you been out? What a glorious day it is."

She did not answer, but looked at him, then again at Robert. But Robert had gone. She could breathe more freely for that; but her look startled Cranford.

"What is the matter?" he whispered.

"The matter?" she answered. "I—I don't know."

He thought her manner extremely strange and alarming. He drew her hand through his arm, and led her into the library close by. "Are you tired, mother?" he asked, tenderly. "You looked so strangely."

"It was Robert," she said, and again she looked round almost in terror.

"Robert!" he echoed, in surprise. "I did not even see him. What did he look like?" Cranford laughed, but the Countess seemed so agitated that he rang the bell sharply. "Send Latham here," he said.

The footman had a long hunt for him. "Where the dickens have you put yourself?" he inquired, vexed. "My Lord has wanted you ever so long. And what in the name of goodness have you been doing to yourself?"

"Putting my head under a tap," said Robert, shortly; "can't a fellow have an ache without this row!" It was so unlike Latham's usual courtesy, that his fellow-servant went away in a huff.

"Where is Helena?" asked Cranford, after waiting some time for Robert.

"I have not seen her to-day, Longleat?"

"Have you not? Tell Latham to go to my dressing-room. I am going to Helena." He went up the broad stairs with quick strides, and knocked at the ante-room door. Evans was there waiting for her lady.

"Is the Countess here, Evans?" he asked, briskly and cheerfully.

"The Countess, my Lord!" Evans stammered and looked surprised.

"Your lady," he said, impatiently. "Is she here? I asked."

"My Lord, has she not come with you?" The Earl looked as if he thought her a lunatic. She was going to add something, but she uttered a cry, and her face was terrible to see; she was looking at something or some one behind him. He turned round quickly. There stood Robert Latham, white-faced and trembling.

"Latham!"

"Oh, my Lord! Go away, Evans—away, I say, do you hear!" He seized her arm, and she, shaking and terror-stricken, obeyed his behest.

"What the devil is the matter?" said the Earl, angrily; "are you mad?"

Robert had entered, and shut the door. He did seem mad. "My Lord!—my dear Lord!" He fell on his knees in his uncontrollable fright, and turned yet whiter still. "My Lady went to you yesterday."

Lord Cranford looked down upon his servant with frowning, incredulous astonishment. "Went to *me* yesterday!" he repeated—"yesterday! What fool's play is this? What do you mean, man?"

"My Lord, the Countess went away from here late last night. She said you were ill—*he* said so."

"I—ill—last—night! '*he* said so!' Why, what in the world——" He raised his hand, swept it over his eyes as if to clear his sight. "Do you mean that your lady followed me to town?"

"She did, my Lord, and—and——" Here Robert sank lower at the Earl's feet, and in his agony he grasped his knees. "It was late. She went with——"

The words came with a great rush, like waters that have swept down their dam. "She went with Mr. Ross, my Lord."

"My God!"

The stricken peer sank down; his jaw fell; his eyes looked in one moment to be tear-dried for ever; his lips and whole face whitened like bone.

"Oh, my Lord!"

Robert's tears rained on the nerveless hands. He stood up, put his arm round his master—forgetful of his ranked nobility in his own nobility of soul; forgetful of difference in their positions in this union of grief; forgetful of decorum in this whirlwind of trouble. So those two men stood, as they would one day stand before their God—equals at least now in one thing, being both bowed down before this treacherous, this sinful, cruel shame!

It was in vain that Robert spoke. The Earl sat rigid, giving no sign that he felt or heard. Suddenly, he got up tottering, looked round the room, and staggered towards the dressing-room.

"I—I am going to the Countess—my wife!" he said, in a thick, changed voice. Then a deep scarlet suffused his whole face. He shook off Robert's hand.

"What have you been saying, fellow?" he shouted, haughtily.

Before Robert could answer, the Earl threw him aside, opened the door, and darted through the galleries, down the staircase—pushing past his servants in such a manner as to shock the nerves of those well-bred aristocrats, who looked their astonishment, as well they might! If the Houses of Lords and Commons were to fall in when the Houses were sitting, and to bury every peer and statesman in the ruins to-morrow, that would be no reason why my Lord's Gentleman and my Lady's Groom should be rudely

hustled, or taken by surprise. So these Knights of the Plush shrugged their shoulder-knots. But he went on, heedless in his mighty misery; and he dashed into his library.

“Mother!”

“Cranford!”

She stood up with her bonnet and shawl on still—things in which, a few moments ago, she had walked and hoped for “happier days;” in which she still waited, expecting her son to take her for a pleasant stroll again.

“Cranford, my dear boy!”

If he had been a teething baby, she would not have spoken with more loving tenderness.

“Mother! Where is Helena? Where is my wife?” he shouted; his face scarlet, then pale.

“Helena! your wife? Cranford, love, I—I don’t know. She is here somewhere.”

“Mother! she *is not* here. She went away with *Ross! Glen Ross*—last night. Do you hear me?” he cried, in a yet more frenzied voice. “Went away with *him—to me!* Good God! Curse him!”

The Earl glared at his mother, and then a quick laugh rattled in her ears—a wild, insane, fearful laugh!

“Cran——”

The name was not finished. She sank down into her seat, pale and trembling.

The door opened, and Robert came in with Mrs. Simcoe, the housekeeper.

“My dear lady, don’t!” said Robert, entreatingly.

Her hands just waved towards her son once—then fell powerless. Her eyes were fixed upon him staringly.

“My Lady! My Lady!” said Mrs. Simcoe, firmly, gently shaking her.

Robert was beside himself. He darted from the room.

“Send Mrs. Harcourt,” he shouted; “and one of you

fellows go for Dr. McConnel—as fast as if you were flying for your life!”

The whole household was in confusion. Servants crowded to the library-door, all anxious to do something but all powerless.

Mrs. Simcoe's self-possession was invaluable. Her brief orders to the groom of the chambers were prompt, and just what were required.

“Clear the hall and staircase of all the servants. Send the butler and Latham here. You three and I will carry my Lady to her room. Mrs. Harcourt, you and Evans must get hot flannels and cylinders, and see to the fire in her Ladyship's room.”

Everything was done with the utmost speed; and then, like a log, or a lifeless body, the poor lady was carried to her rooms by three faithful servants who had grown grey in her service, and by one whose true heart was almost broken.

The old butler gave one sorrowful look at his beloved mistress, when they had laid her upon the bed so death-like, and he bent down and kissed her pale hand—then went away with a great sob. Robert ran back to his lord.

The groom of the chambers—a handsome-looking man, whose *physique* was quite as grand and noble as that of the late Professor Wilson—knelt on one knee beside the bed, and kissed his lady's hand with all a courtier's reverence; but with him it was the homage of the heart.

The women had no time for lamentations. They never have when sickness has to be tended, or suffering alleviated. It is one of God's greatest mercies to woman that she is made to be “the ministering angel” in such hours. Her tender nature can scarcely bear unmurmuringly the torture of sitting by a sufferer and remain inactive. If condemned, by weakness of her own, to be so, even the strongest-

mind of the sex feel it to be a trial. They must either fly from the sight of suffering, or help to alleviate it.

They did everything for the Countess it was possible to do before the arrival of McConnel, but all in vain. She was *not dead*, and that was the only thing that could be said of her.

Near to the Dowager's room, close to its windows, there happened to be a fine old tree, that, being half dead, had been marked to come down. The gardeners were just resting; they had struck it almost through. The tree—it was an elm—had fallen against another, and was saved for a moment from falling to the ground. Mrs. Harcourt happened, in passing the window, to notice it, and she saw that one more stroke of the axe that lay beside it—just one—and the tree would fall. She scarcely knew why, but that elm seemed like her dear lady, who was lying under the plumed canopy, with her servants around her, gazing so helplessly on her stony face; tearless because of their deep sorrow; mute in their terrible awe. It needed one little blow, and that noble life would be ended.

Robert found the Earl where he left him, sitting on the same couch, as it chanced, where Helena sat when she said she would go with Mr. Ross. One of his hands grasped the scroll end, the other his knee. He sat upright; and, when his man came to him, he looked at him bewilderedly, as if he did not know who he was. Robert said,

“My Lord, will you allow me to take you to your room?”

There was no answer.

Then the butler came in, his face white as death. He shook his head.

“May God Almighty help us all; this *is* a bad business. Eh, dear, dear, that I must live to see it, and carried him on my shoulder when he was a baby! Lord

help me!" The old man didn't weep, he just looked as if this blow would kill him. "My Lord Cranford," he said, bending down, using the title by which he had been always called in his boyhood at home. "My Lord Cranford, will you try to take this brandy for our dear lady's sake?—will you?—"

Still no answer. They put the glass to his lips—as well have put it to the set teeth of one dead!

Mason put the glass down with a sigh.

"No use, my lad. You rub that hand as hard as you can."

They rubbed the Earl's hands with no small amount of vigor; but in vain, there was no warmth in the blood. Would help *never* come!

Robert was a young man, and more easily affected to tears than Mason. They filled his eyes as he sat on the floor, with his master's foot upon his knee, chafing it with all his might.

"It's no use crying, my lad," said Mason, gloomily. "There will be more than tears shed before this business is over, if I'm not mistaken."

The door opened, and Dr. McConnel came in, wiping his brow, for he had galloped every inch of the road. "What's up?" he asked in his blunt way, laying down his hat and gloves.

Robert rose from the floor, his face wet with tears.

The butler stepped back, shaking his head.

The Earl looked at him with a vacant, dry-eyed look. "Why, Latham, what in the world is this?"

"Oh, sir, my Lord is broken-hearted. The Countess, our dear, young lady, went away last night. She said she was going to the Earl in London. And I knew it! I knew it!" he exclaimed passionately. "I felt it all. Oh, why didn't I speak?"

"Hush! my man," said the Doctor, keeping his eye on

Cranford. "You will need all your strength, and your head too here. How long has the Earl been like this?" He took up one of the hands that had fallen so helplessly down, and placed his fingers on the pulse. "Extremities cold," he said. "Bring some brandy and hot water."

"We have already tried it, sir; but his teeth are fast," Mason said.

"Bring it!"

By a little silver instrument, he gently forced open the teeth, and a few drops of the spirit were poured down. "We will lay him here," he said. "Strike a light, the fire will blaze directly, and get a cylinder of boiling water."

Suddenly, Lord Cranford laughed—another rattling, dreadful laugh!

Robert shuddered.

"It is bad hysteria," said McConnel, quietly; "do as I tell you, and take no notice."

Again the laugh rang, it was a fearful sound from a man's lips. It contorted his face, his white teeth gleamed; but there was not the slightest expression in his eye. This went on for some time, at intervals he drew a long, shuddering breath that was a groan.

"My Lord," shouted McConnel.

He was quiet in an instant, stonily quiet. Then they managed to give him more of the brandy; and they laid him on the couch.

"Is he in immediate danger, sir?" asked Mason.

"No, not if it continue hysteria, even if violent. The spirit will put warmth into him, and a good deal depends upon his becoming warm."

"My Lady is *very* ill, sir."

"Who, eh?"

"My Lady, sir, she has been carried to her room—I fear——"

Mason's lips quivered, he turned aside; and passed his hand over his eyes.

"How is she affected?"

The old servant shook his head. "Will you come, Doctor?" he spoke scarcely above a whisper, his voice was so choked.

Dr. McConnel followed him up the grand staircase, and through the beautiful galleries—along the corridors, their footsteps made no sound on the thick piled carpets. All was magnificence, and splendor. Yet what sorrow was there! And all the effect of *one sin!*

When the Doctor entered the Dowager's bed-room, Mason waited outside. Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Simcoe were there—one on either side the bed. Evans, white as a ghost, with red eyes—stood at the foot. The Doctor went straight to the lady without speaking. Her eyes were wide open, he closed one lid, then opened it.

"Light a taper," he said.

It was brought. He closed the eye-lid again, then let it open, and held the light close to it. He repeated this experiment several times. Then still silent, he handed the taper back to one of the women.

"Is there danger, sir?" asked Harcourt.

"It's all over, I fear."

"Oh, my Lady!" The maid burst into tears.

"Get some mustard and vinegar," he said, "hot, and bring some muslin."

They applied it to the back of the neck. But there was no change. He tried to pour a little brandy, a drop at a time down her throat; but the fluid trickled from the corners of her mouth.

"Don't give her anything," he said.

"Will my Lady *die*, sir?" said Mrs. Simcoe in frightened tones.

"She will."

“ Can we do nothing ? ”

“ Nothing at all. She may possibly rally to consciousness just before death ; but it is not probable, I think. Poor lady ! ”

Dr. McConnel was a blunt, plain-spoken man ; but he had a kind heart, his feelings were very tender. Harcourt's sobs came fast now, she laid her head down on the bed, weeping bitterly. The Doctor suddenly stooped, and looked closer at the lady. Mrs. Simcoe uttered an exclamation. Harcourt looked up. One eye-lid had drooped, that side of her mouth was drawn slightly. He shook his head, and went to the door. There Robert met him in great excitement.

“ Sir, can you come to the Earl ? he is up, and declares he will go out to look for the Countess.”

Dr. McConnel hastened to the room. As he turned the handle of the door outside, the Earl turned it within. They were face to face on the threshold.

“ I am going out, sir,” he said, in a loud, unnatural voice, “ going to fetch my Lady—the Countess, my wife, sir.”

He spoke like a drunken man, able to speak with clear utterance.

“ Certainly, my Lord,” said McConnel, “ I quite understand. My carriage will be here in a moment. I will go with you ; but I am tired to death, been up all night ; may I beg for a glass of wine before we go ? ”

Lord Cranford took off his hat, which he had ordered Robert to fetch ; unbuttoned his glove calmly, but suddenly dashed it down with great violence. The doctor very calmly picked it up, and when the servant answered the bell he ordered refreshments, and then began to speak of indifferent matters, as if the Earl were quite himself.

When the tray came in, he had a little phial hidden in his hand, he had taken it out of the medicine chest

that he had always kept at Longleat, and to which he alone had access. They were powerful drugs all of them, and were only used in extremities.

"You will take a glass of wine with me, my Lord," he said, coolly, having adroitly emptied the tiny phial into a little sherry. The Earl took it, and then sat down on the couch whilst the Doctor broke his biscuit, and watched him furtively. His head drooped in time—McConnel rang the bell, Robert came; they placed the Earl on the couch again, and covered him up.

"If he sleep he will do well, Latham; you sit there beside him. If he is not himself when he awakes, give him this mixture; but I think he will sleep. I have left a patient in danger, and will be back in an hour. Then he beckoned him to the door.

"Where has she gone?"

Robert told him all.

"And who is this damned villain? That pretty creature! the fairest, purest flower I ever saw!"

"Sir, he was my Lord's dearest friend, his *brother*."

"What, you don't mean Mr. Ross!"

"I do, sir, indeed."

"Good Lord! and were there no suspicions?"

Robert flushed. "Sir, I am only my dear Lord's servant."

"Humph! if all servants were of your sort, I'd have 'em about me as thick as bees. That poor child!"

"Is my Lady in danger, sir?"

"She may last for hours; I cannot say."

Robert uttered an exclamation of horror. "May the Lord help us all!" he said.

"Ay, my lad, no one else can. Go back, and keep as still as death itself."

In two hours McConnel returned. The Earl was sleeping heavily; there was no change in the Countess. He

sent Latham away for something, soon after he returned to the Earl. When Robert went, he put down a book he had been reading. After he had gone, the Doctor looked at it. It was a pocket Bible, beautifully bound; on the fly-leaf the Earl had written:—

TO

ROBERT LATHAM,

THE BEST OF ALL GOOD GIFTS,

In remembrance of his faithful service in times of trouble to

LONGLEAT.

“As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him: for he refresheth the soul of his master.”

The date was that riot time in Angel-Meadow. The Doctor wondered what the trouble and the service had been. The page was blotted with Robert's tears.

It was six the next morning before Lord Cranford awoke. He stared bewilderedly at Robert and the Doctor, who had both sat up all night—the latter having gone constantly between the two rooms of his patients.

“Robert!”

“Yes, my Lord.”

The Earl put his hand to his brow, then turned very white.

“You have been ill, my Lord,” said the Doctor, “take this, if you please.”

He drank it, and then gradually recollection returned. His color continually changed. “What time is it?” he asked.

“Six o'clock, my Lord.”

“Night, or morning?”

“Morning.”

“Then it was yesterday I was taken ill. This is a weary affair, Doctor.”

He spoke so like himself, that Robert with instinctive delicacy left the room; but he kept his faithful watch outside. No one should see his master when he was in his humiliating, *conscious* misery.

"I must have something, Doctor. You must give me strength to do what I have to do. I must follow that——" he set his teeth.

No, not yet even could he call Glen—that brother of his life's love—a villain! Not yet!

"You shall have some coffee, Lord Cranford."

He took it; and by then pale gleams of dawn were stealing through the edges of the purple curtains.

The Doctor drew them back, put out the lights, and stirred the fire. It was a beautiful, still morning. A few bird-chirrup and liquid thrush-notes were heard; but the park looked deserted of all life. Not a stag or fawn could be seen, nor a gardener anywhere.

Doctor McConnel sighed as he stood at the window, for he knew there was more sorrow to come yet to the inheritor of this stately home.

"I am going now, Doctor," he said.

"Stay, my Lord!" Even McConnel's self-control was tested. His voice shook, his hand trembled, as it rested on the young nobleman's arm.

"You must come to her Ladyship, your mother, sir."

"My mother! why?"

"She has not long to live, my Lord."

"Good God! My *mother!* Doctor, I cannot do without my mother. We have been all the world to each other, we have to be that again now. My mother! My own faithful mother!"

Oh, it was pitiful to see her son's clinging love, his trust in her who could never call him "*My Cranford*" more, as she had been wont to call him, in her pride and love! Never more! Oh, it was pitiful!

As soon as they entered her room, the Doctor saw a change in her. As the Earl approached, her eyes had that eager panting look which dumb animals have in trouble. But she could not speak, and the consciousness was momentary, if consciousness it were.

The Earl thought she was sensible, and interpreting the look for himself, said, "Do you want me, mother?"

Presently she opened her eyes, but there was no glance of meaning. He had taken Harcourt's place beside the bed. The stricken arm lay lifeless beside him. He kissed the beautiful hand that had so often swept back his glossy brown locks, and had rested lovingly on his head. Then his emotion welled forth; his agony was greater than he could bear. The bed shook with his sobs; but they were silent ones, hushed for her sake, whose still calm was so unlike life; it was the prelude to that stillness which was coming nearer, and nearer, and nearer.

She lay with her face towards him. Now and then a stifled sob came from the distant corner where Mrs. Harcourt sat, with her handkerchief before her eyes. Now and then a fluttering sigh stole through Lady Cranford's lips; now and then a low groan burst from the Earl's heart; and the kind doctor, whose dear face had never looked so kind or so sorrowful before, now and then heaved a long sigh of pity and distress. These were the only sounds heard in that room, where death was hovering—sparing, it might be, the mother for a while, that her only son might recover strength before she went hence, to be no more seen.

So the day wore on to its noon. One of the windows had been opened, and the gentle breeze stole in, swaying the lace curtains and the silk ones—bearing in, too, the perfume of the hot-house flowers that were scattered beneath on the terraces, in the sun. The watchers could

hear the singing of the birds in the wood; and once some one—a stranger, doubtless—went along one of the paths past the front of the hall, singing “Roy’s Wife of Aldivalloch;” that song jarred on their feelings so much that they were all in agony until it had died away in the distance, and there was no sound left but the carol of the birds, and the plaintive, low-toned wind.

Dr. McConnel touched the Earl “There is no change, my Lord. Will you come with me?”

He followed like one in a dream.

“You must eat something, my Lord. This fasting will not do.”

There was all the Earl’s usual dignity of manner when he went into the dining-room, and he gave an order to a servant. Luncheon was placed ready. How strange it seemed to find that room just as in ordinary circumstances. The old butler was standing by the sideboard. He was surprised to see the Earl; and with deeper reverence than even he had ever shown, he took his place behind his chair. Luncheon was a farce to Cranford. He drank one glass of light wine, and then telling the Doctor that he had something to do, he went away, down the “Lady’s Corridor,” to his mother’s morning room. He stood for an instant beside the memorial window. The misery that filled his heart cannot be told.

To his surprise, when he entered the room, he found the window open, and everything was covered with dust. These sad events had interfered with the usual orderly routine of domestic arrangements. The room had been forgotten, and was exactly as he and his mother had left it the day but one before. Her handkerchief and her knitting both lay where she had been, beside the table. He rang the bell, and sent for Mrs. Simcoe. She came so quickly, that the Earl still had his arms upon the table,

and his face laid down upon them. She coughed. Then he looked up, flushing scarlet.

"Mrs. Simcoe," he said, wearily, for he felt how worn out he was, "I sent for you to know all about this—this sad affair—this dishonor."

"My Lord, I do think there is some great mistake. I do, indeed. I saw my Lady on Wednesday, about three. I was in the picture-gallery with the carver and gilder, who came about those frames. She passed me, and said, 'Mrs. Simcoe, I wish you to see about the re-hanging of those small paintings in my morning-room; there is not one quite straight.' I said, 'Yes, my Lady, I will attend to it;' and then she smiled as she passed me—so sweetly, my Lord. I never saw her look so beautiful, and so—so—pardon me, my Lord—so like an innocent child." Mrs. Simcoe's voice faltered; but she checked her emotion, and went on: "I saw her go down the corridor, towards Mistress Cameron's rooms. Afterwards I saw my Lady again. It was an hour or two later. I was then on the grand staircase. The man was with me still, looking at some of the gilding there, and, my Lord, we were just in one of the niches—I saw her Ladyship flying, really flying, up the stairs. I am sure she didn't see us, and I wondered whatever made her run like that. Her face was as white as death. It gave me such a fright, if your Lordship will believe me, that I could attend to nothing more, and I sent the man down into the servants'-hall. Afterwards, orders were sent that no dinner was to be served. I saw Evans, and asked if her lady were ill. She said she had not complained. Later on, I was surprised to hear that she had gone to London, and that you were ill. We were all uneasy—I mean myself, and Latham, and Mrs. Harcourt. We didn't tell our dear lady."

Again Mrs. Simcoe's voice faltered, and her eyes filled. She stopped.

“Then my mother did not know of it?”

She shook her head, wiping her eyes, and then said: “No, my Lord; we thought it better not. But I am *sure*, quite sure, my Lord, that there *is* a mistake. It cannot be—and Mr.—”

Lord Cranford had had his face covered with one hand whilst she had been speaking. He removed his elbow from the table now, and looked at her. “It *is*, Mrs. Simcoe,” he said, slowly, “and with *him*. I sent for you, to hear what you knew, and to tell you that she never came to London to me. I was not ill.”

“But, my Lord,” she said, interrupting him in her eagerness, “might not he”—she could not name him, try as she would—“have heard that you were ill; or a thousand reasons may have taken my dear lady, bless her! to town. Oh, I cannot think the shame!”

Good Mrs. Simcoe—honest-hearted and faithful herself—she could not believe the miserable truth.

Lord Cranford’s mouth twitched slightly.

“Is it likely,” he said, “that your lady would leave home at that hour, alone, even with one so intimate as he was, without the attendance of her maid, even, or of one of her own servants, and be innocent?” It was torture to him to argue so of her—his Countess—his wife; but he went bravely on: “Two nights and one day have passed since then.”

“My Lord, the carriage might have met with an accident. Dear, dear!”

In her attempt to alter fact, she felt how useless it was—how futile her arguments.

He rose, and said, with great dignity, “The Dowager of Longleat is its only Countess now. Let that other never be named again in this Hall.” He flushed, and said, less haughtily, “She *was* my wife, and so having been, I could not bear that she should be spoken of as one dishonored.

Let her be as one dead, Mrs. Simcoe. Will you take care of this?"

She could not answer him, and he understood why. Just as she was turning away, she gave a startled look at the open window. "My lord," she said, in a deep whisper.

He turned round, frightened, and saw, resting on the grass, its brim even touching the window-sill, Helena's hat. He looked out quickly and saw, too, the little spade, and her handkerchief lying under it upon the garden-chair. It caused such a revulsion of feeling that he staggered back, and caught hold of the window. How came those things to be there? He gathered them up and went into the room. "Leave me," was all he could say; and she went, feeling almost as wretched as her master. Cranford burst into an agony of tears as soon as the door had closed. He understood it now; he remembered that conversation with his mother; he saw that she had been sitting close to the room, where she could hear what passed; and that explained to him the singular circumstance of the house-keeper having seen her rush up the staircase in the manner she had described. He could fully understand how her impetuous spirit would be roused almost to madness by what she heard—he so well remembered all that passed: perhaps, the more clearly for its having been his latest conversation with his mother—that he could distinctly affirm one thing, which was—that whilst the sad topic had been discussed it had not been *directly* mentioned, so that in case Elspie had *not* told her, her Helena would be as much overwhelmed with fearful conjecture, as she would be galled at his remarks and his mother's. He blamed himself bitterly. The remembrance of Elspie caused a keen pain to dart through him. Where was she? How had she borne this? The great mystery was Helena's having gone with Mr. Ross. It was yet an impossibility for the Earl to suspect him of deliberate, base design; but

somehow, several little circumstances came to his remembrance—not noticed at the time, or, at least, not suspected; but which now, seen in a new light, turned his very heart sick with trouble, fear, and agonizing resentment. He looked round that dusty room, usually so bright and pretty, now so desolate. It was his mother's favorite room; there he had learned his letters at her knee. He felt as if he could not bear his present misery. Then his eye fell on that hat, with its pretty blue ribbons. There was a knot on one of the strings, as if it had been entangled in her curls, for two or three long, golden hairs, were in the knot. He carefully drew them out, tenderly wiped the dust from the ribbons, and then he so vividly saw the sweet face beneath the shading brim, that he let it fall, and uttered a loud cry of anguish. But he had no time for the luxury of grief. His mother needed him. He carried those three relics—the spade, the handkerchief, and the hat, to Helena's rooms. Evans was there, kneeling before a couch, sobbing so violently, she did not hear the Earl's step. "Evans," he said, in a pitying tone, "you will make yourself ill."

She started up. "My Lord," she said, "where is my dear lady?"

"You have no lady," he said. "She is *dead* to you—to all—for ever dead to me. Don't think of her again. You loved her once: *I* now thank you for your faithfulness. It is a rare virtue"—he spoke bitterly, and motioned to her to go. She obeyed, sobbing as she went, vehemently. As she reached the door, he said, "Have you the keys, Evans?"

She came back, opened a drawer in a cabinet, took them out, and handed them to him. "The jewels, my Lord," she said, as clearly as she could speak, "are all in there; but this watch, my Lady bade me not touch, nor that white dress. Oh, my Lady, I little thought——"

Evans, being past self-control, hurried away, weeping. He looked at his beautiful gift. The watch was stopped. He shuddered as he touched it with his fingers; but he let it lie there. Then he locked up the hat and spade; the delicate little handkerchief he thrust into his breast, under his shirt. Though he was alone, he flushed scarlet as he did so. He locked all the drawers in the cabinet, and everything in the dressing-room. Then he went back to the bed-room, and drew down the blinds. Not until then did he look at the white robe on the bed.

Ah, if she could have seen that man's agony as he laid his head upon her pillow, where hers had so often rested—but would never, never more!—if she could have seen it revealed now in the presence of none but his God; if she could have heard his piteous wail: “My darling, my darling! my *only* love!” would she have said again—“I do this because he has been faithless?” Would the minor evils of temper and varying moods, have seemed of any moment now, contrasted with this deep, yearning love? Would she have believed that he *had* loved another, or ever had been unfaithful even in a thought to her? Ah, no. But as he so called her name, so mourned, he suddenly remembered her words to him about the Peri. He started as if stung, and, with a fierce look round that room, he went out, locked its door; drew down the blinds of the dressing-room, locked its door; went into the ante-room, did the same there. And as he turned the last key, he lingered a moment outside—just a moment, feeling as if he were leaving his wife's grave. He then went to his mother's room. He found Mr. Hamilton there, for rumours had been flying about the village, which had scared every inhabitant in it. Finally, they had reached the Rectory. No one knew the exact truth; indeed, it may be said, the truth at all; but one of the Hall men-servants had said that something was wrong. Mr. Hamilton was in his

study, when his old servant Susan, a sturdy Yorkshire woman, who had nursed him, and who was all but superannuated now, popped her head in, and with her usual bluntness, said,

“Mester William, I think as yo’ are wanted up at th’ Hall.”

The Rector looked up; he was busy with his next Sunday’s sermon—an old one he was “rubbing up”—so he looked *over* his glasses, rather than *at* her, and said, reflectively, “Well, Susan!”

She repeated her words.

“Who has sent?” he asked.

“I ne’er said as ony one ’ud sent. I tak’ it as yo’re one as should na wait for sendin’ when trouble’s agate.”

“Why, what is the matter?”

“Nay, I knawn naught abaät it; but it’s summot wrong wi’ th’ young lady, and th’ old un’s welly done for. If yo’ll tak’ my advice, yo’ll be marchin’.”

It did not require another word. He took up his hat and stick, and went quickly to the Hall. So the Earl found him in the Dowager’s room. Mr. Hamilton offered his hand without speaking a word.

There was deep stillness in the room. A great change had passed over the Countess. Dr. McConnel had her pulse under his finger. Her mouth was a little open; she was breathing audibly. Cranford went close to her.

“Is she worse?” he asked, frightened.

McConnel nodded gloomily.

He bent over her; her eyes opened; she seemed to be looking at him; but there was no answering smile, no recognition—they closed. And then the silence was broken by Mr. Hamilton’s voice—

“Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it.”

They knelt down—the Earl at the bed-side, with his mother’s hand in his; Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Simcoe in

the distance. The Doctor stood, looking anxious, keeping his finger on her pulse. No response was given; there was a solemn pause between the sentences. The prayers were uninterrupted until the Rector read—

“Take, therefore, in good part the chastisement of the Lord.”

“Stop!” said McConnel.

Cranford started to his feet. Mr. Hamilton looked up. There was a visible change on her face now.

“Mother!” the Earl cried in piercing tones.

She looked at him, and they all saw, with recognition, just for a minute, and only that. Her very soul seemed to be gazing through her eyes. Then “the windows” were “darkened” again.

“Oh, my mother! my mother!”

Mr. Hamilton’s tears rolled down at the sound of that cry. The Doctor swallowed his emotion; but his face turned pale, and he bit his lip fiercely. His professional calmness was lost in emotion. Cranford put a strong restraint upon himself.

“Mother!” he called again, with a fearfully earnest face, “mother! will *you*, too, leave me?”

There was no answer.

She was just on the edge of the “Border Land;” she could hear no voice but her Saviour’s, telling her to “Come up higher.” She could see no faces but those of the angel convoy that waited to bear her home.

Mr. Hamilton continued the prayers; but Cranford heard nothing until these words arrested his attention—

“If Thou wilt Thou canst even yet raise her up, and grant her a longer continuance amongst us.”

“Amen. God grant it,” burst from his parched white lips; but McConnel laid his hand upon him; the Rector raised his impressively.

“Christ, receive her soul!” he said.

Her eyes were gazing upwards; her face whitened yet more; a sweet smile settled on her lips; her hands were lifted with a convulsive throe, they fell gently, one upon her son's, as if in blessing. She heaved one sigh; then Longleat's "peerless Mary"—"at his side again"—was at rest. His WIFE—a widow never more, even as she said.

Her end was so peaceful, they scarcely knew she had gone; but death cannot be long mistaken. The Doctor whispered to Mr. Hamilton. The Earl looked at them hastily and suspiciously.

"My Lord," said the Rector, "will you come with me?"

"My mother needs me. I cannot leave her."

"You cannot help her now. She is in heaven, Lord Cranford."

They could not remove him; he laid his head upon her breast, calling her name piteously. There was not a dry eye in the room, but those of the dead mother and her son's. She could never weep again. God Himself had wiped away her tears. Longleat's faithful love had gone with bridal heart to be his own again.

Mr. Hamilton persuaded the Earl to leave at last; tenderly, as if he had been a child, he led him. Robert was in the ante-room waiting. The Earl refused his arm or his assistance.

"I am going to my room," he said, calmly.

So he went, to be alone with his sorrow and his God.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WEARY AT REST.

Her look and mind

At once were lofty, and at once were kind.
There dwelt the scorn of vice, and pity too,
For those that did what she disdain'd to do :
So gentle and severe, that what was bad
At once her hatred and her pardon had.
Gracious to all ; but where her love was due,
So fast, so faithful, loyal, and so true,
That a bold hand as soon might hope to force
The rolling lights of heav'n as change her course.
Some happy angel, that beholds her there,
Instruct us to record what she was here !
And when this cloud of sorrow's overblown,
Thro' the wide world we'll make her graces known.

WALLER. *On the Death of my Lady Rich.*

IN the meantime, where was Elspie ?

On Wednesday morning, unusually early, the servant who attended upon her went into Mistress Cameron's room, and, to her great surprise, found her nearly dressed, with a shawl over her shoulders. She was arranging one of the drawers in a chest ; others stood open, that showed she had been busy with them.

"Well, Mrs. Cameron," she said, "you *are* fine and early."

"Eh, lassie ; but it's nane a morn to lie. I just

minded mysel o' mony things I hae need to ken. There's kirtle an' gown at Calton Ha' I'll need in the comin' time o' cauld. I'll be gaun the morn to see aboot them. Wull ye gie the order for my ain shandry?"

"What time shall I say, Mrs. Cameron?"

Elspie walked to the bed-head, looked at the old big silver watch hanging there, and answered—

"Ye'll be sayin' half-past nine, lassie."

