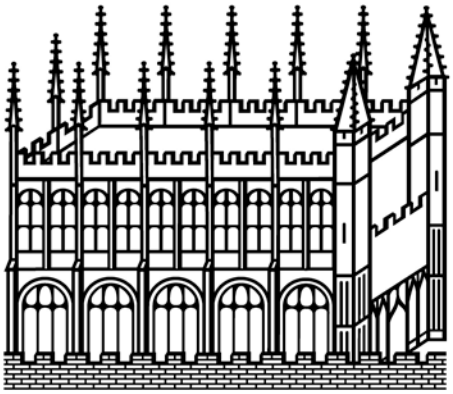

ANGLEY-ON-THE-LEA

A TALE OF LOVE AND DUTY.

BY THOMAS MILLER

PUBLISHED AT 184, FLEET STREET.

OLD JOHN'S ARRIVAL.

LANGLEY-ON-THE-LEA;

OR,

LOVE AND DUTY.

BY

THOMAS MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "GIDEON GILES," "GODFREY MALVERN," "ROYSTON GOWER," "LOVE AND PRIDE," ETC., ETC.

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PREFACE.

THAT the taste for pure and wholesome literature is daily on the increase is indisputable:—where a book was read formerly by hundreds, it is now read by thousands. Much of this excess is attributable to the reduced expense in printing and publishing, but far more to the sudden demand for cheap literature which, several years ago, manifested itself, thus inviting publishers to make an outlay in the purchase of copyrights, wherewith to publish cheap editions of popular works.

Not an unimportant feature too, or one which exercised a small amount of influence on the circulation of cheap editions, was the increased facilities for travelling, by rail, boat, and otherwise

When the railroad began to be universally recognized as a cheap and safe mode of travelling, and persons found that it was not absolutely certain they would be blown up or crushed on their journey, the next desideratum to be supplied was something to amuse themselves with on the way. Manchester men and commercial travellers found it too monotonous to be continually gazing upon flying bridges, running trees, and capering hedgerows; and after a little sleep, and a perusal of the *Times*, from "births and deaths" to the end of the advertisement sheet, there was nothing left for them to do but to attempt a converse with their fellow-passengers—if any. By degrees this feeling of *ennui* became more widely diffused, until travellers—whether of Church, or State, or camp, or field—universally agreed that although travelling by rail was an extremely convenient method of transit, a long and continuous journey was nevertheless very dull, and horridly tiring.

Out of these complaints can be traced to have sprung, what, perhaps, may not inaptly be termed *travelling literature*. Speculative publishers saw a

good reading time coming, and introduced cheap, if not always good, editions of different authors. Then commenced "station" influence: booksellers made their appearance at the various railway stations; while passengers, arriving too late for a departing train, or too early for a coming one, rushed off to the stall, purchasing under the attraction of the first book which presented the most gaudy cover and seductive illustration. It not, however, unfrequently happened that, as with mankind, the outward form much exceeded the inward grace, and the *reader* was disappointed. But time, which works so many wonders, soon effected a necessary reform. Purchasers became stricter scrutineers than hitherto; they peered into the uncut pages here and there before buying; took note of the author's name; in short, began to exercise taste and judgment in their selections, thus commanding, as it were, the issuing of more popular works.

This habit of reading engendered in the public mind soon grew, like increase of appetite, on what

it fed on; and so, in course of a short period on land or water, by steam, rail, or road—reading became fashionable as well as general, and the enterprising publisher found himself enriched.

Come we now to ourselves.

It is a fact generally admitted, that of all authors whose works are particularly well suited to the travelling class of readers, there are none more so than those of THOMAS MILLER, one of whose tales we now have the pleasure of presenting to the public, wherein is developed so much of the author's intimate knowledge and sympathy with the operations of domestic life; his keen and graphic delineations of character, that he draws us away from one scene to another, until we find ourselves seated by him listening to the music of his woodland scenery; his old manor house with its mullioned windows; the rural cottage and its prattling children.

"LANGLEY-ON-THE-LEA" is, perhaps, one of the choicest works which THOMAS MILLER ever penned. Abounding with lively interest, enriched with ele-

gant yet simple phraseology, truthful in its delineation of domestic life, as well as happy in its illustration of country scenery, it will be read from its commencement to the finish with unabated interest and unfeigned delight. There may be some elaborate works regarded in the light of more elegant and accomplished literature; but a book better suited to those who are content to spend a pleasant hour with an author—whether whilst rushing along the iron pathway impelled by the mighty steam-engine, or gliding through the water in the crowded steamboat, or lolling idly in the punt, moored beneath the shade of the willows from the noontide heat—there does not exist, than "LANGLEY-ON-THE-LEA."

Yet not alone for travellers is this cheap edition of "LANGLEY-ON-THE-LEA" intended. Are there not denizens of close courts and heated streets, who cannot leave the circle of their daily evolutions, but who love to read of green fields and shady hedgerows, and to ramble through the lanes of Old England, through the medium of a book?

Yes, many a one! and for them is this book also intended, and by them will it be read again and again; and there is a happiness in thinking we have the means of bringing the opportunity so cheaply within their reach.

Confident, therefore, that our little volume will be extensively read and appreciated, it is with great confidence left in the hands of the public by

THE PUBLISHER.

LANGLEY-ON-THE-LEA.

CHAPTER I.

In one of those old streets in Southwark that look as if they had seen better days, and instead of the ill smell from undrained houses, reeked with the savour of good men's feasts, who never heard the Sabbath bells of St. Saviour's toll without obeying the sacred summons and hastening to church, —in one of those old streets, many of the houses of which now contain half-a-score of lodgers, a country waggon laden with furniture drew up a few years ago, one beautiful summer's morning, about the close of June.

There was a real rustic look about the waggoner and his team which carried the eye of the intellectual beholder far away from the busy streets of

the old borough—in his real village-made smock-frock, his russet-coloured leggings, heavy ankle-boots, the turnpike-tickets with a sprig of wild roses fastened in his hatband, and the wayside flowers with which he had decorated the heads of his well-fed horses, to say nothing of his "gee-hove, come hither" when speaking to them.

"Yonder she be, John; I telled thee she would," said the driver, addressing a grey-headed fresh-coloured hale old man who sat at the front of the waggon. "Heaven bless her! it does one as much good as the sight of a plentiful harvest only to look at her sweet face. Ay, Miss Lucy! we've come at last, thou sees; and I hope have brought everything right and straight. Everybody I know sends their respects and love to thee from Langley-on-the-Lea, and desires to be remembered to thy mother and Master Alfred; and one or two o' the old neighbours sent their very best wishes to Nanny, the old nurse. But John will tell her all about it when he's lighted down. I fear thou'lt feel a little stiffish, John, after so long a ride. We started as Langley Church clock struck the midnight hour, miss."

The beautiful girl to whom he spoke was dressed in deep mourning; she had but just completed her

seventeenth summer; and though her fine eyes lighted up, and there was a cheerful expression in her sweet oval face as she returned the kind greetings of the warm-hearted waggoner, yet there were traces of care and anxiety on the smooth youthful brow, in the thoughtful-looking eye and compressed lips, when the features fell back into their natural repose. It seemed as if the sweet flash of country sunshine which these hearty greetings called up had faded, and the cloudy and smoky light of the old Borough for a moment again closed around the inward eye of Memory.

Lucy stepped forward, as if to assist the old man in getting down, but the burly driver, with a "Nay, nay, that'll never do, lean on me, John," stepped between; and when he alighted, she took hold of both his hands, shook them heartily, said how glad she was he had come; and as the old man stammered forth his thanks and blessings, he almost blushed, so ashamed did he feel of Lucy picking off the loose straw that had adhered to his coat, and wiping off the clean white-looking country dust from his collar.

The nurse was by this time at the door, and as old John shook hands with her, he said, "Well, I

declare, you look almost as young as when you left Langley Rectory twelve long years ago. Why, this London air, whatever they may say about it down our way, quite seems to agree with thee! And how's your sister?—but, deary me! I forgot; the missus told me you wrote her word that she was dead. I'm very sorry, Nanny, I named her; my memory isn't what it was. Sixty years, Nanny, man and boy, have I been in this family, and to think I should have to come to this great noisy city at last! Well, well, I did hope that I should lay my old bones beside his reverence's and his father's. I have served them both, Nanny, and God's blessed sun never shone upon two kinder masters."

Tears stood in the old man's eyes as he raised them towards heaven, and in spite of the effort he made to check them, by winking his eyes, and observing that the sun was very powerful, they would appear, like honest witnesses, to testify to the sincerity of his tribute to the memory of the dead, though they seemed at a loss to find their way among the many hardy furrows which time had ploughed in his hale and weatherbeaten countenance.

Meantime Lucy had hurried indoors to tell her

mother that old John and the goods had arrived from Langley-on-the-Lea.

"Well, child, don't bother me," said the mother, who sat in the old nurse's easy-chair; "you'll get them in somehow. The noise in these streets quite distracts my poor head; I'm sure I don't know whatever possessed me to come here, when I begin to think of it. And now here's old John, as if we shouldn't have trouble enough without him. Shut the door, Lucy, and don't disturb me again until the things are all in, and I can be seated quietly in my own room."

Lucy said, "Very well, ma, we'll not disturb you;" closed the door gently, sighed, and putting on a pair of old gloves, helped to arrange the furniture as it was brought in from the waggon.

Although they had assistance, it was a hard and trying day both for Lucy and the two old people, for in spite of his long night's ride the aged domestic would help, as he said "it made him feel more weary sitting down and seeing Lucy stirring about and lifting and carrying—so delicately as she had been brought up, and never forced to do a handstir of any kind—than it would to assist her, for he had been a stirring man all his life; and as for rest, he

should have nothing else to do when he was laid in his grave."

A few of Lucy's rose-trees and choice plants had been brought, along with several of Alfred's fancy pigeons; and as Nanny took them in she said, "I fear, miss, these beautiful flowers will not long stand the air of London. It isn't often we have such a bright sky as this over our heads; for generally, if the smoke clears off a bit, it's only to make room for the smuts to fall; and when we can't see them tumbling down by thousands, it's owing to the thickness of the fog. Flowers have a sad life of it here to what they lead at Langley. As to the pigeons, pretty things! the first time they are let loose they'll be trapped; and if they are kept in the cats will kill them, for no sooner is one cat out of the wash-house window than another's in. I'm sure I sometimes wish there was a law made to put down those nasty cats'-meat men; for if they wasn't to bring their cats'-meat to the doors, the poor dumb things would steal all they could put their claws upon, and when the people came to lose their dinners every day, as I many a time have had my bit of a chop carried off by them, they would soon grow tired of keeping cats."

The neat and elegant furniture, though in keeping with the beautiful parsonage-house of Langley-on-the-Lea, seemed as sadly misplaced in that old place in the Borough as the flowers did that were set out under the tumble-down and sunless wall in the back yard, as they were removed from the waggon.

"Of course it was not her intention to stay there a day longer than she was forced," Mrs. Langton said; "but as they were compelled to leave the rectory, and had really stayed much longer than the time asked for of the new incumbent, why she was forced to get into the first place that offered, especially as Alfred had promise of a situation at a banker's, which rendered it necessary that she should be in London by the end of June. But she should soon be able to find some nice little cottage, she dare say, a few miles out, from and to which Alfred could ride morning and night, if he continued to like his new profession—for his father's death had rendered it quite impossible for her to send him to either of the Universities."

And so the poor lady ran on, forgetting that her whole income was a life-annuity, which brought in exactly one hundred pounds a year, paid quarterly; for though the rectorship of Langley brought in her

late husband a pretty annual amount, yet owing to his lady's rather extravagant habits, and which he—kind, fond, good, easy man—allowed her to indulge in without a murmer, nothing was saved, or put by "for a rainy day," beyond an assurance on his life for two thousand pounds. Even that was lost during the illness that preceded his death, through her neglecting to pay up the insurance when due, although he had given her the money for the purpose. And when Lucy—who had often heard her father name the amount of the policy as the only provision he was able to make for his children—spoke to her mother on the matter one day after the funeral, while she was complaining of the sum of money it would cost to remove to London, she heard with amazement and regret that the policy was forfeited through her mother's neglect.

"Well, child, it's lost, and there's an end of it," said Mrs. Langton. "How could you think of my parting with the money when your father needed so many little comforts during his illness? If you had had a proper affection for him, as I always have had, you would feel that I have done everything for the best."

Lucy turned aside to conceal her tears. Affection!

Could her dear heart's blood, taken from her drop by drop, until it neither beat nor flowed, have saved his life, and she had been allowed to sacrifice her own to save him from the jaws of death, and leave him to support and comfort her poor, dear, weak, thoughtless mother, she would as cheerfully have laid it down, and prepared for her long night's rest in the grave, as ever, after a weary day's ramble around the beautiful scenery of Langley, she laid down to sleep in her bed beside the jasmine-covered windows. But when she heard her mother weeping, sobbing, and complaining of her poor head, Lucy turned round and kissed her, spoke words of comfort as she threw her graceful arms around her, and after that day never again alluded to the policy of insurance, or mentioned the two thousand pounds which her father had fondly dreamed would bring in an additional hundred a year, and that this sum, together with his wife's life-annuity, would provide them with moderate comforts while she lived, and still leave a thousand each for Lucy and her brother when their mother was no more.

Mrs. Langton was a fond, affectionate wife and mother in her way—she could not be otherwise with her weak, tender, loving heart—but no more fit to

grapple with the stern duties of household life, which require even the affections at times to be checked and held in abeyance, than a two-year-old child. Her fond and indulgent husband had unwisely gratified her every whim and wish, and now her increasing weakness exacted the same sacrifice from the affectionate daughter. She had never dreamed of the sombre colours that appear and cloud over in Time's changes.

Alfred, who was a year younger than Lucy, seemed to inherit a great deal of his mother's weakness of character, though in him it appeared in another form. He possessed the same indecision, negligence, thoughtlessness of the future, disregardfulness of the morrow in yielding to the present; all these, however, and many other faults, were in some measure counterbalanced by a fiery energy when once aroused, but which it was difficult to kindle up; and in this he resembled not his mother. Old John often said "that she had overcaded him, and that it only required a little trouble to make a bright, thinking man of the lad; that no forcing would ever do him a mite of good; but once get him to see with his own eyes the right course, and he would go on in it; and that it would take a precious strong rope to keep him back when he had

once made up his mind to go." Those who knew the lad shook their heads doubtingly when they heard the faithful old servant thus speak of the boy; and the generality, if they replied at all, only said "that so far as obstinacy and self-will went, to please himself, they believed that of him," and so left old John alone to enjoy the hopefulness of his opinion—about the only one, excepting his family's and that of the old Squire's, favourable to Master Alfred, in the whole green hundred of Langley-on-the-Lea. It was through the Squire's influence that the youth obtained a situation in the banking-house; hence the rector's widow coming up to London, for, as she said, "I could not rest in bed of a night unless I knew that he was under the same roof as me."

CHAPTER II.

Nanny the nurse had seen many ups and downs since she left Langley Rectory, with the regrets and good wishes of all who knew her, for she had a kind, feeling heart, an unassuming, motherly way of endearing herself to everybody, without appearing to try to do so. In truth, it came naturally to her; she could not be otherwise than kind, no more than the summer sun can be warm. She would not have left Langley had not her bedridden sister, a widow, required her attendance, for she was no longer able to work; so Nanny came up to London—the poor to help the poor, like God's good apostles of old.

The sister died in the very room which the old nurse still occupied, and which she had rented for many years before Nanny came there to close her eyes. Then the landlady, or the lodging-letter of the house, died also—for she lived by letting it off

into lodgings—and so the house was to let; but at the landlord's request Nanny remained in it, letting off now a room, then a floor, for no one could be found to take the whole of it. Some paid rent, some ran away, and carried off even a portion of the fixtures. When she took any money she gave it to the landlord; when he called, and she had got none, "why he grumbled and went without," as Nanny said, though he still allowed her to remain rent-free; for, as he said, "she was honest, like her sister, and they were about the only two tenants he could say as much of, and speak the truth, out of the scores he had had in his houses; for one had even chopped up the closet door and the staircase bannisters for firewood, another had cut all the glass out of the windows, and a third had not only sold the grate out of the room for old iron, but was bargaining with a man for the marble mantelpiece when he went upstairs with the policeman."

He had, however, spent some pounds in repairing the old house which the rector's widow made "her temporary abode," as she called it; and it was its clean condition that induced Nanny to prevail upon her to remain a few weeks in it, until she could find something that really would suit her. So far as the

house itself went, maugre all ill-usage, it promised to outlast any one of the very best of the more fashionable buildings in the immediate neighbourhood, though gossiping old Pepys was writing his amusing "Diary" at the time it was building. And Nanny had eked out a living by taking in some one to nurse, by washing, and "getting up" valuable lace goods, and by divers and sundry little helps, little jobs, and missions of trust—which no one could better execute—from those whom she had attended upon when there were fewer grey hairs in her good old head than interlaced the remaining black ones, at the time she helped Lucy to arrange the furniture in the first-floor front room of that old house in the Borough. And a comfortable look did they give to it between them, before Lucy led in her mother to take possession, though the furniture looked too light for the heavy wainscoted walls, and the massy mantelpiece, and the heavy old scroll of fruit-work that run round the border of the ceiling. But it was a far cosier room to sit in, before a good fire on a wild winter night, sheltered by so many neighbouring houses, than the snuggest apartment in the envied rectory, with the wind wailing and moaning outside, and all the old oaks in Langley

Park groaning as if the ancient Druids had returned again, and were offering up their writhing victims beneath the knurred and knotted branches. But on such a sunny June day as that was when the widow first entered her new apartment, with the smell of the roses she had left behind still fresh in her memory, still blooming in her "mind's eye," no marvel that she sighed as Lucy handed her into the large easy-chair at the lack of fresh air in the Borough.

And now the hot summer days dragged on wearily, and time hung very heavily on Mrs. Langton's hands, especially the hours during which Alfred was absent, though Lucy exerted herself almost beyond her strength to render her mother comfortable. Even the blue-bottle fly buzzing in the window she said gave her the headache, and set her thinking about the bees that made such a pleasant murmur among the flowers of Langley. She complained of the monotonous chirrup of the dirty house-sparrows, and wanted the songs of the golden-billed blackbird and speckled thrush and sky-singing lark again to console her. It pained her to hear the tranquillity, which ought to reign around the holy Sabbath, broken by the rattle of vehicles, the cry of

mackerel, watercresses, beer, milk, and other articles, as if all the days in the year were work-a-days; and many a time did pious old John lay down his Bible and go to the door to remonstrate with the howling Sabbath-breakers, who only replied to his earnest entreaties with "low chaff," such as his pure mind could not understand, though when Nanny sallied out to assail them, she did now and then, as she said, "send them off with a flea in their ears."

Then in spite of all the sweet flowers which were brought into her sitting-room, the smell from the noisome sewers would find its way in, and overpower the pleasant fragance of roses, stocks, musk-plants, and mignionette; for it was beyond the power of either Lucy, John, or the nurse, to waft the same sweet air into the rooms of that old house in the Borough which all day long blew into the window of the rectory, redolent of every odour that floated around the bowery hollows of Langley-on-the-Lea.

In vain did Lucy read in the cool of the Sunday evenings of the oak of Mamre under which Abraham sat, of the Saviour and his disciples walking forth into the corn-fields on the Sabbath day, of the lilies

that neither toil nor spin. She could not carry her mother's mind away from the sounds without, nor divert her from exclaiming at every street cry, "Oh, that noise!" while, had her thoughts been rivetted on the subject so beautifully read by her charming daughter, she never would have heard such feeble interruptions.

She was a somebody in the village of Langley-on-the-Lea, but in the great changes of the ocean of London she was only an undistinguished drop, and this seemed to prey upon her mind. There was no longer a little levée of cottagers crowding around her, or waiting humbly at the back door of the rectory for lotions and decoctions of herbs, syrups, and home-made wines—telling her of the good this, that, and the other which she had given to them had done; and though many of them were cunning old creatures, and could see through her weakness, and knew that she liked to be praised, and prided herself on the things she made; and though they did get up a bit of cough now and then before her, and give an extra, "Oh, deary me" or two, to make believe that they were in dreadful pain, and laugh in their sleeves at her behind her back, still she believed that she was doing a great deal of good, and felt at

night that she had done her duty to her fellow-creatures, and was not spending her days in vain; and this satisfaction was a great sweetener of her sleep.

As she talked over these things with regret, in vain did Lucy endeavour to persuade her that there was greater scope and a wider field for similar labours in the sewerless streets, crowded courts, and airless alleys of the Borough, and offer to accompany her in quest of objects that needed help more than many of those she was in the habit of relieving at Langley-on-the-Lea. She only shook her head, and continued to murmur, for that alone seemed to ease her mind and afford consolation; so that all dear Lucy could do was to sit and sigh as she listened to her mother's fretful complaints. But a far greater trouble to Lucy was to hear her continually finding fault with the willing-minded and faithful old servant, poor grey-headed John; for however much he might try, he seldom did anything to please her; and many a time did the good old man quit the room with a sigh, and go downstairs and sit alone in the kitchen, to hide the tears which would fall in spite of all he did to control them, while in his charity he found a plea for the change of temper in

his mistress in her altered circumstances, and thought it was enough to make any one cross, leaving so sweet a place as Langley Rectory for those dingy and dusty apartments in the Borough.

"What can I expect," he would say to the old nurse, "while she even speaks sharp to Miss Lucy at times? And I'm sure she seems to stand and watch the words before they come out of her mouth, and to get everything she wishes before she can well ask for it. There never was such an affectionate and dutiful daughter ever born before. Well, well, we must all bear our share; and as I'm the oldest, I must expect to endure the most. Troubles do alter people, though they don't know it, and missus has had to go through a great deal at one time and another."

And the old man would arise and answer her summons with a cheerful voice and a smiling face, which often made Mrs. Langton feel sorry for ever having spoken to him harshly; for meek patience and silent endurance reap, at times, their noiseless victories.

Nanny looked at the brightest side of everything, if a bright side were to be found; for, as she used to say, "It's a great deal better when things are bad

to look about and see which is the best way to mend them, than to sit talking about matters until you seem to make them worse. The longer you look up a chimney the blacker it seems if you expect help to come down it. I like my Lucy's way the best—that is, to do all you can, and not leave a stone unturned; and then let things come to the worst, if they will; you feel that you can endure them all the better after having had a good tussle in trying to mend them. I remember her trying to fasten her doll's broken nose on a dozen times before she could make it stick." And there was a good deal of household wisdom in Nanny's homely remarks.

Although the days passed not away so pleasantly in the close and confined streets of the old Borough as they had beforetime done among the broad, green, breezy places that opened out every way around Langley-on-the-Lea, yet Time came even there with his last handful of summer flowers, at the call of "sweet lavender;" and then there was a smell of new hops about the narrow courts of ancient Southwark—the last that wafted away the memory to "Flora and the country green;" and after that the autumn fogs came creeping over and settling down upon ill-drained London, to the great dismay of

Mrs. Langton, who, until convinced by looking out into the clouded and curtained street, believed that she had got into one of the smokiest houses in the metropolis.

While the weather was fine, Lucy in her gentle and thoughtful way so contrived to manage matters that she found her mother amusement, and induced her to take moderate exercise by taking her out to look at the cottages which were to let near Camberwell, Stockwell, Brixton, and Clapham, and so wiled away the day till Alfred returned from the banking-house, when his presence seemed to shorten the long and wearisome evenings.

At length the eventful day drew near on which the youth would be entitled to draw his first quarter's salary—the first money he had ever earned in his life; and many an hour's talk had it furnished material for, and many a change had his fickle mind undergone as to what he should purchase with the five guineas which all had consented was to be his own, while the remaining fifteen guineas was to be given up to his mother as his contribution towards the household expenses; for through the kind Squire's powerful interest Master Alfred was engaged at eighty guineas a year, with a further

promise of an annual advance of twenty more if his conduct was approved of. But true it is that the greater portion, if not more than the whole of the five guineas, was already owing to his sister Lucy, through an accumulation of shillings and halfcrowns which she had lent him at various times and oft, on his promise that all should be "squared"—as he and his brother clerks called paying their debts—when he received this long-talked-of amount.

CHAPTER III.

And now it was the last evening! on the morrow he would be in possession of the money. "He would," he said, "come home to dinner"—a rare event; for the customary chop or steak, called luncheon by City clerks, though their daily dinner, excepting on the Sabbath, had for three long months "furnished forth" the tavern table at which he dined.

"Dinner must be late. Five would be too early; for he should like to purchase something as presents for his mother and sister Lucy. They must make it six, and then he should have plenty of time to look in some of the shop windows at the West End; he should be sure to be home at six."

And so he sat talking away, asking his mother and sister what they would like to have, and naming one thing after another, which would have swal-

lowed up double the amount of his whole quarter's salary to have purchased.

And his fond mother held his hand, looked into his face, and smiled as she listened to him, while Time presented his changes in that illusive mirror which the eye of the imagination is too prone to look into when glancing behind the visionary curtain that flutters before the future, and seems to reveal some opening here and there visible in his magic glass. And as she toyed fondly with the hand of her darling boy, and twined the fingers around her own, she pictured him in future years a great banker negotiating Government loans, influencing the money market of Europe, while his name became a "household word" on every bourse where "merchants most do congregate."

And Lucy had undertaken to provide a nice little dinner, to be ready at the appointed hour. "No; she should not tell him what it would consist of; but would promise that it should be something he would like, and which her mother would approve of; and he should not have to wait five minutes after he knocked at the door before it was on the table. Hungry she hoped he would be, and expected he would bring a good appetite. Yes; it should be

something like what they used to sit down to and enjoy in happier days, in the snug parlour of the Rectory of Langley-on-the-Lea." And she shook her pretty taper finger at him as she gave him a sweet sister's kiss, and bade him "good night," and playfully threatened to be very angry indeed with him if he were more than a quarter of an hour behind the appointed time.

And then ?——

Ay, then ! when all saving herself had retired, and she had promised her mother that she would go to bed "as soon as she had done," she sat down in the large easy-chair which her querulous mother had quitted, and had, as she used to tell the old nurse, "a good think," as was her custom every night when all the household was at rest, and her long day's work was done ; for, excepting when asleep, it was but seldom that her busy fingers were still. It was her head that thought for all, her heart that felt, her judgment that guided, her hands that acted ; for upon her alone fell all the management of that little state,—all the forethought, economy, and retrenchment—the provision of this little luxury for her mother, the depriving herself of some necessary comfort to obtain it for her, the

supplying of Alfred with money for his every-day expenses, and those little extravagancies which, in spite of her gentle hints and earnest entreaties, he would, like the generality of thoughtless youth, indulge in. All these things, and many other similar matters, engrossed her mind, and kept her awake hours after the rest of the family had lain down to slumber in the land of forgetfulness; giving to her smooth brow a grave look beyond its years, and to her face a solemn and thoughtful expression, and seeming to sadden for a while the smile of its beauty, as the grey passing cloud deadens the bright look of the flowers when it sweeps up the sunshine that gave to them such a cheerful and golden look.

And how had those shillings and halfcrowns been obtained which her brother had too often so foolishly squandered away in bad cigars that made him ill, and glasses of sherry which he cared not to drink, when in company with his brother clerks?

Had he stolen out of bed in the still midnight, he might have known, for then he would have found Lucy sitting alone, and busy with her crotchet, netting, or knitting, working some stool or table-cover, while the crotchet-hook passed so rapidly in

and out of the work that an eye unaccustomed to witness such labour could no more have caught the stroke and loop that formed the chain-work than it could the forms of the ever-shifting rays of a pure diamond.

Far through the night, and sometimes on towards the grey dawning, did that beautiful girl labour, improving some cheap pattern, or weaving some tasteful scroll of her own that she thought would meet with a readier sale, and obtain a few extra shillings thereby, without touching the amount of her mother's dividends, which she religiously appropriated only to the stern necessities of housekeeping; for her mother's luxuries and her brother's wastefulness were supplied out of her own hard earnings, and they knew not at what a sacrifice of sleep and comfort they were purchased.

Only that very day she had been out, accompanied by old Nanny, to dispose of her beautiful and ill-paid-for work, so that she might provide for the promised dinner with the proceeds.

Many an article of dear Lucy's manufacturing was purchased by less industrious ladies, and displayed in their apartments—not perhaps intendedly as their own, though their visitors praised and gave

them credit for the beauty of the pattern and the neatness of the work—never dreaming of the pretty fairy with her wonder-working loom in the old house in the Borough. Many a lazy Phillis won a smile from her over-trustful Damon which she had not merited, as he gave her credit for industry she never possessed, fondly believing that the hours she had spent in folly and idleness had been devoted to making the articles he was called upon to admire—the fruits of Lucy's toil; for women, pretty to look at as angels, will so deceive their lovers at times, to show that they are true daughters of fair and fallen Eve. And we forgive them all the blame for the sweet smiles with which they pay back our too easily won praise. For as Moore wittily says—comparing woman to a book—the "errata" is the sweetest page in all her volume.

The next morning ushered in a busy day, and old John was ever going out and in on endless errands. The price of things fairly astonished him, and he laboured under the idea that because he was a countryman the shopkeepers charged him a great deal more than they otherwise would have done. "They ought to be ashamed of themselves, and so I told them," said he to Nanny, "to charge five

shillings for a couple of such little fowls as those, and two for that morsel of pickled pork, which when I was a young man with a hearty appetite I could have eaten at a single meal. I even had to pay for the bit of parsley! O, Nanny, I do so wish we were at Langley again, with the garden, the store-house, the apple-bin, potatoe-pit, and dairy. They ought to be made of money who come to live in a place like this. Sixpence a dozen for apples! Why when I were a lad, old gardener Bunting used to fill my hat for a penny; he's been dead fifty years come next plum-season. And that bit of beef thou'st got to roast cost ninepence a pound. Laws o' massy! I wonder those butchers can rest in their beds. A body has to pay for every manner of thing in this big place. And as to making neighbours, Nanny, why I only bid the man over the next wall a civil 'good morning,' and he wanted me to give him a lot of cuttings off Miss Lucy's geraniums. I never saw such a place as this London in all my life. They would think nothing of borrowing your grid-iron with the steak on it, then coming back and asking you to stand a pint of beer to wash it down. But I suppose it's a way they have hereabout."

"That's nothing to what I have known them

do," answered Nanny. "I had one lodger who made no bones of borrowing my shawl, and leaving it at the pawnbroker's, or asking for change for sixpence, and when she had got it pretending she had lost the sixpence. One day, while I was out, she called a broker in, and every stick and stone would have been sold and removed had I been away an hour longer. They would have the very nose off your face if it were not fastened on so well as it is."

"How it would have amused our good, kind master to have lived in the Borough," said old John. "But I must see about cleaning the knives and forks; and I'll give them an extra polish to-day, so that Master Alfred shall see his face in them when he sits down to dinner. And what a dinner, Nanny! It puts me in mind of the good old times, and the happy days we spent at Langley-on-the-Lea. I wonder whether Master Alfred will be punctual to the time? This London does so alter young gentlemen, Nanny; and youth is so soon led away. I wanted him to allow me to wait at the door of the banking-house, and bring him home with me—then I should know he would be safe; but he only laughed at me, called me a good old fellow, and said he was too big now to take hold of my hand, as he knew I

should want to buy him a sugarstick, and it would be hardly the thing to be seen sucking it, at his age, in a London thoroughfare. So I am! so I am! I am an old fellow now, Nanny. But if he breaks his word to-day with Miss Lucy, I feel as if——" and the garrulous old man paused as if for breath—as if his tongue were running away with his kinder feelings; and he wondered how it was that he had lost all control over so unruly a member.

A servitude of nearly threescore winters, under two kind masters, who had looked up to him as a humble but faithful friend, had caused him to take a tender, almost a fatherly interest in Alfred, the more so since death had severed one parental tie, for in his mind the boy seemed to have been left to him as something to watch over and guard as a sacred trust of the dead.

Six o'clock struck, and though Lucy had busied herself in assisting Nanny to prepare dinner, there she was, neatly attired as usual, looking as if she had but arisen from the perusal of a book, or left her music-stool a moment before, instead of mixing parsley and melted butter for the boiled fowls, as she had been doing only ten minutes before she dressed.

The table was set out so temptingly, that it would have given a hungerless man a appetite only to have looked at it. There was no end of little "knick-knackeries" in the form of tarts and custards, on the sideboard, which Lucy's own hands had made; there were flowers, too—the last spoils of summer—which had been treasured somewhere to obtain a larger price when produced, and Lucy had paid that price to honour her brother. The proceeds of many a weary hour of toil had gone to fill those two little vases with flowers.

Seven o'clock, and Nanny comes up to say the dinner is spoiling. Eight o'clock, and still no Alfred. Nine o'clock, and old John will not remain in-doors a moment longer, for he says "something has happened to his dear young master." Ten o'clock, and Mrs. Langton has retired to rest very ill. Eleven o'clock, and poor old Nanny, after a good cry, has fallen asleep by the kitchen fire; not a mouthful of the dinner has been touched, excepting the melted butter, which a little slipshod girl, whose dirt and poverty had attracted dear Lucy's attention, and who came in and went out like a family dog, whenever the door was open, had eaten in mistake for her usual supper of thickened milk,

EIGHT O'CLOCK, AND NO ALFRED.

which old Nanny sometimes made her, as "a fine thing for a growing child."

Twelve o'clock, and Lucy stands with her sweet face half-buried in the palm of her hand, her elbow resting on the mantelpiece, the dinner-table set out as when she awaited the coming of her brother six long hours ago. Nothing seems altered, only that her face is paler, and the dark rim beneath her beautiful eyes tells that she has been weeping; nothing besides seems altered, excepting that her mother's easy-chair is vacant, and the flowers in the china vases are drooping; the house is silent, and Alfred has not yet arrived.

CHAPTER IV.

With his twenty-guinea cheque converted into a score of sovereigns and the same number of silver shillings, Master Alfred quitted the banking-house some few seconds after the projecting clock at the west-end of Lombard-street struck four, so full of good resolutions that he would not even stay to partake of a bottle of sherry with his brother clerks; for he had resolved that he would be home punctually at the appointed hour.

To lose as little time as possible, he got into an omnibus; for he was of his weak mother's opinion that the best articles could only be purchased about Oxford-street and Regent-street, and that all was vulgar beyond the east side of Charing-cross. He would have liked to have walked boldly into Howell and James's, and there purchased his promised presents, but he knew that five pounds was the

very utmost he had to spend; so he determined to look at the articles ticketed in the West-End windows, ask for what suited him, pay the money down without attempting to get the tradesman to bate a farthing, then get into a London-bridge omnibus, and go home like a gentleman who prides himself upon keeping his promise.

He was some time making up his mind, though he saw several brooches which he thought his mother would like, and many a ring which it would have given him pleasure to have seen sparkling on dear Lucy's fingers. At last he had made up his mind, and was about to enter the shop, when he was saluted by a flashily-dressed youth with a cigar in his mouth. It was the squire's son from Langley-on-the-Lea, arm-in-arm with another youth, who, if anything, had a more rakish look than himself.

Harold Hastings introduced his man-about-town-looking friend to Alfred as Mr. Lawson, said that he had been looking out for him for some time, inquired kindly after his mother and Lucy, and would take "no nay" when he proposed that they should have a glass of wine together. Alfred knew that he was indebted to Harold's father for the situation he held, and, fearful of giving offence

to the son of his mother's friend, he entered the hotel.

Although the youth explained that he had promised to be home to dinner, yet, as it was neither a birthday that he had to celebrate nor any other occasion that admitted of an explanation—(for how could he tell the son of his patron that the dinner was in honour of his having drawn his first quarter's salary?)—he was persuaded, having exhausted all that is polite in excuses, to dine with his old and new acquaintances, though his heart reproached him with a want of firmness, even while he gave his wavering consent. The dinner was good, though Harold found fault with every dish, the wine strong, leaving no doubt that it was well "brandied," and being so, is generally pronounced as excellent by novices.

Lawson was very amusing! he seemed to know everybody, and to be admitted everywhere, and talked of lords and ladies as familiarly as of "puppy-dogs."

Alfred and Harold had been playmates and schoolfellows, and had explored every green wood together for miles round Langley, been partners in keeping rabbits and fancy pigeons—for the wealthy squire

was a good, plain, sturdy Englishman of the old school, and considered the son of his rector an equal and proper companion for his own headstrong heir. Agnes Hastings had also been Lucy's home friend, and still continued to write to her; and her brother Harold had even then a note from her in his pocket-book, which he had faithfully promised his pretty, kind-hearted sister he would deliver with his own hand, though he had forgotten all about it until he happened to meet with Alfred. Indeed it was the promise to deliver the note and walk with Alfred to the Borough, after dinner, to pay his respects to his mother and sister, that induced the youth to stay; for he knew they would be glad to see the son of his father's friend, and there was a feeling of gratitude about Alfred which impelled him to partake of the offered dinner.

Then they had really a great many things to talk about; for although the rector's son was ignorant of the true character of Harold—as the latter was now, though so young, a regular "fast man," in the full meaning of so well-understood a phrase—still, when he came to glance backwards at his wild, harmless amusements and pleasures—at the pure companionship of his own sister Agnes, and her

affection for Lucy and Alfred—there were streaks of silver innocence across that vanished sky, which the unquenched eye of memory still loved to linger over and look at, though every remembrance caused him to drink deeper, as if he wished to banish the present into dim forgetfulness, and dwell upon the past alone. How true it is that an accusing conscience is its own avenger, springing up at times, armed, and striking the blow ere we are aware of its presence!

Alas! though time may withdraw the curtain for a few moments, and reveal glimpses of the long vistas through which we have wandered, yet the moment his hand looses the string his changes show only the present, just as one waking from a doze, at the end of a pleasant dream, is startled by the familiar objects that surround him, and which at any other time would not have possessed interest enough te arrest his attention. "He was too excited," and in that he spoke the truth, "to visit Alfred's mother that night—a walk would do him good." So they sallied out arm-in-arm together.

The strong wine was doing its work. They looked in at one of the theatres; Alfred would pay for all three. They entered into some con-

versation with some of those frail, fair, and over-dressed females who haunt the saloons; and though the rector's son shrank from such society (he had not drank so deeply as his companions), and as he saw that Harold was under the influence of liquor, he determined not to desert him until he had seen him safe home.

It was late when they adjourned to the supper-rooms in the Haymarket; later when led away by Lawson, to meet a few choice spirits and hear a little excellent singing; and still later, when ignorant of the doings within, Alfred entered a gambling-house, carried on under the disguise of billiard-rooms—a place where thousands had been won and lost in a single night. Alfred and Harold had frequently played at billiards in the manor-house of Langley, for the honest squire delighted in finding in-door amusements for his guests in winter. But never before had he bet sovereigns about putting the ball off the red into the middle pocket, as he did that night with Lawson and Hastings, who were a couple of "sharps," in their small way, and thought it fine fun to "clear the green one out," as they called Alfred; and well they did it, until he had only a few shillings left out of his hard-

earned quarter's salary, and neither gift nor token purchased to present to his doating mother or noble-hearted sister, "for all went at one fell swoop."

Meantime, old John, with but little more than a child's knowledge of the ins and outs of the London thoroughfares, was shouldering his way up one street and down another, in search of his young master. He inquired of policemen; he went into no end of shops, and took off his hat respectfully to the girls he met, as he asked them in a tremulous voice if they had seen a young man answering to the description he gave of Alfred.

One smiled at his simplicity, a second sent him "on a wild-goose chase," a third asked him "if his mother knew he was out"—to which, in his innocence, he replied "that she had been dead more than fifty long years;" a fourth respected his grey hairs, and kindly advised him to go home, while the fifth, a poor unfortunate girl, who had not long before left her native village, fancied that the good old man resembled the broken-hearted father she had left behind, and with her dearly-purchased knowledge of bitter experience led him, with the kindest intention, into such scenes as his aged eyes had never before looked upon.

It was a strange picture—that dear old man, in his earnestness of purpose and simple-heartedness, striding onward beside that poor castaway, to whom vice was more familiar than the light of day; while even she seemed to catch a faint ray from her lost purity as she conversed with the faithful domestic, and listened to his description of Lucy's many virtues, and the trouble of mind she was enduring through the absence of her brother.