It was just nine when Annie fastened Elspie's shawl, and tied her bonnet-strings.

"Mrs. Cameron," she said, "will you have something? You took no breakfast; let me get you a glass of wine."

Elspie looked round the room drearily and wistfully, without noticing the girl's remark.

"I hae a strange feelin', a cauld feelin'," she said; "but the Laird is tender, his mercy endureth for ever. There's nae ca' for it, but I'm just like to greet, lassie."

Annie was quite accustomed to Elspie's quaint speech, but not to her being nervous in this way.

"Shall you be back to-night, Mrs. Cameron?" she asked, anxiously.

"I dinna ken, lassie. I'm auld and feeble, and the road is nane gude."

She did not come back until the following evening, just as the Countess died. Elspie noticed an unusual stillness in the court-yard as her shandry rattled over the stones. One of the grooms laid his hand upon a barking dog's head, another gravely held the horse, whilst a third assisted her down.

"Is a' weel?" she asked, a little anxiously.

The groom who helped her nodded, but did not speak.

As Elspie went in at one door, a maid-servant flew out

at another, with her apron before her mouth, her eyelids were swollen and red.

“Is that Mrs. Cameron?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“The Lord help us all! Our lady is just dead, and *she* gone!”

She ran back. The men went to the stables with gloomy faces and troubled hearts.

Elspie passed through the servants'-hall; it was empty, for they had all fled on hearing that she had come. No one dared to tell her what had happened, and the poor old woman went slowly up a staircase, and then along the corridor that branched off to her rooms—the Earl's old nurseries, as it has been already said—quite alone, and tiredly. She found her sitting-room (once the day nursery) empty. There was no fire; it looked drear and comfortless. Elspie sat down, waiting for her attendant, but somehow feeling too listless to ring for her. Everything seemed very quiet; she could not hear a sound in all that great mansion, so she sat with a heaviness on her heart for which she could not account, until three-quarters of an hour had passed; then the door opened, and her maid came in. She started when she saw Elspie.

“Eh, Mrs. Cameron!” she said.

“Well, lassie, ye hae been lang gane, an' left me my lane.” She spoke rather tartly, but still with no excitement or seeming trouble. Annie looked at her scaredly, and then darted from the room. Elspie sat still in surprise, a most pathetic picture of dependent old age. When the girl returned she fumbled at the strings of Elspie's bonnet so long that she said, impatiently, “What ails ye, lassie?”

The girl burst into a loud cry, and sobbed, “Oh, Mrs. Cameron, our lady is dead!” She had covered her face, so that she did not see Elspie's look, or she would sorely have repented her cruel thoughtlessness.

“*Your leddy dead!* Lassie, as ye hope to see the Laird abuve us a’, tell me what ye are meanin’.” She had risen, and had grasped the girl’s arm so tightly that Annie looked up frightened, and then she recoiled in great terror from that face, on which an awful, nameless dread was written. Knowing, as she did know, what had to be told, it flashed through her mind how much better it would have been if the young Countess had died, and so she kept silence. “Dae ye hear me, Annie?”—in her fear Elspie shook the trembling girl. “Dae ye hear? Wha is dead?”

“The Dowager. Not the Countess—not the young lady, Mrs. Cameron.”

“The Laird be thankit!” Elspie’s face lost its livid look, but it was as colorless as her hair. She tottered back to her seat, and, with a dazed look, reached forth her hand, and took from a basket her coif; she so trembled it was with difficulty she put it on. Then she looked at Annie, who sat with her back to her, and her elbow on the arm of her chair, sobbing bitterly. “The Ledy dead!—dead!”

Elspie repeated the word in an unrealizing way.

“An’ say ye,” she said, suddenly, “where is my ain bonnie bairn hersel? I’m meanin’ the Countess o’ Longleat. She’ll greet sair, my wean!—my bonnie wean! Her heart’s ower tender for ane sae frail. Say ye,” she repeated, as the girl only sobbed. Then Elspie’s lip quivered. “Lassie,” she said, in a touchingly, piteous voice, “ye are young. I am ower auld to fight wi’ sorrow, wull ye nane hae pity whiles ye are greetin’ for the dead, an’ tell me where is my bairn?”

The girl sobbed louder still. “Oh, Mrs. Cameron, don’t ask me—don’t.” There was a minute’s silence.

“Nane ask ye!” said Elspie, in trembling astonishment; “are ye daft wi’ trouble? or hae ye bin’ tellin’ the

fou' lee, an' auld Elspie maun leeve her lane, for her wean lies cauld." She rose from her chair in sudden dread; it gave her supernatural strength, for her step was quick, her tall form erect, as she went to the door.

The girl darted before her, and held her fast. "Mrs. Cameron," she said, in her wild terror, "don't go—don't ask. I dare not tell. Oh, what shall I do? The Countess has gone away—run away, I mean; and her rooms are locked up, and we shall never, never, never see her again."

All this was poured into Elspie's ears by the excited girl like a torrent. She felt almost mad in her fear and trouble.

Elspie stood still, perfectly still, apparently as calm as if she stood upon her native heather, with the plaintive sigh alone sounding in her ears. She had not rightly understood Annie, judging by her words now. "Wull ye say the same again, lassie?"

She did give Elspie the substance. "And we must never name her name again, Mrs. Cameron."

"Whisht!"

The girl stopped, startled. She looked at the dame in fear.

Elspie had drawn her tall figure to its fullest height, had thrown back her head with a mien so haughty that her coif might have been a crown. Her dark eye grew darker in its intent gaze; her lips were curved in scorn. She looked at her maid with a pity that was contemptuous, and smiled a bitter smile, but she spoke not a word.

She took one step. Annie clutched her dress; her tears had ceased to flow, for she had not expected this. She had looked for cries, feeble tears, and wailings, as is usual with the old in trouble; but she saw nothing of them, and Elspie's look awed her.

"Let be my gown."

Elspie spake commandingly.

Annie unloosed her hold.

“An’ why maun I nae gang?” she asked, sternly. “Mebbe ye fear I’ll be learnin’ frae the betters o’ yersel, where ye hard the shamefu’ lee. Ye thochtless lassie! ye niver kenned the honorin’ ways o’ bonnie Scotland’s handmaids, or ye wad hae blushed like ony rose before ye wad hae flung your ain black words on Longleat’s snaw-white Leddy. Did ye think Elspie Cameron was grown auld, and sae her heart was waur an’ feeble? Did ye think, poor lassie! wi’ your English siller-service, that because Elspie Cameron said her hundred prayers before ye saw the licht, that ye could blind her een—could turn her frae the bonnie bairn she rocked, an’ luvd, and tended till the Earl took her to himsel among the lilies that were nane fairer than the wean! Nane fairer!”

Elspie’s stern indignation melted as she said the last words, her high head drooped a little, her hands relaxed their stiff clench, her eye softened, she seemed to have gone back to the bridal day of her “wean.”

Annie gazed in astonishment. The torrent of angry sarcasm astounded her. Only a few minutes ago she had said to her fellow-servant, “This will kill Mrs. Cameron.” But where were the signs of grief even? Elspie’s haughty scorn of this charge against the Countess, the regal contempt with which she flung it from her back to her accusers, would have well become the Czarina of the Russias. Could this be the feeble dame who had lately sat quiet day after day reading her Bible, and then dozing in her old arm-chair? Could this stern woman, whose face seemed frozen into white imperishable strength, be she?

The sight was one never to be forgotten. In long years to come the story of Elspie Cameron’s faithfulness and love will be told in many a household. For such love, such faithfulness are rarely seen. Annie felt

this. It seemed to make all that had gone before seem unreal—she could not believe it to be true. Elspie so altered everything, that she could not realize now that the Dowager *was* dead; that the Countess *had* gone; but as Mrs. Cameron left the room—the dreadful facts came back in all their terrible reality, and she sat shivering and cold—waiting for what might come.

Have you, reader, ever known what it has been to wait for a doom? Sitting alone in a room, so quiet, that you could hear the sound of your heart beat, with parched lips, and eyes strained—have you listened for the sound of those coming who would tell you that, on which, perhaps, your very life hung? Have you so listened—longing, yet fearing to hear? If so, you will know something of Elspie's feeling as she stood at the door which led to Helena's rooms. She knocked—there was no answer. She tapped louder—all was dead silence. She called "Miss Helena!"—as well have called at the vault in Longleat Church, for all the answer given. Terror struck her. She glanced round, then through the domed gallery, where lords and ladies were looking down upon her from the walls—a haughty company, in truth! yet Elspie, so proud for her nursling, thought with exultation that *she* was one of them—the latest Countess—and the loveliest! "My Leddy!" she called again louder. At that instant she heard a mournful sound, it was borne distinctly by the west wind.

It was the minute toll, rung in Longleat Church tower.

She darted from the door, and went swiftly to the Dowager's rooms. In her whirlwind of excitement and trouble, she scarcely knew what she did: she could not have told what Annie had said to her; but she had a sickening, sudden belief, that Helena lay dead beyond those closed doors, which she had left. She tapped sharply at the ante-room—like one who could not bear the agony of

delay. In her agitation she turned the handle, the door was not locked. She entered, and found the blinds drawn down; she went into the dressing-room, found it also darkened—then she knocked at the bed-room door. She fancied she heard a voice, answer, "Come in,"—and she entered. But after a glance she started back with a cry, "The Laird save us a'."

The room was in solemn gloom. The fading light came dimly through the darkened windows—yet fearfully distinct in outline was that still form lying on the stately bed. The dark rich draperies—made its whiteness more startling.

Elspie's heart beat fast with loud, bumping knocks. "The Laird gie me his help!" she whispered. There was no answer.

A majestic calm—an awful silence reigned in that room—a silence which could never be broken—a calm that could never be disturbed.

Elspie went softly to the bed; paused an instant; then a *dread* shot through her like a pain—she lifted the cambric with trembling hand, and looked on the dead face of Longleat's Dowager Countess. Elspie clasped her hands—not a sound came from her lips—she stood almost as rigid as the lifeless form—gazing, and gazing, with the shadows deepening, the light waning so fast, that soon she would be in darkness with the dead. But she heeded not. She was with the past.

A little while ago, they two had stood together face to face, in that same room—the one, haughty and stern in her wounded pride; the other, unbending and fierce in her wounded love. And now they were brought face to face there once more.

Where was the strife that had been? Where the scorn poured out that day in cutting, bitter words?

Hushed, hushed for ever! The mighty Daysman—

whose power no mortal can oppose—had laid his hand on one ; henceforth there could be no bitterness between them. Yes, the Daysman—Death, had touched that one, and henceforth none but the angels and the saved, might hold communion with her.

Elspie felt this—and the sublimity of awe filled her soul. In that past time she had had no regard for their difference in rank, for her love for her nursling had been fierce and passionate, strong, and sustaining, her head never drooped, her eye never quailed in that sad hour, before the gaze of the high-born lady. She had flung back scorn for suspicion ; contempt for entreaty ; silence for inquiry ; pride for humility—and in her bitterness had stood as one on higher ground. Not so now—no, not now !

That aged woman knelt down beside the bed, not touching it, nor the surrounding sheets ;—without support, with her face buried in her hands, uttering no prayer, no cry, impelled only to this lowly act of homage, by the mysterious, the solemn majesty of death.

Then the tightly strung feelings relaxed ; gentle tears came to her aid, welling from her heart, dropping fast through her withered fingers. She clasped them, and raising her face, said with sobs, “I thank thee, Laird, that in thy covenanting mercy, Thou hast nae ta’en my bairn. Bless the Laird, oh, my soul, for his pitifu’ love, that wadna cut down my ane blossom i’ its morn. I thank Thee for the peace o’ this dear Leddy wha’s face tells me she hae lookit on Thine.” Elspie’s voice broke down now. She sobbed pitifully, but in a while she said softly, “Laird, wull Thou forgie the strife that was sae bitter atween us ? It was born o’ Elspie’s love for ‘her wean.’” Then she rose, and bent down over the dead face, so calm, so inexpressibly beautiful ! “Leddy,” she whispered audibly, “wull your speerit, that nae doot is on the wing abuve ye, tak’ the kiss frae Elspie Cameron, a servin’ woman ?

Ye hae gane to the Land o' the Leal, whare rich an' poor a' sing the same song, an' are as the angels before the throne o' ane God, ane Faither. Wull ye stoop your angel-broo, the Laird himsel has croon'd, an' tak' the kiss o' peace? It's a sair trial. Wae's me!"

The venerable woman bowed her silvered head, pressed her trembling lips upon that cold, God-crown'd brow, and then she felt as if the hovering spirit had indeed received the kiss—for a quiet peace settled in her own heart.

Elspie was reverently laying back the "face-cloth to the face" when Mrs. Harcourt entered, carrying a small lamp, and a basket of exquisite white flowers, so white, so waxen against the dark shining green leaves! what could be fairer, or more fitting to lie upon that bed.

The duties to the dead had only just been completed, when Elspie came into the room. Mrs. Harcourt had left for the flowers. She started when she saw Elspie.

"Is that you, Mistress Cameron?" she said, in a whisper.

"It's just my ainsel," answered Elspie, quietly. "I hae bin here my lane, lookin' on the dear Leddy, wha has been ca'ed, sae sudden, to the rest that remaineth for us a'."

The light fell on Harcourt's face, and showed her swollen eyes; but also a strange look of dread, doubt, and dismayed terror. She did not speak; but put down the lamp, and took flower after flower from the basket, laying them here and there upon the sheet, in the hands, and on the breast of her lady. A faint, delicate perfume was diffused through the room. She performed her task in silence until she came to the last flower, a most beautiful and fragrant tea-rose. "My Lady loved roses," she said, with a burst of tears laying it upon the pillow, where its fair leaves might rest against the cold cheek. She stood weeping, with the empty basket in her hand. Her tears were very very bitter ones—though they fell so quietly.

“I mind,” said Elspie, presently, “we hae a custom i’ my ain countra, where a’ my forbears lie thegither i’ the kirk yard on yon hill, o’ puttin’ white blossoms only on wee bairns an’ the godly deid.”

“Well, indeed,” said Harcourt, wiping her eyes, “then I am sure my Lady is one that oughtn’t to have a bit of color in her coffin, if that’s a sign; for if ever an angel was taken cruelly before her time, it has been her.”

“She’s the Laird’s ain noo. We maun bide his wull, an’ boo to his ca’,” said Elspie. “He grat sairly by the grave o’ Lazarus—it might be wi’ the moanin’ freens, an’ the twa puir women left their lane; but I mind oft thinkin’ it wad be for Lazarus himsel, wha He was callin’ frae the peacefu’ rest to our ain warld o’ sorrow ance mair. It was sair for the puir mon to pass through the dead-thraws afterhend again. I daur na mourn for the dear Leddy wha’s warfare is ended, an’ wha lies here as pure as the Day-lily* in the dawin.† I daur na—an’ ye maun nae ca’ it ‘cruel,’ Mistress Harcourt, for it was the Laird’s doin’. Blessed be his name i’ the darkness as the licht.”

Mrs. Harcourt did not answer. She was thinking with terror of what had to be told; for it was evident Elspie knew nothing.

Servants came in, bearing silver sconces with wax-lights. They placed them at the foot of the bed. Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Simcoe were going to keep their solemn watch over their lady.

Death, and death alone, had driven Helena, and all that Annie had said, from Elspie’s mind; but now, as she passed the threshold of the Dowager’s rooms, she turned back and said quietly, laying her hand upon Mrs. Harcourt’s arm,

* Asphodel.

† Breaking of dawn.

“I’m wantin’ to see the Countess o’ Longleat. Puir wee Leddy! She’ll greet for the sorrow.”

“Mrs. Cameron,” said Harcourt, frightenedly, “don’t—you—know?”

The words seemed to ooze from her lips—letter by letter—the question was asked so slowly.

“Say ye, Mrs. Harcourt?” said Elspie, quickly.

“Don’t—you—know—*all*?” the maid repeated.

A livid hue stole over Elspie’s face. And well might Mrs. Harcourt dread it. There had been one death. Would there be another?

“Mrs. Cameron,” she said, “Mr. Hamilton is here. Will you see him?”

“For why wad I be seein’ the godly man frae the manse, Mrs. Harcourt, when it’s my ain bairn, my ain Leddy, I’m just wearyin’ for? Wull ye nane tell me? The sair trial ye hae been ca’ed to bide has dazed ye, Mrs. Harcourt—puir body! I feel wi’ ye. Ye’ll nae think ither, wull ye?”

There was a restless, glittering look in Elspie’s eyes that somehow disproved or belied the tenor of her remarks. In truth, she was nervous now, and frightened.

“Come to your room, Mrs. Cameron, and I will tell you why.”

Elspie would not lean upon Mrs. Harcourt, she went rapidly to her rooms, and then stood there with every limb shaking. But Harcourt gently put her into her own chair; and then, as well as she could, as tenderly, and as briefly, she told her everything. Once she stopped, but Elspie said sharply,

“Dinna stay.”

“Well, she went with Mr. Ross——”

“An’ wha has daured to say she did na gang wi’ him awa to the Earl?”

“The Earl himself, Mrs. Cameron. No tidings have

come of our Lady—that *was* our Lady ; for she must be to us what *my* Lady is—dead ! Our Lord of Longleat has so willed it. He could not bear to hear her spoken of as living—and in shame !”

Harcourt’s face flushed. She said “Our Lord of Longleat” with unconscious pride, for his honor was hers—yea, the honor of all those servants who, like herself, had dwelt almost a lifetime in his service. For Harcourt had long been at Longleat before she was the Dowager’s own maid.

She stopped ; indeed, what more had she to tell ?

A fearful change passed over Elspie. Her chin had dropped upon the cambric folds that covered her breast. One standing above her could not have seen her face.

“An’ the Dowager Leddy ?” she said, huskily.

“It has killed her, Mrs. Cameron. You have just seen her.”

Tears filled Harcourt’s eyes ; but they did not brim over. Anxiety for her companion kept her calm outwardly.

Elspie put her hand to her brow, sighed, and looked round wearily. Then, with a touching expression in her face, she said, falteringly,

“Ye are nae showin’ disrespec’ to my grey hairs ? It’s a’ true, Mrs. Harcourt ?”

“All true,” said Harcourt, speaking with great difficulty. Such misery, in one so venerable, was a sight to move a harder heart than hers.

“Shall I *niver* see her mair ?” she said, pitifully. “*Niver* mair ? My bonnie wean, that I lo’ed mair than onything on airth. I rocked her on this auld bosom ivery gloamin’ hour. Mebbe ye niver nursed a wee bairnie ?—Ye canna tell my pain !”

Mrs. Harcourt burst into tears ; but Elspie’s eyes were dry.

“ Dinna greet,” she said, “ dinna greet. I wad na, for I maun dee. My wark is ower; an’ greetin’ keeps the dyin’ here.”

“ No, no,” said Harcourt, “ you shall have something. You are faint, and——”

“ Whisht!” said Elspie. “ The daintiest bit I iver gi’ed my bairn, woman, wad choke me. Ye niver kenned sic trouble as mine.”

She looked round as if not quite herself; then her eye flashed.

“ The Laird’s luvie is the same, Mrs. Harcourt. He’ll guard my lammie. It was Tuesday I gi’ed her my blessin’. Her gowden heid lay sae quiet on my knee, I thocht o’ a time lang syne, when the sea was sae cawm that the ship seemed sailin’ on wings, an’ the bairn was wakefu’. I rocked her i’ my twa arms to draw down the snaw-lids ower her bonnie een. I minded on it the Tuesday just gane. My bairn! my bairn!”

Bible words alone express her grief: “ She lifted up her voice and wept.” Directly after, Mrs. Harcourt saw her likely to fall, and she caught her as she slid on one side. At once she guessed it was a stroke. It was a slight one. She was quite sensible, and could speak, though her voice was thick. Being a tall, powerful woman, they had some difficulty in getting her to bed.

Dr. McConnel was still in the house; he came to her quickly. She had never seen him since that illness of Helena’s, and both he and she were much affected, though they both carefully hid it. There was a resolute look on Elspie’s grand face which was very striking. She assisted her attendants as much as it was possible for her to do. It was manifest that she would give in under protest alone, and that if she must die, it should be as the Saxon Earl—
“ Standing in armour.”

“ This is ane o’ the Laird’s door-knocks, Doctor,” she

said, "to bid me mind He's waitin'. It's nane my ca' hame."

McConnel nodded, and presently she said,
"I maun leeve to find my wanderin' lamb."

As she spoke, the minute-toll came through the air from the church in the distance. The women held their breath to listen; but Elspie lay calm and quiet, her face almost as serene as that other she had just gazed upon. Now and then her lips moved in prayer for the child.

No one saw the Earl that night. He rang for Robert the following morning, who perceived at once that his Lord had not even undressed.

"You must despatch these telegrams," he said, "and wait for the answers."

Robert took them silently, but he looked wistful.

"My Lord, may I bring you something?" he asked.

The Earl shook his head, and Robert did not venture to say more. He wondered that he had dared to say what he had done before—there was such calm dignity in his master's manner now.

Three hours passed from the time of Latham's leaving the Hall to his return. He rode slowly back; his horse was Lord Cranford's favorite. The Earl had ridden it miles and miles with Helena, when they were together at Longleat. The groom had sent it for exercise, and the beautiful creature might have known there was trouble. Its head drooped, and the usual spirited, graceful capers were exchanged for a slow walk. But Robert did not urge him; he well knew that his attendance would not be required that day by the Earl.

It was a lovely morning. Late as the season was, the sunshine was warm, and there was a fresh wind that came whistling over the downs, and seemed to come too on purpose to put new life into the year that was now so old. There was no melancholy in that sere time. Robert was

thinking this, and contrasting the out-door life in the parks and the Longleat woods, with the inner life of the Hall, when he came to the lodge. White blinds covered its latticed windows. A very old woman, who did not often move from her chair by the fire now, pushed aside her granddaughter, and hobbled with her stick to open the gate. Her eyes were red with weeping. Yet she said not a word, for it was she who had rolled back the gates for the bride—who now lay dead at Longleat. Robert, too, was silent. Instead of the welcome-bells of long ago, they both heard the muffled minute-toll, and their hearts were too full for words.

He turned his horse on to the grass, the sound of hoofs upon the gravel disturbed the strange influence of that bell, and then he met the postman that brought the servant's letter-bag, who touched his cap to "My Lord's gentleman," and passed on with a grave face. Then came the head dairyman, after him a park-keeper; they all passed on without a smile or a word. These were signs of a great, a common woe.

He rode up to the stables, left the horse with the groom, and went into the servants' hall. The butler was opening the letter-bag in the housekeeper's room, he was told. So he went there, and a letter was given to him. He did not at all know the handwriting, so, after looking at it all ways, he opened it. It was from "Miss Seymour to Robert Latham," and it told him that his mother, who had been ailing for a fortnight more than usual, was now in danger. That if he wished to see her alive, he must come at once.

With Margaret's usual thoughtfulness she told him a train would serve at ten minutes past six that night. He read and re-read the letter. Mrs. Simcoe and the butler were both watching him. He looked up, started, and then gave them the news. Mason shook his head.

"Troubles always come like flies in summer, my lad,

thick ; and one doesn't know where from. It's a bad business, but Brixham will take care of my Lord, and your mother is your mother. Happen she'll mend, happen not ; but when God Almighty sent this trouble, He showed you *your* place. You must go, my lad."

"And you had better have a cup of tea now, here," said Mrs. Simcoe, "and I'll see about some fruit being cut at once. A few grapes are never wrong in a sick room."

Robert stared bewilderedly. "I must see my Lord," he said.

"Nobody's against that, my lad, if you'll do it sharp," said Mason.

Robert went. The Earl answered the tap at his door, took the telegrams, and was turning in again ; but Robert's manner arrested his notice. "My Lord," he said, "can you read this ? Will you pardon me ?"

The Earl turned a deep red, and then Robert knew that he had expected it was something from *her*, by his after paleness and trembling, and it filled him with double sorrow to have caused this pain.

"Robert," he said, "you must go at once. Remember she is your mother. I will be answerable for every requisite expense. Don't spare any comfort for her. You will return when she is better, should *my* sorrow be *your* sorrow may God comfort you !"

His voice was steady, yet it was full of tears.

That noble Earl ! Who, deserted by his wife, dishonored by his friend, bereaved by his God—could yet give thought to the simplest needs of others, and had sympathy in his own breaking heart for the sorrow of his servant.

No wonder that as Robert went away, almost blinded by his tears, he felt bitter indignation against him who had wrought all this woe. He had been the attendant of the

boys in all their rambles, and his indignation was the keener because of the great love the Earl had ever had for Mr. Ross.

Robert loved his Bible, and one day long after these events occurred, he said that all through those dreadful hours one text had been continually in his thoughts—
“Perfect through suffering.”

“I thought, somehow, they seemed to have been written for my Lord,” he said, “and that perhaps his trouble was sent to make him even more like Christ.”

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARET REDEEMS HER VOW.

Thou stood'st, as stands a lovely tree,
Whose branch unbroke, but gently bent,
Still waves with fond fidelity
Its boughs above a monument.

The winds might rend, the skies might pour ;
But there thou wert, and still would'st be
Devoted, in the stormiest hour,
To shed thy weeping leaves o'er me.

BYRON.

It was midnight when Robert arrived in Manchester. He knocked gently at the door of the cottage. A woman opened it, peeped out cautiously, and shaded the candle with her hand. Her face brightened when she saw him.

"Come in," she said, "hoo'll be rare an' set up as yo're come ; aw live at No. 8, and aw nursin' her."

"How is my mother ?"

"Well, hoo's i' a middlin' way. Hoo's bin i' danger ; the doctors wur sayin' as happen hoo'll mend ; but aw dunnot think mich at aught they've gotten fort' say. There's two on 'em : one mon looks as if he wur thinkin' so mich he did na know what he wur sayin' ; an' tother—he's youngish, looks as if he ne'er thowt at o'—there's a pair on 'em ! So aw hearkens at what they dun say ; an' aw dun o' as they tell me, and moor too ; or hoo'd ne'er ha bin here neaw."

“Yo’ geet th’ letter, then, as th’ parson’s sister wrote, aw axed her for t’ write th’ direction big. Hoo’s stayin’ a wick or two wi’ her brother; hoo comes a deal a-seein’ yo’re mother, and hoo’s browt her a vast o’ jelly an’ things, but aw thinks a deal moor o’ yerbs. Aw allus believed as they wur so strengthenin’. Aw’ve put the doctor’s bottles eawt o’ seet mony a time”—(as this is a *fact*, medical men, who may perchance while away a few moments by reading even “*a novel*,” would do well to make a note of it)—“an’ gen her istance o’ kinds on ’em, an’ if hoo mends it ’ull be them as has cured her. Aw’ve moor faith by th’ half i’ God Almighty’s yerbs nur I han’ i’ th’ doctor’s stuff.”

All this time Robert was pulling off his boots, and now opened his bag; he was too weary to answer her, and full of thankfulness that his mother was alive.

“Yo’ mun have summat to ate,” she said.

“No, thank you; if my mother is awake, I will go to her.”

“Ay, hoo’s waken. Eh, my goodness!” she exclaimed at the sight of the superb grapes he had unpacked.

“Well, ra—ly! but them met be plums. I ne’er seed nowt i’ Victoria Market to cap ’em.”

She went upstairs, and before Robert could follow he heard her telling his mother there was “a seet comin’.”

But Mrs. Latham didn’t think of that sight when her eyes fell upon her son. She raised her feeble arms, and clasped him when he bent over her, with a love that couldn’t be told in words.

The garrulous neighbor left them together, for even she was touched.

“I did na think as I should iver see yo’ again, lad,” his mother said faintly; “an’ how yo’ han growed!”

“Nay,” he said, smiling, “I’ve done with that this long time.”

“Yo’ wur na so big when I left yo’ at gronfeyther’s, as

hand over his eyes almost fiercely, "Ay, dead, and murdered—for I can call it nothing else—and my Lord is broken-hearted. Nothing but my poor mother's illness would have brought me from him this day."

Margaret had turned sick with terror. "What do you mean?" she stammered. "Where is the Countess?"

"She has gone away and left him, Miss Seymour—gone with Mr. ——"

"Robert Latham!" Margaret Seymour laid her gloved hand upon his arm, and her voice of indignation stopped his utterance.

At that instant the door of the cottage opened, Edward came in. He had called for his sister, but he stood still on the little mat, with the latch in his hand, staring at those two, as well he might, for they were looking into each other's faces—Margaret's like death, Robert's almost livid; her hand grasped his arm still. She recollected herself, and, without speaking, went to the door, closed it, also a door at the foot of the stairs; and then, with an effort that was evident, she said, in a whisper, "Edward, he has brought *terrible* news. Go on, Robert, tell me all."

The man's face was scarlet; the tale of his Lady's sin seemed too shameful to be told. He hesitated.

"It was on Tuesday," he said at last, "about four, I think, that his Lordship went to town. He left a note for the Countess with me. I gave it to her myself, when she had left her rooms dressed for dinner. I could not help noticing how very, very beautiful she looked, Miss Seymour; but her face was flushed, and her eyes so bright that I told Evans afterwards I thought her Lady was not well. She did not seem at all like herself. She wrote a line or two on the back of my Lord's note, to our dear Lady that lies dead."

His voice faltered, so that two or three minutes passed before he went on.

“That note I took to our Lady’s room, and gave it to Mrs. Harcourt. Afterwards I heard that the ladies were not dining together; indeed, Evans says now that the Countess took nothing. I was somehow restless—I had not gone with my Lord because I have a lame hand. I was near to the front of the hall, when I heard a carriage dash up. I don’t know what time it was, but it was dark nearly. I ran in, thinking it was his Lordship, and wondering how he could have come back so soon, but one of the men told me it was Mr. Ross.”

Margaret and Edward both started, and looked at each other. Robert’s voice was singularly earnest now, and his gestures very emphatic. He appeared to forget where he was, as if the incidents of that night were so vividly before him.

“It was Mr. Ross, and afterwards he was with my Lady in the library. In a little while Evans went to the housekeeper for something—it might be an hour or more after—in a great hurry, and she said her Lady was going to London, for the Earl was ill. I was casting up an account for Mrs. Simcoe, having nothing to do, and you may be sure I was distressed, for I knew my place was beside my Lord then, lame or not lame. So I went to the library and knocked. As soon as Mr. Ross saw me, he looked quite away, and seemed confused. ‘Sir,’ I said, ‘is my Lord very ill?’

“‘No,’ he answered. ‘Why?’

“I told him.

“‘Oh!’ he said, ‘it’s nothing; he will be back to-morrow.’ But, oh, he was so white!

“I said, ‘Mr. Glen, I must go with my Lady. Brixham is never with him when he is ill; he cannot attend to him as I can. I must go, sir.’ But he said, quite testily, ‘Don’t be foolish, Latham; your orders are to stay here.’

“I went away; but I lingered in the entrance-hall until

the Countess came. She had been all in white an hour or two before, now she was all in black, with a veil over her face. I was startled, because I had never seen my Lady dressed so. I cannot tell you how I felt. I asked her if I might go; but Mr. Ross came up, and he said, in his firm, grand way, that nobody can resist, Miss Seymour—

“ ‘ Latham, don't detain the Countess.’ ”

“ Then I went to the carriage, though it wasn't my place, and I opened the door. My Lady looked as if she would turn back, but Mr. Ross assisted her in, and then they went. I *felt* there was harm in it, but I couldn't say my thoughts; and then Evans came with something that had been forgotten. I did jump when I saw her, Miss Seymour, for I had forgotten all about her.”

He paused, then, and looked through the window: the sunbeams were stealing down upon it now.

“ Who is Evans, Robert? ”

“ She is my Lady's maid, Miss Seymour.”

“ Then, did the Countess go *alone* with Mr. —— ”

“ She went quite alone with Mr. Ross.”

There was silence now in the little kitchen. The tick, tick of the clock went on monotonously, a cinder dropped now and then, or a footstep sounded overhead. They were the only signs of life. Those three might have been inanimate.

Margaret thought of an ill-natured remark, made long ago—“ You will hear strange things of Helena Davenant before you have done with her history.” Then she remembered her vow, for the time for its fulfilment had come.

Edward laid his hand upon her shoulder; his face was very stern. “ Well, and the *end*? ” he asked; both Margaret and the servant were startled by his tone.

“ Sir, my Lord came home the next day; the Countess had not been to him; he had not been ill.”

"Oh, Edward!" Margaret said; the lie shocked her so much.

"Our Lady had a stroke, sir. She died the next day; but her first seizure was apoplexy."

Edward's face blanched, and you can picture that; but you cannot imagine the mournfulness of Robert's tone. There was great weariness in it—the weariness that is born of sorrow. And then he suddenly burst into tears. He went to the window, laid his face down on his arm, sobbing bitterly. Neither Edward nor Margaret moved. She could not have shed a tear to have saved her life; and Edward's indignant commiseration was strong.

"Miss Seymour," Robert said, at last, "I beg your pardon, but it has been a terrible time. My mother's illness has tried me, too. I thank you for writing very much, ma'am."

"Have you heard of or seen General Davenant, Robert?"

"No, madam. Mrs. Simcoe sent, but the General was away; they did not know where a letter would find him, as he was travelling home, and was expected to-night."

"To-night! Edward, I must go. I must seek Helena. I *will* save her."

"My dear sister! it is useless. What can you do?"

"I *must*, Edward. Years ago, I vowed a vow for her. I dare not, I cannot, break it now."

"Shield her from sorrow, save her from sin"—that had been Margaret's vow in innocent school-days; she could not forget it now.