To her it seemed as if the good angel who had watched over the years of her innocence had again thrown open the gates of the fair Eden which she had lost, and permitted her to look once more upon the outspread flowers, which she could never again gather nor walk amongst until Repentance led her gently by the hand, and Forgiveness and Mercy knelt with bowed heads and pleaded in her behalf. She was not lost to shame; and where that exists, virtue is not wholly uprooted.

They were a long time before they found any traces of Alfred, nor was it until they reached the neighbourhood of the theatre that they fell upon his track. Here, after the poor girl had made inquiries of several of her fair and fallen sisters, she found that some such youth as old John was in

quest of had been seen in the company of Harold Hastings, who was too well known in those haunts.

"That is him," said the old man; "and he has met with the son of his father's truest friend. I am sure they have gone home together, and set the heart of my young mistress at rest. Heaven be praised, he is safe!"

The poor girl who had followed him so faithfully again consulted her piteous companions, and, though it seemed to pain her to dash the cup of comfort from the old man's lips, yet she did it with a delicate hand, ever telling him as she led the way how much he reminded her of her aged father.

She soon found from those whom Solomon describes as waiting "at the street near the corner, in the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night," where Alfred and his friends had supped. Having ascertained this, she made her way thither, and from the conversation the waiter had overheard, and which he repeated to her, she was able to lead old John to the gambling-house, where he found them, long past the hour of midnight.

The girl refused the shilling the old man offered her as they parted at the door; and as she went

away she murmured to herself, "And his voice is like my poor father's, too, whose grey hairs I am bringing in sorrow to the grave."

She turned up to where a court lay in darkness, and was lost in the deep shadows of Time's changes.

As Satan started when touched by the spear of the good angel when squatting near the ear of Eve, so did Alfred spring up with a look of guilt and shame when he saw the aged domestic enter the billiard-room. The touch of the old man's hand, as he placed it lightly on his shoulder, seemed to thrill through his whole frame; and though he had drank deeply, he appeared to feel sober in an instant, as the whole misery that his misconduct had caused at home rushed before his mental vision.

"Come home," said the old man, as he made a cold bow to young Hastings, while speaking to Alfred; "this is no place for you—I have heard that of it. Come home."

Hastings laid down his cue on the billiard-table, inquired after the old man's health, hoped nothing was amiss at home, trusted that he should often see Alfred when his father came to town, sent his respects to Mrs. Langton and Lucy, and paid no regard to the cold formal shake of the hand which

he received from Alfred in return for his own false friend-like pressure.

They had, however, scarcely quitted the billiard-room before Harold said to Lawson, "I don't think we've left the poor devil enough to pay his cab-fare home. Serve him right. A paltry clerk to set himself up for a gentleman. I always hated the fellow when he was a boy and wore pinafores. But his pretty sister's worth peeping at, Lawson, and you shall see her."

CHAPTER V.

With all his vacillation there was one staple trait in the character of Alfred, and that was truthfulness. He had done wrong, and he felt it all the more because those who were blameless were also doomed to suffer for his folly; he concealed nothing, as in his mental anguish he groped about wildly, as if trying to find a way that would lead him back from whence he had started before he had thus lost himself. He might as well have tried to have silenced an echo by shouting to it; the path of error can only be obliterated by opening out beyond it a wider and a better road, and leaving time and forgetfulness to wear out its traces, until it seems invisible beside the broader and "righter" way.

Lightly did Lucy touch their pecuniary straits—never alluding to the sacrifices she had made, to her days of anxiety and nights of toil—after having

listened to a full confession of her brother's misdeeds. The money was gone, and that was the worst of it, though they had not a pound in the house to meet all the necessary expenses that must be incurred until their mother's dividend became due. Still there was some little solace in the midst of all this trouble; her brother was deeply sorry for what he had done, and she had such firm faith in his regret as to feel certain that he would not again be so easily misled.

Then their mother must be kept in ignorance of what had happened, and how was this to be done?

Alfred sat with his sister's hand held within his own, ashamed and silent, after having given utterance to the question, and felt how helpless he was beside her.

"Of course I told John all as we came home," said he, "just as I should have made the worst of it known to my kind father, had he been alive. And oh, Lucy! though I pressed the dear old man's hand, yet you know not how bitter the pang I felt as I did so, when he offered me the full amount which I have so foolishly and sinfully squandered out of the hard-earned savings of his long industrious life, and begged of me to take it, and say nothing

either to you or my mother. And if I would only promise to do so, he said he should go to bed and sleep soundly through what little remained of the night; and, Heaven forgive me for having promised what I never had even the remotest notion of performing, but I did it, Lucy, so that he might sleep in peace after the long and weary walk he has had in search of me. Easy shall be the old man's bed, my sweet sister, if ever the world should roll smoothly with us."

Lucy was glad to find that her brother had refused to avail himself of the old man's kindness, and that with all his waywardness he had made her his confidant, and concealed nothing from her; and Alfred felt that there was something more than forgetfulness in her manner as she parted from him some four hours after midnight, with an assurance that she would somehow manage so to make up such a portion of the sum he had lost that their mother should have no suspicion of what had happened, nor any knowledge of how the amount would be obtained.

And for some hours after her brother had retired to rest did Lucy sit in her mother's easy-chair, worn out with care and anxiety, revolving in her mind a

hundred different plans of getting out of the pecuniary strait into which she was pressed so hard by her improvident brother, but in no direction could she see her way clearly, so suddenly and unexpectedly had she been plunged into the intricate labyrinth.

The dirty fowls that had lost their voices and their forms through pecking about and rolling in the mud of the Borough, had long been trying to crow before Lucy laid her aching head on her pillow.

Troubles seldom come alone, but generally follow each other, as wave succeeds to wave, the largest rolling in when least expected; so they came and overwhelmed Lucy, sweeping before them a host of lesser cares, as if to make room for the greater and heavier current of sorrow that had long before been gathering itself up behind.

All her care and anxiety to conceal Alfred's loss from her mother was wasted tenderness, useless trouble; for on the following morning her mother was found dead in her bed. She had long suffered under a disease of the heart, and it may be that the excitement of the previous night had hastened her death—there was no telling. She had died in her

sleep, without even having tasted the bitterness of death—with one hand under her head, as she was accustomed to lie, and her eyes closed; so had she glided away into the great sea of Eternity without feeling the motion, only to be awakened by the rolling of the waters of life—Siloa's stream, that

lows round and washes the eternal throne.

The doctor, who was suddenly summoned, said that she had been dead some time; that in her state the sensation of death would not be felt, as the blood would cease to flow as slowly and gradually as the faintest ripple becomes imperceptible on a smooth shore, when the breeze dies down into so breathless a calm that even the loose down of the thistle hangs where it fell off upon the spiked leaf for want of the lightest stir of air to bear it away. The only marvel was that she had lived so long with a heart so hopelessly diseased.

Alfred went wailing about the house, and "refusing to be comforted," accusing himself of having been the cause of her death. The poor youth was almost broken-hearted; for he believed that she would still have been alive but for his own

misconduct, and he felt that he could have endured long years of misery, without a single hour of happiness, if he could but have lived over again the last twenty-four hours, or have undone that which was irrevocable. It was all in vain; for time stands as inexorable when we entreat of him to recal the past as the rock on which the drowning seaman is dashed while muttering his last prayer to be saved.

He clung to Lucy like a two-year-old child, and sat on the floor with his face buried in her lap, while she rested her hands on his head, and endeavoured in vain to comfort him, recalling the words of her dear departed mother—all the more forcibly remembered since they could never more be repeated—never, never more—when she had often said to her, "Be a mother to him, Lucy, and never desert him. Promise me that, and whenever it shall please God to beckon me away, I shall depart in peace."

And Lucy had made that solemn promise, the full weight of which she never seemed to feel so heavily as now—as when she sat with her eyes raised towards heaven, her lips moving in prayer, while her poor brother lay sobbing, with his head

resting on her knee, in the chamber where their dead mother lay.

At length the great comforter, Sleep, who even visits the houseless beggar on the wide, wild, desolate moor, while the bitter north wind is blowing bleakly, laid his gentle hand upon Alfred, and then all the house seemed still; for the sorrow of old John was silent—he grieved inwardly; and as for Nanny, she had no more tears to shed, but went about her duties hanging her head aside, and wringing her hands, and sighing piteously.

Once or twice she came into the room where Lucy sat alone in her mother's easy-chair, and tried to speak words of comfort to her dear young mistress; but her old heart was too full to empty itself in dribbling words, so again found vent in sobs and tears—those old outlets of sorrow.

Lucy rose, and kissing her aged cheek, said, "Leave me, dear nurse, and let me try to think what is the best to be done. God will help us."

There was not a pound in the house, and Lucy knew not where the money was to come from that would be required to pay the expenses of her mother's funeral, no more than she knew how to

make up the portion of the amount Alfred had lost, and which she had promised to conceal from the cold form that would never more

> Hear the tempest rave,
> Nor moaning household shelter crave
> From wintry winds that beat her grave.

It was a pitiable sight to see one so young and beautiful bowed down so early beneath a load of sorrow, and not knowing where to look on earth for either help or comfort.

For a time she seemed to envy even the dead; though her conscience smote her the next instant for yielding to such a train of thought, yet, while it lasted, she could not help wishing that she was laid out, mute and cold, by the side of her mother, sleeping the long sleep of peace and forgetfulness, never again to be broken by trouble, sorrow, or tears, nor aught allied to the fever and the fret of this brief, restless life, whose hours are only to be numbered by its cares.

But this feeling lasted not long; for when her thoughts turned towards her brother she felt grateful that she was spared for his sake, and how much better, with youth and health on her side, she was able to bear with his faults and battle against his

failings than her dear, ever-ailing mother had been of late.

She became calmer as she reflected that of the two it were better she should remain behind; that Providence in its, to us, blind decree did everything that was best, though we could not always see it at the time of its dispensation; and she prayed for more patience, as she resolved to do her duty let whatever might befal.

Her reverie was suddenly broken by a loud knocking at the door, and she heard Nanny's voice raised in high altercation with some one in the passage, whom she was threatening to scald, maim, or in any way disfigure with whatever came readiest to hand, unless he forthwith decamped.

"Do you take us for murderers, or what do you think we are, that a person can't die at peace in their bed without your interference?" were the words that caught Lucy's ear as she descended the staircase.

It was the beadle, who had come to make inquiries about Mrs. Langton's death, previous to the coroner holding an inquest.

Another miserable day, and there was the trampling of strange feet on the stairs, as one after

another a dozen low fellows came tumbling in from the neighbouring pot-house, smelling of gin, stale beer, and tobacco, to gaze on the dead, return their verdict of "Died by the visitation of God," then make themselves "jolly" for the rest of the day, by spending the shilling each allowed by the coroner, and adding as much more to it as they could muster. Alas, that it should be so—that solemn, sudden death should be made an excuse for drunkenness! Yet so it is, and so it will be while coroner's inquests are held at public-houses; and those who sit in mockery as a jury are allowed money to spend on such awful occasions.

Lucy felt thankful that her mother had died where she did; that her old home, the beloved rectory of Langley, had not been so desecrated; that the old staircase on which she run up and down when a child had not been stained by such footsteps, nor the walls of her dear birthplace echoed back such coarse remarks as on that gloomy day offended her ears.

And yet it seemed not right that her mother should have died so far away from that sweet spot; she ought to have looked her last on her favourite flowers. to have passed away with the songs of the

old familiar birds ringing in her ears, to have been inquired after day by day by the humble villagers whom she had so often befriended, and whom she hoped to sleep amid when the days of her pilgrimage were at an end. And there she *must* sleep her long sleep; it had many a time been her wish, and Lucy had promised her mother that if she died in London she should be buried in the old family vault in the green churchyard of Langley-on-the-Lea, where the trees waved with a dreamy sound and a sleepy motion, and the golden-banded bees murmured amid the scented thyme that bloomed over the graves in which

The rude forefathers of the hamlet slept.

And now how was she to fulfil her solemn promise?

She had not a pound in her possession, and all her little trinkets had been sold to provide her dear mother with such luxuries as she had been accustomed to indulge in, and to furnish her brother with pocket-money, when her own hard earnings were insufficient to meet their demands.

She unlocked her mother's desk with the intention of writing to a poor young curate who was reading under her father when the latter died; she knew

he was somewhere in London, but nowhere could she find his address. In the desk she found several letters, which her mother had received since her father's death, and allowed to remain unanswered; for Lucy was her mother's letter-writer, and therefore knew that they had not been replied to; nor was she aware of their contents until that moment, when she was disturbed in the perusal by the tramp of the undertaker and his men bringing the coffin upstairs.

CHAPTER VI.

Lucy took up one letter, addressed to her mother by a far-famed publisher from Paternoster-row, respecting some theological work her father had published on his own account, and which she well remembered had often formed matter of discussion amongst his clerical friends who visited Langley Rectory. It was a brief business epistle, regretting her father's death in a few curt words, and wishing her mother to call for a settlement of the account as early as convenient, as the work was out of print and the house had some thoughts of bringing out a new and cheaper edition.

Although Lucy did not quite comprehend the phraseology of the "Row," she resolved at once to answer the letter in person; and fastening her shawl with a miniature-brooch of her father—an admirable likeness—she crossed London Bridge,

and soon stood in the presence of the renowned publisher.

He received her with one of those old-world bows, worthy of the school which has turned out so many "merchants who are princes" in deportment, and more than princely in honour, opened the door that led to his private parlour, handed her a chair, and standing a few "modest moments" while he paid a compliment to her father's genius, ended by saying that, "as it was a matter of business he had written about, he did not see how it could be settled without the presence of her mother."

Lucy told him that her mother had died on the previous day. More she could not say, for her sobbing heart checked further utterance.

The old gentleman drew his chair to her side in an instant, and placing his hand lightly on her arm, spoke such words of comfort as made her feel that in him she had found a friend, all the more sincere for the love he bore to her father's memory.

"He was the only one who could allure me from my ledgers," said the publisher, and his voice was tremulous while he spoke, "and get me into the Chapter Coffee House, and over a bottle of choice

old port, drive all thoughts of business out of my head for the day. You must spare me that miniature for a few days—it is a speaking likeness—and I will, with your permission, have it copied life-size, to hang up beside the few portraits of those I feel honoured in calling my friends."

He ordered in a little sherry and a few biscuits; and while she was partaking of this slight refreshment stepped out, and gave orders to his confidential clerk to make out her father's account.

In a few minutes the document was prepared and brought in; there was so much for commission, binding, and advertising—printing and paper her father had paid for when the work first appeared—so that it was only "less so and so;" which she did not understand, even when the items were pointed out to her, until, with another polite bow, he presented her with a cheque for 89*l.* 2*s.* 3½*d.*, and obtained her signature to a stamped receipt.

"I will never despair again," said Lucy, as she took her father's miniature from the table where the publisher had laid it, and pressed it to her lips during his momentary absence, and as she did so it seemed to smile on her. "Thank God! I shall now be able to lay her by your side," she added

mentally, as she looked on the portrait; and there you will await the coming of your child, when my troubles are also ended, and some kind friend rises up to bear me to that sacred resting-place, like the one I have now found, dear departed mother! who has enabled me to lay you where you wished to rest, when all care and sighing was over."

The honourable old gentleman entered the room with the amount of the cheque in notes and gold, which had been obtained at his own request, to save her the trouble of going to his banker's. He asked her if there was anything he could do towards making arrangements for the funeral; and when told that her mother wished to be buried in the family vault at Langley-on-the-Lea, promised to see the undertaker, and attend to all that was necessary. He also wished her to consult some friend of her father's respecting a new edition of the work, for which he said the house was willing to pay a fair amount, and take all risk; and when she told him that she had no friend, but would leave the matter entirely in his own hands, he took off his spectacles, and looked fixedly on her face, and for the first time saw the cloud of care and anxiety which had settled upon her beautiful countenance.

"No friend!" he said, half speaking to himself, "and so young, and unfitted for the business ways of this hard work-a-day world. What a pity! Well, well; I will do the best I can for us both in the matter, and see what is the most the house can afford to give;" and looking at his watch, he added, "As I live out by Dulwich, I will, with your kind consent, set you down at your own door, as my carriage is waiting at the end of the Row."

He arose, offered her his arm, and a few minutes after she alighted at the old house in the Borough, with ample funds to provide for her mother's funeral, and the conviction that she had found a true friend, to whom she could apply for help and advice when in trouble.

Her first act was to throw herself on her knees beside the coffin in which that beloved form was laid, with cold hands

> Folded on her breast.
> There was no other sign expressed;
> But long disquiet sank to rest—

and there to thank the Great Father, who watches over and cares for all, for His goodness in sending her a deliverer in the dark hour of her trouble.

It was a dull dreary November morning when

the funeral train left the dark and foggy streets of the Borough, on its way to the calm churchyard of Langley, where the dead lay silent as the grey tombstones that marked their last resting-places; for neither the tumult of traffic nor the jar of jostling vehicles broke the tranquillity of their repose.

Old John and Nanny the nurse were seated in the solitary mourning-coach which contained Lucy and her brother, for they were all that followed the pale, cold face which lay enshrouded beneath the black trappings of the slow-moving hearse. When the suburbs of London were left behind, the gloomy-looking horses were driven on at a brisk trot, past gate and tree, lonely grange and straggling village, until the great Babel was left miles behind, and the open, breezy country stretched on either hand, with its leafless trees leaning against the grey leaden-coloured sky, and the song of the red-breasted robin breaking the silence of the far-stretching landscape; for the last vestige of harvest had long been garnered, and not even a bean "stouk" was left to blacken in the frost, which hung its white-rime in the early morning on the hedges and bushes.

Through such scenery the unconscious dead was

borne; but neither the forms of the trees, the song of the robin, nor the silence of the empty harvest-fields would ever concern her again; for never more would

> She obey when one commands,
> Nor answer should one clasp her hands,—
> She answered not—nor understands.

The dead and the living reached the village of Langley late in the misty November afternoon. There was a cheerful fire burning in the parlour of the rectory as they passed it, and Lucy's tears broke out afresh as she saw the light reflected from the warm, comfortable hearth by which her mother had sat through so many long, happy years. When she raised her head to look up again it was to gaze on the cold, damp vault, which lay a little way beyond—deep, dark, and silent, and ready to receive that still dearly-beloved and lifeless form.

Alfred turned his tear-filled eyes upon his sister with a deep, heart-harrowing look, as they passed the home of their childhood; and as the village bell sent its "sullen roar" through the misty air, a chill thrillingness ran through his blood as his conscience again smote him for having hastened her death, as he still believed, on that ill-starred night when he

broke the promise which he had so solemnly pledged himself to fulfil.

In the churchyard many of the villagers were assembled—old and young, reverential and bare-headed, paying solemn homage to death, while the November wind blew alike on the hoary head and the bright long ringlets of youth. And there too was the good old squire and his imperious lady: she looking condescendingly upon those solemn funeral rites, as if she had a notion that even Death himself, had he been by, must have felt honoured by her presence.

There also was one of the sweetest flowers that ever shot from human stem—Agnes Hastings—whose feelings would not be stayed, but impelled her to rush forward and throw herself sobbing into the arms of her dearest friend Lucy, to the great consternation of her stiff and formal mother.

The coffin was borne from the hearse to the grey old weather-beaten church by the aged villagers, whose pains and aches that cold inanimate body had many a time alleviated. Then the deep bell boomed over the landscape, and was answered back by the roaring of the leafless trees, which the loud autumnal wind had awakened; while the new curate headed

MRS. LANGTON'S FUNERAL.

the procession, uttering those words of eternal hope, "I am the resurrection and the life;" on which, like a golden chain, hangs the anchor of our salvation when the frail bark is moored in the silent sea of death. Then there was the shuffling sound of feet in the aisle, the stillness that reigned while the service was read in the church, the backward steps to the grave-side, the heart-chilling sound as the earth fell hollow on the coffin-lid—that sepulchral voice which needed no human tongue to add, "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust;" then a few more solemn words, and all was over.