"Margaret," he whispered, "don't you know?—it is too late; the week is almost spent. She could never go back to *our Earl* again."

"Don't, Edward, oh, don't! I will bless you if you will not say it." Her pale, earnest face was agonized with entreaty. "Robert," she said, turning to him, "you will

help me ; you will do this for your Lady, knowing how the Earl loved her. Oh, think of his love, think of his sorrow ! Robert, she was good, and innocent, and lovely. Oh, try to save *his* heart from breaking ! Help me to save *her*. Let us go, let us go now."

"Miss Seymour!"—Robert's eyes were fixed on the ground ; his face was pale ; his lips seemed thin, through their past compression ; but he spoke firmly—"I would lay down my life for my Lord, and think nothing of it. I would have done it gladly for her sake, to have saved my dear Lady from this. We were all proud of her, we all loved and honored her—I more than any one, for she was my dear Lord's Lady, that I have lived a life with. But I can't do anything now. It is too late. The Earl will not follow them. Her rooms are all locked up ; we are not to speak her name. My Lord has willed it. I dare not break *his* silence. How could I try to bring her back to *him* !"

It was unconsciously, but the man spoke with honest scorn ; and the red blood rose to the roots of Margaret's hair as she saw how low even a noble woman may fall—*must* fall—through one false step. The humiliation lowered her voice, as she said, "Can *nothing* be done, Edward ?"

He had never seen her in his life so agitated and wild.

"Just think," she said, excitedly. "Would they leave England ? What ships are sailing ? Oh, let us go ! let us go !"

Edward couldn't answer ; but he took her to the brougham at the end of the street, and he gave the coachman directions to stop at a place where shipping intelligence could be gained. The first on the list was "The Desperate," a fast-sailing vessel, advertised to leave for Australia two days before this.

"Another," Margaret said.

But Edward's eye rested on that one. He said, "The

time is nothing; they are seldom punctual; she would likely only drop down to Gravesend."

"Then, do you think that is the vessel?"

"I cannot tell, indeed, but as it is the first sailing, I think it probable."

"Home, quickly," he called to the coachman; and then he said: "But, Maggie dear, I have no hope of bringing her back, and——"

She put her hand on his. "Edward, I once had great influence with that child."

"Child!" he said, contemptuously. "Nay, don't give her such an innocent name."

"She was that to me, Edward. I cannot change," Margaret answered, quietly.

Her brother was struck by her tone, and by the words. Margaret looked like one who could not change, who would be true and faithful, because it was not possible for her to be otherwise. His respect for her had never been so high.

"She cannot regain her lost place, dear; she cannot go back to Longleat. Our poor Earl! Oh, it was cruel!"

Margaret sat cold as death; not a word escaped her lips. She was picturing Lord Cranford, bereaved of his mother, and *deserted*. It was too terrible. She shuddered, and looked into Edward's face pitifully.

"You will go with me, brother?"

"I will, dear."

His kind tone almost melted her icy misery; she drew a long, deep breath, and then said—

"Some day, Edward, when, perhaps, I am going to die, I will tell you why I love you for this."

But, as if she had already told him, he knew why—knew why; and he honored her more for her heroism in the past, and her effort now to save Lord Cranford's wife, than he had ever honored her before.

They left Manchester by the night mail, and by nine the following morning they were at Green's office, where they learned that the "Desperate" had left the docks.

"Indeed," the clerk said, "we have received intelligence this morning, about an hour or two since, that she has sailed from Gravesend."

"Can you oblige me with a list of the passengers?" Edward asked.

"Certainly, sir. There were very few on board."

The clerk glanced at Margaret, who was so fearfully white. He took down the book, and read, in a business, matter-of-fact way—

"First-class passengers, with starboard-stern cabin, Mr. Melville and lady."

Then he stopped, and looked up.

"Go on," Edward said.

A very short list followed. Mr. Ross's name was not there; but a sudden thought struck Edward—

"I suppose you did not see Mr. Melville?"

"Oh yes, sir, I did," said the clerk. "Mr. Glen Melville I fancy his name is. That was the name by which I heard his lady address him."

At the name of "Glen," Margaret uttered a slight exclamation.

"I saw them on board. A tall, very distinguished-looking man, with long black wavy beard, the finest I ever saw. The lady was very beautiful. I never saw such a couple. She was fair, with golden hair and very large dark eyes—purple eyes, soft as velvet."

Margaret's grasp of Edward's arm grew tighter; she scarcely breathed; everything seemed to swim before her gaze.

Edward said, "The persons are the same."

"There is a train to Gravesend in twenty minutes,

sir," said the clerk: "it is quite possible that you might catch the "Desperate," if you are anxious to see Mr. and Mrs. Melville."

Mr. and Mrs. Melville!

Margaret instinctively covered her eyes, and shuddered.

"No, no!" she said.

"May God forgive them!" burst from Edward's white trembling lips, and then he took his sister away, leaving the clerk dumb with astonishment.

A gentleman had been standing behind Edward the whole time, and now he questioned the clerk.

"I may be wrong," he said, "but I believe this Melville is no Melville at all, but just Mr. Ross, the member for Henley, who has gone off with the Countess of Longleat. The rumour was floating about town all yesterday. If it be he, I hope that parson will catch him, and preach hell-fire to him like a Methodist, the scoundrel!"

"*That* he isn't," said the clerk, decidedly and warmly; "and I'll not believe that Mr. Melville has gone off in any name but his own."

"Well, I can't say," said the other, "for I never saw him."

"He is the grandest fellow you ever saw, sir. I was delighted to do anything for him, and she is lovely beyond anything. I don't believe it, I cannot. Their manners were not those of persons in such a plight as that—so cool and aristocratic. They had every luxury for the voyage."

The fascinated clerk looked puzzled.

"No doubt of it," said the other. "Ross is one of the richest fellows in the country; and the worst of it is, there is no knowing where the mischief will end. People that are high in position do such harm when they go wrong. He was a member of the House, a great public

speaker; hundreds of young men have made him their model; he was always on the right side in his speeches; and now he has stolen his friend's wife. If Ross hasn't to suffer, there isn't a God in heaven."

"Well, I am certain this Mr. Melville is no Ross," said the clerk. "That lady looked distressed, sir, did she not?"

"Poor thing!" said the old gentleman; "what sin there is in the world."

Edward and Margaret were on their way to Gravesend; her look of misery went to his heart.

"Maggie," he said, "our mother would call your indulged grief morbid."

She remained unmoved till he whispered—

"Would our Earl desire it?"

Then she burst into tears.

A group of watermen and sailors were on the jetty Edward went to them.

"Has the 'Desperate' sailed?" he inquired.

The men turned their heads towards him.

"Ay, sir, ay," said an old sailor, with his hands in his pockets; "yon's her topmasts just above the line, sir. There's a fair wind; she'll soon be out of sight."

Edward shaded his eyes, the sun shone so brilliantly on the dancing waves, hoary with foam. Very dazzling was the old sea—full of life—exhilarating to hearts free from trouble. But as he stood gazing on those thin lines that stood clear against the sky, he was sad enough, thinking of those sailing beneath them, whose blended life of sin had been baptized already by so many tears and would evermore lie beneath the shadow of a broken-hearted mother's tomb. Had the shadow fallen? Was that faithless wife even now looking back with longing for the life that could never more be hers?

As he thought thus, Margaret came to him. He put his arm round her, and pointed to the mast just visible.

She understood him, and, laying her face against his shoulder, wept silently.

The sailors walked away seeing the lady was in trouble, for there was never yet a true English tar who had not the heart of a woman, the courtesy of a gentleman, and the bravery of a lion. Not one passed her without touching his sou'-wester or doffing his cap, although her face was hidden, and she could not see their tokens of respect.

They were left quite alone, with the sea thundering in its break "those league-long rollers," and Edward, with Margaret's face still hidden on his shoulder, watched those lines against the sky until they seemed stars of darkness for a moment, then dipped below the waves, and *he* knew there was night for evermore.

"The ship has gone," he whispered. Margaret and Helena were parted for ever; and still worse, a great ocean, which could never be sailed over, lay between Helena's past and future.

For ever parted! Yes; for though another meeting had to come, the voice of one would be silent, her heart stilled.

"It is of no use staying, love," Edward said; "it is all over; they are past recal."

She raised her head, and looked seawards. There was nothing to be seen but bounding waves glittering in the sun. She looked for awhile, then passed her arm through Edward's, and they went their way.

"Edward," she said, as they were in the return train to London, "you must not think me unreasonable; but I am going to General Davenant. A long time ago he comforted me; I think I can comfort him now."

Edward did not understand her; nor could he guess anything of the truth; but seeing her earnestness, did not oppose her intention, though he questioned its advisability.

It was about ten o'clock that night when a hired coach drove through the park-gates of Calton. There was a moon, her beams shone down in cold calm contrast with the fierce angry grief of him who called Calton his "home." Great masses of trees threw their black shadows on the silvered ground; but on the paths lay the dim gold of faded leaves, and they rustled with a wintry cheerless sound, as the horse's hoofs scattered them aside. They were like unprofitable, worthless lives that are flung into the grave, whilst the reaper binds the golden sheaves for whom the Lord hath need. Very fair looked Calton in the eyes of those two, driving amid its trees, over its park slopes. Margaret's heart was beating very fast. The driver got down from his seat and pulled the bell. They had stopped at the side of the old grey arch, according to Margaret's direction—her nerves could scarcely have endured the thundering echoes of the entrance. All was still. They could not see a light in any window. Margaret could not help thinking of Helena's marriage night, when she, herself, and the Earl returned here from the chapel.

"I don't think the General will be at home," Edward whispered, as people generally do under such circumstances.

Margaret did not speak.

The cabman came up to the window. "Shall I ring again, sir?" he said with a wheezy voice, touching his hat, "the bell is stiff, I didn't pull 'ard."

"Wait a moment or two."

"Very good, sir." He stood still, with the cab-handle in his hand.

They could hear that there was a wind rustling in the trees, but it was a very slight sound.

"You had better ring," Edward said.

The man went briskly to the door, and this time he did "pull 'ard," for a loud peal rang through the stillness.

In two or three seconds a grey, or a powdered servant came to the door, and looked into the arch.

Edward had got out of the cab. "Is General Davenant at home?" he asked.

"He cannot be seen, sir."

Margaret's acute senses had caught the low, respectful answer. She got out, and went to the man. "Has he received any sad intelligence?" she asked, quickly.

He looked at her in surprise, and hesitated.

"I know General Davenant," she said in her eagerness. "I am *sure* he will see *me*."

There was something in her manner which was almost irresistible to the man; but he still wavered. "Madam," he said in a low voice, "My master is in great trouble."

"I know it, I know it," she answered. "Where is he?"

"In the library, madam; but I dare not admit you. No one has seen him since the morning."

Margaret turned to Edward wistfully, then she said to the servant, "I will undertake all responsibility. I must see the General." She passed him in an instant—went through the hall, parted the great Gothic doors, and wended her way to the library.

The servant seemed inclined to follow, but Edward said, "Don't fear, my sister will not be unwelcome, I think."

"Sir," answered the man, "do you know the trouble?"

"I do indeed," he said, "how is the General?"

He shook his head before he answered. "I can't say, sir. He came here and heard all—then he went to his room, and only came from that to his library to-day. I don't know what's to come of it." He showed Edward into a room where a fire burned brightly. It was the same in which Helena and Cranford were betrothed. The man lighted the lamps of a bronze and gilt chandelier, like a church's, and left him.

Edward drew back a small curtain from a picture. It

was Cleopatra in her agony. It impressed him as it had once impressed the Earl; but he little guessed what a thrill of pain would agitate Lord Cranford's heart *now*, if he saw the picture.

Margaret tapped at the library door softly. There was no answer. She turned the handle; the door yielded, and she went in. She could scarcely see anything, for a single lamp gave the only light in that large sombre room; there were a few red embers in the white-ash of an all-but-dead fire. It looked very dreary, as Margaret stood on the threshold, with her heart beating fast, and her limbs trembling. Then she saw the General in the distance, and she closed the door. It was evident that he had not heard her entrance; he was sitting in a low easy-chair, his elbows were on his knees, his face buried in his hands. Nothing but his grey head was visible. She went up to him, and whispered softly, "General Davenant!"

He started, and looked up in amazement.

In an instant she had thrown off her bonnet, and was kneeling down before him, gazing up into his face. "Don't send me away," she pleaded, "I have come here to comfort you."

He groaned, and hid his face again.

Her lips quivered. "This is a fearful grief," she said, struggling with her tears; "but the sorrow we reap is not always of our own sowing."

He looked up then, with an expression on his face which she never forgot.

"I deserved it all, Miss Seymour. Oh, Helena, my child! my child!"

Margaret laid her forehead on his knee, weeping bitterly.

"Why do *you* cry?" he asked, in a voice from which everything but despair was taken.

"I loved Helena," she said. "Years ago I vowed that

I would save her from trouble, or from sin if I could. I tried to do both to-day, but it was too late—too late!”

Ah, how often are those words the epitaph of lives!

He laid his hand upon her head. That touch would have been the finishing stroke to hysteric excitement in one less self-controlled than Margaret Seymour.

She kept still, not sobbing; but her tears dropped on the carpet.

“Miss Seymour,” he said, “I thank you for coming to me. Mine has been a loveless life. I am alone in the world, and dishonored now.”

She could say nothing, it was too true; but, oh, how she longed to comfort him!

“I have seen the past to-day,” he went on presently. “And I have seen that God’s justice is retributive in this world.”

“General Davenant,” she said, laying her hand on his, “God’s promises are more than his threatenings. He is long-suffering. It is we ourselves who are the just avengers of our own wrong-doings. The punishment of our sins lies in the thought of what we might have been. It is not God who is severe.”

“Am I not punished?” he asked, mournfully. “And did I not merit it?”

She did not answer him.

“My child, for whom I never showed a father’s love—who was doubly wronged—has been the sword to pierce my heart. But it matters little. My days are over. She for whom I have borne a blighted life lies dead in yonder Hall.”

Margaret started. She understood his meaning in a moment—saw his history clearly. The General’s life had been blighted by his hopeless love for the mother, even as her own had been blighted through love for her son. Instinctively she laid her cheek upon his breast.

He bent his white head, looked down upon her, and in that dreary room, the tender bond of a daughter's love was given to him. He folded her in his arms, and, for the first time during many, many years, General Davenant shed tears that were the meltings of his heart.

She calmed herself to soothe his grief; for, woman-like, she wished to do something to comfort him. As his sobs stilled, she raised herself, and said,

“General Davenant, the fire is out, and the lamp almost.”

But he held her more closely to him, and she tried for his sake to overcome her own tendency to fresh tears.

In a while he felt her shiver.

“You are cold,” he said.

She would not contradict him, that he might rouse himself to his own comfort.

He rang the bell. The servant came who had answered the door. He looked very much relieved when he saw the lady standing beside his master, with his hand in hers—as if she had been his daughter. The General told him to bring coal and lights; and very soon there was a cheerful blaze and warmth diffused through that splendid room, that perhaps had never looked so bright or comfortable before as it did after Margaret had drawn the General's chair close to the hearth, and had gone quietly up and down, giving those little touches here and there which are so well understood by women, and which, though seeming trifles, often contribute so much to the pleasure and comfort of men, though they seldom detect the cause. He watched her graceful figure moving so quietly, and it added more to his poignant misery; for as she was now, so Helena might have been in the past years—if he had been that to her which the tie between them demanded. It was too late now for him to make atonement.

“General Davenant,” Margaret said, “my brother is here. May I bring him to you before we go?”

He lifted his face without answering; but she understood its mute appeal.

“We will not leave you desolate,” she said, falteringly, “if you wish us to stay a while.”

He grasped her hand, but he covered his face and sat still. She remained silent, until he looked up and thanked her with a woe-worn smile; but never had such an expression been seen on his face as at that moment since the days of his youth, when he looked on the love of his life—Mary Cleveland. Margaret was struck by the change it wrought in him.

When Edward came in, he saw that Bronwylfa’s pearl had shone in this dark hour of Calton’s need; but it was a weary, weary night! Little was spoken, although they did not separate until long after midnight.

It so chanced that Helena’s rooms had been aired but yesterday, hence Margaret occupied them. You remember that chamber, do you not?—with its long lattice looking over the beautiful landscape. The wingèd angel still looked down from the white bed’s Tudor crown; the Madonna’s lips still seemed moving as the shadows of the leaves trembled on her moon-lit face; and on the table the black marble cross stood yet, just as she had left it—just the same as in that old time when the innocent girl went to rest there, dreaming dreams of happy years to come with Cranford!

Margaret stood at the window, looking on the distant towers of Longleat—a dark, gloomy pile against the sky, whose moon was silvering the land. The sight of those towers, the associations of this room, were too painful for her. She knelt down, laid her arms upon the window-seat, and wept as Helena had once wept there; but, oh! how bitter were those tears of now!

She looked as fragile as her own wraith when she went downstairs the next morning. Every window in the Hall was darkened; and as she, the General, and Edward sat at the table, making but a sorry attempt at breakfast, they heard the minute-toll mournful and clear. The General pushed back his chair and hid his face; a shiver ran through him. Every stroke was a blow on his heart. It told him that the one love of his life had gone from earth for ever; and, in the dreadful bitterness of his feelings, he cursed his child!

Margaret, pale and dismayed, rose from her seat, and knelt before him, entreating him with agonized pathos to unsay those words; and then Edward stole quietly away. He was amazed, even awed, by his sister's influence over that stern man, whose past had been so full of strange events, the world said. But it never entered into his thoughts that the General had been the actor in that strange story which had been told to him in the prison.

By and by, Margaret's pleading melted General Davenant's hardness. He blessed her as his "saving angel," and then he talked to her of his life. But sometimes he seemed to have forgotten her presence; to be musing to himself aloud; and she would sit still, praying for him, until he would rouse himself, remembering her; and this gave her even a deeper insight into his broken heart. She comforted him, as his tender, unspoken sympathy had comforted her, when the blight came that withered her whole life.

"Are you not going to Longleat?" she ventured to ask him once.

"I, child?" he answered, with a sharp tone and short laugh. "What should *I* do there—the dishonored father of a faithless wife? The Earl would spurn me from his door."

"No, no!" she answered, earnestly. "He is too noble, too just."

He looked at her keenly.

Margaret turned aside her head, her face was white; her lips, even, were as colorless as those of the dead.

In an hour or two, the General left the room. He came back to her after some time.

“I am going, Miss Seymour,” he said.

She knew where, and she smiled through the tears that came so readily now. She watched him cross the lawn. His tall figure was bent; the wind blew his white hair back; he leaned heavily on his stick. She saw him stop once, for the minute-toll sounded again, and he laid his hand upon his heart. Then he passed on slowly towards the wood, and was lost to her view in the deep shadow of the trees that overhung the path between the Halls of Longleat and of Calton.

CHAPTER VIII.

FAITHFUL TO THE END.

Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure.
Whose souls possess themselves so pure :
Oh ! is there blessedness like theirs ?

TENNYSON.

No one ever knew what passed in that interview. It was so sacred, curiosity dared not lift the veil. They were three hours in the library, then they went together to Lady Cranford's room. The General leaned on the Earl's arm : he seemed an old, old man now—prematurely old. His limbs tottered, and the servants noticed how tenderly the Earl supported him—how gently he walked to accommodate his step to his companion's. It was a beautiful sight, but one that would have wrung your heart to have witnessed.

Three days after such a procession passed through Longleat park as is not often seen. Alone in his carriage, with its blinds closely drawn, the Earl followed the hearse, a long procession of carriages came after—not empty—their owners had travelled miles and miles, some of them hundreds of miles, to pay their tribute to the late Countess of Longleat.

She had won love and reverence beyond what falls to the lot of most women, and now, at her death, they thus honored the purity of her life. All the yeomanry were

there, and the farmer-tenants—not one absent. Young and old, all wore the same look of sorrow. They thought of that festive time when the young Countess came among them a bride; they remembered her affable kindness, her loveliness, they saw the ruin she had wrought; but it was Mr. Ross of whom they spoke bitterly. Poor old Mr. Hendon was almost broken-hearted. He followed with Mr. Lock, in the carriage next the Earl's. The road and churchyard were filled with people. Lady Cranford's scholars were in the organ gallery, all in deep mourning. A few pews had been kindly left for the Dowager's aged pensioners, the others were closely filled by mourning friends. The vault was close beside the altar, a dark chasm, where the body was to lie temporarily; for the Earl had already chosen a site for a mausoleum in the park. There his father and mother would rest side by side, with a niche left for himself, the last of the Longleat line!

That service was a memorable one. Mr. Hamilton all but broke down when he met the coffin at the gates. The Bishop, who had performed the Earl's marriage ceremony, was in the porch, but he took small part in the last sad rites. The Rector read the beautiful service over his old friend. The Earl's face never once changed from its pallor. When the coffin was borne up the aisle, that glorious anthem, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" was sung, and then he fiercely bit his lip; but that was the only sign of agitation. Just before the coffin was lowered, a lady in deep mourning, closely veiled, rose from a seat near, and laid upon it a wreath of white flowers. It was done in a moment; she resumed her seat, which was behind the pulpit out of view. But the effect of the action was very great, it moved every one to tears. It was Margaret Seymour's last tribute to the lady who in life had secretly loved her beyond all other girls.

In a corner pew, with high oak sides, General Dave-

nant had knelt during the whole service. When it ended, it having been understood that the Earl wished to be left alone, every one retired. The little church was left empty and quiet, with the coffin in its chamber, and the wind moaning plaintively outside, bending the old trees against the window—the same trees which he and Glen Ross had watched “bobbing against the panes.” Then the General left his corner, and came and stood beside the Earl. Thus they mourned their dead together in bitter silent sorrow.

It was near setting of the sun when little Mary’s coffin was borne into the churchyard. She died the same evening of the day on which Lady Cranford saw her, before the ill-tidings had reached the village. She was mercifully spared that pang, and had gone to the bright home where henceforth she would be “waiting among the angels.” No one could look on the aged, white-haired man, her grandfather, without emotion. He stood, leaning on his staff, looking down into Mary’s grave, but he did not seem to comprehend that she was there; and, when the service was over, he looked round helplessly. Mrs. Hutchinson, the kindly woman! took him to her own house, where he lingered just three weeks, then God took him “home,” even as the child had said.

The following day Edward and Margaret left Calton. Again and again the General blessed her as his comforter in that dark time. Long after they had gone he was pacing his library, thinking over many things she had said. He began to believe that there must be something in this religion which could so dignify the character, as it had dignified Lady Cranford’s and Miss Seymour’s; that it must be of value, must be real, when it could sustain in the hour of trial, and make easy the bed of death. Margaret was so like the Mary Cleveland of his youth that he came to think of them as one. In three weeks he went on

his travels. The world did not know where; but some said to Egypt, some to Palestine, others to Italy, and they alone were right. He had gone to see Stephanie. He scarcely knew his own purpose, but he wished to see her. When he arrived he learned quite by accident something of the truth also, that she had gone abroad. Thus the scheme of the Jesuits was frustrated.

When the Earl heard that, he more bitterly repented his past short-sighted errors; he now so clearly understood whose the scheme had been, and saw how easily it might have been braved. He remained at Longleat, seeing no one, leading the life of a recluse. He wandered through his mother's rooms, and found a melancholy solace in keeping everything, even her knitting-basket, with the needles in some unfinished work, as she had left it. Her handkerchief had been left within the leaves of her Bible on the reading-stand; he charged Mrs. Simcoe to see that it was never touched—so it remained. It opened at the fifty-fifth of Isaiah: there was a light pencil mark against the third verse. That had been Mr. Hamilton's text the Sunday morning previous to her death—the last sermon she heard before she learned “the exalted strain.”

Truly had God made with her an “everlasting covenant,” whose “sure mercies” would never be lost.

Lord Cranford's grief became morbid. He counted the hours from her death. The return of that day's hour in the week when she died was spent by him at her bed-side. The only object of interest to him was the building of the mausoleum in the park.

The rumour of Helena's flight with Mr. Ross had gone like fire through England. At first it had been doubted in aristocratic circles, for it seemed incredible. They had both stood so high in the sphere which she had graced beyond all others. How wise its members suddenly became, how far-seeing they had been! But no rumour

of this eddy in the calm lake of fashion disturbed the quietude of Longleat. The Earl lived as one out of the world. He had never seen Elspie since Helena's flight; he knew she was ill, but he shrank from seeing her. One night, about six weeks after the death of the Dowager, Mrs. Simcoe came to him. He was sitting, as he often sat now, in his mother's morning room, astride a chair before the window, with his arms resting on its back, and his eyes looking out on the park as if they saw nothing.

It was dim twilight, and a fierce wind was blowing. It battled with the trees, twisted their arms, bent their boughs until they creaked and groaned, and little twigs were borne aloft, dead leaves were caught up, then sent down with a swirl, and all the park was filled as with things of life *tortured*. The Earl found a genial companionship in these wild nights that had lately been so frequent.

Mrs. Simcoe opened the door, for the memorial window rattled so loudly, she could not tell if the Earl answered her. She came close to him before he heard her.

"My Lord," she said, with anxiety depicted in her face, "Mrs. Cameron is much worse. She thinks she is going, and has asked for you." She stopped, for in truth she dreaded the effect upon him.

"I will come," he answered briefly, and he went at once.

Elspie was in her bed, in his own old night nursery. She was supported by many pillows, in a sitting posture. Round her shoulders was a rich scarlet shawl; it seemed like a royal, and so a fitting raiment for that grand old woman, whose face was noble beyond description, now in the near approach of death.

Yet there was no sign of death there. It scarcely seemed that life with her would *ebb* away; but as if its

waves would all roll back at once, in a mighty sweep, and so in one moment she would be borne on its swell from the shores of time into the great eternal harbor.

There was no symptom of weakness. The lines in her face were not furrows, they were marks of individuality, nothing more. Her eyes were piercing and brilliant. She wore her coif; it had been her own wish. She had said to Mrs. Harcourt very quietly, "I'll be gangin' the nicht, Mrs. Harcourt. Wull ye be kind enough to lave my hauns an' face; an' gie me my coif frae yon press. I wad be ready, an' i' decent attire when the Laird ca's, and nae meet his summons like ane' nae watchin', or of a fearsome speerit. Blessed be his name!"

Mrs. Simcoe had sent at once for McConnel and the Rector. Elspie now wished to see the Earl.

When he entered her hands lay one over the other on the counterpane. She fixed her eyes upon him, but not a muscle moved. For a minute or two there was silence, then she slowly lifted her hands, and said, with great solemnity, "'Thus saith the Laird God, I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven awa', and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick. I will save my flock, they shall be nae mair a prey.'"

"My Laird o' Longleat," she said, after a short pause, "when ye asked, 'Wad I gie ye my bairn?' I telled ye a' my heart. It was ower glad to gie her to your tender keepin', an' I hae iver lo'ed and respected ye. I maun dee, the lang nicht is at haun, near bye. I hae to cross the river that godly Bunyan tells us anent; an', my Laird, I canna gang wi' joy an' ye sae desolate. Hae ye forgi'en the wrang?" she asked, wistfully.

His lips remained firmly closed, until remembering her faithfulness, and that she was now passing away, he said, kindly, "I am grieved to find you so ill, Elspie."

“Nane sae, nane sae!” she answered, quickly; “dinna grieve, my Laird, I’m gangin’ to my rest.”

“Do you remember,” said Mr. Hamilton, who had just entered, “the comforting words of our Church’s prayer—‘In all time of our tribulation, Good Lord deliver us?’”

“I’m mair thinkin’ o’ God’s ain promises and luvè,” she answered, quietly; “I mind ane noo,” looking at Lord Cranford again. “Because it was a trial it shall nae mair come to pass, saith the Laird!”

“Do you feel that God loves you?” asked the Rector again. “Can you call Him *your* Father?”

There was a long pause.

The Earl leaned over the footboard, his deep, blue eyes—hollow-set, and dim in their dark trouble-rims—were fixed upon that earnest, grand face.

Mrs. Harcourt was standing near, watching her anxiously; the Rector never once removed his gaze. She slowly turned her head towards him.

“Measter Hamilton,” she said, firmly, “I niver kenned a doot o’ God’s mercy or his luvè, for the Word says, ‘His mercy endureth for iver;’ an’ I hae ca’ed Him Father sin’ the days lang gane, when I gathered gowans on the brae, an’ thocht them stars just fa’en frae the sky—I was sae wee a lassie, scarce higher than the new-dropped lamb. Nae ca’ *Him* Father! Where maun my speerit gang an’ the Laird nane ca’ me his ain? He lays aroond me the arms o’ his luvè; but I hae a sair, sair trial. Waes me! I’m wearyin’ for the birdlin’ that dropped frae the nest, an’ meb-be is lyin’ wi’ broken wing, that can niver soar mair. An’ I maun lie my lane i’ the kirkyard, without iver a tear frae my wean. I canna, canna thole my pain. Oh, my bairn! my bairn!”

“Elspie,” he said, in a kind but faltering whisper, “perhaps you will meet her, you may, in a better land.”

Elspie looked at him fiercely. “Dae *ye* ken *a’* the

mercy o' the Laird, that ye set bunds to meetin's *there*? Elspie Cameron nane see her bairn yond, an' her aye wearyin' the Laird wi' prayer!"

She spake with almost scornful strength, and energy, and vigor.

Doctor McConnel came in at the moment, and remained a short time. He thought her better, and said, cheerfully, he would see her on the morrow. She took his hand in hers.

"Fareweel, Doctor, fareweel," she said, "I hae a memory o' a time when I thocht ye just a messenger frae the Laird. Ye were sae skeelfu' an' sae tender, and ye wud na hurt ane gowden hair nae mair than mysel; an' ye watched wi' me through the nicht, an' wi' the Laird's help an' blessin' ye restored my sick lamb. I hae prayed for ye iver sin. Ye maun pray for yer ainsel noo; but I'll be lookin' for ye, Doctor. Fareweel."

He nodded, and went out without speaking. Elspie's manner to him was very touching; and any allusion to Helena deeply affected him.

Mrs. Simcoe related to him all that Mrs. Cameron had said; still, though he felt sure her end was near, he said he should see her early on the morrow, and expected to do so. Mr. Hamilton prayed, and then the Earl was left alone with Elspie.

Bending down, he asked, mournfully, "Elspie, do you, *can* you hope to meet her in heaven?"

She grasped his hands, and in a very different voice to that in which she had spoken to the Rector, said, "My dear Laird, I hae strang faith i' the Word, an' I hae strang faith i' prayer. Nicht an' day I hae wearied Him to bring my wanderin' lammie to his fauld again. Meb-be ye canna—seein' ye staun sae heich i' the warld, to be a godly pattern to them wha are aneath ye—meb-be ye canna tak' her to your hearth-stane ance mair, as ye tyuk her frae the lilies that were a' her kin; an' ye maun say, for the burden o'

this world's state an' honor, 'It may na be,' but, my Laird, gin my wean comes to ye, an' says, 'Forgie me,' wull ye na do it as Christ Himsel, wi' pity an' wi' tender voice? Wull ye lay your haun upo' her gowden heid, an' say i' pardon, nae i' wrath, 'Goo, an' sin nae mair'? I ken I'm just on the verra lintel o' heaven: for when I'm lyin' my lane, an' the sugh has sighed itsel to cawm, I hear the harp an' the sang beyont the gates, an' a' things i' this world sink doun aneath God's pardonin' mercy. Wull ye ease the deid-thraws I'm feelin', an' nae say me nay, that *ye*, too, wull pardon my wean? Ye'll sing the sang that's breakin' on my ear wi' sweeter soun' gin ye forgie the sin against ye. I ken the sin, my Laird, I hae blushed for the shame; but——" her eye kindled, a glow passed over her face, it seemed to be illumined with prophetic assurance; "but there's nae sin so scarlet, it canna be as wool; an' there's nae mercy sae great that the Laird wull nae grant it. Blessed be his name! I'll meet my bairn in the Land o' the Leal."

She crossed her hands upon her breast, and lay still. There was a smile upon her face; her eyes were closed. The Earl had bowed his head upon the footboard as she spoke. Now there was a long silence, only broken by the fierce gusts as the wind swept by.

"My Laird"—he went to her side again—"I didna ken the sair fack,* the woe on my bairn, when I gi'ed her."

"No, Elspie, no. You were not to blame. I knew it all. I blame myself bitterly, God knows, for many things in the past."

She laid her hand on his, softly, whispering, "Forgie us our trespasses, as we forgie them that trespass against us."

Not yet; no, not yet could the Earl of Longleat pray that prayer.

* Fact, or truth.

“Elspie,” he said, “I will see you again, and talk with you.”

She held his hand tighter, and raising her right one, in as firm a voice as she had ever spoken in her youth, answered: “The lang nicht is comin’, an’ the morn is near its glint—the morn that niver wears to even, and niver kens a clud;* and when ye see auld Elspie, ’twill be i’ the brichtness o’ its shine. The Laird bless thee an’ keep thee. The Laird cause his face to shine upon thee, an’ grant thee his peace—his peace!”

The word lingered on her lips; he heard her whisper it again; then he turned away: but, as he reached the door, he gave a long, parting look at her. Her hands were folded, the peace that passeth all understanding was reflected in her face. So he left her. He thought of Hannah, the mother of the child Samuel, as she prayed her thanksgiving in the temple; of Miriam, singing her song of triumph; and of other “holy women not a few,” who sparkle like a diamond cluster on the sacred page. Elspie seemed to him like one of them.

Twelve at midnight was chiming, when Elspie, who had been dozing some time, suddenly opened her eyes, and stared round the room.

“Jamie!” she called.