The good old squire barely waited until the funeral duties were ended, when, stepping forward, he drew the arm of Lucy gently within his own, and patting her hand lightly, said, "Hush! hush! darling! Do not weep; then I will not be angry with you for not writing to me and apprising me of what has happened. It nearly broke the heart of my pretty Agnes to hear that you were in trouble, and we not acquainted with it. A worthy bookseller was the first to come down and bring us the melancholy tidings."

As he spoke he led the way through the large park gates to the ancient Hall of Langley-on-the-

Lea, while Alfred followed with sweet Agnes on his arm, and her lady-mother treading mincingly in the rear, with that shadow of Pride, a tall footman, at her heels. The honest publisher had witnessed the ceremony at a modest distance, too delicate to obtrude upon the sanctity of grief, but standing aloof until the mourners had departed, then venturing timidly forward to look down into the grave of his beloved old friend. He had seen every preparation made for the funeral under his own eye. As for old John and Nanny the nurse, they gave rise to many a bickering as to whose guests they should become during their brief stay; for there was not a door but what would have been gladly thrown open to receive them throughout the whole of the broad Hundred of Langley-on-the-Lea.

CHAPTER VII.

It is the London season, when everybody is in town who lays claim to belonging to the world of fashion; and the good squire has come up with his family from Langley-on-the-Lea, to give his "aye" or "no" in the House of Commons, where he sits as member for the county of Mum.

Alfred is again attending to his duties at the bank, and Lucy's pretty fingers are as busy as ever plying her crochet-hook and netting-needles, while old John goes in and out on errands, and Nanny bustles about household affairs, and seems every whit as handy at such matters as ever she was in the days of her youth.

She is conversing with honest John at the time we resume the thread of our story; and as their conversation will throw some light on the forthcoming events which make up our narrative, we

have jotted it down just as it was uttered by those two simple-hearted creatures in the kitchen.

"Well, I don't like her a bit," said plain-spoken Nanny, alluding to the squire's wife, Mrs. Hastings; "nor I never did, nor never shall; and it's my opinion, John, she would never have come here to have visited our dear mistress Lucy, and to make a fuss with master Alfred, but for the two thousand pounds they have had lately from the Life Assurance Company, and which we all believed was lost at the death of our dear good master, through our poor departed mistress's neglect. Marry! she kept far enough away when they needed her help; and now she must come 'my good-womaning me' about this, that, and the other, as if I was a giddy girl, just going into service, instead of an old woman, that knew how to manage a household almost before she was born."

And dear old Nanny, while she spoke, wrung out the towel she had just washed, with a tightness that seemed to say that, if she had hold of somebody she knew at that moment, she would wring them in the same way. She made it crack again as she shook out the wrinkles.

"But thou art forgetting, Nanny, that but for

our good old neighbour the squire, her husband, our dear children, as I always call them, would never have got the mint of money they did from the Assurance Company," said old John, trying to throw the smooth oil of his gentle nature over the boiling water of Nanny's wrath, which was perhaps made a little more turbulent than usual through the heat and steam that arose from the wash-tub, and gave a November look to the kitchen, although it was then a lovely evening in May. "It was a roguish company, Nanny, depend upon it; and if thou hadst but seen how our squire stamped his stick on the office floor, and shook his fist in the face of the frightened partners, as he 'bully-ragged' 'em, and threatened to bring the whole affair before the Houses of Parliament, and told them that they held double the amount in hand of our dear master's share o' the division of the company's profits, which they had neither sent to him nor accounted for, to pay what was deficient in the policy at the time of his death. If it hadn't been for him they would no more have seen a shilling of the two thousand pounds, which they have since got, than I shall ever see the tin trumpets which blew down the walls of Jericho. I wouldn't have missed being in

that office, Nanny, when Squire Hastings gave them a few words of a sort on that day—no, not for all the gold it took to make the lavers that they washed in in Solomon's temple."

"The lavers wasn't gold, nor the trumpets wasn't tin," said Nanny; "and I wonder at you, John, that have been in parson's service for sixty long years, not knowing better what Mr. Hiram made his pots and pans of. But that's neither here nor there about what I was talking of. Do you think that artful woman would come here, dragging our Lucy and Alfred out to her parties for nothing in the way she does?—and they in mourning, poor things! for their mother, and going like bears to the stake, through her over-persuading, and 'my-dearing' and 'my-childing' them. I'll tell you what's my opinion, John—and I believe I can see as far through a nine-inch brick wall as most people, without putting my best magnifying spectacles on—she either wants our sweet Lucy to marry her scapegrace, low, drunken, gambling scamp of a son, that kept Alfred out that night, and helped to hasten our poor dear mistress's death, or else she wants to get hold of the two thousand pounds they have got. It's either the one or the other, John;

and if I was given to swearing and cursing, I would take my solemn oath on it."

"Laws-a-massy!" exclaimed John, stopping in the midst of his work, and holding high with one hand the silver spoon he was polishing. "Well, you do see a long way into things, where I should never think of looking for either a hawk or a hand-saw. Why I would sooner see that poor young curate, that used to read with our beloved master at Langley Rectory, and that comes here in his berry-brown black coat, with his timid knock, as if he was frightened out of his life at waking your old tabby there out of her cat's-sleep—I would rather see him her husband—and I believe he's as poor as poverty that has hardly enough to keep house and harbour together—than I would see her married to that wild chap Harold, if every hair of his head had one of the Queen of Sheba's diamonds tied to it, and every toe and finger on his body was weighed down with the gold of Ophir."

"And so would I, John, ten thousand times over," replied Nanny, "though he is but a poor curate and Scripture-reader. But what will be, will be for all that, though we mayn't live to see it," added the old nurse, with what she no

doubt considered a most prophetical shake of the head.

From the kitchen of the house in the Borough Time's changes carry us to a splendid room at the West End, where the squire's wife is conversing with her beautiful daughter Agnes, the latter strongly objecting to her mother's proposal, as she says, "I do not think it would be convenient for them to part with the money, for Lucy was telling me that they thought of removing into a different neighbourhood, and taking a better kind of house; and if so, they will want it."

"Why can't they take apartments, then?" replied Mrs. Hastings. "Besides they have a right to oblige us if I wish them; they would never have had the money but for your father's interference; and as they cannot want it, what difference can it make whether I have two thousands pounds, or they leave it lying useless in somebody's hands? You do not understand such matters, child."

"But when will it be paid back, ma?" inquired Agnes, fixing her large blue honest eyes full on her mother's face.

"Oh, that will be managed somehow, never fear," answered the mother, with averted glance.

"The thing now is to get it. I cannot see your brother's honour at stake, especially after he has promised me that he will never again enter a gaming-house."

"He made the same promise, ma, when you parted with your jewels; and father was inquiring why you did not wear them, only the other evening. I fear Harold will never alter while he keeps the company he does."

"Well, well, my dear, your father cannot live for ever, and when he is gone Harold will be master; and if we do not oblige him now, he will not care to oblige us then. And if you will not ask them for the money, I will. They have not the expensive appearance to keep up that your brother has; and for my part, I do not see that they want the money at all, considering the excellent situation that your father obtained for the young man, and what is brought in by the industry of your friend Lucy. Besides, they have not the mother to keep now."

"Neither have they the hundred a year from the annuity Mrs. Langton was entitled to while she lived," answered Agnes; "that ceased at her death. And I am sure my father would be very angry if he knew you had got this money."

"But your father must not know it," answered Mrs. Hastings, sharply. "Gentlemen in Harold's position incur expenses in these days which were unthought of when he was a young man; for the old school, which he prides himself upon belonging to, is thought no more of by the young gentlemen of the present day than the last year's fashions. Besides he may honour your friend Lucy by offering her his hand some day, after he has sown his wild oats; that is, if there is any truth in what I have heard whispered, and not without; for I may tell you in confidence that your friend Lucy is likely enough to be a wealthy heiress when a certain old lady dies, whom she never saw in her life."

"Heaven forbid that she should ever become the wife of my brother!" exclaimed Agnes, with an earnestness that made her mother start; "she is ten thousand times too good for him, and as unfitted to move among the society he would keep, as he would be to sit beside the quiet, happy hearth she would make her home."

"So all young ladies think who are inexperienced," replied her mother. "I once thought the same; but I soon found it was a humdrum sort of

life to be walking up and down among the flower-beds at Langley-on-the-Lea, hearing the gardener talk about what vegetables would soon be ready, and what fruit he should be able to place on the table; watching the bees or sitting on the lawn listening to the birds; having a drive out where there was nobody to see you excepting the gaping peasants; receiving a few poor gentry now and then, or giving a few dinners on the eve of an election; presiding over some Dorcas society that gave away cloaks and petticoats to the snuffy old women, and pinafores to the dirty little children; with now and then, for a change, a run out to see the hunt, and be deafened by the yelping of a pack of foxhounds. This was what your father called rural felicity; but I gave it another name, and let him have no rest until I tasted the sweets of fashionable life; and I err greatly if your friend Lucy would not be of my opinion were Harold ever to honour her with his hand."

"Honour her, ma?" answered Agnes, her eyes blazing with such a fierce light, that you wondered how the calm blue heaven which shone there a few moments ago could flash forth such scorching

lightning. "Disgrace her! you mean. You surely forget that your son, my brother, more's the pity! has been horsewhipped in the street for cheating at a gambling-house. Honour her! it is a dread of the same lash that makes him more anxious to obtain the few hundreds my dear friend is possessed of, than to satisfy any such feeling, as it would be a mockery in him to pretend to possess it. There is not a respectable family with whom he has left his card of late but what has returned it. Honour her!—we are all disgraced by him." The unladylike reply of the mother we shall not repeat; suffice it that her false pride prevented not her mean artifice from obtaining the two thousand pounds from Lucy and her brother; and that twelve hours after Harold Hastings had received the whole amount—not a single shilling of it remained in his possession.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Not within?" "No, sir. But pray be good enough to step inside and just write her a line to say that you have been; for she does seem to take on so when I tell her that you have called while she was out, there's nothing like it; and asks me all about the poor creatures that you are good enough to visit, and read to, and pray beside."

And Nanny kept on talking, as she led the way to the sitting-room upstairs, and while she dusted a chair with her apron for the young curate to sit upon.

"No, the squire's wife, whom I can never abear, came, and almost dragged my sweet young mistress and master out, to go to another of her parties; and I said to my Lucy while I was hooking her dress, 'I don't know how it is, my darling, but we seemed a deal happier before Mrs. Hastings

came to town; for then we had dinner and tea regularly, and went to bed at Christian hours; and you used to read a chapter of the blessed Bible and the prayers to me and old John, and itswas almost like the quiet days in the rectory at Langley-on-the-Lea. For there was none of this fuss and stew, and hurrying out to meet these fine fal-the-ral people, which I would not give a penny for the whole bunch of, if Miss Agnes was left out!' And so my silly old tongue kept running on, sir, as an old woman's will that's allowed to have her own way, until at last dear Lucy burst out a-crying, as she said, 'You do not know, nurse, how unhappy I feel while at these parties, and how my conscience accuses me of leaving my friend' (meaning you, sir) 'to perform sacred duties which I ought then to be assisting in. But my dear Agnes, her mother says, goes moping about the house as if seeking for something she had lost if I am not there, and the squire is so kind to us. But still I would rather be going my rounds amongst the poor, and rendering what aid I am able to Mr. Hall in his good mission.' And then she rested her pretty head on my old shoulder, and had such a cry, that I wished my tongue had been fast in a live oyster, instead of

causing her to feel so sad, and adding to the many troubles she already has on her mind. But shall I make tea for you, sir? I know I can't make it so nice as dear Lucy, but I am sure she will feel happier if she knows you stayed and took it, and would be good enough after to read a little to comfort me and old John, for we are both tottering nearer and nearer to our long home every day; and I am sure John is dying for the fresh air of Langley-on-the-Lea this sweet May weather, though he says but little; and my darling Lucy looks as if she wanted a change of air too; and so do we all, as far as that goes."

The young curate stayed and took his solitary tea, and seemed to find some solace in handling Lucy's work, in looking into the books which she had touched, and gazing fondly on the flowers she had arranged on the table. He read and prayed to the good old people; then went on his way into the bye-courts and alleys, to comfort the poor and afflicted, and fulfil his Holy Master's mission.

And there is Lucy in a crowded drawing-room, so heated with lights on a warm May night, that the choice and costly flowers which are ranged around droop their heads and curl up their petals,

as if to warn the lovelier flowers that are moving to and fro in the mazy dance to the sound of dulcet music, of the unhealthiness of the atmosphere they are inhaling. Though she takes no part in the pastime, as the signals of sorrow she wears exempt her, still there is not an eye in that ample apartment but what has scanned her fine figure and admired her angelic countenance, that mirror of a loving heart and sweet disposition. Even he who has tried every allurement to wile her into his meshes, who is tolerated in no decent company beyond what assembles around his mother—though he speaks of her as "the daughter of a country parson that his silly father patronised," to his fashionable and thoughtless companions, who pronounce her "a devilish fine gal"—even he feels the power of her beauty, and is determined to possess her if he can. He admires her a little more than he does his favourite horse for its symmetry; but as for love, he has never had such a feeling in his heart, in the pure acceptation of the word; and there is such a halo of virtue around her, that it seems to beam upon him from her eyes and from her face, and to make his own vices stand out more hideously, as they are lit up by the reflection of that

MRS. HASTINGS AND HER SON.

purer light; he feels the shadows of his sins turn blacker beneath the silver splendour of her unsullied purity.

His unscrupulous and fearless mother catches his bloodshot and restless eyes, and beckons him apart from the company into a distant recess, where a silver lamp glimmers through the gauze curtains, and throws its rays on the rich tracings of Indian birds and Eastern flowers—hollow mockeries! like the false hearts now beating within—for lime and bricks, plaster ceiling and wooden floor, form this Paphian bower when stripped of its paint and gilding. Fitter emblems would they have been of those who stood there, had those flowers been twining serpents, those birds hovering hawks; and instead of the crimson ottoman and piled velvet that lies below, furred and beautiful animals that had died through the stroke of those poisonous fangs, and birds whose snowy plumage was dappled in blood.

"I am ashamed of you, Harold," were the first words the imperious and still handsome-looking mother uttered, as she threw herself on the crimson velvet cushions, with a passion that made the tail of the bird of Paradise which adorned her

head-dress dance again. "Why, you stood moping at the girl as if you were moon-struck, instead of trying to ingratiate yourself into her favour. You know that I have as thorough a contempt for love and suchlike girlish nonsense as any sensible lady can have. But it is necessary to assume such a feeling at times; and Lucy is not a girl who would marry a mummy, or have a gentleman at all that did not at least pretend to admire her. I have watched you, and you have not spoken a dozen words to her to-night; and I can tell you that but for the coaxing of your sister Agnes I should not have been able to have got her here. Forty thousand is the amount that she will inherit on her mother's side from this aged dowager."

"Forty thousand!" exclaimed Harold, with a wild gleam in his eyes; "the twentieth part of that would turn the luck 'on my side. I play safe. I have made my calculations out of every ten throws."

"Hush! madman, hush! Drive me not distraught with your gambling calculations. I have lost all faith in them, Harold," said his mother, waving her hand. "You have already ruined us. No respectable family will receive you; no wealthy heiress permit you to approach her; no man of

rank and station be seen with you. This girl I have contrived to keep ignorant of your great vices, and threatened your sister with my dying curse if she breathe a word of them into her ear."

And she looked terrible as she spoke, while the Indian birds and Eastern flowers danced like demoniac forms before the angry flashing of her eyes. "Lady Brier came stalking into the room to-night with my own jewels hung about her, which I could not redeem from the misbelieving Jew. I could have stabbed her. She asked Agnes if she thought they became her as well as they did her mother. My tiring-maid, who was handing round refreshments, overheard her. Would that the ice she took had been one mass of prussic acid! You must marry this girl, Harold, before it is too late, or I shall go distracted—before she can learn that you are what you are," she added, in a low deploring tone of voice, while her lips curled with contempt as her eye measured her mean-souled son from head to heel.

"Her brother ever throws himself between us when I approach her," answered Harold. "He seems never to have forgotten the beggar's dole Lawson and I drew him of at the billiard-table—

a sum that I have doubled and thrown to a groom porter after an evening's winnings as I would throw a bone to a dog. Why does not my sister Agnes speak in my favour? She has more influence over her than any other person. You ought to compel her to do so. It will be for the benefit of us all if I throw myself away upon her, and we get the fortune you say she is sure to possess."

"Your father has provided for Agnes out of funds over which neither you nor I have any control," replied the mother. "As to recommending you to her friend Lucy, I might as well prate to the dead, and expect to be obeyed, as attempt to induce her to do that. I have scarcely influence enough to persuade her to remain silent, and keep her from blabbing out your misdeeds. Why could you and Lawson stoop to such paltry quarry as the twenty guineas which the poor youth had just received for his quarter's salary, as my maid has since learnt from one of his fellow-clerks? It is of a piece with all your doings."

And she waved her hand, and dismissed him; then rose, smiling, to receive a new-coming guest.

Harold, like all villains of his class, knew how to tell a tale that "would please a lady's ear;" and

though the progress he made in Lucy's favour when he called on her, or whenever an opportunity offered, was but slow, still she could not listen to him without being interested, for he had tact enough always to dwell upon what was agreeable to her—the memory of the happy hours they had passed together with his sister Agnes and Alfred in the green seclusion of Langley-on-the-Lea; for Lucy was never weary of talking of scenes that were so much endeared to her, and all the more so since they were now hallowed by being near to the resting-place of her beloved dead.

Any one wholly ignorant of that young libertine's character, who had not listened to him on such occasions, would have gone away, as Lucy sometimes did, with an impression that nothing was more distasteful to him than a London life; that his heart was with his old ancestral oaks in the green glades of Langley-on-the-Lea; that the happiness of the tenantry and the comforts of the poor villagers would be his sole study and chief delight, when his honest father had "shuffled off this mortal coil," and he himself reigned in the stead of the beloved old squire.

The young villain "brushed up" the memory of

his once-happy boyish days, and recalled the sweet spots where they had found the first celandines, while yet the daisy-buds stood, like hard green-headed nails, unopened, and half knocked into the earth. He remembered something she had said when standing amid that twilight flush of early blue-bells in the low-lying copse, where they spread out like a fallen sky; while the bowry hollows behind, fringed with pale golden primroses, seemed to sink down into the wooded distance like another sunset—for so had her youthful fancy pictured them. And as Lucy sometimes listened to him, while she looked at him from out of the heaven of her clear, soft, unsuspecting eyes, he could not help wishing now and then that he were a dove instead of a wily serpent, and worthy of matching with so sweet a turtle. Even the poor curate was deceived, for his mission lay not where Harold's vicious propensities were discussed, and the young hypocrite had talked about founding an infant school at Langley-on-the-Lea, and requested him to go down and discuss the matter with the neighbouring gentry; for as he afterwards said to Lawson, "I could see that the babe of grace was smitten by the beauty of the bird I am ensnaring; and when

those sanctified snobs come in with their soft-sawdering, they often shut up the entrance altogether through which we are slowly making our way."

Lawson suggested making "eternal smash" of the curate, if he were in the way, by throwing him out of the window.

CHAPTER IX.

Without announcing her name, a very aged lady, totally blind, was led by old Nanny into the sitting-room, where Lucy was busy with her needlework, a few days after Mrs. Hastings had given her grand party.

"You would not have known who I am, miss, had I sent in my name," said the old lady, seating herself in the chair which Lucy placed beside her, and carefully arranged, with every consideration for her aged visitor's sad infirmity. "I think I saw your poor mother once—only once, though she was my own sister's child, so that you see I am in some measure related to you. And I have heard from those who are now as old as myself, but who still remember what I was fifty long years ago, that you are like me—very like what I was when this creaking old body of mine had half a hundred years less

to bear than it has now. Let me feel if they speak truly."