Harcourt bent over her; but Elspie did not notice her.

“Jamie! the laverock is wingin’ frae the brae, and the kye are comin’ to the loan; the dew-blobs are on the heather, and the bells an’ the whins are a’ wavin’ i’ the wind. Mac-Ivor’s gillies are awa’ up the hills, an’ the sun is creepin’ doun intil the vales. I hae just seen a flock o’ swallows rise, an’ I hard a laverock’s sang till the bonnie birdie was a speck ahint the lift,† and the wee white lintie, wha’s nest ye fund i’ the garse, has been a’ready for the bannock-crums I thraw. Ye maun gang, Jamie; but ye’ll nae

* Cloud.

† Had disappeared in the sky.

gang your lane the morn. Donald an' Ramsay wanna bide i' the hoose, an' ye awa wi' gun an' skein-dhu* on the hills. I'll meet ye on the knowe at sundown, Jamie, ye an' my brithers, an' meb-be ye'll hae shot doun anither bonnie stag wi' antler-branch, an' just mak' Allan Scott ance mair weary wi' his jealous heart; an' ye'll hae a crack wi' faither i' the ingle—puir mon!—an' him ower weakly to join the spoort he lo'es; but ye'll mak' him merrie, Jamie. I maun gang to the stell noo. My mither gied me my snood lang syne, an' I'm stannin' wi' ye here an' the lammies to come hame. Dinna haud my crook frae me, Jamie—dinna, for I maun gang. Do I lo'e ye, Jamie? ye are askin'. My mither says I maun nae show ye a' my heart whiles the snood is o'er my broo. But why ask me, Jamie, mon, an' I plighted to ye? Didna I gie ye my vow o'er the burnie? Was na't a sign verra sure that I lo'ed ye? I'm nane angered wi' ye, Jamie, for your askin' sae oft. I wadna hae ye like Annie's Claude, wha has ower meikle thochts o' his ain gear, and sae hauds his heid sae heich, he canna think a doot for o' himself wi' Annie. Yes, I lo'e ye, Jamie, an' I'll meet ye on the knowe at sundown. An' here comes Donald, wi' wallet an' gun, an' I maun gang my lane to bring the lammies frae the stell. Mither will be flytin' on me for the daunderin'. Fareweel, 'twill nae be lang to gloamin', an' I'll meet ye on the knowe. Yes, I lo'e ye, Jamie, an' I'll lo'e ye till I dee."

She stopped speaking, and smiled, then lay still a while. Mrs. Harcourt had listened with surprise. Elspie had talked so naturally, as if she had been standing with her lover's arm around her, and he just going to the hills deer-stalking, as on that bright morning, so long ago—so long ago! She thought Elspie would sleep, for her eyes were closed; but suddenly she called, in a loud, piercing voice—

* Highland dagger.

“Jamie! *my* Jamie shot on the muir! Oh, mither, mither! gin ye wadna see me dee at your feet, say it’s a lee. I telled him I lo’ed him, my Jamie! an’ he just lookit like ilka grand chieftain himsel, the morn that’s nane gane. I said I’d meet him on the knowe at gloamin’, mither. I maun gang, I maun gang. Jamie will be there. Mither, mither, wull ye nae tak’ pity, an’ gie me my snood? I telled him I lo’ed him. Dinna flyte on me, an’ I his plighted wife. I was like to fent, mither, wi’ the fricht o’ Donald’s comin’—thochtless laddie!—wi’ his crack to mak’ me greet. I maun gang to Jamie, mither, an’ tell him ance mair I’ll lo’e him till I dee.”

Elspie’s face flushed scarlet; her hands were clasped, as if in agony. Mrs. Harcourt went to call up Mrs. Simcoe, who was lying, dressed, on a couch, in the other room. But, when she returned, Elspie’s eyes were closed again. She was quiet, and seemed inclined to doze. They both remained watching her. Annie came at three, to relieve Harcourt. There was a look about Elspie, however, which made her unwilling to leave her, and they all three stayed.

They sat in stillest silence; nor was there a sound to be heard anywhere, for the wind had dropped. Not a tree moved, any more than if it had been a sultry July day, when a full-blown rose could not shed its leaves for stillness of the air. It seemed, too, that those wild, fierce gusts had driven all the clouds to sea, for above the land there was a calm, clear heaven, and the sun rose in his strength and brightness, without one veiling shadow.

At six, Elspie wakened. Mrs. Simcoe gave her her medicine. Elspie smiled, and took it. Mrs. Simcoe smiled in return, and asked if she felt better for her sleep.

“I thank ye kindly, Mrs. Simcoe,” she answered, but did not say she felt better.

“Wull ye draw back the curtains, lassie?” she said to Annie. “I wad see the risin’ sun ance mair.”

They drew them back, and raised the blind. It was a large, wide window, with immense panes, that had long ago been put in by Lady Cranford's orders, when these rooms had been prepared for nurseries; for she thought that light was an essential in children's rooms. It looked into that old garden, or orchard, which has been named once before. Beyond that was seen a portion of the park; then, further on, the square, ivied tower of Longleat Church; and, far away, crowning all, was the long range of hills, whose high heads and crag-like peaks were now bathed in the rosy beams.

"Truly the licht is sweet, an' a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun," said Elspie. "Blessed be the Laird for a' his gudeness to the children o' men. I'm gangin' to the land where I'll meet a' my forbears. My mither, an' Donald, an' Ramsay, an' Annie. My faither deed when I was but a lassie. Wull he ken his little Elspie, think ye, noo? An' Jamie!" she stopped and smiled, "Jamie, I hae seen the nicht that's gane. He ca'ed me. I telled him I'd lo'e him till I deed, an' I hae! I hae! Our Laird said there's nae marryin' yond; but there's luve, Mrs. Harcourt, an' I'll be Jamie's ance mair. Wull he ken me, I wunner? He left me wi' the snood hidin' my broon locks he lo'ed sae weel; an' noo, noo, the frosts o' mony winters hae bleached them a' to snaw. Wull he ken me noo, I wunner? I think sae, for I hae seen my Jamie i' the nicht that's gane; an' I telled him ance lang syne I lo'ed him; an' Elspie Cameron, he kenned weel, niver telled a lee. Mistress Simcoo," she said, "gie me you're haun, for I maun gang my lane. I thank ye for the kindly offices ye hae iver done me. I could na pay ye back wi' siccan—bein' auld an' waur for time; but the Laird himsel wull gie ye his reward, for I am his ain. Blessed be his holiest name! only ane o' his little ones, waes me! nane like the godly women-martyrs, wha's blude consecrated

mony a hillside o' my bonnie land. Wull ye tak' for yersel the watch I hae iver worn, an' when ye see the hauns movin' to the hours, wull ye ca' to mind auld Elspie, an' iver sing a song o' thanksgivin' i' your heart that she is safe an' weel i' the land where time is a' past an' dune wi', an' the day niver ends. An', Mrs. Simcoo, I'll look for ye there, my woman. Wull ye gie me your word that ye'll dee the death o' the righteous?" Elspie clasped her hand in both hers.

Mrs. Simcoe could not speak for a while. She struggled with her emotion, and faltering, "I will, Mrs. Cameron, I will." She stooped down and kissed her.

"Mistress Harcourt," Elspie said, turning to her, "when ye put the white blossoms on your dear Leddy's breast, ye grat sairly, an' ye rebelled against the Laird. I didna ken a' then, an' I wud na say noo that ye were ower sinfu' for the same; but wull ye mind that the Laird is verra tender, an' his lovin' kindness is iver shown to a' his people. Oh, blessed be his name! I' the darkest hour I iver kenned his luve. Ye may hae long to leeve, an' the Laird, i' his great compassion for ye, may see fit to gie ye mony a cross to bear that ye may hae a grander croon, wull ye promise me that ye will iver lay down the murmur aneath the thocht o' his gudeness, an' gie Him your submissive luve? Ye hae been verra tender to mysel when my heart was like to break wi' the sorrow, ye wad hae comforted me gin ye could; ye did na fling one word upo' my bairn. Mistress Harcourt, I thank ye mair than a' for that ane thing. I pray the Laird to bless ye for it, an' I wad like to see ye i' the goodly land. Will ye nae gie me your word?"

Harcourt had stood quiet and pale at first; but now her tears flowed fast. "I should like to see our dear Lady again," she sobbed; "and, Mrs. Cameron, please God, I will remember all your good words."

“Ye maun hae my Beeble,” said Elspie, “gin ye read the word wi’ prayer, I’ll nae be lookin’ for ye i’ vain. Annie, my lassie,” she said, holding out both her hands with a smile, “ye hae been a kindly hand-maiden to mysel. I hae a memory o’ the day, when *she* telled ye”—Elspie’s voice faltered for the first time; but it was only for a moment—“when she telled ye wi’ her bonnie smile, that ye maun be gude to me. I thocht ye’d weary o’ servin’ an auld dame, wha had mony a crunkle o’ her ain, nane common meb-be; but ye did na. Ye hae been a kindly bairnie. Wull ye, too, meet me yond?”

“Oh, Mrs Cameron!” Annie said with a burst of tears, “I have done nothing for you.”

“Whisht, my lassie,” said Elspie gently, “we maun nane tell a lee to humble our ainsels even. Ye hae dune much for me. An’ gin ye would tak’ tent on it for my sake, I wad like ye to hae the bit bonnie brooch o’ gould an’ peebles o’ my ain countra. It was a gift frae *my* Leddy to me, an’ I hae prized it iver.”

Annie, being of an excitable nature, sank down on her knees by the bed.

Harcourt touched her to still her sobs.

But Elspie, laid her hand upon her head, “Dinna greet, my lassie,” she said, “I’m gangin’ to a better an’ a brichter land, where a’ my trouble wull be past; an’ I’ll sit aneath the tree o’ life an’ sing the same sang I would like to hear your voice singin’ when your ain life shall be past. Kiss me, Annie, lassie, an’ may the Laird guide your youth. There’s mony a danger before ye, but gin ye’ll luv Him, He wull bear ye safe ower a’.”

She seemed faint now, and they gave her some wine. Then she revived; but lay very still, with her eyes fixed upon the sun.

“Would you like to see Mr. Hamilton?” Mrs. Simcoe asked.

Elspie smiled sweetly; but said, "Nae thank ye, Mistress Simcoo; the Laird himsel is wi' me, an' He satisfies a' my needs. I'm waitin' for his ca'. Gin ye dinna mind, I wad like to hear his word."

Harcourt got the prayer-book.

Mrs. Simcoe fancied that Elspie looked wistful. "Do you want something?" she asked.

"It's the Beeble itsel, I wad hear, thank ye," she answered. "I'm sae near hame, Mistress Harcourt, I canna mind e'en the godly book o' prayers. The Laird himsel is haudin' my haun. I wad hear his word. Wull ye read the 96th Psalm?"

Harcourt remembered for *whom* she had last read, and at first her voice trembled; but Elspie's grand calm face, her earnest ejaculations now and then, were almost a rebuke to the slightest excitement. She named several other portions of Scripture; and at the last, the 136th Psalm; she responded herself with great fervor at the close of each verse. "For his mercy endureth for ever." When it was ended she whispered, "Wull ye leave me wi' Mrs. Simcoo a wee?"

Harcourt and Annie went away then.

As soon as the door closed, Elspie said, "Meb-be the Earl wull be askin' gin' I said a word afore I deie'd, wull ye tell him, wi' my service, that I muckle langed to hae seen my measter, the General, an' I wad that he telled him sae. I hae a great respect for him wha's bread I hae eaten, an' wha's siller has made me comfortable a' my days. I canna lie i' the kirkyard o' my ain land, sae I wad wish to be buried i' a grave o' my ain—bocht wi' my ain siller; for a Cameron could niver rest i' ane gi'en. Ye wull let it be the side the sun rises on. I maun lie my lane, wi' a mound o' sod an' gowans ower me, an' a stane aboon my heid to say the Laird gi'ed Elspie Cameron length o' days, an' ca'ed her to himsel at three score years an' ten, before

the weariness o' fowre. Blessed be his name! I dinna like praises o' the deid i' kirkyards, where the Laird himsel sud be worshipped alane; but I wad like my heidstane to tell His luve, sae I'll thank ye kindly, Mistress Simcoo, gin ye wull hae put there, 'Come unto Me a' ye that are weary an' heavy laden, an' I wull gi'e ye rest.' Meb-be some puir wanderin' sheep wull read the gude Shepherd's words, an' wull seek Him. I hae siller i' the bank, Mistress Simcoo; when a' my funeral fees are paid, ye maun gi'e a Beeble to each chield that sang my ain bairn's welcome; an' gin ye wull, I wad like ye to pen each name wi' mine, as a gift frae me, and aneath *the date o' that day*. A' my ither siller ye maun gi'e to the puirest i' the parishes o' Calton an' o' Longleat. It's meb-be a hunner pund; I wad they a' sud mind me wi' kindly memoree. The claes for my buryin' ye wull find at Calton Ha', i' the big oak press i' the auld nursery for the night, where my bairn lay sae oft i' my bosom. They are a' o' finest linen, laid up wi' sweet-smellin' lavender, gathered by mysel an' my ain wean oft i' the simmer gloam. Ye wull nane pit ony ither on me when I'm lyin' i' my coffin."

Mrs. Simcoe wrote down these directions, marvelling at Elspie's strength and recollection of each minute thing. She said—

"All shall be as you desire, Mrs. Cameron. Now, I think you had better have some refreshment. Are you not much better than you were?"

"I shall nane eat mair," she answered, "till I feast wi' the Laird i' Paradise. An' noo I hae ane ither thing to say."

She closed her eyes a moment, and ceased speaking; but in a little while went on—

"I hae a treasure sae dear that I canna part wi' it in life. It is lyin' on my breast. I wad like the Earl himsel'

to take it frae my haun when I am gane. Meb-be, when ye hae laid me to my decent rest, ye wull put it within my paum, an' ye wull ca' the Earl, an' leave him here wi' me alane. An' sae, it aiblins when he looks on my deid face, he'll forgi'e the wrang o' her I aye luv'd better than mysel; an' he'll tak' the gift frae my cauld haun wi' pity an' wi' pardon. I canna greet, an' me sae near my cawm; but, oh, my wean, my wean! I thocht when Elspie's deid-thraw came, her auld head wud lie upo' your breast. The Laird's wull be dune. The Laird himsel bring back my wanderin' lamb."

"Amen," said Mrs. Simcoe, hiding her face, for the tears were falling fast down. When she looked up, Elspie's eyes were raised, her hands were clasped, and her lips were moving in silent prayer.

"Mrs. Cameron," she said, presently, "I, too, have something to say to you. I cannot tell you what a fearful grief this sad event has been to me, for I have lived with my Lady Cranford ever since she came, and I loved her so much I had hoped to have gone first; but I think my sorrow for our dear young Countess——"

Elspie seized her hand, her eyes flashed with joy; it was the first time that Helena had been so called since her flight, and it was now done in generous thought for Elspie.

"My sorrow for our dear young Countess far exceeded my shame for the dishonor. I thought all along that there was some trouble or some mystery that drove her to it, and that if we knew all we should pity more than condemn."

"There was a woe on my bairn," said Elspie, quietly, but nothing more.

Nor did Mrs. Simcoe ask more.

"I have thought that, and I have a feeling, that amounts to a conviction, that in some way the Countess

will be restored. If that day ever comes, Mrs. Cameron, if I am living, I will be to her—not what you have been—no other could be that; not what you would be *then*—no other could; but I will be to her all you would wish me—that is, a faithful servant, as if *this* had never been. It will not be at Longleat, Mrs. Cameron; but I know it's Lord ——. I know how noble is our Earl, and knowing that, believe that my faithfulness to *her* would be my most acceptable service to *himself*. Do you understand me? If she will have me, I will live with her till I die.”

Elspie's dark eyes had been dimming with the shadows of death; but like the sinking sun that suddenly shoots forth a sheaf of glory-beams, a more radiant effulgence just before he dips beneath the sea, so those eyes flashed upon Mrs. Simcoe now. She raised her arms high, and said, “Blessed Laird! Hae I nae trusted Thee i' six troubles, an' did I seem to doubt Thee i' the seventh that Thou hast laid upo' my feeble heart this burden o' thanksgivin'? I am like to fent wi' a mighty joy. I bless Thee and praise Thee wi' my latest breath; an' I pray Thee o' Thy great gudeness to pour on this woman a' Thy covenantin' blessin's. Her woe has been sair, yet noo Thou kens her lovin'kindness. When her warfare's past, her lang day ended, I pray Thee ca' her to her rest as gently as a mither rocks her wean. Ye'll kiss me, Mrs. Simcoe, ance mair, an' noo I'll be left awhile my lane.”

When she had gone, Elspie lay still, with her face towards the light. She fell asleep about eight o'clock. Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Simcoe found her so. They sat on either side the bed watching. At nine she awoke: at first she seemed to wander, but gradually became quite herself. They had quietly shaded the window with the curtains, but she asked them to raise her and let in the light.

“I hae dune wi’ the warld,” she whispered, “I hear the Laird’s ca’. His angels are a’ round me. Jamie! Jamie!” she suddenly exclaimed. Then again, “Bring back my lammie,” in a faint, prayerful tone.

Her eyes closed, her face whitened more, her mouth twitched slightly. They bent down breathlessly, and thought she had gone; but in another moment she looked toward the window—the sun shone full upon the group. With a kindling flash, in a loud, clear voice, she cried,

“‘Bless the Laird, O my soul; an’ a’ that is within me bless his holy name.’”

Her head fell back, her eyes were fixed. With that triumphant song Elspie Cameron’s spirit winged its way to God.

Both the women fell upon their knees. They buried their faces, and remained in silent prayer. “Oh, Lord Jesus, receive her soul,” said Mrs. Simcoe. Harcourt burst into sobs. Tears were running down Mrs. Simcoe’s cheeks, as she rose and kissed Elspie’s brow, then reverently closed her eyes. They slightly opened again. There was a dark, beautiful line, between the white lids. She watched to see if they remained so. “It seems as if Mistress Cameron could not bear the darkness even in death,” she said.

“No wonder,” said Harcourt, kissing Elspie. “If ever there was one that loved the light; if ever there was a good woman, a faithful soul, it was Mistress Cameron. She’s taught me more of Bible goodness than I ever learned in all my life before, just by her living.”

“Yes, just by her living,” said Mrs. Simcoe. “I pray we may meet her yonder.”

“Ah!” said Harcourt, “I fear she’ll be too near the throne for such as me to come nigh her.”

“I felt very near heaven when she went.”

An hour after Elspie was laid to her "decent rest," Mrs. Simcoe sought the Earl, and told him all that had passed. She gave him the paper of directions; for at the end she had written Elspie's words about the gift she wished him to take.

"Perhaps you will read this yourself, my Lord," she said, and was going away. But he called her, and said,

"Darken all the windows; tell them to lower the flag. Let the same respect be shown to Mrs. Cameron as to one of the family."

When left alone he read the paper. Then he went to Elspie's room. It looked singularly light for a death-chamber. There was a white blind over the great window, and the curtains were all drawn back. When he lifted the cambric handkerchief he was absolutely startled. Elspie's face was so noble, so life-like—the eyes seemed just opening, the lips parting. There was an exquisite expression over the whole countenance. Her hands were laid as they were when she died—folded across her breast. The "gift" with which she could not "part in life" had been found, attached to a ribbon: it lay, as she had said, upon her breast. Mrs. Simcoe had placed it in her hands, and the sheet was carefully folded below them. The Earl trembled as he wondered what the legacy might be. He took it from her cold fingers, gazing the while on her face. Then he slowly turned from her, and met Helena's violet eyes, looking into his with that dreamy, lovely expression he had so often seen them wear. Oh, it was like her!—so beautiful!

He knelt down by the bed, hiding his face, with a tearless groan.

"Elspie! Elspie!" he said, "I cannot, I cannot forgive."

He looked at her, and her majestic repose quieted his violent emotion. But he could not bear the impressive

silence that seemed to wait a promise of forgiveness. He covered her face, and then poured out all his agony in prayer. The answer did not come just then ; but it was seen in his after-life, for that was "perfect through suffering."

When he rose he lifted the cambric again, and said aloud,

"Elspie, I will forgive before I die."

Ah, how little he knew what bitter sorrow would win the pardon from him !

He went to his library and sent for Mrs. Simcoe. She had scarcely entered when General Davenant was announced. Cranford rose in astonishment.

"My Lord," said the General, "tidings of Mrs. Cameron's illness reached me some days ago, and I have travelled night and day to see her. She was too faithful to be neglected by me."

"You are too late, sir."

"She is not dead ?" he exclaimed.

The Earl shook his head.

Mrs. Simcoe said, "She died about an hour ago, sir."

"Take me to her," was his brief order.

She obeyed.

When he saw her face, he, standing beside her with folded arms, looked down in stern gloom and silence.

"I never saw such a death, General Davenant," said Mrs. Simcoe ; "it was most beautiful. She didn't seem to die, sir : it was more as if she had gone from earth to heaven with one step. There was no sign of weakness even. Her voice was as firm as mine, her face was unchanged, except that it looked younger. She expressed all her wishes, and then just fell asleep."

"In Jesus," said the General, "and God will bring her with Him. Noble woman, faithful heart ! be at peace !"

The smiling lips seemed silently to answer, "At peace !"

He returned to the Earl, and expressed his desire that Elspie should lie at Calton Chapel, where his own forefathers slept; but the Earl said,

“General, I know that my claim is second to yours; yet if you will waive it I will thank you. Let her lie in the sun at Longleat, and let me bury her.”

Then they had a kindly contest, each wishing to obey Elspie’s behest, yet each wishing to show his honor. They called Mrs. Simcoe, who said,

“My Lord, the wishes of the dead are sacred.”

And that was enough.

Just on the hill-side, where the first morn-beams fall, close beside, but not under, the shadow of a yew, they bought Elspie’s grave with her “ain siller.” But the funeral cost was the Earl’s, and such an one had not been seen before, where there was no pomp to atone for woe. All the villagers of Calton and of Longleat met the coffin, and the old church was crammed. The Earl and General attended as chief mourners.

Mrs. Simcoe, Harcourt, and Annie followed. Then the households of Longleat and of Calton.

Such a sight was never seen before. And when Mr. Hamilton, for the first time in his long life, spoke at the grave-side, in eulogy of the dead—saying, “So may we live, so may we die,”—all the people said, “Amen.”

CHAPTER IX.

DE PROFUNDIS.

The goal's a ruin, like the rest.

CHRISTMAS EVE AND EASTER DAY.

I loved him so, I had
No mother, God forgot me, and I fell.
There may be pardon yet : all's doubt beyond—
Surely the bitterness of death is past !

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

SOME few miles from Melbourne, on a hill which commands a view of the river in the distance, and looks down upon a small wood, there stands a handsome stone mansion, with all the adornments and improvements of a modern European residence. The grounds are lovely, for the site was well chosen, and wealth was the companion of artistic taste when they were laid out. Beyond, in a spacious courtyard, there are beautiful stables and coach-houses, built of the same stone as the mansion ; evidently the whole estate is in the hands of some one fastidious in taste—*was*, should have been written, for “Yarra Hall” may not be cared for now as it was then. On the morning of Midsummer's Day, a few years ago, the owner of Yarra Hall was seated on the terrace, outside an open widow, reading to a young lady who reclined upon a couch near to him ; though within the room, so near, that now and then he drew her Cashmere closer round her

throat, or laid his hand caressingly upon her head, or stooped to kiss her without moving from his seat.

"Is my little one tired?" he asked, after a long, long look at her face.

She had closed her eyes.

"No, Glen, not very"—a slight sigh followed. He instantly dropped the "Times," and, passing his arm beneath the pillow, drew her head upon his breast.

"Darling," he said, "I will not allow these English papers to be sent here any more; they always make you sad."

She looked up into his eyes, and a most lovely flush suffused her face as she answered—

"Only for you, Glen. I sometimes do feel sad, because your life seems so wasted here."

"Wasted, my child!" he said, lightly, "when a deputation has waited upon me to stand for Yarra."

"Ah, but you refused."

"And why, dear? Because I have tried fame, and wearied of it. No, no, my darling, I have my occupations, my books, and you—what more could I desire, little sceptic?"

She nestled closer to him; but his tenderness did not chase the melancholy which had settled upon Helena's exquisite expression—a shadow which no sunshine could illumine. They were silent a while. After apparently deep reflection, he said, taking her little hand in his broad palm—

"Do you feel sufficiently well for me to talk to you a while?"

She looked up with that old, pretty, bird-like look of wonder—half in fear.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nay, you must not look like that, or I fear my tale will never be told for sweet interruptions." He kissed her, and she, blushing, nestled in his breast again.

“I have received some news from England, dear. Nay, don't be fearful, for I am thankful beyond all words. Helena, darling, to-morrow will be a memorable day to me. The great love with which you have enriched my life, has been to me a sacred thing, and to-morrow I may doubly consecrate my life to you by that holy rite which will give me the peerless blessing of calling you by my name. Nay, don't weep my child. My own heart is filled with joy.”

She was not weeping. She raised her white face, unstained by a tear, her eyes glittered—those superb eyes!

“How did you know it, Glen?” she whispered.

“By a letter, dear. And, although *I* don't care for the ceremony—for the reason that no rite could bind me more closely to you than I am bound by love—yet, for your sweet sake——”

“I have wished it, Glen.”

“I could never understand Longleat,” he said, after a while. She shivered at the sound of that familiar name, so long unheard—“why he delayed so long, but——” he stopped, vexed at his own incautiousness.

“But, what, Glen?”

“He has not been well, dearest. Perhaps too ill to care for anything.”

“Oh, Cranford, Cranford! would that you had never seen me!” she wailed, weeping piteously; and, finally, she became so hysterical that he had great difficulty in soothing her. He was terrified, and with anxiety on his face, he entreated her to tell him if she were unhappy, or repented having loved him. She raised her hand, and, without looking up or speaking, drew down his head upon her pillow, and laid her cheek against his.

“Glen,” she sobbed, “I may die, you know; and oh, I have sinned! I have sinned!”

“Hush! my darling,” he answered. “For my sake,

hush! If you were to die, God help me! Oh, have we not perilled too much to be parted now?"

He was almost wild, and strained her to his heart in a close, passionate embrace, as if he would defy Death to take her from him.

"Promise me," he entreated, "that you will not think these thoughts. I have no fears for you, my dearest——" He stopped suddenly, laid her gently down, and then pulled the bell so violently that several servants came at once in alarm.

"Your Lady has fainted," he said, "send her maid; and one of you men fly for Wilson as for your own life."

She revived presently; then he carried her to her room. The surgeon thought he had never seen such devotion as Mr. Melville's; he seemed jealous of another rendering his wife the slightest service, and he soothed her by the gentlest tenderness, until he had won a smile from her; but it was so sad that for a moment he lost his own firmness.

That was a terrible night of anguish to him; of watching for the whole household. Helena's life was trembling in the balance—it seemed that a hair would sink the scale. When morning dawned "another lamb had come into the fold," so Glen said in his heart, and, as he touched the little waxen fingers, and looked into other violet eyes, that seemed Helena's, and yet were not Helena's, he knelt down beside the snowy cot, and, laying his brow upon his arms, sobbed his thankfulness. But the mother, in an adjacent room, lay like a broken lily on her bed, as white and as frail. For days and days her life was despaired of. She gave no sign of recognition when he implored her to say if she knew him. Physicians, the ablest in Melbourne, met in daily consultation, but the case baffled them.

"Had she had a shock lately, Mr. Melville?" asked one. He hesitated.

“Not exactly a shock,” he said; “but she received some news that affected her, and, I think, caused her to faint. Is she still in danger?” he asked, in such a tone of forcibly suppressed agony that the doctors pitied him, and spoke as favourably as they dared. He never left her, night and day found him at her bedside, until his eyes grew dim, his face wan, and then Mr. Wilson took him in hand, plainly telling him that when she would be recovering and needing him, he would be a dead man.

“*Will* she recover?” he asked, eagerly.

“She will,” the surgeon said, risking all in his anxiety. But he proved right, for when Mr. Melville awoke, after a dead sleep of twelve hours, he was told that she had fallen to her first rest, and would probably awake to consciousness. He stole to her room as noiselessly as a leaf falls. When she opened her eyes, she stared at him bewilderedly; he smiled, laid a finger on her lips, and then gave the medicine that had been prepared. She smiled faintly, took it, and presently slept again. When the second waking came, there was no bewilderment; but she looked deathly.

“Have I been ill?” she whispered.

“Yes, my darling,” he answered, trembling with carefully veiled joy. “I have two precious ones now, you know. The other lamb has come.”

The faintest bloom—delicate as that of pearly shell—tinged her cheek; her eyes gleamed with rapture.

“Oh, baby! baby!” she exclaimed, as the sleeping treasure, wrapped in costly laces, was given into her arms. “I would there were no shadow on thee.”

Mr. Ross looked down on Elspie’s “wandering lamb,” and on that little one, fresh from the hand of God, with eyes so full of tears that one dropped upon the babe.

“Oh, Glen,” said Helena, hurriedly, “don’t baptize her with a tear.”

He smiled, and bending down, kissed it away.

“Darling,” he whispered, “this lovely picture has unmanned me. I never knew my love before. I have ‘a heart and a half,’ as we say in Ireland, for you now.”

She gave him a look of affection that was expressively touching. She would not part with her babe. She never wearied of gazing at its face, and would lie still for hours if it were beside her; and when the tiny hand curled its fingers round hers—the thrill which ran through her frame was almost more than she could bear.

Helena made slow, yet certain progress, towards health, and just when the leaves were budding in the Longleat woods, and were searing in that far-off land which she now called “home,” Mr. Ross drove her out for the first time. But the marriage-day had not been. There was the same stain upon the mother and the child. Neither could claim her father’s name. That was the poison in Mr. Ross’s cup. He had scorned the blot upon Helena, and had only thought of it as being a greater reason for his tenderness to her; but his fatherhood was a tie that brought its own peculiar feelings and sensitiveness, and so the shadow on his child was a terrible retribution, although unknown to all but Helena and himself—a fearful revenge which his deadliest enemy might have planned. It almost corroded his peace. He so loved the child, and he had so confidently expected his marriage. He could better understand Longleat now; he blamed his weakness less, and, in his heart of hearts, his own remorse grew keener. But Helena knew nothing of this. No shade ever dimmed the sunshine of his smile on her. More than ever was she beloved. It seemed as if God himself had forgotten her sin, for now her days passed without a disturbing memory. She was worshipped by him whom she *called* husband, and her love for him and the child was absolute idolatry.

So the winter passed, and the child grew in loveliness, seeming to be Helena herself in babyhood. Yet with a blending of Mr. Ross's traits, that made a perfect combination of strength and beauty.

It was now two years since the "Desperate" sailed into the port. Mr. Ross had deemed himself fortunate in having heard of this residence directly after his arrival. It had been commenced for a gentleman who had died suddenly, and it was not finished when Mr. Ross bought it. He added to the original plan, and when completed, it was a most magnificent mansion. He chartered a ship from England with every article of luxury that the most fertile imagination could suggest. His expenditure was most lavish—for he was determined to make Yarra Hall a perfect home, and he succeeded. In Melbourne he became known; overtures were made to him by its most distinguished citizens—but in vain; he declined all with courtesy. When he took Helena from Longleat, he counted the cost. He had lost even his *name*, when for her sake, and hers alone, he entered his mother's maiden name upon the ship-list; but Helena had dreaded the use of his own, and against his secret wish he had called himself "Melville." He knew that not one honorable man in Melbourne would have taken his hand if the truth were known, and Glen Ross scorned to "take them in," in the parlance of the world. So he took no part in public affairs, though pressed to do so. He visited with none, but from time to time anonymous gifts of books came to the public library—costly gifts—and donations to the Mechanics' Institute, and also there came a scholarship to the university, to be called "The Old World's"—but still anonymous. He was the suspected donor, and his influence might soon have been felt. Had he chosen, he might, in an incredibly short time have been one of the leading men in Melbourne, but he would not. His energy spent itself in these private deeds

of good. Honor he would not receive, renown he shrank from, and sheltered himself, in his inevitable remorse, behind such anonymous acts of generosity or of mercy. So the winter ended.

Still the marriage had not been. Mr. Ross had taken into his confidence a kindly old clergyman, and gave him just as much of the truth as he thought desirable. He it was who Mr. Ross had begged to marry Helena and himself, but when he came, she was hovering between life and death. Since then Mr. Ross had not referred to the subject, though it lay heavily upon his heart. He feared to excite her, for she was weak, and there was sometimes a passing shadow over her face which he dreaded to deepen. Helena, they called the little one. Mr. Ross wished it so, though Helena said, "Nay, Glen, don't let the shadow of my name rest upon her; let us give her another that may have a meaning; it may bless her, who can tell?"

Glen looked at her, and smiling tenderly, said, "The pure heart of the child will be her best blessing."

That was an Indian summer in its warmth and brightness, and Mr. Ross took a cottage by the sea, for the child had paled, and Helena, through weakness or much thought, grew more melancholy, and had often reveries which cast a shadow over home, and made Glen sad. Sometimes he could not bear it, and he would wander far away for miles and miles, bitterly cursing himself that he had tempted her; but he never went away thus that Helena did not divine his thoughts, and so, when he came home, there would be a brighter welcome than if he had left for pleasure: fresher flowers in all the rooms, a festive air diffused throughout the household—seen in her dress, or, in the late sitting up of the little one. But when such times had passed, the shadow would return upon Helena yet again. So it was that Mr. Ross took a cottage by the sea-shore, not knowing that he was meeting destiny. One

fair evening they were strolling on the shore, between the dim forest and the sleeping sea, which lay calm beneath a serene sky. Everything was so still, the flapping of a bird's wing could be distinctly heard, and the little waves curled on the shingle with the faintest splash, as if too lazy to roll over or to break. They were both silent. Helena's hat was slung upon his arm, and her hands were clasped there too. Now and then he looked down upon her with a fond smile, and addressed her by some endearing name; so they sauntered on until they entered the wood, then they heard the sound of singing in the distance.

"There is a chapel, I am told, somewhere near here," he said; "let us explore, darling."

"It will be like looking for a nest amid the leaves, Glen," she answered, laughing, as they walked on under the trees, with no other clue to guide them but the hymn. "Glen," she said, as he held up a branch for her to pass under.

"Well, fairy."

"Do you know as you put aside that bough, I thought of that day at Richmond when we went together—that Derby day. Do you remember it?"

Remember it! The blood rushed to his face, then receding, left him white as death.

"I do remember it," he said, in a low voice. And ah, how he remembered his friend's *trust* in him.

"How you loved me, Glen!"

"I have ever loved you since we met, my child. But I did not love you then as I do now."

"Are you sad to-night?" she asked.

"Why, Helena!"

"You answered sadly, I thought."

"No, I am not sad, my darling; but I have memories that sometimes trouble me."

It was so seldom that he referred to trouble in his

conversations with her that she looked up with fear in her eyes.

“What a sadness I have been to you,” she said, with a sigh.

He stopped, looked at her steadily, and taking both her hands in his, said, slowly and emphatically, “You, a sadness to me! All that I have ever known of joy you have brought to me. What men call the pleasure of existence has been that to me only since you loved me. Do you think that I ever cast one longing to the past; that I would go back to it if I could without you? You don’t yet understand my love. Even you have not fathomed my heart, my beautiful child, my one ewe lamb! If I have sometimes a regretful memory, it is all for you, darling; all for my own selfishness, all for *my* sin. Then just for your sake alone, I could almost wish it were in my power to replace you in Longleat once again—a Countess before the world—its ornament, as you were. I could almost weep that *I* brought you here, because, in coming *you* forfeited so much. When I think these thoughts, my darling, there is a pain in my heart which makes me long to do some great thing for you in atonement. I feel as if I could *die* for you, because you gave yourself to me—the most precious gift in all God’s universe.”

He held her closely to his breast, and showered kisses upon her trembling lips. The chant was still heard in the distance, and it seemed like an accompaniment to his earnest words.

“Glen,” she said, gazing up into his eyes, and speaking in an earnest tone, “if you regret for me, let it only be because I sinned. I once told you why I loved you; and, since I have been yours, my love has deepened. I *dare not* think of the past because of my guilt; but far less dare I think of a future apart from you. Sometimes, a shuddering dread of death comes over me,

and I shrink away from it in terror that almost drives me mad, because of the separation that must come then. If the past could come again I would not have it apart from you. It is only my *sin* that I grieve for. Longleat did not love me—he will not miss me, I am sure”—her voice faltered—“but I dishonored him, and have not blest you.”

“My *great* blessing,” he answered, with firm impressiveness—“my great blessing! But, darling, don’t let us talk thus longer—be my own bright, happy child again.”

“I don’t think that I shall ever be *quite* that again,” she said, with a burst of tears. “I don’t know how it is, but to-night, Elspie, and Longleat, and Lady Cranford, all seem near to me, especially Elspie. I can hear their voices, see their faces in every sight and sound. Does it omen anything?” she whispered, with a shiver.

He chid her playfully, as “a superstitious little thing;” and then talked on in a light tone of raillery to hide his own dread that it might “omen” something. So he charmed her to her brighter self, and they rambled on to find the chapel, following a path that led to an opening in the trees. There the chapel was—a rude little sanctuary, built of wood, seeming to have been erected for the use of foresters. The door was open, and Helena saw that the worshippers were Romanists, and that they appeared to belong to the lowest class of emigrants. Several turned their heads and gazed in astonishment at her, as she stood on the threshold, full in their view. One man near to her exclaimed, “Holy Mother! Blessed Mary!” lifting up his hands in fear.

It was scarcely to be wondered at, for she was like a vision, with her uncovered head, on which, the evening sun shone, seeming to illumine as with a halo the golden hair. Her dress was white, and from her hands drooped the brilliant wild flowers which Glen had just gathered

for her. Truly, it was no marvel if, in such a place, she seemed a heavenly visitant to the worshippers.

Helena stood motionless ; she grew paler and paler every instant ; her eyes were fixed on the priest before the altar. Mr. Ross touched her to come away, but she did not heed him, for the priest was looking at her ; and they knew each other. It was Father Felix whom she saw. Then, suddenly, she turned, and fled down the steps from the chapel.

Mr. Ross, for a moment, was too astonished to follow ; but recollecting himself, he darted after her, fearing that she might lose herself in the wood ; and the people in the chapel were left in as great surprise as he had been. " Helena," he shouted, and then he saw her white dress in the distance, and he ran to her ; she was sitting on a tree-root, panting.

" Oh, Glen, that was the priest whom I saw in Italy !" she gasped.

" My darling child," he said, " what fancies you have to-night. It could not be he."

" Oh, it was, it was, Glen ; and he has brought back all that time. Oh, if I could but forget—only forget !" She clasped her hands, and looked up into his face with an agonized wistfulness.

" My pet, we will go home," he said, tenderly.

" Yes, we will go home—go home !" she answered, looking round with an affrighted expression, and then up drearily to the wind-stirred leaves that seemed rustling to each other the tale of " that time."

He was much alarmed by her manner, and exercised every fascinating power he possessed to soothe and please her, until she was beguiled into half forgetfulness of the emotion which the sight of Father Felix had roused.

They went over the sands to the cottage. A servant met them in great anxiety. The child had been seized with a convulsive fit, he told them. Helena uttered a loud,

piercing shriek, and ran with frantic speed to the cottage, as quickly followed by Mr. Ross. There, on the weeping nurse's knee, lay the child; its face was livid, and *he* saw in a moment that death was written there. He would have taken Helena from the room; but no mortal power could have dragged her thence, and have left her reason.

There was not a tear on her face as she held the babe through the long night, she laid it in the bath and alone administered everything prescribed. She took no heed of anyone but the babe. At eight the following morning it died upon her knee.

Mr. Ross had been almost frantic through dread for her, and fear for the child's life. "My own love," he said, when he saw that all was over, "let me take baby."

She looked up at him for the first time without love in her eyes, and with fierce passion she held the dead infant in a strained clasp.

"My *one* ewe lamb," he whispered expressively, "our little one has been taken from us."

She held the child more firmly, looking at him with fear; he repeated his words; then she said—"God has taken my little one." Her arms relaxed their hold, she laughed a wild unearthly laugh that chilled his blood to hear.

He took the beautiful little corpse from her, kissed it passionately, and then he carried Helena to her bed.

The child was buried; but she knew nothing of it: for weeks and weeks she was unconscious, just as near death as it was possible to be and live. It was pitiable to hear her ravings. She would call the babe by the most tender epithets, would sing for it, coo to it, and then often she would stop suddenly, and say, "God has taken my little one," in such a tone of heart-broken sorrow, that many times Mr. Ross had to leave the room, being unable to

control his emotion. Then at other times she would call his name, and though his arm was round her, she would reproach him for having forsaken her; those were the hardest moments for him to bear. "I deserved it, Glen," she would say, "I deserved it for I sinned." And she would call "Elspie," and talk as if at Calton, and a child again; but only once did she name the Earl—then she said, "No, you did not love me, Longleat;" in another moment, if Mr. Ross had not caught her, she would have sprung to the floor.

The doctors did not give the slightest hope of her recovery. Her youth was in her favor, they said; but her disease was brain fever in its worst form.

Mr. Ross was now the ghost of his former self, not less deathly than Helena when at last she was brought from that fearful delirium to consciousness. And as she very very slowly returned to health, he sank gradually, and the first act of exertion she made was to go into his room where he lay as near death as she had been. He was dozing one still sultry evening, when the tide was rolling on the sands with a low dull moan, she went down into the little parlor, and sitting before the open window, laid her head in weariness on her hand, and looked over the sea with dim unseeing eyes. There was one watching her for some time, who at last came into the garden and stood before her. She would have shrieked with terror; but the habit of self-control had grown strong in her during Glen's illness. She checked herself, and rose.

He came into the room, and said "Daughter, you are in trouble, can I help you?"

She could not tell by his words that he knew her; but she saw it in his keen expressive gaze. Helena was yet weak, and she was worn out with misery and watching, so that she sank trembling into her chair, her white lips parting; but not uttering a sound.

He came close to her, and said solemnly, "There must be an offering for sin."

She started up, and wrung her hands. "Oh, not him, not him," she cried passionately; "let me die—not Glen."

"I have but one message, my daughter," he repeated in a saddened voice, yet firm as unchangeable truth. "Repentance without works is dead. You must expiate your sin, or God will avenge himself."

"How?" she asked, with wild frightened eyes, and speaking in a whisper.

"To live in sin is to dare God," he answered, looking at her steadfastly.

She looked up at him without a word—growing more livid every moment.

"God has taken your babe," he went on.

She threw up her arms so wildly that pity awoke in him, and he laid his hand upon her head in gentleness.

"Poor child," he said softly, and the words melted her dumb agony to relieving tears. She sobbed and sobbed so that the priest sat down beside her; speaking now and then a soothing word until she was calm. At last she whispered with quivering lips,

"Did you know me?"

"Know you!" he replied, "I knew you when you sailed into the port. I have known all your sorrow as I have known your sin."

She shivered; but he went on relentlessly,

"It may be that you have yet to suffer more. Turn back while there is a place for your repentance—haply then God will have mercy."

"Turn back!" she echoed, breathlessly.

"Yes, ask forgiveness of him whom you have wronged on earth, then lead a life of penitence. It may be that God will then save both lives—his, and that one here."

Still she looked at him with eyes dilated, full of terror.

"Both lives," she gasped.

"Yes, both—your husband's, he that was your husband, and this man's."

"He never loved me," she said with sudden scorn.

"Did he not? Ah, better, a thousand times than he who lies in yonder room."

She sprang to her feet, with passion blazing in her face, her hands were clenched.

"He love me!" she hissed, rather than said; "he! and I fled from him because I knew that he had been faithless to another as he had also proved to me; knew that he and his lady mother scorned me. Had I not seen his love wane day by day? he love me!"

"Poor child!" he answered with a pitying look; "silly moth that flew to its destruction! Your husband's love was superior to all the scorn he feared for you."

"Scorn!" she repeated with her father's look of pride; "scorn, and I a Davenant!"

He fixed his eyes upon her, saying slowly,

"No, not that—not a Davenant. And he, the noble Earl, married you, though knowing it, because of his great love. If ever he was sad, I know that it was for you; through fear lest you might know the truth. I know it well, because I promised him to keep the secret. I came hither to this strange land, dared all risks, that that secret might not be known through me. And then I saw you enter Melbourne port, but not with him; and I saw Mr. Ross, found out his true name, and learned all afterwards through one who has been a great sinner, but who has repented before God."

The priest crossed himself. Again she sank into her chair trembling.

"What are you saying?" she stammered. "Why was the Earl so sad?"

“Because, as I have said, you had no right to bear your father’s name; for his first wife lived when your mother married him—your father not knowing it; and when he did know it, the Earl loved you. He was faithful after your father told him all. Did he not come back to you? He might apparently have seemed changed to you; but this I know, he was ever true to you. All his dread was that you should learn the truth, and so be saddened or feel shame. He placed his coronet on your brow, took you to his ancient house, and hid the secret under his great love, because his whole heart was yours: that heart you have broken—that house you have dishonored—that coronet you have trampled in the dust.”

She clasped her hands in agony so keen, and bowed her head in remorse so bitter, that one less firm, less stern, might have refrained from speaking more; but he did not.

“Had I guessed what would follow, do you think that I would have kept silence?” he said. “No power on earth would have made me. And now the Earl is ill—perhaps dying, it may be, dead—through your sin. Your child has gone. Will God spare him, I wonder?”

She flung herself upon the ground. Her long hair streamed like golden beams around his feet; her arms were stretched out; she shed no tear, but uttered a wail too full of agony to be loud. There was silence for a while. Then he stooped to raise her, and found that she had fainted. He laid her on the couch, sprinkled her face with water from a glass that stood on the table, then, standing a little way off, gazed upon her sadly, until she came to herself with a shuddering sigh. He poured out a little wine from a decanter on the sideboard, and put it to her lips. She drank it, and then sat upright.

“Tell me all you know,” she said, in a dry, hard tone.

He did so, making all plain to her ; withholding nothing, however bitter or seemingly harsh, and every moment, revealing more and more of the Earl's love. Like a flash, the priest's tale shone upon that conversation she had overheard in Lady Cranford's morning-room, and she looked up with a start. Then her head drooped again, and a deep groan burst from the depths of her soul.

" His mother died when she knew her son's dishonor. Elspie, your old nurse, died too."

" Oh, spare me!—spare me!" she cried, entreatingly. " Not dead!—not dead through me!"

" All dead," he answered ; " I know it, for I have seen a letter written by one who is in the Earl's employ, and who loves that Earl, as all his servants love him, with more faithfulness than she who was his wife."

She seemed to crouch down before this man, whose un pitying voice was meant to bring her from her life of sin.

" And now God may also take him to his own great peace ; and you—poor sinful wanderer—may be left here, desolate."

She raised her dark, large eyes—so lovely in their tearless agony, and, gazing at him, whispered wistfully, in a tone that almost melted even him,

" Will God take Glen if I go away and never see him more ? Tell me : I think you are good—you are His priest, are you not ? Will you tell me ?"

His sternness gave way before her humility and pleading agony ; but he checked his new-born pity—suppressed his softer feelings, and said,

" Daughter, I cannot tell ; but this I know, that your repentance can alone give safety and bring peace."

" Repent!" she said, in a low voice, and speaking as if to herself. " Repent! Ah, I cannot do that—I love him so."

“And must he die—must he lose this life, and lose his immortal soul through your love?” he asked.

“God help me,” she exclaimed; then sounds were heard overhead, and she flew on the swift but noiseless steps that sickness trains to his room. And she found him whom she “so” loved awake; but white and death-like—conscious, yet not conscious—so dreamy, through weakness. But he heard her stifled sobs as she knelt beside the bed, and he laid his feeble, wasted hand upon the dishevelled gold of her hair, and that touch thrilled her so, that her tears were stayed. She rose, rested her cheek beside him on the pillow, and laid her hand upon his breast. He smiled faintly. She whispered, with deep impassioned feeling,

“Glen, Glen, have I not loved you?”

A slight flush came into his wan face. He murmured, so low, it seemed but the movement of his lips,

“My darling blessing!—my one ewe lamb!” Then he sank to sleep again.

She lay there beside him, hour after hour, until morning dawned. When the doctors came, they told her they saw no hope for him.

No hope! Into how many households do those two words bring despair.

She followed them downstairs, and her dreadful anguish moved them—accustomed as they were to scenes so sad—almost to tears. One, an aged, benevolent man, took her little hand in his, and said tenderly,

“My child, pray; for his life is in God’s hands. Prayer may save him—not our skill.”

Then he left her.

“Yes, prayer may save him; but God hears no prayer without repentance,” said the voice of Father Felix.

He had remained in the house through the night, and now had heard what passed.

She pushed her tangled hair back from her hot, fevered brow.

“Will God spare his life if I leave him?” she asked.

“I believe He will,” he answered, firmly.

“Oh, Longleat, Longleat!” she cried, “are you not avenged? Tell me more of him, that I may grow stronger in my resolve.”

He told her all again: all about his interview with the Earl—with the Pope—and dwelt particularly on his interview with herself in Italy to stir old memories. Then he spoke of Stephanie. His voice changed, at which Helena looked at him; his eyes drooped before her gaze.

“Did you love her?” she asked suddenly.

For a moment he was silent; then answered, in a low tone, “That story ended.”

She answered, mournfully, “As all stories end.”

And then they were both silent for a long time. But at last he took up his story again, and told her that in his visitings he had found a convict whose time of leave had come, but who had been, and was still, an invalid, and was kept here through that, that he was a gentleman born and had friends in England who wrote to him.

“I have read his letters to him, and have answered them in his sickness,” said the priest; “and through those letters I heard all your story. For his father has been placed in a situation of trust by the Earl of Longleat through one Edward Seymour, a clergyman.”

Then Helena started to her feet, and covered her face with her hands. For Margaret rose so vividly before her, with her pure life, and her solemn counsels.

The priest went on to speak of the deaths, and described Cranford’s loneliness, on which none might obtrude, however near or dear in friendship—the dishonor where-

with she had crowned him being the great barrier between him and all comfort. He dwelt upon his past love for her. Then she raised her white face, and said,

“Hear my vow. I will go to him—will plead for his forgiveness—then die. I learned to distrust his love—I knew not of his sorrow : it was veiled to me, as he veiled my father’s shame and mine. I will tell him this. I will atone by penitence. Have mercy on me. Tell me, will he live, my Glen?”

It was the one thought of her soul. Days passed on, finding her by his side. He seemed to improve a little ; but a relapse came, and Helena vowed with solemn oath that if God would spare him she would leave him so soon as he was better ; that she would seek the Earl, and then live in lonely penitence all her days. From that night he seemed to revive. As his strength grew she dared not be much with him, lest her purpose should fail. She would sit beside him when he slept, with her eyes—that seemed to grow daily larger and more purple—fastened on his face, in an almost devouring gaze. So that sometimes, if he wakened suddenly, he was startled by her sad, earnest expression. And he would smile upon her, and call her by such loving, tender names, that she would leave the room quietly ; but, being on the threshold, would fly swiftly, in her awful agony, to her room, and lock the door, that none might witness her despair.

Her soul hungered and thirsted for every word that fell from his lips, for every thought that came into his heart ; in his presence there was her heaven—and yet, every day that ended brought her nearer to the fulfilment of her vow.

The summer was near its death when Mr. Ross walked with her one evening upon the shore. He was quite well now in everything but weakness. He had one arm round her slight shoulders for support ; in the other hand, he

carried a stout stick lest he should lean too heavily on her. They did not talk much. She seemed tired or sad, and he rallied her a little.

"You are almost well now, Glen," was her unanswering answer.

"Is that a reason for your melancholy?" he asked, gaily.

"No; but for meditation," she said softly, at which he laughed, and wondered if she were "turning Romanist," as she used such a term—and the priest was such a frequent guest too.

She shivered at the mention of him, and Mr. Ross turned their steps towards home.

He stopped in the low doorway, and looked over the wide expanse of heaving waters, then said,

"What changes since we came, my darling!"

"Yes, what changes," she repeated, clasping her hands. "What changes!"

"Our little one's grave will make this place sacred to us, Helena."

She looked for a moment as if she would have hid her face in his breast, or have burst into tears; but she put a manifest restraint upon herself, and did neither, only grasping her hands tighter, she said,

"You will always care for it, Glen—always care for our darling's grave."

"I, my own love! Will I not? And you?"

"It will be a memory to me," she answered, looking over the sea—"a memory!"

"My darling," he said, anxiously, "don't look so sad. To-night ought to be a jubilee."

She nestled her head in his breast and sighed weariedly.

"Glen, I shall never be jubilant again; but I shall ever, ever love you. Always think that. Come what may. My life with you has been *too too* happy—though I have

sinned. But I must atone. Kiss me, Glen—kiss me with the sea before us, that whenever I look upon a wave I may feel your touch; say something to me, that in every splash I may hear your voice, and be happy at least for one brief moment in a dream.”

He held her to his heart, showering kisses upon her sweet face, and looking down upon it, said fondly, with half a smile,

“Naughty child!”

Yes, she answered solemnly, “God knows I am *that*.”

But he answered with a burst of tenderness,

“Nay, nay, my *one*, my *white* ewe lamb!”

So saying, he led her into their cottage, and the door was shut.

That same night, when all the inmates were in bed, a figure stole quietly down the little garden, and was met by Father Felix at the gate.

“May God help me!” she said piteously.

“He will help you, my daughter, only trust in Him,” he answered.

They arrived at Melbourne, and drove to the port, where a vessel was just ready for sailing. The priest took her on board, saw her in her cabin; then left her knowing that it was for ever.

“Strengthen me,” she said to him. “Tell me, is this sacrifice needful?”

“It is your atonement,” he replied. “God gave you his life.”

She bowed her head, and when she looked up he had gone.

Before Mr. Ross had rung for his attendant, Helena was sailing for England, to fulfil her vow which she believed had won that precious life; and alone with her breaking heart she was praying that when her atonement was made, her sin forgiven, she might die and be at rest.

CHAPTER X.

ATONEMENT.

. Oh! wherefore doth the thought
Of the wave dashing o'er thy long, bright hair,
The sea-weed into its dark tresses wrought,
The sand thy pillow—thou that wert so fair!
Come o'er me still! Earth, earth! it is the hold
Earth ever keeps on that of earthly mould!
But *thou* art breathing now in purer air,
I well believe, and freed from all of error,
Which blighted here the root of thy sweet life with terror.

MRS. HEMANS.

AFTER Elspie's funeral the General remained for some time at Calton, and saw much of the Earl; but he fancied that the sight of himself brought memories that were too painful to Lord Cranford; and so, at last, he judged it better to travel for a while again, and trusted that time would heal the Earl's great sorrows, so that he could rouse himself to fulfil the duties of his high position. But after the General had left England, Cranford seemed to sink into even deeper melancholy; he had a long, tedious illness, too, which the physicians scarcely understood, or were able to relieve; indeed, "who can minister to a mind diseased?" Robert said to Mrs. Simcoe, "It's just this, our Lord's heart is broken."

So she believed, for weary months dragged on, and

still he was at Longleat, not better, nor yet worse—but the shadow of his former self.

The first thing that awakened his interest was the removal of the remains of his mother and of the late Earl, his father, to the mausoleum. He made a great effort to attend the ceremony for he was excessively weak.

When it was over, he remained with Mr. Hamilton alone, and pointing to the niche reserved for himself, said, gloomily, “I wonder how long I shall have to wait?”

Mr. Hamilton did not reply then; but as they walked slowly through the park to the Hall, he began to speak of the Earl's great trials with a gentle consideration; not lessening their terrible magnitude, nor seeming to expect from him more than human resignation; but touching upon them with delicate sympathy, so that Cranford, who had long brooded over them in silence, was led almost unconsciously to unburden his full heart. He spoke chiefly of his irreparable loss in the death of his mother.

“It was not even by God's will that she was taken,” he said, bitterly. “She was murdered, and I trace the guilt to myself.”

This morbid conviction had taken deep root in his mind.

Mr. Hamilton was startled; but he only said, “Doubtless, our dear Lady had a terrible shock, which seemed like a rude call, yet no one who looked upon her sweet face in death could have said anything but this: ‘God took her, for it pleased Him.’ There was heaven there, and however hard the sin against her seems to us, the end gained was her rest, her happiness for ever. Bless her memory!”

The last words were uttered falteringly.

“Mr. Hamilton,” Cranford said, “I am a disbeliever now in love and in friendship. I could never lean upon a human being again; but you were my tutor, and kind to

me when I was a lad. I daresay you are what you profess;" then seeing the look of pain on the venerable face he said, "nay, forgive me, sir, I *do* trust you."

The Rector gently pressed the hand that rested on his arm, and answered with Christian benignity, "My Lord, just say what will ease your own wounded heart, what will give you comfort. It was the bitterness of your bitter sorrow that spoke thus—not you. I feel that God has been good to me in having given me this hour with you—my old pupil, the son of my tried friend—that I may show you his hidden mercy. Let me be the rock against which the billows of your sorrow break; but, oh! how rejoiced I shall be if you will only trust in Him!"

They turned into the path that ran through the wood between the halls of Longleat and of Calton; there, pacing to and fro, the Earl told him his whole story, not sparing, not excusing his own weaknesses, nor his deception; and not more than touching upon Helena's sin, because he so well remembered that conversation between him and his mother, which she had overheard on the day of her flight.

Mr. Hamilton did not interrupt him by a single word. When the story ended, Cranford said,

"Now, sir, am I not right in my self-accusation?" but the Rector only answered,

"My Lord, I have never known such love as yours."

The Earl stopped, and leaned against an old tree. Just above him was Helena's name, and Glen Ross's, and his own. They—he and Glen—had carved them one lovely summer's day, and they had had a playful contest who should cut Helena's. She, standing between them, laughed merrily, and said, "Being friends of older time than I have been your love, Longleat, I will not be a bar between you, but rather a link of union, so my mandate is, do each of you alternate letters."

And so, with much bantering of each other, and many a friendly jest, they did so cut her name and title—“*Helena, Countess of Longleat.*”

You might almost have read the two characters in those letters. Longleat's were carved carelessly, as if for idle pastime, but Mr. Ross's were sharp, perfect, and well-defined, as if it were to him a prized pleasure thus to write her name; and Helena praised his skill until he looked at her so earnestly that the red flush suffused her face, and she stood before him silent and confused.

That was in the summer-time, when Longleat brought his friend to be happy, to gain health and strength in his old hall; and he, after gaining health and strength, had stolen Longleat's treasure!

Lord Cranford rested there, with his head against the letters, not noticing that it was the same old tree, and Mr. Hamilton went on referring to the late Countess—

“It might be that her appointed time had come. *I* think it had; but in any case, however much you may blame yourself, my Lord, for your sin of ignorance, I cannot judge you, because the love which caused it seems to me so like the charity that covereth sins. If you will, you may come from your trials purified. Elspie's life and death humbled me to the dust. It may be that they were intended as lessons to you. She might have heard from the lips of Deity Himself, ‘Have faith in God!’ hers was so mighty, so unwavering. What a grand soul she had! What lion-like courage! How her own sense of responsibility weighed upon her, nerved her, so that she could not, would not try to shake that off even when the object of her care was beyond its reach. Do you remember with what fervor she prayed for her; and when I said something to her of herself, what an answer she gave?—‘*Ken ye nae, Measter Hamilton, the Laird himsel gi'ed me the bairn to tend? I hae to keep my trust till I gang to*

Him.' Ah, my Lord, Elspie Cameron's faithfulness sent me to my home a humbled man. I am sure I had never preached so faithfully since my ordination as I did the following Sabbath, when she had gone to Him. And I pray for nothing more than this: that I may copy her example, so far as to do my duty in this life as she did hers."

Now there was no preaching *at* the Earl in all this. Mr. Hamilton felt what he said; and Lord Cranford had seen his increased earnestness of spirit, his greater zeal in the discharge of his parochial duties; and so this conversation had more influence upon him than if the Rector had talked to him with clerical pomposity of what he ought to do; but with little regard for those fine fibre-like nerves that were still quivering with pain, and trembling with fear of a touch. He listened in silence, and then grasped his old tutor's hand with the warm grasp of days gone by. And they went back to the Hall together. That same night the Earl knew that Helena no longer bore his name.

Time rolled on to the third summer after Lady Cranford's death. Just when the days were shortening and cold, Mrs. Seymour and Margaret walked one evening down the lime walk, to see the tide that was rolling in splendidly. They heard the sound of wheels in the distance, and presently they saw the Earl's well-known travelling-carriage dashing down the hill. Margaret's face blanched in an instant. Lord Cranford let down the window, as he had once done before, you remember, and bowed to them. For a few minutes the sea, the cliffs, the road were all indistinct to Margaret. Mrs. Seymour did not speak, for she understood her daughter's feelings. Then Clara came running from the cliff path.

"Mamma, Margaret, I have seen our Earl," she panted.

"Gently, my dear," interposed her mother, not sorry for the interruption.

"He looks so ill, mamma. I do wonder how soon we shall see him. I am very glad he has come."

There was no reply to her eagerness. The three stood listening to the thundering waves. Presently Clara said—

"Mamma, do you think he will marry again?"

"Clara Seymour!"

Margaret's tone startled both her mother and sister.

"He marry, while she lives!"

"She is not his wife now, sister, papa said," answered Clara, timidly.

"Not his wife!" answered Margaret, with slow emphasis—"not his wife, whom God once joined?"

She turned away, and walked to the house alone.

"Mamma, darling," said Clara, now a graceful and beautiful girl, "I surely have not said anything wrong in quoting papa's words?"

"No, love," said Mrs. Seymour, patting the two pretty hands clasped on her arm; "but do not speak of the Earl to your sister. You know the Countess was her dearest friend."

"Yes, mamma," Clara said, thoughtfully, "I know that; but I somehow think if she had not been, sister would——" She kicked a pebble before her. "I scarcely know how to say what I mean, mamma."

"Then don't attempt to say it, my love. 'Silence is golden' in many instances," said Mrs. Seymour, who at once turned the conversation on Charley, whom they expected shortly.

"Do you think he will go to the Crimea, mamma?"

"I cannot say, dear," her mother answered, with a heavy sigh. "It may be. Your father fears it; but he is in God's hands, Clara."

Charley came at the end of autumn. There had been such rough tides for some time, that Mr. Seymour positively forbade him to take out the "Sylph;" so he and

Clara had to content themselves with standing on the cliffs to watch the great waves break against the rocks below. They paid daily visits to old Captain Ball, who lived with his son-in-law in a cottage on the shore. He was laid aside just now by an attack of rheumatism, but every day when they went they found him propped up in bed, with his glass by his side, trying to sweep the horizon from the limits of his window.

The Thursday after Charley's return—that day week, in fact—was a very stormy morning; just when they were sitting down to a rather late luncheon, a terrible blast of wind suddenly swept by the house; the windows shook as if they would have fallen in.

“By Neptune! but this is a gale,” Charley exclaimed, darting from the room. He was followed by the rest. They went to a front window, and saw such a sea as even Mr. Seymour declared he had never looked upon before. The foundations of Bronwylfa seemed to be tottering, and there was a deafening roar of wind and waves combined.

“I'm off to Captain Ball's,” said Charley, as he dashed away.

Margaret, and Mr. and Mrs. Seymour stood in awe before the grand sight. “Black Rock” was completely veiled by the spray that rose in white showers to the summit of the cliffs. They saw groups of fisherwives on the shore near the bay, for there were many boats out.

“Poor things!” Mrs. Seymour said. “Clara, which boats are in?” Clara always knew such matters.

There was no reply. Her mother looked round. “Surely that child has not gone out in this gale,” she said, anxiously.

“Of course she has,” answered Mr. Seymour, composedly; “catch Clara losing sight of Charley's jacket, or of a storm either. She'll be for going out with the life-boat next, I know.”

And, sure enough, Clara, with a shawl over her head, having already lost her hat, was close upon Charley's heels. She arrived at Captain Ball's almost as soon as Charley did. They had to wait a few moments, for the door was secured fast. They could scarcely hear each other's voices, the thunder of the surge, and the roar of the wind filled their ears "with a mighty rushing" sound. Presently Captain Ball's daughter managed to draw back the bolt, but it took the united efforts of the three to shut the door again.

"It's a bad storm," she said, panting; "the Lord save the ships."

Charley rushed into old Ball's room.

"Eh, young sir," he said, "what am I to do? lying here like a log, and, as sure as great guns are blowing, she'll be wanted."

"You give me the key, Captain Ball," said Charley, manfully; "if she is wanted this night, I'm captain. There's Jones, as good as yourself for getting the crew together. Never you fear."

"God bless you, captain," said old Ball, eagerly. "Here's the key (it hung just above his pillow). Will you see to it now, sir, for I'm fearing every minute she'll be wanted. I've never seen such a storm in my life before. And, sir, look up Cope and Ranstall, they're slippery eels."

Charley nodded, and darted off—Clara with him, of course. They had to pull the door outside while the woman pushed within. In going along the open shore Clara clung to her brother; they toiled on, with their faces down, drawing deep breaths at intervals, and they could not hear each other's voices. Sea-weed, shells, sand, and pebbles were borne aloft like straws. They found all the crew of the life-boat on shore, gathered under the shelter of the boat-house. When Charley held up the key, they gave "the young Captain" a cheer; but even that was drowned in the hoarse plunges of the waves. A few

sea-gulls were wheeling and whirring above the water, driven hither and thither by the wind. At last one was dashed against the cliff with such violence that it fell bleeding and dead on the sand.

Women were there, pale and anxious, on the look-out for the boats, whose safe return the most sanguine dared not prophesy. "No boat could live in such a storm," the seamen told Charley. Mermaid's ribbons, blotches of foam, tangled masses of weed, and broken shells, were blown in the faces of the crowd; they drank large draughts of spray at every breath. The women looked blue and starved, but they could not, would not, return to their homes.

After Charley had seen the life-boat brought down to the edge of the water, he and Clara went towards home. All the crew promised him they would remain at hand. The two toiled as well as they could up the steep cliff road. Clara ran blindly against a gentleman who was coming down. It was Lord Cranford on his way to the beach. In her sudden surprise and joy she seized his hand.

"Miss Clara," he said, in his old, tender way, "this is scarcely a day for you to be out. Well, Charley!"

The brave lad grasped the hand of his friend; but he could not speak. It was the first time he had seen him since his great sorrow. Cranford turned back with them until they had reached the shelter of "Rock Cliff." Then he said, "I hear that Ball is ill, and I fear the boat will be needed."

"I shall be captain, my Lord," said Charley, blushing.

"You!" answered the Earl. "Then if she be needed, we shall meet again, Charley."

He went away quickly. And this was their meeting after all the weary time!

"Oh, he is changed!" said Clara, almost crying. "Charley, isn't it sad?"

But Charley only looked grave; he did not answer. Then they passed into the open road, and had to battle with the storm again.