The blind old lady put out her small white wrinkled hand, and as she passed it slowly over Lucy's beautiful face, neck, and bosom, spanning also her elegant waist, she said to herself, "The same smooth brow which the mirror so often flashed back in the days of my maiden vanity; the straight, long nose, and short curling lips which marks every portrait of the Arbourys that hangs in the long portrait picture-gallery in Winterlea Wold. How well I remember them all; and what hours I spent in it alone when a child, amusing myself with my shuttlecock and skipping-rope when the weather was unfavourable, and I was not allowed to run about the long miles of ground which for centuries have been the heritage of the Arbourys. Kiss me, child; I am the last of the race—the end of a long line of descendants, though now old and blind; the long-honoured name will die with me, and soon be remembered no more for ever."

The tears fell from her darkened eyes as she embraced Lucy, and added, "I shall never feel the wind blowing on my aged cheeks through

the old ancestral oaks again; for I have sold the ancient homestead with all its thousands of broad acres, which there is no one left to inherit when I am gone. A rich millowner is the purchaser, whose grandfather rented a morsel of green bleaching-ground by Winterlea Brook when I was a girl; for such, my child, are Time's changes, and I have lived to see a great many of them, and can see them as they change now; for my mental vision is not darkened, though Memory is the long picture-gallery in which I still play by myself at times, and it is hung with something of every sort, but most with portraits of the dead. Nay, let your soft young hands rest on my old shoulders; they seem to comfort me, and I need a comforter now."

She drew Lucy's face close to her own, and her sweet damask cheek rested on the smoothly-parted silver hair of her aged relative, like a summer rose lying on the snow of winter, and giving a warm flush to the cold white ground on which it rested.

As the blind lady passed her hand through the rich tresses of Lucy's long heavy falling hair, she said, "Just as long, and smooth, and soft, and luxuriant as my own used to be when I was

young—when I was young;" and she repeated the four last words several times with a sad, sweet cadence, like the "dying fall" of plaintive music, which fancy loves to linger over with closed eyes while visions of past pleasures float by.

She then invited Lucy to visit her, and said, "I have taken a house at the corner of a quiet street, with a portion of the windows fronting a fashionable square, so that, as I tell the few aged friends who now and then visit me, when I receive company I am still in the world, and of the world; but when I wish to retire within myself, I shift into the apartments that overlook the still, noiseless street, and there I am neither disturbed by the clattering of carriages nor the deafening din of restless door-knockers, but I sit alone and think over what my visitors have been telling me. And do you know, [dear Lucy, for I already feel you are very dear to me," she added, as she placed her feeble arm round the young lady's waist, while a faint smile lighted up her pale wrinkled features —wrinkled so small that you saw not the traces of Time's finger-marks at a distance, though upon looking close the face appeared like an old portrait, full of little lines that crossed and inter-

sected one another as if they had been drawn with the point of a fine needle; "and do you know, my dear Lucy, I still feel a strange interest in all those I have known in former years, and when I talk about them they seem to appear to me as when I saw them before this sad calamity befel me; for blindness has in it an everlasting beauty. Those that I *did* see when they were young, I cannot now see when they are grown old; so that when they talk to me my inward eye still pictures them as young and handsome as they were forty long years ago—for so long have I been blind.

"These eyes, though clear——" she paused, and as her sightless orbs filled with tears, said, "Cannot you help me to finish the quotation, my love?—the lines were written by the Bard of Paradise, and I have heard that you are a great reader of my favourites, Shakespeare and Milton."

Lucy, in a tremulous voice, repeated the lines:

> These eyes, though clear
> To outward view of blemish or of spot,
> Bereft of sight, their seeing have forgot;
> Not to their idle orbs does day appear,
> Or sun, or moon, or stars throughout the year;
> Or man, or woman——

and Lucy hesitated, as the lines that follow never

seemed to her before to have so solemn and earnest a purport as then, while gazing on the bright sightless eyes of Lady Arboury, and which a stranger would never have thought to have been "bereft of sight."

The aged lady remarked the pause, then raising her face towards heaven, continued the quotation in a firm tone of voice, commencing again with—

> Yet I argue not
> Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate one jot
> Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
> Right onwards.

"But what was I talking about, my child, before I wandered away to Milton, whose beautiful lines you recited so tenderly and feelingly?"

Lucy told her that she was speaking of the interest she still felt in the welfare of those she had known in her younger years.

"I remember now," said the old lady; "yes, I still listen with interest while I hear some go up, and others sink down; how one grows rich, and another becomes poor; how some fare well and others fare ill, just as Life's Time's changes,—just as the sun of prosperity shines, or the shadow of adversity falls down, as it did on the old portraits

in the long gallery of Winterlea Wold, brightening and darkening, when I watched the lights and shades in my girlish days, and saw some old Lord Arboury stand out in the shine, or an ancient ancestress fall back into shadow. Such, Lucy, is life; and I often think I see the changes all the more clearly through my outer vision being darkened. And what is this Harold Hastings I hear spoken of in connection with your name?" and as she put the question the blind lady held her head on one side so that she might hear more distinctly every syllable of Lucy's answer.

Lucy told her all she knew respecting him; spoke of her intimacy in childhood, of Squire Hastings' kindness, the situation he had procured for Alfred in the bank, and the two thousand pounds he had obtained from the Life Assurance Company.

"The bank is a very old and most respectable firm," said Lady Arboury; "our family has banked with it for more than a century, and I have entrusted the whole proceeds from the sale of our heirless estate in their hands,—in a word, all I possess in the world, and the sum is some hundred thousand pounds; so you see how great is my

faith in it. And the two thousand pounds, my dear, what have you done with it? As a relative I may take the liberty of inquiring. You are surely not letting it lie idle? for money begets money, as my bankers tell me."

From any other person it is likely enough that the high-spirited Lucy would have considered such an inquiry a very impertinent question; but there was something so kind and motherly in the manner of Lady Arboury's interrogation, that no one could have felt offended; and Lucy told her at once that she had lent the whole amount to Mrs. Hastings.

"To Mrs. Hastings!" said the blind interrogator, sharply. "Assuredly not without the knowledge or sanction of her husband? What security do you hold for it, my dear?"

"None," answered Lucy; "she asked me for it, and with my brother's consent I gave it to her."

"And her son, the young esquire, has made you an offer of marriage, has he not?"

Lucy replied in the affirmative, while a deep blush mantled her beautiful features.

"There is something very wrong here," said Lady Arboury; "I do not like this. Not that the money is worthy of a moment's consideration, so

far as you are concerned, my dear Lucy; for all I have heard of you caused me to decide some months ago that what I possess, excepting a few trifling legacies, will one day be yours. It is just conscience-money due to your grandmother—my own sister, whom I treated with such contempt and scorn; to your own mother, to whom I could never become reconciled, not even when overtaken by so sad an affliction as blindness. But enough of this; do not attempt to thank me, child, lest in my dreams I should seem to hear the voices of the dead exclaiming 'It is too late!'"

She leant her head on Lucy's breast, and wept aloud as the past again arose before her—the regretted past, which there is no recalling. It was but seldom that she allowed her feelings to overmaster her, yet somehow she felt different in the presence of Lucy than she did with her oldest and most intimate friends; for the few words that the maiden had uttered in sympathy seemed to comfort her, they were the wellings-up of a true, fond heart. Oh! how unlike the expressions she was accustomed to hear in the cold, smooth, heartless, and polite world of fashion.

Old Nanny came in, and announced in a low

whisper that the poor curate was waiting below, and wished to speak to Lucy as soon as she was disengaged.

Lady Arboury, with that acute sense of hearing which is often possessed by those that are blind, caught the sound, and fearing that she had already trespassed too long on her young relative's privacy, was about to depart, when Lucy, in a few apt and modest words, told her that he was a pupil of her father's; and also how he went about from house to house comforting the poor and needy, like the apostles of old, and often relieving their wants far beyond his limited means.

And she spoke of Mr. Hall so warmly, earnestly, and favourably as to call up an approving smile on the countenance of her blind kinswoman, and a wish to be introduced to the reverend young gentleman—a wish that was soon gratified. He felt for her infirmity, and spoke to her as no man ever before spoke; and it was something new for one hardened into the cold, hard iron of fashionable life, to listen to sincere truth, to hear the language of profound respect unmingled with flattery; and she felt a yearning towards the young clergyman which she could not control—a liking

which, until she met Lucy, her heart had been a stranger to throughout her long forty years of darkness.

After conversing with him for several minutes, she sent a message to her footman, who speedily came in, bringing a small morocco case from the carriage, which she opened, and taking out a light mahogany frame, placed the paper, which had been cut to fit it, upon the stand, and regulating the brass lines that went across by screws, she wrote in a bold, clear hand, and in lines as straight as the edge of a patent square, an order upon her banker for 100*l.*; then puncturing the corner of the paper with an ivory instrument which embossed it with a peculiar mark that she could feel and swear to as her own impression, she handed the check to Mr. Hall, and requested him to distribute the amount among the deserving poor whom he visited.

"I know not when I have spent so calm and contented an hour, my dear children," said Lady Arboury, "as I have passed while here. As for you, Lucy, my house is your home; come when you will, quit it not, unless you please, until I am borne for the last time across the threshold; and you, my reverend and good friend," she added,

extending her hand, "I shall ever be at home to, and ready so far as money can assist to aid you in your good work. Heaven forgive me for neglecting the poor so long!"

When she departed, both Lucy and the young curate felt as if a cloud had overshadowed the apartment, so light had that blind lady's presence seemed to make it; but the poor Scripture-reader felt this only for a moment, for Lucy's sweet smile soon spread "sunshine o'er the shady place," causing the youthful divine to mingle with his graver thoughts of angels the lovely face and the beautiful form that sat beside him.

CHAPTER X.

And now the whole fashionable world rung with the name of Lucy Langton, the reputed rich heiress.

Mrs. Hastings had seen her, and heard from her own lips—and she well knew how truthful those sweetly-pouting lips were—all about her interview with blind Lady Arboury; how the latter had sold her vast estate for upwards of one hundred thousand pounds, which sum she ascertained had been paid over to the lady's bankers, and that all this and more would be left to Lucy when Lady Arboury died. Furthermore, she had made the acquaintance of those who were on friendly terms with the blind lady's physician, and heard that it was his opinion she could not live long, as she laboured under a stubborn pulmonary disease.

And now she led her vicious son Harold a sad life, ever urging him on to visit and make him-

self agreeable to Lucy, telling him how necessary it was that he should keep the field, and challenge all new comers, who would throng as thickly around her as flies about an open honey-jar. It made the maiden cheeks of Agnes Hastings burn again to hear the coarse remarks and see the mean devices of her designing mother to obtain the hand, and with it the wealth, of Lucy for her worthless brother.

Yet Mrs. Hastings stood not alone; for there were scores besides her with their wares ready packed for the same marriage-market,—all hoping to find a purchaser in Lucy.

Some came with sons, others with brothers; even nephews and uncles were plentiful; and more than one old widower devoted an extra hour to the toilet, in dyeing their grey hairs and brushing up their last few yellow teeth, in the hope of rendering themselves pleasing to the sight of the comely maiden.

One tried to win the heart of Nanny, the nurse, and obtain her good word; a second attempted to bribe unbribable old John; while Alfred was invited to a score of dinners, and as many evening parties, every day.

Still Lucy toiled on at her needlework, was polite and civil to all, rejected urgent offers with a smile, and saw more through her dreamy, quiet, observing eyes, than any of them gave her credit for.

The old house in the Borough was crowded with visitors; there were often as many as a dozen carriages at a time drawn up in the street. Nanny said, "The ill-mannerdly footmen will drive the old door off its hinges with their knock, knocking; and that, were she Miss Lucy, she would soon send them to the rightabout with a kettle of boiling water, if a civil 'get out' wouldn't do. Coming with their canting flattery, and trying to make it appear that all the angels that were ever born and christened, and dressed in new wings, were 'all my eye and Betty Martin' beside Miss Lucy! Not but what she was as good as the best angel that ever flew over a rainbow; but it sickened her to hear them try to 'bamboozle' her."

Old John used to complain "that his legs fairly ached through running to answer the door, and that the variety of nasty smells, which fashionable folk called scents, quite filled the passage and the staircase, and made him long more than ever for a

sniff of the old May-covered hedges and sweet-smelling hay and bean-fields that perfumed the air of Langley-on-the-Lea."

Lucy's sweet silvery laugh sometimes made the old house in the Borough ring again, as she heard the comments of homely Nanny and honest John on some of her fashionable visitors; and she used to say to the curate "that they had been allowed to utter whatever they thought without let or hindrance, and it was useless attempting to check them."

The subject was discussed in the newspapers, and the sale of the large estate of Winterlea Wold furnished a topic of conversation for eminent lawyers.

One said that the purchaser of so old an heritage was but an abator; and that if any one could be found, though only of half-blood, who set foot upon the land once a year, and maintained the claim. the property could be recovered.

A second maintained that if fifty laid claim to it in a collateral line it would not militate against the right of the buyer, as, after all, it was but a matter of bargain and sale, and the habendam was a sufficient title as given by Lady Arboury, who

had also dug up and given a turf to the purchaser, which alone was a legal investiture.

A third urged that, no matter how remote the kindredship, it had always a perpetual right in an inherited estate, while ever a tree grew, a blade of grass flourished, or a dint could be made in the soil with a footmark; for it was a thing that could be touched, felt, and handled in a hundred ways, and therefore could never pass away: neither could the claimants, though a million times removed from the direct line of heritors; and that Lucy Langton or her brother, after coming into possession of the money for which the property was sold, could also claim and obtain the estate.

Some contended that Lucy could only proceed by recovery—others that Lady Arboury herself was but a parcener.

Still the subject of all this conversation toiled on, neither turning to the right nor the left from her every-day course, seeking to avoid giving offence to any one, and doing her duty to all.

How different from Harold Hastings—whom rumour had given to Lucy for a husband, while all his mother's acquaintances spread and strengthened the report. But his deep, scheming, and cunning

mother did not know to the full extent the advantage he took of this rumour to gratify his vicious propensities. He took care to get it well circulated amongst cunning money-lenders—fellows to whom he had many a time gone cringing and bowing, when he was forced to speak with "bated breath," and who now came to offer him thousands, after having refused to advance him a solitary sovereign on either note or bond. Of a verity, these were the very strangest of all Time's changes; nor was he slow to avail himself of the advantages tendered by the shifting scenes.

He grinned again when he heard of these men buying up his old dishonoured bills, and wrote "Accepted" across as many as they chose to bring him, neither calculating nor caring for the discount, as he said, "so long as they melted the bit of stiff." So popular was his name in this peculiar and rather too public money-market, that even the blackest "legs" he had ever mingled with could get their own kites flown for some fifty per cent. for three months, if they only endorsed the "promise to pay."

Harold knew one or two of the "fast young gentlemen" in the Stamp Office, who used to laugh

heartily, while he stood brandy and cigars, at the jokes he made about finding them employment in furnishing bills for his acceptances. Then his wit —for such they called it—when he gave his pen an extra flourish, and said, "It would do the blind old lady good if she could but see that. Why doesn't she make me her cashier? I would sign you fifty cheques, my boys, while she was poking about and fixing her paper on her writing-machine. I wonder how long it will take me to melt her hundred thousand pounds?"

And so he would rattle on in his heedless, reckless way, caring no more for Lucy than he did for the fallen creatures who shared his mad revels, and numbed their sad heart-pangs in the inebriating wine-cup. Nor was this all: he would sometimes visit Lucy while the fumes of the bottle still clouded his brain, and bring his friend Lawson, or some similar companion, with him, whose free glances and ungentlemanly remarks offended both her eye and ear, and shocked her maiden delicacy; and though she endured much for the love she had for his sister, and the deep respect she entertained for his father, yet there were times when her bright eyes would flash angrily, and her tongue give

utterence to sharp rebukes, which were not lost on Harold's companions, though by him they scarcely seemed to be either understood or felt.

Then they would speak of her in passing down the staircase, in the passage, or when they were outside the door, as they spoke of their horses, and say that "she would require a good deal of breaking in, and keeping a tight rein on, and holding well in hand, and wanting a strong curb-chain."

To these remarks Harold would reply that "they should see how he would make her go, at any pace, or anywhere he chose, when he once got her into marriage harness."

Nanny the nurse and old John had pretty sharp ears for their age, and what they said to one another in the kitchen after overhearing such conversation was the very reverse of favourable to the suit of Harold Hastings.

On more than one occasion did she repeat what she had heard to the young curate; and though his intellectual-looking brow darkened for a moment, and he involuntarily exclaimed, "Shame, shame, on them all!" it was only to Nanny he so far expressed his feelings, for in the presence of Lucy and her brother he remained silent on the subject.

The society of the poor curate was a great solace to Lucy, and she felt more contented and happier in her mind after spending a few hours in his company than she did amongst her fashionable acquaintance; she even felt ashamed at times when she met him, elegantly dressed, as she was compelled to be, for these West-end parties, and wished that she could take his arm, and don one of the well-worn gowns in which she sometimes accompanied him when he visited the poor.

It was one evening when, attired more richly than usual, Lucy was about to step into the elegant carriage which some fashionable lady had sent for her, that a group of dirty boys and girls—real Borough-bred—who had gathered about the door, commenced greeting her with loud huzzas and cries of "Here comes Columbine!" as she stood on the threshold a moment to speak to Nanny; for they had seen no one so gaily attired they could compare her with excepting this great pantomimic favourite. She felt her face burn, for while Nanny was dispersing the poor ignorant dirty children, so as to leave the pavement clear for her to pass to the carriage, the young curate came up, and

began to offer some apology for calling at such a time.

Lucy returned into the house and sat down and wrote a note, which she sent to the footman, and the splendid chariot drove away empty.

She then retired, and in a few minutes appeared in her old comfortable every-day dress, and spent a quiet, happy, comfortable, and intellectual evening with the curate, such as Milton himself enjoyed when

> With neat repast, light and choice,
> Of Attic taste he heard the lute well touched,
> Or artful voice warble immortal notes
> And Tuscan airs.

When the curate had gone, Lucy threw herself into the large easy-chair in which her dear mother had so often sat, and thought how differently she should have spent the evening had he not met her at the door, had she allowed herself to have been carried off, and yielded to an invitation which she had never pledged herself to accept, though the carriage was sent for her.

Then she began to think it was very sinful to waste so much time in dressing—so many hours in society where nothing was talked about that

benefited anybody, where one complimented another on their looks, their attire, their bouquets, or anything, no matter what, so long as they said something pleasing—killed Time by tickling it to death with their tongues—Time which could never be recalled!

She sat still, and pictured in her mind what she had seen at some of these fashionable parties: how one would run up, and seizing another by both hands, commence saying that it was the greatest pleasure in her life to meet her there; but, before the sentence was half finished, another would arrive, and she would hurry off to repeat the same saying, or, if it were a lord, pretend that she had been dying to see him; and if he was "hooked" by her flattery and noticed her, she would look upon all the rest of her acquaintances as something far beneath her for the remainder of the evening. How one would declare how weary she was of dancing, another wish the carriage would come, a third murmer about the heat of the room, a fourth complain of the draughts, and a general feeling of weariness be expressed, and a wish that it was over, often hours before they departed; but they met again and again—began by saying it was the

greatest pleasure of their lives, and ended with the same murmuring, the same feeling of weariness, until miscalled pleasure became a burden which they groaned under, yet were so infatuated and enslaved that they had neither the power nor the courage to shake it off.

She looked the evil boldly in the face, and thought she was never sent into the world so to misspend time, to waste her life, to wear out fine clothes, only to give employment to those who made and replaced them.

"And what more," she thought, "is done by many of these people of fashion? Better be poor a thousand times," said Lucy to herself, "sit at home and repair his surplice, trudge through the streets, and carry what little we can spare to the poor who need it; and though our evening meal was a dry crust, and we rested our head at night on a flock pillow, we should sleep soundly, and not he haunted by fashion's fevered dreams."

Just at that moment a morocco case, which had been presented to her that morning by Harold Hastings, caught her eyes, and as she had not yet opened it, having visitors when he placed it on her hand, she uplifted the lid, and beheld a splendid

set of diamonds, purchased, of course, by his "promise to pay."

Lucy smiled, and, as there was no one present, gave way to the sudden impulse of wishing to see how she should look in them. They threw a blaze of light into the mirror before which she stood in all her beauty adorned with them; and while she was playing with the reflected rays in the glass, by shifting the dazzling bracelets on her wrists, her brother Alfred rushed into the room, pale with alarm, and breathless with affright, as he exclaimed, "Lucy, we are ruined."