Darkness stole on; the storm raged louder and louder. Not one blind was drawn down at Bronwylfa. Mr. Seymour was first at one window, then at another—indeed, the family were all restless. Margaret could not sit still an instant; her cheeks burned, and her eyes glittered with excitement. Clara had told her of Charley's purpose to go out with the life-boat if it went; but neither of them said anything of it to their mother. The night wore on. About nine o'clock Mrs. Seymour had the shutters in the breakfast-room closed—the room was on the land-side, and sheltered. There had been no dinner served that evening; a substantial tea was laid there. The lamps were lighted; a huge fire blazed on the hearth. The wind roared in the wide chimney, but it was a pleasant sound, and did not detract from their comfort. Margaret sat before the antique silver-urn; her father had just opened his "Times." Mrs. Seymour was in an easy-chair before the hearth, with her feet on the fender-stool. Charley was lying on the rug beside her, with his head on her lap; Neptune was at his feet.

"How cosy we are, Charley," she said, playing with his curls.

"Yes, mother. I pity the fellows at sea. Hark at the tide, how it plunges!"

"I don't hear it in this room," said Mr. Seymour, looking up.

"That is one advantage of getting old, papa," Margaret said, with a saucy smile, handing his cup of tea.

He shook his fist at her, but stopped her for a kiss.

"Mamma, are you coming to table?" she asked. "Really, this room is delicious after the day's noise and turmoil."

"It is," said Mrs. Seymour, rising; "I do hope the wind will lull before we go to rest."

Charley sprang up, and wheeled his mother's chair to the table.

"If you knew what it is to be on board in a storm," he said, "you would think such a scene as this, mother, a heavenly haven."

He had scarcely said the words before Clara rushed in.

"Charley, Charley!" she exclaimed, "there is a rocket. I've been watching all night, it's just been fired over the horse-bank."

For an instant everyone sat or stood spell-bound. Clara was white with excitement. "Oh, Charley!" she said, heaving a tearless sob.

That roused her brother. He darted from the room, through the hall, and left the door open, so that the roaring wind blew hats, caps, cloaks, sticks, and umbrellas to the floor; lifted the picture-frames, then dashed them back against the walls. Very soon every inmate in the house gathered there in confusion.

"Papa," said Margaret, "Charley is going out with the life-boat. Oh! don't let him, for mamma's sake."

Mr. Seymour went off quickly. Clara, seeing Adams, the under-coachman, going out at the side door, slipped a cloak over her head and followed him. It was not until they neared the cliffs that he knew she was with him. He vainly entreated her to allow him to take her back. He was still representing the danger to her when two or three of the other men-servants came up, and with them Miss Seymour.

"I cannot rest, Clara," she said; "it would kill me to-night to remain in-doors."

Clara was amazed; but she said nothing; only it was pretty to see her care of her sister as they went down the

steep narrow path—how she always placed herself in the danger, shielding Margaret, and continually bidding the men take care of her. They went down to the shore, towards the lights which flitted up and down in lanterns. The two girls ran there as fast as they could. They did not see Mr. Seymour anywhere. Suddenly there was a loud shout, that rose above the roar of the wind, and the dash of the surge. At the same moment two rockets were fired from the bank, and by their momentary light, they on shore saw, between the tossing ship and them, the life-boat—which had just been launched—rise high on the top of a huge wave. Then all was gloom again, and it was lost to their sight. Fortunately there was a moon, it passed now from behind the clouds, and shone full upon the sea. Clara, who could scarcely stand, was full of anxiety for her sister. They were clinging to each other, when a voice behind them made Margaret's heart thrill and beat rapidly.

“Is the boat launched, Jepson?”

“It is, my Lord.”

Clara turned round with a glad feeling of security, because he had come.

“Oh, Lord Cranford! is it not fearful?”

“Miss Clara! my dear child, you must go home,” he said in astonishment.

“Margaret is here,” was all Clara answered.

“Margaret!”

Yes, he called her so; and she hid her face in her cloak, trembling with the pain—the mighty pain of meeting him again.

“Are you not afraid?” he asked, bending down close to her. She could hear every syllable distinctly, spite of the storm.

“No, Lord Cranford; I am not afraid. I felt obliged to come down to the shore.”

He took her hand, drew it through his arm, and turning to her sister, said, "Miss Clara, will you cling fast to me? I will take you both under the shelter of the boat-house."

They went there, and stood watching and dreading what might come. Now and then, by the light of the moon, when unclouded, they saw the life-boat; but never for more than a moment.

"Oh, Charley!" poor Clara sobbed.

"He is in God's hands," said the Earl, so kindly, with so much sympathy that Clara, just as she had done when a child, put her trust in him, and nestled close to his side. He passed his arm round her, but Margaret felt instinctively that his thought and care for herself never relaxed an instant. She could only pray, for she felt so helpless in this terrible scene, and so strangely affected by this meeting with the Earl.

They were still there when two or three men came towards them. One proved to be Mr. Seymour. In the excitement and confusion it seemed quite natural to find both his daughters there. He had not seen the Earl since his return to Ruthven, yet their greeting was just as if they had parted an hour ago.

"This *is* a storm, my Lord."

"It is," said the Earl, gloomily. "Thank God, there is the life-boat."

"Girls," said their father, "if yonder vessel be a passenger-ship, we shall need all the beds and blankets we can muster."

The crowd was now very great: a black mass on the sands just before them, and a black fringe all along the white breakers, far away to the beginning of the "village road." There was a shout as the moon sailed from behind the clouds again. They saw that the ship had lost her masts, that she had plunged over the bank, and was close upon

“Black Rock.” They saw, too, that a great number of figures were gathered on the deck. The Earl, Margaret, and Clara rushed to the crowd.

“She’ll never weather this, sir,” said an old seaman to Mr. Seymour.

“What do you mean?” he asked, anxiously.

“I mean this, sir: that every man, woman, and child will be tossed like gulls against yon rock. And the ‘Helena’ can’t help them?”

“Pull away, my lads!” he shouted, as they saw the boat rise for a moment. And then all the people shouted, with hands at their mouths, “Pull away!” as if each one felt that his or her own life depended on those oars. Clara clung to her father, almost wild with anxiety and terror; but Margaret had sought one of their men-servants, and had despatched him with a message to her mother, to have fires and beds ready. Lord Crauford overheard her, and he sent a messenger to the castle.

“It’s not beds they’ll want,” sobbed one young woman, whose husband’s boat was out at sea; “it’s a shroud and a grave, if the Lord’s merciful enough to let their bodies be washed on shore.”

There were groups of such weeping, despairing women, and knots of eager, gesticulating, excited men all over the shore; and still the storm raged on—still the hoarse murmur of the mighty waves—still the thunder of the surge upon the beach broke upon their ears, and the wind battered them cruelly as they clung to each other, or sought the shelter of the overhanging cliffs. It was plain to be seen that the ship was beyond all control, and that the heavy seas were rolling over her. Now there was a loud, long shout, which rose higher than the storm—“She’s alongside her!—she’s alongside her!” but in another moment a great mountain-wave had risen between them.

* * * * *

“Steady, boys—steady,” said Charley at the helm. “Now, all together!”

One long stroke was pulled by those sinewy arms, and they neared the ship again—so neared it that they saw the eager, livid faces of those for whom the sea was hungering. But again a mighty wave came between—dashed over them, and that helpless wreck was whirled like a mere top round towards the fatal rock, and as suddenly whirled back to her former position. This occurred so often that even Jones said,

“It can’t be done, captain.”

“It *shall* be done,” said Charley, firmly.

Just at the moment there was a lull in the wind, and the boat was borne on the heave of a wave towards the ship.

“Pull,” he shouted.

They did pull. Then Charley flung a rope from the “*Helena* ;” it was caught, and such a shout rang from the wreck and the life-boat as might have rent the sky. In another moment all was confusion.

“Stand off,” shouted Charley and his crew to the maddened people.

“Where’s the captain?” he cried.

Then he saw one solitary man striving to conquer a host.

“Jones,” he said, “you keep her right. I must go on board.”

Watching his opportunity, he gave a spring and bounded on to the vessel, where fifty hands were outstretched to catch him.

“You shall all be saved,” he shouted; “but keep back, you fellows. Women first.”

He saw Jones, with passion inflaming his face, fling a sailor into the sea, who had pushed aside some women and young children to save himself. He

saw it, and, snatching the captain's trumpet from his hand, cried,

"Right, Jones; serve every man who acts like a fiend in the same way."

The crew saw their late companion swallowed in the boiling waters—he was lost; and that lesson served its purpose. It had been needed. It was a work of danger and of frightful difficulty to sling the women down into the boat: some of the little ones were actually flung there, and caught by the crew. Well might the captain of the ship wonder to see a mere youth so full of high-souled courage—so daring—so regardless of himself—so thoughtful for others. At length Jones, seeing that the right moment had come, shouted,

"Captain, come on board."

"Off with you," answered Charley, "and row back for these lives."

Could a more solemn injunction have been given? Every man felt it, and every voice cried back in the roar, "Ay, ay, captain; we will—we will."

There was a moment's pause. Charley drew the rope on to the deck. Then the life-boat went off—pushed off, it almost seemed, by the force of that shout, "We will!"

There were yet some women and a few little ones left on board. They came now crowding round, and clinging to Charley as their saviour. After a few words with the captain, he tried to induce them to go below; but in vain. The poor creatures dared not. So all the coverings that could be got together were brought and thrown over them. Some wine, too, was given to them. The captain said,

"There is a lady below whom I could not persuade to come on deck. She has been very little out of her cabin since we left Melbourne, poor thing! She has seemed in great trouble."

Charley had just taken a little child in his arms. He

wrapped it in a shawl, and gave it back to the distracted mother.

"I will be back directly, ma'am," he said; "now, just you keep your heart up, and drink this wine. All of you," he continued, raising his voice, "all of you keep an eye on those lights on the cliff yonder. That is my home, and, please God, you'll all be there soon. My mother is looking after your beds, I know."

"May the Lord Almighty bless her for ever," exclaimed an old gentleman, whose long white hair streamed in the wind. Some of the women sobbed; but others, kneeling down, lifted their hands, and, with hysteric fervor, prayed for blessings on that brave lad and on his mother.

Charley dashed away the blinding tears and went below. The saloon was empty; indeed, it seemed a mere mass of debris. He passed into the ladies' cabin. It was dimly lighted by an oil "safety-lamp" was swinging from the roof. He looked round hastily, and saw a woman, with her arms on the table, and her face bowed down upon them. He went up to her. The ship was pitching and rolling so violently he could scarcely stand. The creaking of her timbers, the roaring of the wind, and the dashing of the waves, made such a tumult, that even he—a sailor—for a moment almost lost his courage. But when he looked at the poor lady—alone in her peril—Charley forgot himself. He put his hand upon her shoulder, and gently shook her. As he did it there flashed through his mind a wonder where he had seen hair so very golden before. She uttered a shriek of affright, and raised her head, uncovering her face. Charley drew back, with a look of horror, such as no peril of his life, no storm at sea, could ever have brought there! And she, clasping her hands upon her breast, looked at him with her dark sunken eyes—her lips white and

parted, her whole face colorless as if in death! So they stood!

“Is it *you*?” Charley said. “Is it *you*? Well might the storm come!”

She stood with that dumb look of terror in her eyes, that stony misery on her face, whose loveliness seemed now transformed to awful grandeur.

He clung to the table, for the ship was lurching again, and the timbers creaked and strained so terribly that he feared she would be a total wreck very soon. With that thought he said, hurriedly—

“Speak, for death is near—*is it you*?”

Charles Seymour, remembering the Earl’s misery, remembering how he had seen him but an hour ago, spoke sternly.

Helena shivered, and, in a tone that thrilled his very soul, she said, mournfully—

“Yes, it is I. Don’t scorn me. I have left all to come back to him, to ask his forgiveness, and to *die*. But God has touched me. Have pity on me—have pity on me! He will not let me tell him that I have sinned. He will not let me hear him say, ‘I forgive you, I forgive.’ No, God will not let me hear that; but I have repented—oh I have repented—and Christ has forgiven me—He has pardoned me; for I had only Him to lean upon when I made myself desolate—oh, so desolate! and He saw my heart was broken for my sin.”

With her hands still clasped upon her breast, her eyes raised, and her long bright hair streaming down over her black dress, she looked so beautiful, so unearthly, that Charles Seymour stood before her breathless. An exquisite smile stole round her lips as she said again, “Christ has pardoned me.” Then she looked at him, and said entreatingly, “Don’t scorn me;” and Charley, who had shed no tear for himself when the thought had lain heavy on his

young heart that he should never, never see his mother or his home again—no tear, because death would come to him when he was doing his duty—even as he had once said with simple pathos—in helping little children and frail women on the sea; no, no tear when he had thought, “I shall die in doing that;” but now, with Helena standing there in her lonely misery—with her sweet voice telling him that she had repented—with her humility before his scorn—with her appeal thrilling every nerve, wringing his heart, Charley broke down utterly; he laid his arms on the table, and sobbed as in all his life he had never sobbed before. She clung to the table with one hand; the other she laid upon his shoulder, timidly.

“Are you grieving for my sin?” she said.

The lad raised his face, and, with the tears streaming down, he said—

“Oh, I am sorry for you—I am sorry; and I have seen the Earl, our dear Earl! to-day—but an hour or two since—and his heart is broken.”

“Longleat! Longleat!” she cried, clasping her hands. “Oh, God! have mercy—take me to his feet—let me ask him to forgive me—let me die there. *Will you save me?*” she said to Charley, in her wild agony. “*Will you take me to him? Oh, I will bless you, for ever bless you, if you will let me see Longleat once again, that I may tell him I have sinned, and hear him say, ‘I forgive.’*”

Charley put his arm round the child, for even in her grief’s awful desolation she seemed nothing more; his tears rained on to her golden hair; he sobbed so loudly, that his sobs seemed a part of the storm.

“If the life-boat comes back you will be saved,” he said, speaking by a great effort; “but I fear—I fear very much that the vessel will not live until then.”

She took a small packet from her bosom, and said—

“If *I* am not saved, *you* may be; will you give this to

him? He loved me once—he was true to me—perhaps he will think of me, when I am drowned, as I was in those days—his Helena; and he will read it as if *she* had written it. I have broken his heart, you say. Tell him I repented, that Christ has pardoned me, and some time, when he is an old man—for God spares the good so long—he will come to me in heaven; and when he sees me there, he will know that Christ forgave me, and then he will forgive me too, and will call me his again. Will you tell him this? Tell him that I left that other land because I knew all, and for one other, yes, a greater reason *then*, but not now—not now. The past has been with me in these later lonely weeks, and I would have given to him now not my repentance only, but my old, old love; and having told him at his feet all my penitence, all my love, I would have gone away to live in sorrow, until Christ, who forgave me, also gave me rest. Will you tell him this?”

Every word she said was as distinctly heard as if the ship had been becalmed. Charley could not speak; he felt choked. She clung to him as again the wreck was whirled round, and his arms were round her. He felt that he could gladly lose his own life to restore that erring one to his dear Earl again. So they stood in that wretched cabin, with every broken thing rolling about, and the storm howling fiercely round them. There was no more time for speech now. Charley knew that the next hour would be a final one.

“You must sit here for a few moments,” he said, placing her in a chair that was fast to the floor, “and tell me where I can get for you some warm wraps.”

She pointed to the door of her own private little cabin. He went there, saw a woollen shawl lying upon a box; the box he opened, and found some furs, also other warm garments. These he tied round her. Then he got some wine from the steward's pantry, and gave her some. F

left her again now, and went on deck ; the first thing he saw was "Black Rock" straight ahead. The captain came to him.

"I was coming down, sir," he said. "It's all over, I fear. God help these crying little ones ! I have five in Liverpool that have said their prayers for me this night, I know. It breaks my heart to see these, and hear their cries."

Charley grasped his hand.

"Captain," he said, "you go on your knees, and pray. I have learned in that cabin just now that prayer can save any one."

"God bless you, lad !" said the captain, "danger like this brings a man to his knees ; but if ever an angel took the body of a stripling, one has done it this night."

"I want a life-belt, if you have one," Charley said.

"There are three in my cabin."

Charley ran there, but in a lurch of the ship he fell with great violence ; for a moment or two he thought his leg was broken, but, though in excruciating agony, it was not quite so bad as that. He found the belts, put one on, and carried the other two to the captain, who put one on ; and then Charley said—

"I should like to have this for the lady below. She is the wife of——"

"I know who she is," the captain answered, "but I wouldn't tell you, a stranger, when her death was near. Poor lady, she went out with Mr. Ross in this ship. I heard all the story afterwards. Poor thing, I fear it will be her coffin."

"The Earl is on shore," said Charley.

The captain replied, "Go and put her that belt on ; we haven't many seconds, I can see."

Charley ran down as quickly as his bruised limb would permit. Helena was on her knees. She rose when he

touched her, and stood quietly whilst he put the belt on. Just as they reached the steps, she said—

“You will give him my letter, and you will tell him I repented, because once I told him I never should; and I want *that* to be blotted out from his memory.”

“God being my helper, I will take you to him,” Charley answered; “but if not, every word shall be told to him if I am saved.”

In the meantime, the life-boat had reached the shore, and, after being driven back again and again, the ropes were caught by those on land; and, amid shouts and cheers, the living freight was borne to shore. Mr. Seymour pressed forward.

“Jones, where is my lad?” he shouted.

“On board the wreck, sir; we are going back for him.”

Margaret’s heart ceased to beat for a moment; she bit her lip with unconscious fierceness. Clara uttered a loud cry, that was caught up by the crowd. In the midst of the confusion, Dick Burns came forward, pressing through the multitude. He was dressed in seamen’s clothes.

“Miss Saymoor,” he said to her, “if young sir is to be browt to land, it’s Dick Burns as mun do it. Dunnot yo say nay; one o’ them sailors has broke his arm wi’ a knock, and some o’ t’others are welly beät eawt. There’s a fresh lot gooin’, and aw mun be one on ’em. Aw con row wi’ th’ best, if aw am gettin’ owd; an’ if yo think as a grateful ’art connot see better nur a born sailor’s eyes, yo’re just mistaken. But aw’m gooin’ for th’ young captain, and if aw ne’er come back, yo’ll tell my Meary as aw had but done my duty; and hoo’ll ne’er threäp, for *hoo* knows what yo han’ done for her an’ me.”

Jones was still in the life-boat that tossed among the edge-breakers; he shouted to the men. As Dick Burns waded towards the boat, and then got in, Margaret saw Jones shake his hand, and she was satisfied, for there was

not a braver sailor, nor a better seaman on all the coast than he ; and she knew that he would not, at such a time, have useless hands on board the "Helena." It pushed off in the thundering surge. Mr. Seymour strained his eyes after it. Many of the crowd had already borne off the rescued to their homes. The line of star-like lights above the cliffs showed that every house was ready to receive them. Even "St. Marie's" little chapel was illuminated, for the priest had made his own house ready—and had then begged blankets and beds to be taken there, so that the chapel was intended to be truly a sanctuary that night. Margaret, running hither and thither, found the Earl carrying a little one.

"Miss Seymour," he said, "whom can I trust with this child? You know the men better than I do. I want some one to take it and this wounded man to the Castle. I must remain until your brother comes—I *cannot* leave the shore."

"Margaret," said her father, "my dear girl, I can never look your mother in the face again if her lad be lost."

"Sister," Clara sobbed, "will Charley be safe?"

So they all came to Margaret in their trouble. She held Clara's hand whilst she sent Adams to Bronwyfla with the child, and another man to Ruthven, with orders to prepare the way for the groups that might follow. She said,

"Papa dear, I feel sure that mamma will see Charley again. Richard Burns will save him if possible, I know—and I have prayed all the night, ever since he went."

"God bless you, my girl," her father said ; "it will break his mother's heart if he be lost." He paced up and down, through the crowd, that made a lane for him wherever he passed—for every heart was filled with sympathy for the father of the brave young captain.

Mrs. Seymour received a message from Margaret that they would all be home soon—and she unconscious of

her boy's danger, went from room to room—heaping up fires, warming blankets, giving orders, and making all needful preparations for those who were coming. And all the time the old house shook to its foundations, and the surge thundered on at the feet of the cliffs below.

* * * * *

Charley took Helena on deck. Scarcely had they got there, when there was a loud crash—and as shriek upon shriek smote upon his ear, the vessel parted amidships, and in another moment he and Helena were struggling in the cold waves. As she rose he caught her long hair.

“Cling to me,” he gasped. She did cling so tenaciously that after another wave had gone over them, and almost drowned them both—he said, “Loose your hold, or we shall be lost.” He took her arm from his neck, and holding her with one hand, seized a plank or spar with the other, and told her to hold fast by it, and that the belt would keep her up. It was an awful sea, and Helena gave a loud, wild, agonized shriek as she saw a great billow stealing on.

“Cling to the plank,” Charley shouted, “and don't try to help yourself, the belt will keep you up;” but just as he spoke the billow rolled over them, her grasp of him might have borne them both down; but when that wave had passed, there was a long quiet swell, and the moon shone down on the sea; then Helena relaxed her hold; but Charley clung to her.

“Hoy!” he shouted, “hoy!” A voice came back from where those oars, with such measured stroke as could be pulled in such waves, were drawing the life-boat near.

“There's the captain,” cried some one, and for a moment, lifted on the height of a billow above them, then dropping down into the watery valley, as if it would have sunk them below it into the depths, Charley shrinkingly, yet with mightiest gratitude saw the

“Helena,” the life-boat, which the Earl had given and had called by *her* name, coming to save him and the wife who had so sinned against him! Ah, never might she tell her penitence, or receive forgiveness, for God had touched her. Charley knew by her drooping head that death had come.

As the boat came down the watery wall, Richard Burns flung a rope with a noose. Charley, with deft art, being sailor taught, passed it round his burden and himself; but when they were both drawn on board, Jones said,

“God help us, mates, the young captain and the lady are both gone.”

But as the briny, cold sea dashed over Charley’s face, they saw him move, and they gave him a little brandy; then they rowed for the chance of those two lives as they had never rowed before.

As the moon shone full upon the dead face of Helena, Jones stared again and again at her; he dared not tell his thought, his fear rather; but he knew her well, and looking towards the shore, so distinct in the white shine, then at the lights in Ruthven Castle, that glittered above the headlands—he shuddered, for he foresaw what must come. There were the same shouts on land, and yet more earnest efforts to bring the life-boat in than there had ever been before. Richard Burns watched his chance, and as if that stripling had been a babe—he sprang out, and bore him to the shore.

Mr. Seymour said, “Is that my lad *dead*?”

“No, your honor,” said Dick; “I’ll just bear him to old Ball’s cottage, and he’ll be telling you himself in half an hour what he’s done.” But Dick’s own heart failed him notwithstanding his cheering assurance.

Margaret and the Earl were standing in another part of the crowd. As is often the case in such storms, there was a sudden lull of the wind now. They pressed forward

just as Jones and two other men had brought the lady from the boat, and laid her on the sands. A long strip of green seaweed, and some red coral weed, were entangled in her hair. Her eyes were closed, her lips had a smiling expression. The moon shone upon her as clearly as if it had been noon-day. A woman looked at her, then gave a loud shriek.

“Christ in heaven, it’s her!” she said.

The people pressed closely round, and as one after another looked, they uttered exclamations of fear and dismay.

“Stand back,” shouted Jones, angrily; for he was beside himself with dread.

Just then Margaret Seymour came. The crowd, as if with one accord, drew several paces off.

She looked down on the dead face—then started back in horror.

“Is one of them dead?” she heard the Earl ask hurriedly. “Don’t lose time, my men.”

Margaret turned hastily round, and, lifting her hands, waved him back. She could not speak. The brilliant moon shone upon her, and showed to the startled Earl her face ghastly in its terror, her lips blue, and tightly drawn, her eyes wild with their dumb, agonized entreaty.

She stood between him and the figure lying on the sands, and again and again her hands waved him back.

“Miss Seymour—Margaret!” he exclaimed—he thought the fearful scene had been too much for her brain—“let me take you——” The wind, which was slowly rising after its temporary lull, wafted aside her dress, and revealed to his eye the calm, white face lying beneath the clear shine.

He stopped, took one quick stride forwards, pushing Margaret aside; then his eyes dilated, his hands clenched, a shuddering cry burst from his lips. He was as one

momentarily turned to stone. His look of terrified amazement was no small sight.

Margaret, with her hands clasped, her figure bending towards him, her eyes fixed upon him in speechless agony, was scarcely less terrified to see

"My love!" he exclaimed, and then his hands relaxed, his eyes lost the look of madness, and were fixed upon the face in a long, earnest, mournful gaze. He sank down upon his knees. "Helena!" he cried, in a voice of anguish that sounded clear and distinct in the air—"Helena! have you come back to me this?"

It roused Margaret from her silent, trance-like state of horror, a shiver passed over her. She went to his side. She was jealous of his honor, his dignity, before his people, and, using his proudest name, said—

"Earl Longfellow, where shall we bear the dead?"

But he gave no answer to her, only, with clasped hands, he repeated—

"Helena! have you come back to me?" And, more than the past had made her understand, did Margaret now know, how he had loved the dead. "My darling! my darling!" he wailed, "may God receive your soul. Oh, I loved you—I loved you!"

He put his hand upon her bare head, and felt the slimy weeds; then he drew it back shudderingly.

"Would that I had died for thee," he said, solemnly. There were loud sobs in that near crowd. The brave men who had perilled their lives to save the wrecked, forgot what they had done; women, who had been weeping in dread for their husbands still at sea, forgot their trouble in seeing his; seamen, brawny and rough, covered their eyes with their horny hands, and wept.

Margaret could not shed a tear—she stood like marble in the full moonlight, and she never heard the thundering surge, nor felt the bitter cold, in her agony for him.

The Earl
little hand
put aside
his true heart

We who
him whose
bards—England's
at will, and
the touch
heard, with
olden time
how his love
we saw
weeping, we
loved, with
expiate her
beside the

And
Lo
Forgive

So, listening to the King's
too vividly—that
belted Earl, whose
his coronet was by
form, gathered in
happier summers,
weeds, and, still
forth the agony of his soul. Through King Arthur's love,
since that hour, those who gazed upon the sight have
seen more clearly into that Earl's great heart, have better
understood the divineness of his love—better understood
the nobleness which, towering so far higher than the lower
codes which govern lesser men, remembered but the human

suddenly turned to stone. His look of terrified amazement was an awful sight.

Margaret, with her hands clasped, her figure bending towards him, her eyes fixed upon him in speechless agony, was scarcely less terrible to see.

“My God!” he exclaimed, and then his hands relaxed, his eyes lost the look of madness, and were fixed upon the face in a long, earnest, mournful gaze. He sank down upon his knees. “Helena!” he cried, in a voice of anguish that sounded clear and distinct in the lull—“Helena! have you come back to me thus?”

It roused Margaret from her silent, trance-like state of horror, a shiver passed over her. She went to his side. She was jealous of his honor, his dignity, before his people, and, using his proudest title, said—

“Earl Longleat, where shall we bear the dead?”

But he gave no answer to her, only, with clasped hands, he repeated—

“Helena! have you come back to me?” And, more than the past had made her understand, did Margaret now know, how he had loved the dead. “My darling! my darling!” he wailed, “may God receive your soul. Oh, I loved you—I loved you!”

He put his hand upon her bare head, and felt the slimy weeds; then he drew it back shudderingly.

“Would that I had died for thee,” he said, solemnly. There were loud sobs in that near crowd. The brave men who had perilled their lives to save the wrecked, forgot what they had done; women, who had been weeping in dread for their husbands still at sea, forgot their trouble in seeing his; seamen, brawny and rough, covered their eyes with their horny hands, and wept.

Margaret could not shed a tear—she stood like marble in the full moonlight, and she never heard the thundering surge, nor felt the bitter cold, in her agony for him.

The Earl, unheeding all these people, took her lifeless little hand in his, pressed it to his bosom, and gently put aside the tangled hair, uttering wild, sorrowful words—his true heart's lament.

* * * * *

We who in these later days so proudly call *our* poet—him whose songs are sweeter than the songs of all the bards—England's Laureate, who plays on England's heart at will, and draws forth sympathies that had slept beneath the touch of other hands—we, seated at his feet, have heard, with throbbing pulse and brimming eyes, how in olden time a King once loved and was dishonored, and how his love lived on. When through the "creeping mist" we saw Queen Guinevere in the holy house at Almesbury weeping, we seemed to see again her once so lovely and so loved, who, having sinned, repented, and then, seeking to expiate her wrong, found no rest until they laid her dead beside the hungering sea—

And all is past ; the sin is sinned, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as eternal God
Forgives

So, listening to the king's forgiveness, it brought back—all too vividly—that hour upon Bronwylfa's shore, when the belted Earl, whose love was as unscathed as the lustre of his coronet was by him undimmed, knelt beside the lifeless form, gathered in his hands the golden hair, his "pride in happier summers," now all tangled with the chaplet of salt weeds, and, still unmindful of the wondering crowd, poured forth the agony of his soul. Through King Arthur's love, since that hour, those who gazed upon the sight have seen more clearly into that Earl's great heart, have better understood the divineness of his love—better understood the nobleness which, towering so far higher than the lower codes which govern lesser men, remembered but the honor

he was bound to guard, and, forgetting all the wrong inflicted on his pride, could thus forgive—yes, as the eternal God forgives.

All this we have better seen through our poet's song. But she knew nothing of the "hands that blest"—heard no word of that forgiveness she had come so far to seek. Ah, no! God had "touched" her, even as she had said, and, though Christ had pardoned her, the wrong which she had done was expiated only by her life. So she slept at his feet—the sleep of death.

Was it not in mercy? for now the barrier which had parted the lips of Arthur and his Queen was swept aside, and in one long, lingering, holy kiss, Cranford and Helena were united once again.

* * * * * *

There was a tiny cot called "old Jenny's," that stood so near the sea that sometimes in the highest tides the waves would sweep down its little garden flowers—sea pinks and sea-anemones, with other wee wild things that grow upon a sandy shore—and it was to this cottage that they bore the dead.

Margaret had so decided it. She touched the Earl and said, gently—

"Rise, my Lord—we will shelter her." Simple words, but ah, how full of meaning!

He looked at her, but gave no answer. Then he walked beside the dead, whom four men carried tenderly, slung upon a sheet, with Margaret Seymour going on before alone, battling with the wind that had risen again, and heaving great tearless sobs.

She had sent to Bronwylfa for everything requisite, and, as soon as old Jenny had learned what was coming to her lonely little dwelling, the shrouding sheets of finest linen and the death-garments were brought in. The seamen laid their burden on the little bed in the inner room.

There were only two in the cottage. Lord Cranford, with fiercely bit lips, and pallid face, stood by ; the men took a long look at the beautiful corpse. The expression on the face was very serene ; it seemed to say that she had gone through the storm to the sheltering haven, and was at peace. Then they went out, touching their forehead as they passed the unheeding Earl.

Miss Seymour went into the room now.

“ My Lord,” she whispered, “ no hand but mine shall touch her if you will leave her with me a while.”

He understood, and went into the other room, still mute, like one who had been stricken dumb.

Margaret felt that she could never forget his look at that moment.

As tenderly as if Helena had been a living babe, did Margaret remove her dripping garments, and lave her beautiful limbs, so cold, so white, then washed and combed her long hair, which lay now like sunshine on the pillow. Never, in all the times of her most brilliant spirits, when her loveliness had been so dazzling, had she seemed so exquisite in Margaret’s eyes as now. The delicate, perfect features might have been cut in alabaster ; the long, black lashes curled on the babe-like cheeks, whose outline even anguish had not marred, and between the transparent lids the violet eyes showed darkly. The pencilled brows, the fair forehead, the wavy gold, the perfect limbs, seemed too beautiful, too fair, to be consigned to the grave.

In the bosom of her dress Margaret found a small packet, saturated, of course, with salt water. She dried it ; then, having opened it, found it contained a faded flower, and a most exquisitely-embroidered handkerchief, with the Earl’s coronet and Helena’s monogram.

It was the General’s flower, and Mary’s gift. Margaret could not tell why they were there ; but rightly guessing that they had been dear to Helena, she placed

the crumbling leaves and stalk upon her dead breast, and little Mary's cambric was the covering for her face.

Ah! they had met now, perhaps. The child who had been waiting for her among the angels had, it may be, greeted her, because Christ had pardoned her great sin.

When all was finished, Margaret, who had shed no tear, knelt beside the bed, and prayed for *him*. Then her stifling, choking agony found vent. She sobbed as if her heart were breaking; but in a while she remembered that *he* was waiting, and then she controlled herself, and went to the Earl, and said, that he could "go now." He went, closing the door behind him.

Old Jenny had been taken by Jones to his home, so Margaret was alone in the wee kitchen, with the wind roaring round, and the surge thundering close before the gate. She had sat still more than an hour, when she heard footsteps outside. Charley came in, supported by two men; his head was bandaged, and he was lame.

"Oh, papa," she said, in terror, "I did not know you. What has happened?"

"Only this," said Mr. Seymour. "This brave lad of mine has had the life all but knocked out of him, and is bent on finishing himself. He wants to see the Earl. We heard he was here."

Margaret pointed to the closed door.

"Is *she* there?" Charley whispered.

"She is."

"Oh, I am glad I came, Margaret. I have something to tell—something to give our Earl. Papa, I will go home, then; but I would rather have died than not have kept my word to her this very night."

He untied the cap that was fastened over his bandaged brow, and knocked at the door, gently. It was opened by Lord Cranford. Without a word, Charley went in, and closed it again.

"Are you hurt?" inquired the Earl, quietly, as if nothing could ever rouse him more.

"My Lord," Charley answered, not heeding the question, with his eyes fixed upon the dead face, and holding in his hand the packet which he had dried, "when I went out in the boat this night, it was God who sent me. He did it that I might have the great joy of comforting you in your awful sorrow. I knew this dear lady when I saw her, because, having once seen her, I could never forget one so beautiful. She remembered me, too: I saw that; for a long time ago she knew me as Margaret's brother, and Margaret ever loved her."

"Margaret ever loved her," repeated the Earl, like one talking in his sleep.

"She gave me this letter to give to you, Lord Cranford; and she said this to me, 'Don't scorn me.' And I had not scorned her," said the lad, looking up into his face; "oh no; but I had seen you but an hour or two before—you whom I loved so much—looking broken-hearted, and the sudden sight of her made me frightened, and so I spoke sternly when I asked her, 'Is it *you*?' For that, Lord Cranford, I now repent," he said, with a sob, "and ever shall. 'Don't scorn me,' the poor lady said, 'for I have left that other land to come back to ask his forgiveness. I would have given him all my penitence, given it at his feet; and not my repentance only, but my old, old love; and then I would have gone away to live in lonely sorrow, until Christ, who pardoned me, took me to his rest. Have pity on me,' she said, 'for God has touched me; He would not let me tell Longleat that I sinned, will not let me hear him say, 'I forgive;' but,' she said, and, my Lord, I shall never, never, never forget her voice then; 'but I *have* repented, and Christ has forgiven me; He has pardoned me, for I had only Him to lean upon when I made myself desolate—oh, so desolate! And He saw my heart

was broken for my sin.' And when I told her I had just seen you, she shrieked your name, oh, so piteously! and she entreated God to take her, in his mercy, to you, that she might tell you she repented. I told her I feared we should never see land; she said *I* might, perhaps, and would I take this letter to you, because you once loved her, and so you might—she being drowned—read it as if the Helena of old days had written it, and yet not she—the same, and not the same, the poor lady said—the same because of your faithful, true heart, which she *now* knew was too noble ever to know change—and not the same, because the stain was so deep on her. 'I have broken his heart, you say,' she said; 'but tell him I repented, and sometime when he is old, for God spares the good so long, he will come to me in heaven, and when he sees me there he will know that Christ forgave me; then he will forgive me too, and will call me his once more.' "

Charley repeated every word with his eyes fixed on Helena's face, as if he wished her spirit to know that he had faithfully fulfilled his trust.

The Earl covered his eyes with one hand, and as the lad ceased, he heaved a loud, convulsive sob. It might almost have rent his life. Then Charley, still with his gaze upon Helena, gave the letter into his other hand, and bending down over the bed kissed the two dead hands crossed upon the breast, with the General's faded flower lying within the taper-fingers—that floral relic of the night when the first blow was given to Helena's trust in her husband!

"Charley," said the Earl, after a long, long silence, laying his hand upon his shoulder, and looking at him with full-souled, earnest eyes, "let no man ever rob me of my first right to be your best, and dearest, and truest friend. I have now no trust on earth so sacred, or so dear as you. You must be to me *something* of what she was—ever nearest, ever dearest; not that I can ever prove my gratitude for

this precious legacy; but henceforth you will be to me my younger brother. God bless thee!—for ever bless thee.”

The lad burst into tears, and for a moment, his poor wounded, aching head rested against the shoulder of the Earl; and thus beside her whom Charley would have saved—beside her, to whom his own bravery would give a quiet grave, the tie of brotherhood was formed between those two for ever. The same hand that waved its farewell to the Earl in the sunshine of that morning so long ago, had now brought the legacy which *had* “repaid” that kindly Earl—a legacy which brought consolation that no other gift could bring in all God’s universe.

Then Charley left the Earl alone.

Cranford knelt down beside the bed, and there read those blurred lines. They told him, and it seemed to him that Helena’s voice was speaking in his ear, that she had repented, and was on her way to tell him this; and would he pardon her, would he claim her in that other world, and let her call him husband there if God so willed it that they met yet once more, united for all the ages that had to come—never more to sin—never more to part?

“I will, I will,” he said, kissing her cold lips; and baptising her with a baptism of tears called her his “wife” again.

Thus Elspie’s “wandering lamb” was brought home at last. The Earl remembered her last prayer for her “dear wean;” and now he uttered his fervent thanksgiving that he could believe she had been safely gathered in that other higher, safer “fauld.”

He kissed her pale forehead once more, covered her face with Mary’s gift, and as he recognized it, a keen pain thrilled him—then he went into the other room where Margaret was alone. Mr. Seymour had gone home with Charley, not liking to obtrude upon the Earl; and Margaret

had arranged for her own maid to come down, for she said she would not leave the cottage whilst Helena lay there.

“Margaret,” the Earl said, “Charley brought me a precious legacy. I shall find my *wife* in heaven. She has seen my mother by now.” He stopped and looked into the fire silently. Margaret’s head was bent, her tears were dropping on her listless hands that lay folded on her knees.

“Yes, they have met by now,” he went on presently, “and she must be taken to Ruthven.”

Margaret looked at him in breathless surprise.

“Not in life could this have been; but in death she is mine again—having repented, and from my home she shall be taken to her grave.”

So it was.

In the grey early morning she was borne along the shore, along by the moaning, heaving sea, up the cliff road, over the headlands to the Castle that had been her bridal home.

Early though it was, a crowd had gathered on the heights to watch that strange sight; not near—the Earl’s sorrow was held sacred by his people, and it was far off, so that the procession was dim in the distance, that the crowd stood. Lord Cranford walked quite alone beside the shell that had been hastily made to carry her home.

Every window in the Castle was closely veiled as that shell and its silent occupant was borne in between a line of weeping servants, who marvelled at the deathless love of him who had thus brought her to his castle once again.

“Let her own old room be made ready,” had been his briefly written order to the housekeeper.

And there it was they laid her.

The day before the burial, Margaret went alone from Bronwylfa to Ruthven. She carried a basket of exquisite white flowers, and a wreath of white immortelles. The housekeeper took her into the death-chamber.

“Miss Seymour,” she whispered tremulously, “tell me, did you ever see anything so beautiful?”

There, in a coffin covered with white velvet, in a bed of snowiest satin, lay Helena, as fair as the *cāmilla* which the Earl had placed upon her breast. Her head was uncovered, her golden hair was left unbound, by his own wish—it streamed over her shoulders, down the white embroidered cambric robe which had been left at Ruthven with others, in that past, happy, bridal time.

“Let her be just as she was in life,” the Earl had said to Evans and to Mrs. Simcoe, for whom he had sent from Longleat, and so with many tears they had performed this last sad office for their lady.

The delicate lace fringed the throat and wrists, and the robe was gathered at the waist by a white girdle, just as she had been dressed so often in her life. So startlingly like herself, so exactly as if she had only fallen asleep, that Margaret started back, and truly could she say she had never seen a sight so fair.

A solid silver shield was on the coffin lid. It bore this inscription—

HELENA,
COUNTESS OF LONGLEAT,
LADY OF RUTHVEN.
AGED 25.

Above the shield, on an ermine cushion, was her coronet

“I believe the inscription will not be written on the tomb,” whispered the housekeeper; “but our Lord ordered it to be put here.”

As she spoke he entered, and the woman withdrew.

He stood for some time beside Miss Seymour in perfect silence. Then looking at the wreath which lay at Helena's feet, and at the flowers which Margaret had placed by her side—he said,

“We can thank God that she is now where the blossoms never wither, and where forgiveness is for ever—Poor wandering child! Christ who redeemed thee hath now received thee. Thou art Longleat's again.”

He took one of the waxen hands in his, and saying solemnly,

“My wife! for ever now, in time and in eternity”—placed again a marriage ring where no ring had been since Glen Ross took it from her finger, telling her she would wear his upon the morrow.

That morrow which had never been!

She lies in a beautifully constructed vault, in a lonely corner of the churchyard, at the foot of the hillside that slopes down to the shore, just below Ruthven Castle. A white marble cross stands above her. There strangers often stop to read these words,

HELENA,
WRECKED IN THE “DESPERATE,”
OFF BLACK ROCK.
NOV. 2, 18—

“Have pity on me, have pity on me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me.”

If they ask any of the children playing on the sands, who it is that lies buried there? they are sure to receive but one answer—

“It is the grave of the poor lady who was lost in the great storm. Our good Earl buried her.”

And no more; for somehow, it had come to be known among his people that their “good Earl” so willed it.

CHAPTER XI.

RETRIBUTION.

Oh! th' unutterable gloom
That seem'd as narrowing round me, making less
And less my dungeon, when, with all its bloom,
That bright dream vanish'd from my loneliness!
It floated off, the beautiful! yet left
Such deep thirst in my soul, that thus bereft,
I lay down, sick with passion's vain excess,
And pray'd to die.

THE FOREST SANCTUARY.

It was unusually late on the morning after Helena's flight from her Australian home (if it be not a profanation of the word to call it such), when Mr. Ross rang for his valet, for he had slept the heavy sleep of convalescence.

"Has your lady breakfasted, Darwin?" he inquired, when nearly dressed. It was thus that he invariably spoke of her—partly from old habit, but also in some measure to gratify his taste. The servants, Australian born, believed that she bore an English title, and they always spake of her as "our Lady."

"I think she has not left her room, sir," the man said.

Mr. Ross thought she was not well, perhaps, and he stopped at her door as he passed, tapping gently, and giving a low coo—his usual call to his darling. Even at the moment he remembered, with pain, how delighted she had

been when the child first imitated the sound; and how often she had knelt at his knee when he took the little one and tried to teach her the dove-like note.

Ah, none but God, who took the little one, knew how his heart had clung to it. But the Good Shepherd had taken up the wee lamb, that the mother might follow after *Him*.

Mr. Ross went down into the room, where he expected to find Helena, as she had not answered his call. She was not there, and he concluded that she had strolled on to the shore. He went into the garden, and leaned over the little gate, watching for her. It was an exquisite morning, there was a fine sea—not rough, yet not calm, pleasantly dancing, and exhilarating to the spirits of him who watched it. He did watch the green waves tumble on the shingle for a long time; then he walked up and down the lonely sands; but saw no signs of her, and he went into the cottage with a vague feeling of uneasiness.

He rang the bell, and sent for Helena's maid. "Where is your lady?" he asked.

"She has not yet rung for me, sir; and she told me not to disturb her early this morning, as she was not well last night; indeed, she charged me to see that the house was kept quiet, as she did not wish you to be disturbed either. Is anything the matter, sir?"

He did not reply; but pushed by her, and went upstairs with that vague uneasiness increasing.

He tried to open the door, but it was locked; no answer was given to his repeated calls; his almost frantic fear gave him strength to burst it open. The bed-room looked as if it had not been occupied; the bed was undisturbed, but there was an indent in the coverlet at the side as if someone had knelt and rested the head there. He looked round helplessly, hopelessly; for a moment he seemed paralyzed, then he rushed downstairs. A terrible

dread had seized him; after last night's excitement had her mind given way? He recollected her words to him at the door, and he felt as if he should go mad.

The servants were sent in different directions. Mr. Ross himself rushed hither and thither in search of her; but all in vain. He mounted his horse, and dashed off to Yarra Hall. There he found bewilderment equal to his own, for, the housekeeper told him that to the great astonishment of the domestics, their lady had arrived there about midnight; had had two trunks hastily packed, and had then left again. She had scarcely spoken, and had seemed "so heart-broken," the housekeeper said, that she naturally asked where her lady was going. She said, "To England," nothing more.

The man-servant who had carried the trunks to the carriage that waited for her, told Mr. Ross that there was "an elderly gentleman in it, who seemed like a priest."

Mr. Ross uttered a fearful curse, and went up to her rooms.

He found all her jewellery and elegances which he had lavished upon her, left in their places. She had taken with her a supply of linen; a few plain dresses, and warm wraps; the Bible—the reader will remember that, a long time ago, Mr. Ross told her that although he was not "a religious man, yet he had a great love for the Scriptures"—the Bible which he frequently read, and which always lay upon a stand in his dressing-room was gone: hers was in its place—a dainty little thing, bound in ivory and gold. He took it in his hand, kissed it passionately, and placed it in his vest. Then he flung himself into the saddle, and galloped at mad speed to Melbourne.

And even as Edward Seymour had once watched the masts of the "Desperate" dip beneath the waves, so did

Glen Ross watch them now. He found one clue to the truth. The boatman who had taken her to the ship "only just in time," he said, was found, and he gave the best description of the lady that he could, she having been closely veiled; but it answered to Helena, as did his portrait of the priest to Father Felix.

Mr. Ross returned to the cottage as nearly insane as a man ever was who still retained his senses. He could not rest a moment; he hunted for the smallest scrap of paper on which she might have written her reasons for having left him. He would sometimes go to her rooms and sit there in mute despair for hours; at other times he would fling himself on the floor, and call her frantically by the most endearing names which the fondest love could suggest. He cursed the priest—cursed his own blind stupidity in not having foreseen the evil, and then he would entreat God to bring her back to him, as if he had never sinned.

Four or five days after Helena's departure, he, haggard and worn, with the wildest look in his great dark eyes, was coming from the child's grave, where he had been lying for an hour or more; he had not tasted food, had not slept, since the moment when he discovered her flight; so that any one who saw him now could scarcely have supposed him to be the same man; his long matted hair was waving in the wind; he was staggering rather than walking along the sands—when, looking up, he saw Felix the priest. He stopped, and then with a yell of passion he sprang upon him, and clutched his throat like a tiger.

"Where have you taken her?" he shouted fiercely.

For a moment that man's life was in his hands. But suddenly he relaxed his hold, controlled his passion, and in a subdued, but none the less terrible voice—more terrible, indeed, for its pent-up wrath, he said, "Tell me, you villain, where is my ——, where is she?"

“*Your what?*” answered Felix, sternly. Then there was silence for a moment. “Poor child! She has gone back to him whom she wronged—aye, as she has gone back to her God, for her repentance has begun.”

“*Gone back to him!*” repeated Mr. Ross; “gone back to him! oh, heaven!”

He threw up his arms, and with his white face raised, his blood-shot eyes staring into the pure face of the sky, he laughed a loud, mocking laugh that rang over the quiet shore, and then he fell senseless, like a log, at the priest’s feet.

* * * * *

Six months passed over. Glen Ross was still at the cottage, worn, wasted, the shadow of his former self, a melancholy man without God in his heart, without hope in his life.

That fearful illness had left him shattered—too shattered it seemed for him even to nurse revenge against Father Felix, for he it was who sat beside him now. For the first time Mr. Ross was listening to the whole truth.

“And it was to save me she went? you say.”

“It was. You were in danger, she went away, gave up her love that was *her life*, I verily believe, lest a worst thing should come to you.”

“Leave me,” was all the answer given, in a low, husky voice. Then he was left alone.

Ah! Mr. Ross, in his despair, was more to be pitied than the man whom he had so wronged, and who had just buried his dead. The fearful trial which had cast its gloom upon the young Earl’s life—a gloom no after event could ever chase, which no joy could ever brighten—had served its end, and had purified him. He had learned this lesson, that no aim can justify the slightest deviation from simple, honest, single-minded truth; that no one may, with impunity, do evil that good may come. All his former scepticism had passed away. He had learned th

lesson, "Have faith in God." He no longer questioned his wisdom, or his love, in the mystery of his guidance, and the peace which passeth all understanding had been given to him—that gift of inward peace which Christ received for men. He was patiently enduring his sorrow, submissively waiting until it should please God to take him home; and now no day ever dawned that Longleat did no good thing.

Yes; far less in his dishonored loneliness was he to be pitied than Glen Ross—the friend who had so wronged him. For ever yearning for his lost child; for her to whom his heart still clung with faithful love; with no tie to the one but a grave; with no hope of ever clasping to his heart the other; with keen unavailing remorse for his sin; with no hope in his God; with no ambition for his future—for ever brooding over his misery, for ever longing for annihilation, in which he could not believe—was he not to be pitied? Was he not punished even in this life for his fatal crime?

He, whom the Creator had so richly endowed, and by whom all the good gifts bestowed upon him, had been counted nothing beside the one forbidden thing!

* * * * *

So other months passed on—the weary, weary months, during which Mr. Ross had lived—if life it could be deemed—a strangely fitful, feverish existence. There are some men, however, whom no blow can crush—no trial destroy—those from whom

The dark hours wring forth the hidden might,
Which hath lain bedded in the silent soul.

Such an one was Glen Ross.

A change gradually came over him. It was like the breath of spring, breathing on the ice-bound heart of nature. A thrill of energy—first faintly felt—crept through his veins. He was conscious that if he yielded

longer to his enervating moods, reason must give way. He roused himself.

After consideration he decided to enter the army, with a view to active service in India. He craved employment now as the only refuge from his bitter memories, and still bitterer remorse. He panted for excitement, and his resolution having once been formed, was followed by prompt action. He had erected a most beautiful monument to the memory of the child, who, like her mother, was buried near the sea, and, strangely enough, like her mother had no other than her Christian name recorded above her grave—simply “Helena”—for Mr. Ross would not have a false name written there, and his own would have cast a shadow on the babe.

The night before the morning of his departure had come. He had packed with his own hand everything that had belonged to Helena and her child. There was such a deserted aspect about all the rooms through which he wandered—like the ghost of a dead past—that he could not bear it. He went into the garden; the flowers which his darling had tended; the beds she had had cut to please her fancy; the rose-trees, whose growth she had watched, whose buds she had gathered in many a happy hour to wreath in her hair because *he* liked them, were all there; but she, the spirit of that solitary home, had fled, and where?

Her voice had pass'd away !
It had pass'd away like a summer breeze,
When it leaves the hills for the far blue seas,
Where we may not trace its way.

So her voice had passed, for no tidings of her had come to Glen; and now, as he stood beside the rose-tree, beneath which she had sat so often with her babe, when he, in his loving play, had shook the branches until mother and child were covered with the shower of fragrant, pearl-like

leaves, so that the little one had gazed with wondering, violet eyes into his darling's face, the wee mouth quivering with an infant's fear, even of things so fair, until the mother smiled, and then the little cooing laugh had sounded, coming like a note of angel music up through the tender greenery to the father's ear, and he had knelt beside the two, folding them to his great loving heart, forgetful of his crime, forgetful of his wrong, in his worship, which was idolatry. How often this had been!

His eyes burned in their unteared agony, and with a groan, that came from his heart's depths, he turned away, and went, as one walking in his sleep, to the child's grave. It was a most beautiful night. The tide was creeping in, just lapping the many-tinted rocks, strewn here and there upon the shore. The sun was a mighty globe of yellow fire; his beams had made their pathway along the waves; the west was untinged by his dying crimson glories. All heaven lay serene and pure. There was a mellow light on the smooth sands; a green light upon the waves—they were like emerald crystals tinged with frosted silver when they curled before they fell to "dreams." To the left lay the forest where the priest gathered his flock. And just beneath its deep shadow, like a white stone marked in a long dark life, gleamed the pale Carrara cross above the dead child.

Glen Ross walked on—on by the murmuring sea—on by the whispering forest trees—on beneath the glooming shadows which no sun could penetrate—on until he stood beside the grave.

"And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

The words came to him like a suddenly-remembered dream. He knew not whence; but so it was. He had often read the story. It was when first he loved his darling that its tender beauty so impressed him. He had

called her his "one ewe lamb," and now, beside the grave of their child, the solemn truth of the prophet's teaching, the awful revelation of David's sin and his own, was brought fully before his soul.

"Oh, my child! my child!" The wail sounded in the ear of God, and perchance the spirit of that little angel, always beholding the face of its Father in heaven, might be sent with a message of peace to the repentant soul.

Night had crept on long before Mr. Ross left the grave. There was a faint light over the stone that shone upon the name, "Helena." He turned from it with a feeling he had never had in his heart before—a feeling of dread for his own future in another world. There were two paths to his cottage. He took the longer one. He knew there would be no loving voice to welcome him—his sin had robbed his whole life of that possible sweetness. Never more for him might sound the voices of wife or children. His "house was left unto" him "desolate." He had no hope for his future; stern reality faced him—the reality born of black despair. As he had sown, so must he reap.

There are swift hours in life—strong-rushing hours,
That do the work of tempests in their might!
They shake down things that stood as rocks and towers
Unto th' undoubting mind; they pour in light
Where it but startles—like a burst of day,
For which the uprooting of an oak makes way.
They sweep the coloring mists from off our sight;
They touch with fire thought's green page—the roll
Stamped with past years—and lo! it shrivels as a scroll!

Yes, even as a scroll were the past four wasted years reviewed by Glen Ross. How different his fate might now have been, had he conquered his unholy passion! Longleat's old dreams of life—his own old dreams—all

realized—those happy dreams they had indulged in their college days! Now Longleat was dishonored, and he himself a wreck. He thought these thoughts as he walked on towards home. There was no hope in his heart.

“I have cried for mercy day and night, and there is no helper; there is no God,” he said, aloud. And then he looked over the waves, so dark and weird, for the moon was behind a rock-like cloud, and the drear expanse made him shiver. Suddenly a deep crimson light gleamed in the far distance, which changed rapidly to hues of green and violet, which again broke into a thousand silver gleams, so splendoring the sea, it seemed as if a shower of jewels and diamonds had been dashed from heaven into the depths.

Mr. Ross stood spell-bound. Down at his very feet rolled a bar of brilliant silver that made a line of light along the lonely shore, where he himself was the only witness of the grandeur that proved *God is*. He bared his head, and, for the first time since his punishment had come, Glen Ross prayed humbly, penitently, for pardon of his sin.

As he turned his face from the sea towards his empty home, he felt that now the child was indeed lonely in her little grave—the grave that would never more be tended by his hand, never more be gazed upon through his mist of tears. No sound save the moan of the wind through the forest aisles, and the requiem of the grand ocean waves, for ever rolling in their ebb and flow, would be heard above that cross, beneath which the babe lay in her sinless rest, waiting for the resurrection morn. So lonely! In very truth, Glen Ross had been called to “restore” his “lamb fourfold.”

Long ago—how long it seemed to him now!—he told Helena he could die for her, and yet his selfish passion had destroyed her! “My life’s bright hours are done!”

he thought ; but the shadow he had flung on hers was the one torturing thought to him.

The next day he returned to Yarra. His orders were given briefly, but nothing was forgotten. He sold everything at a reckless value, excepting what had belonged to her—of those things, what he *could* take with him he did. The rest were packed and consigned to safe keeping. It almost maddened him to go through the rooms.

The night he arrived, he went into her boudoir. Her harp was there, just as she had left it, with one string snapped. She had been playing for him that sweet old air, "Go, Forget Me." He told her he did not like it, and she had laughed at him, toying the while with the strings, when one suddenly gave way.

"I shall play no more," she said ; "I feel to-night, Glen, as if all the music had gone out of my soul."

She played no more for him, and the harp, with its broken string was there, with the light of the setting sun brightening its gold. Its music was hushed for ever, even as her voice was hushed—never, never more to be heard by him.

Ah, he did not yet know that God had touched her with that last touch that sanctifies the life by the consecrating crown of death. He lingered in that boudoir. His grief was too heavy for tears ; the dull misery of his heart was benumbing. He moved and spoke as one in a dream.

His servants talked in whispers to each other of their master. They prophesied his death. To all of them he behaved generously ; for most of them he procured situations. It seemed as if his own agony made him feel more acutely for the needs of others. The one wild longing in his soul was for some scrap of writing in her hand.

"If she had but said farewell !" was his constant cry ; yet he knew that in doing that the farewell never would have been. As he was sitting there, dreaming of days

gone by, in which he and Helena had been so happy, when for a time the great sunshine of their love had chased the shadow of even their sin, a servant entered with some papers.

Mr. Ross did not take them; he was gazing out on the garden with such dark gloom on his face, that the man turned his head to look at his master again. Presently, the door opened a second time; a quick step was heard on the carpet. Ross looked round, and saw Felix the priest, whose face, ever thin, and worn, and white, looked ghastly now.

“Oh, sir!” he said, “God knows, I never feared this.”

“What?” exclaimed Mr. Ross, starting to his feet. “What do you mean?”

There was a wild hope born in his heart.

“Speak!” he said. “Is it my darling, my own darling!”

Father Felix shook his head, and clasped his attenuated fingers tightly; his lips trembled so, that, for a minute, he could not utter a word.

“For heaven’s sake, man, speak. *Is it my darling that you have tidings of?*”

“Yes,” he said, so mournfully, so solemnly, that the heart of that other sank like lead. “Yes; her sin has destroyed her. She is lost!”

Mr. Ross grasped his arm, and looked at him with panting breast and staring eyes.

“The ‘Desperate’ was wrecked off the Welsh coast. The news is in the papers. I dared to hope that she was saved; but I cannot hope more. Read this, Mr. Ross, and see at what cost you purchased your bliss.”

He placed in Mr. Ross’s hand a letter, written by Edward Seymour for Mrs. Greaves, to her son, in which he told of the shipwreck, of the Earl’s sorrow, and of Helena’s death and burial—events which had an interest

for her now that her husband owed his comfort to that Earl. Edward hoped that in some way Helena's tempter would hear through his lines: therefore, he wrote carefully. Mr. Ross read the letter; gave it back to the priest with a dagger-like thrust piercing his heart at the sight of the signature, "Edward Seymour!" but he said quite calmly, "Her death is on your head; yes, on *yours!*"

The priest trembled. He said, "Nay, not on mine. It may be that what I did saved her soul."

"It may be," answered Ross, with sneering scorn; but he restrained himself. "You are an older man than I," he said, rising at last, "but I am older in my youth, for my heart is dead, my life destroyed through you."

He turned away, with the sad words upon his lips, and Father Felix never saw him again.

No one ever knew how that night of misery was spent by Glen Ross. On the morrow, he had sailed. The babe, in her grave, was left for ever alone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DAYSMAN—DEATH.

Ah, dearest, if there be
A devil in man, there is an angel too ;
And if he did that wrong you charge him with,
His angel broke his heart.

SEA DREAMS.

GENERAL DAVENANT was in Florence when tidings of Helena's death reached him. He returned to England at once, and went to Ruthven Castle. He found the Earl very ill, with consumptive symptoms, brought on by exposure on the night of the storm. The cold had taken effect on an already enfeebled frame. Their meeting was a very painful one ; but Cranford's weakness, and his submissive spirit, forbade the exhibition of extreme emotion.

The General gazed upon him in wonder : he contrasted the difference between their trials and their lives, and he was humbled.

He went down the cliffs, to Helena's grave, alone. When he came back to the Castle, he found the Earl reclining before a window that looked on the sea. The General took his wasted hand in his, and stood silent for a time ; then, with tears in his eyes, he said, " Cranford, I prayed over the grave of my child as I never prayed in all my life before. I think God touched *me* there."

And the Earl, with his mother's smile softening and lighting up his melancholy face, answered, gently, " So, I

think, God often brings his wanderers to their desired haven.”

Spring passed; summer came, and ere it ended, the General and the Earl were located in a chateau on the Lake Lucerne. It was beautiful to see the old man's care for him, who now appeared to be his *all*—touching, very touching, too, to see Lord Cranford's love, and son-like devotion to him who was the father of his faithless, yet forgiven wife. And in that quiet home by the lake, among the grand mountains, Lord Cranford regained his lost health, though there was an aching void in his heart, a sadness over his spirit which would ever be until he entered into his rest. In those days he was rarely seen to smile; but the General never heard a murmur.

At length, he wearied of his inactive life, of its calm monotony; and one morning, when the letters had been delivered and read, he said, “I have had one from my brother Charley. The lad will win laurels in this war; but may God spare him, for I think I could *not* bear to lose him.”

The old war-horse sniffed the smell of battle from afar. He said, suddenly and cheerily—

“My Lord, let us go and see for ourselves what they are doing in the Crimea;” and, in saying that, he gave expression to the Earl's own wish.

They went to the East, and, in the stirring excitement, Lord Cranford became more like his former self, although his habitual gravity was so pensive that some of his friends, whom he met there after a long separation, were painfully affected.

He and General Davenant went, like many others, as mere spectators of the great struggle, yet it was well known that many a poor wounded fellow owed his life to the Earl of Longleat, who, after a skirmish, was sure to look after the wounded; and many a man in hospital

closed his eyes here, to open them in a better world, through the teachings of that "good Earl."

One brilliant day they sailed into the Sea of Marmora, in the neighborhood of which the reserves of the allies were stationed. The Bosphorous glittered in the sun, and down in its depths were seen the shadows of the cypresses upon the banks. There were vessels of all kinds, transports, merchantmen, yachts, and steamers breaking the expanse of water, and in the midst theirs anchored. Lord Cranford had been very wishful to see Constantinople. Having seen its "narrow, dog-haunted streets, and their dirty inhabitants," very glad he was to quit "the abominable place."

From thence they went to Beicos Bay. The Earl expected to hear of Charley there, but was disappointed. They then had lodgings for a time at Buyakdere, near which place the "Agamemnon" was lying; for the General did not seem well, and Cranford thought that rest was needful for him. In the meantime cholera was raging at Varna; it had now made its appearance in one or two of the ships anchored in the bay. The General was nervous, though he said little, so Cranford proposed that they should quit Buyakdere, and they went to Therapia, where they met several of the General's friends of long ago. There he gained strength and nerve; for he told the lady of a French officer that cholera was a disease which he dreaded beyond all others. Lord Cranford had only guessed that he had this fear.

So passed away the spring and summer of 1854, during which they saw those many monstrous evils and mistakes of officialism which entailed on our brave troops such unnecessary sufferings, and cost such fearful sacrifice of life—so needlessly and so cruelly; and they saw so many horrors, that if the "fervid oratory" of Mr. Bright, and the "grave eloquence" of Mr. Cobden failed to win them

entirely to the side of the "peace party," yet none the less did they shrink from avowing, with Lord Palmerston, that "There are things for which peace may be advantageously sacrificed, and there are calamities which nations may endure still worse than war." Words easily said in the Senate-House of happy England, but hard to be understood on that sacrificial altar in the East!

The Earl left General Davenant in the care of his French friends for a time, and went to Baltschick Bay, where, on the 5th of September, the blue jackets and the red mingled. There he found him whom he went to seek, his "younger brother" Charley, whose bright face was overcast with the shadow of the fearful sights around him, but whose brave spirit never for a moment quailed. As he had been in the life-boat on the night of the storm, so was he now on board the "Britannia."

The 20th of September found the General and the Earl looking on the memorable battle of the Alma. The General was on board the "Agamemnon" while the heights were stormed; the Earl, in following Lord Raglan's staff, shared the dangers. Among the naval heroes who distinguished themselves that day by their humane assistance to the wounded, Charley, though yet "a mere stripling," was one of the foremost.

After the battle, General Davenant, being utterly worn out with excitement, slept in his tent long and heavily, but Cranford spent the night on the field. He went there with a bundle of lint under one arm, a brandy flask and a water bottle in his pockets, also a great number of cigars, and he searched among those four thousand men for any whom he might aid. He was binding one poor fellow's bleeding stump, when the youth—for he was no more—raised the other arm, and, stroking Cranford's face, said, with a delirious smile, and in a broad Scotch accent, "Mither, I ken I'll be hame the morn," and fell back dead.

The Earl passed on: to some he gave brandy, some he covered with garments borrowed from the dead. Many a brave fellow, who seemed to think lightly of a fearful gash or a bleeding limb, just asked him if he would kindly "raise his head," or "give him a light," and very soon Cranford's cigars were distributed, and shone like little red stars on the ground all round him. Truly, he marvelled at the indomitable "pluck," the heroic endurance, the brave spirit, which no suffering could intimidate, and which the prospect of death itself could not destroy. He found one young private of the 77th who had both his legs shot off.

"My poor lad," said Cranford, "I cannot do anything for you, I fear, but give you a little brandy or water."

"Shure, yer honor," was the reply, "and I'll be aisy if you would tell me if the captain himself is safe."

"What captain?" said Cranford.

"Captain Melville, yer honor, of the —th."

"I don't know him," Cranford said; but, seeing a group of moving lights in the distance, he said, "I'll try and find out for you. He is not your captain, though; you belong to the 77th."

"No, yer honor; but shure he's been a friend to me-self."

"Can any of you tell me if Captain Melville, of the —th, is wounded?" he said to a party of soldiers, who, tired as they were, were looking after their comrades on the field.

"The captain is all right, sir," cried one of the men, cheerily. "Two horses were shot under him; but never a scratch did the captain get, God bless him!"

Cranford ran back to the poor fellow, and, seeing that he was all but gone, he knelt down, and said, loudly and distinctly, "The captain—Captain Melville is safe."

Instantly there was a faint cheer from several fellows

lying round. The young man was not able to speak; he lifted his arm, waved it slowly, then it dropped like lead. He had gone from that fearful scene to meet his God.

When the Earl arrived at his tent weary and sick at heart, he found his servant, faithful Robert Latham, who begrudged a single danger to his master which he could not share, preparing breakfast.

“Robert,” he asked, “do you know anything of a Captain Melville of the —th?” (The regiment belonged to the Light Division.)

“I have heard of him frequently, my Lord,” Robert said; “the men seem to worship him.”

A day or two afterwards, he asked Lord Raglan if he knew the Captain personally.

“That I do,” said Lord Raglan. “I had the great pleasure of complimenting him at the end of the day. The man is a marvel to me; he has not been long in the army, has never before seen active service, yet if he had been a veteran in arms he could not have shown more skill or cooler bravery. If he does not fall, he has every chance of promotion. I saw his horse shot under him; the fellow gave a quick leap, caught another as it flew past riderless, flung himself on to the saddle, and led on his men with a shout.”