And he threw himself into the chair which she had just vacated, and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XI.

"Heard the news?" said Lawson, as he stalked into Harold's sitting-room with a cigar in his mouth, on the morning that followed the incident above alluded to.

"News! what is it?" inquired Hastings, without raising his head from the sofa on which he was lounging and smoking.

"Two of the firm have sloped, slanted, mizzled, hooked it, cut it, walked their chalks, bolted, and gone to the devil, I believe," answered Lawson; "and the other one they have grabbed and locked up, and are giving him cold coffee. In a word, Harold, your venerable dad's bankers are ten million times worse than smashed."

"What! my father's bankers broke?" exclaimed Harold, springing up from the sofa, and dashing his cigar on the floor.

"Worse than smashed," continued Lawson; "the

firm of Faith, Hope, and Charity, as we used to call them, have been selling bonds, mortgages, deeds—everything they could rap and ring that would fetch money, from the titles of an estate down to a sheet of blotting-paper. They will pay nineteen-and-sixpence less than nothing in the pound, and put the country to the expense of transporting them, after handing over the aforesaid balance. There was a bottle of Guinness's stout, which one of the clerks claimed as his own, found in the strong box that bore the name of Lady Arboury; and in that which ought to have contained the title-deeds of Langley-on-the-Lea, two of your own dishonoured bills and a bundle of cigars. Everybody is ruined but you and I, old fellow, who have nothing to lose; so pour out the brandy!"

"Bonds! Title-deeds! Lady Arboury! My father!" muttered Harold, speaking and looking like some ruined man enumerating the remains of the wreck which the waves have cast ashore. "Then Lucy, too, is a beggar, and will have to live upon her hated brother's paltry salary?"

"Less than that," replied Lawson; "all the clerks were bundled out last night—sacked, cashiered; and the police are in possession of the premises.

Lady Arboury is penniless, too; and many an old oak, besides those at Langley, will have to shake for this stupendous failure and swindle. I wish you had the diamonds back."

"They were not paid for, and that is a great comfort," answered Harold; "and as to the fifteen hundred pounds the jeweller holds in acceptances, why they may as well go into Faith, Hope, and Charity's cauldron as anything else, and the other thirty thousand beside; they will but strengthen the witches' broth, while we sing—

> Double, double, toil and trouble,
> Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

And the brace of worthies sat down to the brandy bottle,—Harold lighting his cigar with his own acceptance for another thousand pounds, which, but for the rumour of the failure, he would have got discounted on that very morning, as he remarked, "This is no go; and as for Lady Arboury's hundred thousand, and the marriage, it is all——" And he puffed out a large volume of smoke as he handed Lawson a light with a lawyer's letter that commenced with—"Sir, I am instructed by * * * * * *, and unless * * * * *, immediate proceedings——," for those

were all the words that caught his eye as he folded up and made a single cigar-light of the threatening document, without even looking at the name of the sender or the amount claimed; for, as he remarked, "he had so many of those sort of things, that he hadn't even time to look at them."

What these two fast young gentlemen spoke of in their careless slang, and treated so lightly, was, 'alas! too true."

The bankers who were entrusted with the whole of Lady Arboury and Squire Hastings's money, bonds, and everything valuable, together with the property of hundreds beside, had been bankrupts for years, and had only been able to keep their doors open by a system of swindling unparalleled for magnitude, and unprecedented for boldness and daring; for, besides making use of all the money they were entrusted with, they had raised all they possibly could on every bond, title, and security in their possession, without respect to persons. Hundreds of hitherto wealthy families were entirely ruined, and their multiplied losses amounted to hundreds of thousands.

Upon estates that had been mortgaged for a few

thousands they had made fresh transfers, and drawn up new deeds, committing perjury in conveyances, and forgery in signatures, until nothing came too heavy for their hold or too hot for their grasp. They sold A's bond to pay B's dividends, and even pledged B's securities to pay A's interest, until the capital of both were sacrificed, and then they run through the whole alphabet of their clients and customers, from Arboury estates to Zealand bonds.

The polite world that had not suffered spoke of the bankers as "sad defaulters, greatly to be pitied on account of the position they had occupied in society."

Those that moved in the same circle, and had been plundered, called them plain "rogues and rascals, thieves and villains, who assuredly deserved hanging!"

Honest Nanny, when she heard of the robbery, said "she should like to have the making of the ropes for them, for they were more deserving of punishment than the poor and the ignorant, who stole because they were in want, and had no one to teach them right from wrong."

Squire Hastings had been compelled to raise money on his estates to pay debts contracted by

his extravagant wife, both in her own name and that of her son, and the roguish bankers not only mortgaged them for treble the amount they had advanced the squire, but also obtained money on them from a second and even a third mortgage, without the knowledge or consent of the first mortgagee.

Lady Arboury was the greatest sufferer, for they not only sold her estate and spent the proceeds, but had not paid for the furniture they had put into the house they had taken for her, and every valuable she possessed was seized by the Court of Bankruptcy, under which Messrs. Faith, Hope, and Charity sought to shelter themselves.

But most of all did the blind lady grieve for the loss of the few thousands she had set apart to build a row of almshouses for her poor aged tenants, and found a school for the children of Winterlea Wold.

These ravenous rascals had swallowed up all in keeping town and country houses; in laying in stocks of choice wines; in servants, horses, carriages; in giving parties; fêteing the very judges before whom they would have to be tried; and keeping establishments for people, who would be sure to drive up in their gayest attire and finest

chariots to witness the trial, and see the last scene in this dark panorama of Time's changes. Princes and prime ministers had hob-nobbed with these splendidly furnished scoundrels; while very vernal authors, who felt themselves honoured by being allowed to sit below the salt, and partake of the swindle-begotten "spreads," had dedicated their watery-brained bantlings to the bankers, as "souls of honour, stars of commercial purity, and garters," which they now wished the whole villanous firm had long ago been hanged in.

When the poor curate presented Lady Arboury's cheque for the hundred pounds, although it wanted full half an hour to the usual time of closing, he was told that "it was past banking hours, and that he must come again in the morning." And though he did rub his eyes, and look at the clock, and consider it very strange, and would fain have stated how he had advanced every shilling he possessed in the world to the poor and needy on the faith of the cheque he there and then presented, and how his laundress, a very poor woman with a large family, and her husband in the hospital, was coming by appointment that evening for the trifle he owed her for washing—although he would have liked to

have stated all this, yet when he saw Faith pretending to be busied with his ledger—(he had, in fact, just taken the last two sovereigns in gold and ten shillings' worth of silver out of the till, the whole assets left in the house)—the good curate turned away with a sigh, and went home to his humble lodgings to drink weak tea without sugar, and eat his dry, butterless bread.

His religious feelings prevented him from consoling himself with a "good swear," which is a great relief at times, when a man can find no other vent for his anger, and much better than kicking the poor inoffensive cat "up the chimney."

When he went the next morning, the policeman, who was eating an apple as he guarded the door, took the cheque and looked at it as he would at an address, had any one come up to him and inquired the way, and, returning it, he bade the good Scripture-reader "put it in his pipe and smoke it;" then told him to "move on."

And Lucy! poor Lucy! how was she to manage? There was not even the hope of Alfred's salary for her now to fall back upon; and the sum she had long ago received from the publisher was nearly all gone in funeral expenses. Langley was a long way

off; and as a tribute of her affection, and an outward show of her inward grief, she had erected a rather costly monument to the memory of her dearly-beloved parents. As to Alfred, it was useless consulting him as to what was to be done; he looked up to her for all, came to her for all he needed, consulted her in all he did; her's was the head that thought, the judgment that decided, and her's the hands that acted. And what was she to do now?

The tidings of what had happened had reached Langley-on-the-Lea, and got blown abroad as far as Winterlea Wold; and one said the squire was locked up, another that he had run away; that Harold had gone into the police-force, and Mrs. Hastings had bought a mangle; for strange men had taken possession of Langley Hall, and the servants were dispersed in lodgings about the village; the deer had been driven and counted, the flocks and herds numbered, trees measured and marked, plate and pictures turned out and catalogued, and everything turned topsy-turvy.

As for Lady Arboury, many were sorry and a few were glad; one said she had no right to sell the old estate, and a second had foreseen that the

money would never do her any good, while a third had always prophesied that it would come home to her for treating her sister as she had done because she happened to marry a poor gentleman, who had, however, as good blood in his veins as ever flowed in that of the Arbourys. That Lady Arboury was just as high and proud after she became blind as ever she had been before; and though they felt very sorry for her coming to want at her age, yet those who neglected one warning, and didn't repent, might be sure that another one would overtake them in the long run; that they dared to say she meant well enough at last, and would have built the almshouses and erected the school, but it was not to be—the Providence which sees not a sparrow fall to the ground unheeded had given wings to her riches, no doubt for its own wise ends, and they had flown away.

Early on the day following the receipt of these disastrous tidings, Lucy hastened off to the residence of her blind relative, to offer her such comfort and assistance as lay within her power.

She found Lady Arboury sitting calm, resigned, and patient amid the wreck of her fortune, while hard-featured, matter-of-fact men of business were

bustling about with books in their hands, making an inventory of every trifling article the house contained.

Lucy, at her friend's request, spoke to one of the brokers about the family plate and jewels which Lady Arboury had brought with her from Winterlea Wold.

"Why, you see, miss," said the man, civilly, "as the lady is neither lodger nor householder here, the bankers having taken the mansion in their own name, and not even having transferred the tenancy, and as the furniture has also been purchased in their names, we are compelled, by order of the Court of Bankruptcy, to claim everything found on the premises, and leave your friend to recover, if she can."

All they allowed the old lady to take away was a few papers and her writing-machine. Her cheque-book they threw under the grate amid other waste-paper. She took a sorrowful farewell of her servants, promising to recommend them to other situations if ever an opportunity occurred; and, leaning on the arm of Lucy, left the mansion with only a few sovereigns in her purse—now the whole of her worldly wealth—and entering the first

omnibus that ran to the London Bridge station, they hastened *home* to the old house in the Borough.

That night Lucy sat later, and had a longer "think" than usual about the "ways and means," for there was now Lady Arboury to support, her brother out of a situation, and only five pounds three shillings in her own purse, and when that was gone nothing to look forward to, except the trifle she might obtain from the publisher for the new edition of her father's work, and that was the utmost boundary of her prospect.

All beyond was dim, uncertain, sad, and disheartening; for, while she calculated on her own earnings, her thoughts unaware shaped themselves into the language of Scripture, as she said to herself, "What are they among so many?" and there was comfort in that thought, for it directed the large eye of her faith upward, and she felt that, while she put her trust in Him who had never yet deserted her, they would know no want. Strengthened by this feeling, she resolved to press forward along the stony path of duty, in spite of the entangling briers that seemed to overhang the way. She had had her dreams—(for could one so young

and beautiful live without those golden visions of hope?)—of what she should do with the immense fortune Lady Arboury had bequeathed her; but her pride had had a fall, and her good heart regretted more the privations which she feared her blind friend would have to endure in their humble home than the loss of the many thousands which a few days before she believed herself to be in near possession of.

And her poor friend the curate! He had that day sent his laundress with a note that would have blushed, if paper could blush, requesting her to pay his washing out of a small sum he had left with Lucy for the poor who were accustomed to call on her weekly; also inquiring if she could find cheaper apartments for him, as he should be compelled to leave those he then occupied on account of the expense.

She paid the laundress, and wrote back to tell him that if he could make shift to share the sitting-room with herself and her blind friend during the day, he might come and reside with them altogether in the old house in the Borough. And so the dark clouds again gathered thickly and heavily around dear Lucy Langton,

CHAPTER XII.

As there is a lull in the landscape after a storm, and the trees that tossed their branches about are still, while the flowers bear no other trace of the heavy rain beyond the drops that glitter and linger in their bells, like the last tears of grief when the face is calm—so did the old house in the Borough seem to settle down to its former tranquillity, for the roll and thunder of carriages, and the deafening knocks of liveried lacqueys, broke not its silence; and as for the every-day hum of business in the street, it disturbed the inmates no more than the buzzing of the flies in the windows.

The good publisher who had taken so deep an interest in Lucy's welfare was dead; and the remaining partners were so busy balancing their books and taking stock, to satisfy the claim of his widow on the firm, that they had no leisure to

think of reprinting her father's work, neither could they for some time to come make her an offer for the copyright; hence no help from that quarter could be looked for.

Alfred went out every morning to look for a situation, and returned at night wearied in body and mind, for he could obtain no employment; and though he was always welcomed home with his sister's sweet kiss and glad smile, he could see that care sat heavily on her beautiful face, and hear the sighs that would come, in spite of all she could do to suppress them.

Lady Arboury's wants were few, for she was most temperate in her diet; and there were times when Lucy almost felt thankful that she could not see her own make-shifts and the homely fare she was compelled to content herself with, for Lucy knew that it would have given the aged lady pain to have seen such privations.

Not a murmur of poverty was ever allowed to reach Lady Arboury's ear; and in this both Nanny and old John displayed as much pride and caution as their dear young mistress.

As for the poor curate, the sum that he paid for bed and board was a great help in this frugal

household; and, together with Lucy's needlework, just "kept the wolf from the door," though his gaunt form was at times very near the threshold.

But neither Nanny nor old John were blind to these shortcomings, and they often felt thankful that Mrs. Langton was not alive to share the hardships which Lucy and her brother so patiently endured.

"She never could have borne it," said old John to Nanny, as these two faithful servants were occupying themselves with household matters in the kitchen; "yet Miss Lucy, though she was indulged in every luxury at Langley, makes no complaint, but drinks her tea without either sugar or milk, and eats her dry toast as cheerfully as if it were spread with the sweet butter we used to make from the cows that fed in cowslip-dingles; and so does Master Alfred. He made me eat the nice thick chop that you cooked for him last night; and before he went out yesterday morning, Nanny, I saw him put up two or three morsels of dry bread in a paper, and heard him ask dear Lucy if she had twopence to spare to get a glass of bitter ale with; and I'll be bound that was all the young gentleman had all day while he was out. I should be so

happy, Nanny, if you could hit on a plan for me to send our dear young mistress a bit of that money I have saved. How could she tell where it came from if we sent it her by post, without saying a word about anything in the letter, only putting inside, 'From an humble and faithful friend?'"

"She would never make use of a single shilling of it if you did—I know her too well," replied Nanny; "for if I lay out a few pence more than I tell her about, she is sure to find it out somehow or another, and will make me take it back, for she says, in her quiet way, 'It's sacrifice enough for you and John to make to give us your services without pay, and to put up with such humble fare; so do not pain me, dear Nanny, by placing me under greater obligations.' No, John, she wouldn't touch a shilling of the money, but only put herself to a 'mint' of trouble in trying to find the owner. But it's very kind of you; and I should do just the same myself if I had a little money beforehand, and the dear lamb would accept of it. But laws, John, I don't think I should ever grumble if I had to live on workhouse diet, after seeing how contented Lady Arboury is with the plainest food, after having been used all her lifetime to eat off

gold and drink out of sparkling rubies. Such things do teach one patientness and contentedness. And when I see her sitting upstairs, so blind, and so resigned, never uttering a complaint about them that have ruined her, I fancy that she looks just like some of those we read about in the blessed New Testament that used to sit on the kerb-stones in the streets of Jerusalem, so as not to be run over by the cabs and omnibuses, and wait for the passing shadow of our Saviour to fall on them. It does one good, John, and is a sermon of itself, to see one endure such changes of fortune without a murmur. And as our poor curate says, when he sees her dozing in the easy-chair, with a smile on her face, and her lip moving, he could fancy that she was conversing with her guardian-angel. Angels can come in and out of a room like flies, I suppose, John, and such as us be never the wiser ?"

"Parsons know all about them things best, and what they tell me I believe," answered John, with a reverential bow. "But I have made up my mind about this money, Nanny; and as I've been all the way beyond Langley to get it out of the bank, on purpose to give it her or lend it her, just which she will be best pleased with, I shan't be easy until

I've offered it to her, and very miserable indeed I shall be if she doesn't take it, and make use of it; for she'd better have it now when she wants it than when I'm dead and gone, and happen she has no use for it; for, as you've often heard me say, Nanny, there's only you and her and Master Alfred I could leave it to, as I haven't a friend in the world; for I seem, like Methusalem, to have outlived all my kith and kin, far or near."

"It's a disgrace to a many that both you and I know, John," said Nanny, "that Lucy should want it at all. All our good master's college companions, that used to come to the rectory with offers of kindness when no one needed their help, have forgotten that there is either a son or a daughter living—it is 'out of sight out of mind' with them all now; only the poor young curate seems to have any gratitude for past favours. There's that tall hungry-looking man that used to eat so much at Langley, he is now a vicar; and that red-faced gentleman, that used to take so much wine, and quote so much Latin when he wasn't quite 'compas mentus,' he's a bishop, and I hear has a fine double chin, though he talks as much as ever about abstemiousness; I think they might do something for Master Alfred

if they tried, and either get him made cardinal, or judge, or prime minister, or ambassador, or some such humble situation, so as to bring him in an hundred a year or so."

Dear old Nanny had no more knowledge of the ever-upward-pushing fashionable world than she had of the high stations or emoluments of the dignitaries she thought Alfred might so easily be numbered amongst. Her knowledge of such things was of a piece with an account she once gave Lucy of an exhibition she had seen, of what she called the heathen gods and goddesses; for when asked for the names she remembered, Nanny answered, that "she saw Mr. Mars, Nebuchadnezzar, Mrs. Venus, John Wesley, Fontelroy, Daniel in the lion's den, and Daniel Lambert."

Good old soul! she knew not that in the ever-bustling and elbowing world too many have enough to do with the present to devote even a thought on the past; not but what they would be willing enough to lend a helping hand to those they have known and respected, were they near enough to put in a claim; but they are not, and others have sprung up more clamorous, and more eager to seize on what little there is to spare, for in this the old

adage is reversed, and the "race is for the swift" alone.

It was midnight when old John, instead of retiring to rest on his turned-up bed in the kitchen, resolved to put his long-meditated plan into execution; for he knew that Lucy was alone, busy with her needle, and that all the other inmates of the house had gone to bed. He went upstairs, and, lest his timid knock should startle her, accompanied it with the words, "Please, miss, it's only old John, and I want to speak to you very much, I do."

She rose, opened the door, and as the aged attendant closed it softly behind him, she regarded him with a mingled look of kindness, curiosity, and wonder.

"Please, miss, I have brought this," he said, laying an old rusty-red pocket-book on the table; "it would all be yours, and Master Alfred's, and old Nanny's, if I died, and I should be much happier if you would take it now, and use it; for, excuse me, miss, it would do us all good—the dear blind lady, and our excellent curate; and I have no one to leave it to, nor give it to—none that I love, or ever wish to love and serve—and if I did not serve you I should die!"

His tears fell fast, and, without speaking, Lucy drew nearer, and pressing his aged hand, retained it in her own, while he added, "I cannot sleep a-nights, but fancy that I hear my good old master calling to me, and saying, 'John, John! we have kept you well for threescore years; our home your home; as we fared you fared; you shared our sorrows, and you shared our joys; through sixty years of comfort you have been slowly growing rich. Look at our house, and see what it is now.' Sometimes your father's father seems to call, then it is your father's or mother's voice; I know them all. I nursed you on my knee—I took you out to walk when you were but a little child—held you and Alfred on grey Dobbin's back, and tied him to some gate while we all gathered flowers. And now I feel my old heart very sad—fear I shall die your house's debtor; and you—would you were my daughter, for then I could command were I now crave, and ask you to take this, and give me back both peace of heart and mind; I feel I shall not live long unless you do."

There was a silence, and Lucy's tears fell on the hand she still held; she tried to speak, but the

OLD JOHN'S GENEROSITY.

words she meant to utter were stifled by strong feelings of love, gratitude, and veneration; amid which the mind's eye glanced back to childhood—grey Dobbin—field-flowers—to whom he alone, of all the domestics, was entrusted with her as she grew older—her companion in many a long ramble, her hand in his, he instilled into her that love of Nature, the remembrance of which had cheered many a lonesome hour.