The Earl felt a strange desire to see this brave Melville, but he had not the chance. Time passed on to the night of the 4th of November; a bitter night it was. Cranford went to the door of his tent, and looked out with a shiver. They were now before Sebastopol. Suddenly he heard the tolling of church-bells in the distance. The darkness was deep, the stillness so profound that every sound in the city was heard in the camp. An officer who had just been on picket passed by, whistling.

“Do you hear the bells, Armstrong?” Lord Cranford asked.

“Yes, my Lord ; and we’ve heard those devils chanting like angels. Bad luck to ’em !”

The lieutenant went his way. Cranford threw his cloak round him, and walked to one of the outposts nearer the city. It was true enough, and he rightly conjectured that some enterprise was planned by the Russians. He crossed over to General Bosquet’s division, and saw one or two of the officers there ; then he went to his own quarters, and expressed his opinion to an English officer. But truly it might be said of the allies that night, “they all slumbered and slept.” About six the following morning, the first move was made in the grand game. The battle of Inkermann had begun—that great battle of which Mr. Russell wrote : “In the ravine—by the redoubt—on the slope through the brushwood, men fought irrespective of all leaders, with a tenacity and valor never surpassed, as if the gods contested the sovereignty of the world within the limits of Inkermann.” That battle which left stars of honor to glitter on the breasts of those who fought, but which left desolate for ever many a once happy home.

When night came, the moon shone on the valley and the slope, and the thousand weapons of the dying or the dead glittered in its peaceful light, while on the still air was borne the wail of agony or the ravings of the delirious. Lights were moving in all directions ; officers, privates, and civilians were assisting the wounded, and searching for lost friends. It was an awful sight—one which has been described over and over again, and which yet can never be realized by those who did not witness it. Now and then some name would be called by one in mortal agony, whose love alone was deathless.

Lord Crauford felt so unnerved by the terrible scenes of the day, that he hesitated before he went to the field ; but, remembering that his help would be needed, he fol-

lowed the General, who had long since gone there, and was as active as the youngest soldier.

It was strange to see how "the lordly indolence," as Glen Ross once termed it, vanished before the excitement of this later time. No one who knew the Earl in those past days, could have recognized him now.

But it was stranger still how his thoughts were with the past to-night. Never had the fingers of memory so tightly grasped that. It seemed as if his whole life were passing before him. His childhood, with the exquisite motherhood that had guarded it, and carefully led its steps to youth, preparing him for manhood by the great lessons of steady adherence to principle and of self-reliance, never permitting him to decorate his ignorance by the false pretensions founded on position, but ever spurring him to emulate in action the high dignity of his own. That mother, whose lessons had seemed so wasted in his "happiest summers," had not lived to wear the crown of her labors; but her noble monument was the later career of her son.

He thought of his college days. With them came the recollections of his friend. He set his teeth, and strode on rapidly, but in a while his steps grew slower, for he saw Helena vividly as she was when she stood amid the flowers that first night at Calton. He tried to banish these thoughts, but in vain; back they rolled, borne on a tide of tenderness so strong that it swept away all passion, all revenge; and, as if she yet lived, he said, involuntarily, "God bless my darling!"

Then he thought of her at peace in her grave, and he thanked God that it was so; yes, he could do that with the precious letter lying on his breast. He was so absorbed that, before he was aware of it, he found himself among the wounded and the slain. The moon shone resplendently; yet lights were glancing everywhere, held close to

the faces of the dying or the dead. The Earl came to a band of men who were eagerly looking for some one it was evident. He inquired whom they sought.

"Captain Melville, my Lord," answered one of them gravely, who knew the Earl by sight. "His horse was shot under him, and some of the fellows say that he waved his sword and led them into the thickest. I didn't see it, I had some work to do with a Russian or two, or, by God, I would have lost my life in saving his."

Lord Cranford wondered yet more at hearing this captain spoken of in such terms.

"You men all liked him."

"Liked him, sir!" the whole nine of them looked at him, their lanterns glimmering like stars upon the ground, and the great moon shone above them, on every face as earnest in its expression as the first speaker's, who said,

"We loved him sir."

There was a murmured response from the rest, that sent an unaccountably strange thrill through Cranford's heart. He left them and went on his own way.

He was passing a clump of brushwood, when he heard a faint moan. He stopped and turned his head, looked closely, then started back with great horror.

Great heaven! Glen Ross lay at his feet.

The eyes of the two men met, and were fixed in a fascinated gaze.

There could be no disguise now; from the one, life was fast ebbing. He could not turn aside, though he shuddered as he lay there, dying on the trampled ground! but he raised one pallid hand to shade his fast dimming eyes—the other arm had been shattered by the deadly shot, and hung by his side in torturing shreds.

He heaved a deep convulsive breath.

"Is it so?" said the Earl, in a low, stern voice—so stern that the dying man shivered, as if his lingering soul had

been called back from the gates of death to hear a curse. His great eyes grew larger, and darker; they were fastened on the face above him. "Is it so? have *you* sought death upon a field of honor, where only stainless men should die? Have *you* dared to lift your sword with noble men, who would have sheathed theirs in their own true hearts, rather than have fought by your side. The worst, the deadliest of traitors!"

"Good God!"

Passion inflamed Lord Cranford's face. The pale hand was lifted from the face, and waved with a deprecating gesture; the blue lips parted; but no sound came. The fixed gaze that had been one of horror, now told that death was near.

"Tell me," said the Earl, not noticing that it was so, his passion gathering strength, his hands clenching, "tell me, have you dared to fight beneath our standard, or have *we* had the petty glory to fight against a foe so despicable?"

Again the blue lips parted; but no sound came. Again the pale hand was lifted to hide the dimming eyes; but it fell. There was a silence so deep that the heart whose blood was surging in strong waves upon the strand of this life, and the heart whose ebbings were so faint it seemed as if every little ripple were the last—both sent their sounds upon the night's still air; but there was yet no forgiveness in the strong. As a fleecy cloud passed from the moon's bright face, a fuller radiance shone upon the dying man. His eyes had closed, so still he lay—so silent he had been, that a new feeling, a *dread*—a sudden dread, came upon Cranford.

"He is gone!" he said; then shouted "Ross!" in another voice—a voice in which pity, fear, anguish, and past love were all blended.

"Glen!"

Glen Ross opened his eyes—a beautiful expression—that old, old look! stole into them.

He tried to speak.

The Earl knelt down, and, bending still lower, tried to catch the whisper. The present was forgotten, the past was with the dying man.

“Longleat, you know the line—

‘Touch’d with sorrow for the dead too——’”

The sentence was not finished—his eyes closed.

It came back to the Earl then, that old college-time! when he and Glen had construed the line. How strangely it appealed now to him!

Touch’d with sorrow for the dead too late!

and that other followed in his memory, that which they had so bunglingly rendered, being in a hurry, because “a boating” was coming off

Demands the sentence, and contented—dies.

He recalled that summer’s day at Oxford, and he groaned in anguish.

“Glen!” he called in a thrilling voice. The dying man opened his eyes, and looked up dreamily. The white face looked very deathly in the cold, clear beams. Cranford put his arm under his head; it fell upon his breast, and lay there undisturbed. Yes, undisturbed. Once Glen had an illness when they were at college, Cranford nursed him through it, and often his friend’s head rested upon his breast, because he said it “felt better there.” This simple movement revived old thoughts, old feelings, old tenderness. It was so because death was touching him; for in the awful presence of death man grows more like his God—pitiful and tender.

“Glen,” he said in a choked whisper, “I loved thee as I loved my own soul.”

The world was fading to the mortal eyes ; but a flash gleamed from them ; the livid hue was gone, a bright flush suffused his face ; he tried to speak, his hand was raised, it pointed upwards.

“Yonder !” he said ; but no more. His head fell heavily on Cranford’s heart.

Yes, “yonder.” Where all sins repented of here are forgiven—even as Cranford had said beside Helena’s coffin, “with the forgiveness that is eternal.”

The Earl, with the dead head resting on his heart, with his arm supporting him who had in life done him the greatest of all wrongs, knelt in numbed silence, then he started suddenly, looked at Ross and uttered a loud cry. The brother of his life was *gone*.

He drew his arm away, and laid him down gently.

It was all over. The story was ended. The life that can only be lived once had gone for ever. His great sin even was a memory. That sin, and its undying love, had cost him his life. Of that Cranford felt assured, for none in days gone by ever so disliked a military career as he ; and so, as he did that, believing that Helena’s own contrition took her from him—not Glen’s fickleness—so could he well believe that Glen’s restless remorse had brought him there to die.

Would she be his yonder ? Had they now met ? Would the God of Love set his seal upon the past, and grant to the dead his peace ? Were those sightless eyes gazing now upon her ? Was there no peace for him who still lived on ? Would all the future be to him an untold agony ? These thoughts quickly chased each other through the Earl’s mind, as he looked on the dead face—so calm ! so grand !

“Oh, Glen, Glen !” he cried, mournfully.

Suddenly he felt the touch of a shadowy hand upon his brow. It was like his mother’s—as he had so often

felt it in the morning and evening when he had said his prayers at her knee. He felt the touch of that hand so really now, that he looked up startled; but there was nothing to be seen—nothing, save the radiant moon. Yet surely the mother's spirit was near to him, and many of her words came to his remembrance.

Peace for Glen yonder!

Yes, if he had repented here; but there there could be no continuing in sin. If he and Helena met "yonder," it would be even as the angels that are before the throne in purity. But if he had not repented—if not! The Earl's eyes filled with tears.

"Glen," he said, "Longleat never could have dealt treacherously with thee; he never could have stolen thy treasure. He loved thee as he loved himself—ay, once better than he loved his God!"

The light wind stirred the raven hair; but the face, the form were still. Cranford took the hand in his, and as he looked up at the solemn sky, said, "But as God forgives, do I forgive thee; 'yonder' we may meet again, and be as we were in the old time when boys together, playing in the old woods, sitting in the same pew. Yonder we may be as we were then. I forgive thee; but would that I had died long ago. It would have been a mercy from my God."

His fortitude gave way. He sobbed aloud, until hearing footsteps and voices near, he rose.

The soldiers came up, one looking at Melville, said, "Comrades, here's the captain."

They pressed closely round; two or three knelt down and held their lanterns close to the dead face. Lord Cranford stood back; he grasped the bush beside him. Such a sense of the unfitness of things came over him. That this man should be so honored in his death oppressed him; and yet there was a struggling of the old love, that rose up to bid him rejoice in the honor and love won by Glen.

It would be impossible to describe the Earl's blended feelings; the reader can far better imagine them for himself, if he has estimated fully that old love, or understood the Earl's nobility of heart.

"We have found the captain, my Lord," said one of the men.

Lord Cranford did not answer; he felt as one in a dream. He watched them prepare to bear the captain from the field. In lifting the body a ghastly wound in the breast was revealed—the coat fell back and the under linen. Cranford closed it, and saw a small case attached to a ribbon. He shivered, for he guessed what lay there.

They bore the captain to his tent. The Earl walked beside them. As the group neared the camp they were met by an officer wrapped in sables, and accompanied by an aide-de-camp. It was Lord Raglan.

He stopped. "Whom have you there?" he asked.

The Earl did not answer.

"Captain Melville, of the —th," said a bearer.

"You bear a brave soldier, my men," said the marshal.

"He is dead," Cranford whispered.

"Ah, then his country may mourn his loss." Lord Raglan, saying this, passed on his way.

And the Earl had come there to hear that testimony to his memory, above all others!

How strange it seems, even yet, to those who knew both.

They laid him in his tent. His servant was frantic with grief. After a time the Earl left him, and went to the General. Cranford's scared, haggard look frightened him. His story filled the old man's heart with fierce bitterness; but it found no vent in words.

In concluding his sad tale, the Earl said, "I don't think I have long to live. I dare not go to God nursing revenge in my heart. The same God who comforted me, pardoned her. Shall I take vengeance now?"

Her father turned away ; he could not answer a word. They went to Captain Melville's tent together, and for the first time General Davenant looked on the face of him who had destroyed his child.

It was the Earl's hand that removed the handkerchief ; and, as he did so, said, in a low tone, as if the dead could hear, "As I have forgiven thee, so may God forgive me !"

The General heard the words ; and he learned more in that one moment of Christ's own teaching, saw more clearly into the depths of God's own love, than he had learned or seen through all his long life. Mary Cleveland, in her death, thus spoke to him through her son ; for had she not carefully instilled into his mind the principles of sacred truth. Yes, even as our trespasses are forgiven, so must we forgive, even to the last, most cruel wrong. It is not the world's teaching, but it is His whose thoughts are not as our thoughts. And the Earl had so "learned Christ."

They stood for some time looking on the dead man in silence.

"He had a grand face," said the General, at last.

"He had a noble heart, yet he fell !" answered Cranford.

And that was all.

Captain Melville's servant (to whom Lord Cranford had said his master had been a friend of his own), came and told him there was a case attached to the ribbon round his late master's neck—must it be removed ?

"Leave me with him alone," the Earl said.

It was just before the coffin was closed.

He was left alone ; and then he uncovered the breast, and opened the case.

Helena's violet eyes gazed into his own.

He shuddered, and closed it quickly. Those eyes almost

drove him mad. He dared not trust himself to look again, and he stood irresolute what to do, until he saw a piece of paper that had fallen from the case. He picked it up, and read, "Let this be buried with me."

He opened the vest, put the portrait back in its old resting-place, and, with one long, lingering gaze, turned away from the friend of his life for ever in this world.

Captain Melville was buried with military honors. He lies on the hill, near to the graves of Cathcart, Strangeways, and many other officers, "deeply regretted by the army." But there was no coffin on which so many tears were shed from eyes "unused to weep," as upon his, who—so true to his forgiveness was the silent Earl—in death bore a name that was not his own, and in bearing it was honored.

And this was one of the incidents of the battle of Inkermann!

CHAPTER XIII.

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

Oh, thou! that dry'st the mourner's tear,
How dark this world would be,
If, when deceived and wounded here,
We could not fly to thee!

But thou wilt heal the broken heart,
Which, like the plants that throw
Their fragrance from the wounded part,
Breathes sweetness out of woe.

Then sorrow, touch'd by Thee, grows bright
With more than rapture's ray ;
As darkness shows us worlds of light
We could not see by day.

MOORE.

TEN days afterwards, the Earl and the General were sailing towards home. The settled expression on Cranford's face now was very touching and very beautiful. His innate nobility was strikingly depicted, mingled with a look of patient submissiveness that impressed every one who saw him.

It was evident to the General that he shrank from returning to England; but, as if he would not yield to any feeling which might unfit him for his duties, he spent his time chiefly in planning changes on his different estates—all for the comfort and interest of his tenants. He had a most eager and interested listener in the General, who, indeed, scarcely seemed to live out of the Earl's presence.

Reverence is scarcely a word strong enough to express the feeling of General Davenant for him. Ever since he had heard him speak those words of forgiveness, the heart of the old man had been bound to him by a chain as strong as the eternal clasp of death, and Lord Cranford divining this, gave back to him all the venerating love of a son—even as if Helena yet lived, his own true wife; with so much delicacy, too, that to wipe from the General's thoughts even the remembrance of her sin, and of his own wrong, he would often call him "father." That, to the General, was the crowning grace.

One night they were walking on deck, when he said to the Earl—

"I should like to know where *she* is?"

"Should you?" answered Cranford. "I fear that now you will never find her."

The General sighed.

"I should be happier if I saw her once more. Poor Stephanie! we wronged each other."

The Earl did not speak for a long time. When at last he raised his head he looked up to the serene sky, and said, sadly—

"Yes, we all in this life wrong each other. But 'yonder,' as he said, 'yonder!' every wrong will be made right, and our union, our peace, our love, will be for ever. It is that hope which comforts me."

General Davenant left him abruptly, and went alone to his cabin. And whilst they thus sailed towards England, the General was leaving Stephanie far behind. She was among the "sisters" in the Crimean hospitals. So great had the General's dread of cholera been, that, after the Earl knew it, he abstained from visiting Scutari, or, indeed, any place where the disease raged. Had the General gone, he and Stephanie would have met. It may be as Evangeline and Gabriel met, with death between them.

So meeting, there might have been a sad reconciliation. But something better was ordained for them by a kindly Providence ; for Stephanie, with her magnificent eyes softened by tender pity, her rich voice toned by her past sorrow, her hand trained to gentleness by her past suffering, was one of the ablest of those noble women. To many a dying man she seemed an angel in his latest hours, and many a recovering invalid did she cheer and soothe to quicker health. In her work of mercy her old hardness all melted. She never thought of her own fraud now without deep repentance—never of her husband but with forgiveness. She longed to be reconciled to him before she entered the cloister for ever. Then she heard from a wounded soldier something of the Earl of Longleat, and afterwards of his companion. She made such inquiries that she learned even why they never visited the hospitals, and, learning that, she relinquished her own intention to seek the General, lest, in coming from the hospital, she should increase his dread. Thus her latest act to him was one of patient self-abnegation.

When the war was over a letter came to Calton. It told the General all.

That letter was a history—a drama.

Though in its touching farewell there was a pleading for forgiveness, a pardon given, and a hope expressed that they might meet in a better world, it failed to comfort the General. He saw how recklessly he had flung away, how sinfully he had trifled with a noble heart for a dream which he had never realized. Stephanie, with her womanly fortitude, her self-reliance, her wealth of love, her glorious beauty, and her regal grace, might have been to him such a wife as few men ever gain. Instead of his being a childless old man, the last of his long race, sons and daughters might have been born to him, whose children's voices would have made his ancient hall ring with merry echoes ; and he, with Stephanie, might have

gone hand in hand to the grave—faithful in life, and in death undivided.

But it was not so—that dream had passed away for ever.

She was leaving for Spain, her native land, resolved there to live and die a sister in the convent which her own ancestors had endowed.

And Edith Clare was buried in a foreign land.

And her child—what a fate had been hers!

Ah, in his desolation he realized the awful truth of those words, “He that soweth the wind shall reap the whirlwind.”

They arrived at home at the end of the year. For several weeks the Earl kept General Davenant with him at Longleat. At length it came to be understood that their home should be usually one, and that not Calton, for Cranford went there once, but his pain was so keen, so evident, though he tried to hide it—every room recalled Helena to him with such vivid force—that the General never urged him to go again. Occasionally General Davenant went to Calton, but not often. At such times he would say, cheerfully, “It is good to be alone sometimes,” and, though each understood the other, both feigned ignorance, for neither of them could yet bear to touch upon the old sorrow, that never grew less tender or less keen.

In April they went to Ruthven. It was a terrible trial, but duty called the Earl there, and from that call he never shrank now.

A few hours after their arrival at the Castle he went alone to Helena’s grave.

He found it beautifully kept, with spring flowers budding round it, and a wreath of immortelles hung upon the cross.

He knew that this was Margaret’s doing—Margaret, who had “ever loved her.” It was a beautiful evening, there was scarcely sufficient breeze to stir the flag

which had just been hoisted to tell the villagers their Lord had come amongst them once again. The setting sun gilded the cross of St. Marie's, silvered the white sails that dotted the calm sea, and made the gulls, that dipped their breasts below the ripples, seem gay-plumaged. Only the break of lazy little waves was heard, or the voice of some child playing on the shore. Suddenly, as Cranford was gazing at Helena's name, the old crier of the village came alone to the edge of the cliff before the Castle, and rang his bell loudly; then pausing a moment, thus proclaimed, in Welsh and English—

“Victoria Regina. Peace!—peace!—peace! God save the Queen, and the Lord of Ruthven.”

Yes, the strife had ended, and beneath the benediction of that cry, the land was still. Still were the slain in their far-off graves, where the long grass waved their epitaphs. Still, very still, was he who gazed upon *her* grave, whose golden head, not long ago, had for its death-pillow the white sea-breakers, and the plunging waves.

“Peace!—peace!—peace!” On three cliffs were the blessed tidings proclaimed. Then such a shout rang from the people, who came rushing from their homes, as rang from many a cliff that day; from many a city, town, and hamlet, in our tyrant-hating, tyrant-conquering land. The news ran through the crowd, “Lord Ruthven has come home,” and they rushed to the gates of his Castle to give their good Earl “a welcome.”

There were wives there whose husbands his life-boat had saved; fishermen whose homes he had made happy; children, for whose welfare his schools had been built; old men and women, whose days would end in comfort through his generous bounty.

Yes, they were all in that eager throng, and their voices rang over the bay to the anchored boats, where sailors were mending their nets.

They heard the cry, and rowed to shore, wondering what had happened.

When they heard the news, they, too, swelled the chorus of welcome to their "good Earl."

He heard it as he stood alone at his darling's grave. It was too much for his full heart. He thought of him who lay in his lonely grave on the hill-side in a foreign land, without even a name to tell that Glen Ross slept there.

He thought of her whose short, brilliant life had been shadowed by his own weakness—had been ruined by Glen's sin. His face grew paler, his lip quivered. For a long time he stood silent, then he said, with his hand upon the cross, "My child, peace has come to the land—to me—to thee. I dare to hope that yonder it has also come to him."

He went away beneath the rocks, then up by the winding cliff-path to Ruthven Wood. He felt that its quiet solitude would be more in harmony with his sadness than the welcome of his people. He did not pause until he came to an old rustic bridge that spanned a stream which ran through the ferns. Above him, the trees were so thick, and their branches were so closely entwined, that the nests of a thousand birds were safely hidden, and sunshine could scarcely weave amid the greenery, quivering gold. A "beech-woven" gloom hung over the scene. A large, wild rose-bush almost covered the bridge; it was a mass of white blossoms; every waxen leaf gleamed fairly on the grey, old stone.

The Earl had waded through the ferns and grasses to the bridge. There, lifting up a branch of the tree, he found what he came to seek. It was his own name, carved long ago. A thousand memories rushed into his mind; the intervening years were crowded into one thought. He contrasted himself as he was then with now. Ah, how few of us in manhood can look back without a heavy sigh, not for that long-past time, but for this NOW!

He gazed down on the stream, swollen by late rains, and smiled to see its busy, rushing haste; here a miniature cascade, there a tiny tarn; in which the waters hushed their foam-bells into rest. He went a pace or two, and again found what he sought. They were the initials of him who had been dearer to Lord Cranford than his own life—his treacherous friend, G. R. They were cut deeply, as if a strong will had nerved the lad's hand: green mould could never obliterate them; so long as the stone remained, those letters would be read.

“Ah,” said the Earl, aloud, “how truly he foreshadowed the end when he said, ‘In the morning we set our sails, and before noon I lie stranded.’”

How vividly the past came before Lord Cranford now!—their boyish days; their college-life; their separation; then their meeting in the Exchange Rooms, when Mr. Ross purchased Helena's portrait; then Glen's first introduction to Helena; that memorable day at Richmond; their life at Grasmere; then their life at Longleat; Helena's treachery; the agony of that awful time; his mother's death, and Elspie's; then the wreck; Helena's burial; the death of Glen;—how all came back to him, as he leaned his head down upon his arms! He could not bear his thoughts, and he turned hastily away.

He went back through the wood, towards the Castle. The scene was very weird. Not a breath stirred the leaves. Everything was beautiful; but Lord Cranford saw nothing of it, his thoughts were too absorbed. He was trying to solve the problem of this probationary life. There had been a time before when he had questioned that God's tender mercy was over all his works. “I have been looking on a maze,” he said, suddenly, as if it were a relief to speak aloud, “in which every human being is struggling to find the way to happiness, and all rush blindly on to what proves a barrier, until at last—at last

they fall and *die*. Who, and what is the Eternal that his universal law should be 'Great tribulation?'"

The Earl spoke in bitterness, then his eye softened. He thought of his mother's faith, of her life, her death, and he was rebuked.

Ah, never let the Christian mother falter in her teaching. Her early lessons will never be lost, though they may be forgotten for a time.

"I cannot doubt, yet I cannot always believe in a merciful Providence," he said, mournfully, "so much iniquity, so much misery, so much poverty! One man abounding with good gifts, so that they lie in heaps unprized, another without bread to feed his little ones, without succour from his fellows, or seeming pity from his God. One man happy in his wildest dream of bliss realized; another, doomed to wade, with breaking heart, through seas of trouble—no star of hope to guide him, no blessed prize in view.

And so we suffer! for what? For a dream of heaven and a certain grave! No matter whether to Moloch or to God, life is still a sacrifice. The poor ask bread, they find a stone; the rich ask happiness, they cannot find content. The fathers eat sour grapes, and so the children's teeth are set on edge.

"What a retribution! Oh, God, life is hard and hopeless."

He spoke the words as he passed from under the shadow of the trees on to the cliff. A sudden flush startled him from his reverie. He stood spell-bound by the awful grandeur of the scene.

What a sky! He seemed to be standing on the very threshold of the New Jerusalem; to be catching glimpses of the glories eye hath not seen, nor human heart conceived; to be gazing through its everlasting doors, on walls of jasper, streets of gold—the land of angels and of God!

Snow-heights, like seraph-bands, seemed bending over battlements of rosy cloud, to gaze upon a world so beautiful, and yet a world of graves!

A tide of feeling, a rush of memories, swept over him.

The scepticism against which he had striven so painfully in former years, and which but a moment ago had threatened again to disturb the peace of his soul, was mercifully borne away.

So near the "Border Land," he seemed—he almost waited for the Harpers' hallelujahs, for the Conqueror's hymn.

It was but a moment. Then that blinding, flashing glory faded over the sea, leaving the distant hills to blend their shadowy outlines with the grey of evening's sky.

* * * * *

Margaret Seymour was standing by the little gate at the end of the limes, just where she stood when he told her that the story of his love was "over for ever."

She had heard the crier's tidings of peace—then the shouts of the people; she had seen the flag slowly hoisted above Ruthven's tower, which told her that Bronwyf's Earl had come back from his wanderings, and then she burst into tears, and sobbed convulsively, "God comfort him!" Yes, with the solemn remembrance of her early vow; with the memories of her happy dream, which had blighted all her future life—with that remembrance, with those sadder memories, she could pray, "God comfort him!"

* * * * *

Years have passed away. Edward Seymour is the same devoted pastor he ever was, although his failing health compelled him to change his sphere of labor. He never hears now that he is "sacrificing himself." Since that memorable night of Charley's return, good Mr. Seymour had never used the words.

Old Mr. Allen has long since gone to his reward. His

last words were: "I am going to heaven," and in a moment he was there.

Edward never names him without deep feeling; nor has his loss ever been supplied to him.

Richard Burns and Mary still reside at Bronwylfa. Jem Brierly has long been a groom there, and "he bestows more attention," the stable-keeper says, "on Miss Seymour's pad than on all the 'osses in the place," which may be readily believed; for he worships that lady as his "one bright particular star."

Mary has not forgotten her "little un;" nor is her appreciation of "green fields" less keen.

The ivy on the tower at Longleat now mantles all the wall, and droops low on the ground. The window of Helena's "nest" is almost hidden by the leaves; but the dim light is never needed, for the boudoir has been kept closed, excepting when Mrs. Simcoe, venerable now, goes in alone to unclothe the lattice, or to see that all remains as in the days when the beautiful young Countess called it hers.

* * * * *

It was eighteen hundred and sixty-one—a very sunny morning in June. Gardeners were mowing the lawns at Longleat, others were arranging the flowering-plants on the terraces, just as in that old time when preparations were made to welcome Helena, a bride.

A merry little girl was darting here and there, having just been lifted from the back of a pretty Shetland pony which Robert Latham was leading towards the stables. A butterfly had caught her attention, and she was asking Richard Burns to catch it for her; but Richard could scarcely understand her baby language, for she was only three years old. Just then her nurse came and said, "Mamma calls you, Miss Clara; will you come and be dressed before papa and Uncle Charley come?"

"No," she would "do to mamma."

In she ran, through the open window, where Clara Seymour once—now the wife of Captain Heathcourt, of the Royal Navy—was sitting with her sister, Miss Seymour. They were on a visit to Longleat with Mr. and Mrs. Seymour, and were expecting Captain Charles Seymour, and Clara's husband that day. Edward, too, was with them.

"My pet, you will be so hot running in the sun," Clara said, taking the child in her arms. "Come and rest with mamma."

"I t'sall go to de Earl," answered the little one, stoutly.

Lord Cranford looked up from his book, and smiled.

"Come here, Clara," he said, in that half-sad, very gentle tone in which he ever spoke now.

"Don't take her, Lord Cranford, pray don't," said Clara, earnestly; "she shall go to nurse."

But he still held out his arms, and the wee tyrant struggled so that her mother was fain to let her go. Clara knelt down at his knee, where the little one sat. He stroked back her long bright hair, which, to please her sailor-husband, she still wore in curls.

"We shall have our brother back soon, Clara," he said, "our dear brother! How strange it seems to have to call my old pet Mrs. Heathcourt."

"Ah, Lord Cranford, I wish you would not. I would rather be Clara to you, as when we were all so happy at Bronwylfa."

Then she stopped; she feared to touch on those days.

The child was restless; she jumped down from the Earl's knee, and after a while Clara left the room.

Lord Cranford took up his book. Margaret was writing. They were sitting in the Dowager's "morning

room," in the lady's corridor. The General was strolling with Edward on the lawn, and now and then Margaret gave "dear Edward" a look and a smile, for the window was open so widely that he could see her. The little one was so quiet, that Miss Seymour, suddenly remembering her, knew that she must be in mischief.

"Auntie," Clara called at the moment, "see 'ot a pittie box." It was a small mosaic desk—very small. "It's got a 'etter in it."

"Clara, darling, you must not touch that," Miss Seymour said.

"I t'sall," she answered, seating herself on the floor; "I t'sall, Auntie Maggie."

"Then I must send you to nurse, Clara."

She rose, and went to the child. The desk she saw was a dainty gem for a lady's boudoir, and she tried to take it. Clara struggled and screamed.

The Earl looked up.

"What is it, Miss Seymour?" he inquired. "Never mind, she will not harm it."

"I don't know that, my Lord. Clara, you are not auntie's good little girl now."

"I amot naughty, Auntie Maggie. I t'sall 'ave de 'etter," said the little one, clutching it and hiding it in her frock.

"Well, let me see it then." The white, fat little fingers held the note whilst her auntie read, "Not to be opened until Mr. Glen Ross and the Countess of Longleat have left the world."

Margaret turned white as death; she was powerless now; and, as the Earl was still looking at them, little Clara, seeing her advantage, trotted off to him, carrying the paper. He lifted her on to his knee.

"My pet, you are a wilful mite," he said, fondly. "Are you not?"

"Iss; an' dis is for 'oo, 'ord Tanford," said the child, contentedly.

"Is it?" he answered, opening it with a smile.

Margaret was watching him breathlessly; she dared not move.

He saw the violets. She saw the change in his face as he turned to the outside quickly, and read those words written by Helena.

"Oh God!" he cried; and laying his brow on the child's head, he burst into a flood of tears.

Clara was frightened, she put up her little hands, and lifted his face; her rosy lips were pouting.

"'Ord Tanford, are 'oo t'sorry?" she said. "Mamma will tiss 'oo."

The tears were fast dropping from Margaret's eyes. She stood still.

"Are 'oo t'sorry?" repeated the child.

He controlled himself.

"Yes, Clara, I am very sorry."

"Hab 'roo been naughty?"

"No, dear, I am sorry for a beautiful lady that I loved very much."

"Was *see* naughty?" asked Clara, fixing her lovely brown eyes—so like her mother's—on his face.

"Yes, darling," he answered, falteringly.

"Was *see* t'sorry?"

"Yes, Clara; very, very sorry."

"Was *see*? Den God will 'ove her. Where is *see*?"

The tears fell faster down his face as he faltered again—

"She is buried under the white cross in the churchyard, close to the shore, my darling."

"Did 'oo 'ove her?"

"I did; very, very dearly."

"Do 'oo want to see her in 'ebben?"

“I do, my darling—oh, I *do*,” he answered, with a heavy sigh.

Clara looked at him steadily.

“Den I will p’ay God b’ess ’oo, ’ord Tanford, and make ’oo see de bootifoo’ ’ady aden.”

The little thing slipped from his knee, and knelt down.

She closed her eyes, folded her two wee hands, and said, “God b’ess dear ’ord Tanford, and don’t ’et him be t’sorry; ’et him t’see de bootifoo’ ’ady aden!”

“Amen!” said the Earl, “amen!” and raising the child, he kissed her.

Then Margaret came forward to take Clara; the tears were glittering on her face.

“Dear Margaret!” the Earl said, as he rose, and took her hand in his. There was exquisite tenderness in his tone. It was the tenderness of a brother, who had found all the love, all the truth, all the unfailing faithfulness of a sister in her. The other hand rested on the head of his precious little comforter.

Clara looked at them with wondering eyes.

“Auntie,” she whispered, suddenly, “will ’oo pay to God to make de Earl glad aden?”

Margaret had shivered at the sound of her name, never uttered by him since the night of the storm. Now she trembled at the child’s words, so that she could scarcely stand. But she stooped and kissed the little one’s brow, and, in a voice as steady as the bravery of her spirit had been firm through all her trial, she said—

“Yes, darling, I will pray for our Earl, that he may be happy in heaven with the ‘bootifoo’ ’ady;’ and I will pray that through all his life his faith may never fail.”

The Earl stood by her side, pale as marble, mute as death. She raised her face, and their eyes met in a long gaze.

“Margaret,” he said, softly, “I sometimes have

thought that there is nothing in all our Bible so beautiful as the picture of what our world will be when its sins and its sorrows have ended ; but I think now that all its force, all its pathos, lies in those tender words—

“AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM.”

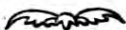
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