But it was not this, it was not this; no remembrance or feeling that could be defined, beyond that there was nothing in the world she possessed that she would not give to add to the happiness of such a faithful and father-like friend, though it were the last morsel from her lips, and she knew not where to obtain another mouthful.

And why should she make him unhappy by refusing to accept what she herself would so cheerfully give to him if he needed it, and she had it to give? Did his being a true, faithful, long-tried, and much-beloved servant make him less a friend? She crushed such false pride under foot, and, without a feeling of selfishness, said, "Dear old friend, I will accept on trust what you so freely give; we need it now. God will reward you for your goodness, if I

am unable," and she kissed the old man's aged and time-wrinkled cheek as she would have kissed her father's.

That night Lucy Langton was reduced to her last shilling, and had used the last table-spoonful of port-wine in the house, to mix with the sago for Lady Arboury's favourite supper, and was fearing that her blind friend would discover on the morrow how very poor she was; for Lucy had long before sent for a person who kept a lady's wardrobe, and disposed of all her fashionable and unnecessary attire. The gaunt wolf lay stretched across the threshold.

She had that very morning, for the first time, written to Squire Hastings respecting the two thousand pounds she had lent his wife, for she had sent numerous notes to Mrs. Hastings, not one of which had been answered, excepting that in which she acknowledged the receipt of the diamonds which Harold had given her: these the squire's wife had applied for, and they were immediately returned by Lucy, and would have been had she not asked for them.

Lucy had heard through Agnes that the encumbrances of the estate of Langley had been obtained

by forgeries, her mother and brother signing her father's name without his knowledge or sanction, and that beyond the mortgage her father had himself obtained, all the other claims were illegal; and that the money the bankers had raised on the property would be lost, as the lenders would not be able to get back a single shilling, nor to sell the branch of a tree, or a blade of grass, to satisfy their illegal claim.

On this hint Lucy had written; for while she believed the good squire to be struggling against difficulties, she remained silent as to the amount of the legacy which his plotting wife and unprincipled son had obtained from her and Alfred, and would have kept that silence to the end of her days had she believed that this upright old English gentleman still remained in straitened circumstances, even had her own privations been more severe than those she had hitherto so nobly battled with.

As for Agnes, Lucy could not shut her eyes to the fact that she had of late endeavoured to allure Alfred to accompany her to flower-shows, the Museum, the National Gallery, and such like places; for she would say, "Oh, hang the bankers; if they should turn out like those he was with

before, he'd a great deal better be without any situation. And, my dear Lucy, Alfred can explain so many things that I am ignorant of, and point out so many beauties which I should never see, that I might almost as well stay at home, for what wiser I should be were he not to go with me. As for you, I might as well importune a statue to move as try to get you out. Besides, father says he never enjoys dinner now without Alfred, and he always has seemed more cheerful when your brother has been present, ever since my mother and Harold left us to go no one knows whither."

So Agnes always carried Alfred off when she came.

The next morning old John, in his tremulous voice, was heard singing over his work, as he moved about the house light-hearted and happy as a bird.

CHAPTER XIII.

On the following morning the first visitor to the old house in the Borough was Squire Hastings.

"That's his knock," said old John to Nanny, as he got up to open the door; none of your fashionable tan-tan-terarers, but a regular good English knock, as if a man had come on business, and was in earnest."

And so he was; and great was the anger of the good squire on discovering that his wife and son had obtained the two thousand pounds from Lucy and her brother without his knowledge; for the first word he had heard of the matter was through the letter he had received from Lucy on the preceding day.

Many were Lucy's apologies for having written it, when he insisted upon paying her five hundred pounds at once; and the tears stood in the kind-

hearted squire's eyes as he listened to her simple narrative, detailing only a few of the privations she had endured before writing to him, and then adding that but for Lady Arboury's sake she should still have remained silent on the subject.

"I believe you—I know you would," said the squire, kissing her; "yet it was wrong, very wrong, not to let me know before. But never mind, there are better things in store for us all. The villanous bankers have done no harm to my property beyond that of putting me to a little expense in law. My rector has written to me about giving up the living of Langley; some uncle, who was a bishop, I believe, wishes him to be near to where he resides; and no doubt there are finer loaves and fishes where he is going than our parish affords, and I have therefore presented your friend, the curate, with the living; and if he makes you Mrs. Hall, instead of letting you remain Lucy Langton, I shall be all the better pleased to have such neighbours. There now, no tears; a little bird told me where your heart had flown to some time ago. For as to my son Harold——" he was about to add something very severe, when Lucy placed her hand gently on his arm and silenced him.

The good squire felt the gentle rebuke, and pressed her hands warmly before he departed, as he said, "You are right; he is my own son, and there are plenty in the world to blame him, without a father being added to the number."

When he had gone, Lucy handed back to John the sum untouched and unopened which he had given her on the previous night, and expressed her gratitude in such language as drew tears from the eyes of that faithful old servant; and as he could not express all he felt when she told him that the squire had undertaken to pay her back the two thousand pounds, and that his affairs were not so bad as they were rumoured to have been, he gave utterance to a threadbare truism, and said, "I always told Nanny that when things came to the very worst they must mend, for then they could be no 'badder.'"

Dismissing John, Lucy, as was her custom, attended to the domestic comforts of Lady Arboury; for she would not even allow tender-hearted Nanny to wait on her blind and aged relative. This done, she retired to her chamber, there to calm herself for a few minutes, and think over what her friend the squire had said respecting the curate and the

dear old rectory of Langley—dearer than ever through being hallowed by the images of the dead.

"Can there yet be such happiness in store for us?" were the thoughts that shaped themselves in Lucy's mind. "Oh, what a calm haven it would be for my brother and Lady Arboury to anchor in!" The comfort of others was still uppermost in her sympathising heart. "To lead her about among those pleasant walks, where there is a smell of roses all summer long, and where the sweet sunshine would make her glad! And faithful Nanny, and dear, good old John!"

Then the forms of father and mother seemed moving about the garden and over the well-remembered floors, and tears fell slowly at first, then faster, as the grave again seemed to open,—the boom of the bell—the still churchyard—the name and age on the coffin-lid; and as Memory threw wider open the doors of the past, fast and faster flowed dear Lucy's tears.

"And he has never breathed even a word in my ear of love," were the next thoughts that came, as she grew calmer. "Kind he is to all; ever studying how he can best serve me, so he is ever thinking how he can benefit others. Perhaps he only

respects me for my father's memory; perhaps he will never marry. Such as he is—and oh, how few they are!—when they have chosen the narrow path, and set out on their Great Master's mission, seldom look back. And yet he tries to get all he can persuade to accompany him. There is comfort in that. I know where he is going to, and I should like to go with him all the way to heaven, and be his companion through the pilgrimage of life, for he would make me better than I am. No, I feel that I am unworthy of him," and she shook her pretty head, as if despondingly. "I even neglected the sick and poor I promised him that I would visit, and he can but have one opinion of me. But he will judge me wrongfully; for my heart was with him in the good work, even while I was wasting my time in the giddy and thoughtless world of fashion. I never liked the folly I shared in. I ought to blush and hang my head in shame for making such an excuse. I dare not make it in my prayers."

And so she sat, becoming every moment more and more dissatisfied with her past conduct, for the standard of excellence which Lucy measured herself against was one that only sinless angels can reach,

and frail humanity but aspire to. Then she remembered that the young curate had been called away suddenly on the previous day, and had left a trifle of money in her hands to purchase a few necessaries for a poor girl who lay ill at the house of his laundress; and her conscience smote her for not having fulfilled her promise, for she recollected that Mr. Hall was deeply interested in the welfare of the young sufferer; so without further loss of time she sent out old John to procure what was required, and deliver it forthwith.

"I have become very negligent of late," said Lucy to herself, "and unless I pay more attention I shall be forced to adopt dear old Nanny's method of tying a bit of thread round my finger when I want to remember anything. Strange, how selfish poverty seems to make one—filling the mind with one's own petty troubles, and leaving no room for the sorrows of others. But it is the first time, I think, that I can plead guilty to such neglect; and what will he think when I tell him of it? I feel that I am in every way unworthy of him. Oh, I have been very selfish of late!"

Dear Lucy! How selfish she had been any one might have judged had they been in the chamber a

few minutes after Lucy had left it, when old Nanny was looking out some clothing for the poor girl in whose welfare the good curate felt so deeply interested.

"Not a pair of stockings but what have been darned over and over again," said Nanny; "and every pair of gloves cleaned and mended—mended and cleaned, until there's no telling the colour they were when first bought. Bless her! she never had a darned thing in her drawers when she first came from Langley; and now I am to look out a gown, a skirt, and I know not what beside, for the poor girl that lies ill at the laundress's, and I'm sure she's hardly a change for herself. It's a great blessing her dear pretty head isn't loose; for if it was, and it would do anybody good to give it them, I do believe she would soon be left without one if she could get it off. Heaven bless her! she hasn't a selfish feeling in her soft, kind heart."

And Nanny was right, however much Lucy might accuse herself; for she had given away many things which she really needed herself to those whom she thought stood in greater want of them than she did. Such, indeed, is true charity; for as the "widow's mite" was richer in His eyes who

seeth all things aright, than all the gifts cast into the treasury of the temple, so are such acts more valued in the all-judging sight of Heaven than the golden contributions that the wealthy throw up before the gaze of the gaping multitude, so that such deeds may be lauded aloud.

CHAPTER XIV.

Meanwhile old John, having obtained the few clothes which Nanny had packed up out of Lucy's scanty wardrobe, set off to the house of the laundress, which stood in a neighbouring street in th Borough.

Seated in a chair, the cane-work of which was broken, and projected between the spindles and trailed upon the floor, with her head drooping and her hands folded on her breast, was a poor girl who kept her gaze fixed on the little handful of fire which almost appeared lost in the rusty grate, and seemed to take no note of the door being opened or shut, neither to regard who came in nor went out. But when old John, who stood behind her, spoke as he entered, she half turned her head, and that seemed to cause her pain, for she was so weak that she could not reach the press-bed in the corner

without assistance; she then gazed again at the fire, and said, "I know that voice, though I have heard it but once before, and then it reminded me of my father's. Who are you, and why do you come to trouble me now?"

The old man moved close beside her, with the basket on his arm, and said, "I have not come to trouble you, my poor child, but have brought you a little wine and jelly, and a few other things, from the young lady, my mistress. She is a friend of the good curate's who visits you, and would have come herself but for matters of business detaining her. I have not come to trouble you, I trust, but hope what I have brought will comfort you, and help to make you better."

He placed his hand gently on her attenuated arm as he spoke; then taking a glass from the mantelpiece, and wiping it out on the clean white napkin which covered his basket, he poured out a little of the wine, while the poor girl, with fixed eyes, gazed on him in silence.

"It is the same," she said, having drank the wine, which seemed to revive her; then placing her hand on his, she added,

"You do not know me? but I remember you,

and the words you spoke to me on the dreary night when we went in search of your young master together. I have never forgotton you. You remember me now?"

Old John passed his hand over his forehead once or twice, as if his memory was asleep, and he was trying to awaken it, then said,

"I do—yes; that bad young gentleman, the son of our good old squire, had enticed him to a gaming-house, and you was kind enough to go with me. I remember it all. It was very late when I left you, and I have often thought since how wrong it was of me to leave you to find your way home alone at so late an hour. My poor, dear girl, how thankful my heart feels, though it bleeds to see you so very ill! yet I am glad that I have found you, to thank you for the good you did on that night, when Harold allured my dear young master Alfred away. My young mistress is also very thankful, though she does not know you."

"Alfred was not the first one Harold Hastings allured from home," answered the girl, and her brows contracted as she spoke, while her voice deepened, and her whole look and manner became altered. "I know the villain too well; he made

me the wreck that I now am. I could not tell you about it that night, though the words came to my lips many times; for I knew who you was before I left you. My name is Abigail, which my father has often told me signified a father's joy. Alas, I have become his sorrow—his disgrace! I was Agnes Hastings' maid."

And she buried her face in her thin, transparent hands, and wept as if her heart was breaking, while recalling what she had once been.

"Yes, I have heard of you," said the old man, after soothing her. "You went away, and no one knew where you had gone to. There was a great deal of talk about it in Langley at the time; for it was remarked that Harold left home on the same day. I remember it all now."

"I was but sixteen," continued the girl, "when he allured me away from my dear young lady, by a promise of marriage; for dearly did I love Agnes Hastings! He swore that unless I consented to marry him, he would destroy himself. He held the bottle, which he said contained the poison, in his hand, in the moonlight, in the park. I dashed it away from his lips, for I loved him, and believed all that he told me. He showed me a paper which

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he said was our marriage-licence, and we came to London to be made man and wife. He would not trust our secret to the rector, Lucy's father, he said, and that was why he wished us not to be married at Langley; for though his father would be angry at first, he said, because he married so young, he would soon look over it, and recal us home. I believed every word he said. I came to London—to some house—he seemed to know the people in it well; I too have known them too well since that dreadful night. He forced wine upon me. I believed him, drank, and became senseless. You know the rest. To soothe me afterwards, he said he had lost the marriage-licence; he went out several time, as he said, to get another. He deceived and ruined me!"

"Oh, the black-hearted wretch!" exclaimed old John, clenching his fist; "old as I am, hadst thou but told me as much that night, when I first saw thee, I would have left the marks of my bony old knuckles on him in more places than one; hey, if I had gone to prison for it. What a narrow escape my dear Lucy had from the villain, and what a blessing it is that Lady Arboury lost all her money! They would have been married but for

that! Oh, the rogue! everything happens for the best in the end, though we can't see it at the time. And so it will with thee, please God—poor lamb, poor lamb! Only sixteen then! Oh, the villain! and he so young in years, too, yet so old in sin. It will come home to him, depend upon it. Did his mother know how he had deceived you?"

"She did! she did!" answered the girl, shaking her head sorrowfully. "I watched my time. I went to her when I knew that my seducer was present. She called me artful, designing—everything that was bad; he laughed at me. I have often wondered since that time I did not stab him where he stood. I think I should have done so had not the room seemed to swim round before me, as I sank senseless on the floor. When I recovered he had left the apartment, and there was no one present but his mother—that mother, as wicked as the son. She offered me money, and said she would give me such a character, if I would keep silent about Harold, as would obtain me a much higher situation than I had beforetime held. I threw the money at her feet, and rushed out to wander I knew not whither, and become I cared

not what. I sought vice—I ran into it to get hardened as soon as I could, lest my purpose should fail me. I had resolved to kill him. For nights and nights I carried the knife I had sharpened for the purpose, but I felt it was cowardly to do it in the dark; and when I met him in the blazing light at the taverns which I then frequented, I could not do it. I could not destroy what I had once loved—no, not even when maddened with drink. I feared I might be seized before I had time to destroy myself, for I had resolved that we should perish together. It is gone; I have had no such thoughts since the night I saw you. What you said to me that night began to melt my hard heart. I did not do wrong after, but through strange circumstances came to live with this poor laundress, who washes for the curate; and when I was first taken ill Mr. Hall came and prayed beside me, and I have felt happier ever since. I have but one wish, and that is to see Miss Agnes and your good Lucy before I die. I do not want to live."

Old John, with his simple nature and tender heart, tried in vain to speak words of comfort to her; but sobs and tears checked his utterance, for all he could say was, "Poor lamb! poor dear

lamb!" and he continued saying so at intervals, all the way he went sorrowing home.

Before old John had returned from his errand, the curate arrived with the good news of his presentation of the living of Langley by Squire Hastings. The letter conveying the gift did honour to the good squire's old English heart.

"I would show it you," said the curate, looking down abashed, "were I not afraid that the allusion to yourself might not be received as my kind patron wishes it to be;" and he held the letter in his hand as he spoke.

"Nay, if it concerns me also, I will know the worst," said Lucy, with one of her sweetest smiles; "for I am sure nothing but good can come from such a hand."

She read the letter, then stood a moment with one hand covering her face to hide her modest blushes.

"Say, dearest, that it shall be as he wishes," said the curate, taking her other hand and raising it to his lips.

"I am unworthy of such goodness," murmured Lucy, yielding her hand.

She consented; and so the brief wooing and winning began and ended.

"I never knew thee drink, John," said Nanny, a few days after the above-named scene had taken place; "yet, gracious goodness, thy tongue does run on at such a rate, that, if I didn't know better, I should almost fancy that one of our dear dead master's birthdays had come round again, and that thou hadst been keeping it; for that was the only time I ever remember seeing thee a very little the worse for liquor."

"It's joy, Nanny, it's joy," replied the old man—"joy at the thought that thou and I, and all of us, are going back to Langley again; and that's better than all the drink in the world for making the heart merry. It's joy through knowing that the good curate is going to marry our dear Lucy, and Alfred is going to marry pretty Agnes, and the squire's come into his rights again, and poor Abigail is getting better, and Lady Arboury is going to live with us at the rectory; and that we are all going to be as happy as the summer days are long. I don't wonder at people dancing when they are light-hearted, Nanny; I feel as if I could dance to the tune of 'Lady Green Sleeves' now, if there was but one in the way to play it, as I did in my younger days."

And the happy old man tried a step or two, until coming in contact with a pile of dishes Nanny was washing up, he upset them, and as Nanny said, laughing, "had more music than he bargained for when he began."

"I don't know how it is, John," said Nanny, "but though I'm as glad as thou art at this happy change in all our fortunes, and though I love the fresh air, and like to look at the sweet green country which I was brought up in when a girl—and one never forgets the scenes of our childhood, no more than we forget the faces of our mothers, the Lord be praised for it!—yet somehow this old house and this dirty Borough are very dear to me, John. Here I have watched over the living, and there," pointing to the street, "I have followed the dead; and when I have been out on my errands, I have looked on the pavement they walked over, and seen the stones they have been carried across when in their coffins, and thought some day they will bear me over this cracked slab, and then I shall not have to step aside to avoid that broken kerb-stone. And so I have walked on and on, thinking how they will carry me past this shop, where I was a customer, and by that door I so often went in at;

and though I know I shouldn't hear them then, yet it often does me good to think that so many of my old neighbours would be standing at their doors, who would speak well of me, and by their good words and regrets smooth my passage to the grave. So, if I go to Langley, John, when I die I must be brought back and buried here."

"And so you shall," replied John, "though I shall not live to see it. Yet everybody in Langley loves you, Nanny, though you was only there a few years; and they'll feel it very hard, when that time comes, to have you carried so far away from a place where you are so much loved and respected. But don't let's talk of these things, Nanny, when there's so many young people that we both love going to be made happy. God bless Mr. Hall and Lucy! As soon as this poor girl, Abigail—which that bad man, Harold, deceived and ruined—is better, and she's mending fast, they are going to take her with us, and she's to make herself useful at the rectory; and the tears came like rain out of the poor dear creature's eyes this morning as she told me how good she would be, and what pleasure it would give her, when she was thoroughly well, to do all she could to save our old bones."

"They will meet with their reward in heaven," said Nanny, raising her eyes, "for putting out a kind, helping hand to the poor creature, and forgiving her her trespasses, as He forgiveth us all when we trespass against Him. I loved our dear dead master's sermons, because he always had something about the Good Shepherd in them; and I have often fancied that I saw the sheepfold stand open, and green, and quiet beside the dusty roads by day, and calm and still when the stars shone out at night, so that the poor stray lost sheep might come in, and welcome, at all hours."

"Ay, blessed be his memory!" answered John, making a reverential bow; "if he couldn't get a poor sinner into the right way all at once, he never disheartened him; and no man ever used fewer threats about the fire-and-brimstone place, where the Bad Man lives, than he did. But I must begin to see about packing up; for a week soon passes away, Nanny, and then we shall be off to dear old Langley again. How I love that cluster of old trees, from which they say it takes its name, and which are so ancient that some say they were planted from cuttings young Mr. Shem carried with him in the ark! But our dear good master

had his doubts about that, and so have a many more, I dare say."

Nanny, whatever she might say about "leaving her old bones to rest in the Borough," took as much pleasure in helping to pack up, and was as eager in her heart to visit Langley, as old John; and many an hour's conversation was there between these two honest simple souls as to how this person and the other would be sure to be on the lookout for them; and many a consultation had they as to what little presents they should take to their old acquaintance, which always ended in adding sundry packages of snuff, tobacco, tea, sugar—to say nothing of children's toys—to the large stock already accumulated in the oaken drawers; "for the poor bairns will look for something as well as their fathers and mothers, and it's very natural they should do so," old John used to say every time he emptied his pockets.

Lady Arboury sat calm and resigned in the midst of all these busy preparations, as happy in Lucy's devoted love as if she had been her own mother; and never did affectionate daughter show more attention, or study a parent's every wish more, than Lucy Langton did the comfort and happiness of her blind and aged relativ

The good curate, too, paid her every attention, in that delicate way which makes willing service a pleasure, instead of awakening a feeling of pain in the breast of the party attended upon ; and Lady Arboury would sometimes say, as she sat between them, "Though my riches have made themselves wings and flown away, I have found what they never yet could purchase—affectionate and devoted hearts, beside which all gold is dross."

CHAPTER XV.

At last the day arrived when all was prepared for removal on the morrow, everything packed up, and never to be used in that old house in the Borough again.

Lucy, ever the last to sit down and the first to get up, rested herself in her dear mother's old easy-chair during the few hours that would elapse before the young carrier—who had put up at one of the ancient hostels in the neighbourhood—would be at the door with his waggon to remove the goods.

It was old John's wish that the young man who brought them thither should take them away, and Lucy offered no opposition.

As she sat and thought of the many changes she had seen, and the hard trials she had undergone, since last those household treasures were packed up as she then again beheld them, her heart sank,

and her eyes filled for a few moments; for dark shadows every here and there heaved up and dotted the past over which her memory gazed; yet she looked not long before they slowly changed into bright forms, as clouds which have floated about all day, gloomy and ominous, become golden when they gather around a beautiful sunset.

After all, she felt this removal was less painful than that of quitting the dear old rectory; there seemed fewer things to leave in the Borough that she should regret, less sacrifice of feeling to be made, and that was a great comfort. She could not recal the dead; but near to where they lay she should carry with her a new happiness—a husband whom they would have approved of had they been living (for the curate had always been a great favourite both with her father and mother)—and one who every day of his life would lead her nearer to that happy land of eternal rest where their liberated souls reposed.

It was sweet spring time, for spring made her presence felt in the smoky streets of the old Borough, and so raised the spirits of poor Abigail that she felt herself strong enough to accompany her kind friends to Langley, saying to Lucy,

who had visited her every day since old John first comforted her with presents sent by his young mistress, "Your kindness, and that of the good curate's, have restored me, and made me strong in heart and hope; and were I left only a day without seeing either of you, I should mope and pine, and think of what I have been, until I got quite into a low way again. So pray, in pity, do not leave me behind." And after such an appeal Lucy had not the heart to refuse her request.

"Poor lamb!" said kind-hearted old John, "she would feel quite 'doley' if left behind; and so should I, for she would never be so well attended to, though the laundress is very kind; but poor people who have to slave so hard for their daily bread as she has cannot afford to be always waiting upon an ailing body, however kind their hearts may be. And that nice jelly you make for her, Nanny, does her a world of good, she says, and makes her feel stronger every day."

"I am glad of it," replied Nanny, with the slightest touch of acid in her reply. "But rogue as the good squire's son has been to her, she was a fool to think he ever meant marrying her."

"Ah! well, her being a bit foolish only makes him the greater villain," said old John; "and it's an old saying, Nanny, that there never was fondness without folly. I remember having a touch of the complaint in my younger years." And the old man began putting a wrapper over Lucy's birdcage, to protect the favourite, and put an end to the argument.

What a crowd of affectionate hearts congregated around the waggon to bid the travellers farewell; and there was many a moistened eye amid the multitude that came to express their gratitude to Lucy and the curate for the benefits they had received in dark and troublous hours.

"Bless her sweet heart!" said one poor woman in rusty mourning, holding a child by each hand, who were clothed in second-hand habiliments of grief. "When my poor old man lay dying she sent a bite and a sup every day, though the cheesemonger and poulterer says only half a pound of butter was taken a week for her own use, while such a thing as an egg, or a chicken, or a morsel of ham was never taken in at the door; and the orders were so little that neither greengrocer, butcher, nor beer-boy called. That is charity,

Mrs. Jones, when you give the very bit out of your lips, so to speak, because another needs it 'worser' than yourself."

"It is, indeed," replied Mrs. Jones; "but it is not what was given, so much as the way she gave it; for, bless her! when she had nothing else to give, when my poor Billy lay so bad of the fever, she cried when she saw what he suffered. Instead of comforting me, I had to comfort her, and could feel the drops fall pit-pat on my poor old cheeks. Had they been drops of gold I should not have stored them half so much as I did her pitying tears. It made me happy, though I was almost broken-hearted, to feel them fall for the likes of me and mine; and as I held her in my arms, I thought how much she looked like the picture of Him what looked over Jerryusalam, and cried, because He couldn't take up and cover and make comfortable everybody, 'as a hen does her little chickens under her wings.'" And the full-hearted little woman wiped away her precious tears on her dirty shawl.

What willing hearts and ready hands helped to load the waggon! what orders they issued to one another to be careful in carrying this, that, and the

other, as the young waggoner said to Nanny, in his cheery voice, "I like to see this, it does one as much good as a hearty meal, after a twenty miles' drive. I thought, Nanny, they cared for nothing in this dirty old Borough but gin, periwinkles, and beer. But they've got hearts, and good hearts, too, poor as they are." And he arranged a feather bed, very carefully, for the poor girl Abigail to lie down upon, in case she needed, besides placing a chair for her to sit in, according to Lucy's orders; and old John arranged the pillows for her to lean upon, with his own careful hands;—and, oh! with what tender care did he and the young carrier lift her into the waggon. Poor girl, her heart was very full, and as she leant upon Lucy's shoulder, she said, sobbing, "I must have my cry out, it will do me good. Pray bear with me."

The good squire wished Lucy to be driven down in his own carriage, but she said she would rather go with the goods, as Abigail would be very miserable without her; so it was arranged that the curate should come down instead, on the following day, with Lady Arboury, when Agnes and Alfred promised to accompany them in the squire's carriage.

"By that time," said Lucy, "I shall have my dear old home in order, and be ready to receive them all."

She departed amid blessings and tears, and good old John shook hands with so many, that his wrist fairly ached again. Nanny, too, shed a few parting drops.

And what were Lucy's thoughts as the waggon went briskly through the suffocating and smoky streets of the old Borough, into the clear, broad highway, with its throng of country vehicles moving towards the busy markets of London, in the early morning?

They alternated like cloud and sunshine—now dull, and then bright with cheerful hope, though all the sunny breaks were seen on a cloudy day. So far she had beguiled her mother to walk to look at that cottage, only for the improvement of her health; and further on, she remembered glancing at that lofty house, when in the mourning-coach she followed that dear mother to the grave, on that dreary, dull November day, when the funeral train loomed mistily through the heavy fog that had settled down upon London.

Old John and Lucy were her companions then, as they were now, but both at that time were

bowed down with grief; yet she was more sorrowful at heart than they could ever be—a fond daughter's sorrow for an indulgent mother—weighing down all the more heavily upon her through magnifying every petty fault into a neglect of duty towards her she mourned over. And yet the Accusing Angel could not have charged her with negligence to her mother, had he measured Lucy by the standard of the most affectionate daughter that ever breathed, from the days when Adah and Zillah waited on their mother Eve, while the flaming sword of the cherubims still blazed over the abandoned garden of Eden, and threw a shimmering light over the flowers that grew on Abel's grave.

Lucy turned her star-bright eyes on old John and Nanny, and felt a pleasurable feeling playing about her young heart to see them so happy after all they had endured for her sake and her brother's; for Lucy set more store on true affection than on treasures of silver and gold, believing, truly, that the greatest wealth we can ever possess in this world is that of a faithful and loving heart, which never alters, no matter what alteration it may find in the idol it adores.

They, good old souls, while poor Abigail dozed in her easy-chair, were talking of those they should again meet with, in the course of a few brief hours, and of Time's changes since they first knew, and last left, dear Langley-on-the-Lea. How some had got up, and others had gone down, in the world, and a few—of whom they spoke with lowered voice—had drifted into the dim darkness, and moored their earthly barks in the unexplored and silent Sea of Eternity.

Half listening, Lucy looked up, and remembered how shocked she felt when last she noticed that clump of trees; for it was there where the funeral-horses were first started off at a brisk trot, when they bore the remains of her beloved mother to the grave. The same thoughts again passed through her mind—that the stately and expensive trappings with which Death is decorated are hollow and useless mockeries, and only put on to enhance the pride and vanity of the living, who follow in the wake of the dead. Not that she had done aught that was not strictly economical in the funeral expenses, but it was the remembrance of the seeming slow-paced mockery of grief, gathering up as it were into a "merry march," when the

eyes of the houses were no longer upon it, that jarred harshly on her feelings.

Then she caught a glance of the cheerful face of the burly waggoner, and the light and happiness that played about it again lifted up her heart, for there was an expression of affectionate delight in his good-natured countenance which told what a pleasurable labour of love he felt it to be in serving her; and a blush stole over her beautiful brow as she thought how unworthy she was of all this loving service. Then the waggoner's cheery voice rang out, as he shouted to old John, and said, "Thou feels a deal more comfortable in thy mind than when I last drove thee, doesn't thee, John? Ah! I see thou dost. I can see it in thy face, and thou shalt have a glass of real downright home-brewed ale, made from the barley the brewer himself grew and malted, when we stop to bait the horses for a few minutes. And Nanny shall have a bottle of wine, if she can drink it, bless her old heart, an' I've got the money to pay for it here."

And the jovial fellow pulled out a yellow bag, and made the silver chink again as he shook it, then tossed it up, when all his wealth fell out upon the road, and Lucy laughed merrily when he

stopped his horses to pick it up, and drove his shamefacedness away—which came at the thought of what a goose he had made of himself—by the cheering and encouraging words she uttered, winning the honest fellow's very heart by telling him that she hoped he would let her taste of the home-brewed ale he extolled so highly. The birds were singing all around her, for Nature had mustered her great band of music, and the "sweet pipings" resounded from nearly every tree, bush, and hedge-row. Again the cloud passed over her for a few moments, and she seemed only to hear the solitary song of the robin, and in the green and flowery fields to see again the brown stubble and the black bean-sheaves covered with hoary rime, while the long-leaved trees rose before her "inward eye" dim and naked, and leaning upon a background of dreary hills, and a dull, leaden-coloured sky, as they did on the cheerless November day when she followed the beloved dead to that silent chamber in which she herself hoped in the end to repose. The mental cloud passed away, the birds sang cheerfully, the long green leaves rustled in the breeze, and the buttercups gave back "gold for gold," while the roadside streams played a low

melody, as they flashed their "loosened silver" in the sun.

Even poor, fallen Abigail raised herself from the easy seat on which she rested, and smiled as she inhaled the aroma of the May-blossoms, looking unutterable love at Lucy as the latter took hold of her poor, thin hand, and held it tenderly within her own. And Lucy thought how many aching hearts that she had left behind in the Borough that sweet spring day would cheer, awakening in them hopes of brighter days in store; that their worst troubles were over, like the bitter cold season of winter, and that better times would return with the flowers, which even then were hawked about the streets, after they had been blown and snown upon, and beaten down upon the earth, even as they themselves had often sunk under the overwhelming weight of sorrow.

"Even they," thought Lucy, as she pillowed poor dear Abigail's pale face on her own innocent bosom, where she slept like a child, "know that spring will bring back again the twittering swallow over the sunny sea; and when they walk out a little way into the suburbs will see the butterflies hovering among the flowers, and smile, even as I myself

now smile, at the pleasant sight of the old familiar daisies. Would that my dear mother were with me, and could look upon them once again, and could hear the bleating of those pretty lambs at play. How many are there amongst those I have left behind to whom spring was not always heralded in with the cry of 'All-a-blowing,' which made my dear mother very sad when she heard it, and thought of our old garden at home; who have not always lived in those close courts where the ever-filled clothes-line tells of one continual washing-day, and where, in wet weather, they dry their poor garments in the very rooms in which their sickly children sleep? Oh, how my heart has ached at witnessing these scenes, over which I have sorrowed to think that I had not the means of alleviating their miseries. And the poor thing," making a softer pillow for Abigail, as she gazed on her with pitiful eyes, "will leave these scenes of human misery, deep-read in the blotted pages of tears, and return once more to hear the matin song of the mounting lark, as it soars singing into the clear blue of heaven, which poets have called the great blue eye of God. She will again hear the voices of children, as they wander on Langley Leas, gathering

the sweet flowers that blow everywhere around her native home; and sounds of spring will once more come to her upon the air of the early morning, from the red cock crowing from the far-off grange, and the cawing of rooks round the high elm-trees, and the milkmaid singing her simple song from behind the May-bloom covered hedges."

Lucy's reverie was suddenly broken by the loud "who—ho" of the jolly waggoner, as he pulled up at the roadside tavern, to bait his horses and taste the strong home-brewed ale he had spoken so highly of. Lucy smiled sweetly as she sipped from the glass he brought her, and drank to his health and happiness, after the old country fashion; and, as the honest waggoner often said afterwards, he had seen a picture or two of angels in his time, but never one that looked half as handsome as she looked when she wished him "very good health."

The sweet country air had already brought back a faint tinge of the old roses to Abigail's cheek, and at the intercession of the waggoner she was permitted to alight and refresh herself for a few minutes in the clean sanded parlour of the inn. The strong, broad-shouldered, kind-hearted fellow carried the poor invalid as carefully and with as

much ease as he would have carried a month-old child; and Nanny's heart melted so far that she would insist upon making the wine negus herself which she ordered for Abigail.

"I could almost kiss old Nanny, only for that," said the waggoner to old John; "for I thought once or twice she looked at the poor dear lass as if she hadn't forgiven her from the bottom of her heart."

"Nanny's as good at heart as this beautiful strong ale is," said old John; "but you know that the best barrel that was ever brewed—and there never was a better than this is—sometimes changes a little through the weather."

"You are right," answered the waggoner; "I sometimes lose my temper with my horses, and I'm always sorry for it afterwards;" and he went out to look after them, to see how they got on "with their feed," and in a few more minutes the waggon was once more on its way to Langley-on-the-Lea.

"Ding-dong, ding-dong; why, bless me, those are Langley bells! What can they be ringing for?" said old John, who now sat with Nanny at the front of the waggon, which the well-fed horses were dragging into the village.

"They're hurrahing, too, I do declare! It isn't a feast-day? Whatever can it all be about? Everybody seems out, else my old eyes deceive me."

His eyes had not deceived him, as he soon found; for the villagers, old and young, soon came up, and, in spite of Lucy's remonstrance, they would unharness the horses, and drag the waggon to the rectory. His eyes had not deceived him, though they filled with tears as he rested his hand on Lucy's arm, and, looking at Nanny, said, "To think that we should be so much respected! Oh, Nanny, they would never have shown their love for us in this way, if we had lived to twice the age of Methusalah, in the Borough. But it's for her sake," he added, looking at Lucy, "and in remembrance of them that's gone before."

He took off his hat as he spoke, and raised his eyes to heaven; and the honest villagers, thinking it was the signal for an old hearty English "hip, hip, hurrah!" made all the houses in Langley-on-the-Lea ring again.

They passed the old timbered tenements which had looked down through the changes of centuries, unaltered, upon the churchyard of Langley. Only the road divided these ancient houses from the

silent beds in which the former inhabitants then slept. Were they not deaf alike to praise or blame, they might still hear what the living say of them at times, when the windows are open and the air is still—might hear their own children calling to one another in the spring evening when they played in the village street. The very sunshine, thrown back from the chamber windows where they died, is flashed back at times upon the daisied graves where they now sleep, and on the window-panes the graves may be seen reflected inside the rooms. But there they sleep, unconscious of all around them; and there Abigail's father had been buried only a few days before.

His little daughter, whose sweet face
He kissed, taking a last embrace,
Becomes dishonoured to her race.

His sons grow up, who bear his name;
Some grow to honour, some to shame;
But he hears not the praise nor blame.

He will not hear the tempest rage,
Nor mourning household shelter crave
From wintry winds that beat his grave.

High up the vapours fold and swim;
Above him floats the twilight dim;
The place he knew forgetteth him.

TENNYSON.

The tears stood in Lucy's eyes as she glanced towards the spot where her dead reposed; and as old John looked in the same direction, he thought how merciful the Lord had been in removing his poor mistress before the dark clouds settled down upon her head which had cast such a gloom over patient and suffering Lucy.

But there were too many hands to shake, and too many welcomes to receive, for either of them to brood over these thoughts and feelings long.

With what care the young waggoner bore Abigail into the house! He would allow no other hands but his own to arrange the cushions on which she rested. "I loved her dearly once," said he, gently pushing old John aside, "and should be worse than a brute were I to behave unkindly to her now, when she so much needs it;" and the old man pressed his arm, and looked at him with one of those looks which is more expressive than words.

Oh, what a rushing and crowding around the waggon there was to shake hands with everybody; and it was well that the horses were unharnessed, and that those who drew the heavy vehicle had to stop every now and then to take breath, after

shouting, or there would assuredly have been some serious accident to have saddened the happiness of that memorable day. Then they were so delighted to see that London had not spoiled their pretty favourite—that Lucy was not above riding in the waggon with the faithful old servants of the family, but, as they said, "hadn't a bit more pride about her than one of themselves—and she going to be the new rector's wife."

Happy people! merry Langley! The bells rang out like mad things, as though they were trying to tear the grey church-steeple down, and fly out loose to welcome their coming! Never was a load of furniture sooner carried in-doors, and each article put in its old familiar place, than those goods were on that day; for some one or another remembered where and how everything had stood in former times in the rectory, the doors of which had ever been open to all.

Happy Lucy! grateful villagers! No emperor ever rode in triumph on more loving hearts than those that welcomed her back to Langley-on-the-Lea, and laboured cheerfully to make her home look as it had done before her dear father died.

The new rector brought dear Lady Arboury from

London to her new home the following day, accompanied by Alfred and Agnes.

Time brought tidings of Harold Hastings and his mother from the Continent; he had become a professed gambler, was driven from one place to another, until he reached Baden-Baden, where he found himself amongst cleverer cheats than he had yet learnt to be, who detected his tricks, quarrelled with him, and one, a greater scoundrel than himself, for he was more hoary in iniquity, called him out, and shot him dead.

Many months after his death Mrs. Hastings came to England, at the solicitation of her daughter and the good squire, "a sadder and a wiser woman," and again took up her residence at Langley Hall, where Alfred Langton and his pretty wife Agnes resided.

Poor Abigail soon recovered at the rectory, and what Time's changes may bring about for her lies hidden at present in "the womb of fate;" though the gossips of Langley know that the young carrier who removed Lucy's goods was an old beau of hers, when she was Agnes Hastings' waiting-maid, and say that "if there isn't a marriage between them before the world's many months older, they never yet knew what o'clock it was when it struck."

Old John says, "They shall have such a wedding-dinner as no carrier ever yet had in Langley; that he will pay for it, and Nanny shall cook it; and he hopes it will not take place until fruit's in season, and he has got the garden into such order as it used to be in former years."

After a long litigation, undertaken by Mr. Hall's friends, it was decided that as Lady Arboury had, in the sale of her estate, set aside and bequeathed a certain sum for the erection of almshouses and a free-school, and as the deed expressed that she had done this "of her charitable affection and disposition, upon the said lands of Winterlea Wold, for the sustenance, relief, and education of poor and impotent persons, to have continuance for ever," the purchase of the estate would be null and void unless this portion of the conveyance and agreement was fulfilled, and the above-named houses built on the grouud she had not disposed of. For the law argued that the purchaser of the freehold had undertaken to pay so much out of the estate—he and his heirs for ever—for the support of the school and almshouses; and they must be built and supported by him and his heirs, or his claim would become null and void.

So the blind donor's wishes were in time fulfilled, and she passed more happy hours in listening to accounts of the progress of the buildings from Lucy and her husband, under whose guidance she frequently visited the village, than ever she had done while she was the proud mistress of the neighbouring hall and the thousands of surrounding acres of Winterlea Wold, through all Time's changes.

THE END.

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